

# Brussels Bound: Candidate Selection in European Elections

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## Abstract

Party leaders make critical decisions about the quality and order of candidates on their electoral lists. To better understand what influences their nomination choices, we advance a theory predicting that contextual party and country factors condition list construction. In order to test this theory, we gathered an expansive new dataset cataloging the demographic characteristics, career backgrounds, and political experiences of candidates in the 2009 European Parliamentary Elections. We use the dataset to examine the strategies that parties pursue when selecting candidates to hold especially electable list positions. Political parties' attitudes and emphases, their sizes, the national party systems they operate in, and the amount of attention that the national press pays to European elections all help to 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 influence policy and governance once in

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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. But party leaders face a variety of, often contradictory, goals in determining where to rank candidates on the ballot: winning extra seats, rewarding loyal politicians, grooming young talent, punishing troublemakers. How do they manage their nominations in order to fulfill these goals?

Despite the critical 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. In fact, we know a great deal about those candidates that are successfully placed in office, but much less about those not chosen. This is critical missing information, as it is impossible to assess party nomination strategies without a full picture of potential alternative candidates that were not given high enough placements to gain office.

To address this, we draw on the experience of European Parliament (EP) elections. In European elections, voters in each of the 27 member states elect a group of national representatives to the EP. As of 2002, all member states must employ some form of proportional representation for these elections.<sup>1</sup> Parties in member-states, therefore, present lists of aspiring candidates to stand for election. The variety of domestic political contexts for these ranking decisions provides us with leverage to evaluate party strategies for candidate nomination. Using a new data set of candidate biographies from the 2009 European election, we

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<sup>1</sup>The Treaty of Amsterdam in 2002 forced all countries to either change to proportional representation, or in the case of Ireland, to STV. Prior to this, some countries used single member districts to elect their MEPs.

examine the effect of party and country factors on list placement decisions. We argue that political parties make nominations based on their supply of quality candidates, the selection rules used by the party for European elections, the visibility of European elections among voters, and the party and country's position with respect to the EU. To test these hypotheses, we classify individuals by the highest level of elected position achieved, using it as a general measure of candidate quality. We then use a custom statistical ranking model to explicitly simulate how party leaders construct lists based on the candidates at their disposal, conditioned by the political environment that they face.

## 1 Ranking Candidates on Party Lists

We conceptualize the candidate nomination process as a decision process initiated by party leaders to choose between candidates. The party leader has a number of suitable candidates for the list, but must determine where candidates rank. Obviously, candidates at the top of the list have a higher chance of winning a seat. Once party candidates learn their ranking, they can choose to run in the election where the party has slotted them, run for election with a different party, or retire from politics. After those decisions have been taken, an election occurs, and based on the seats allocated to parties, candidates are seated as legislators.

When constructing a list, the party leaders want a mix of candidates in order to achieve several objectives. 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 as are candidates who descriptively represent the constituency base. Second, some party candidates must possess the skills and expertise to ensure that, once elected, the party can influence policy and, in government, manage public affairs effectively. These candidates are likely to have demonstrated party loyalty, managerial experience, and/or specialized policy knowledge. Third, the party leader must position the party for success in the future. They must develop young talent, giving them opportunities to demonstrate their political acumen

and gain experience in the political arena. These young politicians will eventually assume leadership roles in the party and the legislature. Finally, the party leader may have to comply with constraints on the choice of candidate order, like gender quotas.

To fulfill these objectives, the party leader naturally prefers to have a large pool of talented potential candidates available—a larger pool than could be possible placed on the list. Yet party leaders have a limited supply of nominations and the basic value of seats varies. Furthermore, when ordering candidates, not all slots are equally valuable, yet the party leader must nominate a full list. Trade-offs between candidates become a necessity for party leaders. Safe seats at the top of the list ensure that the candidate will be seated. Candidates nominated on the list near the expected allocation of seats may or may not be seated. Finally, some candidates are so low on the list they cannot reasonably expect to win a seat. In addition, while party leaders make their decisions, party politicians themselves also have incentives. Politicians want positions that will give them qualifications and allow them to build their resume with different types of experiences. Ultimately, party politicians can choose to refuse placements on lists if the value of the placement is too low or they consider their own quality too high for the given position.

Given the pressures of the placement process, how do leaders make placement decisions and why? Crucially, party leaders must decide between candidates of different experience levels when ordering lists. Highly experienced candidates may generally be considered higher quality; they are known to be loyal, have 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, nationally experienced candidates to occupy all the positions it must fill at the various levels of government. We argue that the incentives to use more vs. less experienced candidates in lists vary depending on the party and country context party leaders operate within.

## 1.1 Candidate Experience and List Placement in European Parliament Elections

The particulars of European elections provide a useful context to the study party nomination decisions. Party leaders nominate candidates with different characteristics and levels of quality across 27 different countries and hundreds of national parties with a shared goal: place candidates in seats in a single legislature, the European Parliament. This common goal allows us to study the effects of wildly different political contexts on party decision making. Because EP candidates all seek the same office, we can be reasonably sure that differences in sought positions—such as the relative size of the legislature,<sup>2</sup> varying access to potential sources of political and personal advancement, and the personal prestige associated with the position—will not contaminate conclusions about the relationships between the various factors identified above and candidate characteristics. The same is not true for cross-national research into, and meta-studies of single-country examinations of, candidate selection to national legislatures. Therefore, EP elections present a “natural laboratory” for research on the wide array of factors that determine who gets nominated to legislative office. We use EP elections to explain list construction decisions, focusing on what factors drive some parties to list more experienced, higher quality candidates while others rely on candidates with only limited experience and quality. We focus on four general determinants of list placement strategy: factors effecting the supply of high quality candidates, the selection institutions used by parties for EP elections, the salience and visibility of EP elections among the national electorate and the party and country’s stake in and attitudes toward the EU. The specific hypotheses and their hypotheses discussed in this section are summarized in Table 1.

First, we contend that the supply of quality candidates constrains the ability of party leaders to nominate experienced, quality candidates (Norris 1997). When parties have few highly experienced candidates to draw upon, they will be less able to place those candidates

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<sup>2</sup>Different countries send different numbers of candidates to the EP, but delegations are roughly proportional to population.

high on EP lists. The few experienced individuals will instead be spread thin between EU, national, regional and local positions. We anticipate, therefore, that small parties with few seats in national legislature will have a limited supply of national legislators to place on EP lists and instead list candidates with lower quality regional and local legislators. We measure this using the proportion of seats currently held by the party in national legislature. In addition, we expect that parties in countries with legislatures featuring many small parties will place fewer high quality candidates high on EP lists. This, again, speaks to the supply constraints faced by parties with few valuable national seats to distribute amongst their politicians. A fragmented legislature will give component parties little access to experienced politicians to use in EP elections, forcing them to place lower quality local and regional politicians on lists. A measure of party fractionalization, the Rae index, characterizes the prevalence of small parties. We expect that parties hailing from fragmented legislatures with high Rae indices will place fewer quality nationally experienced candidates on their lists.

The type of party leaders who make decisions about candidate placement also determines the characteristics of candidates favored on lists. We examine the extent to which intra-party organizational factors—specifically the centralization of candidate selection—help to predict nominees’ political career histories. Previous studies of list placement indicate that it is parties’ selection mechanisms that partially determine the types of candidates chosen (Norris 1997, Rahat & Hazan 2001). Specifically, we hypothesize that selectorates will tend to favor candidates who have accrued political experience at the same level as that of the selectorate. That is, parties with centralized selection mechanisms will prefer to select candidates with extensive experience at the national level, either as elected officials, or as members of the national party’s executive organs. On the other hand, parties with distributed candidate selectors will privilege prospective candidates with sub-national party executive and elected experience, at either the regional or local levels. Selection institutions vary considerably throughout Europe, allowing us to observe variation in types of candidate chosen by different selection mechanisms. We measure party selection mechanism using a

survey question administered to 2009 EP candidates inquiring about their selection mechanism. Parties where the mean of candidates reported national selectorates are characterized by an indicator variable as national selectorates, while all other parties are regional/local selectorates.

The relative importance and visibility of the election among voters also determines the quality of candidates selected for lists. 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. Two complementary incentives cause this effect. Party leaders seeking to maximize votes during an election receiving extensive attention will use candidates with broad appeal to win additional votes. Higher quality candidates with national backgrounds serve parties' purposes more than less visible regional and local politicians. For their part, candidates themselves desire the increased voter attention significant electoral races garner. Higher quality candidates will therefore find such elections attractive to run in. With both party leaders wanting to use their best candidates to win votes and candidates seeking voters to increase their personal appeal, we argue that parties in countries where EP electoral races receive more press and are viewed as more important are more likely to place high quality, nationally experienced candidates on their lists.

Finally, the relationship between the party and the European Union affects the likelihood of placing experienced candidates higher on lists. First, the level of a country's integration in European institutions conditions the relative importance of EP seats to parties. Parties from countries with more at stake in Europe should be more likely to place higher quality, more experienced politicians on EP lists. Specifically, we argue that countries in the Eurozone will prioritize high quality candidates on their EP lists relative to non-Eurozone countries, as the consequences of ineffective representation in the EP are much greater for them.

In addition to the relative salience of EP seats to countries, individual parties also take policy positions on the European Union. Parties outline their policy positions vis-a-vis the European Union during elections, on the campaign trail and in manifestos. The theoretical

effect of positions on Europe on list placement is unclear. On one hand, parties expressing views supportive of the European project may tend to send better politicians there, as the performance of the party in those institutions is viewed as more important. On the other hand, euroskeptic parties also have incentives to send high quality, nationally experienced candidates to the EP in order to resist any additional expansion and roll back EU institutions. These conflicting motivations lead us to expect that a party's support for the EU has a null effect on party candidate nomination strategy.

By contrast, the level of emphasis a party places on the EU, independent of its directionality, will have an effect on its likelihood of sending high quality experienced candidates. Intense support or opposition to the EU motivates parties to place high quality candidates in better list positions in EP elections because both types of parties seek to accomplish major goals in the EP. For anti-EU parties, this is to contract or arrest the growth of European institutions while pro-EU parties seek to widen and deepen the European Union in office. These incentives motivate parties to use their quality, experienced candidates because they are most able to pass effective policy. We operationalize the emphasis placed on the EU by parties using the sum of EU Manifestos positive and negative statements about the EU. In addition, we expect that pro-EU parties that also emphasize the EU will prioritize powerful, nationally experienced lists. The logic is straightforward: for highly interested and pro-EU parties, MEP positions are especially valuable. For party leaders, more EP seats mean a greater opportunity to pass vital EU policy, and for politicians, it serves as an especially valuable elected position. As a result, a party with this combination of attributes will result in an even greater likelihood of constructing a list containing quality candidates. We use an interaction term to represent this effect.

Table 1: Determinants of Candidate Experience on EP Lists

Theory	Operationalization
Small Parties	Proportion of Seats Held
Party Fractionalization	Rae Index of National Legislature
Selectorate	National Selectorate Dummy
Election Importance/Visibility	Aggregate EP Election Television Time
Eurozone	Dummy for Country Eurozone Membership
Pro-Anti EU Position	Party Pro/Anti EU Manifesto Position
Party Emphasis on EU	Sum of Party Statements about EU in Manifesto
Pro-EU X Emphasize EU	Interaction of Manifesto Positions

## 2 The EP Biographies Project

Testing EU list placement hypotheses, however, requires extensive new data collection of European candidate characteristics. Hitherto, most work assessing the identity, experience and background of EP candidates relies on evidence taken from MEP themselves instead of candidates (Patzelt 1999). Others studies examine EP candidate selection in particular countries (Westlake 1994, Kauppi 1996, Schweitzer & Carl-Christoph 1989, Gherghina & Chiru 2009, Linek & Outly 2006) or a small sample of states (Blomgren 1999) Finally, some scholars, assuming that the goal of MEPs is a return to domestic politics, collected information on MEP national electoral experience. Compiling data on pre- and post-EP offices for MEPs elected between 1979 and 1994, Scarrow (1997) observes that, over time, the EP attracted more legislators interested in a European career rather than in returning to a domestic office. Stolz (2001) uses similar data to calculate “exchange rates” between domestic and European levels of legislative office. Most work uses surveys of MEPs to draw conclusions about the candidates parties nominate to the EP and why. Unfortunately, these data are based on subsets MEPs who chose to return finished surveys (?). For surveys that target candidates, rather than MEPs, the evidence is still restricted to a sample of candidates because of low return rates (Norris & Franklin 1997). Even the latest candidate survey project covering the 2009 EP election, the European Parliament Candidate Election

Study (EECS), features wildly varying response rates to its 6500 surveys. Depending on party, response rates typically ranged between 0% and 40% of a party’s candidates (Giebler, Haus & Wessels 2010). At the very least, existing data sources provide a poor tool for examining how different parties across Europe make candidate selection decisions because few parties are represented by more than one or two respondents. Thus, while they may give us a reasonable picture of candidate characteristics on average, they provide little traction for researchers interested in causal questions about candidate selection and strategy variation across parties.

In order to test theories about candidate selection for the European Parliament, we instead collected an original dataset describing EP candidate biographies. In the months before the 2009 EP election, we gathered native language candidate information from internet sources for all EP list candidates. The bulk of the biographical information is drawn from official party websites, but other sources, including blogs, personal websites, media reports, and governments’ candidate rolls were also identified. Biographical materials were then analyzed by fluent language speakers who coded for salient political positions, career histories, and demographic variables. In general, biographies themselves ranged from short, 1-2 sentence descriptions to full CVs. Typically they fell somewhere in between. This approach captured the backgrounds for the vast majority of candidates on lists. In all, we captured information on 5064 distinct political positions for the 3089 candidates in our sample.

The biographical data sample contains 12 countries: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Romania, Spain and the United Kingdom.<sup>3</sup> Table 2 shows the number of candidates coded in this sample, broken down by country.<sup>4</sup> We gathered lists and biographies from all national parties predicted by Hix,

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<sup>3</sup>Coding biographies is extremely time intensive and requires relevant language skills, so we perform our analysis on this relatively representative sample of EU countries. We plan to extend the analysis to all EU countries once coding work progresses.

<sup>4</sup>We 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 2: 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

Marsh & Vivyan (2009) to receive a single seat in the 2009 European Parliament election.<sup>5</sup> In total, the sample contains lists, at the national or regional level depending on EP electoral system, for 71 national parties.

We first coded static variables about candidates drawn from biographies: gender, union membership, education level and age. These variables describe the individual candidates' characteristics. With respect to gender, European candidates displayed an uneven split between males and females, favoring men. 41% of candidates were female, while this imbalance was exacerbated among candidates likely to win EP seats, where only 36% of candidates were women.<sup>6</sup> Union membership was coded as a dummy variable indicating when candidates discussed belonging to a union, works council or agricultural cooperative. In practice, this was rare: 8% of candidates, usually belonging to communist or other hard left parties, noted their union membership. We operationalized education as a categorical variable correspond-

<sup>5</sup>We were unable to find lists and/or biographies for a subset of parties. This was quite rare, only occurring for 4 parties in the sample.

<sup>6</sup>For the purposes of the descriptives and tests presented in the paper, we consider candidates lower than four positions below the lowest successfully elected candidate on national lists as unlikely to win seats and unviable candidates. For regional PR lists with smaller district magnitude and much more predictable election outcomes and seat distributions, we label candidates lower than one position below the lowest successfully elected candidate unviable.

ing to highest level of education reached. Candidates reported their level of education only 49% of the time but 76% of candidates with an excellent chance of winning a seat, however, reported their education level. 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. This is quite surprising given that we expect individuals at the bottom of EP lists will often be younger politicians paying their dues.

Fluent native language speakers then examined individuals' biographies and recorded distinct political positions mentioned by the candidate biographies. When available, they also recorded the dates they held those positions. These positions belonged to one of three categories: elected, ministerial and non-elected party leadership positions. Finally, the data differentiates local, regional and national levels of political positions.

Elected positions were the dominant type of political positions identified. 43% percent of candidates had held some type of elected position, as Table 3 demonstrates. The table also shows that candidates placed in a good position to win seats usually (69%) had elected experience. Individuals near the top of their lists frequently had multiple elected positions in their biographies. Across countries, the distribution of elected individuals was not similar. In some countries, such as Greece, Spain and the Netherlands, only about one third of candidates reported elected experience while in other systems, Ireland, UK and France, experience was far more common.

The second type of experience, ministerial experience, was extremely rare in candidates for the European Parliament in 2009. Only candidates at the top of the list or older candidates near retirement had cabinet experience. In all, only 67 candidates had held portfolios in their national governments. Most were very experienced senior candidates near the top of lists.

Table 3: 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%)

The final category of political position coded was non-elected party positions. Candidates could be quality candidates and gain favorable placement based simply on their internal service to the party rather than elected offices held. The biographies approach allowed us to take a snapshot of the candidate’s rank or former rank in the internal party hierarchy. In particular, we recorded when candidates mentioned their executive level positions (member of the bureau, president or vice president of the party, secretariat, etc) of the national, regional or local party. We expect that candidates with executive level experience in political parties will be considered more desirable candidates than non-executives. Approximately 27% of candidates held executive experience. This indicates that party executive experience in biographies is less frequent than elected experience but far more common than rare ministerial positions.

### 3 Other Data

We supplemented our biographical data with party and candidate level information from a variety of sources. First, we measured national party size by gathering the proportion of seats held by each party in the lower house of their national parliament from the European Journal of Political Research. We also made extensive use of the PIREDEU group’s 2009 European election study (EES 2010). We used the contextual portion of the PIREDEU data to measure national party fractionalization, operationalized as the Rae index for the lower house of each national legislature. Furthermore, we drew eurozone classifications from the same source. We draw 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.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, we code a party’s emphasis on Europe in terms of the total proportion of sentence fragments in their manifesto that coders classified as pertaining to EU institutions. The PIREDEU press study provides us with 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. Finally, we used PIREDEU’s candidate survey to measure intraparty candidate selection mechanisms. Specifically, we used candidates’ responses to the question: “on which level were you nominated as an official candidate for EP elections.” For each party, we coded parties’ selection procedure as nationally based if the modal respondent classified the party’s system as such, and coded the selectorate as subnational otherwise.

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<sup>7</sup>This is the `pro_anti_EU` variable in the PIREDEU dataset.

## 4 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  $p$ ,  $i_{pt} \in I$  is the candidate that party  $p$  selects for list position  $t$ ,  $\Theta_t^p \cap \Psi_t^p = \emptyset$ ,  $\Theta_t^p \subset \Psi_0^p \forall t$ ,  $\Psi_t^p \subset \Psi_0^p \forall t$ , and  $\Theta_0^p = \emptyset$ .

Each element of  $\Psi_0^p$  is associated with a  $K$ -vector,  $\boldsymbol{\gamma}_i$ , representing candidate  $i$ 's membership in each of  $K$  ideal types, or groups. For example, if we wish to model parties' candidate choices in terms of nominee gender, we might represent each potential candidate in terms of a two-dimensional vector where  $\boldsymbol{\gamma}_i = (1, 0)$  when candidate  $i$  is female, and  $\boldsymbol{\gamma}_i = (0, 1)$  for potential male nominees. In general, candidates can hold membership in multiple groups, and partial group membership is also possible. We assume 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.

In general, party  $p$ 's choice of nominee for list place  $t$  can depend both on the characteristics of the remaining available potential candidates,  $\Psi_t^p$ , and those of the list at point  $t$ ,  $\Theta_t^p$ . 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 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. Parties’ characteristics determine their preferences, and, in particular, each  $\boldsymbol{\beta}_k$  is a vector of 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  $\gamma_i$ —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  $\Psi_t^p$  contains  $K$  candidates, each of which is a full member of just one of the  $K$  candidate groups, and no two members of  $\Psi_t^p$  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.<sup>8</sup>

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,

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<sup>8</sup>In reality, parties forming lists rarely 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.

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 list spots for each party,  $p$ .<sup>9</sup> In so doing, we assume that the universe of potential nominees to top list positions,  $\Psi_0^p$ , is captured by each party’s full list.<sup>10</sup> 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.

In what follows, we represent potential EP nominees in terms of  $K = 3$  groups, based on the biographical data that we collected. Specifically, we record the highest level of non-surpanational elected office noted by each candidate, and classify each politician as a full member of one of three groups: local or no elected office, regionally, but not nationally, experienced, and previous holders of national office.<sup>11</sup> So, for example, a candidate that

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<sup>9</sup>In 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.

<sup>10</sup>It 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.

<sup>11</sup>We do not include European elected office—that is, election to the EP—in this classification because we

reported holding no office above the local level would be represented by the vector  $\gamma_i = (1, 0, 0)$ , while a candidate who reported holding local, regional, and national offices would be coded as  $\gamma_i = (0, 0, 1)$ , because her highest elected position was in a national legislature. We use these groupings to examine how parties with differing characteristics prioritize candidates with varying levels of experience in elected office, modeling how parties select those highly viable candidates that populate the top of their lists.

We estimated the models using a Bayesian approach, using a Metropolis-Hastings algorithm, and adopted diffuse normal priors on the coefficients,  $\beta$ . A detailed description of the algorithm, software, and model fit diagnostics are available from the authors upon request.

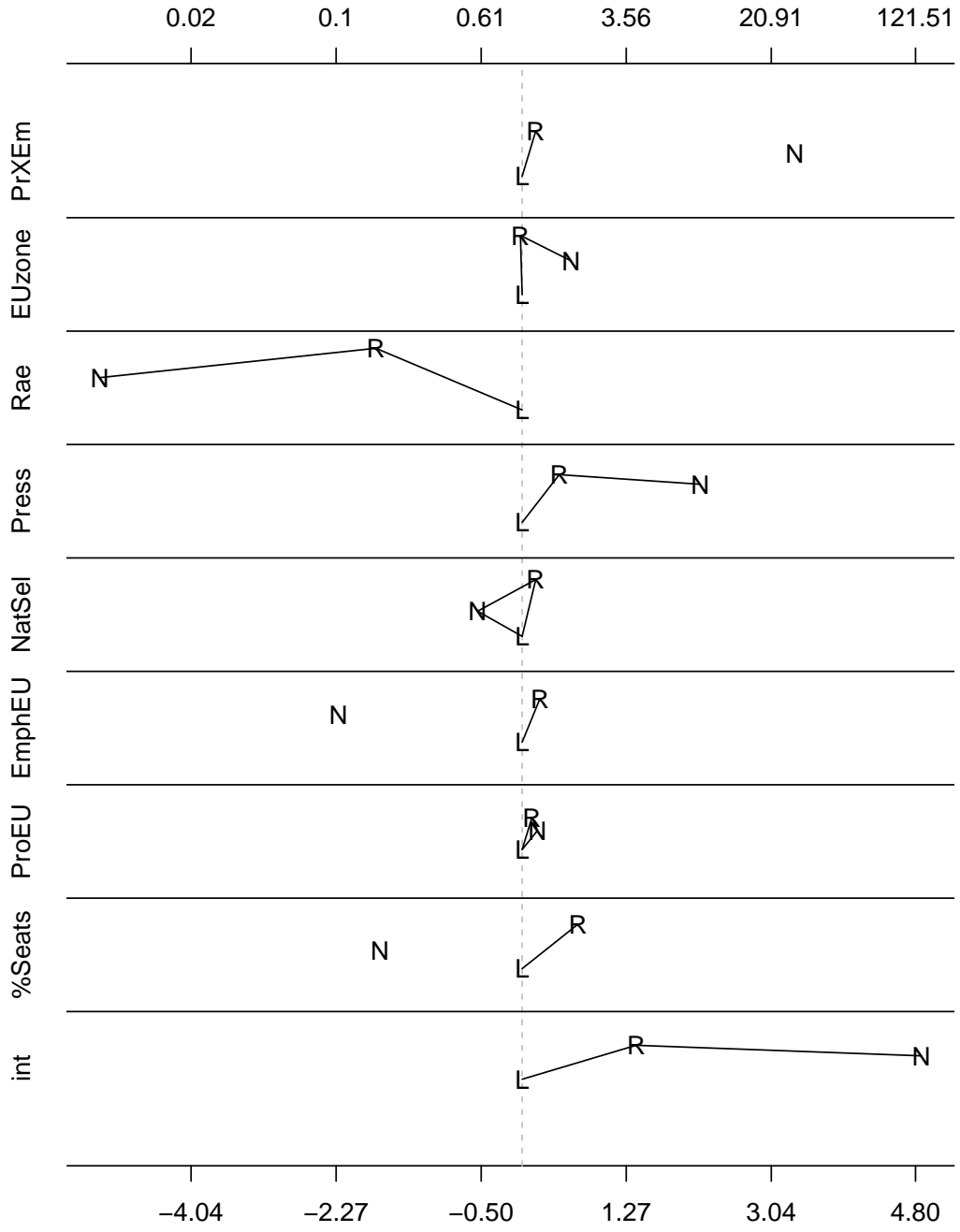
## 5 Results

Figure 1 displays the model coefficient estimates graphically, using a technique introduced by Long (1997) for use with multinomial logit models. The model described in section 4 generates a set of coefficient estimates for each of the  $K$  experience-based groups of candidates. In figure 1, we mark coefficients corresponding to the effect for nationally experienced candidates, candidates who have attained at most regional experience, and local or inexperienced nominees, with N, R, and L, 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 higher than local elected experience—to equal zero; the remaining coefficients represent the tendency of parties to choose candidates with at most regional, or national elected experience, 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 we

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are primarily interested in how elected experience within national system conditions parties decisions about who to send to Europe.

Figure 1: Model results



include them 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 indistinguishable with a line, while coefficients that are different at conventional levels are not connected to one another.<sup>12</sup>

Starting at the bottom of the figure and looking first at the intercept, we see that, as one might expect, the average party prefers to place its most experienced—in terms of highest elected office attained—candidates at the top of the list. Indeed, parties are around four times as likely to select candidates with regional experience for highly viable spots than they are to choose nominees with no elected experience above the local level. They are a whopping 130 times more likely to choose a nationally experienced candidate than they are to select a local politician, although the confidence interval is very large—ranging between 3.5 and 2018 times. Note, that while the differences between local and regional candidates, and between regional and national candidates, are not statistically significant, the difference between national and local nominees is. This finding is consistent with the idea that parties place candidates with name recognition—something that should correspond to level of elected experience—towards the tops of their lists to attract votes.

Next, we move upwards, to the next set of coefficient estimates described by figure 1. The result for national party size—based on the proportion of seats held by the party in the lower house of the national legislature—is somewhat perplexing. Indeed, larger parties tend to nominate candidates with lower levels of elected experience than do smaller parties, even though larger parties should, theoretically, have a larger pool of nationally experienced candidates to choose from. Of course, the model coefficients capture the tendency to select candidates given access to all types; it may be that smaller parties prize their nationally

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<sup>12</sup>Specifically, when the 95% highest posterior density regions—essentially the Bayesian 95% confidence intervals—of two coefficients overlap, we draw a line between those two points on the figure.

experienced nominees more than larger parties because of their relative scarcity. Or, perhaps experienced politicians from smaller parties feel like they can get more done in the EP, where even the smaller groups have a reasonable proportion of the seats, and where procedural rules provide opportunities to affect lawmaking—primarily through rapporteurships and committee work—to a greater degree than may be possible in majority-dominated national legislatures. If this is the case, then small party nominees with national experience may lobby more persistently for highly viable spots than their counterparts in larger parties.

The third-from-bottom, fourth-from-bottom, and top rows of figure 1 show how parties’ attitudes towards the EU, and the degree of emphasis party platforms place on EU institutions, interact to influence selection decisions. As the top row of the figure shows, parties that both approve of, and emphasize, the EU place nationally experienced politicians at the heads of their lists at significantly higher rates than other parties. Indeed, summing the three components of the interaction, we find that, on average, such parties are about three and a half times more likely to choose a nationally experience politician to fill a highly viable list position than they are to choose a nominee with only local or regional experience. Thus, valuing, and approving of, the EU intensifies the general tendency of parties, as evinced by the intercept estimates, to prioritize the placement of their most nationally visible candidates.

Party system characteristics also play a role in how parties prioritize their nominees. Looking at the coefficients for the Rae index of party fractionalization plotted in figure 1, one can see that the use of nationally experienced candidates declines in a statistically significant manner, relative to local or electorally inexperienced candidates,<sup>13</sup> as the national party system becomes more fractionalized. This is consistent with the idea that, on average, parties will have a smaller supply of national candidates who harbor ambitions to lead EP electoral lists because more of every party’s talent with experience at the highest national level will be tied up in national office.

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<sup>13</sup>And also relative to candidates with regional experience, although this contrast is not statistically significant.

Finally, the relative importance of policymaking for a party's nation correlates with their selection behavior. Again, parties show favoritism towards highly experienced candidates vis-a-vis nominees with little legislative background, while the other contrasts are statistically insignificant. Eurozone parties are more likely to send high quality national candidates. This finding largely bears out our expectation that parties will attempt to send legislatively experienced nominees to Brussels more often when they believe that policymaking at the EU level will impact them at home than they will when the importance of EU legislation in their country is less stark.

## 6 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. 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. Specifically, they choose candidates with differing degrees of experience in elected office in a manner that varies systematically with these variables.

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