

Brussels Bound: Candidate Selection in European Elections

Stephen A. Meserve*, Daniel Pemstein† and William T. Bernhard‡

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Abstract

Party leaders decide the quality and order of candidates on their electoral lists. We argue that party ideology, electoral salience, and access to other electoral arenas condition list construction. To test this theory, we gather data on the demographic characteristics, career backgrounds, and political experiences of candidates in the 2009 European Parliamentary Elections. We develop a statistical ranking model that simulates how party leaders construct lists based on the availability of candidates and the electoral context. Political parties' attitudes and emphases, their sizes, and the amount of attention that the national press pays to European elections predict the types of candidates that parties prioritize.

Political parties recruit and train future leaders. Parties channel the careers of aspiring politicians through nominations to stand for election and promotion to important leadership posts. In turn, the identities, experiences, and qualifications of a party's candidates condition not only its electoral success but also its ability to affect policy and governance once in office. A party with visible and experienced candidates is likely to be successful at the polls and in government.

Parties most clearly have the opportunity to manage career trajectories in closed-list proportional representation systems. In these systems, parties determine the order of candidates on the party list, and voters cast their ballot for the party, rather than a particular candidate. Thus, placement on the list strongly influences the probability that a candidate will be seated in the legislature. Obviously, this presents party leaders with an opportunity to behave strategically. Party leaders face a variety of goals in determining where to rank candidates on the ballot: winning extra seats,

*Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Texas Tech University. Email: stephen.meserve@ttu.edu

†Assistant Professor, Department of Criminal Justice & Political Science, North Dakota State University. Email: daniel.pemstein@ndsu.edu

‡Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Email: bernhard@illinois.edu

maximizing legislative policymaking ability, grooming young talent, or punishing troublemakers. How, then, do they manage their nominations?

Despite the importance of these choices for party success and, indeed, the quality of democratic governance, political scientists have limited systematic knowledge about how parties rank order candidates on party lists. To address this problem, we draw on European Parliament (EP) elections. In European elections, voters in each of the 27 European Union (EU) member states elect national representatives to the EP. As of 2002, all member states must employ some form of proportional representation for these elections.¹ Parties in member-states, therefore, present lists of aspiring candidates to stand for election. Thus, EP elections display a variety of party organizations and domestic political contexts, providing us with a unique opportunity to examine parties' candidate nomination strategies.

We ask what sorts of parties choose to send experienced, high quality candidates to Europe. We argue that parties' policy positions, the electoral salience that leaders attribute to Europe and EP elections, and the availability of outside options for placing candidates, help to determine the nomination strategies that parties emphasize. We use a new data set of candidate biographies from the 2009 European election to assess how parties select candidates for office. We identify the link between the candidates parties nominate and their political context using a purpose-built statistical ranking model. This model explicitly simulates how party leaders construct lists based on the candidates at their disposal and the political environment that they face.

1 Candidate Experience, Party Strategy and List Placement

We conceptualize candidate nomination as a strategic process between a party leader and party candidates. The party leader must determine where candidates rank on the list and may choose from a limited number of candidates. Obviously, candidates at the top of the list have a higher chance of winning a seat. Party leaders, therefore, will choose candidates for top list positions depending on the party's strategic goals: winning votes, making policy, or grooming young talent. But potential members of the EP (MEPs) have a variety of career paths open to them (Scarrow 1997, Stolz 2001, Meserve, Pemstein & Bernhard 2009, Hix, Hobolt & Hoyland 2012). Thus,

¹The Treaty of Amsterdam in 2002 required all countries to either change to proportional representation, or in the case of Ireland, Northern Ireland and Malta, to STV.

potential candidates have a choice about whether to accept their position on the list or to pursue alternative career strategies. Each potential candidate must decide whether the leader's proposed list position offers adequate payoff in terms of potential career advancement. Finally, after ranking decisions have been made and candidates have agreed to run, an election occurs, and based on the seats allocated to parties, candidates are seated as legislators.

Consider first the incentives of the party leader. Experienced candidates may generally be considered of better quality; they are known to be loyal, hold promise for future elections, have more experience making policy, and are better able to attract votes in order to win elections. The party, however, does not have an unlimited supply of high quality, experienced candidates to occupy all the positions it must fill at the various levels of government (Norris 1997). Parties must split their supply of high quality candidates between a number of different elections at the local, regional, national, and European levels. The party leader must determine whether a particular election merits the use of scarce, quality candidates. If a party does not consider a particular contest important relative to other elections, it will send a slate made up largely of filler candidates with low levels of experience and hoard its experienced candidates for other electoral outlets. For parties invested in the election, the leader must then decide how to prioritize candidates to achieve different goals: vote maximization, policymaking capacity, and grooming promising politicians for other offices.

First, the list of candidates must contain individuals that help win votes at the election. Visible figures, known to the public, are likely to attract electoral support. Nationally elected legislators are the most likely to be recognizable to the broadest section of the voting population. Since list makers seek to win votes during the election, these electorally successful, recognizable politicians should help bring votes to the party, even in a lower profile election like the European Parliament (Hobolt & Hoyland 2011).

An alternate strategy is to emphasize candidates with proven policymaking skills and expertise to ensure that, after the election, the party can influence policy and manage public affairs effectively. Candidates with previous experience in the institution understand how to navigate the policy process and have formed relationships, passed bills, and become embedded in the committee structure of the legislature. Prioritizing incumbents on the party list is the obvious strategy to ensure policymaking effectiveness.

Finally, leaders may seek to position the party for success in the future. They may give young talent opportunities to demonstrate their political acumen and gain experience in the political arena. These young politicians may eventually assume leadership roles, but they have not yet had the opportunity to gain national political experience. Parties may view the EP as an ideal institution within which to groom candidates with only lower level legislative experience for future office.

Potential candidates also make a calculation about whether to accept the party's offer of a position on the list. Consistent with the ideas of ambition theory, a potential candidate must consider the payoff of accepting a position on the list with the payoff of pursuing an alternative path. Most immediately, the value of accepting a nomination reflects the probability of being seated in the legislature-itself a function of the position on the party list and the expected party vote-and the level of interest in serving in that institution. Candidates must also consider the long-term impact of their decision: accepting a nomination may open doors down the road to other offices or a place in the party leadership or the legislative hierarchy.

2 The Determinants of EP List Composition

European elections present a "natural laboratory" to assess the factors that determine where candidates are placed on the list. In European elections, party leaders in each of the 27 member state are responsible for creating party lists. European elections tend to be low-turnout affairs, with relatively little publicity. As a result, leaders have a great deal of flexibility in choosing a slate of candidates to best fit their own goals for the party with respect to Europe. We expect that nominated candidates will reflect the strategic calculations of these highly diverse European parties.

We focus on what influences party leaders to nominate European incumbents, politicians with prior elected experience at the national level, potential candidates who have held regional or local elected posts, and completely inexperienced prospects. We identify three classes of determinants of list placement strategy: party ideology, domestic and party-level conditions that make the EU more or less salient to individual leaderships, and variation in access to alternative electoral arenas afforded to potential list candidates.

2.1 Internal Party Ideology and Emphasis

The importance that parties and candidates attribute to European elections varies tremendously and depends on their attitudes towards, and emphasis on, the EU. First, the level of emphasis a party places on the EU, independent of its directionality, affects its likelihood of sending effective policymakers to Europe. Intense support or opposition to the EU should motivate parties to maximize the European-level policymaking skill-sets of their candidates. For anti-EU parties, selecting proven European policymakers helps further party aims to contract or arrest the growth of European institutions while pro-EU parties will employ European veterans to pursue a strategy of widening and deepening the role of the EU in national affairs. Therefore, because, once in office, experienced incumbents are best positioned to effectively push for particular policy goals:

Hypothesis 1. *Parties that emphasize Europe in their policy programs will prefer incumbents to other candidates.*

In addition, individual parties take policy positions with respect to the European Union. Some parties take strongly euroskeptic positions, opposing European expansion while other parties push for deeper integration and stronger powers for supranational institutions. Parties outline their policy positions vis-a-vis the European Union during elections, on the campaign trail, and in manifestos. In general, we expect that, because they support the general aims of the European project, and thus are likely to value Europe as an electoral arena:

Hypothesis 2. *Pro-EU parties will send higher quality candidates than euroskeptic parties.*

Yet, we do not have clear expectations about exactly what sort of high-quality selection strategy such parties will pursue. Thus, we propose three, potentially competing hypotheses. First, parties may attempt to maximize their vote share and the visibility of EP elections to their constituents.

Hypothesis 2.1. *Pro-EU parties will send vetted national politicians to the EP, maximizing candidate quality.*

On the other hand, approval for the EU project may provide party leaders with an incentive to maximize the European policy acumen of their EP representatives. Therefore, we might expect that:

Hypothesis 2.2. *Pro-EU parties will prioritize incumbency as a means to developing an experienced cadre of politicians within the EP.*

Finally, the EP potentially represents a better politician training ground for pro-EU parties than it does for euroskeptics. First, euroskeptic party leaders are unlikely to value the education that serving in the EP affords their rank and file members. And, similarly, euroskeptic party members may wish to avoid tarnishing their images by participating in an institution that they do not respect. Thus, we might expect that:

Hypothesis 2.3. *Pro-EU parties will send relatively inexperienced regional/local politicians in an effort to groom talent.*

Finally, we propose a null effect of left-right party position on candidate selection. While right-left ideology dominates the domestic discussion of politics, after taking pro/anti-EU attitudes into account, traditional ideological divisions should be unrelated to a party's attitude towards European elections.

Hypothesis 3. *Right and left parties will act identically when constructing their lists, nominating candidates with similar levels, and types, of experience.*

2.2 Electoral Salience

Most debate of EU salience focuses on the second order nature of EU elections as it relates to the democratic deficit in Europe (see e.g. Follesdal & Hix 2006, Moravcsik 2002), where European elections are fought primarily over domestic issues rather than European policy. While the low salience of EU elections appears accurate on aggregate, the relative salience of the European project varies across Europe, with some publics and parties more attentive to the European Union than others. In some countries, for example, the electorate monitors European elections more closely than others. Similar salience variation exists within countries for different national parties.

We argue that the relative importance and visibility of the election among voters should also influence parties' list placement strategies. The more salient a given election is to voters, the more likely it becomes that parties will place visible, typically nationally experienced, candidates on lists for that election. Well-known candidates may appeal to voters and can help party leaders

to maximize votes, and national politicians are more likely to be known to voters than regional office-holders, or fresh faces. Candidates themselves also desire the increased voter attention significant electoral races garner. Higher quality candidates will therefore find such elections attractive. Therefore, highly visible elections will encourage parties to pursue quality, and to emphasize the profiles of individual candidates, rather than policymaking ability in Europe, or talent-grooming, when making nominations. Therefore, we expect that:

Hypothesis 4. *Parties in countries where the press pays significant attention to EP elections will nominate relatively more nationally experienced candidates than will parties in countries where the media largely ignores European contests.*

Parties' national circumstances also affect the relative salience that they place on EP elections. Parties hailing from countries with a greater overall investment in Europe are likely to pursue party nomination strategies that focus on policymaking expertise. Specifically, because European policies are likely to have especially dramatic effects within their polities, we argue that national parties within the Eurozone will be more likely to prioritize proven policymakers than will parties outside the zone.

Hypothesis 5. *Parties in the Eurozone will prioritize incumbency over other factors when nominating candidates.*

A party's place in the national political system should also influence its approach to EP nominations. In particular, parties in government are more sensitive to the European policy process, and more likely to adopt a policy-maximizing nomination strategy, than opposition parties, for two reasons. First, because European voters often lack a clear understanding of what goes on in Europe (see e.g. Hobolt 2007), governing parties are likely to face voter reactions to European policy in national—rather than European—elections. Therefore, policy effectiveness in Europe may critically affect a governing party's fortunes at home. Second, the two chambered nature of EU legislative institutions, split between the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament, leads to an interplay that may influence nomination strategies. Specifically, parties in government are represented in the Council and in Parliament. Thus, policy success for the Council requires coordination with sitting MEPs. Experienced MEPs are likely to do a better job of coordinating with

their co-partisans on the Council than will new European legislators who may need time to find their feet in the EP.

Hypothesis 6. *Parties in government will prioritize incumbency over other experience when nominating candidates.*

2.3 Access to Other Electoral Arenas

The supply of desirable electoral positions constrains the ability of party leaders to nominate experienced, quality candidates (Norris 1997). When parties elect candidates to offices at multiple levels, the availability of outside options may modulate party leaders' preferences over candidates at a given level. With respect to European elections, the availability of attractive outside options—such as seats in a national legislature—may encourage parties to adopt a strategy of using the EP to groom politicians for future national office. Similarly, European incumbents in parties that are highly competitive at the national level may not be interested in holding onto their current seats, but may prefer to run for national office. Incumbent MEPs in small parties will be much more attached to their posts since small parties have few alternative prestigious positions at the domestic level. Such parties will do better by adopting a strategy of experience maximization in Europe.

Hypothesis 7. *Small parties will be more likely to favorably list incumbent candidates than will large parties.*

A party's recent electoral fortunes in non-European elections may also shape its likelihood of listing domestically experienced candidates for EP elections. Parties that have just lost seats in their regional or national legislatures will have reservoirs of experienced politicians who need new legislative homes. By contrast, after a recent electoral victory, the supply of domestic positions is likely to be relatively large, forcing parties increasingly to rely on inexperienced politicians or incumbents in European elections.

Hypothesis 8. *Parties that lost seats in recent domestic elections will be more likely to place national and regional politicians on EP lists while winning parties will pursue pro-incumbent and/or low experience list strategies.*

3 The EP Biographies Project

Evaluating list placement strategies requires extensive data on the characteristics of candidates. Much existing data on European candidates is drawn solely from elected MEPS rather than the full set of candidates (Patzelt 1999) or is drawn from a small sample of countries (Westlake 1994, Kauppi 1996, Schweitzer & Carl-Christoph 1989, Gherghina & Chiru 2009, Linek & Outly 2006, Blomgren 1999). Attempts to survey candidates have had limited success due to low response rates (Farrell, Hix, Johnson & Scully 2006, Norris & Franklin 1997). Even the largest candidate survey project covering European elections, the European Parliament Candidate Election Study (EECS), has varying response rates to its 6500 surveys, typically ranging between 0% and 40% of a party's candidates (Giebler, Haus & Wessels 2010). Few parties are represented by more than one or two respondents. Thus, while the survey provides a reasonable picture of candidate characteristics on average, they provide little traction for causal questions about candidate selection and strategy variation across parties.

Therefore, we collected original data describing EP candidate characteristics and experiences. In the months before the 2009 EP election, we gathered native language candidate information from internet sources for all national parties predicted by Hix, Marsh & Vivyan (2009) to receive a single seat in the 2009 European Parliament election.² We drew the bulk of the biographical information from official party websites, but also used other sources, including blogs, personal websites, media reports, and governments' candidate rolls to gather information. The biographical materials ranged from short, 1-2 sentence descriptions to full CVs.

Fluent language speakers then coded information about salient political positions, career histories, and demographic variables for each candidate. Coding biographies is extremely time intensive and requires relevant language skills, so we focused those efforts on a sample of EU countries. The biographical data sample contains information on 3089 candidates from 71 national parties in 12 countries: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Romania, Spain and the United Kingdom (see Table 1).³

²We were unable to find lists and/or biographies for only 4 parties in this group.

³We did not fully code German lists because of excessive list lengths. Specifically, we coded either as many candidates as each party listed, or approximately twice as many candidates per party, in list order, than were actually elected to the EP, whichever was smaller. As a result, unlike other countries, the current German data excludes some minor candidates at the bottom of lists.

Table 1: Number of Candidates per Country

Country	Number of Candidates Coded
Bulgaria	51 (2%)
Czech Republic	188 (6%)
France	991 (32%)
Germany	198 (6%)
Greece	132 (4%)
Hungary	78 (3%)
Ireland	29 (1%)
Italy	428 (14%)
Netherlands	189 (6%)
Romania	153 (5%)
Spain	300 (10%)
UK	352 (11%)
Total	3089

To provide an overview of the data, we report statistics on a number of characteristics of candidates. In doing this, we distinguish between viable and non-viable candidates. For a candidate to be viable, she must be placed no more than four positions below the lowest successfully elected candidate on national lists.⁴ With respect to gender, European candidates displayed an uneven split between males and females: only 41% of candidates were female. Among candidates likely to win EP seats, this imbalance was greater, where only 36% of candidates were women. Meanwhile, only 8% of candidates mentioned belonging to a union, works council or agricultural cooperative, in their biographies. These were usually candidates of communist or other hard left parties. Finally, while candidates reported their level of education only 49% of the time, this figure jumps to 76% for viable candidates. The majority of candidates who did indicate their education held postgraduate professional or academic degrees.

Only 59% of candidates reported their age. Among those who did not, most were at the bottom of lists and not likely to win seats. The average age for a candidate was around 50. There is not a large difference—only three years—in the overall age profile between those likely to win seats and the full population of candidates.

We also recorded distinct political positions mentioned by the candidate biographies and cat-

⁴For regional PR lists with small district magnitude and much more predictable election outcomes and seat distributions, we label candidates as viable if they are no lower than one position below the lowest successfully elected candidate non-viable.

Table 2: Candidates With Elected Experience

Country	All Candidates		Highly Viable Candidates	
	Elected Experience	No Experience	Elected Experience	No Experience
Bulgaria	14 (27%)	37 (73%)	10 (42%)	14 (58%)
Czech Republic	62 (33%)	126 (67%)	32 (64%)	18 (36%)
France	421 (42%)	570 (58%)	86 (70%)	37 (30%)
Germany	127 (63%)	71 (37%)	104 (81%)	25 (19%)
Greece	34 (26%)	98 (74%)	22 (48%)	24 (52%)
Hungary	47 (60%)	31 (40%)	21 (66%)	11 (34%)
Ireland	24 (85%)	5 (15%)	24 (86%)	5 (14%)
Italy	217 (51%)	211 (49%)	89 (87%)	13 (13%)
Netherlands	61 (33%)	128 (67%)	26 (43%)	34 (57%)
Romania	59 (39%)	94 (61%)	33 (72%)	13 (28%)
Spain	77 (26%)	223 (74%)	45 (61%)	29 (39%)
UK	176 (50%)	176 (50%)	89 (70%)	38 (30%)
Total	1319 (43%)	1770 (57%)	581 (69%)	261 (31%)

egorized them into one of three categories: elected, ministerial, and party leadership. We also differentiated whether the positions were at the local, regional and national levels.

Elected positions were the dominant type of political position identified. While 43% percent of candidates had held some type of elected position (Table 2), 69% of viable candidates seats had been elected to office. Individuals near the top of their lists frequently had multiple elected positions in their biographies. There were significant cross-national differences. In Greece, Spain and the Netherlands, only about one third of candidates reported elected experience while in Ireland, the UK and France, experience in an elected office was far more common.

In contrast, national-level ministerial experience was extremely rare for European candidates: only 67 candidates had held portfolios in their national governments. Most were very experienced senior candidates near the top of lists.

For non-elected party positions, we recorded when candidates mentioned their executive level positions (e.g., member of the bureau, president or vice president, secretariat, etc.) of the national, regional or local party. Around 27% of candidates held executive experience.

Table 3: Determinants of Candidate Experience on EP Lists

Hypothesis	Operationalization
Party Size	Proportion of seats held in national lower house
Change in Party Size	Seats gained in most recent lower house election
Governing Status	Dummy
Pro-Anti EU Position	Manifesto pro-integration – anti-integration sentence fragments
Party Emphasis on EU	Manifesto mentions of EU > average (dummy)
Right-Left Position	Manifesto conservative – liberal sentence fragments
Election Visibility	Aggregate EP election television time
Eurozone	Dummy

4 Other Data

We supplemented our biographical data with party and candidate level information from a variety of sources. First, we measured national party size, changes in party sizes, and party governing status from the *European Journal of Political Research*. We also made extensive use of the PIREDEU group’s 2009 European election study (EES 2010), drawing our measures of support for European institutions from PIREDEU’s EP election manifesto study, operationalizing EU attitudes in terms of the proportion of sentence fragments in the party’s manifesto that the PIREDEU coders classified as pro-integration minus the proportion of sentence fragments that they coded as integration-sceptic.⁵ We operationalize our right-left ideological position measure in an analogous way. We measure a party’s emphasis on Europe in terms of the total proportion of sentence fragments in their manifesto classified as pertaining to EU institutions. We coded parties as high and low-emphasis depending on whether or not their manifesto contained more or less than the average number EU-specific sentence fragments. Finally, the PIREDEU press study provides a measure of news coverage of the EP elections, operationalized as the total television time in each country that was devoted to EP elections coverage during the campaign, divided by the total number of stations sampled. Table 3 summarizes the operationalizations of the various independent variables in our analysis.

⁵This is the `pro.anti.EU` variable in the PIREDEU dataset.

5 Modeling List Construction

Our goal is to model the decisions that party selectors make when nominating candidates to their EP lists. There is a set $I = \{1, 2, \dots, n\}$ of potential nominees across all parties, with each potential nominee indexed by $i \in I$. For simplicity, we assume that parties make selections in list order—that they choose the candidate heading the party list first, and so on. Furthermore, we assume that a function, $f(\Theta_t^p, \Psi_t^p, \mathbf{x}_p, i) = \Pr(i_{pt} = i)$, probabilistically determines party p 's choice of the candidate at list position t , where $\Theta_t^p \subset I$ is the set of candidates on party list p after choice $t - 1$, $\Psi_t^p \subset I$ is the set of party p 's potential candidates at choice t , \mathbf{x}_p is a vector of covariates describing party p , and $i_{pt} \in I$ is the candidate that party p selects for list position t .⁶

Each element of Ψ_0^p , the party's pool of potential candidates, is associated with a K -vector, γ_i , representing candidate i 's membership in each of K ideal types, or groups. In this paper, we group potential candidates in terms of their previous elected experience at the local/regional and national levels, and their incumbency status in the 2009 European election.⁷ Specifically, potential candidates could hold membership in either the no-experience category, or in some combination of the local/regional, national, and incumbent categories. So, we represented every candidate with no record of previous elected experience by the vector $\gamma_i = (1, 0, 0, 0)$, while an incumbent with previous elected experience at both the local/regional and national levels obtained the coding $\gamma_i = (0, 1, 1, 1)$, and so on. Thus, multiple group membership is possible, except for potential candidates with no prior elected experience.⁸

In general, party p 's choice of nominee for list place t might depend both on the characteristics of the remaining available potential candidates, Ψ_t^p , and those of the members already on the list at point t , Θ_t^p . For example, parties might wish to balance the composition of their lists. Nonetheless, in this work, we make the simplifying assumption that parties' selections are independent of the choices that they have already made and that they consider only their remaining potential candidates when making list selections (i.e. $f(\Theta_t^p, \Psi_t^p, \mathbf{x}_p, i) = f(\Psi_t^p, \mathbf{x}_p, i)$). Building on standard

⁶A number of technical assumptions complete the description of $f(\cdot)$: $\Theta_t^p \cap \Psi_t^p = \emptyset$, $\Theta_t^p \subset \Psi_0^p \forall t$, $\Psi_t^p \subset \Psi_0^p \forall t$, and $\Theta_0^p = \emptyset$.

⁷While a few non-incumbents in the dataset had previous EP experience, explicitly coding such experience was impractical because only a handful of people fit into this category.

⁸In general, the statistical model allows for partial group membership, although we do not take advantage of this feature in this paper. The model assumes only that $0 < \gamma_{ik} \leq 1 \forall k$ and $\sum_{k=1}^K \gamma_{ik} > 0$ for every potential nominee, i . In other words, potential nominees cannot hold negative membership in a group, cannot be more than a full example of a particular ideal type, and each individual must hold at least partial membership in at least one of the K groups.

statistical models of choice, we assume that

$$f(\Psi_t^p, \mathbf{x}_p, i | \boldsymbol{\beta}) = \begin{cases} 0 & \text{if } i \notin \Psi_t^p \\ \frac{\sum_{k=1}^K (\gamma_{ik} \cdot e^{\mathbf{x}_p \boldsymbol{\beta}_k})}{\sum_{j \in \Psi_t^p} [\sum_{k=1}^K (\gamma_{jk} \cdot e^{\mathbf{x}_p \boldsymbol{\beta}_k})]} & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases} \quad (1)$$

Equation 1 implies that parties make nomination choices in terms of how much affinity they feel towards candidates of each ideal type, and that affinity compounds additively for individuals that belong to multiple groups. Parties’ characteristics determine their preferences, and, in particular, each $\boldsymbol{\beta}_k$ is a vector of m coefficients that captures the extent to which parties value candidates representing group k , as a function of party characteristics \mathbf{x}_p . We represent a party’s overall bias towards a potential nominee in terms of the sum of the party’s affinity towards each of the K types, weighted by the potential candidate’s degree of membership—described by γ_i —in each group. The probability that party p selects candidate i for list position p is simply this bias divided by the party’s overall affinity towards the candidate pool that remains at choice t .

Note that this model is a generalization of multinomial logit (see e.g. Long 1997). Indeed, if, at every time t , every Ψ_t^p contains K candidates, each of which is a full member of just one of the K candidate groups, and no two members of Ψ_t^p belong to the same group, equation 1 simplifies to the functional form assumed by multinomial logit. Therefore, one can interpret the coefficient matrix $\boldsymbol{\beta}$ in the model that we present here similarly to coefficients in a multinomial logit; specifically, they capture the relative affinity that parties sporting a particular set of characteristics have for full representatives of each of the K candidate groups, given the counterfactual situation in which party p has the opportunity to select a single candidate from a full set of ideal types.⁹

Ideally, we would predict parties’ list placements in terms of the universe of potential candidates available to them. Unfortunately, this set is generally quite difficult to observe, and even harder to collect biographical data about. Therefore, we analyze how parties select viable candidates, or how they fill the places at the top of their lists that have some probability of providing nominees with seats in the legislature. Thus, we model the selection of n_p top list positions from N_p total

⁹In reality, parties forming lists never face the choice structure implied by the multinomial logit at each—and sometimes even at any—list position. The model we describe here takes this complicated choice structure into account, adjusting coefficient and error estimates to reflect the empirical data structure. Nonetheless, it provides predictions of the choices that parties would be likely to make given an idealized choice structure.

list spots for each party, p .¹⁰ In so doing, we assume that the universe of potential nominees to top list positions, Ψ_0^p , is captured by each party’s full list.¹¹ Combined with equation 1, this strategy leads to the observed data likelihood

$$\prod_{p \in P} \prod_{t=1}^{n_p} \frac{\sum_{k=1}^K (\gamma_{c(p,t)k} \cdot e^{\mathbf{x}_p \beta_k})}{\sum_{j \in \Psi_t^p} \left[\sum_{k=1}^K (\gamma_{jk} \cdot e^{\mathbf{x}_p \beta_k}) \right]}, \quad (2)$$

where $c(p, t)$ is a function mapping party p ’s nominee at list position t into I . Note that this likelihood makes two key modeling assumptions explicit. First, as we mention above, we assume that parties make their viable list placement decisions in order, and that each choice is independent of previous list placements. Second, each party’s nominations are strategically independent of other parties’ decisions. That is, we model list construction as decision-theoretic, rather than game-theoretic. Both of these assumptions are restrictive, and liable to be incorrect under many circumstances. Nonetheless, we believe that they represent a reasonable foundation for systematic research into the determinants of party list construction, and leave the relaxation of these assumptions for future research.

We estimated the model using a Bayesian approach and adopted diffuse normal priors on the coefficients, β . Specifically, after making the identifying restriction that the first row of the parameter matrix $\beta_1 = 0$, we assumed that each $\beta_2, \beta_3, \dots, \beta_K \sim N_m(0, 25 \cdot \mathbf{I}_m)$, a priori. The appendix provides a detailed description of the sampling algorithm that we used to fit the model.

6 Results

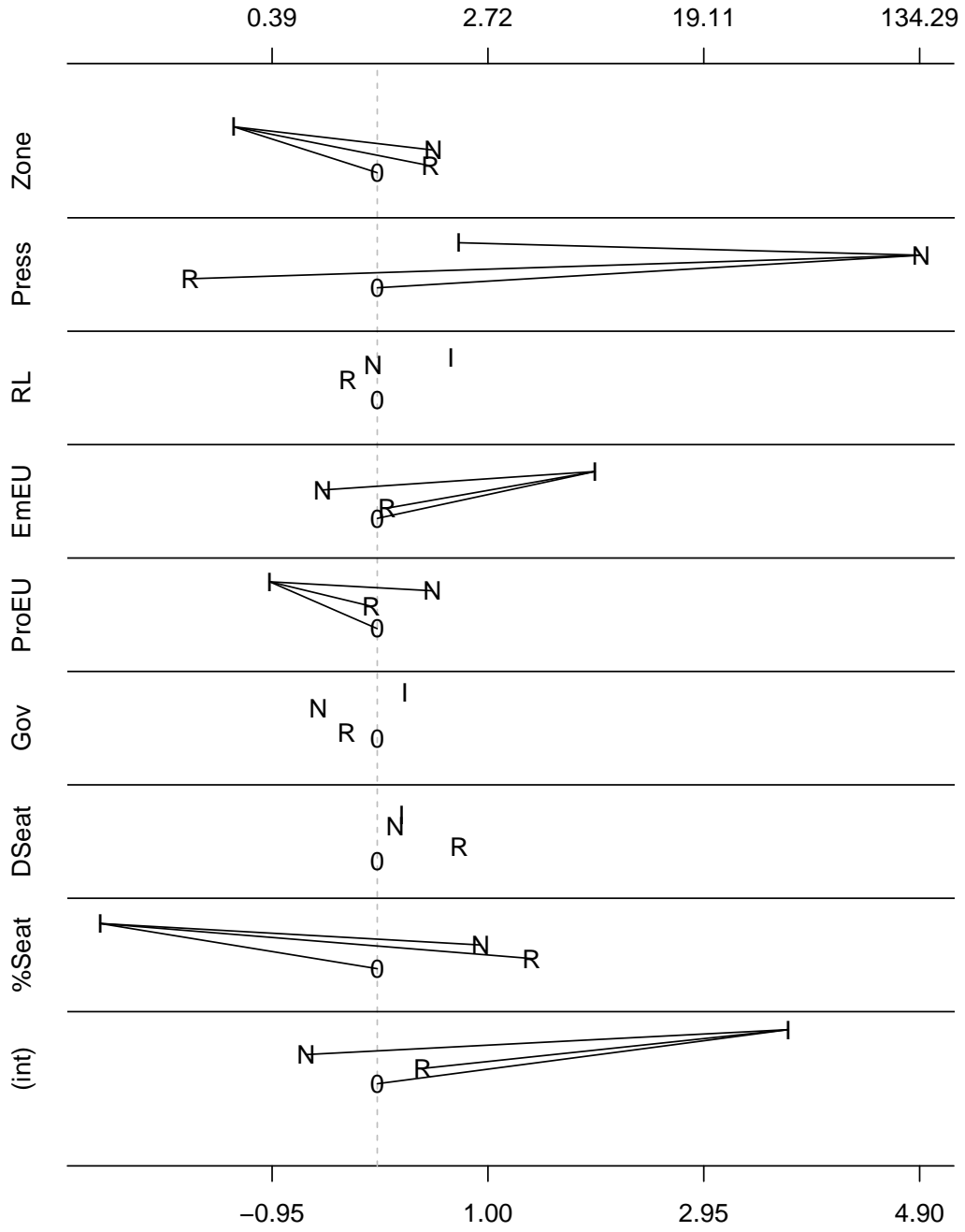
Figure 1 displays the model coefficient estimates graphically, using a technique introduced by Long (1997) for use with multinomial logit models.¹² The model generates a set of coefficient estimates for

¹⁰In general, parties in EP elections nominate substantially more candidates to their lists than can possibly expect to obtain seats in the Parliament, such that $N_p > n_p$ by some measure. In fact, many parties maintain lists that are longer than the total number of EP seats allocated to representatives of their countries.

¹¹It is certainly possible to conceive of situations when this assumption might break down. For instance, some potential nominees, failing to attain viable positions, might refuse any list spot, and thus escape our notice. Nonetheless, this approach represents perhaps the only practical way to approximate the full viable nominee pool.

¹²We had to drop a number of party lists from the dataset because of missing covariate data. These include (with associated PIRDEU codes and candidate counts) the Czech Green Party (1203110, 25 candidates), Czech SNK/European Democrats (1203321, 29 candidates), Dutch Party for Animals (1528006, 15 candidates), Italian Anticapitalist Left (1380212, 72 candidates), Romanian Social Democrats (1642300, 30 candidates), Spanish Coalition for Europe (1724950, 50 candidates), Spanish Europe of the Peoples-The Greens (1724930, 50 candidates), and British Ulster Unionist Party (1826621, 1 candidate).

Figure 1: Model results



each of the K experience-based groups of candidates. In figure 1, we mark coefficients corresponding to the effects for incumbents, nationally experienced candidates, candidates who have attained either regional or local offices, and inexperienced nominees, with I, N, R, and 0, respectively. Remember that these coefficients represent the relative tendency for parties to choose members of one candidate group over another, given an idealized choice between representatives of each ideal type, in terms of party characteristics. We must restrict one arbitrary set of coefficients—in this case those coefficients corresponding to nominees with no elected experience—to equal zero; the remaining coefficients represent the tendency of parties to choose candidates with regional/local or national elected experience, or incumbents, relative to the baseline category. Figure 1 presents these relative tendencies in terms of party characteristics, with coefficient values plotted along the horizontal dimension. Vertical distances within a row are meaningless and included simply to improve readability. The lower horizontal axis in the figure provides the coefficient scale, while the upper horizontal axis displays odds ratios. In general, odds ratios are more readily interpretable than raw coefficients; therefore we will allude to the upper axis values in what follows. The final piece of information presented by the figure is statistical significance. In particular, we join coefficients that are statistically distinguishable with a line, while coefficients that are indistinguishable at conventional levels are not connected to one another.¹³

6.1 Internal Party Ideology and Emphasis

Hypothesis 2 argues that pro-EU parties will send higher quality candidates to the EP than their euroskeptic counterparts, while hypotheses 2.1–2.3 lay out competing arguments—more emphasis on absolute candidate quality, greater European experience maximization, and expanded talent grooming—for how this overall dynamic might manifest empirically. Turning to figure 1 we see that attitudes towards Europe do have a statistically significant effect on nomination strategies. Namely, pro-EU parties tend to nominate fewer pure incumbents, relative to all three other ideal types, than do euroskeptics. Interpreting this raw result with respect to hypothesis 2–2.3 is difficult, but a few predicted probability plots will help to unpack the story.

¹³Specifically, when the 95% highest posterior density (HPD) regions—essentially the Bayesian 95% confidence intervals—of two coefficients do not overlap, we draw a line between those two points on the figure. Long (1997) uses the opposite convention, joining statistically indistinguishable coefficients. Our approach is less logical, but generates figures that are far easier to read for our application.

Figure 2: Attitude Towards Europe

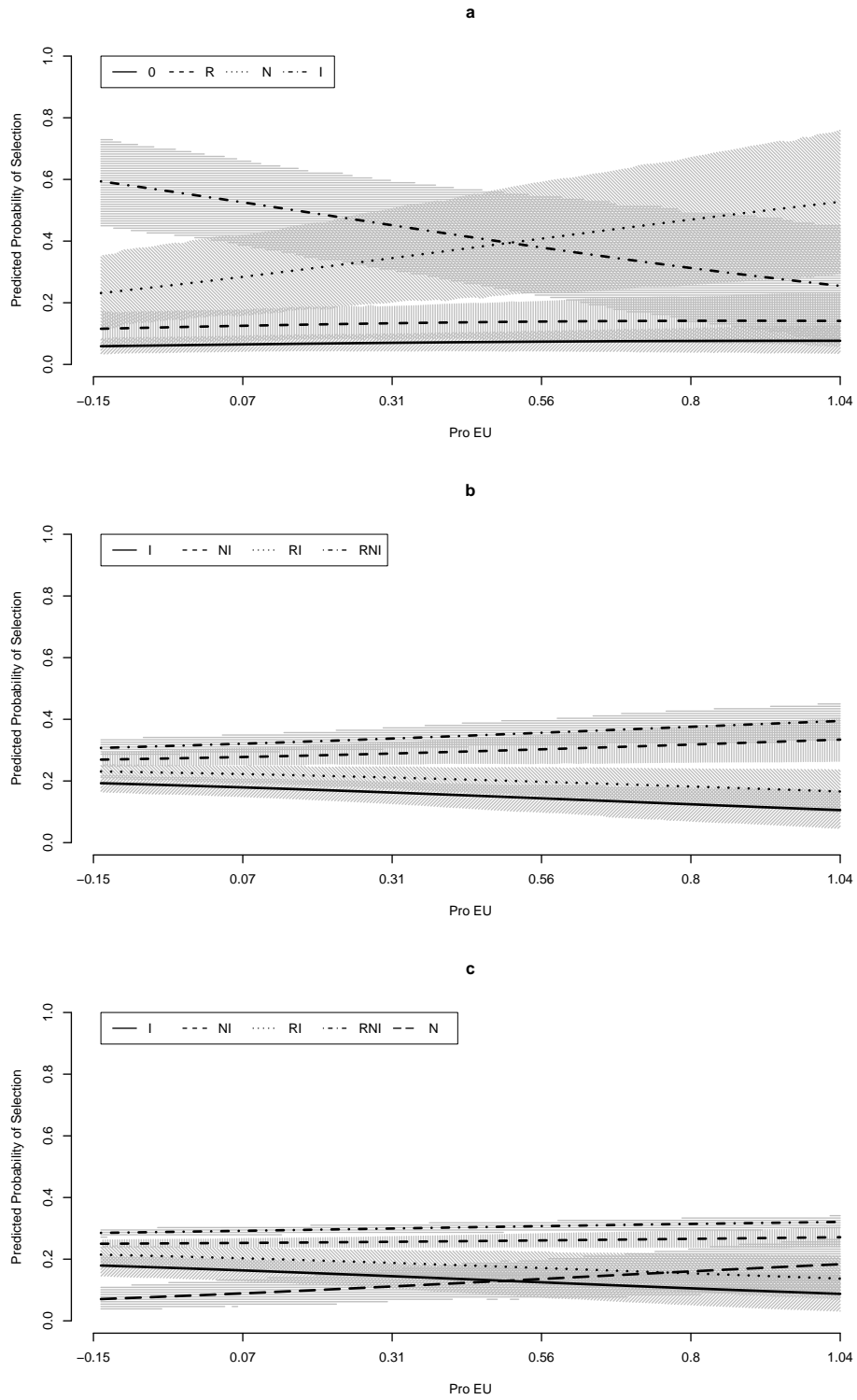
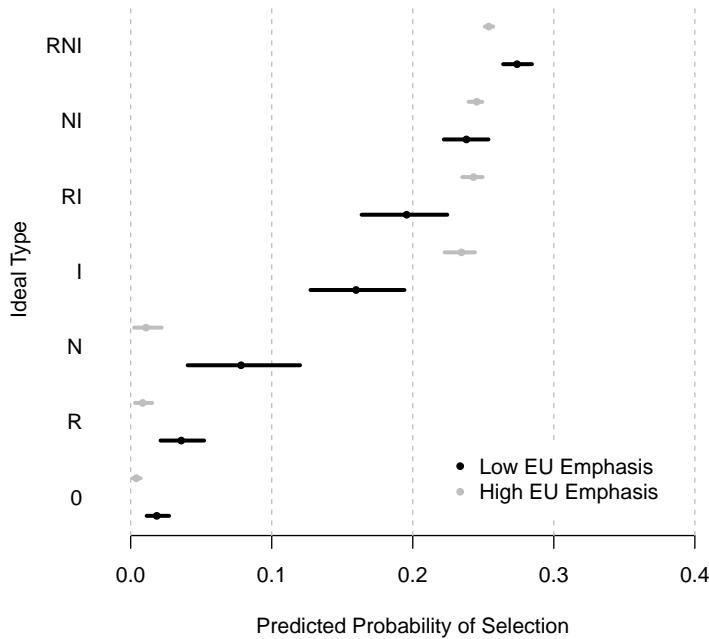


Figure 2 contains three such graphs. Each of the three plots in the figure considers a situation where a party leader must select her next list member from a handful of candidates exhibiting different levels, and combinations, of experience. Each plot represents a party with average—or, in the case of dummy variables, modal—levels of each of the covariates in the model described by figure 1, and displays how the model predicts the hypothetical party leader’s choice probabilities will change as her party’s level of appreciation for the EU varies from that of the most euroskeptical party in the dataset to the value of the EU’s most ardent observed supporters. Specifically, each graph presents average posterior predicted probabilities of selection (the lines) surrounded by 95% HPD intervals. Panel 2a examines a choice between four pure types: an inexperienced candidate, someone with only regional/local experience, a national politician, and an incumbent lacking a non-European elected history. The model predicts that a euroskeptical would select the incumbent over the other options while a pro-EU leader places substantially less emphasis on incumbency and more on national experience. Indeed, at high levels of support for Europe, the HPD interval around the incumbent’s line overlaps those of all three other types while the national politician is clearly preferred to the two non-incumbent types. Preferences for regional/local and inexperienced politicians are reasonably flat—and minimal—across levels of EU support. Thus, panel 2a lends support for hypothesis 2.1, which argues that pro-EU parties will place more emphasis on proven national politicians than others, is largely inconsistent with the grooming hypothesis (2.3), given the consistent lack of interest in regional/local candidates,¹⁴ and is not particularly conclusive with respect to the policy-experience maximization argument in hypothesis 2.2.

In particular, because figure 2a considers only pure types, it cannot tell us what sort of incumbents are losing out to nationally experienced candidates in pro-EU parties. Therefore, panels 2b and c examine the choice processes of party leaders with a variety of mixed-type candidates at their disposal. Panel 2b shows that, among incumbents, preferences for nationally experienced incumbents, and incumbents with both national and regional experience, increases with support for Europe. Moreover, figure 2c shows that nationally experienced non-incumbents are competitive with similarly experienced incumbents in pro-EU parties, but are relatively undervalued with respect to all incumbents in euroskeptical parties. Taken together, this evidence implies that pro-EU

¹⁴Although, admittedly, we have little empirical purchase on the grooming hypothesis here. A 60 year old regional veteran and a 30 year old who has only held one regional position are two very different animals. Unfortunately, we do not currently have the necessary data to separate out these two candidate types.

Figure 3: Emphasis On Europe



parties value incumbents relatively less than euroskeptics because they are replacing incumbents that lack extensive electoral experience with more rounded candidates. These results provide even stronger support than the previous findings for hypothesis 2.1 and are also consistent with the enhanced policymaking emphasis described by hypothesis 2.2. Pro-EU parties do not generally devalue incumbents; in fact they place the highest priority on incumbent politicians with extensive experience at other levels of government.

Turning to party emphasis, figure 1 shows that parties that emphasize the EU in their party programs show a marked preference for incumbents over the other three pure candidate types, as predicted by hypothesis 1. Figure 3 probes this finding further, by considering the predicted choice probabilities of two party leaders—both from average parties that differ only in the level of emphasis that they place on the EU in their party manifestos—who have access to candidates of all four pure types, as well as incumbents with previous elected experience at the regional level, national level, or in both arenas. Low-EU-emphasis parties display a stair-step progression of preference; while they prefer incumbents for list spots, a candidate’s other experience affects the party leader’s likelihood

of selecting her, both when choosing among pure types and when selecting from incumbents with varying degrees of experience. On the other hand, parties that place substantial emphasis on the EU in their programs display a dramatic preference for incumbents, largely disregarding other forms of elected experience. This behavior is consistent with the idea that parties that especially care about the EU are most likely to adopt selection strategies aimed at building cohorts of effective policymakers within the EP by favoring European expertise over other forms of experience.

Our final hypothesis regarding issues of ideology and emphasis, hypothesis 3, predicted that there should be no relationship between a party's candidate selection strategy and its placement on the traditional left-right spectrum. And, in fact, as figure 1 shows, our model finds no statistically significant relationship between traditional ideology and preferences over candidate types, after controlling for other factors.

6.2 Electoral Salience

Hypothesis 4 contends that parties residing in states where the press pays substantial attention to EP elections will be more likely to send nationally experienced politicians to Europe than will other parties. This hypothesis is clearly supported by the model; figure 1 shows that high press coverage dramatically increases the odds of nominating national politicians to contest EP elections. Figure 4 breaks this effect down using the same predicted probability approach that we used for figures 2 and 3. While press attention does drive parties to use nationally experienced candidates, press coverage does not cause parties to abandon their commitment to building an maintaining policy expertise in Europe. Incumbents are still highly valued in high-press states, but incumbents with national backgrounds are valued above all other of potential candidates and nationally experienced non-incumbents have the potential to out-compete incumbents lacking national experience in such states.

While the results for press coverage are consistent with our expectations, the other two variables capturing the impact of electoral salience on parties' nomination decisions do not behave as we predicted. Contra hypothesis 5, parties in the Eurozone actually appear to devalue incumbents relative to other parties. Thus, the data contradict the idea that parties in the Eurozone will have strong incentives to develop their store of politicians with EP experience. Similarly, we find no statistically significant relationship between national governing status and nomination choice.

Figure 4: Press Coverage of EP Elections

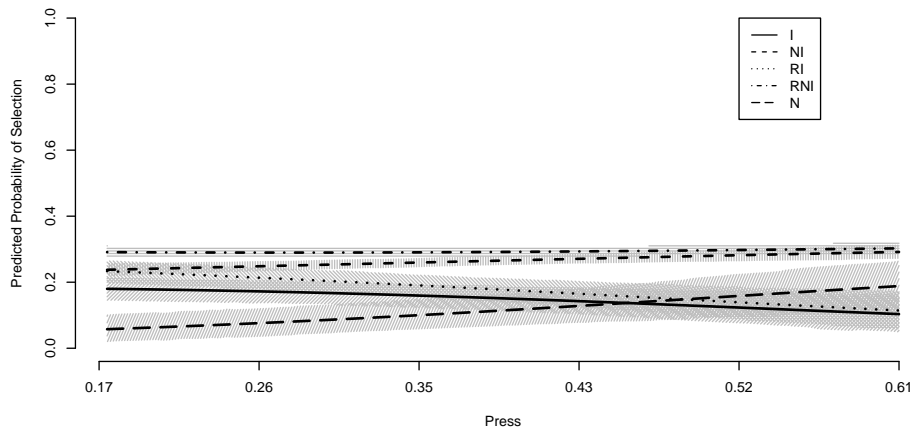
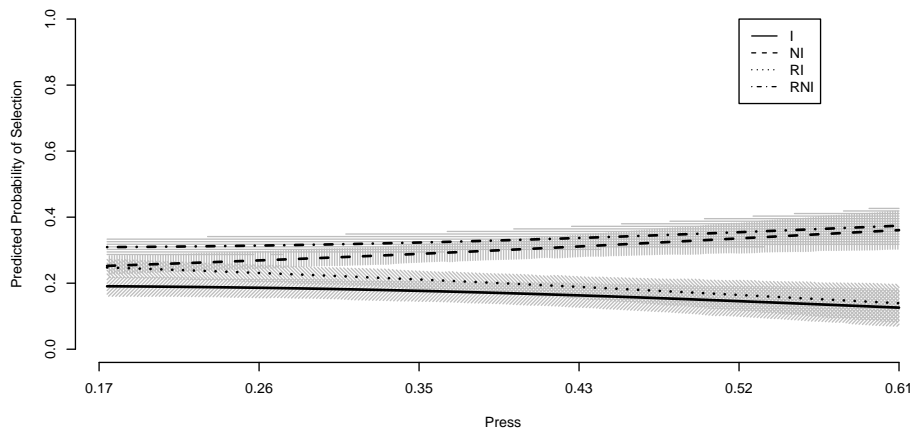
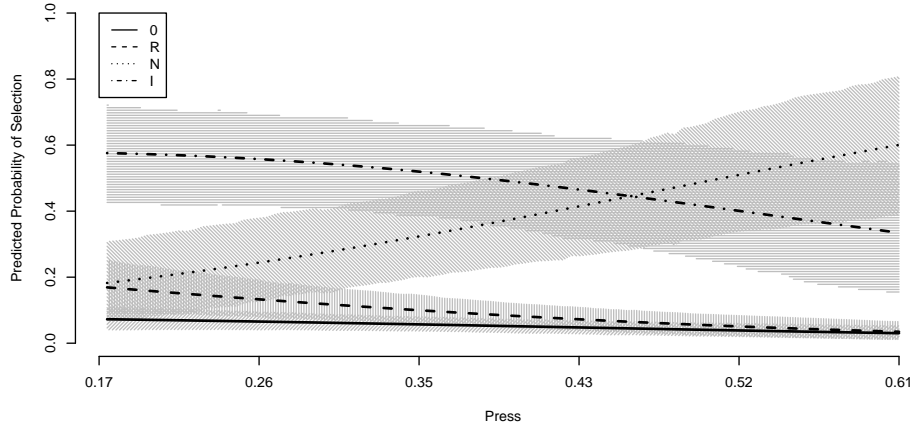
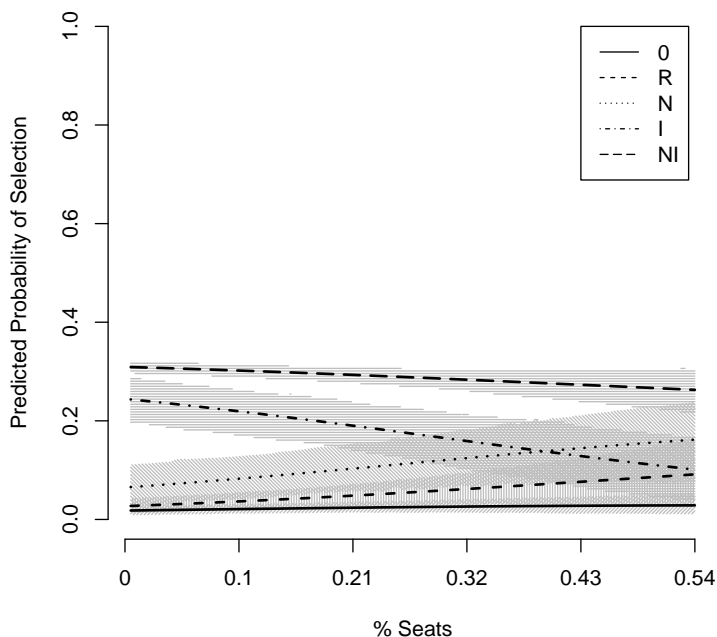


Figure 5: % Seats in National Elections



Nonetheless, the estimated effect of governing status, pictured in figure 1, is at least consistent with hypothesis 6, which predicted that governing parties would work harder than opposition members to build expertise within Europe, by nominating incumbents.

6.3 Access to Other Electoral Arenas

We find a strong relationship between access to other electoral arenas, as captured by the seats a party holds in the national legislature, and candidate preference. Figure 1 shows that parties' preference for incumbents decreases as they grow in size, as hypothesis 7 predicts. As figure 5 shows, particularly small parties are almost 20 per cent more likely to select an incumbent—especially, if they have one, a nationally experienced incumbent—than a candidate with only national experience. On the other end of the spectrum, parties holding over 20 per cent of the seats in their national legislature are no more likely to select a pure incumbent than they are a national politician. At around 30 per cent of the national seats, a party's likelihood of selecting a pure incumbent becomes statistically indistinguishable from its chances of choosing a regional/local politician. And, for

especially large parties, even previous national background is not enough to ensure that a party will prefer an incumbent to a nationally experienced politician. In sum, as party size grows, nomination behavior becomes more consistent with selection strategies based on proven national ability, or grooming new talent, than with building upon European policymaking experience.

Finally, we find no support for hypothesis 8; figure 1 shows that there is no statistically significant relationship between recent national election swings and selection strategy in Europe.

7 Conclusion

Parties face distinct trade-offs when considering candidate placement on electoral lists. They have a limited number of quality candidates and must carefully choose where to put them. Moreover, they have a variety of strategies available to them when placing quality candidates. The composition of EP electoral lists reflects this strategic process of party list construction. Researching EP elections allows us to vary contextual factors that would remain static in an ordinary single country study such as electoral institutions or campaign press coverage while holding constant the stakes of the campaign, a position as an MEP. Using biographical, party, and country-level data from the most recent European elections and employing a procedural statistical model that captures the choice process inherent in list creation, we show that parties take into account their own characteristics and attitudes, aspects of the national party system in which they operate, the visibility of European elections in their member states, and the extent to which decisions within European institutions affect policies at home, when building their lists.

Our approach considers quality, experienced candidates as a relatively scarce commodity. This means that party leaders with nomination power carefully distribute them in a strategic fashion between venues to best accomplish policy goals. From a comparative perspective, our results suggest that party ideology and emphasis towards, and the salience of, an institution determines how party leaders make their nominations. Outside of the EU context, this predicts that party leaders tend to set goals and prioritize/deprioritize some institutions. In addition, our results show that the use of quality candidates in a given institution may vary even between parties within the same country. We also highlight the connection between party policy goals and the use of particular types of candidates. Two parties may send quality, experienced candidates to an institution but, depending

on their policy goals, will send candidates with distinctly different types of previous experience.

Appendix

We fit the model described in section 5 using Markov chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) methods. We used a basic Metropolis-Hastings algorithm and implemented the sampler using the Scythe Statistical Library (Pemstein, Quinn & Martin 2011). The authors will make this software available as an R (R Development Core Team 2010) source package to interested readers upon request. The algorithm generates a chain of values for the $K \times m$ coefficient matrix β that, at convergence, represents a random walk over the posterior probability distribution of the coefficient matrix, based on the model in section 5. The algorithm begins with an arbitrary starting matrix β^0 , subject to the identifying constraint that the first row of the coefficient matrix $\beta_{\mathbf{1}} = 0$. Next, at each iteration s , the sampler generates a draw from the proposal distribution,

$$\beta_{-\mathbf{1}}^p \sim \mathcal{N}_{m(K-1)}(\beta_{-\mathbf{1}}^{s-1}, c^2 \mathbf{I}_{m(K-1)}), \quad (3)$$

where $\beta_{-\mathbf{1}}$ is the submatrix of β that excludes β 's first row, $\beta_{\mathbf{1}}$, and c is a tuning parameter that we set to 0.09 in practice. Next, using equation 2 and our assumed prior distribution for β , the sampler computes an acceptance probability,

$$r = \min\left(1, \frac{g(\beta^p | \Psi, \mathbf{X})}{g(\beta^{s-1} | \Psi, \mathbf{X})}\right), \quad (4)$$

where Ψ is the set of all party sublists Ψ_t^p , \mathbf{X} is the full matrix of party covariate vectors \mathbf{x}_p , and $g(\cdot)$ represents the posterior probability of the parameter matrix given the observed data. Finally, with probability r , the sampler sets $\beta^s = \beta^p$; otherwise, it sets $\beta^s = \beta^{s-1}$. We ran the sampler for one million iterations and discarded the first half of the run to allow the sampler ample time to reach convergence. We saved every hundredth draw from the second half of the chain, recording 5000 draws to summarize the posterior distribution of β given our observed data. Standard MCMC diagnostics for the sample are consistent with Markov chain convergence.

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