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Candidate Choice in Political Advertising: What Determines Who Gets Attention?

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Jonas Lefevere and Régis Dandoy

Abstract

In the run up to the elections, parties have several ways of communicating with voters. In this article, we focus on one piece of the puzzle: advertisements of political parties in the mass media. More specifically, we are interested in the choice of candidates within these advertisements. In countries where parties are the dominant actor, they are faced with a choice: not all candidates can be promoted in the campaign, as this would be too costly and inefficient. Thus, the first question we want to answer is which factors determine candidate choice in political advertisements? Secondly, does candidate choice in political advertisements have an effect on the subsequent coverage in media as well? Agenda setting research has shown that as far as issues are concerned, advertisements do set the media agenda. We use a content analysis of seven magazines and newspapers that was collected in the run up to the 2009 regional elections in Flanders, the largest region of Belgium. The results indicate that both internal party hierarchy, as well as external visibility of candidates determines candidate choice in political advertisements. Furthermore, the agenda setting effect of political advertisements is confirmed as well.

KEYWORDS: election campaign, advertisements, agenda setting, content analysis

Introduction

Come election day, parties and candidates can only await the results, but in the run up to the elections they hardly stop to take a breath. Presenting oneself to voters occurs not only in the mass media, but also through parties' and candidates own communications. They use a broad array of communication channels to draw the voters' attention: canvassing, handing out flyers, frequenting markets, and publishing advertisements in the mass media. Because visibility, both in paid and unpaid mass media, has electoral consequences, this topic has received ample scholarly attention (Cwalina, Falkowski, & Lynda Lee Kaid, 2000; Dumitrescu, 2010; Maddens, Weekers, & Noppe, 2006). This paper focuses on a specific type of party communication, i.e. advertisements in the mass media. For many voters, the mass media are still the primary means of political information (De Vreese, 2010). Consequently, advertisements in those media reach many voters, and their potential electoral impact cannot be ignored. Various studies, mostly based in the US, investigated how issue attention in political advertisements influenced the regular coverage in the mass media (Bostick, 2005; Lopez-Escobar, Llamas, McCombs, & Lennon, 1998; Roberts & McCombs, 1994). Other contributions study whether advertisements focused more on the candidates' image rather than policy positions (Holtz-Bacha & Lynda Lee Kaid, 1995). Finally, a large body of literature has focused on the (effects of) negative advertisements (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1996; Ansolabehere, Iyengar, Simon, & Valentino, 1994; Geer, 2006). *Which* politicians are featured in the advertisements has received much less attention. This is mostly due to the focus on US presidential elections, where only one candidate per party is running and candidate choice is thus irrelevant. However, in most parliamentary democracies parties are the dominant actors, and they chose who to present to voters in political advertisements. This choice, and its effect on regular coverage in the mass media, has received far less scholarly attention.

Because the (presumed) personalization of politics has been well studied (for an overview see Karvonen 2010), it is surprising that candidate choice in political advertisements remains an understudied topic. After all, this choice is an important indicator of both the number and type of politicians that parties want to put forward in their campaign. The question seems mostly relevant in the Belgian context where parties campaign in small constituencies with separate lists, where it is not always clear who is the frontrunner. Consequently, we want to answer two questions in this contribution: which factors determine who is, and who is not featured in political advertisements? And does being featured in an advertisement increase media attention for that politician? Both questions have electoral implications. Media attention results in more votes (Van Aelst, Maddens, & Noppen, 2006). If advertisements manage to increase visibility in regular

coverage, they indirectly increase electoral success. Additionally, their direct effect should not be underestimated either.

To answer these two questions, we use a content analysis of the news coverage of 7 Flemish weekly magazines and daily newspapers in the run up to the Flemish regional elections of 2009. Flanders is the largest region of Belgium, a small consociational democracy in Western Europe (Deschouwer, 2009). Because Flemish legislation only allows advertisements in the written press, it is the only mass media outlet available to parties to advertise (Flemish Government, 2009). Judging from the campaign expenses, parties do use this possibility. In the 2007 elections the Flemish parties spent roughly 12 million euros on the campaign, which is almost 70 per cent of the maximum amount they are allowed to spend (Maddens, Weekers, & Fiers, 2007). Because of the electoral system, the ballots contain hundreds of candidates per party (on average 232 different candidates per party). It is impossible that they all appear in an advertisement. Consequently, we can assume that parties are faced with a choice, namely to include some, and exclude other candidates from the advertisements. We begin our contribution with a discussion of the existing research on political advertisements and the role of candidates in political campaigns. Then we discuss the effect of political advertisements on regular coverage in the mass media. After presenting our research design, we present results and finish with suggestions for future research.

Political advertisements and their role during the campaign

During an electoral campaign, parties have two basic means of communicating with voters on a large scale. They can invest in their own communication, or they can try to reach the voter through the mass media. The mass media are an excellent medium to convey messages to large amounts of voters, but parties have little to no influence on the actual content of the messages (Holtz-Bacha & Linda Kaid, 2006, p. 3). The mass media have taken an increasingly critical stance towards the parties and candidates (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999). Because of this, parties also use alternative channels of communication that offer more control over what is being communicated. Advertisements are an important part of the campaign strategy of Flemish parties, and also constitute a substantial part of their campaign budget. These expenses are not without impact as various studies showed that the magnitude of campaign spending helps predict the amount of (preference) votes (Maddens, Wauters, Fiers, & Noppe, 2004; Van Aelst e.a., 2006; Van Aelst, Maddens, Noppe, & Fiers, 2008; Maddens, Wauters, Noppe, & Fiers, 2006).

The importance of advertising is also indirectly substantiated by the strict legislation they are subjected to (Holtz-Bacha & Linda Kaid, 2006). Many West-European countries enforce restrictions on parties' ability to advertize. Some countries simply ban all advertisements¹ while others limit the possibilities² (Holtz-Bacha & Linda Kaid, 2006). In Belgium advertizing on television and radio is forbidden, leaving only the written press as a viable outlet (Voorhoof, 2009). The restrictions are often in place to protect the smaller parties. Larger parties have larger campaign budgets, and could blow the small players away in a grand advertizing offensive in the media. Additionally, parties could become financiers of the mass media through such advertizing which possibly endangers the latter's independence (Voorhoof, 2008). These extensive legal restrictions are an indication of the potential impact of advertisements. Thus, research on their content is necessary.

Advertisements are used to communicate various messages to voters: policy stances on various issues, important values of the party or candidate, and of course the frontrunners themselves. Because this article deals with candidate selection, we focus on the importance of individual candidates in winning or losing elections. For a long time, scholars assumed that campaigns had 'personalized' in recent decades: campaigns were structured around candidates, rather than parties. Various studies have shown that this personalization of political campaigns is far from universal (King, 2002; Karvonen, 2010). The importance of individual candidates in voting behavior has mostly been downplayed in recent studies (Marsh, 2007; Hayes, 2009). Despite these findings, the fact that candidates still play a role in winning or losing elections still stands. For at least part of the electorate, candidates are a factor that determines party choice (Marsh, 2007; Goeminne & Swyngedouw, 2007). Furthermore, candidates that are able to spend more also attract more personal preference votes, which indicates that the individual candidate still has an impact (Maddens e.a., 2004). Karvonen (2010) also notes that while personalization is not a general trend, it still manifests itself in countries where parties are traditionally dominant.

Parties were always important actors in Belgium (De Winter, 1981), and they still play a crucial role (Deschouwer, 1996, 2004). They determine list formation, and thereby determine who even has a chance to be elected (Delwit, Hellings, Pilet, & Van Haute, 2005; Dandoy, De Decker, & Pilet, 2007). Even though candidates can and do make individual campaign contributions, parties still have larger budgets at their disposal. Consequently, individual candidate expenses are often supplemented by donations from the party. In the 2007 federal elections, over 70 per cent of the expenses relied on such donations (Maddens,

1 Among others Denmark, Sweden, Ireland, United Kingdom, France, Portugal, Norway.

2 Among others the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Austria, Finland, Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, Lituania and Estonia.

Weekers, & Fiers, 2007, p. 10). We can therefore assume that the parties' internal decision making will affect candidate choice: if the party is financing the advertisements, it probably gets a say in their content. A party's internal decision is determined by various considerations based on the electoral legislation, the internal distribution of power and external factors. The electoral legislation forces parties to submit lists in various constituencies. This causes the total number of candidates to grow, which in turn may fragment the public's attention to those candidates. Even if local candidates may be able to develop a separate campaign strategy, the parties' usual strategy aimed at sending one message through to the general electorate. In such communication strategies, we can assume that candidates running in the largest constituencies have an advantage. Such candidates have the greatest amount of potential voters. In the Flemish regional elections of 2009, parties ran in constituencies of varying magnitude. Consequently, we assume that:

H1a: Candidates running in a larger constituency have a greater chance of appearing in an advertisement.

Another self-evident explanation is the candidate's place on the list. Because the first person on the list is presumably the frontrunner for that constituency, it seems logical that such candidates will be much more likely to appear in an advertisement. Considerations regarding the media logic are also in play here: by putting a selected bunch of candidates at front stage, a party may focus the attention in the regular coverage upon those frontrunners. If the media's attention is too thinly spread out over a multitude of candidates, the odds are that the resulting effect vanishes. The last place on the list is often also a more visible place, and is thus also more likely to attract more preference votes.

H1b: Candidates on the first place of the list have a greater chance of appearing in an advertisement compared to candidates elsewhere on the list.

H1c: Candidates on the last place of the list have a greater chance of appearing in an advertisement compared to candidates elsewhere on the list.

When the lists are being drafted, parties make an assessment of the amount of seats they expect to obtain in each constituency. For a party that expects to get 5 seats, the first 5 candidates have a so-called 'eligible' place. Though these candidates are not necessarily all 'heavyweights' in the party, the fact that they have something to win or lose is a reason to claim a spot in the parties' publicity space.

H1d: Candidates that are on an eligible place have a greater chance of appearing in an advertisement compared to candidates elsewhere on the list.

Finally, parties also take external factors into account. A candidate's popularity and familiarity amongst the public is an important asset. The party and media agendas are linked and interdependent (Boyle, 2001; Roberts & McCombs, 1994; Lopez-Escobar e.a., 1998). Because the mass media are the key source of political information for many voters, we can assume that parties are sensitive to their agenda (De Vreese, 2010). A candidate that frequently appeared in the media before the campaign has some notoriety among voters. Consequently, regardless of internal considerations, parties can decide to choose such candidates: if a candidate survives the external selection process of the mass media, this increases the odds (s)he survives the parties' internal selection as well.

H1e: Candidates that frequently appeared in the media before the campaign, have a greater chance of appearing in an advertisement compared to candidates that appeared less frequently.

It should be noted that the reverse could also be argued: parties may wish to diminish the focus on the frontrunners by deliberately promoting other candidates. Despite this, we expect that parties will have a hard time ignoring mediagenic candidates.

Advertisements and Regular Media coverage

The mass media are an excellent means to communicate with large amounts of voters. For the parties, the mass media's main drawback is the lack of control over the way the media report about them, and the message they try to convey. The media increasingly criticize the parties, making every media appearance both an opportunity and a threat (Mazzoleni en Schulz 1999). Parties try to influence media coverage in a variety of ways: during campaigns, the share of political coverage steadily increases (Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006). Consequently, journalists are continually looking for political news, which can be easily found in the messages that parties are distributing. If the party communication always focuses on specific candidates, this is likely to be reflected in the regular coverage. Thus, in addition to its direct effect, parties' own communication has an indirect effect on the voter.

The process through which advertisements influence the media agenda is captured by the concept of (inter-media) agenda setting. Various studies showed that advertisements of parties affect the media agenda (Boyle, 2001; Sweetser, Golan, & Wanta, 2008; Roberts & McCombs, 1994; Lopez-Escobar, Llamas, McCombs, & Lenon, 1998; Roberts, Anderson, & McCombs, 1994). The focus in previous agenda setting studies has been on issues. Various studies demonstrated the issue agenda setting effect of advertisements but this effect might also occur for candidates. The underlying principle is identical. Journalists are continually looking for news, and partly rely on the messages of the parties. If these messages persistently focus on the same candidates, these candidates get more regular media visibility in turn.

The parties' communication strategy is not 'invented' during the final weeks of the campaign, though the advertisements themselves are often concentrated in this period. This does not mean that their agenda setting effect on the media agenda is absent. We base this assumption on the fact that advertisements are an indicator of the broader party strategy. Our indicator of the party strategy only covers the final stages of the campaign, but the party presumably used the same strategy throughout the entire campaign. As such, the candidates that are being promoted at the end of the campaign are very likely the same candidates that were being promoted at the beginning of the campaign. Just like the issue agenda setting effect found in previous studies, we therefore expect a candidate agenda setting effect.

H2: Candidates that appear in advertisements receive more attention in the regular coverage during the final weeks of the campaign compared to candidates that do not appear in advertisements.

Hypotheses 2 thus tests whether an advertisement can cause additional media attention for a candidate compared to others. We assume that advertisements are a good indicator of the general party strategy. The candidates presented in the advertisements are the same as those presented in the overall campaign communications. Even though parties have the legal option of determining frontrunners, this measure cannot be used to test the validity of our measure. Parties mainly use the legal option to circumvent the legally imposed ceiling on candidate spending, which makes it hard to use it as a benchmark for our measure: the Christian-Democrats had 32 frontrunners in 2007 while the Liberals had none (Maddens et al, 2007). The legally appointed frontrunners are thus not really a good criterion variable. Because of this, we will present an overview of the candidates that do appear in the advertisements. This can provide a first assessment of the validity of our measure for the broader party strategy.

Data and Methods

We test these hypotheses using a content analysis of seven Flemish daily and weekly magazines and newspapers³: De Standaard (DS), Het Laatste Nieuws (HLN), Het Nieuwsblad (HN), De Morgen (DM), Dag Allemaal (DA), Humo (H) and Knack (K)⁴. The criterion to select the newspapers was to select two ‘quality’ newspapers with a smaller circulation but much attention to politics (DS, DM) and two popular newspapers with large circulations but generally less political coverage (HLN, HN). The weekly magazines were also selected based on circulation: we included a magazine with large circulation (DA), and two magazines with smaller circulations but more attention to politics (H, K) (CIM, 2010). In these outlets, all advertisements of political parties and candidates were coded. The weekly magazines were coded in their entirety; in the newspapers we coded everything except the regional, sport, and special weekend sections. We purposely left the regional pages out because our focus is on national advertisements and the regional pages often contain advertisements of local candidates that are self funding their advertisement. Because we expected that most of the advertisements would appear in the final weeks of the campaign, we limited the period under study to the final five weeks of the campaign. As a control, two newspapers (DS and HLN) were coded for an additional four weeks. Our expectation was confirmed: all the advertisements appeared in the final four weeks of the campaign. In total, 170 advertisements were coded. For two newspapers (DS and HLN) we also coded the regular coverage during the final two weeks of the campaign, which provides data regarding the visibility of candidates in the regular coverage at the very end of the campaign.

For all items, we coded which candidates were mentioned⁵ and which parties were mentioned. We also coded whether the articles mainly dealt with domestic or foreign news, and whether they dealt with the regional elections or not. The regional elections in Flanders coincided with the European Parliamentary

³ The content analysis was a cooperation between the UA and ULB Partirep teams. Partirep is an IAP project (www.partirep.eu). Funding for the coding was provided by Belspo (www.belspo.be) and by the FER research grants of the ULB. Promotors of the project were Jean-Benoît Pilet (ULB) and Stefaan Walgrave (UA). The research itself was monitored by Régis Dandoy (ULB), Jonas Lefevere (UA) and Dave Sinardet (UA).

⁴ With a circulation of 107.888 copies in the first quarter of 2009 De Standaard is the biggest quality newspaper of Flanders, followed by De Morgen with 76.439 copies. In the same period Het Laatste Nieuws had the largest circulation (341.606) of all Flemish newspapers, followed by Het Nieuwsblad (299.698). This makes them the two largest daily newspapers. Dag Allemaal, a weekly magazin, had a circulation of 504.192 copies in the first quarter of 2009. Humo and Knack had a circulation of 256.558 and 141.361 copies, respectively (CIM, 2010).

⁵ We coded a maximum of 12 politicians per article; because of this, we might be missing some mentions of politicians, but results indicate that only in 0.3 per cent of the items all 12 fields were actually used. The impact of this restriction is thus very limited.

(EP) elections, so we must take that fact into account: there may be some overlap. In some advertisements parties not only presented their regional frontrunners, but also their European ones. In the current dataset we only retain advertisements in which a regional candidate appears. This results in 126 advertisements used in our analysis.

Based on the newspapers, we could not determine who financed each advertisement. Thus, the advertisement could have been paid for by an individual candidate or by the party. An objective criterium to discern between the two types was not available. This may introduce a slight bias because an individually paid advertisement is not a real indicator of party strategy (which is the assumption for H2). Earlier on, we noted that in the 2007 elections roughly 70 per cent of the individual expenses were indirectly funded by the party (Maddens, Weekers, en Fiers 2007). Even though an individual candidate may be financing the advertisement, his/her funds are in a large part party-based. By giving more money to some candidates, and less to others, parties are still determining who appears in the advertisements. And those candidates that get the most money are the frontrunners (Maddens e.a., 2006, p. 487).

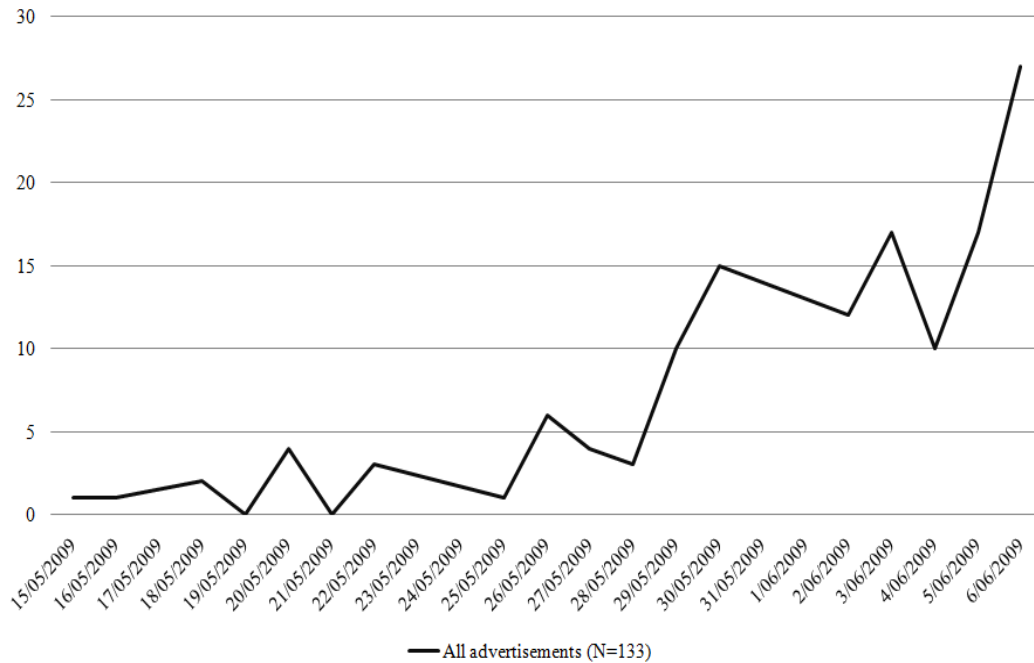
The coding itself was done by four coders. To calculate inter rater reliability we double coded one newspaper per coder, which is roughly 100 items. The inter rater reliability was generally high: for parties and candidates Cohen's kappa was never below .8, which is considered as very good (Fleiss, 1981). For the other indicators used in this article⁶, the kappa was never below .6, which is still considered as acceptable. Unless otherwise mentioned, the data have been weighed to account for item size (small, medium or large) and being on the front page or not.

Results

Figure 1 presents the amount of advertisements in the four newspapers through time. We omit weekly magazines in this graph, because this would introduce weekly spikes that hamper our ability to interpret the graph. The graph plots the period between May 15th which is the day of the first advertisement, and June 6th, the day before the elections.

6 Dummy for regional election coverage, dummy for political coverage, type of news (domestic / mixed / foreign).

Figure 1: Amount of political advertisements per day, unweighted.



The parties advertise during the last two weeks of the campaign. The majority of advertisements are published in the final week. If we weight the advertisements, the final weeks would dominate the graph even more because during this period the advertisements were often spanning an entire page.

Before testing our hypotheses, it should be noted that there are large differences between parties and candidates. Generally speaking, our dataset contains advertisements by all parties that had representatives in the regional parliament. However, some parties have less advertisements in the dataset compared to others. Of the 126 regional advertisements 37 were from Open VLD (Liberals), 27 from Sp.a (Socialists), 22 from N-VA (Nationalists), 15 from CD&V (Christian-Democrats), 12 from Groen! (Greens), 12 from LDD (Neo-Liberals), and only 1 from VB (Extreme Rightists). The low amount of VB advertisements is caused by the fact that their advertisements are systematically blocked by the Flemish newspapers (Wienen 2009). The only coded ad was found in a weekly magazine. Because of this we will not retain VB in the analyses. Groen! and SLP (Social Liberal Progressives) are also excluded. In the

advertisements by Groen!, no candidate was present; for SLP all advertisements (N=8) were removed because Geert Lambert, the European frontrunner, was the only mentioned candidate.

Which candidates were visible in the advertisements? Table 1 provides an overview for each party. Note that some EP candidates are also listed, because we retained them when they were visible next to regional candidates. The number between brackets is the per cent of party advertisements in which the candidate was visible.

Table 1: Overview of the Candidates that were coded in the party advertisements.

Party	Candidates (N=67)
CD&V	Kris Peeters (93%), Jean-Luc Dehaene (65%), Marianne Thyssen (7%), Tom Dehaene (7%).
LDD	Jean-Marie Dedecker (100%), Derk-Jan Eppinck (88%), Moniek Denhaen (88%), Stef Goris (88%), Ulla Werbrouck (88%), Guy Paulis (12%).
N-VA	Bart De Wever (90%), Frieda Brepoels (63%), Geert Bourgeois (57%), Jan Peumans (43%), Mark Demesmaeker (43%), Helga Stevens (43%), Izolda Ferhobaguirova (10%), Linda Mbungu (10%), Bano Zaka atia (10%), Nadia Sminate (10%), Flor van Noppen (6%), Scescenyi Zsuzsanna Pauwelsne (6%), Kris Van Dijck (5%), Liesbeth Homans (5%).
Open VLD	Dirk Van Mechelen (61%), Guy Verhofstadt (45%), Bart Somers (35%), Patricia Ceysens (28%), Jean-Jacques De Gucht (28%), Davy Brocatus (6%), Bart Tommelein (21%), Marino Keulen (21%), Annemie Turtelboom (20%), Annick De Ridder (20%), Karel De Gucht (18%), Sven Gatz (14%), Vincent Van Quickenborne (14%), Guy Vanhengel (14%), Patrick Dewael (13%), Dirk Sterckx (13%), Marleen Vanderpoorten (11%), Herman De Croo (7%), Patrick De Klerck (7%), Guido De Padt (7%), Frans Verhelst (7%), Alexander De Croo (6%), Caroline De Padt (6%), Margriet Hermans (6%), Matrine Lesaffre (6%), Kris Luyckx (6%), Annemie Neyts (6%), Rik Remmery (6%), Herman Schueremans (6%), Ludo Van Campenhout (6%), Hilde Vautmans (6%).
Sp.A	Caroline Gennez (64%), Kathleen Van Brempt (31%), Frank Vandembroucke (24%), Patrick Janssens (15%), Freya Van den Bossche (5%), Peter Vanvelthoven (5%), Pascal Smet (5%), John Crombez (5%), Bert Anciaux (3%), Saïd El Khadraoui (1%), Marleen Temmerman (1%), Sigyn Van de Velde (1%).

CD&V (Kris Peeters), LDD (Jean-Marie Dedecker) and N-VA (Bart De Wever) clearly put one candidate up front. This candidate was sometimes flanked by a select group of others. For these parties, the frontrunner is almost always present in all the advertisements. Open VLD and Sp.A use a slightly different strategy: they have a clear frontrunner (Dirk Van Mechelen and Caroline Gennez, respectively), but this frontrunner is not visible in all advertisements. Especially Open VLD has a very large amount of candidates being promoted. The frontrunners are often visible, but accompanied by (a lot of) other candidates.

To test our first series of hypotheses, we regress the amount of advertisements in which a candidate was mentioned or visible on a set of predictor variables using a linear regression. We use a file that contains all the candidates that were listed on the ballot of the five parties in our analysis (N=1049). We control for both (former) party-presidency and being a (former) minister using two dummy variables that are coded 1 if the candidate was or used to be party president or minister, and 0 if (s)he was not. This way, we control for candidates that have a larger weight within the party, and are subsequently more likely to appear in the advertisements. We also include four party dummies to control for systematic differences between the parties (not reported). In addition to these control variables the model contains the size of the constituency, operationalized as the amount of seats up for election in the district (H1a). Additionally, we include 3 dummy variables for being the first person on the list (1) or not (0) (H1b), being the last person on the list (1) or not (0) (H1c), and being on an eligible place (1) or not (0) (H1d). The eligible places are determined based on the previous election result. If the party obtained 5 seats in the constituency in the previous elections, places 1 to 5 are considered as eligible. To test the impact of media-attention prior to the campaign (H1e), we add the absolute amount of news items in which the candidate appeared in a non-election year (2008) as an explanatory variable. The amount of items was determined based on ENA⁷ data, which codes all news broadcasts of both the commercial and public broadcaster. The regression results are reported in table 2.

⁷ Electronic News Archive, www.ena.be.

Table 2

Adj. R2		.55
(Former) Party leader	11,49 (.66) ***	
(Former) Minister	3,30 (.35) ***	
District magnitude	0,02 (.01) ***	
First person on the list	4,24 (.29) ***	
Last person on the list	0,19 (.24)	
Eligible place	0,25 (.15)	
Media attention in 2008	0,01 (.00) ***	
Constant	-0.70 (.15) ***	
N		1049

Table 2: Results of linear regression predicting the amount of time a candidate appears in an advertisement. Coefficients are unstandardized, with standard errors in parentheses. Stars indicate levels of significance: *: sig < .05, **: sig < .01, ***: sig < .001.

Both control variables are significant, as we would expect. Both the party president and their ministers are likely to be played out in the parties' own communications. District magnitude has a strong positive impact on the amount of appearances. Candidates that are running in larger districts have an advantage compared to other candidates. The fact that the dependent variable is measured using national media outlets may enhance this effect. In local media, or even in the regional sections of the magazines and newspapers, the odds of finding local candidates are greater. Nonetheless, hypothesis 1a is confirmed. Even though being on the first place of the list has a (very) significant coefficient, being on the last place on the list has no significant effect on the amount of appearances. The internal party logic explaining this might be that the party wishes to limit the amount of candidates and thus only focuses on the candidates 'pulling' the list. We already saw indications of this in table 1: most parties had one clear frontrunner. When choices have to be made, the person pulling the list gets priority. Additionally, being on an eligible place has no effect either, so a similar logic seems to be at work here (focusing exclusively on the frontrunners). Finally, media attention seems to be definite incentive for parties to select candidates in

advertisements: controlling for other internal factors, media attention has a strong positive effect on the amount of appearances. This makes sense, because candidates that are familiar to large amounts of voters are likely to attract more votes. Of course, media attention may also reflect the party hierarchy: some politicians are ‘sent out’ to communicate the messages. Overall, the results indicate that both internal and external factors matter. The place on the list and electoral district of the candidate matters, but prior media visibility is also taken into account.

Now that we have some clarity regarding the factors influencing candidate choice in political advertisements, we turn to the question of how this impacts upon the regular coverage in the media. To test this, we regress the absolute amount of appearances in regular news items in the last two weeks of the campaign on a set of independent variables. To control for the baseline media attention, we again include media visibility of the candidate in 2008 as a control variable. Additionally, we include the (former) party leader and (former) minister dummies. Finally, we control for systematic differences between the parties by including four party dummies (not reported in table). The variable of interest is the amount of political advertisements in which the candidate was visible. Table 3 presents the regression results.

Table 3

Adj. R2	.69
Media attention in 2008	0,08 (.00) ***
Party leader	21,18 (1,78) ***
(Former) Minister	9,04 (.86) ***
Amount of advertisements candidate appeared in	1,23 (.06) ***
Constant	0,14 (.21)
N	1049

*Table 3: Results of linear regression predicting absolute media attention for a candidate during the final 2 weeks of the campaign. Coefficients are unstandardized, with standard errors in parentheses. Stars indicate levels of significance: *: sig < .05, **: sig < .01, ***: sig < .001.*

As expected, the control variables all significantly increase the amount of regular media attention given to a candidate. Our model explains roughly 70 per cent of the variance in the dependent variable, which suggests that this small amount of variables captures most of the differences in candidate visibility.

Naturally, prior media attention is the strongest predictor in the model, but even controlling for this we find strong effects of both the party leader and minister dummies. Journalists often turn to key politicians in their campaign coverage. Most importantly, H2 gets strong empirical support. Controlling for previous attention, we still find a strong positive effect of the appearances in political advertisements: if the party decides to promote certain candidates, these candidates get an additional ‘visibility boost’ in the final weeks of the campaign. Thus, appearing in advertisements is important and vital to getting some time in the spotlights.

Conclusion

In this paper we investigated the interplay between political advertisements and mass media visibility. Most of our hypotheses received clear empirical support. Regarding the question ‘what factors matter in candidate choice for political advertisements?’, three factors stand out. Being on the first place of the list and running in a large constituency are the two internal factors that matter; being on an eligible place, or ‘pushing’ the list did not have a significant effect. The third factor that matters is external: prior media attention increases the odds of surviving candidate selection for being advertised by the party. Admittedly, these results are hardly groundbreaking, but they are a first indication of the way parties decide how to use advertisements. Advertisements are expensive means of communication. Consequently, these decisions are important because they constitute a large part of the campaign budget. Explaining these decisions is thus crucial if we want to get how parties strategically use the means they have at their disposal. Most of the previous research has focused on issue-related choices (Roberts & McCombs, 1994), the financial impact of campaign spending on the party budget (Weekers, Maddens, & Fiers, 2008), and their impact on the public (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1996). In this contribution we have demonstrated that candidate choice is an understudied and very relevant area of research. Candidates matter in the vote choice of at least part of the electorate (Karvonen, 2010; Marsh, 2007; Hayes, 2009; Goeminne & Swyngedouw, 2007), and high media visibility increases the amount of preference votes for candidates (Van Aelst et al, 2006). We clearly confirmed the impact of advertisements on the media agenda regarding candidate visibility: this means that in addition to their direct persuasive effect, advertisements have indirect electoral impact because they focus attention on a selected group of candidates. These candidates then gain familiarity amongst the public at large, which increases their electoral chances. The inter-media agenda setting effect is clearly self-enhancing: previous media attention increases the odds that a candidate survives the internal advertising selection, making it in turn more likely that (s)he gets more media attention.

We only had Flemish party, candidate and media data at our disposal. Flanders, and by extension Belgium, is a good case to estimate (the effect of) candidate choices. Parties are still central actors, which is a crucial condition for candidate choice to even exist. In presidential elections or in systems where parties are less crucial, the factors we distinguished here are unlikely to matter much at all. A final missing factor is the voter. We have no estimate of the actual direct and indirect effect of advertisements on voters. However, media visibility has been found to increase the amount of preference votes (Van Aelst et al, 2006).

Regardless of the limitations the fact that our findings confirm our expectations still stands. At the start of the campaign, parties face crucial choices that determine their electoral faith: which policies do we wish to enact (issues), how do we package our message (strategy), and who is going to bring the message to the voters (candidates)? Unveiling the decision underlying the choices made in these areas deserves further scholarly attention: it is the only way to understand parties' campaign strategies.

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