

“GIMME YOUR NAME AND I’LL TELL WHO YOU ARE”: A TYPOLOGY OF LOCAL LIST NAMES IN WALLONIA

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GIMME YOUR NAME AND I’LL TELL WHO YOU ARE”: A TYPOLOGY OF LOCAL LIST NAMES IN WALLONIA

Abstract:

This article argues that list names reflect specific electoral dynamics and different conceptions of local politics. Based on an original dataset collected during the 2012 local elections in Wallonia, it classifies all local lists in 14 categories based on their official names. We show that opting for a label is not a product of chance but emphasizes specific conceptions of local politics. More specifically, three stakes can be distinguished: the nature of local politics – different vs. similar to other levels of government –, the nature of local lists – partisan and ideological vs. non-partisan –, the nature of local candidates – professionalized politicians vs. amateur citizens. The results presented in this article demonstrate that the choice of the name reflects different positions related to these three trade-offs. This choice is explained by a combination of macro variables (municipality characteristics), meso variables (party competition) and micro variables (list and candidates characteristics).

Résumé:

Cet article propose d’étudier le nom des listes en ce qu’il reflète différentes dynamiques et conceptions de la politique locale. À partir d’une banque de données originales récoltées lors des élections communales de 2012 en Wallonie, l’article propose une classification des listes locales en 14 catégories établies selon leur nom officiel. Nous démontrons que le choix d’un nom n’est pas le fruit du hasard mais qu’il met en exergue des conceptions spécifiques de la politique locale. Plus spécifiquement, trois enjeux peuvent être distingués : la nature de la politique locale – différente vs similaire par rapport aux autres niveaux de pouvoir –, la nature des listes locales – partisane et idéologique vs non-partisane –, la nature des candidats locaux – politiciens professionnels vs citoyens amateurs. Les résultats présentés dans cet article indiquent que le choix d’un nom renvoie à des positions différentes par rapport à ces trois enjeux. Ce choix peut être expliqué par la combinaison de variables macro (caractéristiques des communes), meso (compétition partisane) et micro (caractéristiques des listes et des candidats).

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The name of a political party is the first thing the voters and the media see and remember. Often, the label used by a party tells much about its ideology. Since in most cases, only a few parties compete for each election it is difficult to undertake large qualitative and quantitative analyses of party names. Local elections provide an interesting research opportunity since, in several local cases, a variety of names is found beside the usual national party labels.

Local elections are often presented as different from those organized at other levels of government (Reif and Schmitt 1980): the partisan landscape tends to remain steadier at national (or regional) level than at local level. Presenting new electoral lists is generally easier at the local level whilst the close proximity of citizens with local institutions provides greater stimulus for political involvement outside traditional political parties. Nevertheless, the local level is not totally independent from other levels of government. National and/or regional parties remain key actors that present their own lists – or at least affiliated ones – at local elections. Moreover, when all the local elections take place on the same day, as it is the case in Belgium, aggregate results are important indicators for the strength of national parties (Deschouwer 2012, Dandoy 2013). Altogether, two main political dynamics are at stake in local politics: on the one hand, a *bottom-up* dynamic – local politics as grassroots politics – and on the other hand, a *top-down* approach – local politics as one dimension of national politics.

Wallonia, the second largest region of Belgium, provides an interesting case of study since its local political landscape is quite diversified and the theatre of both political dynamics. At the local elections of 2012 in this region, no less than 1 012 lists were in competition in the 262 municipalities (*communes*), thus an average of 2.68 list per municipality (a variation from one list up to 14 lists). At the last elections of 14 October 2012 more than half of the electoral lists (n=553, 54.6 percent) used a name different from existing political parties at other levels of government (provincial, regional, federal and European).

This article argues that local list names should not be overlooked. Far from being mere ‘appellations’, they reflect specific electoral dynamics and different conceptions of local politics. Therefore studying the names of local lists is key to understand the political dynamics at the local level. For this purpose, we build a typology of list names, based on an original dataset collected during the 2012 local elections in Wallonia. Using logistic regressions we disentangle the variables behind the choice of a list name and we seek to show that such choice is strongly related to distinct structural and political variables. Finally, we discuss the challenges and benefits of studying local list names to reveal the various conceptions of local politics.

1. Choosing a name

Finding a name for a list is an important step in the preparation of any election. Together with the names of individual candidates, this is often the only information that voters see on the ballot. What’s more list names are cognitive shortcuts that define the political nature of electoral lists and help voters choose candidates who share their political preferences (Rahn 1993, Lau and Redlawsk 2001, Schaffner and Matthew 2002, Snyder and Ting, 2002, Kam 2005, Burnett and Tiede, 2015, Garlick 2015). In other words, list names may guide voters in their choices in the polling station. While several elements explain the choice of a name, scholars have hitherto mainly focused on the relation with national parties. The advantages of using a national party label for a local list are rather obvious (Abramowitz 1975).

First, it brings along familiarity and recognition for the party name. Such name may not only increase turnout and reduce the amount of invalid votes (Schaffner et al. 2001, Schaffner and Matthew 2002, Garlick 2015) but may also bring extra votes at the local level, while increasing name recognition at different electoral arenas may attract new voters for the national party (Soós 2008, 67). Second, the local list can also play the national incumbency card especially when voters are satisfied with the performance of the party in the national cabinet. Third, it may help attracting local partners into “franchise organizations” that are more flexible and adaptable to local specificities without losing the overall party brand (Carty 2004). Fourth, the local candidates can use the national party resources to win elections, including campaign material (slogans, website, etc.), campaign workers, frames for policy proposal and other financial resources related to the national party (Snyder and Ting 2002).

Nonetheless, the use of a national party label for a local list might bring about negative effects. On the one hand, the national party controls the use of its brand (Locke and Harris 1996, 18). The control by the national party elites may be rather strong in order to prevent any misuse of the party name, logo, style, strategy or even ideas and ideology by the local list. In this perspective the national party name is often viewed as a constraint as it allows little freedom for local electoral marketing. Yet, it does not exclude the possibility of negotiating an explicit agreement between the local list and the national party. It sometimes leads to the authorization of using the national name during the campaign, with some autonomy for the local programme and policies (Soós 2008, 67). On the other hand, since national parties are not uniformly popular, the use of the national name may frighten potential voters and supporters in some municipalities (Steyvers et al. 2008, 173); therefore alternative names may be looked for in order to “hide” one’s list affiliation with an unpopular national party.

Overall, there are pros and cons for choosing a list name that directly refers to a national party and many candidates decide to opt for a list name that is completely independent from any references to national actors and issues. Similarly, there are arguments in favour of the choice for a non-partisan list name. First, an independent list name may more easily address an electorate that is different from the one at the national level. In order to maximize its number of votes, a local list needs to adapt to its voters and may adopt a strategy of a list name that better reflects the characteristics of the local electorate.

The second argument concerns candidate selection. By avoiding the use of a national party label, the list leaders have more leeway in the choice of the candidates. Such candidates are not imposed by a central party but can be selected for local strategic or political reasons. In addition and following Snyder and Ting (2002), it may help integrate candidates whose ideological preferences do not fit with the national party’s official position on certain policy issues. In the Belgian case, the presence of non-partisan and independent candidates (in French *candidats d’ouverture*) is rather large at the local level and can be related to a strategy of putting forward some specific (local) characteristics of certain candidates (Vandeleene et al., 2013).

Similarly, a list that chooses for a non-partisan list name may also indicate other policy priorities, especially when combined with strong local leadership. This independence from a national party gives to the list a large freedom to draft a party manifesto that addresses different policy issues than – for example – the issues put forward by a local section of a national party which chooses to adopt the official party name. Finally, a larger distance from the national

party also provides more flexibility and independence for the list leadership, especially when conflicts occurred between national party leaders and local leaders (Carty, 2004).

An alternative research path emphasizes the relation between the name and the attached conception(s) of local politics (Boogers 2008, Soós 2008). Based on two surveys of Dutch local parties in 2005 and 2006, Boogers (2008, 160-161) builds up a typology of local party names. Excluding local sections of national parties from his analysis, he distinguishes eight types of local party names among them are “name of the municipality”, “citizenship”, “ideological profile” and “person-based group”. One of the most interesting finding of this work is the relation shown between the names and different conceptions of local politics.

With the help of an original and comprehensive dataset on the 2012 local elections in Wallonia, this article refines and deepens Boogers’ typology (2008). First, our data include all the 1 012 lists that presented candidates on 14 October 2012, and not only a sample of surveyed local lists. Official national lists and lists associated partially to national parties are thus included in our analysis.⁶ This database yields a large variety of list names that enables the conceptualization of new categories, such as references to the type of list (for example a reference to an “alliance”), the political project (for example a reference to a “change” *vis-à-vis* previous policies) or even to higher political levels (for example a reference to the country). With its 262 municipalities, Wallonia offers thus a comprehensive case study to enable an insightful account of name choice in local politics.

2. The name of local lists in Wallonia

On 14 October 2012 were held the sexennial local elections in Wallonia. The electoral competition occurs only between national parties in some municipalities while it occurs only between local parties in others. Therefore, national and local parties compete in these elections but in different configurations, producing 262 unique party systems. Yet, the electoral system is the same for all municipalities: a proportional system with semi-open lists where the voter can either vote for the list or one or several candidates on the same list. The attribution of seats is based on the *Imperiali formulae* while there is a single electoral district that corresponds to the limits of the municipality.

Wallonia is a very good case study to understand the dynamics behind list labels. Indeed, local political parties independent from national parties are still seen as an anomaly (Boogers 2008). With the process of modernization and professionalization of local governance, the literature assumes a decrease in the number of local parties that are increasingly replaced by local branches of national parties. This is the nationalization of local elections hypothesis. If we take this hypothesis seriously, the nationalization of local politics should also affect party names (at least partially) and we should observe a significant proportion of local lists adopting the national party label. With 54.6 percent of the lists name having “local” names unrelated to national parties, Wallonia offers a “deviant case study” particularly suitable to look for new explanations in the adoption of list names (Seawright and Gerring 2008, 302-303).

⁶ In Belgium and thus in Wallonia, there are no national parties anymore. It is conceptually more accurate to speak of ‘regional parties’ as the French-speaking parties compete mainly for French-speaking voters while the Dutch-speaking parties compete mainly for Dutch-speaking voters.

While there is much freedom in the labelling of electoral lists, there are some legal rules that constrain this choice. First of all, the ‘Code of local democracy and decentralization’ (that regulates political life and local elections in Wallonia) stipulates that lists are identified by one acronym. The latter is composed of maximum 12 letters or figures. According to article L4112-5§2 of the Code, the acronym is formed of initials of all or some of the words that compose the full denomination of the list. Furthermore, political parties represented in the regional parliament may request to forbid the use of some names. As in the previous elections, national political parties have asked to protect the use of their “old” names such *POB* (“Belgian Worker Party”), which is the former name of the Socialist party. Names as *ECOLOVERT* (“ECOLO-GREEN”) were also forbidden because it is ambiguous with the current name of the Green party, *ECOLO*. Beside these limitations, local lists have much freedom for their name.

A first attempt to grasp the choice of the names is to look at the most often chosen labels. Table 1 shows the top 20 names and their variations. The first column shows the number of occurrences of list names used in their stricter use, i.e. without being accompanied by a symbol, an adjective or another list name. The second column shows the number of occurrences of the term whether it is or not accompanied by a prefix or suffix. The third column shows the number of variations of the term.

Table 1. Occurrence of list names, terms and number of variations (20 largest categories)

	List names	Occurrence of the list name	Occurrence of the term	Number of variations
1	ECOLO	155	164	2
2	PS – Parti socialiste	116	133	7
3	MR – Mouvement réformateur	73	98	2
4	CDH – Centre démocrate humaniste	53	74	5
5	IC – Intérêt communal/Intérêts communaux	32	61	6
6	Ensemble	23	60	28
7	FDF – Fédéralistes démocrates francophones	23	24	1
8	PTB+ – Parti du travail de Belgique +	13	13	0
9	Union communale	10	12	0
10	PP – Parti populaire	10	10	0
11	LB – Liste du bourgmestre	9	19	3
12	Avec vous	7	10	3
13	Union	6	24	13
14	Entente communale	6	7	0
15	Pour	5	37	3
16	Alternative	5	20	9
17	Renouveau	5	19	12
18	Wallonie d’abord	5	8	1
19	Action	4	12	9
20	Alternative citoyenne	4	4	0

Note: Out of all 1 012 lists in competition for the 2012 local elections in Wallonia.

The four largest parties of Wallonia come in the top 4, even though their respective position in this ranking does not reflect their electoral weight. Indeed, *ECOLO* (“Green party”), which is currently the third party in Wallonia, appears in the local elections in 155 municipalities, while the label *Parti socialiste* (“Socialist party”), the largest Walloon party, was used 116 times by electoral lists. The *Mouvement réformateur* (“Reform movement”) is the official label of the liberals, the second main party of the Region, and it was used 73 times. With 53 occurrences, the *Centre démocrate humaniste* (“Center democrat humanist”) is the least frequently used label among the four main political parties.

Below this top 4, which is composed of references to existing parties at the national level, other types of names of local lists appear. The labels “IC” (*Intérêt communal* and *Intérêts communaux*) translate the idea of local interests (being singular or plural) and have been grouped into one single category for consistency. They appear 32 times. The names *Union communale* (“municipal union”), *Liste du Bourgmestre* (“list of the Mayor”) and *Entente communale* (“municipal partnership”) appear 10, 9 and 6 times respectively. In the top 20, we also find the label of smaller regional parties without parliamentary representation at the Wallon Parliament such as the *Fédéralistes démocrates francophones* (“Francophone regionalist”), *Parti du travail de Belgique* (radical left) or *Parti populaire* (“right-wing populist”).

By contrast, we find 389 list names that have been used in only one single municipality during the 2012 elections. If we do not take into account alliances that add names of the parties existing separately, the number of list names appearing only once can be reduced to 296.

3. A typology of local list names

To grasp the diversity of the 1 012 lists, without misled generalizations, a qualitative typology of list names has been established. It consists of 14 non-mutually exclusive categories (Table 2). It provides the basis to capture the different logics and discourses relating to local elections in Wallonia, and more generally the nature of local politics. Indeed, choosing a name is presenting the voter a certain conception of local politics, in other words a specific vision of what local governance should be. For each of the 1 012 lists, three coders individually and independently used this codebook to apply our typology (Table 2). Such procedure ensures a high internal validity of the results, which is also confirmed by the inter-coder rate measured with the Cohen’s Kappa. Indeed, this index – shown in the fourth column of the Table 2 – equals 1 or is close to 1 for each category, which demonstrates a very high level of agreement between coders. This high score is not surprising as the room for interpretation is often low due to several objective categories (e.g. official party name or municipality name). Besides, because our categories are not mutually exclusive but additive, it reduces trade-offs to classify into a single category.

Table 2. Typology of local lists and frequency by category (descending order)

Category	N	Percentage	Cohen’s Kappa
Reference to a national party	459	45,36	1
Reference to the local level	161	15,91	1
Union – alliance	161	15,91	1
Change	132	13,04	1
Name of the municipality	128	12,75	0,96
Partisan reference	111	10,97	1
Personalization	56	5,53	1
Citizens – democracy	52	5,14	1
Mayor’s list	45	4,45	1
Future	33	3,26	1
Others	28	2,26	1
Reference to Wallonia	22	2,17	1
Reference to Belgium	13	1,28	1
Puns	12	1,19	1

Note: With the exception of the category “Others”, the categories are not mutually exclusive, which explains why the sum of percentages is superior to 100 percent.

The first category is based on the *reference to a national party*. Indeed, local elections are characterized by a degree of nationalization as political parties from higher political arena compete at local elections (Blaise, de Coorebyter, and Faniel 2012, Deschouwer 2012). More specifically, this category includes lists whose name refers to one or more traditional parties represented in both regional and federal assemblies: thus, *CDH*, *ECOLO*, *MR* and *PS*. Overall, 459 lists refer to one or more national parties. Among these, 164 lists refer to *ECOLO*, 133 to *PS*, 98 to *MR* and 77 to *CDH*. It is important to keep in mind that one list can mention several national parties (in case of alliances of two national parties, for instance). Moreover, the combination of a reference to a national party with another category is possible (e.g. ‘Socialist Party-Municipal interests’ in several municipalities).

The *Partisan reference* refers to political organizations different from the four traditional national political parties, such as the *FDF* or the *PP* or to an ideological dimension in the broad sense, such as “left”, “right” or “center”. For instance, in the municipality of Verviers, the *PTB+* (“The Workers’ Party of Belgium”) presented candidates and there was a *Pirate* list (“Pirate Party”) in Walcourt as well as in La Louvière. These two first categories combine names that typically refer to an ideological profile (Boogers 2008, Soós 2008, 73) but since they reflect different political dynamics in comparison to the four established national parties, a distinction was thought necessary.

The category “Name of the municipality” includes any list that refers to the municipality, be it a direct mention of the municipality’s name or its inhabitants. For instance, the lists *Clavier autrement* (“Clavier differently”), *Ensemble pour Fernelmont* (“Together for Fernelmont”) belong to this category. This type of lists puts the emphasis on the local dimension of the list’s project – i.e. a project for a specifically delimited political space.

The following category (“Reference to the local level”) includes lists that refer to the local institutional level (including the evocation of the mayor), rather than the name of the local place. It mainly concerns list names such as *Entente communale* (“Municipal partnership”) or

Intérêts communaux (“Municipal interests”), sometimes coupled to the name of the municipality or with a party name. The reference to the local level of government is also present in a series of less frequent labels, such as the list *Commune Passion* (“Municipality passion”) in Sainte Ode.

As indicated by its label, the category *Citizens – Democracy* gathers lists whose names evoke citizenship, citizens or democracy. For instance, the list *Pour Nandrin, l’expression citoyenne* (“for Nandrin, Citizen’s expression”) or the lists *Union démocratique* (“Democratic union”) in Fosses-la-Ville and *Alternative citoyenne* (“Citizen alternative”) in Froidchappelle are part of this category.

The category *Union – Alliance* includes lists whose name refers to the idea of union and alliance, i.e. containing words as “together”, “with you”, “group” or “alliance”. These elements may refer to diverse political trends such as the notion of alliance between several political groups or an enhanced distance with traditional political parties. We find for instance the list *Groupe d’ouverture* (“Opening group”) in the municipality of Pecq or *Ensemble pour vous* (“Together for you”) in Bièvre.

The category “Change” refers to the idea of change and/or to alternative ways of doing politics. Words such as “alternative”, “renewal”, “succession”, “hope”, “action”, “initiative”, “opening” as well as the verbs “to mobilize”, “to react” and “build” under different forms belong to this category. It is basically a recurrent vocabulary in numerous political campaigns. The lists *Alternative Citoyenne* (“Citizen’s alternative”) in Chapelle-Lez-Herlaimont and *Agir Ensemble* (“Act together”) in Chiny are instances of this category.

The category “Future” includes list names that refer to the future or to a forthcoming event, which is often the next local elections in 2018, such as *Horizon 2018* in Fauvillers. Yet, local lists use generally words that are temporally less specific, with for instance *Aubel Demain* (“Aubel tomorrow”) or *Construisons l’avenir ensemble* (Let’s build the future together) in Chimay.

The category of *Puns* gathers list names that are often word play jokes or evoke funny references for the voters. Examples are found in list names such as *Geerons ensemble* (Geer together, which is used to mean let’s manage together) or *Re-nous-vaux* (“Re-us-vaux” but sounds like renewal) in Vaux-sur-Sûre. These elements are often overlooked in political science even though they appeal to an entertaining aspect of politics. It constitutes a genuine strategy for a local list to present itself as different from other traditional national and local lists.

The tenth category of list names (“Personalization”) focuses specifically on one individual or one embodied function. Although electoral lists present several candidates and thus encompass a certain degree of collective actions⁷, local lists often play the card of the personalization of politics, particularly at the local level (Wille and Deschouwer 2012). Several lists put forward the name of one of its candidates such as “Renard Ginette” in the municipality of Brugelette and “Wirtz” in Bullingen. But the most exemplary case of personalized lists is the ones built on the incumbent mayor. To account for this important dimension of local politics, we have set a category *Mayor’s list* that includes the lists whose names correspond to lists

⁷ Nevertheless, there were 29 lists that present a single candidate at the 2012 local elections.

such as *Liste du bourgmestre* or *Liste du mayor* and other similar variations. Unsurprisingly, most of these lists are also present in the category *Personalization*: out of the 56 electoral lists that belong to the latter category, 46 also refer to the category “Mayor’s list”.

The category entitled “Reference to Wallonia” encompasses lists with a name referring to the Walloon region or to the Walloons. In this category, we observe for instance the lists *Fédérations des nationalistes wallons* (“Federations of Walloon nationalists”) in Hotton, *Rassemblement wallon* (“Walloon rally”, the former strong ethno-regionalist party) in Quaregnon and *Wallonie d’abord* (“Wallonia first”) in Seraing. This reference to Wallonia seems to open up the political landscape outside the municipality, but in fact most of these lists are considered as close to xenophobic and extreme-right factions (Blaise, de Coorebyter, and Faniel 2012).

Similarly, the category “Reference to Belgium” includes the lists that refer to Belgium or its inhabitants. This category primarily encompasses lists related to the radical left political party *Parti du Travail de Belgique+* (“The Workers’ Party of Belgium +”). An exception is found in the extreme-right list: *Front national belge* (“Belgian national front”) in Charleroi. Moreover, we can observe that, out of the 1 012 lists, there are no lists that refer to the provincial level, the French- and German-speaking community, the European Union or even the world at large.

The last category (“Others”) gathers list names that have not been included in any of the categories above. Contrary to the previous categories, this one is exclusive. Examples of such list names are *Un bon point* (“One good point”) in the municipality of Stavelot and *Ecout@* (“Listen@”) in Saint-Léger. These names require a too far-reaching interpretation to be coded in one of the first thirteen categories and were thus coded ‘Others’.

4. Explaining the choice of the name

In order to explain the choice of their name, the 1 012 lists that participated at the 2012 local elections in Wallonia have been thoroughly analyzed (Authors, 2013). As we have argued above, existing measurements of the local list phenomena are not satisfactory as they only focus on a sample of electoral lists and they provide little information on the determinants of a list name. Therefore, we collected a large amount of information on each list and the candidates in order to understand the dynamics behind the choice of the name.

In our logistic regressions – the most suited technique given the nature of the data – (Table 3), we have a first group of independent variables relating to the socio-demographic characteristic of the municipalities. We consider firstly the size of the municipality, which is included in the models as the logarithm of the number of inhabitants. The literature assumes indeed a correlation between party system and municipality size where larger municipalities tend to expose a nationalized local party system (Kjaer and Elklit 2010), i.e. there is arguably a more frequent recourse to official national party labels. The models also account for the degree of urbanization in order to integrate the socio-demographic heterogeneity of municipalities. We use the threefold *DEGURBA* (degree of urbanization) indicator provided by Eurostat (there are 42 urban, 137 semi-urban, and 82 rural municipalities). Finally, we control for municipalities where a single list detained the absolute majority. This is a dummy variable where municipalities with an absolute majority are coded 1 and others 0. With 163 municipalities with such majority, this is a Walloon specificity that requires to be controlled for.

The second group of variables measures the party competition based on two indicators. First, the variable “inter-party competition” measures the number of lists present in the municipality (from 1 to 14 lists, with a mean of 4.52). Three categories are thus created: low (1 or 2 lists), medium (3 to 4 lists), and high (from 5 to 14 lists) inter-party competition. Let’s note that some would argue that this indicator is left-skewed due to the high number of amateur lists – a specificity of local elections – that often have weaker likelihood to get even one candidate elected. In the absence of local surveys, the only available measure to try and assess the electoral weight of those lists is to assume that their electoral results reflect more or less their electoral strength before the electoral campaign. Therefore we measured the effective number of parties based on Laakso and Taagepera (1979)’s formulae. Whereas the mean of the ‘absolute’ number of lists is 4.52 lists, there is on average 2.91 “effective” lists.

The models were then duplicated based on the effective number of lists but the models remain extremely stable: the coefficients of all variables and the indicators of party competition were hardly altered, and not even perceived when rounded to 2 digits, while the degree of statistical significance was not affected. The second variable relating to party competition refers to the lists from the incumbent majority. A dummy variable is created where the 354 lists in office at the moment of the 2012 elections are coded 1 and the others 0.

The last group of independent variables considers lists-based factors. Firstly, a dummy variable is created to distinguish lists presenting as many candidates as the number of available seats (complete lists are coded 1 and incomplete lists are coded 0). A recent study on Wallonia (Authors, 2013) has demonstrated that most local lists are complete lists (n=827) while incomplete (n=185) lists present always a significant proportion of vacancy of candidates (two thirds of the incomplete lists have less than 50 percent of candidates). Therefore, this dummy can be used as a proxy to control for minor lists that do not seriously compete at the local level, in comparison to more professionalized lists that aim to win elections. In this wake, we also control for lists that chose to “open” their lists to non-partisan and independent candidates (called in French *candidats d’ouverture*). Thirdly, we control whether lists present candidates for the very first time (n=300) or if the list was already present at the 2006 local elections (n=712). This is a dummy variable where the latter category is coded 1, others 0. Admittedly, the constant reconfiguration of the local political arena between elections complicated the coding task for that variable: existing lists appearing with new names, new alliances based on former lists, partial dissolution of past coalitions, etc. Only a triangulation of sources (local newspaper, analysis of individual candidates on the lists, contacts with lists officials, etc.) allowed us to make a distinction between new and existing lists. Another dummy variable is also created to distinguish lists with the Mayor present as candidate (1) from other lists (0). The introduction of the semi-direct election of the Mayor in 2006 has enhanced the centrality of this political figure (Matagne, Radoux, and Verjans 2011). Out of 262 mayors, 242 presented their candidacy. Finally, a dummy variable measures candidacy of elected officials and members of cabinets from other levels of government (regional, federal and European).

Regarding the dependent variable, due to the low frequency of certain labels, some categories have been merged on the basis of their conceptual proximity that is their proximity in terms of a specific conception of local politics, in order to give more statistical leverage. To this end, we combined the ‘reference to a national party’ and the ‘partisan reference’ into a first group called partisan label. For this model, we furthermore specifically control for the effect of the Green party (dummy variable where the use of the green label is coded 1). The

reason is that the party leadership made mandatory for the local sections to use the official national party name (it explains the high frequency of the Green label, see Table 1). As the party is not uniformly implemented on the Walloon territory, we want to make sure that there is not confounding effects.

A second group that refers to the municipality label includes “the reference to the local level” as well as the “name of the municipality”. We also combined the categories “future” and “change” to create the category change and future label while the lists referring to “Wallonia” and “Belgium” are merged together into an institutional reference label. Finally, the following categories are analysed separately as initially created: Citizens and democracy label; Lists of the mayor; Union and alliance label; Puns; Others. Nonetheless, in the Table 3, we only report the models that show at least one statistically significant relation. Given their small N (respectively 25, 45, 12 and 28 – see Table 1), the models on the Institutional reference label (Belgium and Wallonia), Lists of the mayor, Puns and Others have not yielded statistically significant results.

Table 3. Logistic regressions for the choice of the name at the 2012 Walloon local elections

	Partisan label		Municipality label		Change and future label		Citizen and democracy label		Union and alliance label	
	O.R.	c.i. (95%)	O.R.	c.i. (95%)	O.R.	c.i. (95%)	O.R.	c.i. (95%)	O.R.	c.i. (95%)
<i>Municipality's characteristics</i>										
Absolute Majority	1.25	0.92 - 1.71	0.88	0.63 - 1.23	0.87	0.58 - 1.29	1.10	0.61 - 1.99	0.90	0.61 - 1.32
Population (log of inhab.)	1.77 ****	1.27 - 2.45	0.71 **	0.51 - 0.97	0.80	0.58 - 1.12	1.08	0.64 - 1.82	0.39 ****	0.27 - 0.58
Urbanization (Ref=Eurostat B)										
Eurostat A	0.25 ****	0.16 - 0.39	0.98	0.66 - 1.46	2.88 ****	1.90 - 4.35	0.76	0.37 - 1.59	1.43 *	0.97 - 2.12
Eurostat C	1.58 *	0.97 - 2.56	0.44 ****	0.27 - 0.72	0.74	0.37 - 1.46	1.04	0.48 - 2.29	0.97	0.49 - 1.91
<i>Party competition</i>										
Inter-party competition (Ref= medium)										
Low competition	0.21 ****	0.10 - 0.43	1.33	0.81 - 2.20	1.23	0.67 - 2.29	2.29 *	0.96 - 5.45	1.31	0.72 - 2.38
High competition	0.88	0.62 - 1.26	1.20	0.81 - 1.78	1.08	0.67 - 1.73	0.52 *	0.25 - 1.05	1.77 **	1.08 - 2.89
Incumbent majority	1.96 ****	1.25 - 3.07	0.89	0.57 - 1.41	0.65 *	0.39 - 1.09	0.70	0.28 - 1.74	1.09	0.67 - 1.78
<i>List's characteristics</i>										
Complete list	0.60 **	0.37 - 0.97	1.38	0.83 - 2.32	1.54 *	0.92 - 2.57	1.03	0.46 - 2.28	2.66 ****	1.42 - 4.95
Openness	0.72 **	0.53 - 0.97	1.23	0.91 - 1.66	1.35	0.92 - 1.97	2.08 **	1.15 - 3.77	1.40 *	0.97 - 2.00
Present in 2006	1.10	0.78 - 1.55	0.83	0.60 - 1.14	0.77	0.52 - 1.14	0.48 **	0.27 - 0.85	0.85	0.59 - 1.24
Mayor candidate	0.41 ****	0.26 - 0.64	3.39 ****	2.12 - 5.43	0.57 *	0.31 - 1.08	0.34 *	0.11 - 1.03	0.93	0.55 - 1.59
Multi-level candidates	2.10 ***	1.29 - 3.41	0.78	0.49 - 1.24	0.33 ****	0.15 - 0.76	0.77	0.27 - 2.24	1.00	0.54 - 1.85
Green party	4.83 ****	3.38 - 6.90	-	- -	-	- -	-	- -	-	- -
Intercept	(1.73) ****	- -	(-4.49)	- -	(-0.045)	- -	(-3.07)	- -	(5.38) ****	- -
Log Likelihood	-516,76		-530,71		-403,12		-192,43		-398,91	
N	1 012		1 012		1 012		1 012		1 012	

Entries are odds ratio (O.R.) and their 95% confidence intervals (c.i.) of a logistic regression (clustered data: 262 municipalities).

The dependent variable is the adoption of the label by a list (adoption = 1).

*p<0.10, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01, ****p<0.001.

Firstly, lists with a partisan reference are mainly found in urban or semi-urban municipalities. Similarly, the larger the size of the municipality, the more likely candidates will choose a “partisan” name for their lists. This confirms the hypothesis that it is in rural municipalities that local politics differs most widely from the federal and regional arenas (Deschouwer 2012). The traditional political cleavages are less mobilized by candidates and the name of the lists tends to reflect it. Lists confronting low party competition are 79 percent less likely to opt for the partisan label in comparison to lists facing higher competition.

Furthermore, when the list is part of the incumbent majority, the probability is higher to adopt a partisan name. Thus governing lists tend to choose more frequently such label. Nonetheless, the incumbent mayor as candidate is on the contrary less likely to opt for this choice. In this case, incumbent mayors prefer names that emphasize the municipal focus (see below), or even their own names with List of the Mayor. The presence of the list in previous local elections and officials from other levels of government has also strong positive effects. The latter is not very surprising since these candidates are clearly associated with a national party and it is tempting for them to go in front of the voters under this umbrella.

Complete lists have less probability to opt for this type of name. It is a bit surprising as the four main national parties (PS, MR, CDH, ECOLO) generally present complete lists when they are present at the local level. Yet, the negative effect of the size of the lists is the inclusion in the dependent variable of reference of smaller ideology-based lists that have difficulties to present complete lists, in addition to the four traditional parties. To sum up, we can conclude that on average, lists with a partisan name are present in municipalities where the political dynamics looks alike regional or national politics, in large cities, with the same famous politicians and where many lists compete in the elections. In those municipalities, at the risk of oversimplifying, local politics is a small-scale copy of regional and national politics.

By contrast, we can look at the second model that uses the reference to the municipality as dependent variable. The lists using this label differ quite largely from those with a partisan label. Indeed, the greater the population, the less likely the lists to adopt this type of name. Furthermore, urban municipalities have a smaller probability to include lists that refer to the local dimension in comparison to semi-urban municipalities (minus 56 percent). In other words, it is less common to emphasize this local dimension for lists from densely populated urban centers. By contrast, lists with the mayor as one of the candidates are also three times more likely to adopt this label. Because this central actor represents the legal and political “face” of the town, it is not surprising that these lists often tend to opt for this type of name. For this kind of lists, local politics only mean local politics.

The third model analyses the choice to adopt a future and change label. First, rural municipalities have a greater probability to present this kind of list than urban or semi-urban areas. Then, the history and the composition of the list also matter. Lists that are made of candidates such as the mayor and politicians from other policy levels or lists that were part of the incumbent majority do not use the image of change to present themselves to the voters. Conversely, if the list accepts candidates who are not affiliated with national parties, it is more likely to opt for change and future in their name. This is an interesting element because it suggests that the choice of the name is not purely rhetoric. After all, referring to the future or promoting change is associated with a non-partisan approach of local politics, or at least as a way to distinguish oneself from the traditional local political actors. Unsurprisingly, new

lists, i.e. not present in the previous local elections, are more likely to use the term of change in their label.

Contrary to the previous types of names, the municipality's characteristics (size and degree of urbanization) do not explain the choice for citizens and democracy label. However, it is connected with the two other types of variables: party competition and list characteristics. Such lists appear more frequently when there is low inter-party competition; that is where there are one or two lists only. The second most important variable is the openness of the list: lists with independent candidates are twice more likely to opt for this type of name (actually, lists using this label present on average only 30.8 percent of partisan candidates). The non-partisan nature is also reflected, in most cases, by the recent creation of the list (new lists are 52 percent more likely to opt for this name in comparison to lists present at the 2006 local elections). Corollary, the mayor is generally not present on this kind of lists. Therefore, local lists that put forward citizens and democracy labels are less professionalized lists. As for the previous category, we can confirm that the use of the name is related to the nature of the list. Insisting on the citizenship character of the list is in line with the composition of the list and characteristics of the candidates. This also entails that the study of the name is a good indicator to describe and explain the dynamics of local politics.

Finally, the lists from rural areas are much more likely to choose a label referring to alliance and union. The larger the municipality, the less likely candidates opt for this type of names. From this point of view, the strategy of alliance and union is less often used in cities than in the countryside. Furthermore, the use of that label tends to be more present in municipalities with fragmented party competition, which is not much of a surprise. In a competitive setting, alliances and unions offer an interesting alternative to reach a majority. It also reflects a different strategy that emphasizes the nature of the list as an 'alliance of all citizens' and not so much an alliance of two political parties. On this regard, the choice for alliances and unions labels reflects a grassroots approach: from the citizens to the citizens. Another element points to that direction: the openness of the list has a significant positive effect. Indeed, 88 lists of the 161 lists with such labels present a majority of non-partisan candidates: on average, 88.2 percent of the lists. This corroborates the study of Steyvers et al. (2008, 173) who have shown that a non-partisan name is sometimes used in order to allow the participation of independent candidates on local lists. Alliance and union offer such more neutral name.

5. Choosing a name, adopting different styles of local politics

Choosing a name can be seen as a simple strategic calculation to obtain more votes (Bol and Teuber 2013) but the perspective offered in this article is different. The name is not only a label for a group of candidates seeking votes, but above all it is the marker of a specific conception of local politics. The name of a local list tells thus much about the political style and vision of local institutions. Indeed, in their seminal piece, Hall and Taylor (1996) argue that institutions are symbol system and cognitive script that are historically produced. Plenty of typologies were created to analyse the place, the role and the ideology attached to local level between European countries (Heinelt and Hlepas 2006). But this international diversity of meanings must not hide the national diversity of one same legal body. Similar political institutions can indeed be seen differently from one place to another in the territory and according to different actors.

This is the case of municipalities, especially in Belgium (Wayenberg et al. 2011), where two main conceptions are in competition. On the one hand, municipalities are mainly seen as decentralized bodies of national and regional governments. From this point of view, the municipality is seen as an agent executing administrative tasks assigned to them. On the other hand, municipalities are seen as the place for a grassroots democracy, a place autonomous from the national authorities. This is observed by the prevalence of the “municipal interest” in local political discourse and list name in Wallonia: the idea that the municipal authorities take whatever initiative they want as long as it is beneficial to local interest and as long as no other government has assumed legal responsibility for the concerned field of action.

To explore this diversity of meanings and conceptions attached to local politics, we have endeavoured to follow a promising option: studying the name of local lists. Indeed, naming a group is a political and cultural process by which some characteristics of the reality are detached (Chang and Holt 2011). Our findings show that opting for a label, instead of another or in fact many others, reveal the desire to emphasize specific conceptions of local politics. More specifically, three stakes can be distinguished: the nature of local “politics” – different vs. similar to other levels of government –, the nature of local “lists” – partisan and ideological vs. non-partisan and consensual –, the nature of local *candidates* – professionalized partisan politicians vs. independent amateur citizens. The results presented in this article demonstrate that the choice of the name reflects different positions related to these three trade-offs. This choice is not purely rhetorical and can be explained by macro variables (municipality characteristics), meso variables (party competition), micro variables (list characteristics). One important finding of our analysis is that each of the three levels of variables explains the choice of the name.

Firstly, the municipality’s characteristics matter. In large urban areas, the political offer is of similar nature than at other levels of government. In those municipalities, local politics are thus national cleavage and debates imported at the local level. We find local lists affiliated with the main traditional parties competing for local representation, along ideological lines. On the contrary, further away from urban areas, local politics becomes a local issue. Ideological reference is less present and the emphasis is much more on the so-called municipal interest. Reiser and Holtman (2008, 7) who analyze local lists in Europe state that “typically, they understand themselves as protectors of a harmonious factual political style. In their opinion, good local politics is not compatible with party politics so they consequently perceive themselves as non-parties” (7).

Secondly, the meso variables (party competition and incumbent majority) confirm this diversity of local dynamics and show how these variables interact with the choice of the name. Local lists from the incumbent majority are more likely to adopt partisan or ideological labels. This may reflect two dynamics: partisan lists are often in the incumbent majority but also that a governing position is more likely to frame the local politics into partisan politics. Party competition has a different effect: not so much in terms of the nature of politics itself but rather in terms of the relations between local lists. A high party competition explains much the unions and the alliances of local lists, while a low party competition opens up the room for emphasis on citizens and democracy. These meso variables tell us that the choice of a name is not only an intra-list matter but also an inter-lists matter.

Thirdly, micro variables also explain the choice of the name when it refers to the composition of the list. Local lists without candidates that hold an elective or executive mandate at ano-

ther government level, lists running for local elections for the first time, and with candidates not affiliated to establish national political parties have the most incentive to emphasize change and future as well as citizens and democracy labels. This choice means an alternative ways of doing politics; that is a non-partisan and non-ideological approach of local politics. After all, most local lists – if not all – do seek votes. Doing so, they adopt the strategy they think fit best their vision of local politics and therefore the name that shows it the most meaningfully. In sum, the name of the local lists matters.

6. Conclusion

As for each local election, the 2012 local elections in Wallonia have come with a number of unusual names for the lists in competition. Beside the names referring to established national parties and the typical local references such as *Intérêts communaux* or *Liste du Bourgmestre*, many list names were very specific to each of the 262 local contexts. The choice of a name is always a complex decision. In this article, we sought to investigate this question that is often overlooked in the literature, albeit crucial. We showed that there is a multitude of list names that can be classified into different items. And these categories tell a lot about the nature of the lists: behind the name of a list, there are different conceptions of the local level. The same legal institutions can have different meanings across the territory and actors. Studying the name of the list is a good means to analyse the diversity, the localization and the relation with others structural variables of these meanings.

These findings call for future research in at least two directions. On the one hand, in order to understand more finely the choice of the name, we have to go beyond quantitative approaches. This does not only entail interviews with local actors but also exhaustive data collection of political and socio-demographic characteristics of individual candidates, analysis of local media coverage and possibly participatory techniques wherever they are possible in the process of list making and list naming. On the other hand, the long-term dimension of choosing a name has still to be assessed. Several questions remain to be answered notably: Does a local list keep the same name election after election or does it change often, and if so why? Only long-term, ideally longitudinal, studies will bring additional knowledge to our understanding of local politics.

Finally, our findings do suggest the choice of a name should be explored by researchers interested in elections and electoral politics. As such, our study offers perspectives at the intersection of language and politics, with a typology that could travel across cases in search of the meanings for list names.

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