

## **Belgian Candidates' Multilevel Career Preferences at the 2014 'Mother of all Selections'**

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### **Abstract**

In May 2014 Belgium experienced an uncommon vertical simultaneity of the regional, federal and European elections. They took place in a context of strong electoral volatility, high intra-party competition, enhanced regionalization and electoral reforms. Multilevel electoral candidacies have been banned at joint elections, forcing a choice between regional and federal lists. These elections were thus a conundrum to achieve an equilibrium between candidates' offer and selectorates' demand. Based on an original dataset, mixing the Belgian Candidate Survey (BCS) and biographical data about regional and federal MPs/Cabinet members, our models test five hypotheses to explain candidates' dissatisfaction with the regional/federal list they were running on. Our findings stress that candidates' attitudes (preferences in terms of regional autonomy) and candidates' attributes (experience at another level of government) significantly impact candidates' dissatisfaction. Moreover, we suggest that the enhanced regional empowerment explicates the larger impact of attitudes and attributes on the dissatisfaction of federal candidates (19.1%) in comparison to regional candidates (6.3%).

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## **Introduction**

In 2014, Belgian voters were called to elect their parliamentarians at the federal level, as well as at the regional and European level. This full vertical simultaneity occurred only once before (in 1999). In addition, the 2014 joint elections constitute the first campaign since the sixth State reform (2012-2014) – which devolved extensive policy sectors to regional tiers of government. These elections took place in a decade of strong electoral volatility – and consequently high intra-party competition. Lastly, important electoral reforms were implemented. From 2014 onwards, regional, federal and European elections would be – in principle – organized jointly. And for the first time in Belgian history, multilevel electoral candidacy is forbidden.

In this new institutional and electoral context, the prohibition of multilevel candidacies allows for the exploration of the equilibrium between candidate's supply and party's demand vis-à-vis regional and federal positions (European candidacy are excluded for the sake of parsimony). Focusing specifically on candidates' viewpoint, we examine the reasons of candidates' dissatisfaction with the tier of government they campaigned for. Indeed, results of the Belgian Candidate Survey (BCS) indicate that 6.3% of regional candidates would have preferred to figure on a federal list while 19.1% of federal candidates would have preferred a regional list. Our research question is twofold. First, which features of the candidates' profile and electoral context explain their dissatisfaction? Second, what factors determine the greater dissatisfaction of federal candidates in comparison to regional candidates? Five hypotheses are tested: candidates' territorial identity, their preferences vis-à-vis regional autonomy, their

former regional and federal parliamentary/executive experience, intra-party competition and realistic list positions.

The structure of the article unfolds as follows. First, we sketch the main lines of the political and electoral context while describing how candidates and their career choices have been hitherto studied in Belgium. Second, we outline the uniqueness of the Belgian case study. Third, the analytical framework, the research questions and the hypotheses are presented. Fourth, we describe our data and methods. Finally, the main results of the analysis are discussed.

## **1. The Belgian context**

### **1.1. Federalization, electoral rules and candidate selection processes**

Belgium was founded as a parliamentary monarchy and unitary state. Apart from the introduction of proportional representation in 1899 and the gradual expansion of the suffrage, the structure of representation did not undergo important modifications until 1993 (De Winter and Dumont 2006), despite three waves of devolution reforms launched since 1970. The 1993 reform that completed the transformation of the unitary state into a complex federal system also modified the structure, composition, and functioning of the federal Parliament and executive, and created fully fledged substate quasi-autonomous political systems, namely, the (partially overlapping) three cultural communities (Dutch-speaking, French-speaking, and German-speaking) as well as the three regions (Flanders, Wallonia, and Brussels-Capital) (Deschouwer 2012).

Regarding powers and budgetary means, all reforms have empowered the substate governments and weakened the federal Authority. Before the most recent devolution reforms of 2012-2014, regional powers included urban planning, environment, agriculture, local government, housing, developmental aid, and parts of public transportation, employment, trade, and economy. The communities' powers

include nearly all education matters, culture, parts of health policy, and assistance to families, the disabled, elderly, youth, and so on. In budgetary terms, the community/regional entities controlled 39% (vis-à-vis 38% for the federal level and 22% to local government, excluding the social-security budget). The 2012-2014 reforms drastically deepened devolution with respect to social security policy sectors, decreasing the share of federal government expenditures to 32% and boosting the regional ones to 48%. Hence, the latest leap forward of regional empowerment turned this level into a prominent career level *per se*. Indeed, regional MPs control now much more policy sectors and budgetary means, especially those relevant for pork-barrel politics and individual constituency service, a traditional MP role (De Winter and Brans 2003).

*Increasing volatility, party system fragmentation and legislative turnover*

The Belgian party system is amongst the most fragmented in West Europe (attaining 9.1 ‘effective parties’ in 1999, 7.8 in 2014), due to the breakthrough of regionalist/language parties in each of the three regions, the split of the polity-wide Christian-Democrat, Liberal, and socialist parties into two organizationally independent Flemish and French-speaking parties, and the emergence of the ecologist parties and the Flemish separatist *Vlaams Blok* at the end of the 1970s. Therefore, since 1978 one cannot strictly speak any more of a single Belgian or federal party system, as there are two distinct party systems: Flemish and Francophone<sup>1</sup>.

This skyrocketing fragmentation resulted arose from increasing electoral volatility. Since the 1980s, overall aggregate volatility surpassed usually the 10% level (De Winter, Swyngedouw, and Dumont 2006). But among individual voters, post-vote

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<sup>1</sup> Only in the Brussels-Capital district, do these two party systems overlap. Flemish and Francophone parties compete—at least potentially—for the same voters.

shifting between two successive elections was about three times higher, with a peak of 41% in 2014 (Dassonneville and Baudewyns 2014). This creates high electoral insecurity for parties and candidates, increasing the electoral marginality of many places on lists. Consequently, the average duration of a legislative career has by now declined to 68.8 months in the House, to 45.6 months in the Flemish Parliament, and to 42.3 months in the Walloon Parliament (own calculations from Dodeigne 2014b).

#### *Multilevel representation and electoral system(s)*

The federal Parliament consists of the House of Representatives and the Senate. The latter is since 2014 not anymore elected in a direct way. Currently, the 150 Representatives are elected in eleven constituencies (the ten provinces plus Brussels), with district magnitudes varying from four to twenty-four seats. Seats are allocated between constituencies and parties through PR, following the D'Hondt method. Since 1995, regional MPs are elected directly (1989 in Brussels). The 124 members of the Flemish Parliament are elected in the five Flemish province-wide constituencies plus Brussels; the 75 members of the Walloon Parliament are chosen in thirteen subprovincial constituencies. The 89 members of the Parliament of the Brussels Region are chosen in a single region-wide constituency, including 72 Francophone and 17 Flemish MPs. Eligibility requirements at both regional and federal elections are generally undemanding, but since 1995 several measures have been introduced to enhance gender equality. Since 2007, parties have to present perfectly gender-balanced list with the two top positions occupied by candidates from different sex. These quota measures have boosted the representation of women of less than one out of ten before 1995 to four out of ten in 2014 (Erzeel, Celis, and Severs 2014).

In 2014 electoral constraints were introduced banning the candidacy of regional office holders to run for federal elections, obliging candidates to sit in the assembly of

the electoral tier they ran for. Anti-cumul rules were introduced for the Walloon parliament, limiting the accumulation of a local executive office with parliamentary office to maximum one quarter of MPs in each party, i.e. those that obtained the highest ratio of preference votes. Hence the federal House – where local accumulation is still allowed – is arguably more attractive for municipalists. In addition, candidates cannot anymore be simultaneously candidate on a regional and a federal list (as also applied for European elections). From the 2014 elections onwards, candidates can only figure on one list. This constitutes a major change as multilevel candidacy was common practice (see below).

#### *The allocation of seats to candidates*

The system of allocating seats to candidates (used since 2003) is based on two alternative ways of casting votes: a list vote, endorsing the order of candidates on the list, and a preference vote for one or more candidates of the same list. Every candidate whose number of preference votes reaches the eligibility figure receives a seat. Usually, only candidates at the top of party lists do. Voters rarely manage to alter the ordered list (this has happened in less than one% of all MPs elected since World War I), even though preference voting has increased from 16% in 1919 to 57% in 2014. In 2014, only six candidates (i.e. 4%) were elected ‘out of list order’. In practice, voters only decide the number of seats a party will receive, but selectorates decide who will fill these seats.

Apart from the ‘effective’ candidates on parties’ list, we find an additional type of candidate, the ‘substitute’ candidates. If an elected official were to abandon office (mostly due to the promotion to an executive office after coalition formation), s/he is replaced by the first substitute. Hence, in constituencies in which a coalitionable party has *ministrable* candidates, that first substitute position is nearly a guaranteed ticket to

parliament<sup>2</sup>. This practice further reinforces the power of selectorates. To conclude, the Belgian electoral system used for both regional and federal elections is *formally* a semi-open list system (Carey and Shugart 1995). Yet, in *practice*, it is a quasi-closed list system, giving the party leadership ‘virtually unrestricted control’ over candidate selection (Borchert 2011, 126).

### *Party candidate selection processes*

Candidate selection processes are specific to each party but there are still some similarities across methods (for a detailed analysis, see Vandeleene 2014). The selection method is in every party almost identical for regional and federal lists. Parties employ a multistage procedure to draft their electoral lists. Several selectorates – i.e. the bodies that selects candidates (Hazan and Rahat 2010) – have to work together to arrive at the final list. In all but one party (Flemish liberals), national leaders play a formal role in the selection process. Local (provincial or sub-provincial) leaders also intervene in most parties, yet rank-and-file members have a say in only half of them. In about half the cases, the method differs for candidates on realistic positions and/or for the head of list. Note that a large share of these top candidates are also part of the selectorate. Finally, selectors’ choice also impact on the candidate’s campaign as central party offices decide on the allocation of public campaign subsidies across candidates.

## **1.2.MPs’ career patterns**

While the processes of candidate selection in Belgium were early documented in the literature (Obler 1974, De Winter 1988), the impact of regionalization and

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<sup>2</sup> For instance, of the 150 candidates formally elected on May 2007, a fifth (38) were replaced by a substitute, either because they were promoted to cabinet level, or they did not intend to take up a mandate in the Chamber, but preferred to continue to work as a regional parliamentarian/minister or MEP (numbers from Dodeigne 2015).

federalization has been – surprisingly – rather ignored by Belgian scholars (But see Vandeleene 2014). However, Vanlangenakker, Maddens, and Put (2010)’s study highlighted the ‘integrated nature’ of electoral candidacy in both Wallonia and Flanders. Regional incumbent MPs are often candidates at federal elections, and vice-and-versa for federal MPs. This study also found that only a small proportion of incumbent MPs actually took up a position at another level of government, even when they were duly elected (between 3.2% and 7.3% for the period of analysis). Although these scholars investigate some aspects of candidate selection in the Belgian multilevel system, they do so indirectly: the focus is restricted to *MPs*’ trajectories, not on *candidates per se*.

In Belgium most research has focused on MPs’ career patterns, permitting to draw two main conclusions about parliamentary elite circulation. Firstly, all studies on MPs’ careers reported the unmistakable ‘integrated’ nature of the regional and federal electoral arenas (Pilet, Fiers, and Steyvers 2007, Dandoy and Dumont 2012). Since the first 1995 regional elections, level-hopping movements – from and towards regional and federal electoral arenas – have been regularly observed (all numbers for the 1995-2014 period from Dodeigne 2014a). Level-hopping movements represent movements conducted by regional/federal MPs (including members of the regional/federal cabinets) quitting their regional/federal position to take up a seat at the federal/regional level of government. In comparison with regions from other multilevel democracies, such as the UK and Canada, Belgium presents a high ratio of level-hopping movements, comparable to other ‘integrated polities’ such as Spain (Stolz 2010, Dodeigne 2014b). This high ratio of level-hopping movements is due to the weight of party selectorates in candidate selection. Incumbent regional and national MPs are often ‘(re)placed’ as candidate at another level of government according to selectorates’ strategies. The latter

can be driven either party *internal* incentives (e.g. geographic repartition, diversity purpose, factional disputes, etc.) or party *external* electoral goals in terms of office and vote-seeking strategies (e.g. placing popular candidates on strategic electoral lists, irrespective of the level of government) (Dodeigne 2015). Yet, level-hoppers should not be overestimated because they constitute a minority of all careers. They are the ‘big fishes’ of political parties who often become regional and federal cabinet members (Dodeigne 2014a).

This conclusion leads to the second lesson that can be derived from the literature on Belgian MPs’ career patterns. Despite the integrated nature of the regional and federal levels, MPs’ career patterns reflect the territorial differentiation between electoral arenas. Hence, seven out of ten Flemish and Walloon careers are developed within a single – regional or federal – electoral arenas (Dodeigne 2014b). Interestingly, the 2014 electoral reforms adopted in Belgium have enhanced this territorial differentiation as developed in the next section.

### **1.3. The case of the 2014 regional/federal elections: candidates at the crossroads**

As outlined above, candidate selection at the 2014 ‘mother of all elections’ was probably one of the most complex puzzles selectors ever had to solve. First, the number of federal offices had declined, since senators were no longer directly elected. Hence, most of the 71 incumbent senators had to find a realistic position on the list of the Chamber, regional parliaments, or the EP (Dandoy et al. Forthcoming). Hence, the reduction of available federal offices increased intra-party competition between federal, regional (and European) incumbents. Second, opinion polls predicted highly volatile elections, making more positions on the list ‘unsafe’ than usual. Third, regional, federal and European elections were organized on the same day. Fourth, some electoral rules had changed: candidates could figure on one list only, and Walloon candidates were

severely restricted in holding on to their local executive office. This also meant that the old ‘all hands on deck’ strategy could not be repeated, i.e. with regional and federal MPs and ministers participating in both elections in order to maximize their party’s score. Last but not least, the further empowerment of regional parliaments made this level more attractive than ever before, stimulating more candidates to consider level hopping. In other words, the 2014 elections definitely represent the ‘mother of all *selections*’.

Research on candidate selection usually focuses on the political parties’ perspective (Hazan and Rahat 2010). Yet this article chooses to embrace the candidates’ perspective. We reckon that selectorates in each party have to behave strategically when allocating their scarce resources (the candidates) to the right spots (the type of list in a first phase, and the specific position in a second phase). This research focus on the candidate’ own preferences, i.e. one criterion that selectors consider to decide on which list to put which candidate. Moreover, we study all electoral candidates, not only candidates on safe places as most research does (Hazan and Rahat 2010). The whole population is indeed of interest given that a large share of them is part of the political elite at large, as office-holders at the local level, as future members of the federal/regional political elite – candidates on hopeless positions hoping to score well in order to move up towards the top of the list at the next elections, or as ‘have been’ politicians, which do not hold any mandate anymore but anyway accept to help the party gaining votes. In short, all candidates are somewhere on the career ladder (moving up, down or sideward) and thus allow us to get a fuller picture of what candidate selection is really all about.

## **2. Analytical framework, research question and hypotheses**

The 2014 elections constituted a crossroad when candidates faced two main alternatives in terms of lists, which is rarely the case. The possibilities of dissatisfaction are therefore higher than in case of non-vertical simultaneity of elections where candidates do only have a binary possibility: ‘to be or not to be’ a candidate. The 2014 federal and regional elections offer us a unique chance to analyze these dynamics of this choice between levels.

Evidently, candidates’ choice for the regional rather than federal arena (and vice-and-versa) does not entirely reflect just their own preference. Quite the opposite, we have already underlined the centrality of selectorates in candidate selection. In fact, electoral lists result from the equilibrium between supply and demand (Norris 1995). The demand-side is represented by selectors choosing among a pool of aspirants who will run for office. Their choice is determined by a various factors, among which candidates’ characteristics such as their political experience or their qualifications. Candidates stand at the supply side of the model. They offer their candidacy, which is influenced/constrained by their resources such as their electoral popularity, and their motivations including ambition or sectorial policy interests. The equilibrium to be achieved in 2014 was more difficult than ever given the numerous factors to take into account; even though the simultaneity of elections – creating a large number of positions available at the aggregate level (about 400 individual candidacies per party) – could have eased the process.

This article focuses on one of the consequences of this search for equilibrium, i.e. candidate’s dissatisfaction with their attributed list. Hence we investigate the suboptimality of this equilibrium, from the candidates’ viewpoint. For that goal, we use an original question from the BCS that asked all candidates whether they would have

preferred to stand on a list for another parliament, i.e. federal candidates that would have preferred to stand on the regional list as well as regional candidates that would have favored the federal one. About 11.0% report to be dissatisfied with the level of government they ran for (n=187 out of 1699). This percentage is relatively important considering the high level of ‘social desirability’ of this question. In a system characterized by the norm of strong party unity, candidates tend to ‘hide’ their genuine feelings, because expressing dissatisfaction would reveal intra-party conflicts. Accordingly, our first research question is: to what extent does the profile of dissatisfied candidates explain their dissatisfaction?

Interestingly, the survey material shows a substantial difference between federal and regional candidates in terms of percentage of dissatisfied candidates (respectively, 6.3% and 19.1% of dissatisfied candidates). Our second research question is thus: why are federal candidates more dissatisfied with their list than regional candidates? By analyzing the profile of dissatisfied candidates, and the differences observed between regional and federal candidates, we seek to better understand the dynamics of the process of candidate selection in multilevel Belgium, from the viewpoint of candidates. In the next section, we develop five hypotheses and explain why our model also controls for three other variables.

## **2.1. Hypotheses**

Like ordinary citizens, political elites nourish varying territorial identity feelings. We therefore hypothesize that candidates that nourish a more regional than Belgian identity, would prefer to run on a regional list (e.g. for ‘The Parliament of The Flemish Nation’). Indeed, exerting influence on the regional level is the *raison d’être* of regionalist political actors (De Winter and Türsan 1998). Although the federal level used to be relevant for the regionalist goals – exerting pressure to devolve powers to the regional

level (Masseti and Schakel 2013) – it has become gradually less important after five decades of federalization. On the opposite, candidates that inclined towards a predominantly Belgian identity, would prefer to run for the Belgian House of Representatives, symbol of the ‘Belgian Union’. We used the Moreno question to tap the main features of the most relevant territorial bipolar identification (i.e. Belgian vs regional identity).

*H.1: Candidates that are running at the electoral arena that do not correspond to their territorial identity are more likely to be dissatisfied than other candidates.*

Given the prominent, albeit fluctuating, place of institutional reforms on the political agenda since the language laws (1962-1963) (Walgrave and De Winter 2005), political elites are expected to be influenced by their preferences vis-à-vis regional autonomy. Certainly there is a correlation between the latter and elites’ identity, but they do not fully overlap (Dodeigne et al. Forthcoming, Pattie et al. 1999). We therefore hypothesize that candidates will seek to run at the tier of government that according to them should hold most powers. Candidates that position themselves more towards the autonomist pole would prefer to run on regional lists, while those that incline towards a return to the unitary state would prefer to run for federal elections.

*H.2: Candidates with unionist preferences vis-à-vis regional autonomy are more likely to be satisfied with being on a federal list than candidates with autonomist preferences, and vice-and-versa for candidates on a regional list.*

Our literature review showed that there is a territorial differentiation between regional and federal electoral arenas. Hence,, we expect that parliamentary experience at one

level of government increases incumbent MPs' inertia for being candidate on another list. Indeed, parliamentarians must learn the formal and informal rules of their institutions, acquire the technical and intellectual skills relevant for policies managed by their institutions, while building and developing a network relevant for their political actions. Therefore, MPs changing parliaments must 'virtually' start from scratch in a new institution, even though some political capital and skills acquired may be relevant at another tier of government. This hypothesis is furthermore supported by Depauw and Thomas (1997)'s previous results which showed that policy expertise and institutional socialization influences the probability of federal MPs to run on a regional list. Overall, MPs' experience acquired at one level of government is thus expected to increase reluctance to change. .

*H.3: The greater is the candidates' former experience at another level (regional and federal), the higher is the probability of dissatisfaction with being candidate at another level (federal and regional)*

Candidate selection is a focal arena of intra-party competition (Gallagher 1988). Selecting candidates is a delicate exercise for parties seeking votes and offices, while maintaining party unity (Müller and Strøm 1999). At the individual level, the stakes for candidates are also high (Rahat, Hazan, and Katz 2008). Realistic positions are rare whereas aspirants are numerous (Lovenduski and Norris 2003). Accordingly, candidates facing high intra-party competition may have not obtained what they wished from the selectorates, e.g. in terms of the type of list. We therefore expect these candidates having had to fight in order to get their specific position on the list to express higher levels of dissatisfaction with the parliament they ran for than others.

*H4. The higher the intra-party competition perceived by the candidate, the greater the dissatisfaction the candidate will express.*

Because only a few candidates ultimately manage to acquire parliamentary office, it is the ‘realistic positions’ that constitute the real object of dispute in PR list system. Political parties even recourse to peculiar candidate selection procedures for these positions (De Winter 1988, Vandeleene 2014). According to Hazan and Rahat (2011, 13-4), the concept of realistic positions ‘include all those positions/districts that are seen at least as winnable before the elections’. On the opposite, unrealistic position are the type of ‘positions at the bottom of the list that have no possibility of being elected, [...] the parties simply try to convince someone to stand in their name, with no chance of even giving a good fight’. Therefore, we assume that candidates holding realistic positions are more likely to be satisfied because of their quasi-guaranteed access to parliamentary office, irrespective of the level of government.

*H5. Holding a realistic position increases candidates’ satisfaction with their list, irrespective of the level of government.*

## **2.2. Control variables**

In addition to our five hypotheses, we control the effects of five additional variables whose influence on candidate selection has been acknowledged in the literature. Firstly, gender may impact upon candidates’ satisfaction because women are less often self-selected (Kenny 2010). The BCS data confirm this trend: 67% of male candidates report having been stimulated to become candidate against 77% of female candidates. Accordingly, women may be less demanding than men regarding the tier of government because it was not their own initiative to run anyway. Secondly, we control for candidate’s satisfaction with their list rank. Indeed, without a good position on the list

*at elections time*, it is less likely for candidates to climb up towards realistic positions at *next elections*. We thus posit that candidates' satisfaction with their list rank is positively correlated to their overall satisfaction with the type of list, be it regional or federal. Thirdly, for the federal model, we take into account the variation of the media and party system, and voting behavior along community lines (Sinardet 2013). Therefore, we control the Francophone and Flemish electoral dynamics. Fourthly, the regional model controls for the electoral rules that differ between the Brussels, the Flemish and the Walloon parliaments (e.g. anti-cumul Walloon decree or larger Flemish districts). Finally, we differentiate effective from substitute candidates. Except the first substitute who has a genuine opportunity to access parliamentary office (see above), substitute positions are occupied by militants/sympathizers willing to fill these non-strategic substitute positions. We thus expect effective candidates to be more dissatisfied than substitute candidates because the issues at stake are greater for the former than the latter.

Last but not least, the party variable was not included in the model. The reason is the fragmentation of the party system – especially in Flanders – creating too many categories (14 parties). In fact, parties are not statistically significant in the regional and federal models, even in bivariate logit regression. We furthermore tested the robustness of our models isolating the potential impact of the Greens, given their overrepresentation in our sample and their highly inclusive selection processes. Overall, the inclusion of parties did not improve the model. On the opposite, it diminished the quality of fit of the model according to the Akaike's Information Criterion (Burnham and Anderson 2002, 3-5).

### 3. Data and methods

Two main data sources are used. First, the BCS includes all candidates at the regional and federal elections, covering all parties having obtained at least one parliamentary seat in May 2014 (14 parties in total). This population covers 5.254 candidates from which 1.816 candidates answered the post-electoral questionnaire (i.e. 34.6%). In terms of party response rate, we encountered the ‘classical’ overrepresentation of the green parties<sup>3</sup> and underrepresentation of far-right parties<sup>4</sup> (De Winter and Baudewyns 2015). The second source is Dodeigne (2015)’s database, which covers Brussels, Walloon and Flemish regional and federal parliamentary/executive careers since 1991 (n=1.356).

Our models test why candidates are dissatisfied with being candidates at regional/federal level. The dependent variable is measured via the following BCS question: ‘Would you have preferred to run as candidate on a list for another parliament?’ The four proposed answers for regional and federal candidates were respectively (1) ‘Yes, on a list for the federal/regional elections’, (2) ‘Yes, on a list for the European elections’, (3) ‘No, I am satisfied with the regional/federal list’ and (4) ‘The level of power does not matter to me’. Candidates’ giving response (1) are categorized as the dissatisfied ones. We excluded candidates with European preferences as this special issue focuses on the interaction between regional and federal levels. Evidently, candidates for which the ‘level does not matter’ are *not* considered as dissatisfied. Because of the binary nature of the dependent variable, the model is tested through logistic regression. The event (i.e. candidates’ dissatisfaction) is coded 1.

Table 1 outlines the operationalization of the independent variables. The following developments detail the most complex operationalization. For hypothesis 1,

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<sup>3</sup> With 54.2% and 56.7%.

<sup>4</sup> With 21.6% and 17.9%.

candidates were asked ‘which of these propositions best describe how you regard yourself?’, with five propositions: I feel (1) only regional (be it Flemish, Walloon, or Brussels), (2) more regional than Belgian, (3) equally regional and Belgian, (4) more Belgian than regional, and (5) only Belgian. The first and second propositions of the Moreno question were grouped into a ‘regional identity’ dummy, the fourth and fifth were joined into the ‘Belgian identity’ dummy, while the third response (‘equally regional and Belgian’) serves as reference category. In hypothesis 2, candidates’ preferences vis-à-vis regional autonomy are operationalized through a 0-10 scale varying from ‘all powers to the regions/communities’ (0), ‘all powers to the central state’ (10), while the ‘status quo’ option is explicitly mentioned (5). In hypothesis 4, we asked candidates ‘to what extent they had to struggle during the selection process to obtain their specific position’ on the list. Following their answer (‘greatly’, ‘moderately’, ‘hardly’, ‘not at all’), we operationalized intra-party competition as ‘high’, ‘moderate’, ‘low’ and ‘null’. In hypothesis 5, the 2014 electoral results are used to determine candidates’ realistic positions. Although there are some valid arguments in using previous electoral results (elections time<sub>t-1</sub>) (Hazan and Rahat 2010) – e.g. the selectorates are assumed to refer to past behavior – we argue that party results at elections time<sub>t</sub> are a better reference in a context of high electoral volatility (such as observed in 2014). Indeed, selectorates scrutinize closely electoral polls adjusting their evaluation of how many list positions are realistic (Vandeleene forthcoming). For instance, Greens in Wallonia perfectly knew in 2014 that they would not be able to reiterate their exceptional results of 2009.

In this respect, electoral results at elections time<sub>t</sub> constitute a fair proxy of selectorates’ anticipation of their parties’ results. Hence we coded positions as realistic following the party list order according to seats obtained at elections time<sub>t</sub>. In addition,

we defined the first substitute as a realistic position (only if the list obtained at least one seat) given the high probability of promotion to office during the legislative term (see above). There is one exception: when ‘list-pushers’ is successful (i.e. when positioned at the very bottom of the list but still elected), then realistic positions follow the list order minus the list pusher (who is recorded as holding a realistic position) plus one substitute) (for detailed explanations, Dodeigne (2015)).

**Table 1.** Summary of hypotheses and operationalization of variables

<b>Hypotheses</b>	<b>Independent variables</b>	<b>Operationalization</b>	<b>Variables</b>
H1	Territorial identity (Moreno question)	-More regional; -More Belgian; -Equally regional and Belgian’ (reference).	Categorical
H2	Regional autonomy preferences	Score on the 0-10 State reform scale	Continuous
H3	Former regional and/or federal parliamentary/executive experience	Number of months as MP and/or member of the regional/federal cabinet.	Continuous
H4	Level of intra-party competition	-Null; -Low; -Moderate; -High (reference).	Categorical
H5	Realistic position	Holding a realistic position at the 2014 elections	Binary
<b>Control variables</b>			
1	Gender	Male candidates are the reference category.	Binary
2	List position satisfaction	-Highly satisfied & satisfied=0 -Hardly satisfied & not satisfied at all=1	Binary
3	Community group	Flemish candidates are the reference category.	Binary
4	Type of regional Parliament	-Flemish Parliament; -Walloon Parliament; -Brussels Parliament (reference).	Categorical
5	Effective/substitute	Substitutes are the reference category.	Binary

#### 4. Results

The logistic regressions corroborate three hypotheses across the regional and federal models (H.2 regional autonomy, H.3 regional and federal experience, and H.4 intra-

party competition) while H.1 (identity factor) is only validated for the federal model. Moreover, the discrepancies of the effects observed in the federal and regional logit models explain the greater dissatisfaction observed for candidates on a federal list. The results are presented in tables 2 and 3.

Firstly, the beta of the variable ‘preferences vis-à-vis regional autonomy’ is statistically significant in the direction expected in H.2. All other things being equal, the more ‘autonomist’ the candidates are, the more likely they would be satisfied with being candidates on a regional list. The positive sign of the beta (0.109<sup>\*</sup>) in the regional model entails that preferences closer to ten (i.e. being in favor of the unitary Belgian state) increase the likelihood of candidates’ dissatisfaction with being on a regional list. On the opposite, more ‘unionist’ candidates are less likely to be dissatisfied with being on a federal list as indicated by the negative sign of the beta (-0.149<sup>\*\*\*</sup>). In other words, candidates’ position on the autonomist-unitary continuum contributes to explain the level of dissatisfaction of regional and federal candidates.

Secondly, former political experience at regional and federal levels (either as MP and/or member of the cabinet) is statistically significant and positively associated with candidates’ dissatisfaction as formulated in H.3. Longer experience at regional level increases the likelihood of candidates to be dissatisfied with being on a federal list (beta=0.009<sup>\*</sup>) and similarly for regional candidates with former federal experience (beta=0.022<sup>\*\*</sup>). It thus confirms the territorial differentiation between the regional and federal political elites, which is observable even at the candidacy level.

Thirdly, the level of intra-party competition influences candidates’ dissatisfaction negatively, in line with H4. Federal candidates having faced high competition during selection are more likely to be ultimately dissatisfied than other candidates. In the regional model, it is only the difference between high competition

and null competition that is statistically significant (the beta for the ‘null’ category is -0.958\*, the reference category being ‘high’ competition).

Fourthly, we observe effects for the identity factor but only in the federal model (H1). Candidates with greater Belgian identity are less likely to be dissatisfied than candidates with dual identity (beta=-0.56\*\*). However, the effects of territorial identities seem indecisive as the sign of the regional identity is negative in both models (albeit not statistically significant). Further studies, e.g. measuring identity differently, would be necessary to corroborate these counter-intuitive results.

Finally, the variable ‘realistic positions’ (H5) shows results in the expected direction but fails to be statistically significant. In the control variables, only the variable ‘list position satisfaction’ is statistically significant in the expected direction.

**Table 2.** Logistic regression predicting regional candidates’ dissatisfaction

	$\beta$	SE $\beta$	P-value	
Intercept)	-3.379	0.741	0.000	****
Realistic positions	-0.307	0.611	0.615	
Preferences vis-à-vis regional autonomy	0.109	0.068	0.098	*
Territorial identity (ref= dual identity)				
More regional	-0.707	1.097	0.519	
More Belgian	0.417	0.317	0.189	
Regional parl./executive experience	-0.009	0.009	0.309	
Federal parl./executive experience	0.022	0.009	0.016	**
Intra-party competition (ref= high)				
Moderate	-0.541	0.632	0.392	
Low	-0.374	0.565	0.508	
Null	-0.958	0.547	0.080	*
Substitute on the list	0.228	0.313	0.466	
Gender (ref=Male candidates)	-0.117	0.297	0.694	
Type of regional parliament (ref= Brussels)				
Walloon Parliament	0.181	0.433	0.676	
Flemish Parliament	0.421	0.412	0.307	
Being satisfied with rank on the list	0.963	0.338	0.004	***
Nagelkerke's R <sup>2</sup>		0.097		
AIC		401.19		
Wald test		279.2 (df=14)	****	
Likelihood ratio test		31.63 (df=14)	****	
N		855		

Key: p<0.10\*, p<0.05\*\*, p<0.01\*\*\*, p<0.001\*\*\*\*

**Table 3.** Logistic regression predicting federal candidates' dissatisfaction

	$\beta$	SE $\beta$	P-value	
(Intercept)	0.70	0.59	0.237	
Realistic positions	-0.71	0.54	0.190	
Preferences vis-à-vis regional autonomy	-0.18	0.05	0.001	****
Territorial identity (ref= dual identity)				
More regional	-0.90	0.55	0.105	
More Belgian	-0.56	0.26	0.028	**
Regional parl./executive experience	0.01	0.01	0.098	*
Federal parl./executive experience	0.00	0.01	0.707	
Intra-party competition (ref= high)				
Moderate	-0.94	0.56	0.094	*
Low	-1.37	0.52	0.009	***
Null	-1.32	0.46	0.004	***
Substitute on the list	0.30	0.26	0.259	
Gender (ref=Male candidates)	-0.01	0.25	0.973	
Community group (ref=Flemish)	0.08	0.26	0.757	
Being satisfied with rank on the list	0.88	0.32	0.006	***
Nagelkerke's R <sup>2</sup>			0.14	
AIC			456.14	
Wald test			149.7 (df=13)	****
Likelihood ratio test			44.46 (df=13)	****
N			475	

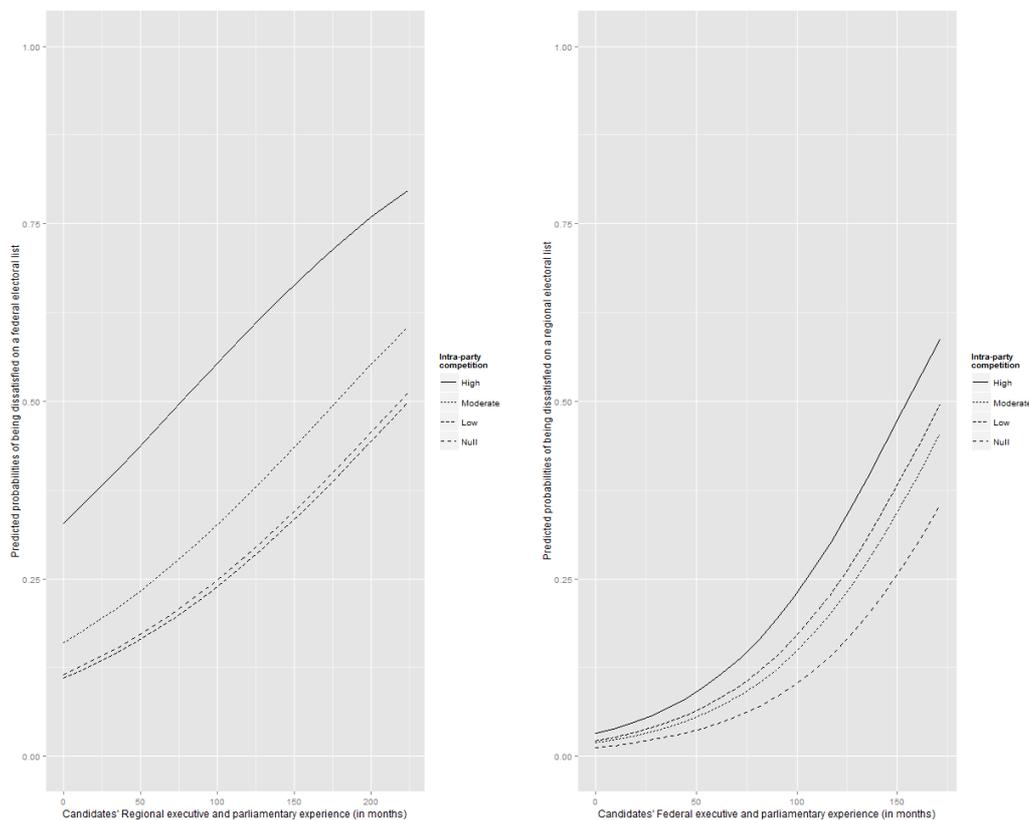
Key:  $p \leq 0.10^*$ ,  $p \leq 0.05^{**}$ ,  $p \leq 0.01^{***}$ ,  $p \leq 0.001^{****}$

The effects of these three hypotheses (H2 to H4) are illustrated by the figures 1 and 2 which plot the predicted probabilities of candidates' dissatisfaction. The figure 1 shows the effect of preferences vis-à-vis regional autonomy while figure 2 displays the influence of former federal and regional experience. In both figures, the predicted probabilities furthermore illustrate the level of intra-party competition encountered by candidates, all other things being equal. The predicted probabilities permit to clearly illustrate how the three hypotheses (H2 to H4) affect more strongly the dissatisfaction of federal candidates' than of regional candidates.

Firstly, figure 1 shows that similar experience at another level government affects differently regional and federal candidates. For instance, federal candidates with 100 months of regional experience are twice more likely to be dissatisfied (pred. prob. = 0.52) than regional candidates (pred. prob. = 0.23), considering candidates having

encountered high intra-competition. In fact, the predicted probabilities of regional candidates exponentially increase when federal experience grows. This suggests that the most experienced federal MPs are the most dissatisfied. On the opposite, the predicted probabilities of experienced regional MPs on federal lists start at a higher level while increasing consistently and gradually according to regional experience. In other words, it is not exclusively the most experienced regional MPs that are likely to be affected for being on federal lists.

**Figure 1.** Effects of parliamentary experience at another level of government for federal candidates (left) and regional candidates (right)



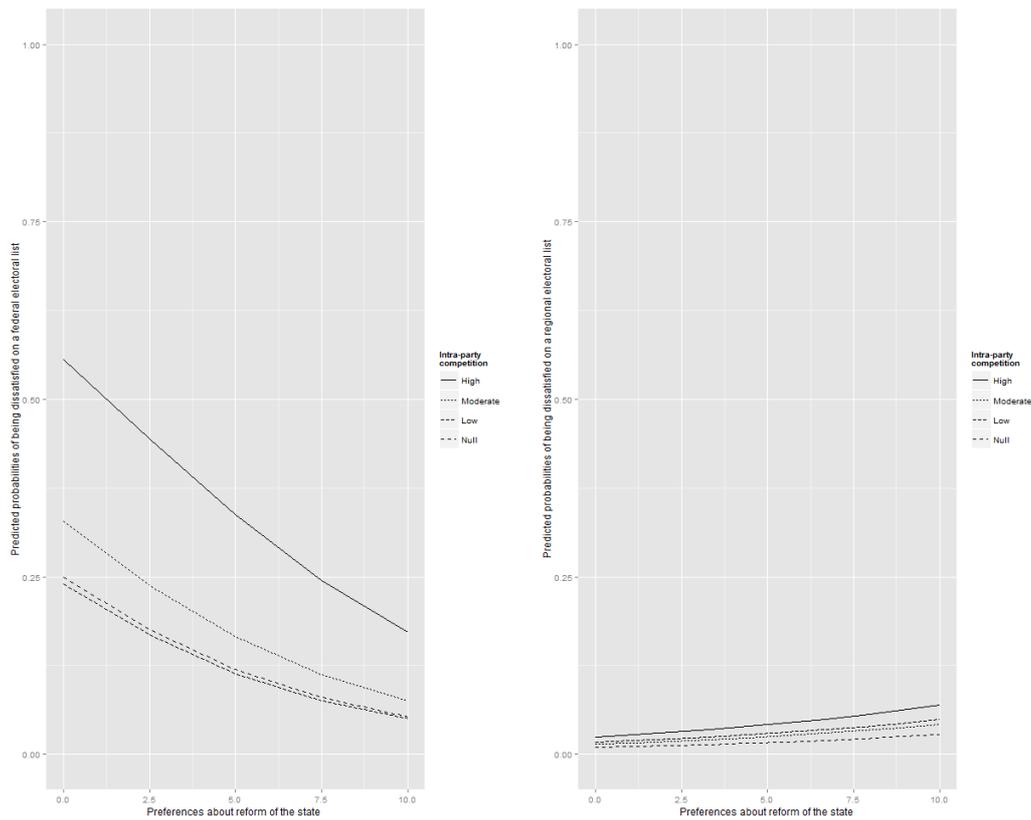
What causes these differentiated effects between regional and federal candidates? Our tentative explanation is the context of the sixth State reform (with massive transfer of powers to the regional tiers of government) in which the 2014 joint elections took place. As shown by H.3, former federal and regional MPs do prefer to stay at the level

where they made their career. Nevertheless, former federal MPs becoming regional candidates appear to be less affected than former regional MPs moving to a federal list. The reason is probably the context of empowerment of regional tiers of government that became more attractive for ambitious candidates. As figure 1 shows, only the very core members of the federal class (those with extensive experience) consider becoming regional candidates as 'stepping down'. This interpretation is reinforced by the exponential curve that indicates that only regional candidates with more extensive experience at the federal level are really likely to be dissatisfied. Besides, the predicted probability of regional candidates who are the most likely to be dissatisfied is still 10% lower than the most dissatisfied federal candidates with former regional experience. In other words, the very context of the state reform seems to have made that moving towards the regional level substantially less 'painful' for experienced federal MPs than for experienced regional MPs becoming federal candidates.

This interpretation is also supported by the comparison of figure 2 about the effects of preferences vis-à-vis regional autonomy. The latter is statistically significant in both regional and federal models, but the magnitude of the effects is unmistakably higher in the federal model. The more 'autonomist' federal candidates will have a much higher probability of being dissatisfied than the more 'unionist' candidates on a regional list. In this respect, preferences vis-à-vis regional autonomy help to understand the higher level of federal candidates' dissatisfaction. The predicted probabilities vary greatly on the 0-10 continuum for federal candidates while they differ only marginally for regional candidates. As a matter of fact, removing this variable from the federal model affects (proportionally) twice as much the Nagelkerke's  $R^2$  (decrease of 4.5%, 14% in total) than in the regional model (minus 1.2%, 9.7% in total). Put differently, if preferences vis-à-vis regional autonomy affect candidates' dissatisfaction, moving to the regional

level appears again much less painful than entering the federal electoral arena given the context of the sixth state reform.

**Figure 2.** Effects of preferences about state reform  
for federal candidates (left) and regional candidates (right)



## 5. Conclusion

The 2014 Belgian joint elections were very specific because of the empowerment of regional tiers of government, electoral volatility and high party-competition, vertical simultaneity, and new electoral rules. Therefore, these elections were a real conundrum to achieve an equilibrium between candidate's offer and party's demand. The originality of our article lies in the richness of two datasets to explore the dynamics of multilevel candidacy through the eyes of individual candidates. We tested five hypotheses explaining, on the one hand, candidates' dissatisfaction with the list type

they were running on, and on the other hand to what extent these factors determine the difference in satisfaction observed between federal and regional candidates.

Our logistic models confirmed the critical impact of three factors. First, ‘autonomist’ candidates tend to be more dissatisfied on federal lists in comparison to ‘unionist’ candidates, and vice-and-versa. Second, previous parliamentary/executive experience at one electoral arena negatively impacts upon satisfaction of candidates running at the other level (be it regional or federal). Thirdly, intra-party competition matters: the more candidates experienced intra-party competition, the more they were dissatisfied with the electoral arena they ran in. Those results are congruent with our hypotheses. However, our logit models did not confirm that candidates’ territorial identity affects satisfaction neither did the holding of realistic list positions, i.e. safe position to parliamentary office.

More importantly, the suboptimality of the equilibrium between candidates’ supply and selectorates’ demand appears more pregnant at the federal level. In particular, two of these factors explain the greater federal candidates’ dissatisfaction in comparison to regional candidates. First, preferences vis-à-vis regional autonomy greatly impact upon federal candidates’ satisfaction but only marginally upon regional candidates. Second, former regional experience affects systematically federal candidates’ dissatisfaction while, for the federal MPs becoming regional candidates, only the most experienced ones are dissatisfied. Our tentative explanation refers to the context of the sixth state reform and the overall regional empowerment. It was ‘less ungratifying’ for federal candidates to go to regional levels of government whose powers and fiscal capacity increased significantly.

The results should not be overestimated because of the specificities of the 2014 elections. Nonetheless, these findings stress that the multilevel structure impacts

candidate selection: candidates' *attitudes* (notably preferences in terms of regional autonomy) and candidates' *attributes* (experience at another level of government) should therefore be systematically taken into account in the analysis of candidate selection in multilevel democracies. Yet, the *classic* explanation already acknowledged in the literature on party politics (i.e. the effects of intra-party competition) remains a relevant lens to elucidate the outcome observed in 2014. Candidate selection processes are central to electoral democracies and the latter are becoming increasingly multilevel settings (Hooghe, Marks, and Schakel 2010). Connecting these two research areas as promoted by this special issue is thus not only timely, but also a necessary step in our understanding of the fulfillment by political parties of one of their core functions.

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