# Second-order electoral personalization. Intra-party preference voting in Belgium and the Netherlands

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# 2 The constraints: the effects of a list vote and the number of votes[15] [16]

## 2.1 Introduction

In 2006 the *Burgerforum kiesstelsel* (Electoral System Civic Forum) was set up in the Netherlands, with the goal of advising the government on what the best electoral system would be for the Netherlands, according to the civic forum. The civic forum was composed of 143 citizens, partly chosen by lottery. After being informed about different types of electoral systems, the forum came up with two recommendations. The first one was to introduce a list vote. Voters should have the option to cast either a list vote or a vote for a candidate. In addition, the Forum recommended that preference votes should be given more influence by abolishing the threshold for individual candidates. This would have given voters more influence on which candidates would be elected. However, these proposals were rejected by the government (Fournier et al., 2011, pp. 8–9). What the effects of these proposed changes would have been is difficult to say, but it is likely that they would have had an influence on the intraparty competition.

However, it is difficult to determine the exact influence, because not much research is conducted on the effects of electoral system change on intraparty competition. While the question of how electoral rules influence electoral behaviour has been of central interest to political scientists (Blais & Carty, 1991; Clark & Golder, 2006; Cox, 1997; Duverger, 1951; Singer & Stephenson, 2009), most of these studies examine how different electoral systems influence election results in terms of vote distribution across parties. In a 1985 review of the studies on electoral systems, Lijphart (1985, p. 7) concluded that the intraparty dimension had thus far been neglected in academia. There is a change visible, however. Nowadays, not only the *inter*party dimension is studied, but the *intra*party dimension starts to receive attention as well. For example, Carey and Shugart classify different electoral formulas and explain how they might affect the vote-seeking behaviour of candidates (1995). At the same time, electoral rules also affect voters, as they constrain voters in their options, and are therefore one of the factors affecting preference votes. In this chapter the effects of these constraints are discussed.

In both Belgium and the Netherlands levels of preference voting are much higher nowadays than they were in previous decades (see also chapter 1), a trend that can also be seen elsewhere (Karvonen, 2010). But while preference voting increased, Karvonen (2010) did not find conclusive evidence for a trend towards more candidate-centred electoral systems. However, in an extensive and more recent study on electoral reforms Renwick and

[15] This chapter is based on Nagtzaam & Van Erkel (2017).

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Pilet (2016) came to a different conclusion. They observe a trend towards more candidate-centred electoral systems, probably because they used a 'more fine-grained classification of the intra-party dimension' (Renwick & Pilet, 2016, p. 267). According to Renwick and Pilet this trend started in the 1990s. They especially observe an increased weight of preference votes in the allocation of seats within parties (2016, p. 267). Examples of electoral systems changing in a more personalized direction are Bulgaria, where a closed list system was replaced by an open list system with preference voting in 2011, and Belgium, where rules were introduced in 2002 that increased the weight given to preference votes. In the Netherlands the relative weight of preference votes was increased as well. Since the general elections of 1998 a candidate only needs 25 per cent of the threshold for parties in order to get elected out of list order, opposed to 50 per cent the candidate needed before.

In this chapter, I will not look at the influence of an electoral system as such, but I will analyse the variations of one type of electoral system: flexible list systems (Carey & Shugart, 1995). Flexible list proportional representation systems are amongst the most commonly used electoral systems in Europe. Yet, the system and its effects are understudied (André, Depauw, Shugart, et al., 2017). In flexible list systems both preference votes cast by the voters and the rank ordering of candidates by the party determine which candidates are elected. Therefore, the system should be distinguished from closed lists, where only the party rank ordering determines which candidates are elected, and from open lists, where only preference votes determine the elected candidates (Shugart, 2005).

There is considerable variation between the various countries where flexible list systems are used with regard to how open or restrictive the system is. Probably the most important distinction is whether casting a preference vote is optional or not. In some countries, such as Austria, Belgium, Latvia, Luxemburg, and Sweden, voters can choose whether they vote for a candidate or whether they cast a so called list vote, i.e. a vote for the party list as a whole. In other countries, such Estonia and the Netherlands, voters cannot cast a list vote and preference voting is therefore obligatory. Shugart (2005, p. 43) calls this latter subtype of the flexible list system a latent list: while the list itself has the most influence on how seats are distributed, the voter does not have the option to cast a vote solely for the list. A second difference relates to the number of preference votes that voters may cast (Karvonen, 2011a)[17]. In some countries voters have the option to cast multiple preference votes. In other countries voters are restricted to voting for a single candidate. The option to cast a list vote (or the constraint of not having the option to cast a list vote)

[17] A distinction can also be made on the basis of the relative weight of preference votes, i.e. how easy it is for a candidate to be elected out of list-order. Wauters et al. (2012) concluded that an increase of the relative weight of preference votes in Belgian local elections had only in some urban municipalities a minor effect. In other municipalities the reform had no effect, arguably because personalization, i.e. casting a preference vote, had reached some sort of ceiling. In these municipalities the increase of the relative weight of preference votes did not result in an increase of casting preference votes. We decided to focus only on the list vote and number of preference votes in our experiment. By including the weight of preference votes, the number of manipulations in the experiment would increase, with the risk of the experiment becoming overly complicated.

and the number of preference votes that a voter can cast are the two central themes in this chapter. The goal of this chapter is to contribute to the understanding of preferential list systems of which 'little is currently known' (Shugart, 2005, p. 43).

## 2.2 Studying the effects of electoral rules

Most studies on the effects of electoral systems compare election results between different systems with different electoral rules. This approach is problematic, however, because many factors might be involved that were not taken into account in the analyses. In response to this problem, a recent strand of literature has emerged that conducts experiments that study how voters react to changes in the electoral system (Blais et al., 2012; Blumenau et al., 2017; Laslier et al., 2015; Van der Straeten et al., 2013). The present study fits this trend, by conducting an experiment to investigate the impact of electoral rules on voting behaviour. The advantage of conducting experiments for such questions is that two homogenous groups in the same context can be asked how they would vote under a specific rule. When each group is asked to vote under a different rule, we can see the effects of each rule by comparing the two groups.

The experiment presented in this chapter is conducted in two countries: Belgium and the Netherlands. Conducting the same experiment in two different contexts has a great advantage. The advantage of conducting a similar experiment in two countries is that if similar results are found this strengthens the conclusions. Likewise, different results would show that the effect institutions exert on voting behaviour is likely to be influenced by the specific context. In either way, conducting an (almost) identical experiment in two countries gives us more information than conducting the experiment in only one country.

The two countries in which the experiment is conducted are very different from each other when it comes to the list vote and the number of preference votes a voter may cast. The electoral system of Belgium allows voters to cast either a list vote, or one or multiple preference votes. Belgian voters who support the party and have no preference for individual candidates or agree with the party on the order of candidates may cast a list vote. Voters who have a preference for one or more individual candidate(s) may cast multiple preference votes as long as these candidates belong to the same party (De Winter, 2005). Dutch voters are forced to vote for a single candidate (Andeweg, 2005). Therefore, it can be argued that in this experiment the Dutch case is most interesting. Dutch voters – compared to Belgian voters – are more restricted in showing their actual preference, and the experiment allows us to investigate what happens when these constraints are lifted. An extra benefit is that this gives an indication of how 'preferential' a preference vote is. Previous studies have argued that due to the nature of the Dutch system, where voters are forced to cast a single preference vote, the vote for the list-puller (i.e. the first candidate on the list) does not really reflect the preference for an individual candidate, but simply a choice for the party. Therefore, in general only votes for candidates from the second position onwards are

considered to be actual preference votes in the Netherlands (Andeweg, 2005). This distinction is quite strict and might not always reflect the exact motivations of the voters. Van Holsteyn and Andeweg (2010) for example show that approximately one quarter of the voters who voted for a list-puller in the Dutch general elections of 2003 and 2006 actually stated to have a preference for that particular candidate[18]. If the candidate would have been lower on the list, or even on a different party list, these voters would have still voted for that candidate. So, for these voters their vote is seen as a 'party vote' and not as a preference vote, but this does not reflect what the voter intended. However, it seems that for a majority of voters the vote for a list-puller could be regarded as a true party vote. With an experiment it is possible to explore to what extent this is indeed the case by investigating how the introduction of a list vote affects the votes for list-pullers and for other candidates[19]. Furthermore, the experiment allows for an exploration of what happens if a voter prefers multiple candidates, but is only allowed to cast a vote for a single candidate.

The advantage of conducting an experiment in two countries is that it allows testing the hypotheses in two different contexts. Of course, it should be stressed that one still has to be careful when comparing the results of the experiments in both countries (this will be discussed in more detail below). Therefore, when discussing the results, the focus will be first and foremost on the effects within a country.

Conducting the experiment in two contexts and comparing their results, brings forth one limitation of the experimental design, namely that electoral system effects become real via a learning process. When introduced to new rules, respondents may stick to their voting habits and behaviour in the beginning, and only adopt and adapt to the new rules over time[20]. This may result in an underestimation of the treatment effects. Comparing the results of two countries that currently have opposing electoral rules regarding the number of votes and the option of a list vote, might provide an (tentative) insight into the extent of this underestimation.

## 2.3 Electoral rules and the influence on preference voting

Using an experiment to investigate the effects of electoral rules on the election outcome is in line with a recent trend. Blumenau et al. (2017), for example, study the differences between open and closed list electoral systems on party choice. They demonstrate that some voters

[18] In the Dutch Parliamentary Election Studies of 2010 and 2012 respondents were also asked for their reason to vote for the list-puller. The distribution of voters who cast a vote for the list-puller as support for the list-puller and the voters who did so as support for the party was stable. The percentages for the number of votes for list-pullers as support for the party are: 77% (2003), 77% (2006), 75% (2010) and 79% (2012) (source DPES 2002/2003, DPES 2006, DPES 2010 and DPES 2012).

[19] Throughout this dissertation 'other candidates' should be read as 'other candidates *than the list-puller*'.

[20] Next to this learning effect a change in the electoral rules might also have an effect on the behaviour of parties and candidates. They will also adapt to the new rules, which in turn might also affect the behaviour of the voters. These effects are not taken into account in this chapter.

who voted for a niche party in a closed list system, switch to a mainstream party under an open list system. More specifically, some Eurosceptic voters voted for UKIP under the closed list rules and switched their vote to a Eurosceptic candidate of the Conservative party under the open list rules. This move applies to approximately 6 per cent of the electorate. Other experiments were conducted as part of the 'making electoral democracy work' project (Blais, 2010). These experiments were conducted as quasi-experiments during real election campaigns, inviting people to vote under different electoral systems. The general conclusion of these experiments is that a substantial number of voters vote differently in different systems, showing that voters are responsive to changes in electoral rules (Blais et al., 2012; Laslier et al., 2015; Van der Straeten et al., 2013). Similar results can be expected in the experiment with regard to preference voting in the Belgium and the Netherlands. In particular, for the Dutch case, where some respondents get new opportunities to express their political preference, the expectation is that when these new rules are available, some Dutch voters will use the option to cast a list vote and others will choose to cast multiple preference votes.

### 2.3.1 The effect of a list vote

While it is interesting to see whether and to what extent voters actually make use of these new rules, the primary goal of this chapter is to study how these rules affect the type of preference votes that are cast. As stated earlier, in the Netherlands only votes for candidates on the second place on the list or lower are regarded as preference votes, because the choice for the first candidate is assumed to be a choice for the party (Andeweg, 2005, p. 494)[21]. Therefore, it is plausible that a substantial number of these voters would have cast a list vote if that option would have been available to them. It is less likely that voters who voted for other candidates, i.e. candidates from the second position on the party list onwards, switch to a list vote. In general these votes are considered as an expression of a real preference for an individual candidate and as a more sophisticated type of voting behaviour (Marsh, 1985): casting a vote for a specific candidate who is not the list-puller requires additional information about the candidates. The assumption is that these voters made a conscious choice for a specific candidate within a party, so there is no reason to expect that a substantial number of them would switch to a list vote if that option would be available. Overall, we can expect that in a situation where Dutch voters have the option to cast a list vote, this would reduce the number of votes cast for the list-puller, but not so much for other candidates. The latter is seen as an actual preference vote, whereas the former is often a reflection of support for the party.

Can different outcomes be expected if the situation is reversed: i.e. if the option to cast a list vote disappears in the Belgian case? Voters who usually cast such a list vote - and

[21] In the present experiment, all votes for individual candidates are considered to be preference votes, to distinguish them from list votes. Thus, in this chapter a vote for the list-puller in the Dutch context is always seen as a preference vote as well.

thereby accept the order of the list - need to change their behaviour if the option to cast a list vote disappears. It is most likely that especially the list-puller will profit from this. André et al. show that voters with less political interest and sophistication are more likely to cast list votes, because party labels 'act as brand names from which rationally ignorant and risk-averse voters can readily infer information about the issue positions and policy commitment of all candidates a party endorsed' (2012, p. 296). When these less sophisticated voters can no longer use the easy option of a list vote, they have to find an alternative solution. The most likely heuristic for these voters would be to rely on the ballot list position: they will cast a vote for the list-puller instead of another candidate. This bias toward the first option on a list can be interpreted as a *primacy effect* (see Brockington, 2003; Miller & Krosnick, 1998; Van Erkel & Thijssen, 2016). Consequently, the expectation is that once voters can no longer cast a list vote, it is primarily the list-puller who profits, although in that case this vote does not reflect a real preference for the list-puller but a preference for the party. Giving voters more or less options of course has an effect on the other options. If an option is added, the other options are likely chosen less often. If an option is removed, the other options are chosen more often. However, in this study the main interest is to which options these votes go to. The expectations are summarized in the following two hypotheses:

> **Hypothesis 2.1**: Voters who do not have the option to cast a list vote are more likely to vote for the list-puller than voters who do have the option to cast a list vote.
>
> **Hypothesis 2.2**: Voters who do not have the option to cast a list vote are *not* more likely to vote for other candidates than voters who do have the option to cast a list vote.

### 2.3.2 A single preference vote versus multiple preference votes

A major difference between the Belgian and Dutch system is the number of preference votes citizens can cast. It seems obvious to expect that the lower a candidate is placed on the list, the more he or she benefits if voters have the option to cast multiple preference votes. List-pullers will hardly be affected by the number of preference votes that may be cast.

In Belgium many voters combine a vote for the list-puller with a vote for another candidate, often a more local candidate (Wauters et al., 2004). If these voters would be forced to vote for only one candidate, one can expect that more voters drop the vote for the other candidate(s). First, previous studies have shown that candidates at the top of the list receive more preference votes (Marcinkiewicz, 2014; Miller & Krosnick, 1998). Given this tendency to vote for higher placed candidates, it is more likely that voters drop the preference for a lower placed candidate when they are forced to vote for a single candidate. Second, a bandwagon-effect could occur if citizens who can cast only one preference vote vote for the candidate who is expected to receive more votes. This could be because they

think that their vote is wasted if they vote for a lower placed candidate, who is not likely to get enough votes to get elected. When voters get the opportunity to cast more preference votes, this will benefit lower ranked candidates, because voters who usually vote for the list-puller may decide to also cast a vote for another candidate to whom they wish to give additional support. Of course some voters will drop the vote for the list-puller, or higher placed candidate, because they have a really strong preference for the lower placed candidate. But considering the electorate as a whole, the expectation is that lower placed candidates will have a greater disadvantage than higher placed candidates when the voters' choice is constrained to only one candidate. The general effect described above might be a position effect or a candidate quality effect. However, it is not the goal of this study to analyse what exactly drives the (possible) mechanism. The first step is finding out whether there is a clear pattern visible. If such a pattern would be visible, the next step would be to find the exact causes for this pattern.

The question is whether it is reasonable to expect something different for the group of voters who also have the option the cast a list vote than for the group of voters who do not have this option. The option to cast a list vote will lead to a lower number of preference votes, but it is not likely that a different pattern with regard to the type of preference votes that are cast can be observed for these two groups. This leads to the following hypotheses:

> **Hypothesis 2.3**: Voters who can cast multiple preference votes are more likely to vote for other candidates than voters who can only cast a single preference vote.
> **Hypothesis 2.4**: Voters who can cast multiple preference votes are *not* more likely to vote for the list-puller than voters who can only cast a single preference vote.

## 2.4 Methods and data

### 2.4.1 General outline of the experiment

In order to test these hypotheses an experiment was conducted[22] simultaneously in Belgium (Flanders) and the Netherlands using a between-groups design. The disadvantage of a between-group design is that it is not possible to say how a specific voter changes his or her behaviour if other rules become available (or disappear). However, asking the same respondent to vote twice under different rules might have the disadvantage that the second vote is influenced either by the first, or that the respondent is more inclined to change his or

[22] Before conducting the experiment of which the results are presented here, a pilot study was conducted under first year bachelor students Political Science at Leiden University. This pilot study was set up in the same way as the experiment described in this section. Based on this pilot some changes were made. The most important one was that in the pilot party lists were used from the previous general election, resulting in variations in the length of lists per party. In the actual experiment fictional lists (with real candidates) were created with the same number of candidates on each list (this issue is discussed further in section 2.4.2).

her behaviour. Therefore, asking each respondent only once how they would vote under a given set of rules seems most appropriate. Thus, to say something about the effect of the electoral rules, different groups should be compared.

Since the effects of two institutional rules (stimuli) are tested, it was necessary to have four groups to which respondents are randomly assigned in each country (see table 2.1). Respondents in group 1 have the option to either cast a list vote or to cast a preference vote for a single candidate. Group 2 reflects the Belgian system: respondents can cast a list vote or cast a preference vote for one or multiple candidates, as long as these candidates belong to the same party. Respondents in group 3 can vote according to Dutch rules: they are forced to cast a vote for a single candidate. Finally, respondents in group 4 do not have the option to cast a list vote, but they can cast multiple preference votes.

**Table 2.1** Experimental groups (both in Belgium and the Netherlands)

| | | Number of preference votes | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | One | Multiple |
| Option to cast a list vote | Yes | Group 1 | Group 2 *(Belgian system)* |
| | No | Group 3 *(Dutch system)* | Group 4 |

As part of the data collection, two almost identical surveys to conduct the experiment were created, one for Dutch and one for Belgian respondents[23]. Both surveys were distributed by Survey Sampling International (SSI). This guaranteed that respondents in both countries received an identical survey with regard to layout, etc. SSI has its own panels from which respondents were selected. These panels consist of people who registered themselves[24]. The aim was to have 750 respondents for each country to participate in the experiment. As only voters for large and medium parties are taken into account (see below) a filter question was used to determine which respondents could participate in the experiment, by asking respondents for which party they would vote. Eventually, 785 respondents in the Netherlands and 788 in Belgium participated in the experiment.

In the context of an experiment the prerequisite of having a representative sample is less important than in a 'normal' survey, as long as respondents are randomly assigned to a

[23] The main difference between the surveys was that in the Netherlands Dutch parties and candidates were used, while in Belgium Flemish parties and candidates were used. Furthermore there was some variation in the explanation of the rules (see also appendix B.2).

[24] For more information about SSI, see: https://www.surveysampling.com.

treatment group. Nevertheless, in order to increase the external validity of the experiment the aim was to have representative samples. Therefore, representative quotas on key socio-demographic characteristics (gender, age, region and educational level) were used. These quotas were applied to each characteristic individually, and not combined. For this study the quota on educational level is particularly important with regard to external validity, as previous studies show that political interest and knowledge are important predictors of casting a preference votes (André et al., 2012). Education is strongly related to political knowledge (e.g. Rasmussen, 2016) and is a good proxy.

The survey consisted of four parts. In the first part respondents were asked for which party they would vote if national elections were held that day. This question served as a filter to decide whether respondents would participate in the experiment or not: only respondents who said they would vote for a party were included. In addition, respondents for the smallest parties were excluded (see appendix B.1); it would have been too difficult to design a list of candidates for these parties that would have enough candidates that could be recognized by the voters. Second, respondents received an explanation of the electoral rules under which they could vote, based on the group to which they were randomly assigned[25] (see appendix B.2). After respondents had read these instructions, they proceeded to the third and main part of the survey: a ballot paper. The ballot paper they received depended on the group they were assigned to and their party choice (see section 2.4.2 for more information about the ballot papers). Finally, the fourth section contained some additional, more general questions.

The way the experiment is designed has a potential problem. Voters were only given limited information on how their votes influence the (hypothetical) seat distribution, while we know from the literature on strategic voting this could influence the decision voters take (Blais et al., 2012). However, the choice to give respondents no detailed information on what the rules meant and what their (potential) purpose is was deliberate. Giving more detailed information could have a negative effect, i.e. to prime voters in a particular direction and thereby artificially increase the use of specific options. Moreover, voters in a real polling booth also only receive a ballot paper; the rules are not explained to them. Consequently, it is possible that voters based their behaviour in the experiment on the knowledge of their own electoral system. Dutch voters and Belgian voters thus could have something different in mind while participating in the experiment. This is especially true for the introduction of the list vote in the Netherlands, since participants were only told that

[25] The time respondents spent on this page was registered. There was no manipulation check included in the survey, but the time respondents spent on (specific) parts of the experiment could be used to say something about whether the manipulation was understood by respondents. Appendix B.6 contains an analysis of these time data, which resulted in two important conclusions: 1) voters who used the option to cast a list vote or the option to cast multiple preference votes on average spent more time on the page with the explanations of voting rules than voters who did not use any of these additional options and 2) based on a comparison between Belgium and the Netherlands there is no reason to expect that this had a (large) influence on the experiment. The estimations of the effects reported are conservative at most.

with a list vote they 'support the party list as a whole'.

However, the lack of detailed information and subsequent bias towards information from their own political system are not too problematic. In the analysis the main focus will be on the results within both countries separately. In that part of the analysis the potential problem identified above is not a real problem, because it can be assumed that since voters are used to the same rules in real life there is no difference between the experimental groups in their average level of knowledge off the electoral system. With regard to the list vote for Dutch voters, it is not possible to know for certain what voters had in mind. In the conclusion of this chapter this aspect of the experiment design will be discussed.

In order to test the hypotheses, first four bivariate analyses will be presented. Using cross-tabulation tables the relationship between the electoral rules and voting for either the list-puller or other candidates will be investigated. In addition, two logistic regression analyses for each country are conducted with respectively voting for the list-puller and voting for other candidates as dependent variables. The dependent variables for both the bivariate and multivariate analyses are coded based on the type of vote that was cast by the respondent (see table 2.2). In the logistic regression models, several independent variables are included, first and foremost the two treatments: the option to cast a list vote and the option to cast multiple preference votes. Control variables are added for factors that the literature has identified as key predictors for preference voting; political interest, education and being a party member (André et al., 2012). One might also expect that the type of (preference) vote may be a result of the evaluation of the list-puller. Voters who give the list-puller of their party bad evaluations might be more likely to vote for other candidates, than voters who give the list-puller better evaluations. Therefore the model also controls for this evaluation. Respondents were asked their affection for both the party they voted for and its leader on an 11-point scale (feeling thermometer). Two dummy variables are included in the regression models: one where list-puller evaluations were lower than party evaluations and one where list-puller evaluations were higher than party evaluations. Thus, the reference category is voters who evaluated the party and its list-puller at the same level.

**Table 2.2** Coding of dependent variables

| **Type of vote** | **Dependent variable** | |
|---|---|---|
| | **Voted for list-puller** | **Voted for other candidate** |
| List vote | No (=0) | No (=0) |
| List-puller | Yes (=1) | No (=0) |
| List-puller and other candidate(s) | Yes (=1) | Yes (=1) |
| Other candidate(s) | No (=0) | Yes (=1) |

### 2.4.2 Ballots and party lists

Each ballot paper included 20 candidates of the chosen party and, for the relevant experimental groups, also allowed voters to cast a list vote[26]. Lists of candidates were

[26] In appendix B.3 examples of these ballot papers are given.

designed with real politicians instead of fictional candidates. Although fictional candidates have the advantage that the researcher exerts more control over the experiment, it would nevertheless be problematic for the design of this study. Fictional candidates are not known by respondents and are probably more likely to drive respondents in the direction of casting a list vote or a vote for the first candidate, since they are unlikely to have a preference for candidates they do not know. The choice for real candidates ensures that, next to the party leader, each ballot paper presents a number of candidates who are known by respondents.

To increase comparability between Belgium and the Netherlands, and between political parties within each country, first a general draft list was designed that could be applied to each party, using criteria that were held constant across political parties and the two countries. Therefore, differences between political parties with regard to the overall quality and familiarity of the candidates on the ballot list would not be too large. For example, for all parties the sixth place was occupied by an incumbent MP. To design this draft list a standardized mixture of a few characteristics was used: incumbency, gender, ethnicity and region. Not only are these characteristics taken into account by real-life selectors (Gallagher, 1988; Put & Maddens, 2013), they are also predictors for the success of a candidate in terms of preference votes (e.g. Maddens et al., 2007; Van Holsteyn & Andeweg, 2012). Subsequently, using this general draft list, a list of candidates was created for each party with actual politicians from that party. Two draft lists were designed: one for the larger (government) parties and one for the smaller parties included in the experiment. This made it possible to put a larger number of familiar candidates on the list of the larger parties. If a single list would have been made that would apply to all parties, this would restrict, for example, the number of members of parliament who could be included on the list since some smaller parties only have a few members of parliament.

The lists were different from what Belgian voters are used to, because respondents normally vote in a district in which each party presents a district-specific list. However, since the lists were standard to all Belgian respondents, irrespective of their district, the same ballot with candidates from all districts was presented. This was done to guarantee comparability of the experiments by avoiding that the lists presented in the Netherlands were "stronger" than in Belgium. The draft lists and identification of parties as large/small are given in appendix B.4. The specific lists of candidates for all parties are given in appendix B.5.

## 2.5 Results

Respondents were randomly assigned to one of the experimental groups. Table 2.3 shows the distribution of the participants in the experiment across experimental groups and party choice for Belgium. In Belgium 1,163 respondents started the survey. Excluded from all analyses were 375 (32.2%) respondents who said they would vote for the PVDA[27] (n=46) or

[27] Appendix A.1 contains a list with the used party abbreviations and the full names of the parties.

another party (n=16), would cast a blank vote (n=59), would not vote (n=57), would not say or did not know what to vote (n=161) or did not answer all the relevant questions for the experiment (n=36).

Table 2.4 shows the distribution for the Dutch participants. In the Netherlands 1,247 respondents started the survey. From those respondents 462 (37.0%) did not participate in the experiment because they would vote for a party that was not included in the experiment (n=137), would cast a blank vote (n=15), would not vote (n=121), would not say or did not know what to vote (n=169) or did not answer all questions relevant for the experiment (n=20). These respondents are excluded from all analyses. The chi-square and p-value indicate that in both countries voters from different parties are distributed equally between the experimental groups.

**Table 2.3** Participants in Belgian experiment

| Group<br>Party | 1. List vote or single pref. vote | 2. List vote or multiple pref. vote | 3. Single pref. vote | 4. Multiple pref. vote | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| CD&V | 16% | 12% | 17% | 16% | 15% |
| N-VA | 31% | 34% | 33% | 30% | 32% |
| Open VLD | 9% | 13% | 13% | 11% | 12% |
| sp.a | 16% | 15% | 15% | 18% | 16% |
| Groen | 12% | 14% | 8% | 10% | 11% |
| Vlaams Belang | 16% | 12% | 13% | 15% | 14% |
| **Total (N)** | **192** | **203** | **195** | **198** | **788** |

$\chi^2$ (15) = 9.597, p = .844
Source: Own dataset.

**Table 2.4** Participants in Dutch experiment

| Group<br>Party | 1. List vote or single pref. vote | 2. List vote or multiple pref. vote | 3. Single pref. vote | 4. Multiple pref. vote | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| VVD | 12% | 11% | 13% | 16% | 13% |
| PvdA | 11% | 17% | 15% | 7% | 12% |
| PVV | 24% | 22% | 25% | 27% | 25% |
| CDA | 12% | 12% | 7% | 11% | 11% |
| SP | 19% | 14% | 17% | 19% | 17% |
| D66 | 13% | 10% | 13% | 9% | 11% |
| GroenLinks | 4% | 7% | 5% | 6% | 6% |
| ChristenUnie | 6% | 6% | 4% | 5% | 5% |
| **Total (N)** | **197** | **195** | **183** | **210** | **785** |

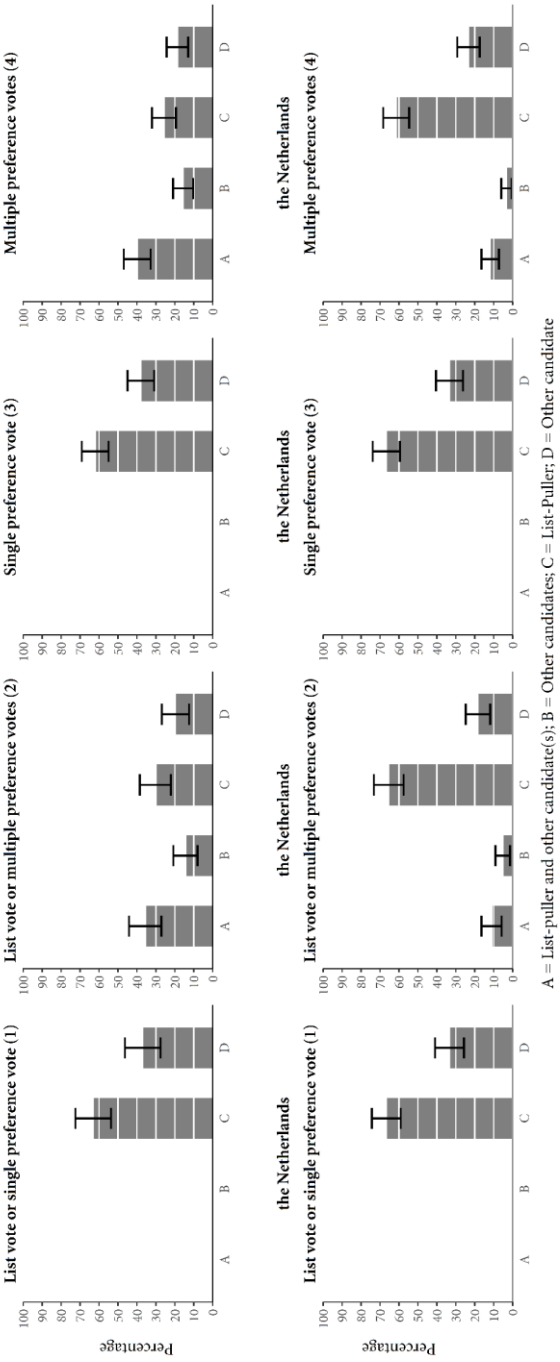
$\chi^2$ (21) = 22.230, p = .386
Source: Own dataset.

Before comparing the experimental groups, it should be noted that respondents who voted under the system they are used to, vote very much in line with the actual electoral results. In group 2 (list vote or multiple preference vote), which represents the Belgian electoral system, 35 per cent of the Belgian respondents cast a list vote (see figure 2.1). This is not very different from actual election results, which normally fluctuate around 40 per

**Figure 2.1** Types of votes cast

Since respondents in group 3 could only cast a single preference vote, this group is not shown.

**Figure 2.2** Types of preference votes cast



cent. In group 3 (single preference vote) 33 per cent of the Dutch respondents cast a vote for another candidate than the list-puller (see figure 2.2); this is also in line with the real outcome, although slightly higher than in real elections, probably as a result of the way the party lists were designed. Familiar candidates tend to be overrepresented on these lists and even more concentrated at the top of the list. Thus, it is not surprising that a slightly higher amount of voters cast a vote for another candidate in the experiment than can be observed in real-life elections.

The first thing to be noticed when comparing between groups is that voters respond to new rules. In the Netherlands approximately 20 per cent of the respondents in group 1 (list vote or single preference vote) and 2 (list vote or multiple preference votes) - who in real life do not have the option of a list vote - cast a list vote. The same is true for the option to cast multiple preference votes. In the Netherlands 15 per cent of the Dutch respondents did cast a preference vote for multiple candidates. Thus, a substantial part of Dutch voters made use of the new options, showing that the electoral rules matters.

However, Dutch voters made less use of the option to cast a list vote and were more likely to stick to a single preference vote compared to Belgian voters, of whom approximately 40 per cent did cast a list vote or used the option to cast multiple preference votes. Additionally, when we look at how many preference votes were cast by the respondents in group 2 (list vote or multiple preference votes) and 4 (multiple preference votes) it is clear that, with the exception of the respondents who cast 20 preference votes (1 in the Netherlands and 4 in Belgium), the maximum number of preference votes that were cast was lower in the Netherlands as well. The maximum number of votes on one ballot in the Netherlands was five, while in Belgium this was 17. Even when this outlier is discarded, the number of preferences votes in Belgium on a single ballot is still higher than in the Netherlands: nine. This is confirmed by looking at the averages. In Belgium, respondents who cast a preference vote in groups 2 or 4 (in which casting multiple preference votes was allowed) on average voted for 2.7 candidates[28], in the Netherlands this was 1.3.

Having shown that electoral rules influence voting behaviour, it is time to turn to the hypotheses. Table 2.5 and table 2.6 show the effect the list vote has on voting for respectively the list-puller and other candidates. The expectation is that having a list vote negatively affects voting for the list-puller (H2.1), but does not affect voting for other candidates (H2.2). There is indeed a statistically significant and medium effect of the list vote on voting for the list-puller. In Belgium 64 per cent of the respondents who did not have the option to cast a list vote, voted for the list-puller. Only 40 per cent out of the respondents who had the option to cast a list vote, voted for the list-puller. In the Netherlands, 70 per cent of the voters without the option to cast a list vote and 57 per cent of the voters with the option to cast a list vote cast a vote for the list-puller.

[28] The average number of preference votes for the 2007 federal elections in Belgium (in Flanders) was 2.63 (Wauters & Weekers, 2008, p. 64), 2.75 in 2010 and 2.55 in 2014 (own calculations), indicating that the results of the experiment are similar to actual election results.

**Table 2.5** Effect of list vote on votes for the list-puller

| | **Belgium** $\chi^2$ (1) = 45.905, $p < .001$ ; $\varphi = .241$ | | | **The Netherlands** $\chi^2$ (1) = 15.083, $p < .001$ ; $\varphi = .139$ | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | List vote | | | List vote | | |
| | No | Yes | Total | No | Yes | Total |
| Not voted for list-puller | 36% | 60% | 48% | 30% | 43% | 36% |
| Voted for list-puller | 64% | 40% | 52% | 70% | 57% | 64% |
| Total (N) | 393 | 395 | 788 | 393 | 392 | 785 |

Source: Own dataset.

**Table 2.6** Effect of list vote on votes for other candidates

| | **Belgium** $\chi^2$ (1) = 40.534, $p < .001$ ; $\varphi = .227$ | | | **The Netherlands** $\chi^2$ (1) = 7.506, $p = .006$ ; $\varphi = .098$ | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | List vote | | | List vote | | |
| | No | Yes | Total | No | Yes | Total |
| Not voted for other candidate | 44% | 66% | 55% | 64% | 73% | 68% |
| Voted for other candidate | 56% | 34% | 45% | 36% | 27% | 32% |
| Total (N) | 393 | 395 | 788 | 393 | 392 | 785 |

Source: Own dataset.

**Table 2.7** Effect of available number of preference votes on votes for list-puller

| | **Belgium** $\chi^2$ (1) = 1.788, $p$ = .181 ; $\varphi$ = .048 | | | **The Netherlands** $\chi^2$ (1) = 4.046, $p$ = .044 ; $\varphi$ = .072 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Preference votes | | | Preference votes | | |
| | Single | Multiple | Total | Single | Multiple | Total |
| Not voted for list-puller | 51% | 46% | 48% | 40% | 33% | 36% |
| Voted for list-puller | 49% | 54% | 52% | 60% | 67% | 64% |
| Total (N) | 387 | 401 | 788 | 380 | 405 | 785 |

Source: Own dataset.

**Table 2.8** Effect of available number of preference votes on votes for other candidates

| | **Belgium** $\chi^2$ (1) = 71.089, $p$ < .001 ; $\varphi$ = .300 | | | **The Netherlands** $\chi^2$ (1) = 0.864, $p$ = .353 ; $\varphi$ = .033 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Preference votes | | | Preference votes | | |
| | Single | Multiple | Total | Single | Multiple | Total |
| Not voted for other candidate | 70% | 40% | 55% | 70% | 67% | 68% |
| Voted for other candidate | 30% | 60% | 45% | 30% | 33% | 32% |
| Total (N) | 387 | 401 | 788 | 380 | 405 | 785 |

Source: Own dataset.

Surprisingly, there is also a statistically significant, although somewhat smaller, effect of the list vote on voting for other candidates. In Belgium, from the group of voters without a list vote 56 per cent cast a vote for another candidate. In the group of voters who had the option to cast a list vote, this percentage was only 34. In the Netherlands, in the group of voters who had the option to cast a list vote, 27 per cent did vote for another candidate; nine percentage points below the percentage of voters who cast a vote for another candidate in the group without a list vote. These results refute the idea that *all* votes for other candidates are more sophisticated and more 'preferential' in nature than votes for the list-puller in situations where a list vote is not possible. In this study, we see that the list-puller and other candidates are almost equally affected by the introduction (or abolition) of a list vote[29].

With regard to the option to cast multiple preference votes, the expectation is that having multiple preference votes will benefit other candidates (H2.3). For Belgium the results are in line with the hypothesis, but the results for the Netherlands are not in line with the hypothesis (see table 2.8). In Belgium, there is a statistically significant effect of the option to cast multiple preference votes on voting for other candidates. In the group of respondents without the option to cast multiple preference votes, only 30 per cent cast a vote for another candidate. However, in the group with respondents who had the option to cast multiple preference votes 60 per cent of the respondents cast a vote for another candidate. In the Netherlands this effect was absent. The difference between voting for other candidates in the group without multiple preference votes and in the group with multiple preference votes was only 3 percentage points, a difference that is not statistically significant. When it comes to voting for list-pullers, the expectation is that the option of multiple preference votes has no effect on the number of votes cast for the list-puller (H2.4). In Belgium, there was no statistically significant effect of the number of preference votes available on votes for the list-puller. In the Netherlands the relationship between both variables was statistically significant. However, the effect was very small (see table 2.7)[30].

The effects of the list vote and the option to cast multiple preference votes are also tested using logistic regression models, which allow for the inclusion of additional variables that could influence whether voters cast a vote for a list-puller or another candidate. For each country one model predicting voting for the list-puller (table 2.9) and one model predicting voting for other candidates (table 2.10) will be presented. These models contain

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[29] In table 2.6 and table 2.7, the other manipulation (i.e. the number of preference votes), is not taken into account. In appendix B.7 (page 170, table b.4 and table b.5) this distinction is taken into account. With one exception, the same conclusions can be drawn. Only for Dutch voters who had the option to vote for a single candidate, the effect of the list vote on voting for other candidates was not significant. However, the effect was in the same direction, so there is no reason to change the overall conclusion.

[30] In appendix B.7 (page 170, table b.6 and table b.7) the effects of the number of preference votes are also shown when the other manipulation (i.e. the list vote) is taken into account. The only difference is that for the Netherlands the effect of the number of votes on voting for the list-puller is not significant when we distinguish between those who had the option to cast a list vote and those who did not have the option to cast a list vote, which is in line with the hypothesis.

**Table 2.9** Voting for the list-puller

| | **Belgium** | **The Netherlands** |
|---|---|---|
| (Constant) | 0.474 | 1.220*** |
| | (0.259) | (0.317) |
| Option to cast a list vote | -1.184*** | -0.462* |
| | (0.173) | (0.190) |
| Option to cast multiple preference votes | 0.367* | 0.115 |
| | (0.170) | (0.190) |
| Political interest (Ref. = not interested) | | |
| Somewhat interested | 0.244 | -0.046 |
| | (0.192) | (0.237) |
| Highly interested | 0.308 | 0.593 |
| | (0.270) | (0.373) |
| Party member | 0.286 | -0.233 |
| | (0.254) | (0.366) |
| Evaluation difference (Ref. = No difference) | | |
| List-puller < party | -1.644*** | -1.028*** |
| | (0.238) | (0.237) |
| List-puller > party | 0.790*** | 0.433 |
| | (0.195) | (0.232) |
| Education (Ref. = low) | | |
| Middle | 0.008 | -0.293 |
| | (0.216) | (0.247) |
| High | -0.225 | -1.133*** |
| | (0.232) | (0.249) |
| -2LL | 832.293 | 650.020 |
| Cox and Snell's $R^2$ | 0.194 | 0.114 |
| Nagelkerke $R^2$ | 0.259 | 0.154 |
| N | 713 | 530 |

Note: *p< .05; **p< .01; ***p< .001. Standard errors in parentheses.
Source: Own dataset.

**Table 2.10** Voting for other candidates

| | **Belgium** | **The Netherlands** |
|---|---|---|
| (Constant) | -0.771** | -1.182*** |
| | (0.265) | (0.318) |
| Option to cast a list vote | -1.125*** | -0.541** |
| | (0.172) | (0.190) |
| Option to cast multiple preference votes | 1.387*** | 0.336 |
| | (0.173) | (0.191) |
| Political interest (Ref. = not interested) | | |
| Somewhat interested | 0.362 | 0.304 |
| | (0.195) | (0.240) |
| Highly interested | 0.506 | 0.035 |
| | (0.270) | (0.375) |
| Party member | 0.334 | 0.336 |
| | (0.249) | (0.360) |
| Evaluation difference (Ref. = No difference) | | |
| List-puller < party | 0.698** | 0.890*** |
| | (0.217) | (0.233) |
| List-puller > party | -0.418* | -0.295 |
| | (0.197) | (0.232) |
| Education (Ref. = low) | | |
| Middle | -0.043 | 0.236 |
| | (0.219) | (0.246) |
| High | 0.086 | 0.658** |
| | (0.229) | (0.247) |
| -2LL | 836.876 | 651.344 |
| Cox and Snell's $R^2$ | 0.182 | 0.077 |
| Nagelkerke $R^2$ | 0.244 | 0.106 |
| N | 713 | 530 |

Note: *p< .05; **p< .01; ***p< .001. Standard errors in parentheses.
Source: Own dataset.

two variables that state whether a respondent had the option to cast a list vote and whether the respondent had the option to cast multiple preference votes. In addition, a number of control variables are included. These models confirm most findings of the bivariate analyses. With regard to the list vote the logistic regression models show the same pattern as the bivariate analyses: the option to cast a list vote equally affects votes for the list-puller as well as other candidates. Some differences can be noticed when it comes to the effect of multiple preference votes on voting for the list-puller. While the bivariate analysis showed no effect of multiple preference votes on votes for the list-puller in Belgium, the logistic regression model (see table 2.9) shows that list-pullers also benefit when voters may cast multiple preference votes, contradicting hypothesis 2.4. For the Netherlands we conclude that the results confirm the hypothesis: there is no significant effect of having multiple preference votes on voting for the list-puller. The logistic regression models confirm that having the option to cast multiple preference votes benefits other candidates in Belgium, but not in the Netherlands (table 2.10). The difference between Belgium and the Netherlands persists when combining the cases in one model with an interaction term between the Netherlands and multiple list votes (see appendix B.8). So overall, the findings with regard to the effect of multiple preference votes are mixed. The nature of these differences will be discussed in the next section.

Most of the control variables that were included in the models were not significant. However, the variables with the comparison of the party and party leader evaluations are significant, both in Belgium and the Netherlands. Voters who gave the list-puller a higher (i.e. more favourable) evaluation than the party are more likely to cast a vote for the list-puller and voters who evaluated the list-puller lower than the party are more likely to cast a vote for another candidate. The evaluation of the list-puller might have something to do with the surprising findings with regard to the list vote also affecting voting for other candidates[31].

## 2.6 Discussion and conclusion

This chapter aimed at studying the extent to which electoral rules influence electoral behaviour with regard to preference voting. An experiment was conducted in order to answer this question. The focus of this experiment was not only on preference voting as such, but also on the distribution of preference votes across candidates.

The main finding is that electoral rules shape voting behaviour. Belgian voters were already used to the options of a list vote and multiple preference votes. Consequently, in the experimental groups for which these options were available many respondents also used them. For Dutch voters these options were new and about 20 per cent of the Dutch respondents made use of new options when they became available to them. A second important finding of this study is that the results show that - primarily for the Netherlands -

[31] The next chapter, which deals with the question which voters cast a preference vote, will discuss this issue.

the idea behind the distinction between a vote for the list-puller as a party vote and a vote for another candidate as a preference vote may be too strict and as such incorrect. The expectation was that in systems where a list vote is not possible many voters cast a vote for the first candidate because this is the most 'simple' option when one lacks information about the candidates. Thus, once an even simpler option becomes available in the form of a list vote it seems logical to expect that voters go for the list vote instead. For voters who cast a vote for another candidate no change was expected as this is considered to be a more sophisticated type of voting behaviour (Marsh, 1985), reflecting a 'real' preference. This expectation did not hold. Both the list-pullers and other candidates lose votes once the option to cast a list vote becomes available. Why voters who cast a more sophisticated vote in one situation switch to a 'simpler' type of vote in another situation is puzzling and raises the question whether a 'preference vote' for a list-puller and a preference vote for another candidate are as different from each other as is, especially in the Netherlands, often assumed. The hard distinction that is often made between a party vote and a preference vote, might be even more flawed than we already observed. It is not only the case that a 'party vote' could also be a preference vote (for the list-puller) (see Van Holsteyn & Andeweg, 2010), but a 'preference vote' (for another candidate) might also be a party vote. Finally, the results show that the benefits for lower ranked candidates as a result of the option to cast multiple preference votes only holds for Belgium.

As argued before, it is difficult to compare the results of the experiment of Belgium and the Netherlands, but it is nevertheless interesting to look at the similarities and differences. This could help to gain insight into avenues for further research. The third and fourth hypotheses, stating that other candidates benefit from the option of multiple preference votes and list-pullers do not, only receives support in Belgium. Additionally, while a substantial number of Dutch respondents make use of the option to cast a list vote or multiple preference votes, this percentage is by no means as high as the percentage of Belgian respondents using these options.

That observed differences are in line with research on electoral change. Moser and Scheiner (2012, p. 236) for example argue that effects of electoral system change are not always the same in all cases. They find that the political context of a country conditions the effect electoral rules have. The experience with democracy and the development of the party system especially determine how voters adapt to new electoral rules. With regard to the Dutch and Belgian case, it is only possible to speculate about the nature of these differences. Perhaps the Netherlands has stronger leaders on average, due to the single national district, giving voters less incentive to cast a list vote or to vote for candidates with a lower ballot list position. However, this is unlikely as in the experiment the Belgian lists were made as strong as the Dutch lists by including party leaders. The fact that the number of list votes is still higher for voters of the N-VA, which has a strong leader in Bart De Wever, goes against this explanation.

A more likely explanation is that differences can be attributed to voting habits.

Belgian respondents were familiar with the options to cast a list vote or multiple preference votes. For Dutch voters these rules were new, and consequently respondents may have stuck to their usual behaviour. This indicates that changes in the electoral system do not immediately result in changes of voting behaviour: voters need time to learn how to use the new rules. This interpretation corresponds with actual election results in Belgium. The option to cast multiple preference votes was introduced in 1995, but the option was hardly used in the elections of 1995 and 1999. In 2003 and 2007, however, the average number of votes per 'preference ballot'[32] increased (Wauters & Weekers, 2008). In 2010 this number increased again, before dropping slightly in 2014. In general an increasing use of multiple preference votes was visible. In addition, it seems to resemble the notion of habitual voting (Dinas, 2018): that voting in one election increases the chances of voting in the next election. Voting, according to this idea, is habit-forming. This contrasts the idea that voting is a consideration in terms of costs and benefits. If habits indeed seem to have an influence on the turnout, they might also have an influence on the act of voting itself. Casting a list vote, or a specific type of preference vote, might then also become a habit.

In this chapter the focus was solely on the voter, but if electoral rules would change, it is likely that parties and candidates would also change their behaviour. On top of that, Norris (2004) argues that electoral rules influence voters directly, but that voters are also influenced by the reaction of for example parties and candidates to those electoral rules. Parties will adapt their strategies on the basis of the electoral rules. If the ballot structure changes, parties will also change their strategies in order to achieve their goals. Within the context of this experiment it is not possible to make any statements about this issue, but is highly likely that such a mechanism would have additional influence on the effects of the introduction of new rules.

Further research, for example by studying first time voters, should shed more light on whether voting habits indeed can account for the differences. However, if this is the case it implies that the experimental method that is used to estimate effects of electoral rules, actually underestimates the effects found in this experiment.

The findings presented in this chapter have two important implications. First, the results suggest that preference votes might be less preferential with regard to a specific candidate than is often assumed. For systems without list votes it is often argued that whereas votes for list-pullers might not really be preferential, votes for other candidates are based on conscious decisions and are truly preferential. However, the findings of the analysis in this chapter cast doubt on this common assumption: both voters who cast a vote for the list-puller and voters who cast a vote for other candidates opted for a list vote when presented with this possibility.

The possibility that, for some voters, a list vote still contains a preference for a candidate cannot be fully excluded. It could be that they prefer candidates at the top of the

[32] A term used to distinguish cast ballots with preference votes from cast ballots with a list vote.

list and think that a list vote will help those candidates get elected. However, considering the effect sizes that are found it is unlikely that all voters who cast a list vote instead of a preferential vote think so strategically. Moreover, many voters may not be aware that by casting a list vote one technically supports the candidates at top positions. Particularly in the Dutch case, where voters are not used to these (new) rules and where not all implications of these rules were explained in the description, voters might not have been aware of the practicalities of the list vote. If this is true, the estimate of the percentage of voters who switch their vote might even be conservative. This could indicate that at least for a group of voters their preference vote might be less preferential than has often been assumed. What this discussion above all shows, is that further research is necessary to get a better understanding of the meaning of a preference vote and a better insight in the degree of preference in a so-called preference vote. The next chapter attempts to deal with this issue. However, further research should also focus on other cases to see if we can find similar results. First, it might be interesting to see whether there is a difference in effects between open and flexible list systems which allow voters to cast a party vote. It might be that the openness of the list is an additional constraint to casting a negatively motivated preference vote, next to the list vote. In addition, systems that combine compulsory candidate voting with a (more) open list system, such as Estonia and Finland, would be interesting cases. What would voters do in such systems if they have no, or only negative candidate preferences?

Second, even when being modest in comparing the results of the experiment in Belgium and the Netherlands, the fact remains that different results in both countries were found. These differences might be the result of voting habits. If this is true, it means that the effects that are found are an underestimation. In real life, and in particular over time, the results may be stronger.