

Vote or Party Strategy? Understanding the Electoral Success of Ethnic Minorities in Brussels

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Abstract:

European democracies have grown ethnically diverse in the recent years. Still, ethnic minority groups remain underrepresented in politics in general. Despite the theoretical argument asserting that ethnic minorities should perform better in systems allowing voters to cast intraparty preferences, empirical studies bring mixed results. In particular, scholars highlight the role of both parties and voters in explaining the electoral success or failure of ethnic minority candidates. Using data on regional elections between 1995 and 2014 in Brussels, our study shows that even though parties have made gradual efforts to include ethnic minorities on their lists, voters appear to be an important force behind the election of ethnic minorities in Brussels. We find variations according to party ideology, with socialist and –to a lesser extent– Christian democratic party’s candidates benefiting the most from preferential voting. However, the positive impact of preference votes seems to decrease overtime, as parties themselves become more inclusive and tend to allocate more realistic positions to their ethnic minority candidates in recent elections.

Keywords: Brussels – electoral system – ethnic minorities – political representation

1. Introduction

European societies have grown ethnically diverse in recent decades as a result of international migration processes, but ethnic minorities often remain an underrepresented group in politics. In explaining the limited numbers of ethnic minorities in politics, scholars have often focused on the impact of state structures and citizenship regimes (a.o. Koopmans et al, 2005) and civic infrastructures (a.o. Jacobs & Tillie, 2004). A growing body of work however now also points to the role played by the political opportunity structure, in particular the electoral system (Moser, 2008; Togeby, 2008). One hypothesis that has received considerable attention in that respect, is that ethnic minorities do best under electoral rules that combine proportional representation and preferential voting (Togeby, 2008). Proportional representation is expected to foster diversity by providing parties with incentives to balance candidate lists in socio-demographic terms, while preferential voting is assumed to create opportunities for ethnic mobilization among voters and stimulate the practice of ethnic-based voting (e.g. Togeby, 2008; Teney et al, 2010; Jacobs et al 2013).

However, despite these theoretical arguments, empirical studies show somewhat mixed results. While in Denmark a combination of PR rules and preferential voting contributed extensively to ethnic minorities' success in local politics (Togeby, 2008), in Sweden the numerical presence of ethnic minorities in politics remained low despite similar favourable conditions (Dancygier et al, 2015). Such mixed results show that electoral rules can indeed create opportunities for enhanced representation, but cannot offer any guarantees. Actual outcomes depend on how specific actors – political parties and voters in particular – engage with these rules and give meaning to them. Political parties, through their crucial role in candidate recruitment and selection, act as gatekeepers and/or facilitators of ethnic minorities' representation. Voters in addition can decide to support or reject ethnic minority candidate(s) and hence influence ethnic minorities' electoral score.

Because more research is needed to understand how and when PR rules with preferential voting contribute to the electoral success of ethnic minorities, this article will examine another (non-Scandinavian) case, namely the Brussels capital region of Belgium. Much like other West European countries, Belgium, and its Brussels capital region in particular, has witnessed an increase in the ethnic diversity of its population and of its political class. Currently about 25 per cent of the members of the Brussels regional assembly are of ethnic origin; a percentage that reflects the proportion of ethnic minorities in the population. This article therefore takes a closer look at the electoral success of ethnic minorities in Brussels

and explores how political opportunities generated by the electoral system, political parties and voter strategies have contributed to these results.

In order to answer the research questions, this article will analyze original data on the electoral scores of ethnic minority candidates competing in regional elections in Brussels from 1995 until the most recent election of 2014. By taking this over-time perspective, we want to trace back the political representation of ethnic minorities over a period of 20 years, while controlling for broader changes in the political and societal context such as changes in citizenship regulations. The focus on regional elections is furthermore interesting because it complements existing research in Belgium that has often focused more on the local or national/federal level than on the regional level (Celis, Eelbode & Wauters, 2013; Teney et al, 2010; but see: Jacobs, 2000 for an important exception). The situation in the Brussels Capital Region in particular deserves more attention because the region is characterized by a highly diverse population, creating specific political and electoral opportunities for ethnic minorities. As recent debates about the political integration of ethnic minorities in Belgium focus almost exclusively on non-EU minorities, in particular the Moroccans, Turks and Congolese in Brussels, our study will also focus on these minorities.

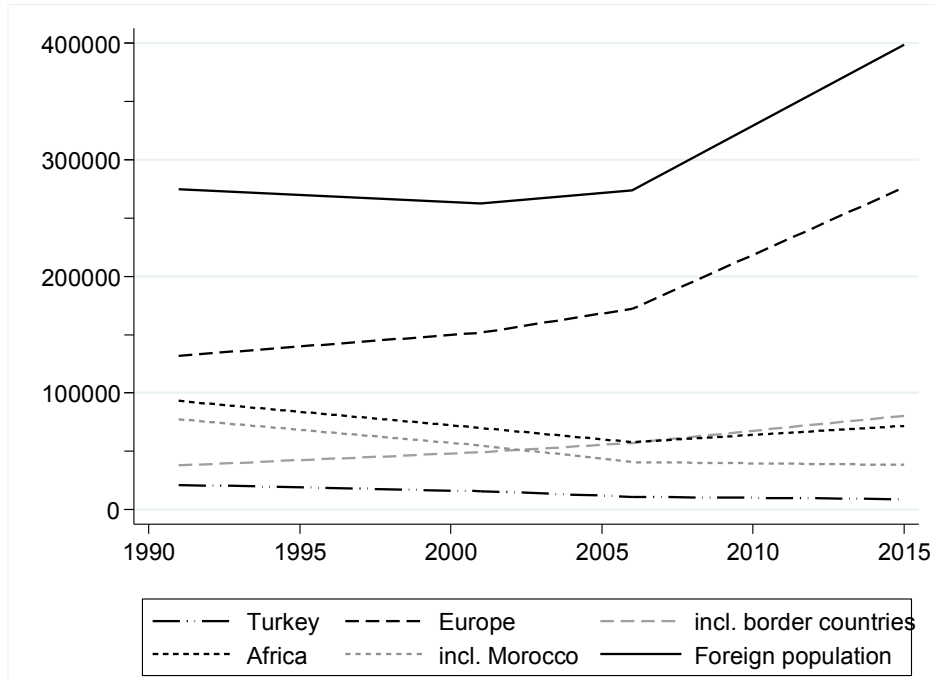
In what follows, we first discuss the existing literature on the political representation of ethnic minorities in Belgium and Brussels. This is followed by a description of the data in a methods section. Then we present and discuss the findings themselves. In the final section, we return to the conclusion of the results.

2. Ethnic minorities in Belgium/Brussels

Of the three regions in Belgium, the Brussels Capital Region has the most diversified population. Since 1991, about 30 per cent of the population in Brussels has a foreign nationality, compared to 5 to 10 per cent on average in Flanders and Wallonia. European citizens remain the largest immigrant group, especially so after the enlargement of the European Union and the accession of new Eastern European member states (see also Figure 1). Turkish and African residents constitute the major extra-European groups of foreigners in Brussels, with Moroccan citizens accounting for more than half of the African group. Several changes made to citizenship regulations however have facilitated the attribution and acquisition of the Belgian nationality for third and second generation immigrants in the 1990s and for foreign residents in 2001. The impossibility to keep track of these new Belgian citizens and their children makes it overall difficult to estimate the actual proportion of citizens with an

immigrant background in Brussels. Nevertheless, the presence of so many foreign nationals from specific communities clearly illustrates the cultural and ethnic diversity of the Brussels region.

Figure 1. Major nationality groups in Brussels, 1991 to 2015 (INS, 2017).



Although the first Belgians of ethnic origin started to appear on candidate lists from the late 1980s onwards (Bousetta & Bernès, 2007), the political integration of ethnic minorities became particularly salient in the 1990s when the issue of granting migrants local voting rights was put on the table. Especially in the bilingual Brussels region, migrant voting rights were heavily debated between French-speaking and Flemish political parties, because it was believed that voting rights for immigrants (especially non-EU immigrants) could endanger the already fragile balance of power between Flemish and Francophone parties (Jacobs, 2000). The Maastricht Treaty first instituted the right to vote for European citizens in local elections from 1995 onwards. In 2004, non-EU immigrants who had been Belgian residents for five years were also granted voting rights for local elections. Changes in voting rights, as well as changes in citizenship regulations, have progressively changed the composition of the electorate in Belgium. Citizens of immigrant origin are now an important electoral group in Belgium and (especially) in Brussels.

Given these societal and political evolutions, research on the political involvement of ethnic minorities in Belgium has continued to grow at a fast pace in recent years. Many studies have paid attention to patterns of political *participation* of ethnic minorities by examining the determinants and varieties of immigrant associational life and the impact of local enfranchisement (a.o. Jacobs, 2000; Jacobs, Phaet & Swyngedouw, 2004). Compared to studies of political participation, research on the political *representation* of ethnic minorities has taken a slower start, mainly because until recently the number of ethnic minorities in formal politics remained (very) low. However, alongside the gradual integration of ethnic minorities in the formal political arena, research on the political representation of ethnic minorities has also gained more ground in recent years.

Studies of political representation have on the one hand explored the actions undertaken by *political parties* to recruit and select ethnic minority candidates, as well as their openness and responsiveness towards newcomers in politics (Jacobs, 2000; Celis, Eelbode & Wauters, 2013; Celis & Erzeel, 2017). Recent studies show that parties have made efforts to include candidates with an ethnic minority background on candidate lists (Celis & Erzeel, 2013). Especially Brussels has observed an increase in the number of ethnic minority candidates over the years, partly because of this increased interest of political parties to include ethnic minority candidates in order to attract more voters (Eelbode, Wauters, Celis, & Devos, 2013; Teney, Jacobs, Rea, & Delwit, 2010). Because ethnic minorities make up a very large part of the Brussels electorate, parties who win the immigrant vote can indeed win the elections.

However, this attention paid by parties has not (yet) led to the adoption of concrete and binding measures aimed at removing structural barriers for ethnic minorities in politics, such as quotas or target numbers (Celis et al, 2014). According to Celis, Eelbode and Wauters (2013), parties merely take ‘window-dressing’ measures, aimed at giving a platform to ethnic minorities without actually sharing power with them. Even in Brussels, parties find it more important to balance candidate lists in terms of gender than in terms of ethnicity (De Winter et al, 2013). This makes it uncertain that party strategies can really account for the electoral success of ethnic minorities.

Next to the role of political parties, a more limited number of studies have explored the ‘*voter side*’ of political representation by studying voting patterns of ethnic minorities. Looking at party preferences, Eelbode et al (2013) found that ethnic minority voters in Ghent and Antwerp were more likely to support a leftist party than a rightist party. This finding was not confirmed in Brussels, where Teney et al (2010) concluded that the support of ethnic minority voters for leftist parties was not that straightforward and that important variations existed

across ethnic identities. Research on candidate preferences however remains scarce and few studies have looked into the role of ethnicity in preference voting. Teney's et al's (2010) stands out as an important exception. Focusing on preferential voting for ethnic minority candidates at the occasion of the 2006 local election in Brussels, the authors identified patterns of both 'ethnic voting' and 'symbolic voting'. Although ethnic minority candidates drew disproportionately from the support of voters of their own communities (i.e. ethnic voting), there was also a group of (ethnic majority) voters who deliberately cast votes for ethnic minority candidates as a 'symbolic' gesture in favor of diversity (i.e. symbolic voting) (Teney et al, 2010). Teney et al's study of local politics offers some empirical proof for the fact that preferential voting shapes the electoral success of ethnic minority candidates in Brussels, which is in line with the findings of Togeby (2008) in Denmark, but more research is needed in order to understand to what extent and how preference voting plays a role.

The dual focus on voters and parties is needed in Belgium's flexible list system. Belgian voters can cast a vote for the entire list (= list vote), or vote for one or several candidates on the same list (= preference votes). Both list votes and preferential votes influence the allocation of seats between candidates. Candidates with enough preferential votes to exceed a particular 'threshold' are elected, notwithstanding their position on the list. For candidates not attaining this threshold (often the majority of candidates), the order in which they appear on the list influences their chance of getting elected. Those with positions higher on the list take advantage of list votes, which are allocated to candidates in the order in which they appear on the list and are added to their preferential votes. Given the partial impact of the list vote, preferential voting does not have a full effect. Over the years, Belgium has witnessed various electoral reforms with the intention to increase the importance of preference votes. Since 1995, voters can cast multiple preference votes while it was limited to a single one until then. In 2002, the impact of the list order was reduced by two to the advantage of preferential votes (Wauters, Weekers, and Maddens, 2010). Despite these changes however, the top-list positions are still the safest and candidates on these positions almost always get elected. A minority of candidates manage to get elected 'out of order' and the original ranking as decided by parties usually determines who gets the seats (Bouhon, Reuchamps & Dodeigne, 2012).

In this regard, Karvonen rightly categorizes the preferential voting system in Belgium as weak (2004: 208). But even if their preference votes only rarely directly lead to their election, candidates get indirectly rewarded for their personal electoral score. Indeed, a candidate who was popular in the last election (i.e. who got a high amount of preference votes)

is more likely to get a higher position on the list in the next election (André, Depauw, Shugart, & Chytilek, 2015; Crisp, Olivella, Malecki, & Sher, 2013).

3. Methodology

In order to answer our research questions, we composed a dataset of all candidates that participated in the Brussels regional elections from 1995 to 2014. We collected information on the ethnic background of the candidates, their party affiliation, their position on the list, the number of preference votes they received, and whether or not they got elected. In order to keep the study feasible, we have limited our analysis to effective candidates who ran on lists of ‘winner parties’ i.e. parties that won a least one seat in a given election, resulting in a total of 2.903 candidates. Parties that did not get any seat as well as substitute candidates were removed from the dataset.

Data were collected from 1995 to 2014, because this allowed us to map the evolution of ethnic minorities’ electoral success over time, while taking into account the role of social and institutional changes in Brussels. Several important changes took place between 1999 and 2004. The Brussels parliament, which originally had a single electoral district of 75 seats, increased its number of seats to 89 in 2004 and – more significantly – introduced reserved seats according to language. French-speaking voters elect 72 French-speaking regional MPs while Dutch-speaking voters elect 17 Dutch-speaking regional MPs. Moreover, the impact of the list order was reduced by two in 2002 (i.e. the devolution of the list vote), which increased the impact of preferential voting on the allocation of seats between candidates. Migrant voting rights were furthermore introduced in 2004 at the local level, which raised public awareness on the need to integrate ethnic minorities in politics. Our comparison over time should always be interpreted against the backdrop of these changes.

In our analysis of the political representation of ethnic minorities, we focus exclusively on the political representation of *non-EU* ethnic minorities, because recent debates about the political integration of ethnic minorities in Belgium focus almost exclusively on non-EU minorities, in particular the Moroccans, Turks and Congolese¹. The coding of the ‘ethnic background’ variable is a complex process since we do not dispose of much official information on the candidates’ personal backgrounds, apart from their name, address, gender

¹ One of the conditions for being candidate in the Brussels regional elections is the Belgian nationality. However, this does not prevent candidates to also hold another nationality, such as Moroccan or Turkish.

birthdate and occupation. Our proxy for identifying candidates of ethnic origin is therefore based on an onomastic procedure, i.e. an analysis of their family name and first name (see also Celis & Erzeel 2013). The distinctive first name / last name method is often used as an efficient way to identify members of ethnic (minority) groups in similar studies in other countries or contexts (see e.g. Black, 2008; Bloemraad, 2013).

Three independent coders classified all candidates in different categories based on the origin of their name. In very few cases of doubt or disagreement between coders, we looked up the picture of those candidates on the available campaign websites and materials. Yet, if more detailed information on the ethnic background of well-known candidates in larger parties is accessible in the most recent elections, the same does not apply for less-known candidates especially in older elections, so we could not use this technique for all the candidates.

In addition, we collected data on the number of preference votes and the list position of obtained by each candidate. Candidates' list position gives us information on parties' efforts to enhance the representation of ethnic minorities, especially if they are placed on realistic list positions. The realistic position variable has been calculated on the basis of the number of seats won by a party list ('party magnitude') in the previous election (PM-1). The candidate is considered to be on a realistic position if his/her initial position is lower or equal (in terms of numbers) to PM-1. The number of preference votes is an aggregated measure at the district level².

In the final section of the analysis, we are interested in the electoral process itself, i.e. in the interplay between parties, candidates, and voters. We present data on how candidates managed to disturb the list order. First, we compare the initial position candidates had on the list to the final position candidates would have had according to their personal score only, leaving aside list vote devolution. This allows us to assess how preference votes play a role in the ability of candidates to move up or down the list. Second, we consider how preference votes influence the official election results, by analyzing the link between the eligible position and the effective election. Compared to the 'realistic' position that was calculated on a PM-1 basis, we define the 'eligible' position on the basis of the actual number of seats won by the party at the moment of the election (PM-0) (see section 4.4 for an explanation of the purpose of that distinction). We examine the ethnic background of candidates who did not occupy an eligible position but did get elected anyway, and of candidates who did not get elected while they were

² Hence, we cannot conduct any individual-level analysis with regard to how and why voters might use preference votes and whether this is linked to ethnic or symbolic voting.

on an eligible position. This allows us to put into perspective the actual score of a party with the electoral success or failure of ethnic minority candidates.

We present the results of our analysis by election year to highlight the evolution over time. We also present the results by party family in order to determine how party ideology shapes the representation of ethnic minorities in the Brussels Parliament.

4. Empirical results

4.1. The representation of ethnic minorities

As a first step in the analysis, the percentages of ethnic minorities among the elected MPs and among the effective candidates are compared over time. Roughly 17.8 per cent of the elected MPs and 13.4 per cent of the candidates in the period between 1995 and 2014 had an ethnic minority (i.e. Turkish, Moroccan or Congolese) background.

The findings in Table 1 reveal that the presence of ethnic minorities in the Brussels parliament was rather low in 1995 but has strongly increased over the years. In 1995, only 5 per cent of the elected MPs had an ethnic minority background. This percentage doubled in 1999, when ethnic minorities occupied 11 per cents of the seats in the Brussels parliament. Subsequent increases in ethnic minorities' presence followed in 2004 and 2009, when the share of ethnic minority representatives amounted to 20 per cent and 25 per cent respectively. In the most recent term (2014), the presence of ethnic minorities seems to have stabilized and ethnic minorities make up roughly one fourth of the elected MPs.

If we furthermore compare the percentage of ethnic minorities among the elected MPs to their percentage among the effective candidates in Table 1, we see that until 2004, the percentage of ethnic minority MPs has always been higher than the percentage of ethnic minority candidates. This means that ethnic minorities, especially in the earlier legislative terms, were better represented than could have been expected based on their presence on candidate lists. The electoral success of ethnic minorities can be the result of two phenomena: either ethnic minority candidates occupied a large amount of the realistic positions on party lists, or they received a large amount of preference votes which allowed them to get elected out of order. The following sections of the paper (4.2 and 4.3) will investigate both possibilities in more detail.

Table 1. The ethnic background of elected MPs and effective candidates in the Brussels parliament, over time

Year	Ethnic background	Elected MPs N (%)	Candidates N (%)
1995	Ethnic minority	4 (5%)	18 (2.4%)
	Non-EM	71 (95%)	730 (97.6%)
	Total	75 (100%)	148 (100%)
1999	Ethnic minority	8 (11%)	55 (7%)
	Non-EM	67 (89%)	731 (93%)
	Total	75 (100%)	786 (100%)
2004	Ethnic minority	18 (20%)	68 (15.3%)
	Non-EM	71 (80%)	377 (84.7%)
	Total	89 (100%)	445 (100%)
2009	Ethnic minority	22 (25%)	99 (25.4%)
	Non-EM	67 (75%)	291 (74.6%)
	Total	89 (100%)	390 (100%)
2014	Ethnic minority	22 (25%)	148 (27.7%)
	Non-EM	67 (75%)	386 (72.3%)
	Total	89 (100%)	534 (100%)
Total	Ethnic minority	74 (18%)	388 (13.4%)
	Non-EM	343 (82%)	2.515 (86.6%)
	Total	417 (100%)	2.903 (100%)

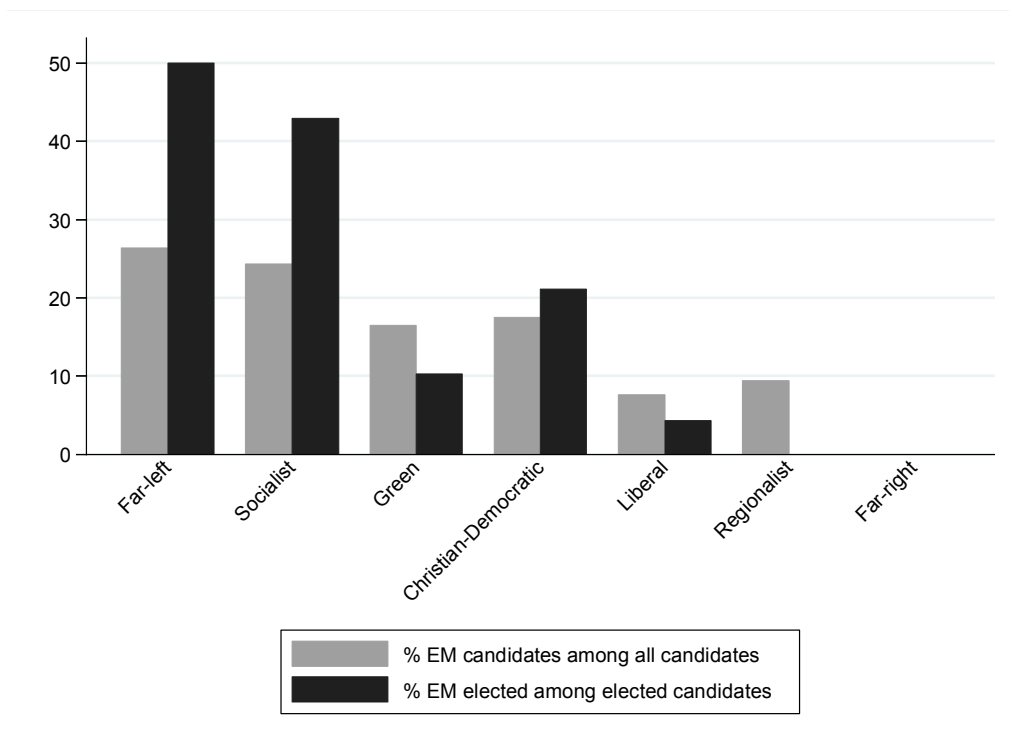
Note: percentages are column percentages by year. Non-EM means 'non-ethnic minorities'.

However, we first take a closer look at the presence of ethnic minority candidates and MPs among the different party families in Figure 2. Previous studies show that most ethnic minorities have traditionally been elected by socialist parties in Belgium (Celis, Eelbode & Wauters, 2013; Van Hauwaert et al, forthcoming). These findings are also confirmed for the Brussels case. Together with far-left parties, socialist parties present the highest percentage of ethnic minorities among their candidates and elected representatives. Christian democratic parties and green parties nominate slightly less candidates compared to the socialist and far-left parties, and have substantially less ethnic minorities among their elected MPs. Right-wing parties such as the liberal parties and regionalist parties host a small number of ethnic minority candidates and MPs, which is also in line with other (inter)national studies (Celis & Erzeel, 2013; Mügge, 2016). The radical right has no ethnic minorities among its candidates or representatives.

If we again compare the percentage of ethnic minority candidates to the percentage of ethnic minority MPs, we notice that only in socialist and far-left parties the percentage of ethnic minority MPs is higher than the percentage of ethnic minority candidates. In other parties, it is the same or lower.

Although Figure 2 presents the general results per party family, it is important to notice that the Brussels electoral arena is divided into a Flemish and Francophone arena. When we analyze the results for the Flemish and Francophone parties separately (not shown here), we find that the results in Figure 2 hold for both language groups. Even if we compare the parties over time, the tendency remains the same, and becomes even stronger in the most recent elections.

Figure 2. Number of ethnic minority candidates and ethnic minority MPs among candidates and elected candidates for each party family (in percentages)



Note: EM means 'ethnic minority'.

4.2. The role of candidate lists

As mentioned above, the electoral chances of candidates in Belgium's flexible list system are to an important extent shaped by the list order. The list order is to a large extent determined by national and regional party leaders. In order to consider parties' role in the electoral success of ethnic minorities, we therefore analyze in Figure 3 to what extent parties nominate ethnic minorities for realistic positions on the list. The results reveal that ethnic minorities have gradually obtained more realistic list positions over time. Until 1999, parties offered less than 10 per cent of the realistic positions to ethnic minority candidates. In the most recent elections, ethnic minorities gained a larger proportion of the realistic positions, up to 22.4 per cent in 2009 and 23.1 per cent in 2014.

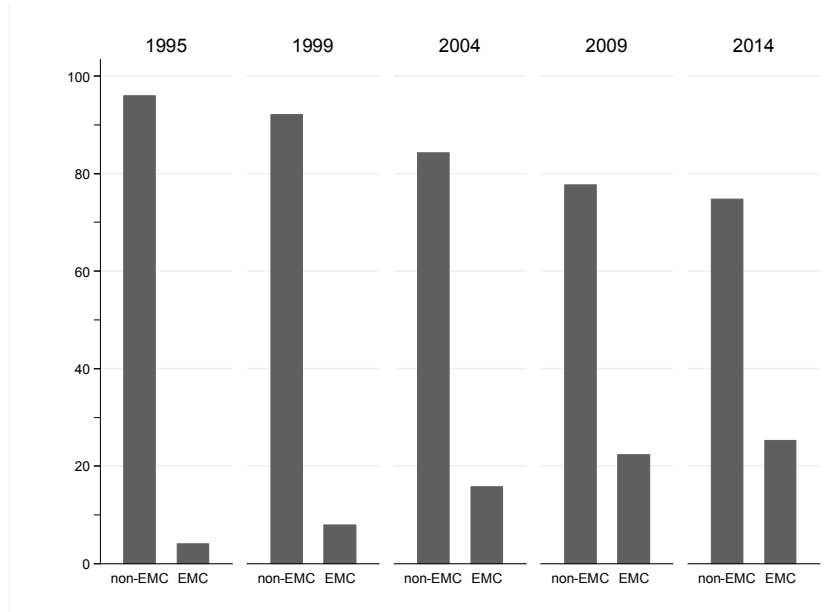
However, in order to assess whether parties contributed to the electoral success of ethnic minorities, we have to compare for each year the percentage of candidates occupying realistic list positions (in Figure 3) to the actual percentage of elected MPs (as displayed in Table 1). The results are quite revealing. In every legislative term up until 2009, ethnic minorities obtained a larger proportion of the seats in the Brussels parliament than we could have expected based on their proportion of realistic positions. For instance, in 1999 ethnic minorities obtained about 8 per cent of the realistic list positions and 11 per cent of the seats in parliament. In 2004, a threshold of 20 per cent elected ethnic minority representatives was reached, despite the fact that ethnic minorities (only) received 15.8 per cent of the realistic list positions. Only in 2014, the share of ethnic minorities among the elected representatives proportionally reflects their share among the candidates occupying realistic list positions. Overall, we conclude that the electoral success of ethnic minorities cannot be attributed to party efforts (alone), especially in earlier years. On the contrary, if the allocation of seats would have been based solely on list order, the numerical integration of ethnic minorities would have followed a slower track.

These findings confirm our initial expectations that political parties are not the driving forces behind the increased ethnic diversity in Belgian politics. Parties seemingly take a 'wait-and-see' attitude: before committing to selecting (a high number of) ethnic minorities, they first need proof that selecting ethnic minorities offers electoral advantages.

Differences between party families furthermore occur, as shown in Figure 4. The socialist party represent the largest percentage of ethnic minorities on realistic positions, closely followed by Christian democratic and green parties. The right-wing liberal and regionalist parties have the lowest percentage of ethnic minorities on realistic list positions,

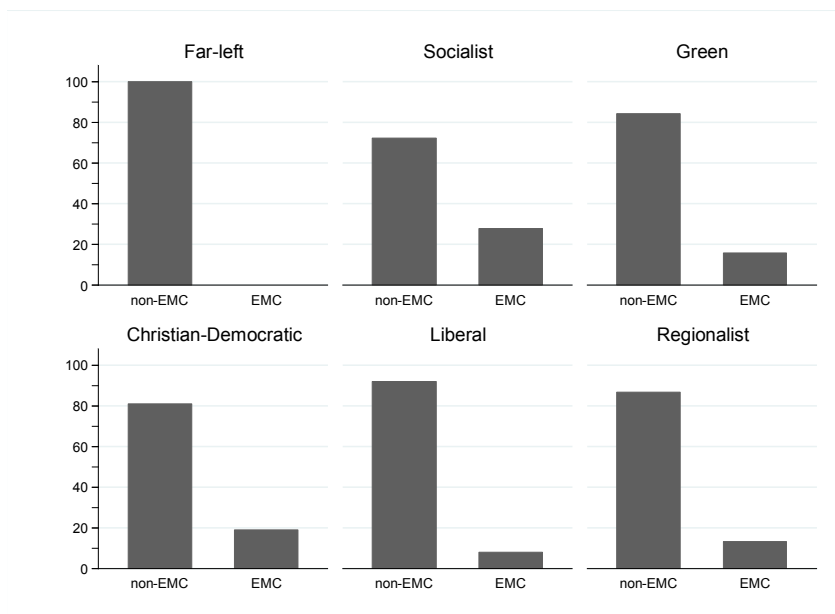
which might explain why they also have the lowest number of ethnic minorities among the elected representatives.

Figure 3. Percentage of candidates occupying a realistic position on the list according to their ethnic background, over time



Note: EMC means 'ethnic minority candidates'.

Figure 4. Percentage of candidates occupying a realistic position on the list according to their ethnic background, by party family



Note: The radical right party family was not included because it did not have a single ethnic minority candidate during the period considered. EMC means 'ethnic minority candidates'.

4.3. *The role of preferential voting*

Next, we consider the role of voters, by assessing the impact of preferential voting. In Brussels, more than 70 per cent of the voters use preference votes rather than list votes, which means that preference votes are a key element for understanding election results.

Table 2 first gives an overview of the average amount of preference votes obtained by effective candidates, by ethnic background and election year. On average, an individual candidate in the Brussels regional elections receives 1090 preference votes. This number nevertheless largely varies across candidates. In 2004, for instance, Charles Picqué (PS) received 59.216 preference votes. Overall, very few candidates receive more than 10.000 preference votes, since the vote is rather fragmented in these elections, given the high number of parties and candidates. Table 2 furthermore shows a clear positive trend in the amount of preference votes cast: since 1995, the average amount of preference votes for *all* candidates has steadily increased, reaching a peak in 2004 and 2009, and (slightly) decreasing again in 2014. The increase in 2004 coincides with the 2002 electoral reforms, in particular the reduction of the impact of the list order by two to the advantage of preferential votes (Wauters, Weekers, and Maddens, 2010). Although we cannot assume that the electoral reforms have had any mechanical effects on the number of preferential votes cast in the next elections, it is possible that they have encouraged voters to take advantage of the new system and cast (more) votes for their preferred candidates (Wauters, 2014).

When we consider the ethnic background of candidates, it is clear that ethnic minorities initially attracted a higher amount of preference votes than other candidates (in 1995, 1999 and 2004). This trend confirms Teney et al's (2010) earlier study showing that ethnic minority candidates attract more preference votes in ethnically diverse contexts where they can take advantage of ethnic mobilization. The advantage of ethnic minority candidates however disappears in the last two elections. In 2009 and 2014, the average amount of preference votes obtained by ethnic minorities roughly equals the amount of preference votes gained by non-ethnic minorities. Based on our current dataset, we cannot offer any conclusive reasons for why this shift occurred. One possibility – namely, that this shift occurred because ethnic minorities received fewer ‘visible’ positions on candidate lists – should be rejected because the results in Figure 3 in the previous section showed an increase in the number of ethnic minorities occupying realistic list positions in recent years. Another possibility is that the advantage of a system of preferential voting disappears once the numerical presence of ethnic minorities in politics starts to increase. Ethnic mobilization might prove to be a successful strategy for ethnic

minorities especially when they are newcomers in politics because their ethnic background offers them a competitive advantage. However, this competitive advantage might disappear once more ethnic minorities gain access to parliament, because more (well-known) ethnic minority candidates are competing for votes and might need to divide preference votes between them.

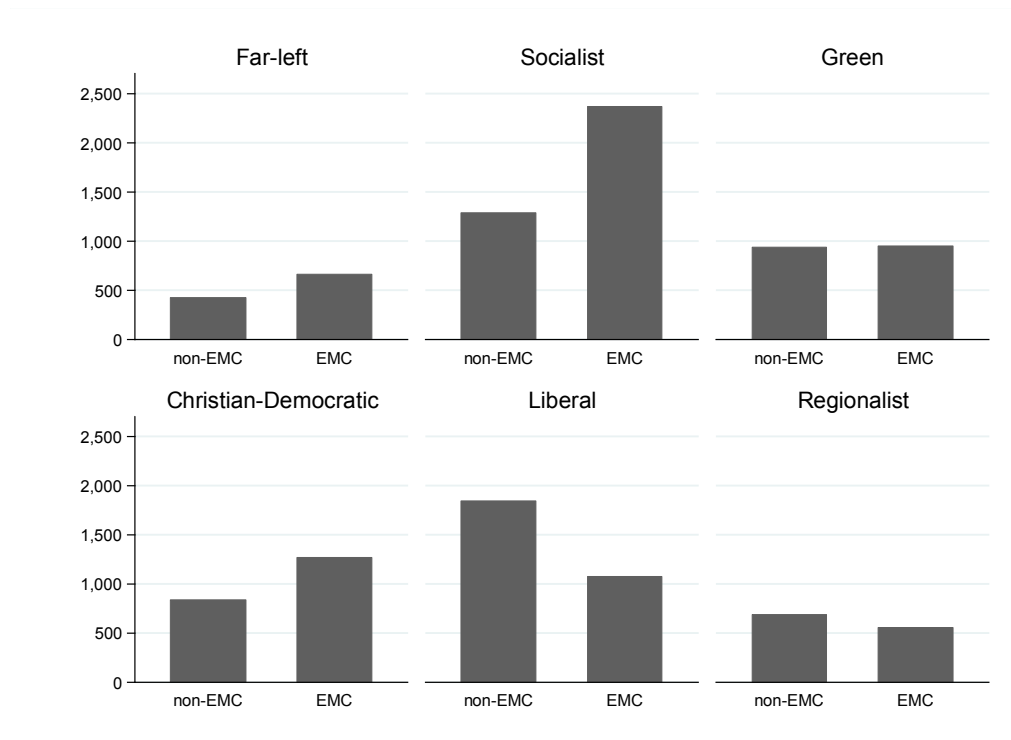
Table 2. Average amount of preference votes by ethnic background and election year

Elections	Ethnic background	Average amount of preference votes
1995	Ethnic minority	788
	Non-EM	585
	Total	589
1999	Ethnic minority	1115
	Non-EM	706
	Total	735
2004	Ethnic minority	1811
	Non-EM	1511
	Total	1557
2009	Ethnic minority	1859
	Non-EM	1911
	Total	1898
2014	Ethnic minority	1397
	Non-EM	1311
	Total	1335
Total	Ethnic minority	1519
	Non-EM	1024
	Total	1090

Note: Non-EM means 'non-ethnic minority'

Figure 5 furthermore reveals a lot of variation in the average amount of preference votes between parties. On socialist and Christian democratic party lists, ethnic minority candidates obtained more preference votes than non-ethnic minority candidates. In other party families, ethnic minority candidates received either an equal amount (green, far left, regionalist) or fewer preference votes (liberal) compared to non-ethnic minority candidates. Especially on liberal party lists, ethnic minority candidates received only a small proportion of the realistic list positions (see Figure 4), which might also explain why these candidates obtained a smaller amount of preference votes.

Figure 5. Average amount of preference votes by ethnic background and party family



Note: The radical right party family was not included because it did not have a single ethnic minority representative during the period considered. EMC means ‘ethnic minority candidates’.

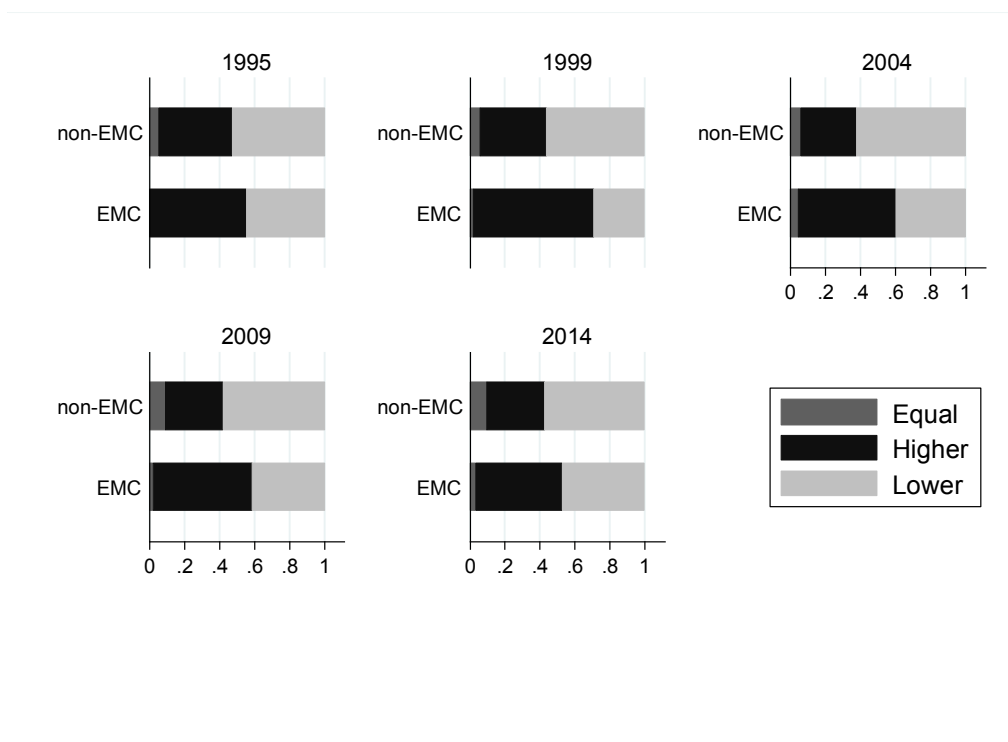
4.4. The election process

The next question is whether preference votes also allow candidates to disturb the list order. In order to answer this question, we compare the initial position candidates had on the list to the position they would have been elected in if results were only based on personal scores. Figure 6 first shows how both ethnic minority and non-ethnic minority candidates fare in the elections, more precisely how many of them moved up the list, down the list or maintained the same list position. The results are clear: ethnic minorities are more likely to move up the list compared to non-ethnic minorities, indicating that minority candidates generally do better in terms of preference votes than other candidates.

Figure 7 nevertheless reveals important differences between party families. Ethnic minorities in socialist and -to a lesser extent- far-left parties take the most advantage of their

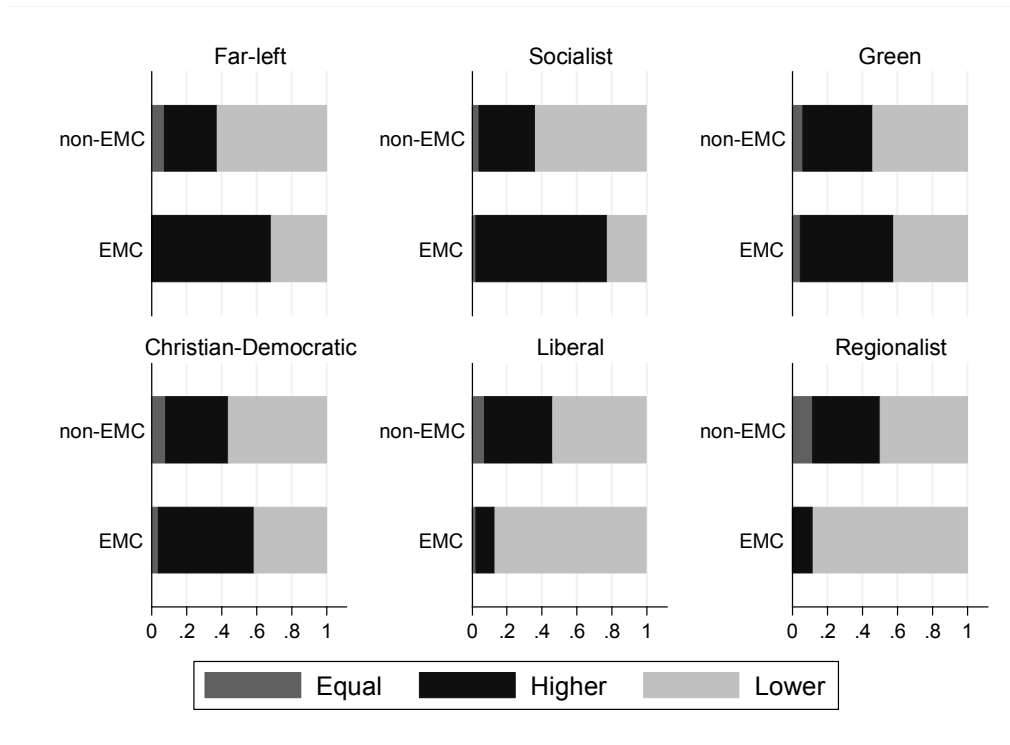
preference votes to move up the list. In both party families, more than 60 per cent of the ethnic minority candidates is able to get a higher list position as a result of a high level of voter support. This is also the case for about half of the ethnic minority candidates on Christian democratic and green party lists. In liberal and regionalist parties, on the other hand, the majority of ethnic minority candidates actually move down the list when only preference votes are taken into account. Overall, Figure 7 indicates that levels of voter support are higher for ethnic minority candidates on leftist lists.

Figure 6. Candidates disturbing the list order (without the devolution effect), by ethnic background and year



Note: EMC means ethnic minority candidates.

Figure 7. Candidates disturbing the list order (without the devolution effect), by ethnic background and party family



Note: Radical right party family not included because not a single elected EMC during the period considered. EMC means ethnic minority candidates.

Figures 6 and 7 show how preference votes play a role in the ability of candidates to move up or down the list. However, if we want to consider how preference votes in the end shape the election results, we have to take into account the effect of the devolution of list votes –i.e. the fact that for determining the final ranking of candidates and for calculating which candidates obtain a seat, list votes are added to preference votes. Table 3 therefore compares the proportion of ethnic minority candidates who would have been elected without the devolution effect to those who were actually elected. We can see that the devolution of list votes slightly disadvantages ethnic minority candidates. Between 1995 and 2014, 14 ethnic minority candidates did not get elected due to the devolution effect, but would have been if there was no devolution of list votes. Six ethnic minority candidates took advantage of the devolution effect: they got elected while they would not have been elected if their election would have relied solely on preference votes. Out of the 14 ethnic minority candidates who were not elected but would have been without the devolution effect, 10 come from a socialist list and 4 from a

green list. On the contrary, 5 out of the 6 ethnic minority candidates who seemed to benefit from the devolution effect come from a liberal list (and one from a socialist list).

Table 3. Comparison between the numbers of ethnic minority candidates who were actually elected and their potential numbers without the devolution effect.

Election		Would have been elected without the devolution effect		
		NO	YES	
1995	Actually elected	NO	13	1
		YES	0	4
1999	Actually elected	NO	41	6
		YES	1	7
2004	Actually elected	NO	49	1
		YES	1	17
2009	Actually elected	NO	74	3
		YES	2	20
2014	Actually elected	NO	123	3
		YES	2	20
Total	Actually elected	NO	300	14
		YES	6	68

Similar conclusions can be drawn from Table 4. Table 4 displays the number and percentage of candidates who were elected *without having obtained an eligible list position* in the first place. While we focused on *realistic* positions in the second section, and measured them on the basis of the party magnitude in the previous election (PM-1), we believe that the number of seats allocated to a party in the current election is the best measure to capture how the election process itself plays a role in the electoral success or failure of ethnic minority candidates. Using realistic positions measured on a PM-1 basis doesn't allow us to know with certainty whether the electoral success of ethnic minority candidates is linked to the amount of preference votes received by candidates, or to the positions candidates had on the list. Indeed, it could be biased by the fact that their success is simply linked to the electoral success or failure of the party list itself. What we want to know here is which process steers the allocation of seats to ethnic minority candidates, considering the number of seats allocated to the party in a specific election (PM-0). In order to distinguish between PM-1 and PM-0, we call *eligible* positions those positions measured on a PM-0 basis. We see from Table 4 that the percentage of candidates who were elected without being on an eligible position is every election year higher for ethnic

minorities than for other candidates. Between 1995 and 2014, 32 per cent of the ethnic minority candidates got elected despite having occupied a non-eligible list position, compared to only 15 per cent of the other candidates. Hence, ethnic minorities benefit from preferential voting.

But party family again plays a crucial role here. All the ethnic minority candidates who were elected without having obtained an eligible list position came from socialist parties, except in 2009 and 2014 where respectively one out of seven and two out of five came from a Christian democratic list. This reconfirms the conditional effect of preferential voting. Only for socialist parties, and to a lesser extent Christian democratic parties, did preferential voting have a real positive effect on the election of ethnic minority candidates. In other parties, it did not play a role at all, or it played a negative role. This is clear if we compare two categories of candidates in Figure 8: (1) candidates who did not occupy an eligible position but did get elected anyway – meaning that they managed to breach the list order thanks to a good personal score, and (2) candidates who occupied an eligible position but did not get elected – meaning that they did not get elected while the party ‘wanted’ them to get elected. Figure 8 displays the proportion of candidates belonging to each category by party family and over time. It is clear that preference voting especially helped candidates on socialist lists to breach the list order and get elected. In most recent years, preference votes were also conducive to the electoral success of Christian democratic parties. However, in other parties, preference voting did not benefit ethnic minority candidates. On the contrary, on several occasions, ethnic minority candidates were not elected, despite having occupied eligible list positions. In those cases, the system of preference voting benefitted *ethnic majority candidates*, who were able to get elected by ‘jumping over’ ethnic minorities initially positioned higher on the list.

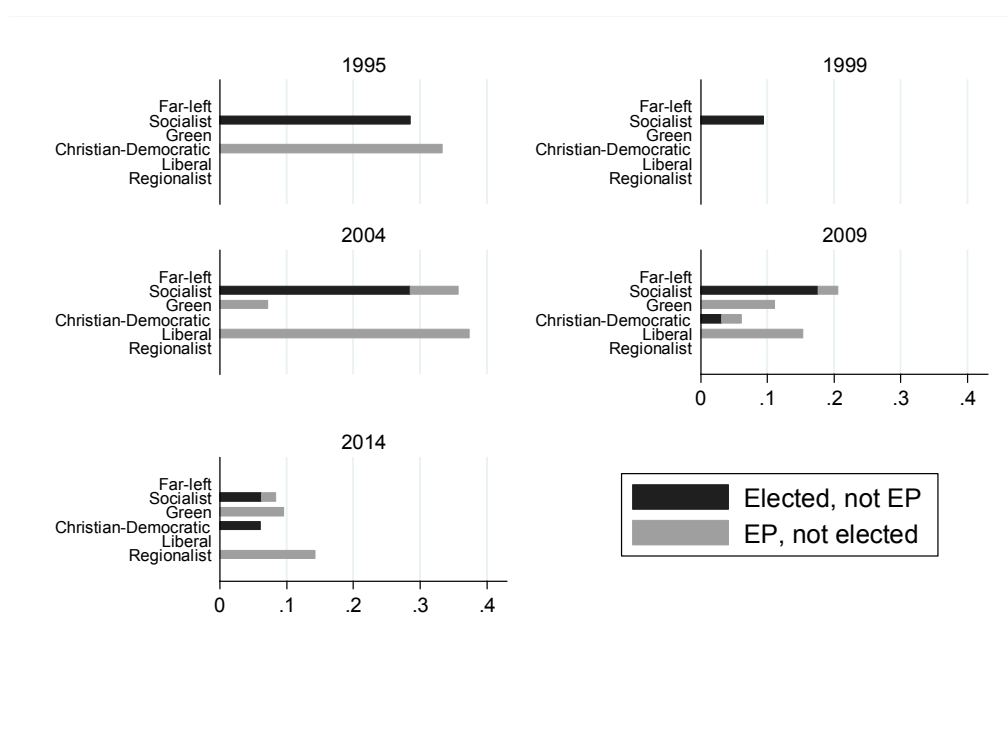
Table 4. Link between position on the list and preference votes, by candidates’ ethnic background and year

Year	Ethnic background	No eligible position, yet elected N (%)	Total elected N (%)
1995	Ethnic minority	2 (50%)	4 (100%)
	Non-EM	5 (7%)	71 (100%)
	Total	7 (9%)	75 (100%)
1999	Ethnic minority	2 (25%)	8 (100%)
	Non-EM	3 (5%)	67 (100%)
	Total	5 (7%)	75 (100%)
2004	Ethnic minority	8 (44%)	18 (100%)
	Non-EM	19 (27%)	71 (100%)

	Total	27 (30%)	89 (100%)
2009	Ethnic minority	7 (32%)	22 (100%)
	Non-EM	14 (21%)	67 (100%)
	Total	21 (24%)	89 (100%)
2014	Ethnic minority	5 (23%)	22 (100%)
	Non-EM	10 (15%)	67 (100%)
	Total	15 (17%)	89 (100%)
Total	Ethnic minority	24 (32%)	74 (100%)
	Non-EM	51 (15%)	343 (100%)
	Total	75 (18%)	417 (100%)

Note: percentages are row percentages. Non-EM means non-ethnic minority.

Figure 8. The link between occupying an eligible position and being elected for ethnic minority candidates, by year and party family



Note: EP means 'eligible position'.

5. Discussion and conclusion

What can in the end explain the electoral success of ethnic minorities in the Brussels regional parliament: is it voter behavior or party strategies? Our results show that, even though parties have made gradual efforts to include ethnic minorities on candidate lists and on realistic list positions, voters appear to be an important force behind the election of ethnic minorities in Brussels. Overall, ethnic minorities were able to attract a higher number of preference votes than other candidates, which allowed them to move up the list and (sometimes) get elected out of order. At the same time, however, we cannot generalize these findings to all party families and to all legislative terms.

One important finding is that especially ethnic minorities in socialist parties, and to a lesser extent Christian democratic parties, take advantage of the system of preferential voting. The positive effect of preferential voting was far from obvious in other parties, even in other left-wing parties such as the greens, where ethnic minorities were unable to attract a high number of preference votes despite having received a substantial share of the eligible list positions. In this latter case, the election of ethnic minorities was not due to voters, but mainly the result of party efforts. Further research should investigate how differences between party families can be explained and to what extent ethnic-based voting shapes patterns of preferential voting.

Another interesting finding is that the role of parties and voters in the promotion of ethnic minorities changed over time. Whereas the initial success of ethnic minorities (1995-2004) was primarily due to voter behavior, parties substantially increased the percentage of ethnic minorities on realistic list positions in the most recent period, while the advantage of ethnic minorities in terms of preference votes seemed to disappear. Hence, in the most recent elections, the electoral success of ethnic minorities should be linked to both party strategy and voter behavior. It is difficult to explain based on our current dataset why these changes over time occur; future research should try to sort this out by conducting in-depth interviews with parties and voters.

The timescale of our analysis furthermore allowed us to make some assertions about the role played by institutions. The electoral system in Belgium has moved from a more closed-list system to a more open-list system in the mid-2000s. In most cases, list vote devolution only secures the two or three candidates on a list (Renwick & Pilet, 2016). As a consequence, the system gets more open as party magnitude increases. As district magnitude is high in Brussels (75 seats until 1999, then 89), party magnitude is high too and parties usually win much more

than 3 seats. Crucial in this instance is that voters make actual use of their opportunity to cast preference votes, considering that preferential voting is optional in Belgium (Bergh & Bjørklund, 2003; Togeby, 2008). Our study suggests that the flexible-list system in Brussels produces similar positive results as open-list systems do and this is especially beneficial to ethnic minority candidates. At the same time, we found also that more ethnic minority candidates would have been elected if the system was really fully-open.

Although our focus in this article was on the impact of the electoral system, it should be clear that levels of ethnic minority representation cannot be attributed to features of the electoral system alone. Changes in citizenship regulations and voting rights in the mid 2000s drastically changed the ethnic constellation of the electorate in Brussels and resulted in a strong politicization of ethnicity. Parties have responded to these changes. The number of ethnic minorities nominated as (top-list) candidates among this group strongly increased from 2004 onwards. Following up on socialist and green parties, other parties gradually included them on their list, with the exception of the radical right party. What Martiniello and Hily (1998: 129) called a ‘moral obligation’ to *nominate* candidates progressively turned into what we can call a ‘moral obligation’ to *elect* candidates as the number of ethnic minority candidates on realistic positions increased over time. What remains unclear, however, is how social and institutional changes that took place in the mid 2000s have influenced voter strategies. Is preference voting particularly conducive to the election of ethnic minorities when they are newcomers in politics, and will this competitive advantage disappear once more ethnic minorities enter the elected assemblies? This is yet another question that deserves more attention in future research.

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