

Gender and ballot position effects in free party lists: Evidence from Switzerland and Luxembourg*

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ABSTRACT

Free party lists provide the greatest freedom of choice to voters, by allowing them to vote for candidates from more than one party. They are also highly cognitive demanding so that voters have incentives to use shortcuts to discriminate among a party's candidates. This article examines the effect of gender and ballot position of candidates on their number of preference votes in Luxembourg and Switzerland, using individual candidate level-data. Both countries use free party lists with Proportional Representation in parliamentary elections, but with electoral lists of different length and format. Our results show no consistent effect of gender on preference voting. Female candidates receive fewer preference votes than their male party colleagues in Luxembourg and they have an electoral advantage in Switzerland. Conversely, ballot positioning of candidates determines their preference vote share in both countries. Our findings demonstrate that the position of candidates on the ballot has a reversed J-shaped effect in intraparty competition. They also have important implications for electoral design.

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PRESENTATION

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. Gender and ballot position effects in IPV PR systems**
- 3. Hypotheses**
- 4. Data, variables and analyses**
- 5. Results**

Gender and ballot position effects in IPV PR systems

IPV PR systems are highly cognitive demanding so that voters have incentives to use shortcuts available on the ballot to discriminate among a party's candidates (Brockington, 2003; Valdini, 2012 & 2013; Marcinkiewicz & Stegmaier, 2015; Muraoka, 2019; Mustilo & Polga-Hecimovich, 2020; Söderlund et al., 2021).

Under IPV PR systems, voters may rely on primary, secondary and tertiary information when making a decision among a party's candidates (Brockington, 2003).

- ➔ **Primary information**: information voters gather on candidates before voting
- ➔ **Secondary information on the ballot**: such party labels and candidates' names
Candidates' names contain politically useful cues for voters such gender, ethnicity and class (Ortega, 2008; Wauters et al. 2010; Kunovich, 2012; Valdini, 2012; Spierings & Jacobs, 2013; Allik, 2015; Marcinkiewicz & Stegmaier, 2015; Mustilo & Polga-Hecimovich, 2020)
- ➔ **Tertiary information**: the position of candidates on the ballot (Darcy & McAllister, 1990; Miller & Krosnich, 1998; Ortega, 2003; 2008; Lutz, 2010; Blom-Hansen et al., 2016; Mustilo & Polga-Hecimovich, 2020; Söderlund et al., 2021).

HYPOTHESIS (1-5)

- H1: If voters are biased against women, female candidates will receive fewer preference votes than their male party mates.**
- H2: candidates placed in the beginning of a party list will receive more preference vote than candidates listed lower on the list.**
- H3: candidates listed in the end of a party list will receive more preference votes than their party counterparts placed in middle positions.**
- H4: if voters are biased against women, female candidates listed in the beginning or the end of a party list will receive fewer preference votes than male candidates leading or at the end of a party list.**
- H5: gender and ballot position effects will be stronger in party-ranked lists than in alphabetical lists.**

HYPOTHESIS (6-7)

- H6: in PR systems with optional preference voting, gender and ballot position effects are not expected to increase, as the number of candidates standing for election increases.**
- H7: the effect of gender and ballot position of candidates is expected to decrease, as the electoral support for their party list increases.**

DATA

- To test our hypotheses we use data from the last two parliamentary elections in Luxembourg and Switzerland. Original data for each election were obtained from the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg official election website, the Swiss Federal Statistical Office and other resources.
- We limit the analysis to candidates from parties that received seats in either of the two elections.
- In Luxembourg, 6 parties gained parliamentary representation in 2013 and 7 parties won seats in 2018 (see table 1). All parties nominated as many candidates as there were seats in each constituency. This gives a total of 840 cases (420 for each election).
- A total of 13 parties gained seats in at least one of the last two elections to the Swiss National Council (see table 2) . Political parties usually field several lists in the same district (combined or sub-combined). Lists containing one candidate or only candidates of one sex were removed from the analyses. This nomination practice gives us a total of 3200 and 3827 cases in 2015 and 2019, respectively.

DEPENDENT VARIABLE

LOGIT PREFERENCE
VOTE SHARE

GENDER

1 for women and 0 for men

BALLOT POSITION

On a scale from 0 to 1

BALLOT POSITION SQUARED

Squared root of ballot position

INCUMBENCY

1 for incumbent and 0 otherwise

PRIOR ELECTORAL EXPERIENCE

Number of elections running (1,2, 3)

AGE AND AGE SQUARED

In decades and its squared root

LIST LENGTH

Number of candidates on a party list

LIST SIZE

Proportion of votes cast for the list

MULTILEVEL REGRESSION ANALYSES

CANDIDATES ARE NESTED WITHIN PARTIES IN SPECIFIC DISTRICTS AND ACROSS ELECTIONS IN EACH COUNTRY

RESULTS

H1: If voters are biased against women, female candidates will receive fewer preference votes than their male party mates.

We found no consistent effect of gender in intraparty competition. Female candidates receive fewer preference votes than their party male colleagues in Luxembourg and they have an electoral advantage in Switzerland

RESULTS

H2: candidates placed in the beginning of a party list will receive more preference vote than candidates listed lower on the list.

H3: candidates listed in the end of a party list will receive more preference votes than their party counterparts placed in middle positions.

Positioning of candidates on party lists or columns have their expected effects in both countries. Ranking earlier on party columns is associated with more votes. However, candidates listed in the end of party lists are advantaged in getting preference votes over their co-partisans in the middle positions

RESULTS

H4: if voters are biased against women, female candidates listed in the beginning or the end of a party list will receive fewer preference votes than male candidates leading or at the end of a party list

Consistent with our hypothesis 4, female candidates listed at the beginning or at the end of a party list receive fewer preference votes than male candidates leading or at the bottom in Luxembourg. However, there are not significant differences by gender for the middle positions (figure 3). Conversely, in the Swiss National Council, where voters do not seem to be biased against women, female candidates receive more preference votes than their male party counterparts, especially when they are listed in the last positions of party lists.

RESULTS

H5: gender and ballot position effects will be stronger in party-ranked lists than in alphabetical lists.

Results partially support our hypothesis 5: the effect of gender does not significantly vary according to the ballot type. Conversely, the effect of ballot position of candidates on their electoral success is stronger in party-ranked positions than in alphabetical ordered sections in both countries

RESULTS

H6: in PR systems with optional preference voting, gender and ballot position effects are not expected to increase, as the number of candidates standing for election increases.

Results support our hypothesis 6 in both countries. Models indicate that there is no significant interaction effect between gender and length of party lists. Similarly, the effect of ballot position of candidates on preference vote share does not significantly vary, with regression estimates close to zero, as the number of candidates competing increases.

RESULTS

H7: the effect of gender and ballot position of candidates is expected to decrease, as the electoral support for their party list increases.

Results clearly support our last hypothesis in Luxembourg and Switzerland: the effect of gender and ballot position of candidates on their preference vote share weakens, as the electoral support for their lists increases in the district.