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Keeping the gates closed?
National parties and candidate selection for European elections

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- Abstract -

Political parties constitute the main revolving door between aspirants and candidates. Parties can incite, endorse, dissuade or even impede aspirants' attempts to stand as candidates. The proportional - mainly closed-lists - electoral system for European elections means that parties may often choose directly who will eventually hold MEP positions. Indeed at the EU level, one posited explanation of the stronghold of national parties on their MEPs is their power in candidate selection processes, through which parties can reward or punish their outgoing parliamentarians. It is thus relentlessly assumed ballot access for European elections is the preserve of national parties, although the actual processes underlying this claim remain largely unexplored empirically. Research into the recruitment processes for European elections has however tended to focus on either the political resources of candidates, providing 'supply-side' explanations, or the peculiarities of the multi-level political context, determining the 'structure of opportunities' for these recruitments. The analysis of party rules and of the attitudes of gatekeepers, producing the 'demand' for candidates has often been overlooked or unsystematically studied. The analysis of party rules has been overlooked or unsystematically studied. National parties are often depicted as unitary actors which unilaterally control ballot access for European elections, although the actual processes of selection have not been the object of thorough empirical studies so far. As such, political recruitment for EP elections deserves renewed scholarly attention. Based on a new dataset recording the candidate selection methods used in various political parties of the 28 member states in view of the 2014 European Parliament elections, this research examines how EP candidates are selected. Formal rules prevailing in the parties are collected through the organisations' internal documents (statutes, resolutions) and an experts' questionnaire. In order to classify the methods thus unveiled, the paper relies on an analytical framework distinguishing the selectorate (the question of 'who selects') and the decentralisation (i.e. at which level within the party) dimensions of candidate selection for EP elections, and taking into account the multi-stages nature of the processes. Findings allow in particular for cross-party and cross-national comparisons.

Introduction

Political parties are pivotal to democracy. The "indispensability of parties" thesis (Lipset 2000) largely relies upon the idea that political parties constitute the main intermediate between society and government in modern representative democracies. In order to "link people to a government" (Sartori 1976:25), parties perform specific functions, mainly centred on the articulation and aggregation of social interests, among which prominently figure the recruitment function. Accordingly, it is somewhat unsurprising that explanations of democratic failures often revolve around issues of political representation and underline the role of parties therein. The EU 'democratic deficit' is no exception, with the question of input legitimacy being central to most of the arguments made. The debate surrounding the EU 'democratic deficit', one of the most fruitful academic and political debates having emerged in the wake of the integration process, indeed largely revolves around the existing gap between the electoral and legislative arenas at EU level. A gap relentlessly attributed to the assumed absence of truly European elections (Follesdal and Hix 2006; Hix and Lord 1997; Hix et Roland 2007).

Yet, the EU electoral arena - as most other electoral arenas - is almost invariably looked at through considerations related to inter-party electoral competition - i.e. the European election itself. By contrast, intra-party competition has drawn by far less scholarly interest. Processes of recruitment and candidate selection at the EU level remain largely unexplored, despite their largely acknowledged consequences for representative government (Norris et Lovenduski 1995; Norris 1997; Siavelis and Morgenstern 2008) in terms of participation, competition, responsiveness and representation (Hazan and Rahat 2010) at the national level. Therefore, in order to understand any political system one should not be deprived of a systematic study of methods for selecting candidates. This is precisely what this paper intends to do by asking how parties select their candidates for European elections.

Parties indeed constitute the main revolving doors between aspirants and candidates. Individual attempts to stand as candidates can be encouraged, discouraged or even prohibited by political parties. Authors concerned with candidate selection originally focused on examining and classifying the methods used by political parties. Criteria to that end have often included: the level of centralization, the selectorate, and eligibility or candidacy criteria (see in particular: Rahat and Hazan 2001). In the meantime, the characterisation of candidate selection as 'secret garden of politics'

(Gallagher and Marsh 1988) still largely holds: little information is available on these processes, and often only covering the selection of candidates for national (legislative) elections. Local, regional or European elections largely constitute under-studied interfaces when it comes to the selection of candidates.

Thus, the ambition of this paper is two-fold. First, it aims at unveiling the processes of candidate selection taking place ahead of the elections to the European Parliament (EP). Second, it seeks to re-evaluate the non-appearance of Europarties in the wake of the 2014 (s)elections. To investigate these mechanisms and to establish findings, this paper proceeds as follows. First, it briefly surveys the literature on candidate selection processes and delineates major theoretical arguments underlining the need for studying candidate selection at European level and especially demand-side considerations therein, thus highlighting the relevance of the subject-matter. It further expounds on specificities of candidate selection at the EU level, in order to place this study in context. Second, it proceeds with a brief discussion of the methods and data used: an approach relying on a unique dataset of the candidate selection methods (CSM) used in the 28 member states for 2014. Finally, descriptive statistics are used to depict rules and underline preliminary patterns and results are highlighted, before a few concluding remarks are drawn.

1. Political parties: the main revolving doors between aspirants and candidates.

The accession of individuals to political offices, whether the office is the European Parliament or any other, is two-fold: first, within parties, aspirants are (or not) selected as candidates; second, candidates are (or not) elected to public office. Thus, electoral politics and, more broadly, democratic life is not limited to competition between parties in terms of elections and representatives, but also occur within the parties through the selection of candidates. It remains that literature on the inter-party arena of electoral competition is however generally acknowledged as less developed than the intra-party one, that of general elections (Alvarez and Sinclair 2012).

1.1. Why candidate selection matters

Candidate selection has become a core function of political parties and one of the prime mechanisms through which they organise (Epstein 1967: 10, 77; Henig 1970: 15; Key 1964: 370; Kirchheimer 1966: 189–90; Ranney 1981: 102–3; Schattschneider 1942: 64; Shomer, 2012). More precisely, candidate and leader selection have been thought to confer crucial powers within the party to the actor(s) in charge (Gallagher and Marsh 1988; Marsh 1993; Massari 2004; Hazan and Rahat 2010). Over seventy

years ago, Schattschneider analysed the nominating as the most crucial process of the party, suggesting that "he who can make the nominations is the owner of the party. This is therefore one of the best points at which to observe the distribution of power within the party" (Schattschneider 1942: 101). Selection is accordingly the focus of power contests within parties (Seligman, 1961).

Although recruitment occurs at different levels, legislative recruitment has certainly concentrated much of the scholarly attention (Norris, 1995). Recruitment and selection processes and in particular the questions of how and why selection occurs ahead of legislative elections has important consequences for parties, legislatures and representative government (Norris 1995; Siavelis and Morgenstern 2008). Indeed, by choosing who is going to stand on electoral lists and at which place, parties influence the future composition of legislative assemblies (and even of executives) and hence their policies. Authors have shown that in fact two main factors affect the accession of aspirants to legislative office, including EP positions: "electoral laws and (the) control of candidate selection" (Mitchell 2000: 340; see also: Faas 2003; Gallagher 1988: 258). As such, studying candidate selection further allows assessing "what goes into politics", which then can be mobilised when trying to explain legislators' behaviour. An increased number of studies have linked recruitment and selection to subsequent parliamentary work, by examining the effects of these processes on the behaviour of legislators in various types of political systems (Alvarez and Sinclair, 2012; Bowler et al., 1999; Crisp et al. 2004; De Luca et *al.* 2002; Faas 2003; Hazan 2000; Hazan and Rahat 2000; Hix 2002; 2004; Shomer 2009) and on the representativeness of the party's list (Kernell 2008). Candidate selection can also notably prove a key-determinant of a party's ability to act in a united manner during a legislative term (Gallagher 1988). Light has further been shed on the consequences of the different methods on the functioning of democracies. Most notably, these consequences concern the dimensions of participation, competition, responsiveness, and last but not least, representation (Hazan and Rahat 2010). Nevertheless, the relation between these four dimensions is not always linear or positive: one dimension may go at the expense of another, and in particular more participation does not necessarily entail a better representation (Katz 2001; Rahat, Hazan and Katz 2008). A striking example can be found in the gender recruitment literature: enlarged selectorates do not necessarily benefit women (see *inter alia*: Wauters 2012).

There is considerable variation between parties in the nature of candidate selection processes (Bille 2001; Lundell 2004). Delineating a more fine-grained model, Norris (1997: 1) has put forward four levels in the study of legislative recruitment: the political system (which encompasses legal regulations, the party system and the electoral system), the recruitment process (especially focusing on intra-party democracy and rules governing candidate selection), the candidates' 'supply' (i.e.

those willing to run for elections – the aspirants) and the demands of gatekeepers. She sees these different levels as encapsulated in a causality chain: the political system shapes recruitment processes which subsequently constrain the supply and demand (Norris 1997). Recruitment processes thus occupy a central position in these studies.

As such, in order to understand any party system or political system, there is a need for more systematic studies of the processes used for selecting candidates. These endeavours might however be complicated by the intra-party nature of these processes which has earned them the qualification of 'secret garden of politics' (Gallagher and Marsh 1988). Little information is available on these processes, and often only covering the selection of candidates for national (legislative) elections. By contrast, selection processes for local, regional and all the more European elections have not received the scholarly attention they might deserve.

1.2. Candidate selection for EP elections: the preserve of national political parties

National political parties control the selection of candidates for European elections. Previous studies have suggested that the stronghold of national parties on their MEPs during the legislature (in terms of voting behavior) is due to their power in the candidate selection processes (Frech 2013; Hix 2002; 2004). The 'second-order national elections' hypothesis (Reif and Schmitt 1980) has often been interpreted in the sense that MEPs do not need to follow the preferences of their electorate because their actions, the policies they defend or oppose in the EP, the discipline to their group are unrelated to their re-election. Conversely, they have all the reasons to follow their main selectorate, the national political parties, which decide on their placement on the lists and can accordingly reward or punish them (Hix and Lord 1997; Lord 2002). It is as such relentlessly assumed that ballot access for European elections is the exclusive preserve of national parties (Hix 2002; Faas 2003; Thiem 2009), and that other actors - including political parties at European level - are excluded from these processes. Generalising slightly, recruitment at EU level has often meant that the European elite mainly comes from national elites (Delwit et *al.* 2001), although the exact pattern underlying this mechanism remains unclear. There is hence a need to display how parties select candidates for EP elections.

And there are, in particular, two reasons to pursue this research in terms of recruitment processes focusing on rules governing candidate selection at the EU level. First, although more encompassing studies exist (see in particular: Norris and Franklin 1997), the rather sporadic attempts to look into the EU legislative recruitment processes have however tended to focus on either: the political resources of candidates (Frech 2013; Navarro 2012), providing 'supply-side' explanations, or the

peculiarities of the multi-level political system, determining the 'structure of opportunities' for these recruitments. Regarding the latter, its relevance has been underlined given the absence of strict or encompassing legal regulations regarding candidate selection. In most countries, there is simply no law which establish guidelines or constrain parties in drawing-up their lists or ballots. Exceptions in Europe mainly concern Finland and Germany (Rahat 2007). Further, for EP elections there is no harmonized electoral rules. The overarching electoral system - i.e. the proportionality system with pre-ordered lists of candidates - means that the party basically decides who will be candidate and at which rank and as such largely determine their (re)election chances. Closed-lists PR systems - which are in used in most member states - further contribute to this privilege of parties, as evidenced for example in the case of the Czech parties (Linek et Outly 2006). In fact, PR closed-lists systems are even deemed to encourage centralised recruitment (Navarro 2012).

Second and by contrast, the analysis of recruitment processes (intra-party democracy and party rules) and of the attitudes of gatekeepers, producing the 'demand'-side of the causality chain have often been overlooked or unsystematically studied. Isolated studies have however shown that where centralized methods are used in national parties to select MEPs, the latter tend to defect from their EP party group lines more frequently (Faas 2002; 2003). In contrast, more decentralized candidate selection methods for EP elections allow for MEPs to act more independently from their national party, and thus more in accordance with their EP party group lines. Such decentralized methods, Hix argues, would also permit that MEPs follow the preferences of the voters and not simply of the national party leadership (Hix, 2004). In sum, the centralisation and exclusiveness of the methods may impact the cohesion of the EP groups. Political recruitment in general and candidate selection in particular have further relentlessly served as illustrations to the underdevelopment of political parties at European level (the transnational party federations). Authors have used it as a justification when arguing and agreeing that Europarties development is unimpressive and that national parties are the central actors within Europarties (Bardi 1994; Lord 2002). As such, national parties are often assumed to be unitary actors which unilaterally control ballot access for European elections, although the actual processes remain empirically unexplored.

In fact, candidate selection for European Parliament elections has not been the object of extensive research so far. Researches on candidate selection methods for European Parliament elections have so far often been limited to case studies (Buskjær Christensen 2009; Linek and Outly 2006). Although more encompassing mapping of the processes have also been conducted (Lehmann 2009), they would deserve updating in light of the 2014 elections and a more systematic comparative analysis (one limited attempt to do so is Bardi et *al*. 2010). Although not systematically collected, the existing

data points toward a certain convergence of practices between the different Member States and within each EP group (Bardi et *al.* 2010) as possible paths toward a transnationalisation of the EU party system.

In sum, at the EU level, candidate selection processes and the attitude of gatekeepers therein have been sporadically researched, not least because of the often deplored difficult access to empirical material (Hazan and Rahat 2010). This places the processes of recruitment at the EU level in a largely under-studied interface.

1.3. Political parties as gatekeepers: toward an analytical framework to the study of candidate selection for European elections
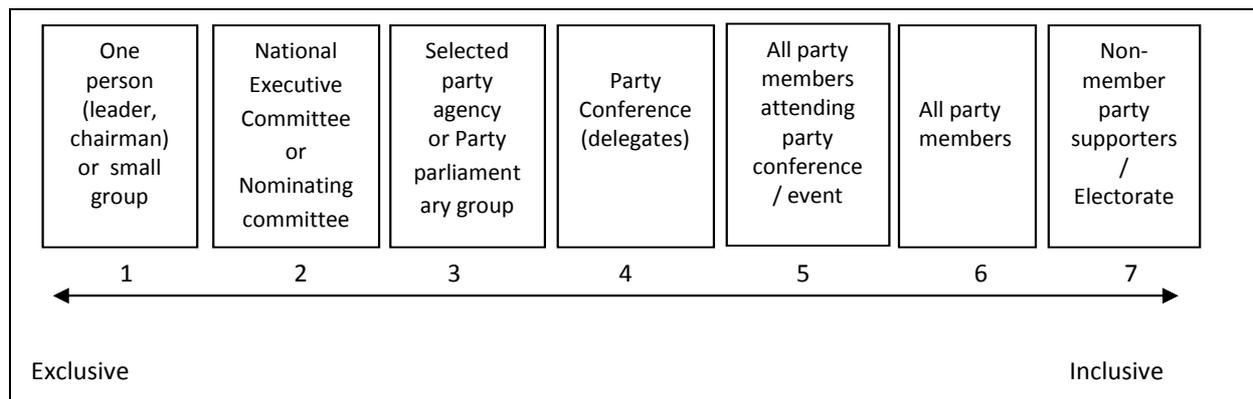
Parties are often considered as gatekeepers to elected office (Bochel and Denver 1983; Norris and Lovenduski 1995) and we have seen that EP positions are no exception to that claim. There is hence a need to assess how candidate selection processes exactly work within parties.

Gatekeepers select candidates both through formal rules and informal practices (Gallagher and Marsh 1988; Norris and Lovenduski 1995; Ramney 1981). Analyses of candidate selection procedures usually concentrate on two dimensions of these processes: the level of intra-party decision-making (the territorial or centralisation-decentralisation dimension) and the selectorate used (exclusion-inclusion dimension). It should be mentioned however that Rahat and Hazan have introduced a more encompassing framework, distinguishing four dimensions of CSM democratisation: candidates' eligibility criteria, the selectorate, decentralisation, and voting *v.* appointment systems (Rahat and Hazan 2001). Along this framework, studies have suggested that the outcome of candidate selection (who is selected) is largely determined by the degree of centralization of the selection process, discrimination by selectors and the use of affirmative action.

First, regarding eligibility criteria, the literature has already sketched some of the specificities of the profiles of candidates for European elections, although this is often done based on the MEPs than on the whole pool of candidates. Senior politicians are more likely to be offered an eligibile place (Verzichelli and Edinger 2005), political parties tend to select incumbents rather than new aspirants (Ghergina and Chiru 2010) and women (Chiva 2014; Freedman 2002). This reflects the second-order hypothesis: scholars have asserted that European elections are less attractive for high profile candidates and that there is less at stake for parties (Chiva 2014 ; Vallance and Davies 1986 ; see also : Lord 2002). Despite a mixed picture, the literature thus generally acknowledges the lower profile of EP candidates.

The second dimension of the analytical framework retained relates to the intraparty body in charge of the selection of candidates, i.e. the selectorate. In fact, research on recruitment has more often than not concentrated on the level of inclusiveness of the selectorate (Le Duc 2001; Hazan and Rahat 2010; Rahat and Hazan 2001). This appears in line with the idea that candidate and leader selection confer crucial powers within the party to the actor(s) in charge (Gallagher and Marsh 1988; Marsh 1993; Massari 2004; Hazan and Rahat 2010). Numerous studies have thus concentrated on who controls selection within political parties and how this power has evolved overtime. In that respect, the most widely used typology is that developed by Hazan and Rahat (2001; 2010): it distinguishes selectorates on basis of their degree of inclusiveness. In this typology, selectorates are ranged from the most inclusive - i.e. when all voters are eligible to take part to the selection of candidates (e.g. US primaries) - to the most exclusive - i.e. when one single person (generally the party leader) selects candidates. Between these two extremes, decisions on selection within parties may be in the hands of party members, delegates at party conferences, selected agencies or the parliamentary group, or even national executives.

Figure 1. Exclusiveness-Inclusiveness of candidate selection methods

One person (leader, chairman) or small group	National Executive Committee or Nominating committee	Selected party agency or Party parliamentary group	Party Conference (delegates)	All party members attending party conference / event	All party members	Non-member party supporters / Electorate
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Exclusive ←——————————————————————————————→ Inclusive

Source: own compilation, adapted from Kenig 2009; 2009b; Hazan and Rahat 2010

The third dimension of the analytical framework relates to decentralisation which can be functional or territorial (Lundell 2004; Rahat and Hazan 2001). However, we find only isolated rules which refer to the functional decentralisation (and only related to affiliated organisation) and hence concentrate solely on the level at which the selection is organized. This dimension distinguishes between selection processes entirely controlled by the national party organs and processes where the procedures are in the hands of decentralized branches of the party organisations. Under the 'decentralisation label' however, rules might involve multiple levels of power. It is however schematically possible to distinguish regional organs to more local ones, usually situated at the level of the national constituencies or municipalities. Regarding candidate selection for national elections, in most Western parties, cross-country comparison seem to suggest that decentralized bodies

dominated the processes (Bille 2001) with national party organs having often only a consultative role. Nevertheless, in the most recent period, several authors have identified a trend towards an increased influence of the central party organs. It appears in particular that larger parties, as well as political parties in Southern Europe, are more likely to centralize candidate selection procedures (Lundell 2004; Rahat 2007). More precisely, relying on the assumption that small parties rely more on local and district organs, Lundell expounds a relation between these parties and decentralised selection procedures. He contrasts it to the complex structure of large parties - which he finds may lead them to adopt more centralized selection procedures (Lundell 2004).

Figure 2. Decentralisation of candidate selection methods

National level	Regional level	Constituency / local level
1	2	3

Centralisation ←————————————————————————→ Decentralisation
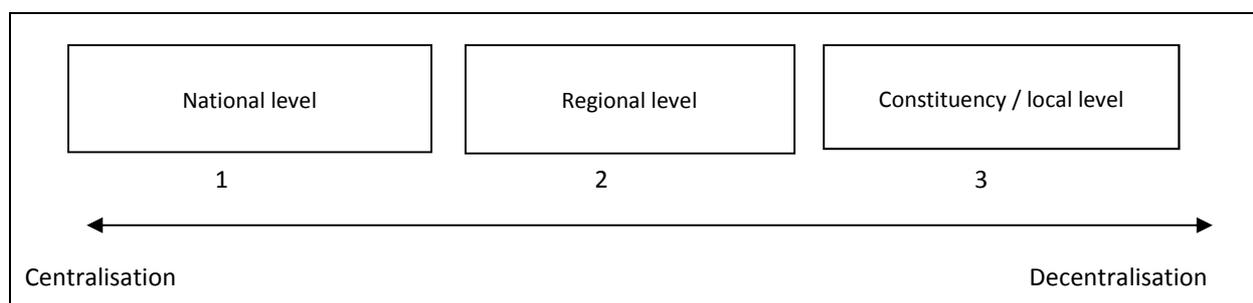
Source: own compilation, adapted from Kenig 2009 and Hazan and Rahat 2010

To complicate the picture further, selectorates and levels are often mixed, with several bodies intervening, and processes can be multi-stages. It has in fact long been suggested that the selection of candidates within a political system should be treated as process rather than a punctual decision (Rahat and Hazan 2001; Blomgren 2003: 128). For analytical purposes, these processes can be divided in different stages: from the nomination to the final decision (Rahat and Hazan 2001), and through eventual inputs. Taking into account (multiple) levels, selectorates and stages thus allows to account for the complexity of the candidate selection processes.

2. Methods and data

This paper thus looks at how EP candidates are selected within party which it considers as a necessary pre requisite to studies of party politics in the EU. To do so, it builds on different data sources that are used in a complementary manner. It should be noted that the often non-transparent nature of these intra-party processes, which has earned them the qualification of 'secret garden of politics' (Gallagher and Marsh 1988) largely constrained data collection. For 2009, data has been recoded based on the information provided by the Lehmann's report (Lehmann 2009), but the unsystematic gathering of the data greatly limited its use. For 2014, a similar report was drafted by

the *Centre d'étude de la vie politique* (CEVIPOL) on behalf of the AFCO Policy department of the EP's Directorate general for internal policies. It essentially consisted in two steps. First, information on formal rules to select candidates displayed by political parties' statutes or other documents in the 28 member states was gathered through an experts' questionnaire. Second, to obtain direct insights into the selection processes, semi-structured face-to-face interviews with MEPs were conducted, recorded and transcribed. They aimed at investigating the informal practices in candidate selection processes, and at assessing how informal practices differ from formal rules from the point of view of those who went through the processes themselves, thus better delineating the attitude of gatekeepers. However, the interviews were not mobilised directly in this paper. The sampling used for the interviews was based on the size of the national delegations, complemented by other cases selected to achieve a geographical balance. However it did not control for 'supply'-side explanations as it included successful, unsuccessful and indifferent MEPs in seeking reselection and these personal circumstances can influence the perceptions of MEPs on the candidate selection process (and especially the attitude of gatekeepers) within their party.

Hence, building on the data set thus gathered, this paper focuses on one main issue. It explores which methods in terms of party rules are used to select candidates. Using a scale developed elsewhere (Rahat and Hazan 2001), although slightly adapted (selectorates are coded on a 1 to 7 scale and decentralisation on a 1 to 3 scale – with averages being retained whenever several party actors or levels intervene in a particular stage), it provides for a cross-country and cross-party comparison. Accordingly and based solely on the formal rules, this paper ambitions to put forward patterns of candidate selection at European level.

3. Findings

The analytical framework retained is based on two main dimensions for analysing candidate selection processes: the selectorate and decentralisation, for which findings will now be put forward.

Most recent literature analysing parties from an organisational perspective underlines that the most used instrument for implementing this 'democratisation' process is the enhancement of the inclusiveness of the methods for candidate selection. In that regard, results are displayed in Table 1 and main findings illustrated in Graphs 1 to 4. They are based on the average of the several selectorates eventually intervening for each stage - e.g. if in the initial stage the leader and the PPG intervene, it has been coded 2 (to be understood as average between 1 and 3, and not strictly as NEC or nominating committee). They show, both in the step-by-step break-down and the overall

repartition (mean), that a higher number of parties use rather exclusive CSM. Furthermore, aggregating all the parties having a selectorate for each step, the mean values are of respectively 3.10 (initiative), 2.67 (input) and 2.95 (final approval). This seems to indicate that party are slightly more exclusive in the input stage while relatively more opened in the final approval and above all in the initiative stage (the overall mean being of 2.90). This can be attributed in particular to a number of parties holding votes of members as a mean of ratification of the processes or just before the actual ratification.

Table 1. The exclusiveness-inclusiveness of candidate selection methods for the 2014 EP elections

| Selectorate	Scale	Overall (N)	Mean (%)	Initiative (N)	Initiative (%)	Input (N)	Input (%)	Final approval (N)	Final approval (%)
Single leader	1	4	3,15	10	8,70	5	4,95	5	4,27
	1 to 2	21	16,54	17	14,78	16	15,84	16	13,68
Party elite	2	19	14,96	21	18,26	35	34,65	37	31,62
	2 to 3	28	22,05	9	7,83	11	10,89	6	5,13
PPG	3	6	4,72	2	1,74	5	4,95	4	3,42
	3 to 4	16	12,60	12	10,43	4	3,96	8	6,84
Delegates	4	16	12,60	22	19,13	14	13,86	21	17,95
	4 to 5	8	6,30	4	3,48	3	2,97	5	4,27
Members at conference	5	2	1,57	4	3,48	4	3,96	8	6,84
	5 to 6	3	2,36	10	8,70	4	3,96	2	1,71
All party members	6	2	1,57	2	1,74	0	0,00	5	4,27
	6 to 7	2	1,57	2	1,74	0	0,00	0	0,00
Non-member party supporters	7	0	0,00	0	0,00	0	0,00	0	0,00
	Total	127	100%	115	100%	101	100%	117	100%

Graphs 1 to 4. Candidate selection processes for EP elections: exclusiveness-inclusiveness of the selectorate
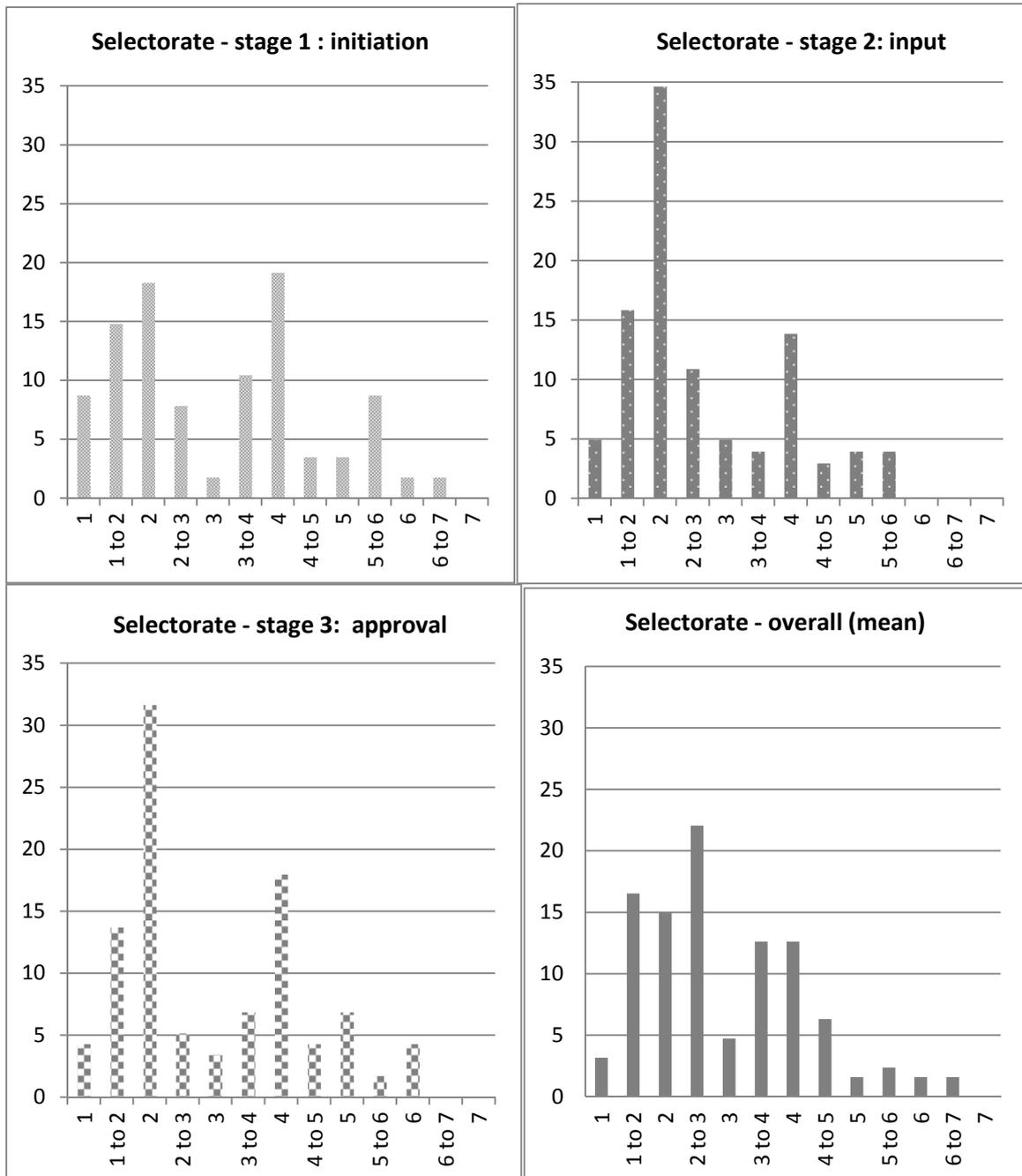

This calls for further exploring which parties use more exclusive or inclusive selection processes. Previous studies have often looked at single countries in isolation or compared parties as independent units of analyses. They never consider the possibility of having a link between the methods used to select candidates across different countries. Partly inductively and partly relying on previous works on policy diffusion – which is sometimes based on geographical proximity (Bouche and Volden 2011) or cultural ties (Simons and Elkins 2004) - and to have a better outlook of this distribution, I propose to look at possible patterns of candidate selection methods within subgroups

of Member States, as well as within European party families[1] - operationalised through parliamentary group affiliation in the EP legislature preceding the (s)election (Graphs 5 and 6).

Graph 5. Exclusiveness-Inclusiveness of the selectorate per geographical region
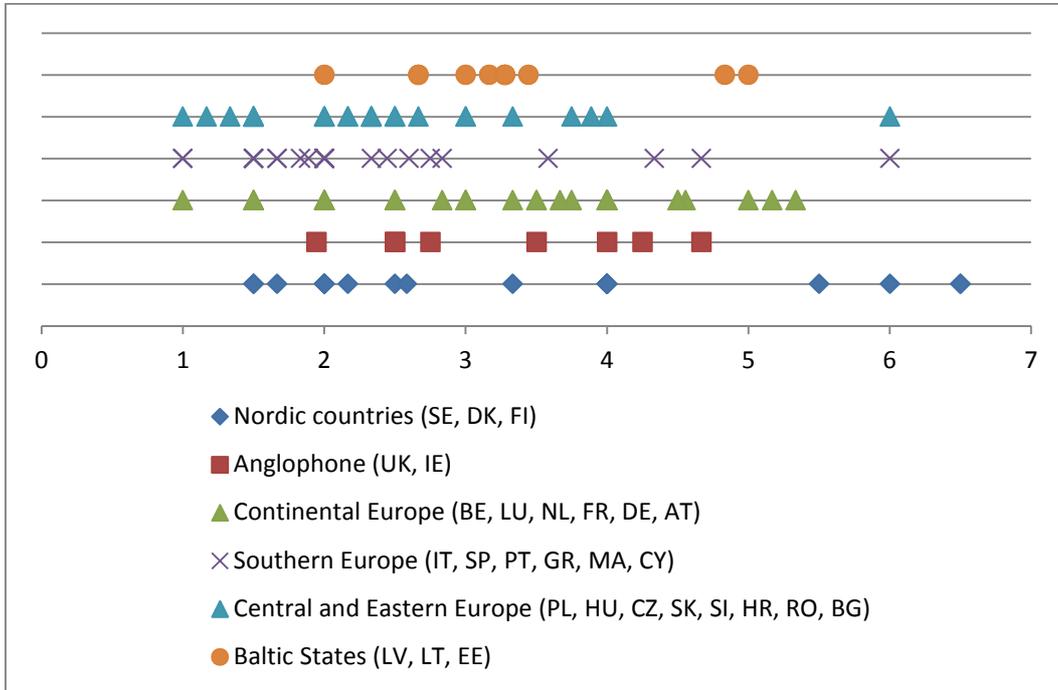
**Graph 6.** Exclusiveness-Inclusiveness of the selectorate per European parliamentary party group

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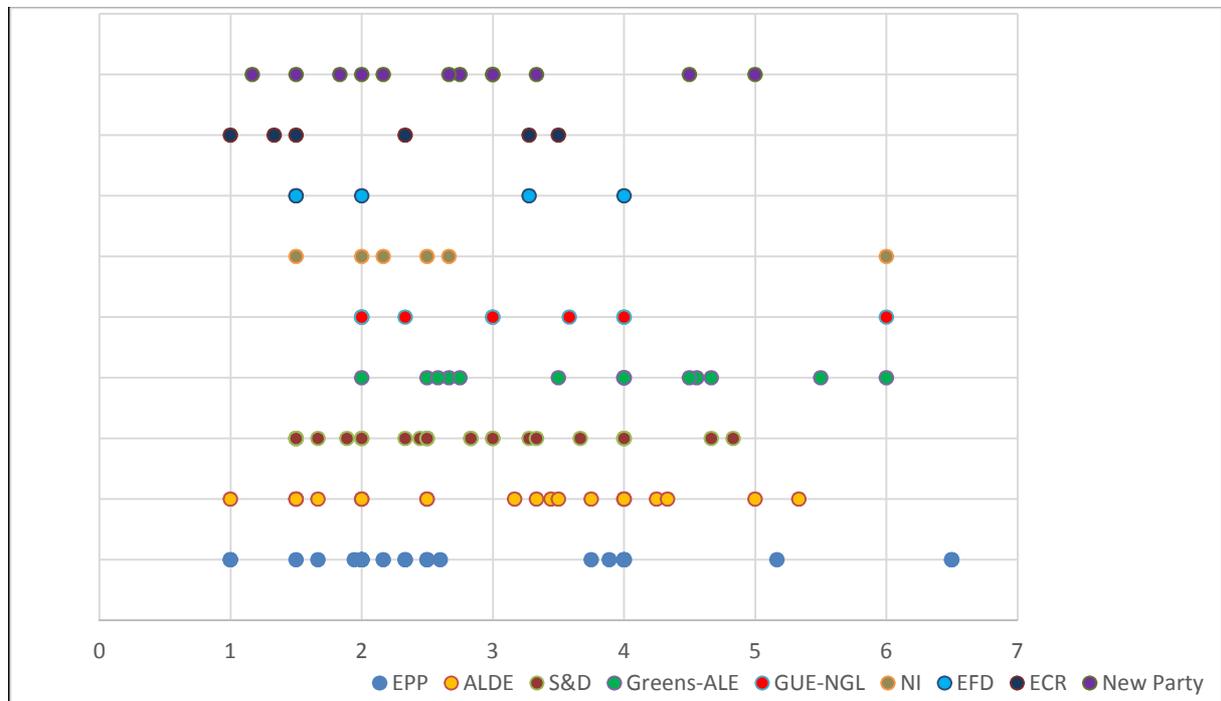
[1] Operationalised through European parliamentary group affiliation in the EP legislature preceding the (s)election.

Arguing that the other main dimension, the territorial decentralisation of CSM, might be particularly affected by the various electoral systems for EP elections (with some countries having multiple constituencies and thus a more 'regional' dimension), the analysis further investigates this promising path. The results are straight-forward: within the parties, the national level (i.e. central party organs) overwhelmingly dominates each stage of the selection processes (see: Table 2 and Graph 7).

Table 2. The territorial decentralisation of candidate selection methods for the 2014 EP elections

Decentralization	Scale	Overall (N)	Mean (%)	Initiative (N)	Initiative (%)	Input (N)	Input (%)	Final approval (N)	Final approval (%)
National	1	103	80,47	96	82,76	103	85,83	112	88,89
	1 to 2	11	8,59	1	0,86	4	3,33	3	2,38
Regional	2	6	4,69	9	7,76	6	5,00	5	3,97
	2 to 3	7	5,47	6	5,17	4	3,33	6	4,76
Constituency/ Local	3	1	0,78	4	3,45	3	2,50	0	0,00
	Total	128	100%	116	100%	120	100%	126	100%

Graph 7. Candidate selection processes for EP elections: territorial decentralisation
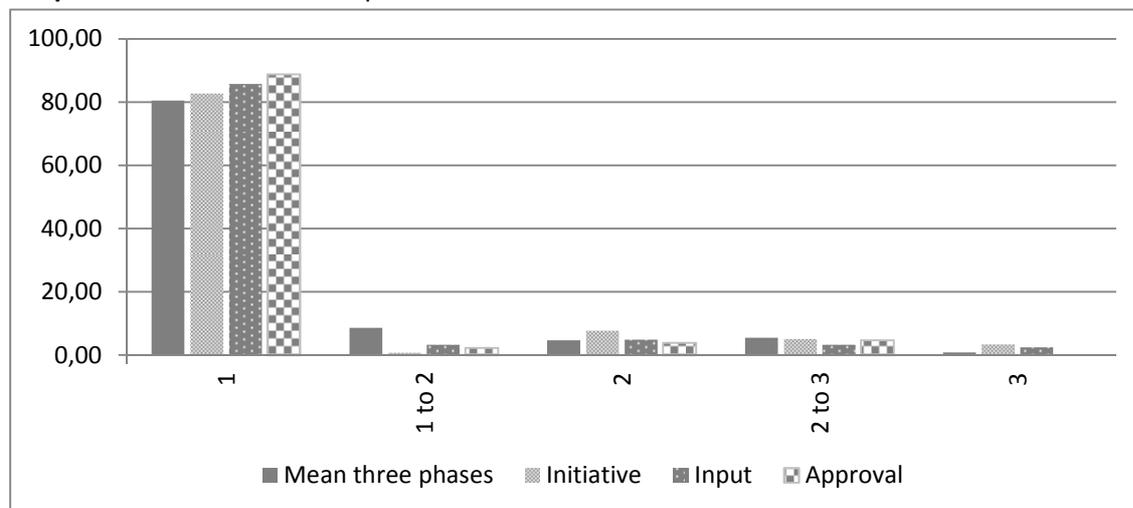
Overall, these findings highlight relatively exclusive and very centralised CSM, which appear quite in sharp contrast with Bille's findings (2001) which underlined that in most Western political parties, the traditional pattern is that decentralised bodies dominate candidate selection processes for national elections, with the national party organs only having a consultative role. However, they seem to largely confirm that the adaptation of parties to Europe is marked by a strengthening of the power of national executive elites (here: parties' executives) concomitant to an eventual loss of influence and control of the party on the ground (Poguntke *et al.* 2007).

Conclusion

The selection of candidates can sometimes prove more decisive than the subsequent election itself. The outcome of an election is not necessarily a surprise and in cases where it is predictable - for instance in the case of the so-called 'safe seats' (because of historical anchors of a party, of a downturn of the main competitor) -, the party finds itself in a situation to choose directly who will eventually hold public office. By contrast, in case where results are expected to be tight, parties can affect voters' behaviour by putting forward a specific individual. As such, understanding methods for selecting candidates is a necessary pre requisite for anyone - whether scholar or parliamentarian - who wants to look at parties, elections or political systems.

Based on an analytical framework combining considerations regarding both 'who selects' and 'at which level' within the party, this preliminary research has established the need to look beyond the often assumed unitary nature of political parties. Parties may be keeping the gates, but how so? This paper has found that candidate selection processes put in place within parties running for European elections are rather exclusive, but above all that they are extremely centralised.

This exclusiveness and centralisation of candidate selection methods suggests that the national executive or central organs of the parties retain considerable control in choosing and ranking candidates, which is to be considered in contrast with the general trend often identified in the literature of a 'democratisation' of CSM and of intra-party processes more generally. Yet, these results are based on a static analysis and no trend can be identified for these selection processes given the scarcity of data available for previous (s)elections. A striking feature is of course the inexistence of a corresponding level or party organ at the EU level: while local or regional selection processes can rely on corresponding regional or local party branches and structures, candidate selection is often used to illustrate the under-development of political parties at European level (the so-called Europarties) (Lord 2002).

Future possible research paths could consider the still largely unresolved question of whether candidate selection for EP elections is itself of a 'second-order' nature. Despite the long-standing hypothesis that European election constitute 'second-order national elections' (Reif and Schmitt 1980), the extent to which recruitment processes are themselves about EU issues, EU personalities or Europarties would deserve specific scholarly consideration.

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