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# **Gendered Patterns of Support for Maghrebian Origin Candidates in Belgium: Empirical Evidence and Theoretical Implications.**

**Abstract.** The aim of this paper is to highlight the existence of gendered patterns of support for Maghrebian origin candidates among ethnic groups and to investigate whether these patterns can be explained by voters' ethnic background and parties' supply of Maghrebian origin male and/or female candidates. We use data collected through an exit poll survey during the 2018 local elections in Belgium. The survey includes a mock ballot and a questionnaire, which allows us to make the link between demand- and supply-side factors. We find greater levels of support for Maghrebian origin male candidates than for their female counterparts among Maghrebian origin voters, while the contrary is observed among ethnic majority voters. These results are striking when they are put in perspective with supply-side considerations. When voters can choose among Maghrebian origin male and female candidates on the list, Maghrebian origin voters still prefer Maghrebian origin men, while the opposite holds for ethnic majority voters. Our findings support the assumption that voters' preferences for Maghrebian origin candidates are gendered, which can affect parties' inclusion strategies. We conclude by discussing the critical theoretical implications of our research for the representation of marginalized groups in politics.

**Keywords:** vote choice; preferential voting system; ethnic minorities; parties; Belgium, intersectionality

## **1. Introduction**

As Western societies grow increasingly diverse, ethnic minority men and women slightly but progressively enter elected assemblies. However, research suggests that ethnic minority women do not get the same chances as their male counterparts to get (s)elected across electoral systems nor across electoral districts (Hughes, 2016; Janssen et al., 2021). Regardless the rules or the districts, the presence of ethnic minority women and men in politics relies on parties' nomination in the first place, and then on voters' electoral support. So far, research has highlighted the key role of parties in shaping intersectional outcomes (Freidenvall, 2016; Mügge, 2016), but little is known about voters' preferences for ethnic minority male and female candidates. Yet, these preferences affect parties' nomination strategies and therefore diversity in politics (Dancygier, 2017). This is particularly salient in proportional representation (PR) preferential voting systems where voters can directly support individual candidates, which contributes to parties' electoral score.

The aim of this paper is to shed light on voters' role by investigating the existence of gendered patterns of support for ethnic minority candidates in a PR preferential voting system. This study is rather exploratory and aims to determine whether parties' expectations regarding voters' preferences actually reflect these preferences. More precisely, we seek to determine (1) whether such gendered patterns exist among ethnic majority and minority voters and (2) how they relate to the supply of ethnic minority male and female candidates. Our research makes several theoretical and empirical contributions. We add to the existing literature on parties' inclusion strategies by highlighting how and to what extent parties' strategic calculations echo actual patterns of voting behaviour. We discuss how and to what extent voters' demand for individual candidates can be satisfied and how and to what extent representatives are likely to descriptively and substantively represent voters. We then reflect on the meaning of representation with regard to parties' electoral considerations. Finally, our research highlights

the importance of taking an intersectional approach to the study of ethnic minority representation to account for in-group inequalities. If ethnic minority representation is on the rise in many European parliaments and local councils, chances for ethnic minority men and women to get included vary across electoral and sociodemographic contexts.

Thus far, studies examining gendered patterns of support for ethnic minority candidates have mainly been conducted in majoritarian systems (Bird et al., 2016; Philpot and Walton, 2007) and/or used experimental designs (Penney et al., 2016). Compared to real-life PR list settings, these previous studies offer only limited understanding of how both voters and candidates' gender and ethnicity influence vote choice. Experimental designs offer limited external validity since they do not account for the strict reality of the electoral context (Devroe and Wauters, 2019). Majoritarian systems present voters with a limited pool of candidates whose traits might not reflect maximal diversity, and party labels might trump ethnic or gender affinity preferences (Michelson, 2005). Our study is innovative as it relies on unique data collected through an exit poll survey during the 2018 local elections in five highly diverse municipalities in Brussels and Antwerp (Belgium). Belgian local elections constitute an interesting case to investigate voters' preferences towards ethnic minority candidates because of the features of the (strong) preferential voting system used in an ethnic diverse context. The survey included a mock ballot and a questionnaire, allowing us to link voters' traits with those of the candidate(s) they supported on the "real-life" ballot.

We start by discussing the existing literature on party selectors' and voters' gendered preferences for ethnic minority male and female candidates. Then, we present features of the Belgian local context and its relevance for our research. In the fourth section, we introduce our data and methodology. We then present our results and discuss their theoretical implications, and we conclude by highlighting the limitations of our study and suggesting possible paths for future research.

## **2. The inclusion of ethnic minority male and female candidates: the relationship between parties' supply and voters' demand**

Party selectors' decision to nominate candidates with characteristics that differ from the prototypical candidate (i.e. ethnic majority/white men) is to a large extent (but not only) influenced by electoral considerations (Zapata-Barrero 2017). Parties aim to maximize their vote share by nominating candidates who attract votes. This is notably salient in PR systems where voters can directly support individual candidates by casting preference votes that contribute to parties' electoral score. If in such systems parties can nominate a large pool of candidates, the diversity of this pool will depend to a large extent on voters' demand for non-prototypical candidates.

Voters' demand depends -among other things- on their own characteristics. The affinity voting thesis indeed suggests that voters prefer candidates with whom they share similar characteristics, like gender or ethnicity (Campbell & Heath, 2017; Goodyear-Grant & Tolley, 2019; McConnaughy et al., 2010; Teney et al., 2010). Candidates' gender and ethnicity then become important information shortcuts that voters can easily extract from the ballot itself, based on candidates' name (Thrasher et al., 2015; Valdini, 2006). Valdini (2006) argued that such shortcut is used by voters to 'extrapolate stereotypical information' from which they infer candidates' representational behaviour, ideological beliefs, and competences. These traits are particularly important in contexts where candidates face intraparty competition for their election because they allow voters to distinguish among intraparty candidates (Shugart et al. 2005). When inferences are positive (e.g. ethnic minority candidates are best to defend my own interests), they trigger voters to support candidates exhibiting these attributes. When, however, they are negative (e.g. ethnic minority candidates are incompetent), voters might be more reluctant to support these candidates.

It was shown that ethnic minority candidates receive more preference votes than their ethnic majority counterparts in districts where their ethnic group is more concentrated, which suggests an ethnic affinity effect among ethnic minority voters (Bergh & Bjørklund, 2011; Janssen, 2020; Togeby, 2008; Van der Zwan et al., 2020). Since ethnic minority voters have more leverage in districts where their ethnic group is more concentrated, their preference votes are more likely to translate into significant gains for candidates and parties (Dancygier, 2014). The sociodemographic context will thus generate incentives for parties to compete for the support of ethnic minority voters by nominating ethnic minority candidates in those districts (Farrer and Zingher, 2018).

If the sociodemographic context influences the inclusion of ethnic minorities in politics, it also determines whether these candidates will be male or female. Research indeed showed that parties follow *vote-based* inclusion strategies by nominating ethnic minority men over ethnic minority women in ethnically dense districts (Dancygier, 2017; Janssen et al., 2021). Dancygier (2017) asserted that these strategies are driven by parties' expectations regarding the preferences of the ethnic minority electorate. Ethnic minority male candidates are expected to be preferred over their female counterparts by ethnic minority voters, and thus to bring more votes (i.e. vote-based nomination strategy). Evidence of this can be found in the literature. Focusing on Muslims in Belgium, Dancygier (2017) showed that Muslim male candidates receive higher shares of preference votes than their female counterparts. Akhtar and Peace (2019) showed that Pakistani voters in the UK strongly favour Pakistani male candidates and discriminate against Pakistani women. Ethnic minority voters' preferences for male candidates might be explained by androcentrism. The latter posits that men are prototypical members of social groups and are thus more likely to exert a form of social influence and leadership on group members (Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach, 2008). These perspectives on gender roles can be

particularly strong among groups sharing traditional or patriarchal values toward women (Norris and Inglehart, 2001).

Alternatively, parties running in electoral districts where only few ethnic minority voters reside will be primarily concerned about not losing ethnic majority voters' support when including ethnic minority candidates. The different stereotypes that ethnic majority voters might hold about ethnic minority men and women offer a first explanation for party selectors' preference for ethnic minority female candidates in such contexts. Indeed, the stereotypes associated with the latter tend to be more positive than those associated with their male counterparts. Ethnic minority women's presence in politics suggests the rejection of patriarchal structures and conservative values connected to certain foreign cultures or religions that place women outside arenas of power (Murray, 2016). Hence, these candidates often symbolize positive and successful integration within society. Male minority candidates, in contrast, are often associated with negative stereotypes emphasizing societal threats such as terrorism and criminality (Celis and Erzeel, 2017). Dancygier (2017) calls this a *symbolic* inclusion strategy since parties are more concerned about including diversity on their list as a symbol of openness than about winning votes.

Voters' attitude toward the inclusion of ethnic diversity on party lists also varies according to party ideology. Therefore, the extent to which left- and right-wing parties pursue vote-based or symbolic inclusion strategies will differ. Left and center-left parties might have more incentives than right-wing ones in pursuing vote-based inclusion strategies since they are more likely to attract ethnic minority voters (Bergh and Bjørklund, 2011; Teney et al., 2010). Their ethnic majority electorate is also more likely to support ethnic minority candidates (Jacobs et al., 2002). If right-wing parties also have incentives to include ethnic minority candidates on their lists, these candidates are more likely to be discriminated against by voters

(Besco, 2018; Eelbode et al., 2013; Portmann and Stojanović, 2018). Right-wing parties might thus be more likely to opt for symbolic inclusion strategies.

Parties' inclusion strategies rely on the assumption that voters' ethnicity shapes their preference for male or female candidates within and outside their ethnic group. Whereas evidence so far primarily focused on ethnic minority voters' gendered preferences, less is known about whether parties' assumptions about ethnic majority voters' gendered preferences are accurate as well. The present study aims to contribute to the existing literature by bringing such evidence and strengthening evidence of gendered patterns of support among ethnic minority and ethnic majority voters. We build 2 hypotheses:

*H<sub>1</sub>. Ethnic minority voters are more likely to vote for ethnic minority male candidates over ethnic minority female candidates.*

*H<sub>2</sub>. Ethnic majority voters are more likely to support ethnic minority female candidates over ethnic minority male candidates.*

Inclusion strategies and their variations across parties and districts inherently support intersectionality theory by suggesting that ethnic minority male and female candidates' (dis)advantage in politics is context dependent. Black women's experience of discrimination in the US was described as a "double jeopardy" in early Black feminist theory (Beal, 1970; King, 1988). As women and Black, they were thought to endure the cumulative burden of gender and ethnic discriminations (King, 1988). But ethnic minority women experience intersecting and interdependent patterns of subordination that are more than the sum of racism and sexism (Crenshaw, 1991; Hancock, 2007; King, 1988). Taking an intersectional approach to group representation allows us to understand that not all women nor all men get access to politics (Celis and Lovenduski, 2018). Yet, perhaps contrary to what early Black feminist theorists



suggested, ethnic minority women's double minority status does not necessarily constitute a "double jeopardy" in all representational processes at all times. Celis and Erzeel (2017) notably asserted that ethnic minority women's intersectional identity allows parties to maximize diversity on their lists at minimal cost, which gives these candidates a "complementarity" advantage in the selection process.

Their double minority status might as well lead to an "intersectional invisibility" (Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach, 2008). Voters who want to support ethnic and gender diversity might pay more attention to prototypical ethnic minority and gender group members (i.e. ethnic minority men and ethnic majority women respectively) than to ethnic minority women, as non-prototypical members of both groups. However, ethnic minority women's higher presence among ethnic minority candidates could compensate for their lack of sociodemographic visibility by giving them more "electoral" visibility. The effect of parties' supply on the electoral support for ethnic minority women could be more important among (more cosmopolitan) ethnic majority voters than among ethnic minority voters. We could indeed assume that ethnic minority women are more "invisible" to the former than to voters with whom they share the same ethnic background. Based on this, we expect that:

*H<sub>3</sub>. Voters are more likely to support ethnic minority women as their proportion among ethnic minority candidates increases, and this will be more marked among ethnic majority voters.*

### **3. The Belgian local context: gender quotas, ethnic diversity, and a strong preferential voting system**

Features of the Belgian local semi-open PR system make it an ideal case to study voters' preferences toward ethnic minority candidates in connection to the supply of ethnic minority

candidates. It is a strong preferential voting system and both parties and voters play significant roles in shaping representational outcomes. Parties select their candidates and attribute them list positions. These positions play a role in candidates' electoral chances as candidates on top and bottom list positions tend to receive more preference votes than other candidates (Geys & Heyndels 2003). Voters can then cast either a list vote or as many preference votes as there are candidates on the list (i.e. flexible list system). The ballot only includes candidates' name, from which voters can derive candidates' sociodemographic traits. Candidates need to reach a minimum number of votes to get elected. Those who did not meet the required threshold based on their preference votes can benefit from the allocation of list votes. Part of these votes is allocated to the first candidate on the list who did not manage to attract enough preference votes until the threshold is reached. The allocation then follows the list order until all transferable list votes have been allocated. The remaining seats (if any) are then granted to candidates based on their personal score. The effect of preferential voting is more outspoken in local elections compared to other levels of election because the eligibility threshold is higher. List votes are therefore allocated to a few candidates only so that candidates are more dependent on their personal score for their election (Delwit, 2005). These features strengthen the importance of voters' choice in elections and intraparty competition among candidates. In doing so, they also increase the importance of candidates' gender and ethnicity as (s)election criteria for party selectors and voters (Shugart et al., 2005).

The combination of mandatory voting, the sociodemographic context, and gender quota in Belgium further influences parties' nomination strategies. The mandatory voting system requires all nationals to vote. This includes citizens (at birth or naturalized) with an ethnic minority background. As a result, the ethnic minority population constitutes a far more important electorate to attract than in non-mandatory voting systems where ethnic minorities' electoral turn-out is generally low (Fraga, 2016; Rocha et al., 2010; Whitby, 2007). This is

especially so since several reforms facilitated foreign citizens and residents' access to the Belgian citizenship in the early 2000s. These reforms notably benefited Maghrebians residents (Algerians, Moroccans, and Tunisians) who represented about 41% of the new Belgian citizens<sup>1</sup> between 2003 and 2007. Maghrebians initially arrived as guest workers through bilateral agreements in the 1960s. In the 1988 local elections, the first Moroccan origin candidate got elected in Antwerp (Bousetta and Martiniello, 2003). From then on, their political representation grew consistently across levels of elections. Nowadays, the Maghrebian origin population is the largest, most visible, and most politicized ethnic minority group in Brussels and Antwerp (Martiniello and Hily, 1998). Citizens of Maghrebian origin are an important part of the electorate that parties aim to reach by nominating Maghrebian origin candidates.

The focus of this study is restricted to Maghrebian origin candidates and voters in highly diverse municipalities in Brussels and Antwerp. For reasons elaborated upon in the next section, the municipalities under examination are Antwerp in Flanders, and Brussels, Jette, Molenbeek-Saint-Jean and Saint-Josse-ten-Noode in the Brussels region. Table 1 shows that all these municipalities are majority-minority districts, meaning that more than 50% of the populations had foreign (i.e. non-Belgian) origins in 2018. When restricting the figures to those of non-EU descent, three out of five municipalities can still be considered as majority-minority districts. The third column (Table 1) shows the percentage of citizens of Turkish or Maghrebian origin, who constitute the biggest ethnic minority groups in each of these municipalities. Their size ranges from 17.6% in Antwerp to 46.60% in Molenbeek-Saint-Jean. The important size of the ethnic minority electorate and the presence of cosmopolitan ethnic majority voters in these districts lead to high levels of ethnic minority representation. For instance, after the 2018 local elections, about 27% of the elected councillors in Brussels and 25% in Antwerp had an ethnic

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Belgian statistical office. <https://statbel.fgov.be>

minority (non-European) background. These figures are significantly higher than the average percentage of non-European elected councillors across all Flemish municipalities (3.1%<sup>2</sup>) (own data).

[INSERT TABLE 1 HERE]

Finally, parties must comply with existing gender quota regulations. The latter stipulate that (1) the difference between the number of male and female candidates on a single list cannot exceed one, and (2) the first two list positions cannot be occupied by same-sex candidates. Since 2018, these regulations have been reinforced by the introduction of the zipper rule in local elections in two regions, Brussels and Wallonia, but not in Flanders, the third region. This rule requires that all party lists adopt alternating list positions for male and female candidates. The nomination of female candidates is therefore a requirement for parties.

Considering the sociodemographic context in Brussels and Antwerp, ethnic minority candidates are expected to represent an important proportion among candidates. But with the gender quota, it is also likely that a proportion of these candidates will be women. As Reynolds (2006) suggested, the presence of gender quota in a multicultural context is likely to reinforce ethnic minority women's "complementarity advantage" in the list composition process, particularly when list placement mandates are enforced. Janssen et al. (2021) showed that it is indeed the case on visible list positions in Brussels. Their inclusion allows parties to maximize diversity on these positions while preserving ethnic majority men's advantage (Celis and Erzeel, 2017; Janssen et al., 2021). Ethnic minority women might thus acquire more visibility

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<sup>2</sup> Percentage restricted to candidate lists affiliated with a national party and cartel lists (local lists excluded).

than ethnic majority women and ethnic minority men. As party lists are extremely long in Brussels and Antwerp<sup>3</sup>, this visibility might be crucial to get voters' support.

## **4. Methodology and data**

### **4.1. The exit poll survey**

The data used in this paper were collected through an exit poll survey conducted during the 2018 local elections in Belgium. The survey took place in 46 municipalities across the country and adopted a systematic design. Every fifth voter exiting the ballot station on election day was invited to fill in a mock ballot and a questionnaire about her personal characteristics and attitudes toward politics. The combination of the ballot and the questionnaire enables us to link voters' individual characteristics to those of the candidate(s) they supported. The data used in this paper focus more specifically on 5 highly diverse municipalities (Antwerp, Brussels, Jette, Molenbeek-Saint-Jean, and Saint-Josse-ten-Noode) that were oversampled in order to maximize the representation of ethnic minority voters among the respondents. We furthermore invested in diversity among our pollsters to obtain a higher response rate among minority groups in these municipalities. This resulted in a general database including 1.352 respondents across these municipalities, with a response rate of 51%.

### **4.2. Case selection**

Among the respondents who disclosed their origin (N = 1.212), 49.5% reported being of non-Belgian descent, 35% of whom originated from a Maghrebian country (Tunisia, Algeria, or Morocco). We focus our empirical research on this particular group to distinguish among voters

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<sup>3</sup> There are 32 candidates on average on party lists in Antwerp, Brussels, Jette, Molenbeek-Saint-Jean, and Saint-Josse-ten-Noode (the municipalities included in our dataset).

based on their ethnic background (i.e. Maghrebian origin or ethnic majority). Hence, we also focus on voters' choice for Maghrebian origin male and/or female candidates. We describe the operationalization of these variables in the next subsection. The focus on one ethnic minority group allows us to make assumptions about our results considering the larger number of respondents (N) within this category.

To analyze voters' preferences for Maghrebian origin male and/or female candidates, we further make two choices. First, we only look at voters who cast (1) at least one preference vote (N=817), (2) for at least one Maghrebian origin candidate (N=213). Then, we focus on lists that included at least one Maghrebian origin candidate. Of the 51 party lists represented in the general database, 37 included at least one Maghrebian origin candidate. We categorized party lists by manually coding the ethnic background of all candidates running in the five municipalities under study. Maghrebian origin candidates have been identified by looking for information on candidates' origin using online news websites, official party and individual websites, and social media accounts. Otherwise, we used name recognition.<sup>4</sup> As a result, about 12% of the candidates running in these 5 municipalities were identified as having a Maghrebian background.

### **4.3. Data description**

#### **4.3.1. Supply-side**

The first part of our analysis focuses on the supply-side. We examine whether party lists included Maghrebian origin candidates and if so, what is the gender ratio among them. The gender ratio measures the proportion of female Maghrebian origin candidates among Maghrebian origin candidates on the list, so that:

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<sup>4</sup> We used the genealogy portal 'Forebears' (<http://forebears.co.uk>) to identify the origin of candidates' surname.

$$\text{Gender ratio} = \frac{\# \text{ Maghrebian origin female candidates}}{\# \text{ Maghrebian origin candidates}}.$$

A ratio of 0 means that there are no Maghrebian origin woman on the list, and a ratio of 1 means that all Maghrebian origin candidates running on the list are women. The higher the number, the higher the proportion of Maghrebian origin women in relation to their male counterparts on the list. A value of .5 means perfect gender balance among Maghrebian origin candidates. We also take a more detailed look at the gender ratio according to parties' ideology.

#### **4.3.2. Demand-side**

In the second part of the analysis, we look at the preference votes cast by voters. To start, we categorized voters based on their ethnic background. This information is derived from the questionnaire in which the respondents were asked to indicate their own nationality at birth, and their mother and father's nationality at birth. We then created 3 categories: ethnic majority voters (i.e. voters who indicated that they and their parents were born with the Belgian citizenship), Maghrebian origin voters (i.e. voters who indicated that they and/or their parents have a Tunisian, Algerian, or Moroccan background) and other ethnic minority voters (i.e. voters who indicated that they and/or their parents have a non Maghrebian foreign background). In line with our research question, we investigate two aspects of voters' behaviour. First, we distinguish between voters who supported at least one Maghrebian origin candidate and those who did not. Second, we analyse whether voters who supported Maghrebian origin candidate(s) supported male or female candidates only, or both.

#### **4.3.3. Supply and demand**

In the last part of the analysis, we run two multivariate analyses to predict voters' support for at least one Maghrebian origin female candidate (outcome variable). Our aim is to determine to what extent parties' supply of male and/or female Maghrebian origin candidates influences voters' choice. Our two independent variables are voters' ethnicity and the gender ratio of

Maghrebian origin candidates on the list. We also control for a set of variables. In order to reduce the complexity of our models, we followed a step-wise approach testing the effect of several control variables. Ultimately, we only include variables that appear to significantly improve our models<sup>5</sup>. To start, we control for voters' gender, their level of education (higher education or not) and the number of preference votes they cast. The latter is included because we expect that the more preference votes voters cast individually, the more likely it is that they vote for both male and female candidates. Fixed-effects for the two regions, Flanders and Brussels, were also included.

## **5. Patterns of gendered support for Maghrebian origin candidates**

### **5.1. Gender ratio among Maghrebian origin candidates**

We first analyse the inclusion of ethnic minority male and/or female candidates on party lists. Figure 1 displays the distribution of lists that include at least one Maghrebian origin candidate (N=37) based on the gender ratio among these candidates. Of the 37 lists, 9 presented only male (N=3) or female (N=6) Maghrebian origin candidates, which accounts for a gender ratio of respectively 0 and 1 on the graph. Interestingly, these results suggest that, when fielding only one candidate with a Maghrebian origin background on their list, parties tend to opt for a female rather than male candidate. It could be a sign of symbolic inclusion: the nomination of a female candidate makes it less risky to include diversity and allows parties to maximize ethnic majority men's advantage on the list. Despite this, there are more lists on which Maghrebian origin male candidates outnumber their female counterparts than lists on which they do not. 7 lists out of the 37 show a perfect gender balance among Maghrebian origin candidates, while 17 and 13

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<sup>5</sup> Based on this, the categorical variable "age" (18-34, 45-54, 55-64, 65+) and the ideological self-position on a Likert scale ranging from 0 (left) to 10 (right) were excluded.



lists have respectively more male and more female candidates. These results suggest that parties' considerations are more complex than pursuing one inclusion strategy or the other, and might be affected by the gender quota requirements.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]

We now look more closely at whether the gender ratio differs according to party ideology. Figure 2 shows that, except for the far right, all party families have included Maghrebian origin candidates on some or all lists. The far left, socialist and Christian democratic parties are known to compete for the ethnic vote in Belgium (Gaasendam, 2022). Interestingly, they consistently field both Maghrebian origin male and female candidates on all lists. Other party families have presented some lists on which no Maghrebian origin candidates were running. Then, while Green, regionalist, and local lists presented lists with either Maghrebian origin male or female candidates and both, liberals never fielded Maghrebian origin male candidates only. This might be in line with the idea that fielding Maghrebian origin male candidates might be riskier for rightist parties than for leftist ones.

[INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE]

## **5.2. Voters' preference for Maghrebian origin male and/or female candidates**

The second part of our analyses focuses on demand-side factors: which voters support (which) Maghrebian origin candidates? To start, our data show evidence of an ethnic vote among Maghrebian origin voters. As shown in Table 2, more than half (55.6%) of the Maghrebian

origin voters cast at least one preference vote for a Maghrebian origin candidate, compared to 18.7% of ethnic majority voters. Then, we analyse whether Maghrebian origin and ethnic majority voters' support for Maghrebian origin candidates is gendered. Results displayed in Table 3 indicate that ethnic majority voters more often exclusively support Maghrebian origin women (49%) compared to their Maghrebian origin counterparts (33%), whereas a higher proportion of Maghrebian origin voters (50%) compared to ethnic majority voters (34%) supports Maghrebian origin male candidates only. We do not see important differences among ethnic groups regarding the support for both Maghrebian origin men and women. These results suggest that voters' support for Maghrebian origin male and female candidates varies with voters' ethnic background: Maghrebian origin voters are more likely to vote for Maghrebian origin male candidates over Maghrebian origin female candidates, while the contrary is true among ethnic majority voters. These findings support our hypotheses  $H_1$  and  $H_2$ .

[INSERT TABLE 2 HERE]

[INSERT TABLE 3 HERE]

### **5.3. The interaction between supply and demand**

We now analyse whether and how the gender ratio among Maghrebian origin candidates affects the relationship between voters' ethnicity and support for Maghrebian origin male and/or female candidates. We start by analysing ethnic majority and minority voters' support for male and/or female Maghrebian origin candidates on lists with only male or female candidates and lists with both. Results presented in Table 4 show that of the Maghrebian origin voters who voted exclusively for Maghrebian origin men, 92% could have supported Maghrebian origin women as well since they chose lists where both gender were represented. Then, among ethnic

majority voters who supported Maghrebian origin women exclusively, 83% could have voted for men as well. These results suggest that voters' exclusive support for Maghrebian origin men and women is not directly constrained by parties' supply.

[INSERT TABLE 4 HERE]

Nonetheless, voters' support for these candidates can be indirectly influenced by the proportion in which they are represented, i.e. the gender ratio. Our third hypothesis suggests that a gender ratio above .5 (more Maghrebian origin female than male candidates) stimulates voters' support for Maghrebian origin women. We conduct multivariate analyses to verify these expectations. Results of two different models are displayed in Table 5. Our dependent variable is voters' choice for at least one Maghrebian origin woman (see section 4.3.3 for a description of other variables). The first model presents the direct effect of the independent variables on the outcome variable. An interaction effect between our main independent variables is tested in the second model. We insist on the fact that these results should be interpreted with caution considering they are based on a limited number of observations.

Results displayed in Table 5 show that the gender ratio among Maghrebian origin candidates are a significant predictor of voters' support for at least one Maghrebian origin woman. We also notice that being a woman as well as having a higher education background are significantly correlated with the outcome variable. Our results further show that the more preference votes cast by voters, the more likely it is that at least one of these votes is for a Maghrebian origin woman. These variables are statistically significant in both models. Results of the interaction terms (voters' ethnicity and gender ratio) included in the second model indicate that the probability for Maghrebian origin voters to support at least one Maghrebian

origin woman does not increase as the gender ratio among Maghrebian origin candidates gets higher.

[INSERT TABLE 5 HERE]

The marginal effects of the interaction are graphically displayed in Figure 3. The latter shows that the gender ratio among Maghrebian origin candidates influences ethnic majority voters' choice for Maghrebian origin women: the higher the gender imbalance in favour of Maghrebian origin women, the more likely it is that ethnic majority voters support them. We, however, do not see any variations among Maghrebian origin voters. Figure 3 suggests that Maghrebian origin voters are willing to support Maghrebian origin women even when they are present in lower numbers compared to their male counterparts, but it does not vary as the gender ratio increases. Our third hypothesis is thus partially verified since ethnic majority voters are more likely to support Maghrebian origin women as their proportion on party lists increases, but this is not verified among Maghrebian origin voters.

[INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE]

## **6. Discussion**

Departing from an intersectional approach on voters' choice, our findings show that Maghrebian origin voters prefer Maghrebian origin men whereas ethnic majority voters prefer Maghrebian origin women. This is so even when voters are given the possibility to support both Maghrebian origin male and female candidates on the list. If our results indicate that ethnic

majority and Maghrebian origin voters' preferences for Maghrebian origin candidates are gendered, we cannot conclude that one voter group or the other directly discriminate against Maghrebian origin male or female candidates. Indeed, we still find relative support among Maghrebian origin male or female candidates. Indeed, we still find relative support among Maghrebian origin voters and ethnic majority voters for Maghrebian origin female candidates and Maghrebian origin male candidates respectively. Our research nonetheless complements previous studies on ethnic affinity voting by showing the existence of gendered preferences within and across ethnic groups. Overall, these findings “validate” the expectations regarding voters' preferences that underlie parties' inclusion strategies, as suggested by Dancygier (2017). In doing so, they shed light on the role of intersectionality and the contextual nature of the (dis)advantage experienced by ethnic minority male and female candidates.

Much as we know that ethnic minority women might experience a complementarity advantage on their male and ethnic majority counterparts in the list composition process in some contexts (Celis and Erzeel, 2017), their double minority status seems also to constitute an advantage on their male counterparts in the election process in districts where their ethnic group is less concentrated. Hence, our findings show that the disadvantages associated with marginalized identities (here, having a Maghrebian background and being a woman) do not necessarily add up. Indeed, Maghrebian origin female candidates do not experience a double disadvantage compared to their male and ethnic majority counterparts because of their double minority status: they do not consistently get discriminated against by voters, and they might get preferred by parties over their male counterparts. The disadvantage experienced by intersectional identity groups, including ethnic majority men, is context dependent. In this regard, our results could differ if the study were to be conducted in another country or another city, or in the same context but on a different ethnic minority group. If this study was one of the first to empirically test the intersectional dynamics of preferential voting for ethnic minority

male and female candidates (but see also Gershon and Lavariega Monforti, 2021), much remains thus to investigate.

We should nonetheless reflect on the notion of (dis)advantage. Surely, Maghrebian origin female candidates do not consistently get discriminated against by voters, *but* they are more likely to be supported by voters outside their own community than by voters with whom they share their ethnic background. They might outnumber their male counterparts on party lists, *but* this is mainly so in districts where their own ethnic group is less present (Dancygier, 2017; Janssen et al., 2021). Similarly, Celis and Erzeel (2017) asserted that ethnic minority female candidates can experience a complementarity advantage on top list positions, *but* these candidates are chosen because their profile does not threaten the power bases of white, male incumbents. Hence, ethnic minority female candidates get elected and selected but their inclusion relies on considerations related to the ethnic majority electorate, and more generally, on existing power dynamics that parties aim to (re)produce. This has implications for the substantive representation of ethnic minority men and women. If ethnic minority female candidates' profile usually intends to signal positive integration in the host society, these candidates might be less connected to more marginalized layers of their ethnic group. The same is true for ethnic minority male candidates as ethnic minority voters might perceive prominent male figures with strong ties to religious or organizational structures within their community to be better equipped to defend their interests (Akhtar and Peace, 2019; Dancygier, 2017). These candidates might then be less connected to less conservative parts of their community. But then maybe, also, we -as researchers- should rethink our notion of "community" as an essentializing concept.

Additionally, our results reveal that most parties opted to include both Maghrebian origin men and women on their list, despite the ethnically diverse context. While Dancygier (2017) linked symbolic and vote-based inclusion strategies to candidates' gender and the

sociodemographic context, our findings indicate that parties' considerations are more complex and that both the institutional and sociodemographic context influence their strategies. It would therefore be interesting to pay attention to the profile of ethnic minority male and female candidates (in terms of e.g., incumbency or organizational membership) to understand whether it varies across contexts and how it relates to one or the other inclusion strategy (if it does so). More precisely, when parties nominate Maghrebian origin female candidates in ethnically dense districts, to what extent does their profile fit to the perspective of a "symbolic" inclusion strategy? Can these candidates be considered as "examples" of positive integration? These questions need to be answered to provide a better understanding of parties' nomination strategies and to contribute to our considerations on the substantive representation of ethnic minority groups.

Finally, our study shows that the supply of Maghrebian origin female candidates played a role in predicting ethnic majority voters' support for these candidates: the higher the proportion of Maghrebian origin women among Maghrebian origin candidates, the more likely ethnic majority voters support them. These findings highlight the crucial role of parties in shaping diversity within elected assemblies. As we asserted earlier, the representation of a diverse set of interests and identities relies on parties selecting a diverse pool of candidates. As parties make Maghrebian origin female candidates more present on the list and, therefore, more visible, ethnic majority voters tend to notify and support them to a greater extent.

## **7. Conclusion**

The objective of our research was to investigate the existence of gendered patterns of voting for Maghrebian origin candidates among ethnic majority and minority voters. Our results allowed us to confirm our two hypotheses that ethnic majority voters are more likely to support

Maghrebian origin female candidates, and that Maghrebian origin voters are more likely to support Maghrebian origin male candidates. Our third hypothesis suggested that voters are more likely to support Maghrebian origin female candidates as their proportion among Maghrebian origin candidates increases. This was verified among ethnic majority voters, but not among their Maghrebian origin counterparts.

Our research makes several contributions to the existing literature. It highlights the need to examine supply and demand factors together to better understand ethnic minority male and female candidates' electoral success. In doing so, this study provides empirical evidence that intersectional representation is not solely shaped by parties or voters, but by their intertwined roles. We also contribute to the literature on intersectionality by providing a deeper understanding of how ethnic minority male and female candidates' opportunities for inclusion are context dependent. We show how ethnic majority and minority voters' preferences for Maghrebian origin candidates are gendered, and we discuss the implications of these patterns for parties' nomination strategies and candidates' substantive representation.

Our research has some limitations. First, we only focused on *one* ethnic minority group of candidates and voters, that is, those with a Maghrebian background. This choice is relevant, since Maghrebian origin citizens constitute the most numerous ethnic minority group in Antwerp and in the Brussels municipalities under study here. Yet, methodologically, this choice reduces the number of respondents included in the 'ethnic minority' category. Theoretically, this does not account for supply and demand factors related to other ethnic minority groups. For instance, we did not consider the possibility of a cross-ethnic voting from other ethnic minority voters, nor the possibility of different patterns of voting behaviour among other ethnic minority groups. Group-level characteristics, such as group-based resources and cultural or religious traits, are essential to understand supply- and demand-side factors when it comes to ethnic minority groups. As we discussed earlier, results might thus differ when considering



another ethnic minority group in Antwerp or Brussels, or even Maghrebian origin voters in other local contexts. Moreover, ethnic majority voters' behaviour toward other ethnic minority, non-Maghrebian male and female candidates could differ as well from the gendered patterns highlighted in this research. These shortcomings are mainly due to limitations related to the dataset (notably lower proportions of other ethnic minority, non-Maghrebian voters and candidates).

Second, we are also aware that Antwerp and the Brussels region are particular cases in Belgium due to their sociodemographic context and the visibility of Maghrebian origin representatives in politics. However, we assert that the combination of the local electoral system and sociodemographic context makes them ideal cases to show how both candidates' ethnicity and gender shape voters' choice in a context where voters have the possibility to mark intraparty preference(s) among a large and diverse pool of candidates. This research thus brings strong evidence of gendered patterns of voting behaviour in a "real-life" PR setting, in a context where ethnicity is strongly politicized and where men and women are (almost) equally represented on every party list.

To conclude, this study calls for future research to address gendered patterns of voters' preferences for Maghrebian origin and other minority candidates in other contexts and/or focusing on other ethnic minority groups in similar contexts. Scholars also need to dig deeper into the motivation for voters to support ethnic minority male and/or female candidates, and into the profile of candidates selected by parties across sociodemographic contexts.

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**Table 1.** Size of the ethnic minority population (2018) per municipality (%).

Municipality	Population of foreign origin	Population of non-EU origin	Population of Turkish/Maghrebi origin
Antwerp	50.36	35.49	17.60
Brussels	79.70	53.98	32.58
Jette	66.73	45.25	25.07
Molenbeek-Saint-Jean	83.55	65.80	46.60
Saint-Josse-ten-Noode	90.26	63.37	42.04

Note: Figures derived from Statistiek Vlaanderen (2020). Classification based on the nationality of residents by birth and their parents' nationality by birth.



**Table 2.** Electoral support for Maghrebian origin candidates, according to voters' ethnicity. N (%).

Voters' ethnicity	Voted for at least one Maghrebian origin		
	candidate		Total
	Yes	No	
Maghrebian origin	99 (55.6)	79 (44.4)	178 (100.0)
Ethnic majority	72 (18.7)	313 (81.3)	385 (100.0)
Other ethnic minority	42 (16.5)	212 (83.5)	254 (100.0)
Total	213 (26.1)	604 (73.9)	817 (100.0)

Note: Percentages are row percentages. Only voters who cast at least one preference vote are considered.

**Table 3.** Gendered support for Maghrebian origin candidates, according to voters' ethnicity. N (%).

Voters' ethnicity	Voted for Maghrebian origin candidates			Total
	Men only	Both men and women	Women only	
Maghrebian origin	49 (49.5)	16 (16.2)	34 (34.3)	99 (100.0)
Ethnic majority	24 (33.3)	13 (18.1)	35 (48.6)	72 (100.0)
Other ethnic minority	19 (45.2)	8 (19.1)	15 (35.7)	42 (100.0)
Total	92 (43.2)	37 (17.4)	84 (39.4)	213 (100.0)

Note: Percentages are row percentages.

**Table 4.** Electoral support for Maghrebian origin male and female candidates, according to voters' ethnicity and the presence of Maghrebian origin male and female candidates on the list of their choice. (%)

Voters' ethnicity	Presence of Mag. origin men and women on list	Voted for at least one Maghrebian origin candidate			Total support for lists
		Men only	Both men and women	Women only	
Maghrebian origin	Men only	4 (8.2)	n/a	n/a	4 (4.0)
	Both	45 (91.8)	16 (100.0)	30 (88.2)	91 (92.0)
	Women only	n/a	n/a	4 (11.8)	4 (4.0)
	Total	49 (100.0)	16 (100.0)	34 (100.0)	99 (100.0)
Ethnic majority	Men only	1 (4.2)	n/a	n/a	1 (1.4)
	Both	23 (95.8)	13 (100.0)	29 (82.8)	65 (90.3)
	Women only	n/a	n/a	6 (17.1)	6 (8.3)
	Total	24 (100.0)	13 (100.0)	35 (100.0)	72 (100.0)
Other ethnic minority	Men only	4 (21.1)	n/a	n/a	4 (9.5)
	Both	15 (78.9)	8 (100.0)	12 (80.0)	35 (83.3)
	Women only	n/a	n/a	3 (20.0)	3 (7.1)
	Total	19 (100.0)	8 (100.0)	15 (100.0)	42 (100.0)
Total	Men only	9 (9.8)	n/a	n/a	9 (4.2)
	Both	83 (90.2)	37 (100.0)	71 (84.5)	191 (89.7)
	Women only	n/a	n/a	13 (15.5)	13 (6.1)
	Total	92 (100.0)	37 (100.0)	84 (100.0)	213 (100.0)

Note: Percentages are column percentages

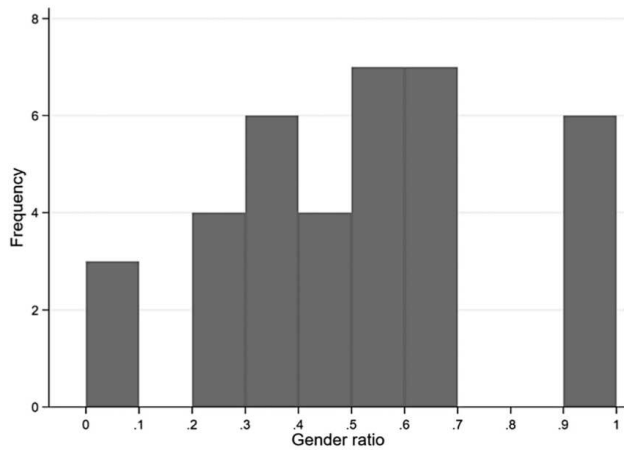
**Table 5.** Logistic regression models predicting voters' support for at least one Maghrebian origin female candidate. B(se)<sup>sig.</sup>

	(1)	(2)
Ethnicity (ref. cat.: Ethnic majority voter)		
Maghrebian origin voter	-0.145(0.396)	2.813(1.418)*
Other ethnic minority voter	0.228(0.513)	2.204(1.851)
Gender ratio among Maghrebian cand. on list	4.770(1.387)***	9.679(2.934)***
Maghrebian origin*Gender ratio	-	-7.301(3.416)*
Other ethnic minority*Gender ratio	-	-4.983(4.503)
Gender: female	0.706(0.347)*	0.729(0.354)*
Higher education	0.809(0.347)*	0.844(0.354)*
Number of pref. votes cast	0.148(0.051)**	0.151(0.050)**
_cons	-3.045(0.773)***	-5.024(1.282)***
<i>N</i>	186	186
pseudo <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.184	0.204

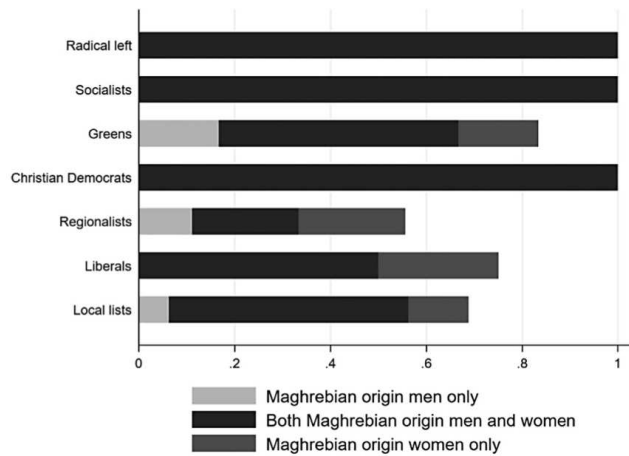
Note: Sig.: ^ p < 0.1, \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001. Fixed effects for regions are included but not displayed.

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1. Distribution of party lists according to the gender balance among Maghrebian origin candidates.



2. The presence of Maghrebian origin male and female candidates on party lists, according to party families.



3. Predictive margins of the probability for voters to support at least one Maghrebian origin woman, with 95% confidence intervals.

