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One for all or all for one: The electoral effects of personalized campaign strategies

(Short title: One for all or one for all)

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One for all or all for one: The electoral effects of personalized campaign strategies

Political candidates in multi-member district proportional systems use different campaign strategies. Scholars have studied why some candidates focus on the party and run a party-centered campaign, while others highlight their own personal profile and merits by running personalized campaigns. However, it remains unclear how these different strategies influence the electoral success of candidates, especially in the context of proportional flexible list systems. To answer this question, we asked Belgian candidates to map out their campaign strategy and linked this to their election results. We find that especially investing personal money is an important predictor of success. Moreover, we find that candidates who aim to attract attention for themselves instead of the party also score better, but this effect is contingent on a candidate's resources, list position and political party.

Keywords: Preferential votes, campaigning, personalization, elections, voting behaviour

1. Introduction

Recently, scholars have argued that the decline in party membership and the deterioration of party identifications have enhanced the role of individual politicians in the political arena (Karvonen, 2010; Mcallister, 2009; Rahat & Sheaffer, 2007). Moreover, new social media platforms have increased opportunities for personalized communication within election campaigns (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013). Although the extent to which political candidates can act independently of the party is still largely dependent on the electoral rules of a country, in many European proportional systems with multi-member districts the electoral competition is no longer solely between political parties, but also increasingly between candidates within a political party. Hence, inter-party competition is complemented with intra-party competition in which candidates strive to win preferential votes. For contesting candidates, intra-party preference votes are important for a number of reasons. First, preferential votes matter for determining which candidates get elected and thereby influence the composition of parliament. Considering that parties are not unitary actors, the composition of the party delegates influences the party's behaviour (Katz, 2003). Second, preferential votes can be seen as a politician's resource or currency in the political game. More preferential votes can help candidates in obtaining executive mandates or at least strengthen their position within the party. Therefore, even when candidates do not receive enough preference votes to get elected, if they perform well it can still be an instrument to obtain a better ballot position in the next election (André, et al., 2015; De Winter, 1988).

As a result of the higher salience of the intra-party competition, candidates have increased incentives to adopt new strategies to cultivate personal votes. This manifests itself in multiple ways. Candidates can become more active in the media and/or parliament, for instance by sending individual press-releases or initiating new bills (Bowler, 2010; Crisp, et al., 2004). However, they can also adopt a more independent campaign style. A recent strand of literature concentrates on this latter strategy and distinguishes party-centered campaigns, where candidates promote the political party, from personalized campaigns, in which candidates

accentuate their own political identity (Cross & Young, 2015; De Winter & Baudewyns, 2015; Eder, et al., 2015; Gschwend & Zittel, 2015; Selb & Lutz, 2015; Zittel & Gschwend, 2008). These studies explore under which conditions candidates are more likely to run personalized campaigns and conclude that campaign strategy is dependent on factors such as political experience (Eder et al., 2015) or the anticipated electoral outcome (Selb & Lutz, 2015).

While the question *when* political candidates run personalized campaigns received attention, the question to *what extent* personalized campaigns contribute to electoral success has mostly been neglected. Earlier empirical studies on Great-Britain conclude that candidates who campaign stronger on issues which matter in their own constituency, benefit of this (Denver, et al., 2002; Pattie, et al, 1995). Yet, constituency campaigns do not necessarily have to be personalized, as candidates may also stress the success of their party within their district. Additionally, Great-Britain is characterized by a majoritarian political system with single-member districts in which a limited number of candidates, belonging to different political parties, compete for votes. It remains unclear whether personalized campaign strategies lead to electoral benefits in complex multi-member district systems with flexible lists, where candidates not only compete with candidates from other parties, but also with candidates from their own party.

This study contributes to the literature by studying the electoral effects of personalized campaigning in the 2014 Belgian elections. Belgium is a proportional system with a flexible ballot list. The institutional context provides candidates incentives to run both party-centered campaigns and personalized campaigns, creating a trade-off and thus variation between candidates in campaign strategy. Using a large scale survey we map out the campaign strategy for each candidate and investigate whether more personalized campaigns generate more preferential votes. The results suggest that this is the case. Especially the investment of personal money is an important predictor of individual success. Moreover, we find that candidates who aim to attract attention for themselves instead of the party also score better, but this effect is

contingent on a candidate's financial resources and list position. Finally, we show that personalized campaigning matters more for candidates from traditional parties.

2. Personalized versus party-centered campaigning

2.1 Personalized campaign strategies

In multi-member district systems where an intra-party competition complements the inter-party competition, candidates have a dual aim of winning votes for their party and for themselves. Consequently, they are faced with a trade-off in deciding which campaign strategy to use. Zittel & Gschwend (2008) distinguish two types of strategies; party-centered campaigns and personalized campaigns. In *party-centered campaigns* the main goal of candidates is to maximize the share of attention for their political party, putting themselves second. Hence, candidates mostly emphasize the accomplishments and ideology of the party and focus less on their personal ideas and merits. In *personalized campaigns*, on the other hand, the aim is to attract as much attention for oneself as possible. Hence, the main focus is not on the political party, but fully on the individual candidate. Politicians can, for example, emphasize their experience and accomplishments they achieved, bring forward new issues, or ideologically differentiate oneself from the party. Of course the two campaign strategies should be seen as ideal types as in practice politicians may adopt elements of both.

For a more specific conceptualization of the two strategies we follow the framework of Gschwend & Zittel (2015) and distinguish three dimensions on which campaigns can be more personalized or party-centered: campaign *norm*, campaign *agenda*, and campaign *finance*.¹

The campaign *norm* relates to the overall goal. As stated before, candidates can maximize the attention their political party receives (party-centered campaign), or rather use their campaign to maximize attention for themselves (personalized campaign). Although both strategies can have an electoral goal, the second strategy provides more 'personal' information and could persuade voters to cast a preferential vote, as citizens prefer to vote for someone they

know and can identify with (Gshwend and Zittel, 2015). The second dimension, *campaign agenda*, is related to issues which are stressed during the campaign. In general political parties focus on a limited set of issues, aiming to make these issues the salient ones in the campaign (Budge & Farlie, 1983; Norris, et al., 1999). We expect that candidates will mostly follow their party and campaign on these core issues. However, to distinguish themselves from other candidates within the party, they can also decide to highlight issues that are important in their constituency or on which they are an expert. In any case, a campaign is more personalized if a candidate decides to highlight other issues than the political party. The final dimension is related to the *financial* aspect. When a campaign is fully party-centered candidates will rely completely on the money and existing distribution networks of the party. However, candidates can also invest their own money in the campaign. We follow Gschwend & Zittel (2015) and expect that candidates who rely less on party money and more on their own money, have more autonomy and thus more room to adopt a personalized campaign strategy.

In sum, campaigns are personalized when candidates aim to maximize their personal attention, highlight issues that do not receive attention from the party and use party-independent finances. However, these dimensions do not necessarily have to go together. Candidates can aim to maximize attention for themselves, but stick to traditional party issues. Similarly, they can stress new issues, but rely solely on party money. Thus, while the three dimensions are related and may strengthen each other, candidates do not have to score high on all dimensions simultaneously.

2.2 Variation in campaign strategies

Recent studies show that there is strong variation in campaign styles between candidates *within* an electoral system. For example, candidates' anticipation of getting elected strongly influence their campaign strategy (Eder et al., 2015; Selb & Lutz, 2015; Zittel & Gschwend, 2008). Politicians are especially likely to run personalized campaigns when they expect to have some

chances to get elected, but are not certain yet. Incumbency and a good ballot list position also make it more likely to run a personalized campaign (Eder et al., 2015) as these candidates often have more political experience to stress in their campaign. Finally, Eder et al., (2015) show that differences exist between candidates of different political parties. They argue that personalization is stronger in typical catch-all parties which are ideologically more diverse.

An additional factor, more specific to Belgium, in creating differences in the extent of personalization, and specifically personal funding, are spending caps (Weekers, et al, 2009). However, these caps are not the same for all candidates. Depending on incumbency and ballot list position, candidates can spend more or less personal money. High positioned candidates, reflecting the number of chosen seats for a party in the previous election plus one, can spend 8700 euro plus an additional 0.035 euro for each voter in the constituency. All other candidates have a limit of 5000 euro (De Winter & Baudewyns, 2015).

2.3 The electoral effects of personalized campaigning

While we have insight into why candidates choose different campaign strategies, it is unclear whether these strategies actually work. Previous research shows that spending money in campaigns matters (Johnston & Pattie, 2008; Put, et al., 2015; Samuels, 2001). However, these studies focus on the amount of money spent, but do not distinguish personalized from party-centered campaigns (Johnson, 2013; Maddens, et al., 2006). An exception is a recent study by Gschwend & Zittel (2015). They investigate candidates in the 2009 German elections and find that personalized campaigns are more effective than party-centered campaigns. This effect is especially strong for the financial and agenda dimensions. Yet, this study focuses on a single-member districts with one candidate per political party. It remains untested whether personalized campaign strategies are effective in the more complex context of a proportional system with flexible lists. Whereas in single-member district systems the party label plays an important role in the choice for a candidate, this is much less the case in multi-member districts

systems where multiple candidates run for the same party. Therefore, in order to receive votes (but also to be recognized at all), candidates have to put more effort to attract attention for themselves.

2.4 Hypotheses

We expect that candidates electorally benefit from more personalized campaigns. In particular in multi-member districts systems with many candidates competing on the same party list, candidates have to attract attention in order to be recognized and stand out from their peers. Using personalized campaign strategies could help candidates to generate name recognition for themselves, making it more likely to attract citizens' votes. Additionally, personalized campaign strategies can be used by candidates to stress their political track-record in order to convince citizens of their competence. The strategy to use a personalized campaign agenda can also be beneficial. By stressing other issues than their party, candidates can distinguish themselves from their fellow party candidates. Moreover, they can stress more local issues to attract more local votes. Finally, we also expect that personal investments generate more preferential votes. While all forms of campaign funding will be helpful in obtaining votes, we expect that the effect of personal money will be stronger than the investment of party money, as candidates who invest more personal money can run a more autonomous campaign in which there is more room to attract attention for themselves.

Hypothesis 1a: *Candidates who aim to attract more personal attention receive more preferential votes than candidates who aim to attract more attention for their political party.*

Hypothesis 1b: *Candidates who campaign on personal issues receive more preferential votes than candidates who campaign on party issues.*

Hypothesis 1c: *Candidates who invest more personal money receive more preferential votes than candidates who spend more party money.*

However, the electoral effects of the three dimensions of personalized campaigning might not work across the board. We expect differences between candidates depending on their ballot list position. High positioned candidates are given a higher profile in the advertisements of political parties and in general possess more resources, in terms of campaign money and staff (Lefevere & Dandoy, 2011). Also, they get more easily attention from the media than lower ranked candidates who are often completely ignored (Van Aelst, et al., 2008) and for that reason will be more successful in reaching their audience. Moreover, they may have a better political track-record and can therefore more easily stress personal achievements. Lower positioned candidates have less resources to spend, receive less coverage in the media and have in general a modest political track-record to highlight, making it more difficult to set up successful personalized campaign strategies which can convince citizens to vote for them. Another reason why we expect personalized campaigns to be more effective for high positioned candidates is that they are probably more strongly embedded in the inter-party competition compared to low positioned candidates, whose main competitors are mostly their fellow party members. Thus, by running personalized campaigns high positioned candidates might not only attract voters from their own party, but might also convince voters from ideological close parties to vote for them. We expect this to be less likely for low positioned candidates, who are less likely to actually make voters switch parties with a personal campaign strategy.

Hypothesis 2: *The positive effects of a personalized campaign norm, agenda and finance on individual electoral success is stronger for candidates with a higher ballot list position.*

We also expect that personal money may strengthen the effects of the other two dimensions. Candidates can try to attract attention for themselves or put new issues on the agenda, but if their campaign hardly reaches the electorate it is unlikely to have any effect. Therefore, candidates have to press leaflets, develop websites and perhaps even hire personnel to join their

campaign team. Thus, it is not sufficient to try to attract as much attention for oneself as possible, but candidates also need to possess enough resources to actually succeed in spreading their personalized message to the voters. In that sense personal money can be seen as an important prerequisite for the success of the other two dimensions.

Hypothesis 3: *The positive effects of a personalized campaign norm and agenda on individual electoral success is stronger when candidates invest more personal money.*

Finally, we expect the effectiveness of personalized campaign strategies to depend on a candidates' party. More specifically, we expect that personalized campaign strategies lead to more preferential votes for candidates of traditional parties, such as the Christian Democratic, Social Democratic and Liberal party, than for candidates belonging to niche parties, such as the Greens, Far-Right, and the Regionalist party. Previous research indicates that the electorate of traditional parties is much more likely to cast a preferential vote than citizens who vote for niche parties (André, et al., 2012), as the latter are more guided by their party's ideology. Thus, for candidates of traditional parties there is potentially more to gain from running a personalized campaign strategy. Also, these parties are more catch-all, and thus ideologically broader. This could make the intra-party competition, and thereby personalized campaign strategies, more important. Additionally, traditional parties have a stronger pool of candidates. Many of them have experience at the local or national level, making the competition between them more fierce than the competition between candidates of newer parties, who only have a few well-known politicians.

Hypothesis 4: *A personalized campaign strategy is more effective for candidates belonging to a traditional political party than for candidates belonging to a niche party.*

3. Data and method

To test the hypotheses, a survey was distributed amongst all political candidates who participated in the 2014 Belgian federal and regional elections. In Belgium, both of these elections are considered first-order elections and follow similar rules. We restricted our population to candidates who are electable in Flanders (the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium, reflecting 60% of the population), 1432 in total. 602 candidates finished our survey, and completed all relevant questions on (personal) campaigning (42%). Using Chi-square tests we examined whether our sample was representative for the whole population of candidates. We find that this is the case for almost all variables, including ballot list position and number of preferential votes. Only with regard to party belonging we notice a slight overrepresentation of candidates from the Green party and an underrepresentation of candidates from the Far-right, but we do not expect this to affect our results. The survey enables us to gather data on the candidates' personal characteristics, political experience and campaign strategies. We complement the survey data with official records on the ballot list position and the electoral score for each candidate.

Belgium is an interesting case for multiple reasons. It is a proportional parliamentary democracy with a flexible list system. This means that although political parties determine the order of the ballot list beforehand, citizens can change this order by casting preferential votes for a candidate. Unlike some other open-list systems, Belgian citizens can opt for two kinds of votes: a list vote or a preferential vote. When citizens cast a list vote they support the party and agree with the order in which candidates are presented. With a preferential vote citizens can support one or multiple candidates belonging to the same party. Preferential votes, alongside list votes, are used to determine how many seats each party receives, but also influence the composition of parliament. Candidates who receive enough preferential votes to surpass a quota get immediately elected. Other candidates can complement their pool of votes using list votes. These votes first go to the number one on the list, until (s)he has enough votes to reach the quota, then to the number two, etc. Once all list votes are distributed, the last empty seats, if still

any left, go to the remaining candidates with the most preferential votes. Because new laws introduced in the beginning of this century stipulate that instead of all list votes now only half of the list votes can be used to reach the quota, it is now more common that lower-positioned candidates get elected in the third phase. The clear distinction between list votes and party votes helps us analytically to measure preferential votes. This is often not possible in other systems (e.g. The Netherlands or Finland) where citizens are forced to vote for one person and often vote for the first candidate on the list for party-specific reasons (van Holsteyn & Andeweg, 2010).

Consequently, in Belgium, candidates have incentives to maximize votes for the party as well as their personal votes. Political parties are important as seats are divided between them and as they determine the order of the ballot lists. Thus, if a party wins more seats their candidates have more chance to get elected. Yet, at the same time preferential votes matter to change the order of the ballot list. Additionally, André et al. (2015) show that even for candidates who do not get enough preferential votes to get elected, they still matter because they influence which ballot list position a candidate will have at the next elections. Candidates thus have incentives to maximize both the share of party votes as well as their preferential votes.

To measure the electoral effect of the different campaign strategies, we use individual electoral success as dependent variable. Instead of the absolute number of preferential votes obtained by a candidate, we use a relative measure, since candidates participate in different electoral constituencies, and the district magnitude and number of voters in these constituencies strongly influence the number of preferential votes candidates receive; obtaining 2000 preferential votes in a small district with a small magnitude, will not be the same as obtaining 2000 votes in a larger district. We divide each candidate's absolute number of preferential votes by the total number of preferential votes cast in the electoral district of the candidate. We divide it by the total number of preferential votes in the district (district proportion), rather than the total number of preferential votes cast for the candidate's party in that district (list proportion), as this allows us to test the fourth hypothesis which requires interaction with party dummies.

Furthermore, if we use the list proportion we would only model the intra-party competition, but not the inter-party competition which also matters for higher positioned candidates.

We distinguish three dimensions of personalized campaigning, following the operationalization of Zittel & Gschwend (2008). The first dimension, *campaign norm*, is measured by asking candidates on a ten-point scale about campaign's main goal. More specifically candidates were asked whether they aim to attract attention for their party (0) or for themselves (10).

For the second dimension, *campaign agenda*, we asked candidates whether they focus on issues in their campaign which do not receive attention from their political party. This variable represents a dummy in which a positive answer reflects a more personalized campaign.

Finally, we operationalize *campaign finance* by concentrating on campaign funding. First, we asked candidates how much money they plan to spend on their campaign. Subsequently, we asked what percentage of this amount is funded by the party and what percentage is paid with own money. Using these questions we create two variables: *party funds* (percentage of party funds*total campaign spending) and *personal funds* (percentage of own investment*total campaign spending).² If our first hypothesis is correct then personal funds should have a stronger effect than party funds. Candidates were questioned before the elections, at the start of the campaign. This way candidates cannot adjust their answer based on their electoral success.³

As stated in the theoretical framework there are a number of factors that may influence electoral success, but also the campaign strategy candidates use. Therefore, in order to increase our internal validity we have to add a number of controls. First of all, we control for campaign intensity. In the survey candidates were presented with twelve campaign means and activities and were asked whether they plan to use it in their campaign.⁴ By counting the number of positive answers, we compose a campaign intensity index, running from 0 to 12. We also control for other factors which may influence both the adopted campaign strategy, as well as the proportion of preferential votes. Hence, we include different socio-demographic variables such as age, gender, and ethnicity (Cutler, 2002; Erzeel & Caluwaerts, 2015). Previous studies also

show that political experience influences the electoral success of candidates and their campaign strategy (Maddens et al., 2006; Thijssen, 2013; Van Holsteyn & Andeweg, 2012). For that reason we include a measure of incumbency at the local and national level, as well as ballot list position, with additional dummies for the first and last candidates on the list, who usually receive an additional electoral bonus. By controlling for incumbency and ballot list position we also account for the fact that some candidates have a higher spending cap.

We also address the option that the effects suffer from reversed causality; anticipated electoral performance may affect the strategy of a candidates. Therefore, candidates had to indicate whether they “were certain”, had a “high chance”, a “low chance” or “no chance” to get elected.⁵ We recode this into a dummy in which 0 indicates that the candidate does not expect to be elected, whereas 1 means that s/he does. Finally, to control for the fact that candidates run for different parties and in different districts we add dummies for the different districts and political parties, as well as the electoral level in which candidates participate. This way we also indirectly control for differences in district magnitudes. Appendix A depicts the descriptives for the key variables.

In the next section we present a number of regression models. First, we add the three dimensions of campaigning in the model together with different control variables. Subsequently, we add interactions terms to test the other three hypotheses. As the residuals have a non-normal distribution when running the regressions, a transformation of some variables is necessary. A Box-Cox test indicates that we should use a natural logarithmic transformation for the dependent variable and also for the two campaign spending measures and media coverage, all variables which are very skewed.

4. Results

Figure 1 shows that candidates vary strongly in their campaign goal. In general, candidates lean more towards a party-centered campaign, which is not surprising considering that parties are still the most important actors in the Belgian political system. About 20% percent of the

candidates indicate that their only goal is to maximize attention for their party. A similar percentage aims to perfectly balance the goal of maximizing party attention with the goal of maximizing their personal attention. The percentage of candidates which aims to attract attention only for themselves is very low, however about 22% of the candidates is leaning to the personalized side (score between 6 and 10). Also campaign agenda (Table 1) shows clear variation amongst candidates. Although most candidates simply follow the party, almost one out of four plans to campaign on different issues. Finally, the personal funds of candidates varies strongly around an average of 1324 euro. Yet, almost one out of four candidates does not invest any personal money, while at the same time 3% spent more than 10.000 euro.

[Figure 1]

These descriptives show that most candidates run mainly party-centered campaigns, but that there is strong variation with a majority of candidates adopting at least some elements of a personalized campaign. The subsequent question then becomes whether this variation actually matters. In Table 1 we run a number of regressions to study the electoral effects of these strategies. The first model includes the different dimensions of a personalized campaign strategy together with dummies for parties, electoral constituencies and electoral level. The model shows that candidates investing more personal money receive more preferential votes. When candidates spend 10% more personal funding on their campaign the proportion of preferential votes (in the district) increases by .4%.⁶ While this may seem small at first sight, it is actually quite substantial, as it means that the proportion of preferential votes of candidates who spend 200 euro increases by 4% over candidates who spends 100 euro. While personal funding is significant, party funding is not. We expect that this is because candidates who invest more personal money can run a more autonomous campaign, and therefore also a more substantive personalized campaign than candidates who rely more on party money. This tentative expectation gets support in an explorative analysis where we regress the extent to which candidates feel that they can run an autonomous campaign on the amount of personal money

invested. We indeed find a significant relationship (not in table). The amount of money spend might also be a proxy for a candidates' effort. More personal money points to a higher motivation of candidates. However, we did somewhat control for this alternative mechanism by adding intensity of the campaign to our model.

[Table 1]

We do not find any effects of the other dimensions. Candidates who claim to run a campaign which is more focused on themselves do not benefit from this, nor do candidates who emphasize new issues.⁷ These results hold in model 2 where we control for political and socio-demographic characteristics, the intensity of one's campaign and anticipated electoral outcome. Just as in the first model we conclude that neither campaign norm nor campaign agenda have significant positive effects, but that personal funding does matter. Thus, we find support for hypothesis 1c, but hypothesis 1a and 1b have to be rejected.⁸

[Table 2]

Our second hypothesis states that the personalized campaign strategies may only work for higher-positioned candidates. This could explain the insignificant finding of campaign norm and agenda in the first two models. To test the second hypothesis we add interaction terms between the three dimensions of personalized campaigning and ballot list position in model 3 (Table 2). The significant interaction between list position and campaign norm supports hypothesis 2. Candidate on the second position benefit more from personalized campaign strategies than candidates on the third place, etc. To get a better understanding figure 2 plots the marginal effect of the campaign norm on the proportion of preferential votes depending on list position (Brambor, et al., 2006). The figure shows that the strategy to attract attention for oneself is significant for the first four candidates on the list (about 20%), but not for candidates on the fifth position or below. The relationship is quite strong for higher-positioned candidates. For example, for candidates who take the second position on the ballot list the coefficient of

campaign norm is .019, indicating that for each increase on the campaign norm by one, the proportion of preferential votes increases with 1.9%. For candidates on the 4th position this percentage still takes a value of 1.5%. However, hypothesis two is only partially confirmed, as the interactions with campaign agenda and personal funding are insignificant. Thus, while putting attraction attention for yourself as a candidate is a successful strategy for high-ranked politicians, emphasizing different issues is not. The coefficient of personal funding is equal for all types of candidates.

[Figure 2 & 3]

In model 4 we interact personal spending with campaign norm to test our third hypothesis which stated that the strategy to attract as much attention to oneself works best if one also invests personal money. The model supports this hypothesis. We find a significant positive interaction between campaign norm and the amount of personal money invested in the campaign. In figure 3 we plot the marginal effect of the campaign norm on the proportion of preferential votes depending on personal money. The plot shows that attracting attention for oneself instead of the party is only a successful strategy if one has at least 2700 euro to spend.⁹ If one invests less money a personalized campaign is futile. About 13% of the candidates meet this condition.

Finally, we test whether there are differences between candidates from different political parties. Our expectation was that personalized campaigning are more effective for candidates from traditional parties and less for “new” parties. Model 5 shows that this is indeed the case for the finance dimension. Personalized funding is significant for candidates of Christian-Democratic, Social Democratic and Liberal parties, but not for “new” parties such as the Greens, Far Right, Regionalist and socialist party. This in line with hypothesis 4. But again, the hypothesis is only partially confirmed as no interaction effects were found for campaign norm or campaign agenda.

As stated in the method section, problems may exist with regard to endogeneity. We partly took this problem into account by controlling for a number of factors which may influence both the campaign strategy, as well as the electoral outcome and by including a measure for electoral anticipation in the model. However, as an extra test to find out whether the effect of spending personal money is not driven by the fact that candidates who expect to do well in the elections, and who ultimately also receive many preferential votes, spend more personal money, we also add an interaction between a candidate's electoral anticipation and personal spending. Problems of internal validity are strong if the results show that our effect only holds for those candidates who expect to be elected. However, model A in Table 3 shows that this is not the case as the effect of personalized campaigning also holds for candidates who do not expect to be elected. Other problems of causality may exist due to the fact that some candidates simply have more means to run a personalized campaign. In other words, the amount of money one can spend is not distributed randomly over candidates, but depend on a number of factors such as incumbency, list position and party belonging. We took this into account by controlling for these factors in model 2. Yet, differences may also exist also due to the spending cap in Belgium, which allows some candidates to spend more than others. To test the effects of these spending cap, we add a dummy indicating whether a candidate had a higher spending cap or not in model B. When we compare this model to model 2, we find very similar results, indicating that our results are not influenced by rules on spending.

[Table 3]

In Appendix B we further examine the robustness of our results. We test whether the non-normal distribution of the residuals and outlier cases with regard to electoral success and campaign spending affect our findings. In both situations the findings remain robust.

Conclusion & discussion

This study shows that it pays off for candidates to adopt a personalized campaign strategy. Candidates who run personalized campaigns receive on average more preferential votes than candidates adopting party-centered campaign strategies. In particular, the way a campaign is financed matters. Politicians who rely more on personal money, and are therefore able to run a more autonomous campaign, receive a higher bonus than politicians who rely fully on party money. However, not all personalized strategies are successful. The strategy to focus on distinct issues which the party does not put up front, does not seem to be fruitful. At least not in the short time span of a campaign. This finding is in line with literature on issue ownership that states that parties want to campaign as much as possible on issues they have acquired a reputation among the electorate (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1994). In that sense parties may not like their candidates to put forward alternative issues as this might be more beneficial for other parties or create the impression of a divided party that is not 'on message' (Norris, et al., 1999).

We also find that the electoral benefits of a personalized campaign are not similar for all candidates. In particular, politicians with high ballot list positions are successful in translating their personalized campaign into votes. We speculate that this is due to the fact that they possess more resources, both in terms of campaign organization as in terms of media attention. In most countries the media focus solely on the most popular candidates across parties, making it more likely that their personal strategy is picked up by the public and pays off in terms of preferential votes. Personalized campaign strategies may also be more effective for these candidates because they not only compete in the intra-party, but also in the inter-party competition. Next to ballot list position, the electoral impact of a personalized campaign strategy is also conditional on the personal investment of candidates. In general, personalized campaigns only lead to more preferential votes if one spends a significant amount of personal money. These financial resources are probably necessary to actually reach the electorate with a personal message. Furthermore, these personal means might be proxy that there is more at stake for the candidate and indicate that (s)he is willing to really invest a lot of time and energy in his/her campaign.

Finally, we show that effects are different for candidates of different parties. Personalized campaign strategies are more effective for candidates of traditional parties, than for candidates of niche parties. We hypothesized that this is due to the fact that traditional parties are ideologically more catch-all and have stronger candidates, making the intra-party competition more fierce and individual campaign strategies more important.

By showing that personalized campaign strategies are effective for certain candidates we have contributed to the campaign literature. We hope these findings will inspire scholars and suggest at least three pathways for future research. First, more comparative studies are necessary to address the role of the electoral system. One of the limitations of this study is that it is only conducted in the Belgian context. The Belgian electoral system provides both incentives for candidates to run a party-centered campaign and a personalized campaign. This leads to the question whether our findings will hold in relatively similar systems such as the Netherlands, Denmark and Austria, where candidates also aim to win preferential votes, but at the same time are (stronger) dependent on the party. Second, we need to get more insight into the role of personal money. In line with Gschwend & Zittel (2015), we find that this dimension of the personalized campaign strategy has the strongest effect. Yet, in this paper we are unable to uncover the exact mechanism behind it. Does personal money matter because it leads to a more autonomous campaign or is it rather a proxy for ambition? We lack the data to uncover which mechanism is actually at play, but for future research this would be fruitful to do. Third, it might be a step forward to take privatized campaigns into account. One could argue that privatization, a focus on the personal life and non-political traits of candidates, forms a relevant fourth dimension of personalized campaigning. Future research could investigate how privatization relates to the other three dimensions and how it affects the electoral success of candidates.

In sum, we conclude that personalized campaigns are effective, but mostly for candidates with high positions on the ballot list or candidates with enough resources to set up an effective personalized campaign. This means that that the strategy to cultivate personal votes, has the least effect for those candidates that could benefit from it the most. Put differently, candidates

that are ranked lower and have less campaign money to spent cannot make up for their weaker position by running a more personalized campaign. In that respect, party interests do not seem to be hampered by personal campaigning because only those candidates on top of the list profit from it. As top candidates on the list are in principle most strongly endorsed by the party leadership, the party 'still comes first', so to say.

Endnotes

1. Zittel & Gschwend label this dimension as *campaign organization*. However, as they only focus on the financial aspect we call it campaign finance.
2. In Belgium candidates have to officially declare their campaign spending. However, since these records do not distinguish party money from personal money, they are more suitable when we would study how much money candidates effectively spent in their campaign, but less useful in specifically studying personalized financing.
3. We are aware that asking candidates beforehand does not capture the fact that some candidates might spend more or less money than intended during the campaign. However, a problem of asking candidates afterwards is that those who performed less than expected may be inclined to understate the money they spent. With our measure we avoid this problem.
4. These campaign means are leaflets, cards, posters, advertisements, websites, emails, Facebook and Twitter. The activities are: contacting voters by telephone, campaigning in local associations, campaigning at markets and door-to-door visits.
5. The validity of this measure was checked by comparing it with actual results. Of the candidates who said they would certainly get elected 97% also got elected. For candidates who indicated that they had a "high chance" or a "low chance", this was respectively 68% and 3%. Of the candidates who indicated they had no chance at all no one got elected.
6. $e^{(\log(\frac{100+10}{100}))}$.041
7. We included campaign norm as a linear effect. Yet, we investigate what happens when we recode the scale in three categories; party-centered (score 0-4), in between (score 5) or personalized (6-10). Even with this specification no effect is found.
8. None of the VIF values are higher than 4, indicating that there are no problems of multicollinearity.
9. $e^{7.9}$

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Table 1: OLS regression models of electoral success(N=602).

Electoral success(log)	Model 1 b(SE)	Model 2 b(SE)
Campaign norm	.013(.01)	-.002(.01)
Campaign agenda	.022(.06)	.045(.03)
Party spending(log)	.013(.01)	-.001(.01)
Personal spending(log)	.041(.01)**	.018(.01)**
<i>Political party (Ref.=Christian democrats)</i>		
- Regionalist party	.458(.09)**	.405(.05)**
- Greens	-.719(.09)**	-.677(.06)**
- Social democrats	-.377(.09)**	-.436(.05)**
- Liberal party	-.248(.08)**	-.195(.05)**
- Far right	-1.208(.10)**	-1.248(.07)**
- Socialist party	-1.652(.10)**	-1.619(.07)**
<i>Electoral level (Ref.=Regional)</i>		
- Federal	.326(.05)**	.173(.03)**
Ballot list position		.029(.00)**
First candidate		.904(.09)**
Last candidate		.508(.07)**
Woman		.297(.03)**
Ethnic minority		.217(.06)**
Age		-.002(.00)
Local legislative mandate		.162(.04)**
Flemish parliament		.094(.06)
Federal Parliament		.174(.07)**
European parliament		.468(.19)**
Local executive mandate		-.005(.03)
Major		.103(.05)
Minister		.787(.14)**
Anticipation to get elected		.288(.05)**
Campaign intensity		.011(.01)
Districts	4 controls	4 controls
Constant	-6.130(.11)**	-5.783(.15)**
R ²	.676	.896

***p<.05;**p<.01**

Table 2: Interaction models. Controls (see model 2) are not depicted(N=602).

Electoral success(log)	Model 3 b(SE)	Model 4 b(SE)	Model 5 b(SE)
Campaign norm	.023(.01)*	-.024(.01)*	-.010(.02)
Campaign agenda	.019(.06)	.045(.05)	.093(.10)
Party spending(log)	.001(.01)	.001(.01)	.003(.02)
Personal spending(log)	.017(.01)**	.002(.01)	.049(.01)**
Ballot list position	.023(.00)**	.029(.00)**	.028(.00)**
Campaign norm*list position	-.002(.00)**		
Campaign agenda*list position	.001(.00)		
Personal spending*list position	.000(.00)		
Campaign norm*personal spending		.005(.00)**	
Campaign agenda*personal spending		.001(.01)	
<i>Political party (Ref.=Christian democrats)</i>			
- Regionalist party			.579(.14)**
- Greens			-.458(.11)**
- Social democrats			-.348(.12)**
- Liberal party			-.299(.15)*
- Far right			-1.073(.13)**
- Socialist party			-1.296(.11)**
Campaign norm*Regionalist party			.019(.02)
Campaign norm*Greens			.011(.02)
Campaign norm*Social democrats			.008(.02)
Campaign norm*Liberal party			.001(.02)
Campaign norm*Far right			.027(.02)
Campaign norm*Socialist party			-.003(.02)
Campaign agenda*Regionalist party			-.120(.14)
Campaign agenda*Greens			-.128(.12)
Campaign agenda*Social democrats			.077(.13)
Campaign agenda*Liberal party			.008(.12)
Campaign agenda*Far right			-.152(.14)
Campaign agenda*Socialist party			-.069(.14)
Personal spending*Regionalist party			-.038(.02)*
Personal spending*Greens			-.050(.02)**
Personal spending*Social democrats			-.022(.02)
Personal spending*Liberal party			.011(.02)
Personal spending*Far right			-.038(.02)*
Personal spending*Socialist party			-.101(.02)**
R ²	.897	.897	.902

*p<.05;**p<.01

Table 3: Robustness models. Controls not depicted(N=602).

	Model A b(SE)	Model B b(SE)
Campaign norm	-.001(.01)	-.003(.01)
Campaign agenda	.044(.03)	.035(.03)
Party spending (log)	-.011(.01)	-.000(.01)
Personal spending (log)	.016(.01)**	.016(.01)**
Anticipation to get elected	.223(.10)**	.183(.05)**
Personal spending (log)*anticipation	.010(.01)	
Spending cap		.283(.00)**
R ²	.896	.901

***p<.05;**p<.01**

Figure 1: Overview of the campaign goal distribution.

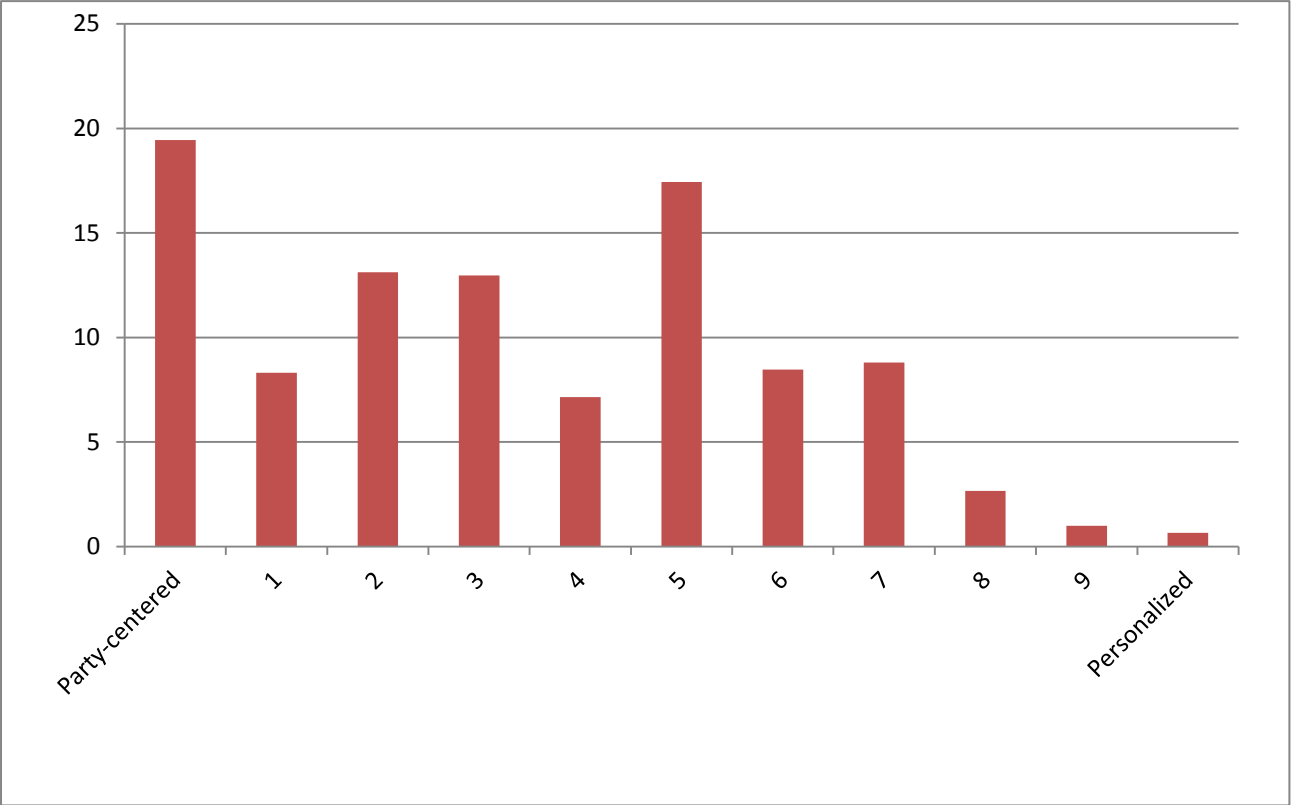


Figure 2: Overview of the interaction between campaign norm and list position

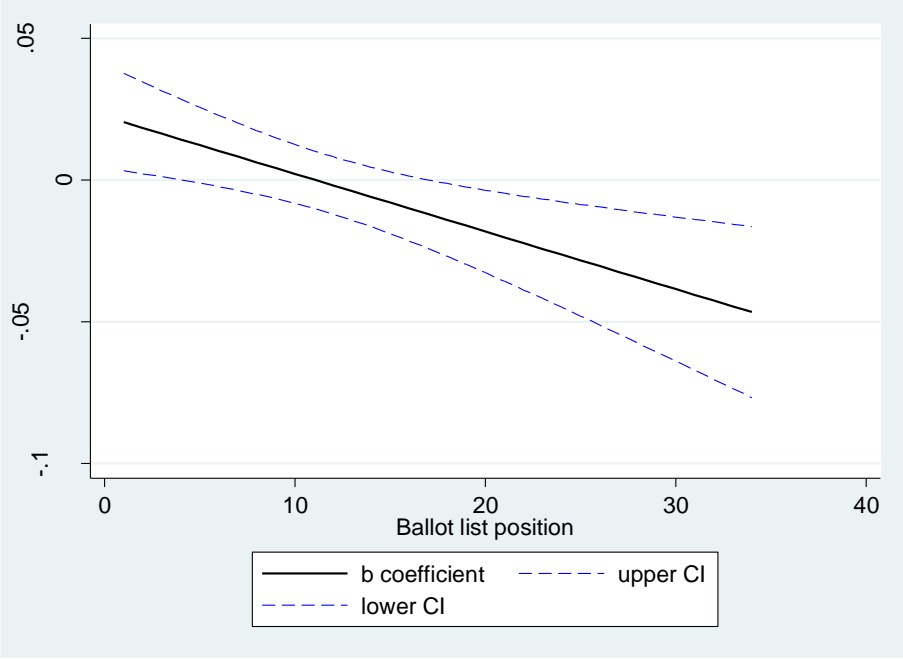


Figure 3: Overview of the interaction between campaign norm and personal spending

