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

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# 4 The supply side: what determines the popularity of candidates?

## 4.1 Introduction

If there is a demand side there should also be a supply side to meet this demand: in this case the candidates that are on the party lists and from which the voters can choose. According to Marsh (1985, p. 371) "candidates' characteristics may be particularly salient where parties are composites of clearly defined subgroups. These may be ideological, and many derive from group identity – ethnic, religious, class, locality – or may be more personal: incumbents, for instance, may be perceived as potentially more effective deputies than their challengers".

There is a huge variation in the popularity of candidates in the Netherlands and Belgium. Even between those candidates who are elected large differences exist between the numbers of preference votes they receive. In the Netherlands, in each election a few candidates receive more than 100,000 votes, but at the same time some elected candidates only receive around 200 votes. The Dutch election of 2006 was an extreme election in this respect. While Rita Verdonk (2nd position VVD) received 620,555 preference votes, Tony van Dijck (8th position PVV) received 114 votes. The electoral threshold for an individual candidate to be elected on the basis of preference votes amounted to 16,398 votes. Thus, while Verdonk reached this number almost 38 times, Tony van Dijck did not reach one per cent of the individual threshold, but both candidates were elected to parliament. A comparison between the total number of votes of each elected candidate in Belgium does not tell the entire story, because of the size of the districts. However, it shows that differences in Belgium are also large. In 2014, for example, Bart de Wever was (in absolute terms) the most popular elected candidate with 314,650 votes. Benoit Hellings received 3,725 votes and was (again in absolute terms) the least popular elected candidate. If we look at the number of votes, relative to the number of votes needed to be elected based on preference votes, Bart de Wever was still the most popular candidate. He received 8.4 times the number of votes needed to be elected directly. In relative terms, Marijke Dillen was the least popular candidate. She only received one fifth of the number of votes needed to be elected based on preference votes.

Of course, these differences might not be relevant for all candidates. After all, both countries have a flexible list-system, in which parties still have a large influence on which candidates are elected and which candidates are not. Preference votes for a candidate are thus not always relevant, since candidates can also rely on the party. This is for example visible in the fact that in the Netherlands by no means all candidates take action to receive preference votes (Van Holsteyn & Andeweg, 2012, pp. 177–178). In Belgium, most candidates only campaign for their party and not for themselves either. Approximately one fifth of the candidates run a more personalized campaign, in which they try to convince

voters to vote for them specially and not only try to make sure the voter cast a vote for the party (Van Erkel et al., 2017, pp. 393–394). Still, research has shown that preference votes have consequences beyond the scope of who gets elected. Parties for example reward popular candidates with better list positions in subsequent elections or promote them to better political functions (André, Depauw, Shugart, et al., 2017; Crisp et al., 2013; Folke et al., 2016; see also chapter 5 of this dissertation). Thus, there are two reasons why it is relevant to know which candidates are successful: it influences which candidates are elected and also influences later decisions of political parties. Therefore, this chapter looks at what factors determine the electoral success of candidates.

## 4.2 Expectations[65]

### 4.2.1 Socio-demographic factors

As we saw in chapter 3, socio-demographic factors play a role when it comes to preference voting. These factors especially seem to benefit candidates from groups who are traditionally underrepresented. If citizens of these underrepresented groups vote for candidates from their own group, we would expect that women, candidates from ethnic minorities, candidates within a certain age category and candidates from specific regions are likely to receive more preference votes. However, the evidence is not conclusive.

For example, there is no consensus whether gender has influence on the number of preference votes a candidate receives. While some studies in different contexts show that no voter bias against women exists (Black & Erickson, 2003; McElroy & Marsh, 2010; Wauters et al., 2010), Erzeel and Caluwaerts (2015) show that especially voters with low levels of political interest are still only voting for male candidates. Erzeel et al. (2017) argue that a "gender-based vote from the part of female voters (i.e. women opting to vote for women) is still limited". Wauters et al. (2010) observed that in the 2003 Belgian federal elections women received fewer preference votes than men. The conclusion of their study was that "women do not obtain a lower number of preferential votes because they are women (no voter bias), but because they are less likely to occupy crucial positions on the list, wage a less expensive campaign and get less media coverage (systemic bias)" (Wauters et al., 2010, p. 483). Controlling for the systemic bias resulted in no gender effect. This corresponds with McElroy and Marsh (2010, p. 824). They argue that "the role that candidate sex plays in voting behaviour is undoubtedly complex", but that there is no evidence that women are 'discriminated' against by voters. If they receive fewer votes, other factors can explain this. In absolute terms female candidates receive fewer votes than male candidates, but other factors can explain this, for example because male candidates have better list positions. Therefore, controlled for such factors, in Belgium female candidates still receive marginally more preference votes than male candidates (see for example Maddens et al., 2010). In the Netherlands the effect is larger, although this is to a large extent caused by the first female

[65] A summary of the expectations can be found in table 4.1.

candidate on the list (Van Holsteyn & Andeweg, 2012). Gender-based voting in the Netherlands therefore seems more important than it is in Belgium.

The effect of age is not linear (Maddens et al., 2007). Candidates tend to receive more preference votes when they are older, but beyond a certain age (around 60) the vote level drops to the level of the youngest candidates. In the Dutch national election of 2010, members of ethnic minorities receive on average 7,516 preference votes, compared to 2,064 preference votes for those candidates not belonging to an ethnic minority (when votes for list-pullers are not included). However, the first figure is highly influenced by the average for the highest placed candidate from an ethnic minority on the list (which is 16,280) (Van Holsteyn & Andeweg, 2012). The first set of hypotheses therefore is:

> **Hypothesis 4.1**: If a candidate belongs to a traditionally underrepresented social group in parliament he or she will receive more preference votes, than a candidate who belongs to a social group that is traditionally overrepresented in parliament.
> **Hypothesis 4.2**: The effect described in hypothesis 4.1 is stronger for the first candidate of a specific group, than it is for other candidates belonging to that group.

Studies in the U.S. and United Kingdom also show that voters tend to vote for candidates who live closer to them (Arzheimer & Evans, 2012; Gimpel et al., 2008). Jankowski (2016) found that in the parliamentary elections of Hamburg candidates receive more votes in their own urban district, and that the effect is larger for the first candidate from a district on the list. Not much research has been done on the regional effect of the preference vote, but Van Holsteyn and Andeweg (2012) concluded that in the Dutch national elections of 2010 region did not seem to have a large influence. However, 30 years earlier Hessing (1985) concluded that most elected candidates in the Dutch elections of 1982 received relatively most votes in their own district (*kieskring*).

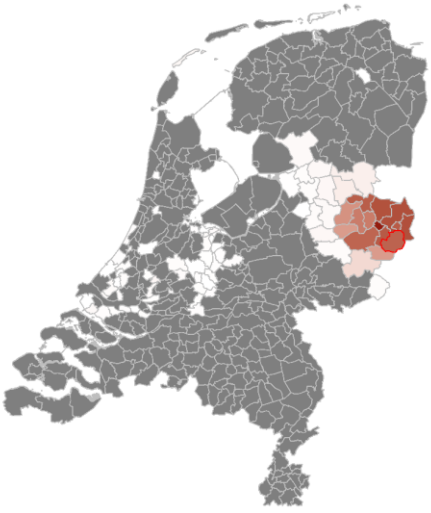
The findings for the Netherlands of Van Holsteyn and Andeweg and Hessing contradict each other. Of course, it could be that trends in preference voting simply changed in 30 years. However, in the previous chapter we saw that an important reason for Dutch voters to cast a preference vote is that the candidate is from the same region or that they know the candidate personally: together these two reasons were mentioned by approximately 20 per cent of the voters as their motivation for casting a preference vote (see table 3.4, page 51). Furthermore, if we look at the seven candidates who are elected out of list order in the three most recent Dutch parliamentary elections (of 2010, 2012 and 2017), we see that regional considerations seem to play an important role for most of these candidates' preference votes. Figure 4.1 shows their share of preference votes in each municipality. Five candidates received most of their preference votes in their own place of residence (indicated on the map with a red border) and the surrounding municipalities. Especially Sabine Uitslag (2010), Pieter Omtzigt (2012), Maurits von Martels (2017), and

**Figure 4.1** Candidates elected out of list order and their vote share per municipality

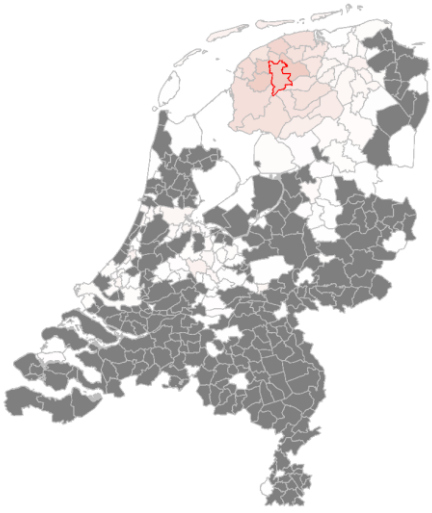
**A) Pia Dijkstra, D66 (2010)**

**B) Sabine Uitslag, CDA (2010)**

**C) Pieter Omtzigt, CDA (2012)**



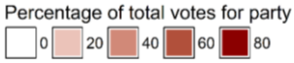
**D) Isabelle Diks, GroenLinks (2017)**



**E) Maurits von Martels, CDA (2017)**

**F) Lilianne Ploumen, PvdA (2017)**

**G) Lisa Westerveld, GroenLinks (2017)**




Note: These maps show the preference votes a candidate received in each municipality, as a percentage of the total number of votes for their party in that municipality. The place of residence of the candidate (indicated on the ballot) is marked by a red border.

In municipalities that are coloured grey the candidate received a lower percentage of preference votes than was necessary to be elected out of list order. In other words, if the candidate would have received the same percentage of preference votes in each municipality as in such a municipality, the candidate would not have reached the individual threshold to be elected out of list order.

Sources: Kiesraad (2017a) for 2010 and 2012 election results and Dataportaal van de Nederlandse overheid (2017) for 2017 election result; visualization borders municipality: © Kadaster and Centraal Bureau for de Statistiek (2013, 2015, 2016). For the visualization of the 2017 election the *Wijk- en buurtkaart* 2016 was used.

Lisa Westerveld (2017) received most of their preference votes in a very specific part of the country. The fact that Van Holsteyn and Andeweg did not find an effect might have a methodological reason: regional distance between voters and candidates was operationalized as an interval-ratio variable measuring the distance between the municipality of the voter and the municipality of the candidate (2012, p. 180). Based on what is visible in figure 4.1 this might not be the ideal way to operationalize the variable. It seems there is a strong effect when the distance between voter and candidate is relatively short, but the effect is not linear. After a certain distance it stops, and after that point distance plays no role anymore. In this chapter a subsection will be devoted to the regional origin of Dutch candidates to test the hypothesis that:

> **Hypothesis 4.3**: Dutch candidates receive relatively more votes in their own district (kieskring) than they receive in other districts.

### 4.2.2 Ballot position

One of the strongest predictors of the number of preference votes a candidate receives is the ballot position of the candidate. Evidence for the effects of ballot position are overwhelming, although much of earlier research may have been influenced by not considering other explanations or is methodologically flawed by using wrong statistical models, or even no statistical model at all (Darcy & McAllister, 1990). Recent studies, which also take other factors into consideration, come to the same conclusion however: candidates towards the top of the list receive more votes (Blom-Hansen et al., 2016; Faas & Schoen, 2006; Lutz, 2010; Miller & Krosnick, 1998; Ortega Villodres, 2003), even when lists of candidates are ordered alphabetically (Lijphart & López Pintor, 1988). Even in races with only two candidates, the ordering of the candidates matters to the advantage of the first listed candidate (Chen et al., 2014). In addition, also the list-pusher (i.e. the candidate on the last position on the list) receives more votes than candidates just above him or her on the list. However, the advantage for list-pushers is not as large as the advantage for candidates on the first positions on the list (Marcinkiewicz, 2014). Parties sometimes place well-known candidates, either from inside politics or outside politics on this last position, with the idea to attract voters. For example, in 2017 the PvdA had Jan Smeets (who is the founder of Pinkpop, a large music festival that is held every year in the Netherlands) on the last position of the list. In Belgium the last position on the list is often occupied by a politician who is active at another level and does not have the ambition to enter the Chamber of Representatives. For example in 2010 Rudy Demotte, as the Minister-President of Wallonia, was list-pusher for PS in the district of Hainaut.

An important question is whether the ballot position is a pure primacy effect, or whether candidates towards the top of the list receive more votes because they are better qualified for office. Van Erkel and Thijssen (2016) show that the success of candidates at the top of the list can partly be explained by the political experience of those candidates and the fact that they receive more media attention. However, a primacy effect works to their

advantage, both because voters have a confirmation bias towards candidates on top of the list and because of a pure primacy effect: some voters vote for the first candidate on the list, simply because the candidates is the first one on the list (Van Erkel & Thijssen, 2016).

> **Hypothesis 4.4**: The more a candidate is positioned towards the top of the list, the more preference votes he or she will receive.
> **Hypothesis 4.5**: The last candidate on the list (the list-pusher) attracts more votes than might be expected based on the low list position he or she occupies.

### 4.2.3 Political experience

Whether voters actually prefer incumbents or whether incumbents receive more votes because of structural factors that are to their advantage is a matter of debate (see for example Brown, 2014), but there is no doubt that in many countries a positive correlation between incumbency and preference votes exists (Karvonen, 2011b; Maddens et al., 2007; Marsh, 1985; McElroy & Marsh, 2010; Van Holsteyn & Andeweg, 2012). In addition, candidates with experience in other political functions performed at the local level, either directly before the election or earlier, attract more preference votes as well (Maddens et al., 2007; Tavits, 2010).

One way to explain the advantage incumbents and candidates with other political functions have with regard to the number of preference votes they receive, is the fact that they appear in the media more often. Maddens et al. (2006) and Van Aelst et al. (2006, 2008) found a positive effect of media exposure on the number of preference votes. Politicians who appear in the main news bulletin on national television more than once during the campaign receive significantly more preference votes than candidates who do not (Van Aelst et al., 2006). The effect of being mentioned in newspapers seems to be especially significant for those candidates who do not appear on television. Candidates being mentioned in newspapers receive more preference votes than those candidates who are not being mentioned in newspapers (Van Aelst et al., 2006).

> **Hypothesis 4.6**: Candidates with more political experience receive more preference votes than candidates with less political experience.

### 4.2.4 Ideological differences

A possible additional factor that could influence the popularity of candidates is if there are ideological differences between candidates within the same party. We know from studies on interparty competition that ideology plays a role when voters decide for which party they vote. Could there also be an effect of ideology on the intraparty competition? Political parties are often seen as unitary actors (e.g. Downs, 1957) and MPs in Belgium and the Netherlands often vote according to party lines (Van Vonno, 2016). However, there are differences in how Dutch MPs of the same party place themselves on a left-right scale, and

these differences are larger when it comes to specific issues (Andeweg & Thomassen, 2011). For candidates in Flanders (Belgium) research has also shown that such differences between candidates from the same party exist (Van Erkel, 2017, p. 96). These differences are relatively small, however. This is no surprise, first of all because parties have an incentive to strive for party unity. Second, it would not make sense, especially in a multi-party system if a candidate from a left-wing party would have opinions that are extremely right. In such a situation it is more likely that the candidate would be a member of a right-wing party.

However, some variation might also have an advantage for parties, if the electoral systems allows for intraparty choice. Candidates with, relatively extreme positions within the party might attract voters from other parties. In an experiment on the effects of electoral systems Blumenau et al. (2017) for example found that, British voters under an open list system are likely to switch from niche parties to mainstream parties. Some Eurosceptic voters voted for UKIP under closed list rules and switched to a Eurosceptic candidate of the Conservative party under open list rules.

Throughout this study the assumption is that voters first choose for which party to vote. Next, they make a choice for a specific candidate. If differences between candidates of the same party exist, this might give the voter an opportunity to express a preference for a certain direction (see also Blumenau et al., 2017). According to the directional theory of issue voting (Rabinowitz & Macdonald, 1989), voters do not vote for the party which is closest to them on the left-right scale (assuming a political space with a single dimension) but for the party which takes the most extreme position on their side of scale. This would suggest major support for extremist parties, an expectation that is not supported by empirical findings. Rabinowitz and Macdonald therefore include the 'region of acceptability' in their model. If a party would cross a certain boundary, it would be penalized by the voters. Voters thus vote for the most extreme party within the region of acceptability. In terms of the intraparty competition this region of acceptability is less important for voters: it is likely to assume that the acceptability is already regulated by the party. It is unlikely that a candidate who is unacceptable to a (large part of the) voter(s) of a party, is acceptable to the party itself. If voters want to push the party in a particular direction, the direction model would suggest that the voter votes for the candidate who takes the most extreme position in that direction within that party.

There is some evidence that candidates who deviate from their party have some electoral success. 'Rebellions' in the UK may pay off, although the effect is weak, even in favourable conditions (Vivyan & Wagner, 2012). Results are mixed, however; as another study shows that voters take deviation by MPs as a sign of integrity and trustworthiness and they therefore have stronger preference for such candidates (Campbell et al., 2016). Findings for the US also show that voters partly base their voting decision on how members of Congress vote (Ansolabehere & Jones, 2010; Carson et al., 2010).

It is not necessarily true that the effect of deviating from the party line is the same for all candidates. I expect that this effect especially applies to candidates more towards the end

of the list. They might be more inclined to deviate from the party line, in order to attract voters, since they depend more on the voter. Candidates towards the top of the list can rely more on the party to be elected and thus it is less important for them to distinguish themselves from co-partisans. At the same time, parties may also be more inclined to put candidates towards the top of the list who are more loyal to the party. Therefore, we expect that:

> **Hypothesis 4.7**: Candidates who deviate more from the party line will receive more preference votes than candidates who deviate less from the party line.
> **Hypothesis 4.8**: The more the candidate has a position towards the end on the list, the stronger the effect of deviating from the party line (hypothesis 4.7).

The only recent study that addressed the ideological positions of candidates in this context of intraparty competition found no effect of ideology on the electoral success of candidates in Belgium (Van Erkel, 2017, p. 104). Van Erkel studied the effect of ideology based on a candidate survey, in which candidates were asked their position on 30 ideological questions on six dimensions: economy, environment, Europe, migration, ethnics and federalism. While he found that variation existed on these dimensions between members of the same party, he found no effect of that variation on the preference votes candidates received.

One of the explanations Van Erkel gives for his non-finding relates to the availability of the information voters need to distinguish the ideological positions of candidates. A first problem is that this information is hard to find, and, if available at all the second problem relates to the capability of voters to process the information. While Voting Advice Applications (VAAs) at the party level is a growing and popular phenomenon (Marschall & Garzia, 2014), for candidates the use of such VAAs is (still) limited (Dumont et al., 2014). A voter therefore should actively search for information about the policy positions of a candidate if the voter wishes to cast a vote for a candidate with a similar ideological position. As will be explained below I measure ideological positions of candidates in a different way, namely based on content analysis of speeches made by MPs in plenary sessions of parliament and of written questions submitted. In line with the availability of information argument, we might expect a different effect based on both these sources. I argue that it is more likely that candidates who distinguish themselves from co-partisans in the questions they ask attract more votes. First of all, because of the function these questions have. Walgrave and Van Aelst (2006) distinguish between substantial and symbolic political agendas. They argue that political agendas 'can be placed on a continuum ranging from substantial to symbolic' (2006, p. 95). Furthermore, media affects the questions that are submitted (Van Aelst & Vliegenthart, 2014). The questions MPs ask might have a more symbolic function, showing that they care about issues which are reported on in the media, while speeches made in plenary sessions might be more substantial in nature. In addition,

an MP might have more freedom while asking questions compared to when he or she is delivering a speech in parliament[66]. When delivering a speech in parliament the MP is at that time the spokesperson of the party and therefore might be more constrained by the party. Second, because of their symbolic functions it is more likely that the positions MPs take while asking questions is known to the voters. I therefore expect that:

> **Hypothesis 4.9**: Deviating from the party line has a stronger effect on preference votes when it is done through submitting questions, than it has during speeches in plenary sessions of parliament.

### 4.2.5 Party effects

Next to these explanations at the level of the candidate, there may be effects relating to the party. These might have an effect on the number of preference votes candidates receive, and should therefore be discussed in this chapter. A first factor that might influence the number of preference votes at the party level is whether the party is relatively new or not. Traditional parties in general have a larger pool of candidates who are familiar to the voter, they have more local politicians and (former) ministers (see Wauters et al., 2016, p. 5). Therefore, they are able to attract more preference votes, so we expect that:

> **Hypothesis 4.10**: Candidates from traditional parties are more likely to receive preference votes than candidates from newer parties.

There is a specific group of parties for which we expect that candidates receive fewer preference votes: populist parties. These parties are often characterized as parties with strong 'charismatic' leaders and often lack a differentiated internal party structure (Kitschelt, 1995; Taggart, 2004). We can therefore expect that other candidates than the party leaders from these parties receive fewer preference votes, because of both the strong appeal of the leader[67] and the fact that other candidates are relatively unknown to the voter. Since there is a weaker party structure (or no local party roots at all) for these parties, candidates have fewer options to become familiar to the voters of these parties.

> **Hypothesis 4.11**: Candidates from populist parties are less likely to receive preference votes than candidates from other parties.

Some scholars argue that ideology has an influence on preference voting. Preferential voting is "slightly more common amongst the political right" (see also Karvonen, 2011b;

[66] Although, some political parties have internal rules that state that members should ask their party for permission before submitting questions (Andeweg & Thomassen, 2011, p. 659).

[67] In the Netherlands the votes for the leader are not considered to be preference votes, while in Belgium they are. The effect therefore might be stronger in the Netherlands. However, in Belgium the leader of the party can still only be elected in one district, so in other districts we would also expect that the first candidate on the list of a populist party would receive fewer votes.

Marsh, 1985, p. 369). André, Depauw and Pilet (André, Depauw, & Pilet, 2017) also found that casting a preference vote is more common in right-wing parties. According to them, the reason for this is the fact that candidates from right-wing parties tend to run more personalized campaigns than candidates from the left (André, Depauw, & Pilet, 2017). Running a personalized campaign indeed seems to have an effect on the levels of preference voting. In the Netherlands in 2006 parliamentarians were asked whether they had undertaken activities during the election campaign in 2003 to get preference votes. According to this study 40 MPs had undertaken such activities and 70 had not (the list-pullers were not included in the analysis). They received on average respectively 5,601 and 3,958 votes, suggesting that a personalized campaign does make a difference (Van Holsteyn & Andeweg, 2012). Belgian research has also shown that individual campaign expenses have a robust and positive effect on preference votes (Maddens et al., 2006; Maddens & Put, 2013; Van Erkel et al., 2017).

> **Hypothesis 4.12**: Candidates from right-wing parties are more likely to receive preference votes than candidates from left-wing parties.

Finally, based on the findings in the previous chapter, we expect that in the Netherlands candidates from parties with less popular list-pullers receive more preference votes. Since in the Netherlands voters are forced to vote for a candidate, voters without a candidate preference tend to vote for the first candidate on the list. However, the previous chapter showed that for some voters without a positive candidate preference, a negative candidate preference exists: they have no strong preference for another candidate, but they do not want to vote for the list-puller. These voters switch to another candidate, for whom they have no real preference. Thus, we expect that:

> **Hypothesis 4.13**: In the Netherlands, candidates of parties with less popular list-pullers receive more preference votes than candidates of parties with more popular list-pullers.

## 4.3 Methods and data

To test the hypotheses presented in the previous section multilevel regression analyses were conducted. Since the used data are clustered at several levels, a single level regression model would be problematic. Not all observations are independent from each other, since they are clustered in parties, elections and (for Belgium) in districts. When a single level regression model is run with these data, it does not provide correct standard errors (Jones, 2009). A multilevel model, with random intercepts for these groups addresses this problem.

For each country four different specifications of the multilevel model will be presented in the results section. The first model is the basic model, containing only independent variables at the candidate level. In the second model independent variables at

**Table 4.1** Summary of expectations for chapter 4

| Group | Categories | H | Expectation |
|---|---|---|---|
| Underrepresented social groups | Women | 4.1 | + |
| | Candidates with a non-European background | 4.1 | + |
| First of a underrepresented social groups | First woman | 4.2 | + |
| | First candidate with a non-European background | 4.2 | + |
| Geographical representation | Dutch candidates in their own *kieskring* | 4.3 | + |
| List position | More towards the top | 4.4 | + |
| | Lowest position | 4.5 | + |
| Political experience | Incumbent MP | 4.6 | + |
| | Minister | 4.6 | + |
| | Junior minister | 4.6 | + |
| Deviating from party line | | 4.7 | + |
| | Interaction with list position | 4.8 | + |
| | Stronger for question than for plenary sessions | 4.9 | + |
| Party effects | Traditional parties | 4.10 | + |
| | Populist parties | 4.11 | - |
| | Right-wing parties | 4.12 | + |
| | Parties with unpopular list-pullers | 4.13 | + |

the party level are included as well. In addition, the third and fourth models contain variables that measure a candidate's deviation from the party line.

### 4.3.1 Candidates included in the analyses

The analysis for the Dutch case is based on the parliamentary elections between 1998 and 2017. For the most part of this period, the Netherlands was divided in 19 districts (*kieskringen*). Since 2012 the country has 20 districts[68]. These districts mainly have an administrative function, but this function is salient for the analysis in this chapter.

Political parties can present a different list of candidates in each district (see also section 1.1.1). This has two important implications when we compare the preference votes of candidates at a national level. First, not all candidates participated in all districts. Some political parties present lists that contain different candidates at the end of the list in each district. For example, a party that is allowed to have a maximum of 30 candidates on the list in each district may choose to run with the same 25 names in the same order on the first 25 positions in each district, but present a different number 26 to 30 in each district. They may want to put some regional candidates on the list in a district, or they may want to present more than 30 candidates in total. Second, a party may choose to present a list with the same

[68] The 20th district, which was created in 2012, is formed by the three municipalities in the Caribbean Netherlands.

30 candidates in each district, but vary the order in each district. Therefore, a candidate 1) does not always appear on the ballot in all districts and 2) does not always appear on the ballot on the same position in each district. To make sure the results of the regression analyses are not biased by these differences in candidates, only the candidates who participated in all districts *and* were placed on the same position on each list are included in the analysis.

If all parties would have presented identical lists in all districts in the elections between 1998 and 2017, the total number of candidates would have been 4,845. In reality, a total of 6,123 candidates participated in the elections. Of these candidates 3,725 (61 per cent) were placed on the same position and participated in all districts. In addition, the list-pullers are excluded from the analysis. This results in a total of 3,623 candidates in the analysis.

The analysis for Belgium is based on the federal elections between 2003 and 2014. Parties in Belgium present lists with effective candidates and successors. Effective candidates can be elected directly. On each list the maximum number of effective candidates equals the number of seats to be elected in a district. Successors cannot be elected directly; they replace effective candidates who do not take up their seat or leave parliament before the end of the legislative term. The list of successors has a maximum of half the number of seats available in a district. Since successors cannot be elected directly, only effective candidates will be included in the analysis. In the four elections between 2003 and 2014 in total 6,943 effective candidates participated.

### 4.3.2 The dependent variable

The dependent variable should be a measurement of a candidate's electoral success. Therefore, preference votes are used to determine the electoral success. There are different ways in which this measurement can be operationalized. In this chapter I use the proportion of a candidate's preference vote relative to the total votes cast for candidates within the candidate's party at the level at which the seats are distributed to parties. Thus for the Netherlands this is in relation to the total votes for the party (since voting for a candidate is mandatory) at the national level, but for Belgium this is in relation to the number of votes cast for candidates (so excluding the list votes) within a district. Another option would have been to look at the proportion of votes in relation to total number of votes cast for candidates. However, in this dissertation the main focus is on the intraparty competition, since the assumption behind second-order personalization is that a voter first decides for which party he or she will vote. Only when the party choice is made, the voter makes a specific choice for a candidate within that party. Therefore it makes sense to look to a candidate's popularity relative to the popularity of other candidates of the same party. The advantage of taking the relative number of votes, instead of the absolute number of votes, is that the relative number of votes do not depend on the size of the party or (in the Belgian case) the size of the district.

The distribution of the percentage of preference votes for each candidate is highly skewed; therefore a decimal log transformation of the percentage of preference votes is used as the dependent variable[69]. For the Netherlands this data comes from the official documents published by the *Kiesraad,* which contain the results of the election (Kiesraad, 1998, 2002, 2003, 2006, 2010, 2012, 2017a). For Belgium this data comes from the official website of the Belgian government, containing the election results (Belgium.be, 2003, 2007, 2010, 2014).

In the Netherlands the average candidate received 0.64 per cent preference votes, ranging from 0.002 to 43.0 per cent. Table 4.2 shows for different levels of preference votes how many candidates reached that level. The table shows how skewed the distribution is: more than 40 per cent of the candidates received less than 0.1 per cent of the votes of a party. Only 12 per cent of the candidates received more than 1 per cent of the votes of his or her party[70]. This is important to keep in mind when the results of the multilevel model are discussed.

**Table 4.2** Percentage of preference votes for Dutch candidates

| **Percentage** | **1998** | **2002** | **2003** | **2006** | **2010** | **2012** | **2017** | **Total** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 0.00 up to 0.10 | 33.3 | 42.5 | 39.3 | 49.0 | 46.3 | 41.8 | 43.2 | 42.3 |
| 0.10 up to 0.25 | 21.1 | 22.5 | 23.7 | 22.2 | 21.9 | 24.9 | 24.8 | 23.1 |
| 0.25 up to 0.50 | 14.8 | 12.7 | 16.0 | 11.8 | 12.0 | 15.8 | 12.1 | 13.6 |
| 0.50 up to 1.00 | 11.5 | 9.2 | 9.6 | 6.7 | 7.6 | 9.2 | 8.4 | 8.8 |
| 1.00 up to 2.00 | 9.4 | 3.8 | 4.3 | 3.9 | 5.4 | 4.5 | 5.2 | 5.3 |
| 2.00 up to 4.00 | 5.3 | 4.1 | 4.1 | 2.3 | 4.7 | 1.8 | 2.2 | 3.4 |
| 4.00 up to 10.00 | 3.3 | 3.8 | 2.1 | 2.5 | 1.6 | 1.8 | 2.8 | 2.5 |
| 10.00 and higher | 1.2 | 1.4 | 0.9 | 1.6 | 0.5 | 0.2 | 1.3 | 0.9 |
| **Total (N)** | **487** | **369** | **438** | **433** | **643** | **619** | **634** | **3,623** |

Source: own dataset. Included are all candidates who participated in all districts from the same position in an election (list-pullers are excluded).

In Belgium, on average a candidate receives 5.67 per cent of the preference votes of his or her party, within a range from 0.6 to 53.2 per cent. The distribution of preference votes is extremely skewed in Belgium as well (see table 4.3). Only 2.4 per cent of the

[69] Using the decimal log has some advantages and disadvantages compared to using the natural log (see for example Gelman & Hill, 2007, pp. 60–61). I chose to use to decimal log for this dependent variable, to be consistent with the transformation I use for the dependent variable in the analyses presented in chapter 5 (on the effect of preference votes on the list position for the next election), a choice made based on the fact that it was used in previous research (André, Depauw, Shugart, et al., 2017).

[70] The fact that there seems to be a relative drop of the number of candidates with higher percentages of preference votes is mainly caused by the decline of candidates who do not participate in all districts. The absolute number of candidates who receive over 1 per cent of the vote stays roughly equal: in absolute terms the group of candidates with fewer preference votes increases. This is because the candidates who do not participate in all districts are low on the list. If fewer parties present lists in different districts with different candidates on the lower positions of the list, the number of candidates participating in all districts increases. And since the increase is caused by candidates lower at the list, who tend to receive fewer votes, the group of candidates participating in all districts and receiving few preference votes increases.

candidates received more than 25 per cent of the preference votes. The majority of candidates (70 per cent) did not receive more than 5 per cent.

**Table 4.3** Percentage of preference votes for Belgian candidates

| Percentage | 2003 | 2007 | 2010 | 2014 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 0.00 up to 2.50 | 34.5 | 27.5 | 31.5 | 22.3 | 29.2 |
| 2.50 up to 5.00 | 36.5 | 40.9 | 36.7 | 41.8 | 38.9 |
| 5.00 up to 10.00 | 17.1 | 19.6 | 19.3 | 19.1 | 18.8 |
| 10.00 up to 15.00 | 4.8 | 5.7 | 5.7 | 6.2 | 5.6 |
| 15.00 up to 25.00 | 4.9 | 4.7 | 5.3 | 5.8 | 5.2 |
| 25.00 and higher | 2.1 | 1.5 | 1.4 | 4.8 | 2.4 |
| **Total (N)** | **1880** | **1776** | **1688** | **1599** | **6943** |

Source: own dataset. Included are all effective candidates.

### 4.3.3 Independent variables

Most of the relevant independent variables are readily available from the official election records for the Netherlands (Kiesraad, 1998, 2002, 2003, 2006, 2010, 2012, 2017a) and Belgium (Belgium.be, 2003, 2007, 2010, 2014). First of all, the gender of a candidate is obtained from these documents. In the Netherlands, for most candidates the gender is given on the ballot. However, not all parties publish the gender of the candidates on their list. Missing data was added as much as possible by hand coding the gender[71]. In addition, for female candidates it was coded whether they were the first woman on the list (coded as 1) or not (coded as 0).

Second, the ethnicity of a candidate was coded based on the name of a candidate. For each candidate it was coded whether they had or at least seem to have a non-European ethnicity. Coding based on the name is not be the most optimal solution, although it has been done before (e.g. Thijssen, 2013; Van Erkel, 2017, p. 49; Van Holsteyn & Andeweg, 2012). For those candidates with a non-European background it was also coded whether they were the first non-European on the list (coded as 1) or not (coded as 0).

Third, the list position of a candidate was obtained from the official election records. List position is operationalized in two different ways. For the Netherlands, in the second, third and fourth model list position is included relative to the number of elected members for that party. For example, if a party wins 10 seats in an election, the candidate on position 10 has a list position of 1 in this operationalization and the candidate on position 1 has a list position of 0 in this operationalization. I set a maximum value of this variable at 1.5. So, in the previous example, the value for a candidate on position 20 as well as a candidate on position 30 would be 1.5. The advantage of this operationalization is that it is better suited to test the hypothesis that a deviation from the party line is more likely to have an influence

[71] First, by checking whether the gender of the candidate was mentioned in another election. Second, by looking at the first name of a candidate which for candidates of most parties is also given on the ballot. If the first name was not given or if it was not a typical male or female name, the gender of a candidate was coded based on an internet search. For 32 candidates none of these ways were sufficient to code the gender. Therefore, these candidates are excluded from the analysis.

on lower placed candidates. This operationalization accounts for the fact that 'lower placed' is relative to party size. For example for a medium party a candidate on the 8th position might be a lower placed candidate, but for a large party this candidate might not be considered a lower placed candidate.

In the other models, the decimal logarithm of the list position is used to test the effect of the list position of a candidate. This logarithmic transformation (at least partly) accounts for the different length of lists of parties and accounts for the non-linear effect list position has on preference voting. This operationalization is unfortunately not possible in the model with all candidates, since candidates from parties who did not win seats are also included (and therefore it is impossible to calculate the relative position towards candidates elected). For Belgium this operationalization would also not work, since within some parties in some districts only one candidate gets elected. In such a situation this operationalization would not result in a meaningful indicator of list position.

Based on the list position a dummy variable was created to indicate whether the candidate was the list-pusher (i.e. the last candidate on the list), since previous research has shown that a 'last position effect' may occur (Marcinkiewicz, 2014). In addition to an effect based on the last position, this particular candidate might also attract more votes, because parties sometimes put well know persons either from inside or outside politics on the last position on the list. These candidates, often do not have the intention to become an MP, but they want to express their support for the party by being the list-pusher (see for example Van Holsteyn & Andeweg, 2012, p. 181).

For all candidates it was determined whether they had served as a minister, junior minister or MP in the legislative period directly prior to the election. For the Netherlands, data for these variables was obtained from the website *Parlement & Politiek* (Parlementair Documentatie Centrum, 2017b, 2017a). For Belgium, information about ministers and junior ministers was obtained from the Political Data Yearbook website (Political Data Yearbook, 2017; Rihoux et al., 2013). A list with members of parliament for each period was obtained from the website of the parliament (Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 2017a). If a candidate performed more than one of these functions, only one was coded as such. For example, a candidate who was an MP at the beginning of the previous term but became a minister when the government was formed was coded as minister and not as MP[72]. The last independent variable at the candidate level that is included is the deviation of a candidate from the average party score; this variable is discussed in section 4.3.4.

In addition information at the level of the party was gathered. Based on the official documents with the election results the number of candidates on the list for each party was

[72] In Belgium political functions at the local level play an important role in the electoral success of candidates (see Put & Maddens, 2015 for an extensive analysis). These functions are excluded from the analysis in this chapter to keep the included political functions similar in the Dutch and Belgian models.

coded[73]. Furthermore for each party it was coded whether the party was traditional or new, whether they were in government the previous legislative period, whether they were a populist party (classification of parties as populist was done based on the work of Hakhverdian & Koop, 2007; March & Mudde, 2005; Pauwels, 2014) and what their position on the left-right scale is. The position of the party on the left-right scale was taken from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) (see Bakker et al., 2015; Polk et al., 2017). This scale runs from 0 (extreme left) to 10 (extreme right). Finally, and only for the Netherlands, the average evaluation score for the list-puller by voters for the party was coded; the previous chapter showed that leadership evaluation has an influence on the likelihood of casting a preference vote in the Netherlands. Data for this variable was taken from the Dutch Parliamentary Election Studies; this evaluation score is measured on an 11-point scale (for more information about this variable, see section 3.3.1). Since it is not possible to code all these variables for all parties (for example, because no policy positions are given in the CHES for the smaller, non-elected parties), the second, third and fourth model (which include variables at the party level) are solely based on candidates coming from parties that obtained at least one seat in parliament.

### 4.3.4 Estimating a candidate's deviation from the party line

Measuring policy positions of individual candidates is a difficult task. One way to measure their positions is by looking at voting behaviour in parliament. However, both in Belgium and the Netherlands MPs usually vote according to party lines (Van Vonno, 2016, pp. 63–64). Thus, if we would try to measure a policy position of an individual MP, based on the voting behaviour of that MP, it is highly likely that we would find almost identical policy positions for all MPs from one party, since they all voted in a similar way. This analysis would not lead to variation in the policy positions for individual candidates belonging to the same party and therefore would not be useful for the purpose of this study.

Another option to measure policy positions is via content analysis of speeches by MPs. Thanks to advances both in the (digital) availability of parliamentary documents and computer techniques to analyse text documents, options are available that make content analysis of large volumes of parliamentary speeches possible (Slapin & Proksch, 2014). Automated content analysis allows analyzing large text files to establish policy positions of individual members of parliament. There are two main approaches: *Wordscores* (Laver et al., 2003) and *Wordfish* (Slapin & Proksch, 2008). In this study the Wordscores approach will be used.

Wordscores is an *a priori*-method in the sense that "reference" texts are used to estimate the position of "virgin" texts. Based on the reference texts the positions on a dimension are known. In essence, the word patterns of these reference texts are compared to those of the virgin texts. Based on these word patterns the virgin texts are scored (for a

[73] For the Netherlands, if a party presented lists of unequal length in different districts, the maximum number of candidates was coded.

detailed description of the method, see Laver et al., 2003).

An important decision during this process is to decide which texts should be used as reference and virgin texts. What to use as virgin texts is clear: texts produced by MPs in parliament. Studies have shown that Wordscores can be used to measure policy positions based on speeches of MPs in parliament (Bäck et al., 2010; Bernauer & Bräuninger, 2009). The data for the text file for each individual MP was obtained from official websites (Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 2017b; Ministry of Home Affairs and Kingdom Relations, 2016). For Belgium the 51st (2003-2007) 52nd (2007-2010) and 53rd (2010-2014) legislative periods are analysed. For each Belgian MP all contributions to plenary sessions and all written questions submitted to ministers are included. For the Netherlands six legislative periods between 1998 and 2017 are analysed. For these legislative periods all speeches made in plenary sessions and all submitted written questions are included[74]. For each MP two text files per legislative period were created with all contributions of that MP in a given legislative period, one that contained speeches made in plenary sessions and one that contained the questions submitted. These texts files are used to estimate the positions of MPs in a specific legislative period in two different ways. This allows checking whether the behaviour differs across the two forms of participation, as is expected in H4.3.

The choice for reference texts and how to score those texts is less clear-cut. An option would be to use party manifestos as reference texts. However, comparing manifestos with speeches in parliament complicates matters. For example, in manifestos a large range of issues are usually discussed, while speeches normally focus on a single topic. Furthermore, there is a difference between the 'language' of manifestos and speeches. Since Wordscores counts all words in a document, if the vocabulary of manifestos and speeches differ, Wordscores will not be able to estimate a policy position accurately (see Laver & Benoit, 2002 for further argumentation). It is therefore better to choose reference texts that are also produced in parliament by MPs, so the reference and virgin texts can actually be compared. One way of doing this is by using the texts of all MPs from one party and combine them into a single text, which could be used as the reference text for that party (Mickler, 2017b). This was done for this study: all text files created for the individual MPs of a party were combined into one file for each party in each legislative period, serving as reference texts. For the party (reference) texts two versions were made as well: one with contributions to plenary sessions and one with the written questions[75]. If members of parliament switched to another party (or started his or her own parliamentary group) between elections, only the contributions made as a member of the party for which the

[74] The plenary sessions for the 51st legislative period in Belgium were not analyzed, due to the format of the documents containing the proceedings for this period. It was not possible to subtract the needed information from these documents in an automated manner. The written questions for this period are included in the analysis.

[75] For the Netherlands, some co-partisans submitted questions together. These questions were included in the own document of each MP, but were only included once in the document of the party.

candidate was elected are included.

The scores given to these reference texts are the party positions on the general left-right scale according to the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (Bakker et al., 2015; Polk et al., 2017)[76]. This scale runs from 0 (extreme left) to 10 (extreme right). The general left-right scale is chosen to score the reference texts, since these reference texts consist of texts dealing with a wide range of topics. Therefore, using the general left-right scale seems most appropriate. In Appendix D.1 the policy positions for the parties included in the analysis are given.

Based on the outcome of the Wordscores analyses the value of the (absolute) difference between a candidate's individual position and the average position of all candidates from his or her party will be calculated, serving as an indicator of a candidate's deviation from the party line. Measuring a candidate's deviation from the party line like this has one important consequence. It is only possible to do this for MPs, and not for other candidates. The models that contain the deviation from the party line are therefore restricted to candidates who also served as an MP in the previous legislative term.

Advantages of the Wordscores method are that it increases reliability compared to hand coding; it is easier and more flexible to implement; the researcher does not necessarily have to (perfectly) speak the language of the analysed texts; and the Wordscores approach produces uncertainty measures for each policy position (Klemmensen et al., 2007, p. 748). One of the disadvantages of the method is that the validity of the produced scores for the virgin texts depends on the choice of reference texts and how they are scored (Klemmensen et al., 2007, p. 748). Choosing and scoring the reference texts is therefore crucial. With regard to this study this disadvantage is slightly less important, because I am not interested in the party and candidate positions per se, but only in the differences between members of the same party.

A disadvantage of measuring a candidate's deviation from the party based on legislative behaviour is that, by definition, it is only possible to measure the deviation from incumbent candidates at the time of an election. Therefore, the number of candidates that can be included in the regression models that take into account the deviation variables (models three and four) is much lower than the actual candidates participating in the election.

The Wordscores approach delivered promising results in the field of estimating policy positions based on party manifestos. However, whether they can also be used for estimating policy positions of individual legislators is still debatably. Mickler (2017a) for example shows that there is not much overlap between policy positions of MPs estimated by Wordscores and self-placement of MPs on a left-right scale. Some additional analyses were conducted to test the validity of the policy positions estimated by the method described in this section. These are presented in appendix D.2. This appendix contains a further

[76] For more information about the Chapel Hill Expert Survey, see http://chesdata.eu/.

discussion of the decisions made for the analyses, shows the number of documents that were analysed and gives an overview of the estimated policy positions.

In addition, descriptive statistics for all variables included in the model can be found in appendix D.3 (Table D.3).

## 4.4 Results

### 4.4.1 Preference votes for Dutch candidates

In this section the results of the analysis of the Dutch case will be presented and discussed. The results of the multilevel regression models for the Netherlands are shown in table 4.4. The first model shows the result with only the predictors at the individual level included. This model is based on all candidates participating in all districts at the same position on the list in the parliamentary elections between 1998 and 2017.

Since the model presented is based on the entire population, statistical significance is less important and we should mainly look at the magnitude of the effects. Note that the dependent variable is the log(10) transformation of the percentage of preference votes of a candidate. As the scale is less intuitive, the interpretation of the regression coefficients is harder. The effect size of each variable is discussed based on the difference between the predicted outcome if that variable would take its minimum value and its maximum value, while keeping all other variables at their mean (for interval-ratio variables) or modus (for dummy variables). In addition, the predicted outcome was transformed back to its original value (the percentage of votes, instead of the logarithmic transformation), which makes it easier to gauge the effect sizes. These values were calculated using the effects package for R (Fox, 2003).

Female candidates receive more votes than male candidates, but this effect is small. Women near the top of the list receive approximately 1 per cent point more preference votes than male candidates at the same list position. Near the end of the list the effect is even smaller. For example, a woman at position 25 receives less than 0.1 percentage point more preference votes than male candidates at position 25.

What matters much more is being the first woman on the list. For example, if a woman occupies the third position on the list and is the first woman, she receives approximately 4 percentage points more preference votes than male candidates on the third position. In addition, she also receives 4 percentage points more preference votes than a female candidate on the third position on a list where she is not the first woman on the list (in other words: the first or second position on that list is also occupied by a woman). If the first woman is lower on the list, the absolute effect decreases. However, the effect remains. These effects are similar in the other models as well.

Having a non-European background does attract slightly more preference votes: depending on the list position the effect varies from 0.5 percentage point for candidates higher on the list to 0.1 percentage point for candidates lower on the list. In contrast to the

**Table 4.4** Preference votes for Dutch candidates

| | **Model 1** | **Model 2** | **Model 3** | **Model 4** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| (Intercept) | 0.778*** | 1.393*** | 1.862*** | 1.678*** |
| | (0.064) | (0.232) | (0.431) | (0.415) |
| Woman | 0.161*** | 0.133*** | 0.099* | 0.121* |
| | (0.013) | (0.021) | (0.047) | (0.049) |
| First woman on list | 0.374*** | 0.931*** | 1.068*** | 1.016*** |
| | (0.046) | (0.075) | (0.125) | (0.134) |
| Non-European background | 0.345*** | 0.432*** | 0.285* | 0.364* |
| | (0.032) | (0.049) | (0.135) | (0.149) |
| First non-European background | -0.113* | 0.016 | 0.140 | 0.032 |
| | (0.054) | (0.083) | (0.171) | (0.184) |
| List position | -1.167*** | -0.627*** | -0.559*** | -0.581*** |
| | (0.021) | (0.027) | (0.096) | (0.102) |
| List-pusher | 0.753*** | 0.547*** | | |
| | (0.043) | (0.09) | | |
| Member of parliament t-1 | 0.128*** | 0.221*** | | |
| | (0.019) | (0.028) | | |
| Minister t-1 | 0.476*** | 0.773*** | | |
| | (0.059) | (0.077) | | |
| Junior minister t-1 | 0.082 | 0.242** | | |
| | (0.059) | (0.077) | | |
| Deviation (Plenary sessions) t-1 | | | 2.774 | |
| | | | (1.984) | |
| Deviation (Written questions) t-1 | | | | -0.285 |
| | | | | (0.935) |
| Deviation*list position | | | -4.408 | -1.247 |
| | | | (2.818) | (1.464) |
| Traditional party | | -0.123 | -0.350 | -0.430 |
| | | (0.21) | (0.321) | (0.307) |
| Populist party | | -0.247 | -0.494 | -0.512 |
| | | (0.217) | (0.331) | (0.316) |
| Left Right scale | | -0.064* | -0.046 | -0.045 |
| | | (0.022) | (0.037) | (0.036) |
| Evaluation score list-puller | | -0.133*** | -0.171*** | -0.154*** |
| | | (0.017) | (0.041) | (0.04) |
| Government party t-1 | | 0.031 | 0.157* | 0.149* |
| | | (0.026) | (0.061) | (0.063) |
| Candidates on list | | -0.009*** | -0.007*** | -0.004 |
| | | (0.001) | (0.003) | (0.003) |
| AIC | 2831.2 | 2128.3 | 595.0 | 543.8 |
| BIC | 2911.6 | 2233.4 | 664.2 | 611.4 |
| Log likelihood | -1402.6 | -1045.1 | -280.5 | -254.9 |
| Observations | 3591 | 1869 | 433 | 394 |
| Groups (Parties/Elections) | 44/7 | 8/6 | 8/5 | 8/5 |
| Variance: Party (intercept) | 0.112 | 0.029 | 0.058 | 0.052 |
| Variance: Election (intercept) | 0.005 | 0.010 | 0.013 | 0.003 |

Note: *p< .05; **p< .01; ***p< .001. Regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

findings for gender, being the highest placed candidate with a non-European background does not have an additional effect. This effect is absent in the second, third and fourth model. In the first model there is a slightly negative effect. When looking at absolute numbers of preference votes and comparing the number of votes for the first candidate with a non-European background with other candidates with a non-European background, the first candidate with a non-European background on the list in the Netherlands receives more votes than other candidates with a non-European background. Since this effect does not show up in the regression models, this difference could likely be explained by the effect of the list position. The first candidate with a non-European background simply seems to receive more votes, because he or she has a better list position.

List position has a strong influence on the percentage of preference votes a candidate receives. Candidates lower on the list receive fewer preference votes. It is mainly the first few candidates who have larger shares of preference votes. It is not until we reach the bottom of the list that we see a small effect again: the list-pusher receives slightly more votes. However, this effect is not very large. A list-pusher may expect two or three times the percentage of preference votes of other candidates near the end of the list.

Political experience has a positive influence on the percentage of preference votes a candidate receives. All things equal, an incumbent candidate receives approximately two to three times as many preference votes as a candidate who was not an MP in the previous legislative period. For ministers this effect is larger. A minister who runs at the same list position as another candidate who was not a minister receives approximately four times as many preference votes. From the variables measuring political experience, having been a junior minister in the previous period has the smallest effect. For example, running for office at position 8 on the list, having experience of a junior minister only adds 0.1 percentage points to a candidates expected percentage of preference votes. These effects are robust when party variables are added to the model (model 2).

The third and fourth model include the effect deviation from the party line in the previous legislative period has on the percentage of preference votes a candidate receives[77]. It tests the hypotheses that candidates who deviate more strongly from the party line receive more preference votes in the next election and that this effect is stronger for candidates more towards the end of the list. Furthermore, the expectation was that the effects would be stronger if we look at the deviation from the party line of an MP based on the analysis of the written questions an MP submitted compared to speeches held in parliament. Most of these expectations are not met. First, while there is a positive effect of deviation from the party

[77] Some independent variables at the candidate level are excluded in the third and fourth model. This is because the group of candidates included in these two models is fairly homogeneous. Since we are interested in the effect of behaviour in parliament in the previous period, we can only include candidates who were a member of parliament in this previous period. Therefore, some of the variables included in the first and second model cannot be included in the third and fourth, because they have no (member of parliament t-1 and list-pusher) or almost no (minister and junior minster) variation.

line in plenary sessions, there is almost no effect of deviation from the party line with respect to written questions. For MPs, independent of their list position, deviating from the party line while submitting written questions actually seems to result in fewer preference votes, although the effect is only 0.1 percentage points. However, there is an effect for MPs who deviate from the party in the plenary sessions, but this effect does not apply to all MPs. Contrary to what was expected, only MPs near the top of the list can benefit from deviating from the party line. For candidates at the bottom of the list, deviation from the average party score has no effect; for candidates near the top of the list, this has an effect of 0.7 percentage points. However, this effect of 0.7 percentage points applies to the candidates who deviated most from their own party compared to those who did not deviate at all. So all in all, we have to conclude that deviating from the party line hardly has an impact on preference votes.

The model also contains some party effects. The average evaluation of the list-puller also has a negative impact on the percentage of preference votes, in line with what we found in the previous chapter. All other things being equal, a popular list-puller might result in a loss of two-thirds of a candidate's percentage of preference votes. The hypothesis that candidates from traditional parties receive more preference votes than candidates from newer parties has to be rejected: no evidence is found for this hypothesis. The magnitude in terms of percentage preference votes is almost zero, suggesting that there is no difference between levels of preference voting for candidates from traditional and newer parties. The effects for candidates from populist parties are stronger. Candidates from populist parties receive approximately only one-third of the percentage of preference votes that candidates in the same position for other parties receive, although these effects are not significant. Finally, candidates from parties more towards the right receive fewer preference votes than candidates from more left-wing parties, contrary to what was expected.

In addition, two control variables were added: list-length and government party. The length of the list has a negative impact on the percentage of preference votes a candidate receives. For a candidate near the top of the list, a longer list leads to a maximum decrease of preference votes of 0.6 percentage points. Candidates from government parties receive slightly more votes: approximately 0.2 percentage points.

### 4.4.2 Dutch candidates and where they receive their votes

One hypothesis for the Dutch case is not tested yet. Hypothesis 4.3 states that candidates receive a higher percentage of votes in their own district than in other districts. Since the analysis in the previous section was based on the number of votes at the national level, it was not possible to test this hypothesis. Therefore, in this section I will conduct some additional analyses to test this hypothesis.

In Dutch elections the place of residence of candidates is mentioned on the ballot. If voters wish to cast a vote for a candidate from their own region, this information is thus available. Table 4.5 is based on all candidates in the elections between 1998 and 2017 who

participated in at least two districts, including their 'home district', i.e. the district which includes their place of residence. Almost all candidates participated in their own district (97 per cent), but not all of them participated in another district as well. We are interested in how candidates perform in their own district, relative to their performance at the national level. Therefore, only candidates who participate in their 'home district' and at least one other district than their 'home district' are included in this analysis. In the period between 1998 and 2017 5,036 candidates satisfy both conditions. For each of these candidates the number of preference votes as a percentage of the total number of votes for their party in each district is calculated. Over the entire period for 81.5 per cent of the candidates this percentage was highest in their own district. For almost all candidates (98.0 per cent) the percentage of votes in their home district was above their nationwide percentage of votes. It therefore seems highly likely that the region the candidate comes from plays a role in where candidates receive their votes. At least a part of the electorate seems to look for a regional candidate to vote for. Candidates can therefore expect a considerable 'home bonus'.

**Table 4.5** Electoral performance Dutch candidates in home district

| Year | Candidates | Highest percentage in home district | Percentage home district above average |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1998 | 793 | 81.1% | 97.7% |
| 2002 | 664 | 80.3% | 97.9% |
| 2003 | 591 | 72.8% | 96.8% |
| 2006 | 617 | 75.0% | 97.1% |
| 2010 | 642 | 85.7% | 98.9% |
| 2012 | 833 | 86.0% | 99.2% |
| 2017 | 896 | 85.8% | 98.1% |
| **Total** | **5036** | **81.5%** | **98.0%** |

Source: own dataset. Included are all candidates who participated in at least two district, including their 'home district' (excluding list-pullers). The district of Bonaire (in 2012 and 2017) is excluded from the analysis.

Table 4.6 compares a candidate's performance in his or her own district and the performance in all other districts. For all candidates between 1998 and 2012, candidates on average received 2.2 percentage points more votes in their own district, compared to the votes in all other districts the candidate participated in. At first this might not look impressive. However, at the national level on average only 7 per cent of the candidates in the Netherlands receive 2.2 per cent or more of their party's votes. Moreover, the average candidate only receives 0.64 per cent of the votes of his or her party. The regional 'bonus' of a candidate is thus substantial for many candidates. In addition, the effect we observe for women is visible for the regional candidate as well. In a particular district, the bonus is much stronger for the first candidate on the list from that district. On average the first candidate from a specific district on the list receives approximately 4.5 per cent more preference votes than co-partisans from the same district.

There is considerable variation in the home bonus between the various districts. The effect of the home bonus varies from 6.1 in the district of Middelburg to 0.8 in the district of

**Table 4.6** Average 'home bonus' per district

| District | Bonus | Candidates |
|---|---|---|
| Middelburg | 6.1 | 119 |
| Maastricht | 5.1 | 230 |
| Leeuwarden | 4.6 | 173 |
| Groningen | 4.3 | 205 |
| Assen | 4.2 | 124 |
| Rotterdam | 3.1 | 241 |
| Lelystad | 2.9 | 140 |
| Nijmegen | 2.4 | 119 |
| Zwolle | 2.4 | 247 |
| Amsterdam | 2.1 | 512 |
| Den Helder | 2.0 | 180 |
| Tilburg | 1.9 | 228 |
| 's-Hertogenbosch | 1.8 | 278 |
| 's-Gravenhage | 1.7 | 356 |
| Arnhem | 1.5 | 365 |
| Haarlem | 1.3 | 328 |
| Dordrecht | 1.1 | 286 |
| Utrecht | 1.0 | 471 |
| Leiden | 0.8 | 434 |
| **Average** | **2.2** | **5036** |

Source: own dataset, based on all parliamentary elections in the period 1998-2017. Based on election results without the district of Bonaire. Included are all candidates who participated in at least two district, including their 'home district' (excluding list-pullers).

Leiden. Partly, this effect is 'mechanical' in nature. If we assume that in all districts an equal proportion of voters would vote for a regional candidate, on average candidates in districts in which fewer candidates from that district are on the ballot would receive a higher percentage of votes. We indeed see a negative correlation between the number of candidates from a district and the average home bonus ($r = -0.371$, $p = <0.001$, $N=133$). This, however, does not fully explain the variation in the home bonus. The home bonus is highest in the five provinces furthest away from 'The Hague': the districts of Middelburg, Maastricht, Leeuwarden, Groningen and Assen. In the district of Maastricht almost 60 per cent of the preference votes are cast for regional candidates. In the *Randstad* only 20 per cent of the preference votes are cast for a regional candidate. The distinction between the *Randstad* and the rest of the country, which was already discussed in the previous chapter, is also visible here. Voters living outside the *Randstad* are more likely to cast a preference vote, especially those living in the north and south of the country. Based on the findings presented in this chapter, this suggests that voters outside the *Randstad* are more likely to cast a preference vote; they have a greater inclination to cast a vote for a regional candidate compared to voters living in the *Randstad*.

### 4.4.3 Preference votes for Belgian candidates

The regression models for Belgium are shown in table 4.7. In Belgium, the gender effects are different compared to the Netherlands. Female candidates receive slightly more preference votes than male candidates, if we look at a larger subset of candidates (in the first and

**Table 4.7** Preference votes for Belgian candidates

| | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| (Intercept) | 1.122*** | 1.310*** | 1.399*** | 1.418*** |
| | (0.027) | (0.026) | (0.078) | (0.068) |
| Woman | 0.031*** | 0.038*** | -0.106* | -0.092* |
| | (0.004) | (0.006) | (0.05) | (0.038) |
| First woman on list | -0.011 | -0.001 | 0.034 | 0.026 |
| | (0.008) | (0.013) | (0.056) | (0.046) |
| Non-European background | 0.087*** | 0.113*** | -0.046 | -0.047 |
| | (0.013) | (0.019) | (0.091) | (0.076) |
| First non-European background | -0.066*** | -0.100*** | | |
| | (0.017) | (0.025) | | |
| List position | -0.620*** | -0.620*** | -0.623*** | -0.560*** |
| | (0.007) | (0.011) | (0.063) | (0.053) |
| List-pusher | 0.304*** | 0.388*** | | |
| | (0.007) | (0.012) | | |
| Member of parliament t-1 | 0.139*** | 0.134*** | | |
| | (0.009) | (0.01) | | |
| Minister t-1 | 0.370*** | 0.377*** | | |
| | (0.021) | (0.022) | | |
| Junior minister t-1 | 0.266*** | 0.276*** | | |
| | (0.045) | (0.046) | | |
| Deviation (Plenary sessions) t-1 | | | -0.459 | |
| | | | (0.567) | |
| Deviation (Written questions) t-1 | | | | 0.066 |
| | | | | (0.324) |
| Deviation*list position | | | 0.891 | -0.359 |
| | | | (0.992) | (0.557) |
| Effective candidates on list | | -0.015*** | -0.009** | -0.011*** |
| | | (0.001) | (0.003) | (0.002) |
| Old party | | -0.048* | 0.026 | 0.050 |
| | | (0.019) | (0.082) | (0.063) |
| Government party t-1 | | -0.031*** | -0.075 | -0.101 |
| | | (0.009) | (0.075) | (0.056) |
| Populist party | | 0.014 | 0.016 | -0.018 |
| | | (0.037) | (0.087) | (0.069) |
| Left Right scale | | -0.003 | -0.002 | -0.003 |
| | | (0.004) | (0.01) | (0.009) |
| AIC | -6091.8 | -2933.4 | -54.7 | -98.2 |
| BIC | -5995.9 | -2816.7 | -4.1 | -41.1 |
| Log likelihood | 3059.9 | 1485.7 | 43.3 | 65.1 |
| Observations | 6943 | 3430 | 174 | 262 |
| Groups (Parties/Districts/Elections) | 105/13/4 | 11/13/4 | 10/13/2 | 11/13/3 |
| Variance: Party (intercept) | 0.003 | 0.001 | 0.001 | 0.001 |
| Variance: District (intercept) | 0.008 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 |
| Variance: Election (intercept) | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 |

Note: *p< .05; **p< .01; ***p< .001. Regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.
Source: Own dataset.

second model). In these models female candidates receive approximately 6 per cent more preference votes than male candidates from the same list position. For example, if a male candidate on the fifth position receives 5.4 per cent preference votes, a female candidate on the same position would receive 5.7 per cent preference votes. The percentages for male and female candidates drop more towards the end of the list, but the relative difference remains the same. In the third and fourth model, however, this effect changes, and women tend to receive 15 per cent fewer preference votes than male candidates. These two models are only based on candidates who were a member of parliament in the previous election. These candidates normally occupy positions towards the top of the list. The positive effect for woman seems to be for female candidates towards the end of the list in particular, and less for women at the top of the list. An even bigger difference with the Netherlands is the effect of being the first woman on the list. In the Netherlands this has a strong positive effect, but in Belgium this effect is much smaller. In the first two models the effect is negligible; the third and fourth model show an effect of approximately 0.7 percentage points preference votes for female candidates running at the second position on the list, compared to male candidates running at the second position on the list[78]. The fact that there is a much smaller 'first woman effect' in Belgium can be explained by a difference in gender rules between both countries. In the Netherlands there are no rules stipulating a specific distribution of female and male candidates. In Belgium these rules exist. Since 2002 the difference between the number of male and female candidates on a list may not be greater than one. Therefore, on lists with an even number of candidates there are an equal number of male and female candidates. Furthermore, the first two candidates on the list may not have the same gender[79]. This may explain the difference between vote shares for male and female candidates between Belgium and the Netherlands.

Having a non-European background leads to slightly more votes in Belgium, if we look at the first and second model. A male candidate running at the fifth position with a non-European background would receive 1.1 percentage points more preference votes than a male candidate with a European background running at the fifth position. However, the effect disappears if we look at the third and fourth model. This again suggests that candidates with a non-European background lower on the list have an advantage, but candidates at the top of the list do not have this advantage. This is also what is shown by the 'first non-European background' indicator, which shows a negative effect of approximately one percentage point.

In Belgium too, list position is a strong predictor of a candidate's share of preference votes. The model predicts that candidates towards the top of the list receive approximately

[78] If we look at the actual election results, on average the 390 women on the second position receive 8.9 per cent preference votes. The 159 male candidates on the second position receive on average 8.3 per cent preference votes. However, there is almost no difference in the average percentage of preference votes for male and female candidates on top of the list (22.0 versus 22.1 percentage).

[79] As a transition rule, in the elections of 2003 not all first three candidates were allowed to be of the same gender.

15 per cent preference votes, whereas candidates at the bottom of the list receive only 2 per cent preference votes. Next to this negative effect of position a 'last position effect' exists as well. The last candidate on the list receives two to three times the number of preference votes that other candidates towards the end of the list receive.

Three variables are included in the model to test whether political experience has an effect on the percentage of preference votes a Belgian candidate receives. Just like in the Netherlands, candidates who served as an MP, minister or junior minister in the previous legislative period may count on additional preference votes. For example an incumbent candidate running at the third position receives two percentage points more preference votes than a candidate without experience as an MP who runs at the third position. For ministers this effect is 8 percentage points and for junior ministers 5 percentage points. This last result is in contrast with the findings for the Netherlands, where a junior minister does not receive much more preference votes compared to other candidates.

Model three and four include the effect of deviating from the average party score, based respectively on speeches in plenary sessions and written questions[80]. The expectation is that in general candidates who deviate more from the party line receive more preference votes, and that this effect is stronger for candidates lower on the list. In addition, the expectation is that this effect is stronger for the indicator based on written questions. Based on the speeches MPs made in plenary sessions, for candidates towards the top of the list the effect of deviating is negative. The effect is also limited: only candidates who deviate most from the average party score receive more than 2 percentage points fewer preference votes, compared to candidates who are on the average party score. For candidates towards the end of the list the effect is positive, which is in line with the hypothesis. However, the electoral gains are limited: not more than approximately 0.5 percentage points for the candidates who deviate most. Based on the written questions MPs submitted the effect is reversed: there is a small positive effect for candidates near the top of the list, but this effect is not more than 0.7 percentage points for the candidates who deviate most. For candidates lower on the list the effect is negative, candidates who deviate most receive approximately 0.5 percentage points fewer preference votes than candidates close to the average party score. The implications of these findings will be discussed in the conclusion of this chapter.

Next to these indicators at the candidate level, the model includes indicators at the party level. First, the number of effective candidates on the party list has a negative effect on the percentage of preference votes a candidate receives. This is not a surprising finding: it is

[80] Some variables are excluded from the third and fourth model, because they have no variation, see also footnote 77, page 54. In addition to the variables mentioned in that footnote, the variable 'First non-European background' is excluded for Belgium as well. Because of the districts in Belgium, from each list only a few candidates are elected. Most elected candidates with a non-European background are therefore the first candidate with a non-European background on a list. This has an effect on the correlation between both background variables in the third and fourth model, since only candidates who were a member of parliament in the previous period are included. Since the correlation between both variables is extremely high in this subset of candidates, only the variable measuring a candidate's background is included in the third and fourth model.

rather logical that for lists with larger numbers of candidates, on average a candidate receives fewer preference votes in relative terms. The model predicts that candidates of parties with longer lists (24 candidates) receive on average only half of the votes of candidates who run at the same position on smaller lists (around 5 candidates). The inclusion of this variable in the second, third and fourth model is therefore also an important explanation for the difference in the variance of the intercepts for the different groups (as shown towards the bottom of table 4.7). In the first model there is some variance between the intercepts for different parties and the intercepts for different districts. The intercept (and thus the number of preference votes) is higher for smaller districts and for parties that do not present lists with the maximum number of candidates. In the second, third and fourth model the variation between these intercepts disappears to a large extent, because the variation in these models is explained by the number of effective candidates on a list.

The other party indicators have a different impact in the model for Belgium compared to the model for the Netherlands. In the Dutch model the percentages of all candidates in one party do not add up to 100 per cent, since votes for the first candidate are not considered as preference votes. Therefore, in the Dutch models these other party variables did actually say something about which parties attract more preference votes (instead of more votes for the list-puller). For Belgium this is not the case, since all votes for a candidate are seen as a preference vote. Therefore in these models these variables do not say that much about which types of parties attract preference votes. If a specific party would attract more preference votes, but these would be distributed equally amongst the candidates of that party, these effects would not be visible in the regression models[81]. An effect would only show up when comparing the second with the third and the fourth model, if the distribution of votes between candidates on top of the list and at the bottom of the list would differ much. However, this difference does not seem to exist.

In table 4.8 the variables on the party level are included in a model predicting the percentage of preference votes cast for a party, relative to the total number of votes cast for that party. The results show that traditional parties attract approximately 20 percentage points more preference votes than newer parties. For populist parties fewer preference votes are cast, but the difference is only 3.7 percentage points. Government parties receive slightly fewer preference votes than opposition parties, but this difference is very small (below 1 percentage point). Parties located more towards the right of the left-right scale receive fewer preference votes, but the difference is small. Based on the positions of the parties the difference between the most left-wing and most right-wing party would be 3.7 per cent. Finally, the effective number of candidates has a positive influence on the number of preference votes cast. For each extra candidate on the list, the party can expect half a

[81] These effects would have been visible if instead of using the votes of a candidate as a percentage of the total preference votes cast for that party, the percentage of the total votes cast for the party (thus including list votes) would have been used.

percentage point more preference votes.

**Table 4.8** Percentage of preference votes within Belgian parties

| | **Model 1** |
|---|---|
| (Intercept) | 45.658*** |
| | (5.307) |
| Effective candidates on list | 0.402 |
| | (0.205) |
| Traditional party | 19.342*** |
| | (3.500) |
| Government party t-1 | -0.658 |
| | (2.026) |
| Populist party | -3.670 |
| | (6.220) |
| Left Right scale | -0.468 |
| | (0.774) |
| AIC | 1312.8 |
| BIC | 1345.1 |
| Log likelihood | -646.4 |
| Observations | 186 |
| Groups (Parties/Districts/Elections) | 16/13/4 |
| Variance: Party (intercept) | 25.16 |
| Variance: District (intercept) | 20.88 |
| Variance: Election (intercept) | 19.01 |

Note: *p< .05; **p< .01; ***p< .001. Regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.
Source: Own dataset.

## 4.5 Discussion and conclusion

In this chapter I study what factors affect the electoral success of candidates. An overview of the results is given in table 4.9. As expected, list position and political experience have a strong and positive influence on the electoral success of candidates, both in Belgium and the Netherlands. However, not all expectations were met and some differences exist between Belgium and the Netherlands. The effects for gender are different in the Netherlands and Belgium. In general the effects are stronger for female candidates more towards the end of the list in Belgium. In the Netherlands the first woman on the list has a larger advantage, while in Belgium there is no such advantage for the first female candidate. These differences might be explained by the fact that in Belgium rules exist that guarantee an equal number of male and female candidates on the list. In addition, the top two candidates should not be from the same gender. That female candidates towards the top of the list do not seem to benefit as much in Belgium as they do in the Netherlands might be explained by the fact that the lists in Belgium are more gender balanced: the need to vote for a woman in Belgian might actually be smaller, because there are more women towards the top of the list. The fact that female candidates lower on the list receive more votes than male candidates in Belgium might be a result of the fact that Belgian voters can cast multiple preference votes. The explanation therefore might also be that it is not so much that the first female candidate

**Table 4.9** Summary of findings for chapter 4

| Group | Categories | H | Exp. | Bel. | Net. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Underrepresented social groups | Women | 4.1 | + | ++ | + |
| | Candidates with a non-European background | 4.1 | + | + | + |
| First of a underrepresented social groups | First woman | 4.2 | + | ~ | ++ |
| | First candidate with a non-European background | 4.2 | + | - | ~ |
| Geographical representation | Dutch candidates in their own *kieskring* | 4.3 | + | | ++ |
| List position | More towards the top | 4.4 | + | ++ | ++ |
| | Lowest position | 4.5 | + | + | + |
| Political experience | Incumbent MP | 4.6 | + | ++ | + |
| | Minister | 4.6 | + | ++ | ++ |
| | Junior minister | 4.6 | + | ++ | + |
| Deviating from party line | Deviating from party line | 4.7 | + | ~ | ~ |
| | Interaction with list position | 4.8 | + | ~ | - |
| | Stronger for question than for plenary sessions | 4.9 | + | ~ | ~ |
| Party effects | Traditional parties | 4.10 | + | + | ~ |
| | Populist parties | 4.11 | - | ~ | - |
| | Right-wing parties | 4.12 | + | - | - |
| | Parties with unpopular list-pullers | 4.13 | + | | + |

Note: ++ strong positive effect; + positive effect; ~ no effect; - negative effect

in Belgium does not benefit from being the first woman on the list, but rather that lower placed female candidates benefit as well (and therefore making the difference between the first female candidate and the lower placed candidates smaller), because voters in Belgium have multiple preference votes. It would be interesting to look at this phenomenon by looking at other electoral systems and see whether there is a relationship between the number of votes and the advantages for the first candidate of a specific (underrepresented) group.

A common assumption is that proportional representation benefits the representation of women in parliament (e.g. Norris, 2004), although this also depends on the context of the political system. However, studies focussing on the electoral success of women in list systems show mixed results. Some studies show that women receive fewer votes (Wauters et al., 2010) and some studies show no difference (Schmidt, 2003; Van Holsteyn & Andeweg, 2012). However, whether women actually receive more votes is not the most relevant question, if we are interested in the representation of women in parliament. In such a case it is much more interesting to see whether the votes actually make a difference. It remains surprising that it is the first woman on the list who has such a large advantage in the Netherlands, since normally these candidates are elected anyway (see also Van Holsteyn & Andeweg, 2012). However, it seems that there is a small change in this respect. In the most recent elections four candidates were elected out of list order, three of them being a woman. It is difficult to say whether this actually has something to do with the

'vote for a woman' initiative, but at least it seems there is more awareness for the fact that if the goal is to make sure more women are elected, voting for the first woman on the list does not really help that cause.

In this chapter I also tested whether deviating from the party line has an effect on preference votes. To my knowledge, only one other study has investigated the effect ideology has on the intraparty competition in proportional representation systems. Van Erkel (2017) used a candidate survey to ask candidates about their opinion on different issues. He showed that differences between co-partisans exist, but that these differences had no effect on the electoral success of the candidates. I used quantitative text analyses to estimate policy positions of candidates and test whether candidates who deviate from their party receive more preference votes. Both in Belgium and the Netherlands there was no effect of deviating from the party line on the number of preference votes a candidate receives, neither for candidates near the top of the list nor for candidates lower on the list. For intraparty competition, it does not seem to matter whether a candidate deviates from the party line or not.

What could explain this non-finding? In Belgium, depending on the size of the district, voters can choose between 4 to 24 candidates. In the Netherlands, voters for most parties can choose between 30 candidates[82], although lists may include up to 80 candidates. It may be that for most voters in the Netherlands there are just too many candidates to be able to collect enough information about each candidate to see whether they have (slightly) different options than the party and whether this would be a reason to vote for such a candidate. Voters take ideology into consideration when distinguishing between parties, but look at other aspects when deciding which candidate within a party they prefer. It would be a difficult task for a voter to find the information necessary to make an informed choice based on the policy positions of all candidates on a party list. The question is even justified whether it is possible to obtain this information at all. While there are voting advice applications to help voters choose between parties, these tools are normally not available for all individual candidates[83]. Some parties have some information about their candidates on the website when they announce the lists for the upcoming elections, but the information is usually not very elaborate and focuses more often on the motivations of candidates to become an MP.

The electoral systems of Belgium and the Netherlands can both be classified as flexible list systems. In such systems parties still have a large influence on which candidates are elected. Therefore it might be that in flexible list systems the cost of making an informed choice about a candidate's policy position is too high, compared to the expected benefit. In systems where the expected benefit is higher, ideology at the interparty level might have a larger influence. For example in open list systems, where voters have way more influence on

[82] Some parties present shorter lists, but these are mostly new parties who do not receive enough seats to be elected.
[83] Although this is beginning to change. For example, in Belgium a VAA was launched in Flanders for the federal elections of 2014 (Van Erkel, 2017, pp. 50–51).

the actual composition of parliament, it might be worthwhile to look for a candidate who represents certain interests. In addition, such an effect might also be stronger in systems that allow for panachage voting, if candidates try to attract voters from other parties as well. Further research should therefore test the hypotheses in list systems that are more open as well.

Another important finding in this chapter is that in the Netherlands candidates tend to receive relatively more votes in the district in which they live. In the Netherlands the place of residence of a candidate is mentioned on the ballot, which makes it easy for voters to search for a candidate from their own region. This is different for Belgium, where the municipality of a candidate is not mentioned on the ballot. However, this phenomenon does not play the same role in Belgium as it plays in the Netherlands, since in Belgium voters can only vote for candidates from their own district.

Yet, it is striking that most of the factors that strongly influence the electoral success of a candidate (gender, list position, municipality in the Netherlands) are those factors that depend on or are given on the ballot. In the conclusion of this dissertation I will reflect on this issue of information availability on the ballot.