

To adapt or not to adapt? An experimental test of whether the selection of ethnic minority candidates is affected by interparty diffusion

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Abstract

Although it is widely acknowledged that political parties operate in a system of party interdependence, little is known about whether party selectors' decisions to select ethnic minority aspirants is affected by previous selection strategies and motives of other parties, a process referred to as diffusion. Drawing on a survey experiment conducted among Flemish local party chairs, this study tests whether party selectors are more likely to select ethnic minority aspirants when they are made aware that doing so has previously yielded electoral benefits for some of their competitors ('competition'), or that by doing so they adhere to social norms ('emulation'). Contradictory to research examining the diffusion of female candidacies, only little evidence is found that diffusion affects the selection of ethnic minority candidates. Emulation had a general, but weak, positive effect on the selection of ethnic minority candidates, whereas the influence of competition was restricted to leftist and less electorally successful parties. These limited effects can be explained by the high supply of ethnic minority aspirants provided in the experiment, but also by the specific inclusion dilemmas associated with selection ethnic minorities. These are strongly party- and context-specific, which makes parties less likely to respond to other parties' strategies.

Key words: ethnic representation, candidate selection, diffusion, survey experiment

1 Introduction

Political parties are crucial contributors to the under-representation of ethnic minorities, which is considered as one of the major democratic deficits of current democracies. By failing to take the interests of under-represented groups at heart as well as to motivate them to participate in the political recruitment process, unrepresentative institutions undermine their own legitimacy (Martin, 2016; Phillips, 1995). Political parties can diminish these deficits by

selecting more diverse candidates, by assigning diverse candidates to realistic list positions or districts and by supporting their electoral campaign (Janssen, Erzeel, & Celis, 2020; Shah, 2014).

Scholars examining parties' strategies regarding the selection of ethnic minority candidates have thus far examined which party and district characteristics shape parties' decision to include ethnic minority candidates as though they were operating in a vacuum (Dancygier, 2017; Farrer & Zingher, 2018; Janssen et al., 2020; Tolley, 2019; van der Zwan, Tolsma, & Lubbers, 2020; Van Trappen, Vandeleene, & Wauters, 2021). However, parties operate in a system of party interdependence, which implies that a party's selection strategies can be influenced by the prior selection strategies of other parties, a process which is referred to as diffusion (Gilardi, 2012; Matland & Studlar, 1996).

A study of Shah (2014) indirectly showed how diffusion could affect the selection of ethnic minorities. She argued that ethnic minority candidates are more likely to emerge in districts where ethnic minority candidates have previously run than in districts where no ethnic minority candidate has ever run before. This correlation was framed from a supply-side perspective. Running as an ethnic minority candidate in an electoral district when no other ethnic minority candidate has done so before is considered to be a significant initial hurdle which ethnic minority aspirants need to overcome. Once this hurdle is passed, more ethnic minority aspirants will come forward as previous ethnic minority candidacies signal the readiness of the electoral district for more political diversity. The correlation between previous ethnic minority candidacies and the emergence of present ethnic minority candidates can instead also be looked at from a demand-side perspective. When a political party nominates ethnic minority candidates on their list, this could incentivize other parties to enhance the representation of ethnic minorities on their list as well.

This paper offers a first step in bridging the diffusion literature and the literature on ethnic minority representation by examining how the selection strategies of different parties are connected. It departs from insights derived from studies focusing on the diffusion of policies in general and the diffusion of female candidacies and gender quota in particular. Two issues are scrutinized in this paper. First, why are political parties responsive to the selection strategies and motives of other parties? Both competition and emulation are expected to influence parties' responsiveness to other parties. The former implies that parties adopt a logic of consequences and are influenced by selection strategies which appear to increase their electoral competitiveness. Alternatively, the latter means that parties' adopt a logic of appropriateness

and are inspired by the normative implications associated with other parties' selection strategies. Second, this paper addresses whether some parties are more responsive to the strategies of other parties than others. Attention is paid to parties' ideological predisposition to select ethnic minority candidates, their electoral strength and their previous experience with selecting ethnic minority candidates.

To these ends, a survey experiment was conducted among local party chairs in Flanders. An experimental approach was chosen because real-life data are less suited to measure diffusion in terms of the selection of candidates as they generally fail to account for the role of aspirant supply. Furthermore, real-life data are also less suited to attribute changes in party's behaviour to different diffusion mechanisms (Butler, Volden, Dynes, & Shor, 2017; Maggetti & Gilardi, 2016). The participants were randomly assigned to one of three experimental groups. The first group was shown a short hypothetical journal article which included information about the electoral appeal of ethnic minority candidates who had previously run for other parties in their electoral district. The second group had to read an article about the democratic norms which led other parties to select ethnic minority candidates in the past, and the article presented to the third group discussed the campaign expenses of local parties. The first two articles allowed to measure diffusion based on respectively competition and emulation. The respondents assigned to the third article acted as the control group. After having read the article, the participants were asked to compose a candidate list of 9 candidates to be chosen from a fixed list of 20 potential candidates, including 4 ethnic minority aspirants.

The analysis of the experimental data revealed that diffusion is not a dominant driver of the selection of ethnic minority candidates. In general, participants assigned to the 'emulation' treatment selected slightly more ethnic minority aspirants than the participants assigned to the control group. The 'competition' treatment, in turn, only had an effect on specific parties. Compared to their rightist and more electorally successful counterparts, both leftist and less electorally successful parties selected significantly more ethnic minority candidates when being made aware that doing so had previously been an electorally successful strategy for other parties in their district. The difference between more and less successful parties was, however, only statistically significant among participants in moderately diverse municipalities.

On the one hand, these results could be an underestimating of real-life diffusion effects as the large supply of ethnic minority aspirants presented in the experiment made it easy for all party selectors to diversify their lists. On the other hand, there are reasons to assume that diffusion in general plays a smaller role for ethnic minority candidates than for female

candidates given that the ethnic inclusion dilemmas parties are faced with are highly party- and context-specific (Dancygier, 2017). This makes it more difficult for parties to translate the experience other parties have with ethnic minority candidates to their own party.

2 The selection of ethnic minority candidates and the role of diffusion

That political actors, whether defined as parties, governments or organizations, do not operate in a vacuum but in networks, and that as a result their strategies, policies and decisions (hereafter in short: strategies) are interdependent was already recognized in the late 19th century and is currently known as diffusion or contagion¹ (Gilardi, 2012). Diffusion patterns have been demonstrated for a wide variety of political phenomena, including policies (Gilardi, 2010), electoral systems (Bol, Pilet, & Riera, 2015) and regime contention (Bamert, Gilardi, & Wasserfallen, 2015).

The diffusion literature offers important opportunities to enhance the scholarly insight into candidate selection processes as well. As parties are generally uncertain about the consequences of new selection strategies, they are expected to rely on informational shortcuts, including the perceived consequences of other parties' strategies, to estimate whether some strategies are beneficial or not. Starting with Matland and Studlar (1996), several scholars have provided evidence about how diffusion affects parties' decisions to select female candidates or to adopt gender quota (Cowell-Meyers, 2011, 2014; Meier, 2004; Simón & Verge, 2017). Attention has been paid to both diffusion between parties within the same electoral district on the one hand and diffusion between parties operating in different electoral districts within (Matland & Studlar, 1996) or across countries (Huang, 2015; Hughes, Krook, & Paxton, 2015) on the other hand. The insights presented in this paper are restricted to the former, which Matland and Studlar (1996) refer to as micro-contagion. As ethnic minority communities are unevenly distributed across electoral districts and the openness of ethnic majority voters equally differs between electoral districts, it is highly presumable that, parties will first and foremost respond to the diversifying selection strategies of their direct competitors rather than to look at parties operating in distinctive contexts.

¹ Whereas scholars generally use the concepts diffusion and contagion interchangeably (Graham, Shipan, & Volden, 2013; Most & Starr, 1990), some distinguish between the two (Cliff & First, 2013). For consistency, the term diffusion is used throughout this paper.

When it comes to the question why strategies diffuse, two distinct yet related classifications of diffusion mechanisms are commonly used in the literature (Gilardi, 2012). The first type of classification distinguishes between a logic of consequences and a logic of appropriateness. Whereas the former implies that strategies are altered when the strategies of others appear useful to achieve certain desirable results, the latter refers to strategy adaptations driven by ideas about normatively appropriate behaviour (March & Olsen, 1998; Pollitt, 2001).

The second type of classification differentiates between competition, emulation and learning. Competition implies that political actors adapt their strategies based on the strategies of other actors because they compete for the same resources. For instance, when one government introduces a reduction of corporate tax rates, other governments will be likely to follow suit to remain competitive. When political actors are made aware that adopting similar strategies is socially appropriate and therefore start to adapt their own strategies, emulation is at play. For instance, after several democratic countries had introduced election monitoring, other countries followed suit to signal their commitment to democratization (Gilardi, 2012). Competition and emulation therefore closely resemble a logic of consequences and a logic of appropriateness respectively. Learning, finally, means that political actors gain knowledge about the consequences associated with a strategy. When contemplating whether to introduce smoking bans in bars and restaurants, for example, governments can learn from trends in the cigarette consumption in other countries where antismoking laws have already been implemented. However, although in theory, learning constitutes a separate mechanism, it cannot always be perfectly discerned from competition and emulation as sometimes it is defined as gaining knowledge about how political actors can increase their competitiveness (Gilardi, 2010), whereas other scholars define learning as obtaining information about the socially appropriateness of adopting certain strategies (Glasius, Schalk, & De Lange, 2020). Therefore, depending on the context, a classification consisting of only two mechanisms seems more appropriate.

In relation to parties' diversifying selection strategies, both competition and emulation are likely to explain why parties (further) diversify their candidate lists when others have previously done so. Because parties are both vote-seeking (Downs, 1957) and concerned about their legitimacy and party image (Ignazi, 2014; Johns, Mitchell, Denver, & Pattie, 2009), they can be expected to diversify their candidate pool when they think this will increase their vote share and/or legitimacy. Therefore, both competition and emulation can be expected to be important drivers of the adoption of diversifying strategies. In line with the previous paragraph,

considering learning as a separate mechanism would distort a clear delineation between parties' selection motives as parties can learn from both the electoral and normative consequences of other parties' selections strategies (Simón & Verge, 2017). Studies focusing on the diffusion of female candidacies and gender quota have confirmed the effect of both competition and emulation (Muriaas & Kayuni, 2013). On the one hand, once a successful innovating party shows that selecting female candidates does not result in an electoral penalty, or can even contribute to a party's electoral success, more established parties are likely to follow suit (Caul, 2001; Matland & Studlar, 1996). On the other hand, parties equally respond to pressures to comply with social norms about gender equality and women's representation (Cowell-Meyers, 2011; Meier, 2004; Simón & Verge, 2017).

Although the selection of ethnic minority candidates has not yet been approached from a diffusion perspective, research has pointed out that when deciding whether and which kind of ethnic minority candidates to include on their list, political parties take both electoral and normative incentives into account. Dancygier (2017) in this regard distinguishes between vote-based and symbolic inclusion. Vote-based inclusion of ethnic minority candidates emerges when a party can attract more voters than it can lose by selecting ethnic minority candidates. This is primarily the case in ethnically diverse electoral districts. Symbolic inclusion appears when parties want to boost their party image by appearing as a non-racist and minority-supporting party. The (anticipated) electoral consequences of symbolic inclusion are limited, as it is only expected to attract a small number of cosmopolitan voters. When translating vote-based and symbolic inclusion patterns to a context in which political parties interact, they closely resemble competition and emulation. Therefore, I hypothesize that:

- **H1a:** party selectors are more likely to select ethnic minority candidates when they are aware that competitors have done so in the past and this has yielded electoral benefits.
- **H1b:** party selectors are more likely to select ethnic minority candidates when they are made aware that by doing so they act in accordance with present democratic norms.

Besides examining why diffusion occurs, scholars have addressed the question in which contexts and among which political actors diffusion is more likely to occur. Research focusing on the diffusion of gender quota and the selection of female candidates have primarily addressed the role of party systems and the role of party leadership exclusiveness. When it comes to diffusion between parties in the same electoral district, Matland and Studlar (1996) argued that multi-party proportional representation (PR) systems offer better opportunities than majoritarian systems. Because majoritarian systems tend to be single-member district plurality

systems which are dominated by two parties, the latter may feel less pressured by small innovating parties. Furthermore, the potential costs associated with selecting a female candidate are higher than in PR systems where parties can balance their ticket. Additionally, parties characterized by strong organizational structures and exclusive selectorates are more responsive to diffusion pressures as their leadership can steer the course of the party (Cowell-Meyers, 2011; Kenny & Mackay, 2014). In this paper, I choose to hold these factors constant, as will be discussed in sections 3 and 4, and instead move to the potential effect of three other party characteristics derived from the diffusion literature which are likely to affect parties' sensibility to diffusion pressures.

First, leftist parties can be expected to be more sensible to diffusion pressures regarding the selection of ethnic minority candidates than rightist parties (Kenny & Mackay, 2014; Simón & Verge, 2017). To start, parties are more inclined to respond to the strategies adopted by other parties when they are ideologically predisposed to adopting a certain strategy than when they are predisposed against this strategy (Butler et al., 2017). Notwithstanding recent findings that rightist parties are increasingly committed to ensuring ethnic minority representation, even in districts with small ethnic minority populations (Sobolewska, 2013), leftist parties remain stronger advocates of equal access to political power for marginalised groups, including ethnic minorities (Bird, Saalfeld, & Wüst, 2011; Marcos-Marne, 2017). Consequently, leftist parties can be expected to be more sensible to both competition and emulation pressures than rightist parties. Furthermore, leftist parties are more popular among ethnic minority voters than rightist voters (Bergh & Bjørklund, 2011; Strijbis, 2014). Therefore, when other parties start to select ethnic minority candidates, leftist parties might feel that their electoral appeal among ethnic minority and cosmopolitan voters and their image as a minority-friendly party are both directly affected by these choices and that as a consequence they need to reconsider their own strategies. Rightist parties, which generally attract less ethnic minority voters, may feel less need to respond to such pressures as they assume they have less to gain by adapting their current selection decisions.

- **H2:** Leftist parties are more sensible to competition and emulation pressures to select ethnic minority candidates than rightist parties.

Second, previous studies have argued that electoral uncertainty and party competition positively affect the likelihood that diffusion occurs within a political system (Cowell-Meyers, 2011). Translated to the party level, parties with a large vote share may be less likely to respond to the strategies by successful innovating parties, because their current strategies have already

proven to be successful and because they may believe they are already perceived as legitimate by the electorate because of their electoral strength. Less successful or opposition parties, in turn, are more likely to adapt their strategies after suffering electoral losses (Put, Maddens, & Verleden, 2017). Therefore, they can be expected to respond more strongly to strategies of other parties which seem electorally beneficial (competition) and to a lesser degree also to strategies of other parties which seem to have increased their legitimacy and party image (emulation), as these factors could indirectly contribute to their electoral success (Krook, 2009; Simón & Verge, 2017).

- **H3:** Parties which obtained a small vote share in the previous elections are more sensible to competition pressures and to a lesser degree also emulation pressures to select ethnic minority candidates than parties which obtained a large vote share.

Third, parties' responses to the selection decision of other parties are also likely to be affected by whether or not they have prior experience with a certain strategy. Previous research has in this regard pointed to the difference between learning from others' experiences versus learning from one's own experiences (Volden, Ting, & Carpenter, 2008). Parties which have nominated ethnic minority candidates in the past already know how the selection of ethnic minority candidates affects their vote share and/or party image and therefore do not need to rely on the experiences of other parties. For instance, when they know that selecting ethnic minority candidates could entail a loss of votes, they will refrain from selecting ethnic minority candidates even when selecting ethnic minority candidates appears to be a successful strategy for other parties. Equally, when they know that selecting ethnic minority candidates increases their vote share, they will do so regardless of the electoral effects other parties generated by selecting diverse candidates. Alternatively, parties which have not yet nominated ethnic minority candidates are dependent on the experiences of other parties to make inferences about the electoral and normative consequences selecting ethnic minority candidates will entail.

- **H4:** Parties which did not select ethnic minority candidates in recent elections are more sensible to competition and emulation pressures to select ethnic minority candidates than parties which selected ethnic minority candidates in recent elections.

3 The Flemish local context

This paper examines the diffusion of ethnic minority candidacies in the context of Flanders, the Dutch-speaking and largest region of Belgium. The Belgian population has become increasingly ethnically diverse since the end of the Second World War, yet political

institutions at all political levels and in all regions remain rather homogenous (Celis & Erzeel, 2017; Janssen, Dandoy, & Erzeel, 2017; Van Trappen et al., 2021). Considering that this underrepresentation is strongly shaped at the candidate selection stage, and that Belgium is characterized by multi-party PR systems at all political levels makes it a most-likely case for the diffusion of diversifying selection strategies (Matland & Studlar, 1996). Instead of the whole country, only the Flemish-speaking region is targeted in this study. As a result of the federalization of Belgium, the Belgian party system was split into a Flemish-speaking and French-speaking party system which operate rather autonomously from each other and are characterized by their own political culture (De Winter, Swyngedouw, & Dumont, 2006). By solely focussing on the Flemish context, the party system and political culture are held constant.

The research population is further restricted to local parties instead of regional parties because the former are better suited to examine the diffusion of selection strategies within electoral districts. To start, for Flemish regional elections, Flanders is divided into five electoral districts. Because of these large electoral districts, which cancel out important distinctions in ethnic minority concentrations between municipalities, almost all parties participating in regional elections put ethnic minority candidates on their lists. Flemish local elections, in contrast, take place in 300 municipalities (and 9 districts within the city of Antwerp). Because the size of the ethnic minority population widely diverges across electoral districts, the proportion of ethnic minority candidates equally varies to a great extent. Whereas for the 2018 local elections, 54% of the candidate lists affiliated with a regional party did not include any ethnic minority candidate, the most diverse lists counted more than 50% ethnic minority candidates (Van Trappen et al., 2021). Additionally, at the regional level, the impact of the central party leadership on the list composition is very strong and there is generally some coordination of the candidate selection process across electoral districts (Vandeleene, Dodeigne, & De Winter, 2016). At the local level, in contrast, the autonomy of local party branches is much bigger (De Winter, Erzeel, Vandeleene, & Wauters, 2013). Therefore, the ‘most likely’ character of the Belgium context is most outspoken at the local level.

4 Data and methods

4.1 Survey experiment

The diffusion of ethnic minority candidate selection was tested by means of a survey experiment. An experimental approach is best suited to overcome the two main challenges diffusion scholars are confronted with. First, researchers should make convincing claims that

certain patterns are due to diffusion and are not the result of political actors responding to common shocks in a similar manner but independently from each other (Graham et al., 2013). Second, scholars need to differentiate separate diffusion mechanisms. Both quantitative and qualitative approaches based on real-life data generally fall short on at least one of these accounts. With real-life election data, it is hard to determine whether an increase of ethnic minority candidates in a particular party is inspired by prior selection strategies of other parties or whether this increase is due to other factors such as an increased supply of ethnic minority aspirants or a new party selectorate. Furthermore, quantitative studies are often confronted with a lack of suitable empirical data, which steers scholars towards using inaccurate proxies to measure diffusion mechanisms (Maggetti & Gilardi, 2016). For instance, the number of prior adoptions of a certain strategy has been used as a proxy for competition, emulation and learning (Gilardi, 2012). Although qualitative approaches are better suited to demonstrate causal relations and presumably also to detect different diffusion mechanisms, they are often aimed at finding ‘smoking gun’ evidence, which is generally hard to find (Starke, 2013). Such ‘smoking gun’ evidence is also unsuited to examine which political actors are more likely to respond to diffusion pressures than others. An experimental setting overcomes both problems. By controlling for the supply of aspirants, the experimental setting allows to make causal inferences. Additionally, the creation of clearly distinguishable experimental treatments greatly enhances the internal validity of the measurement of different diffusion mechanisms.

The research population consisted of all local party chairs in Flanders who (have) presided over a local branch of six out of the seven regional parties represented in the Flemish Parliament. Vlaams Belang, the far-right party, did not wish to participate in this study. The party chairs were chosen as the research population as they constitute the primary party selectors at the local level (De Winter et al., 2013). 1,561 local party chairs were invited to participate in the survey experiment over 297 municipalities and the 9 local districts within the city of Antwerp.² The party chairs were contacted via email. The email addresses were gathered via the party headquarters as part of the RepResent Local Chairs Survey 2018, and three parties provided updated contact lists (the liberal party, the regionalist party and the green party) in the beginning of October 2020. A first invitation was sent in the middle of October 2020, followed by a first reminder at the end of October 2020 and a final reminder in the middle of November

² Not all regional parties have local branches in every municipality.

2020. 615 local party chairs completed the survey experiment which resulted in a response rate of 39.40%. Appendix 1 contains information about the response rate per party.

At the beginning of the survey experiment, the participants were randomly divided into three groups, each of which was presented a different hypothetical newspaper article. Two groups were assigned to the experimental treatments which measured the success of competition and emulation as diffusion mechanisms. The ‘competition’ treatment focussed on the electoral success that other parties in the electoral district of the participant enjoyed due to the presence of ethnic minority candidates on their list, whereas the ‘emulation’ treatment elaborated on the democratic norms associated with the diverse candidate lists previously composed by other parties in their electoral district. The control group was provided a hypothetical newspaper article about the general campaign expenses of local parties, a neutral topic which was expected not to affect party selectors’ intentions (not) to select ethnic minority candidates. All three articles are included in Appendix 2. After being presented one of the newspaper articles, the participants were asked to answer a multiple choice question about the content of the article. This question served to test whether the participants had understood the selection strategies of other parties, which is a condition for diffusion to emerge (Matland & Studlar, 1996). Only one respondent (0.16%) did not answer the content question correctly.

The ‘competition’ and ‘emulation’ articles referred to respectively the electoral success and selection motives of ‘two other parties’ in the electoral district of the participant at times of the 2018 local elections, which took place two year prior to the experiment. Because, as in real life, parties are unable to anticipate their competitors’ current strategies, but are instead more likely to respond to the strategies they adopted in previous elections, the experimental conditions were framed accordingly (Simón & Verge, 2017). Furthermore, the articles deliberately referred to two parties instead of a single party to add weight to the message of the articles. In the 2018 local elections in Flanders, only 13 of the 300 (4.33%) municipalities counted less than three candidate lists and only one local party branch of a regional party present in these municipalities managed to obtain a vast majority of the votes (Agentschap Binnenlands Bestuur, 2018). Therefore, the reference to two competing parties is likely to be perceived as a realistic scenario by the participants. Finally, the identity of the parties mentioned in the newspaper articles was not specified for three reasons. First, although the seminal work of Matland and Studlar (1996) emphasised the catalysing role of small leftist parties, other scholars have shown that also other parties can initiate diffusion (Cowell-Meyers, 2011; Kenny & Mackay, 2014). Second, the ideological identity of the lists competing in local elections

strongly diverges across and within municipalities over time due to the presence of cartel lists and the emergence of local lists which have less outspoken ideological profiles (Dodeigne, Jacquet, & Reuchamps, 2020; Heyerick, 2016). Specifying the party profiles would therefore result in a less realistic scenario for a part of the local party chairs.

After having read the newspaper article, the participants were asked to imagine a hypothetical situation in which local elections would be held in a few months' time and were invited to compose a hypothetical candidate list consisting of nine candidates for these elections. An English translation of the question wording can be found in Appendix 3. The candidates were to be chosen from a fixed pool of 20 aspirants who varied in terms of gender (man/women), ethnicity (Flemish/Moroccan name) and experience (incumbent/active party member). The lists were thus fairly short, as in real-life local elections in Flanders candidate lists may include on average 24,66 candidates maximum. This restriction in list length was necessary because only limited information could be given about the potential candidates to ensure that the selection of ethnic minority candidates could be ascribed to their ethnic background. It would be too difficult a task to ask the party chairs to compose a realistic list of more than 20 candidates based on such limited information. Moroccan names were used to denote ethnic minority candidates because the Maghrebi community is the most prominent visible ethnic minority group in Flanders whose political representation is one of the most debated (Janssen, Dandoy, & Erzeel, 2017). Four aspirants were assigned a Moroccan name, which resulted in a high supply of ethnic minority aspirants. As such the experimental design provided another necessary conditions for diffusion to emerge. Parties not only have to understand the selection strategies of other parties, they also have to be able to adapt their strategies (Matland & Studlar, 1996). The participants were also asked to comply with the legal gender quotas present in Flanders³ when drawing their list. 36 of the 615 respondents (5.85%) did not respect the quota legislation. After having drawn their lists, the participants were asked what they thought to be the research objective of the experiment. 11 participants (1.79%) rightly guessed that the objective of the experiment was to test their response to the newspaper article.

The questionnaire ended with some questions about the party selectors and their local party. One of these questions is used as one the main predictor variables in this study: party

³ Candidate lists should be composed of an equal number of male and female candidates and the two first list positions may not be occupied by candidates of the same sex.

selectors' ideological placement of their local party branch. This was measured on a seven-point scale (1=very leftist, 7=very rightist).

4.2 Variables

The dependent variable measures the percentage of ethnic minority aspirants which were selected as candidates on a scale from one to zero. As four ethnic minority aspirants were present, a score of 0.5 for instance implies that two of the four ethnic minority aspirants were selected. Although in proportional list systems, party selectors cannot only foster the representation of ethnic minorities by selecting ethnic minority candidates, but also by granting them higher list positions, this study only looks at the presence of these candidates on the lists. Considering that the candidate lists composed during the experiment counted only nine candidates, the data are unsuited to make predictions about the 'visible' or 'eligible' list positions of the ethnic minority candidates. Furthermore, only 15 of the 651 participants selected an ethnic minority candidate as the head of list, which equally makes it impossible to estimate possible diffusion effects on this account.

The independent variables capture whether the participants were assigned to the 'competition' treatment (N=205), 'emulation' treatment (N=201), or the control group (N=209). To test hypotheses two to four, three additional variables were included. First, the ideological position of the participants' local party was included as a scale variable (1=very leftist, 7=very rightist). Second, for participants who participated with their own party (cartel lists excluded) in the 2018 local elections (N=475), information about their vote share was gathered from official government sources (Agentschap Binnenlands Bestuur, 2018). Considering that the relationship between parties' vote share and the dependent variable was not linear for all treatment groups, parties' vote share was included as a categorical instead of a numeric variable. A distinction was made between parties which obtained less than 10% of the votes (N=110), parties which obtained between 11% and 20% of the votes (N=173), parties which obtained between 21% and 30% of the votes (N=98) and parties which obtained more than 30% of the votes (N=94). Third, again those participants who participated with their own party in the 2018 local elections, the percentage of ethnic minority candidates on their lists was calculated. Candidates' ethnic origin was coded based on information found on party, candidate and news websites, complemented by information about the geographic distribution of their names (see Janssen et al. (2020) for a similar approach). Candidates of non-European, Southern-European and Eastern-European origin were defined as ethnic minority candidates. Due to the

right skewness of this variable (Appendix 4), the presence of ethnic minority candidates is measured by means of a dummy variable indication whether (N=252) or not (N=223) ethnic minority candidates were present. Finally, at the district level, the size of the ethnic minority population (Stad Antwerpen, 2020; Statistiek Vlaanderen, 2020) is taken into account as a control variable.

4.3 Statistical tests

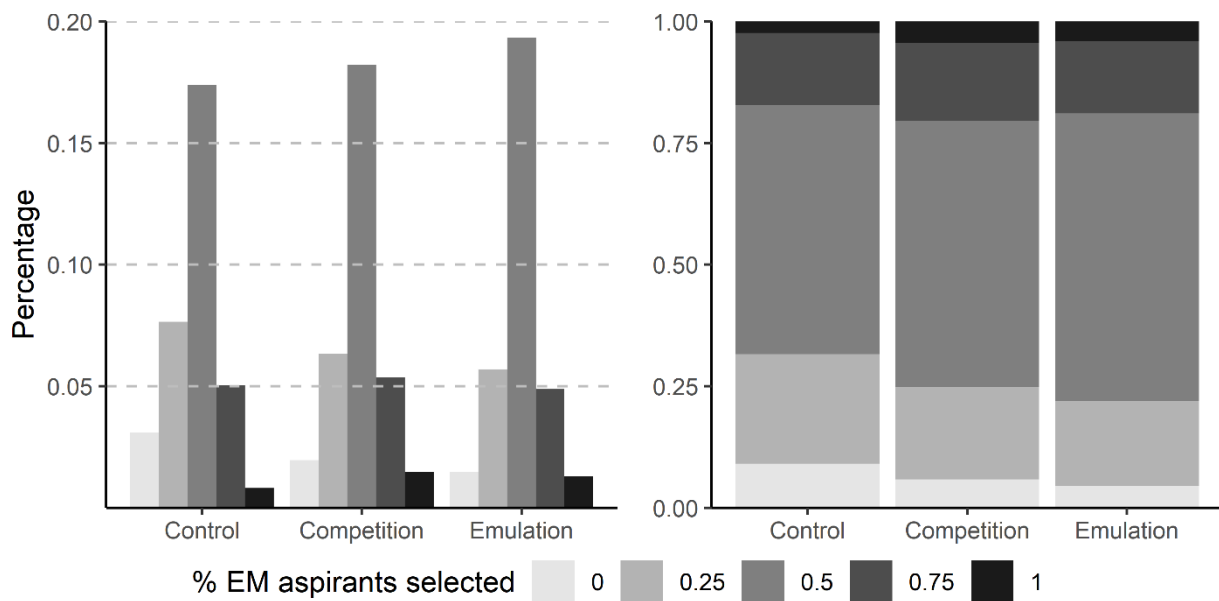
To estimate the selection of the ethnic minority aspirants, this paper relies on fractional logit regression models. These type of models are highly suited to predict the values of proportional data between the open interval (0,1). As the dependent variable in this paper captures the proportion of selected ethnic minority aspirants, the values range from 0 (no ethnic minority aspirants were selected) to one (all four ethnic minority candidates were selected). Alternative approaches such as beta-regressions or zero- or one-inflated beta models therefore cannot be used as they do not allow to take both values of zero and one into account.

The analyses below are based on the entire sample, but additional robustness checks were conducted to control for a potential social desirability bias. The robustness checks excluded those respondents who did not answer the content question correctly, those who violated the gender quotas and those who guessed that the research objective was to measure their reaction to the information provided in the hypothetical articles. When differences emerged between the models based on the entire sample and the robustness checks, this is discussed in the text.

5 Results

A comparison between the different treatment groups reveals that in all groups on average 50% of the ethnic minority aspirants were selected (2 out of 4). Party selectors in the control group selected on average 44.85% of the ethnic minority aspirants, whereas those assigned to the ‘competition treatment’ selected 48.45% and those assigned to the ‘emulation treatment’ selected 48.53%. Figure 1 shows that participants assigned to the control group more often selected zero or only one ethnic minority aspirant and less frequently nominated more than one ethnic minority aspirant than the participants assigned to the competition or ‘emulation treatment’. A one-way ANOVA test showed that these differences are statistically significant at the $p < 0.1$ level ($F(2) = 2.538$, $p < .1$) and a post hoc Tukey HSD test showed that the differences between the control and emulation group are statistically significant ($p < 0.1$).

FIGURE 1. PERCENTAGE OF ETHNIC MINORITY (EM) ASPIRANTS SELECTED, PER TREATMENT GROUP



A fractional regression model (Table 1) estimating the proportion of selected ethnic minority aspirants shows that participants assigned to the ‘competition’ or ‘emulation’ treatment selected slightly more ethnic minority aspirants than the participants assigned to the control group, although the differences are only significant for the ‘emulation’ treatment and solely at the $p < 0.1$ level. Furthermore, the ideological position of the party has a significant negative effect on the proportion of selected ethnic minority aspirants. Party chairs of rightist selected less ethnic minority aspirants than participants of leftist successful parties. Party chairs whose party obtained a vote share of more than 30% equally selected less ethnic minority aspirants than party chairs whose party obtained less than 11% of the votes. The size of the ethnic minority population has a significant positive effect, which means that party chairs from more diverse municipalities selected more ethnic minority aspirants than party chairs running in less diverse municipalities. The robustness check confirmed the effects of the party characteristics, but the effect of the emulation dummy variable became statistically insignificant. Whilst the results thus seem to refute the role of diffusion as a dominant explanation for parties’ diversifying strategies, they suggest that parties in general are somewhat responsive to normative calls concerning the representation of ethnic minorities (emulation) thereby providing limited support for hypothesis 1. The results furthermore mirror previous findings that parties’ ideological position and the ethnic composition of the electorate are primary explanations for the selection of ethnic minority candidates (Bird et al., 2011; Dancygier, 2017; Geese & Schacht, 2018; Tolley, 2019).

TABLE 1. FRACTIONAL REGRESSION MODEL ESTIMATING THE PERCENTAGE OF ETHNIC MINORITY ASPIRANTS SELECTED

	b (SE)
Intercept	0.39 (0.15)**
Treatment (ref. control)	
Competition	0.09 (0.09)
Emulation	0.16 (0.09) ^
Party's ideological position	-0.19 (0.03) ***
Party's vote share in 2018 (ref. =<10%)	
11-20%	0.06 (0.10)
21-30%	-0.05 (0.13)
>30%	-0.22 (0.13) ^
Ethnic minority candidates selected by party in 2018 (ref. not selected)	-0.03 (0.08)
% ethnic minority population	0.02 (0.00) ***
Adjusted D squared	0.12
N	468

Notes: Significant codes: $p < 0.001 = ***$, $p < 0.01 = **$, $p < 0.05 = *$, $p < 0.1 = ^$.

To test hypotheses 2 to 4, three additional fractional regression models were computed, each including an interaction term between the treatment variable and one of the party characteristics at stake. Model 1 confirms the significant effect of the ideological position of the participants' local party, but the interaction effects are statistically insignificant. The robustness check provided the same results. Model 2 shows a significant effect of the competition dummy, but again the interaction effects are statistically insignificant. However, in the robustness check of Model 2, which omitted the participants who did not answer the content question correct, who did not comply with the gender quota legislation and who guessed the objective of the experiment, the interaction effect between participants assigned to the 'competition treatment' and participants with a vote share higher than 30% (as opposed to those with a vote share lower than 11%) was statistically significant ($p < 0.01$, results not shown). Finally, Model 3 shows that whether or not the participants' party selected EM candidates in the past does not have a significant influence on the selection of ethnic minority aspirants and neither do the Treatment variable and the interaction terms. The robustness check confirmed these results. In sum, Model 1 and 2 suggest that there might be some interaction effects between the experimental conditions and the ideological position and vote share of the local

parties. However, as the interaction effects are conditional rather than independent effects, it is necessary to look beyond the results presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2. FRACTIONAL REGRESSION MODEL ESTIMATING THE PERCENTAGE OF ETHNIC MINORITY (EM) ASPIRANTS SELECTED

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
	b (SE)	b (SE)	b (SE)
Intercept	0.39 (0.23)	0.31 (0.18) ^	0.39 (0.16) *
Treatment (ref. control)			
Competition	0.46 (0.30)	0.39 (0.20) *	0.07 (0.13)
Emulation	0.03 (0.28)	0.14 (0.19)	0.21 (0.13)
Party's ideological position (ref. leftist)	-0.16 (0.06) **	-0.20 (0.03) ***	-0.19 (0.03) ***
Party's vote share in 2018 (ref. <10%)			
11-20%	0.04 (0.10)	0.14 (0.19)	0.06 (0.10)
21-30%	-0.07 (0.13)	0.07 (0.18)	-0.05 (0.13)
>30%	-0.24 (0.13) ^	-0.06 (0.21)	-0.22 (0.13) ^
EM selected by party in 2018 (ref. not selected)	-0.02 (0.08)	-0.02 (0.09)	-0.01 (0.14)
% EM population	0.02 (0.00) ***	0.02 (0.00) ***	0.02 (0.00) ***
Competition x Ideological position	-0.09 (0.07)		
Emulation x Ideological position	0.03 (0.07)		
Competition x Vote share 11-20%		-0.38 (0.25)	
Competition x Vote share 21-30%		-0.34 (0.29)	
Competition x Vote share >30%		-0.42 (0.29)	
Emulation x Vote share 11-20%		0.12 (0.25)	
Emulation x Vote share 21-30%		-0.05 (0.28)	
Emulation x Vote share >30%		-0.09 (0.28)	
Competition x EM selected			0.03 (0.19)
Emulation x EM not selected			-0.09 (0.18)
Adjusted D squared	0.12	0.12	0.12
N	468	468	468

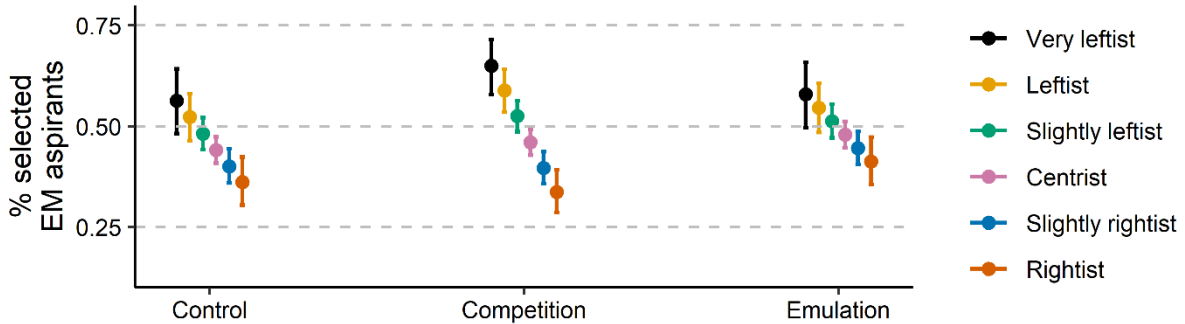
Notes: Significant codes: $p < 0.001 = ***$, $p < 0.01 = **$, $p < 0.05 = *$, $p < 0.1 = ^$.

Figure 1 shows how the interaction effects play out. The first and third plot are based on the fractional regression model depicted in Table 2 (N=468). The second plot is based on the

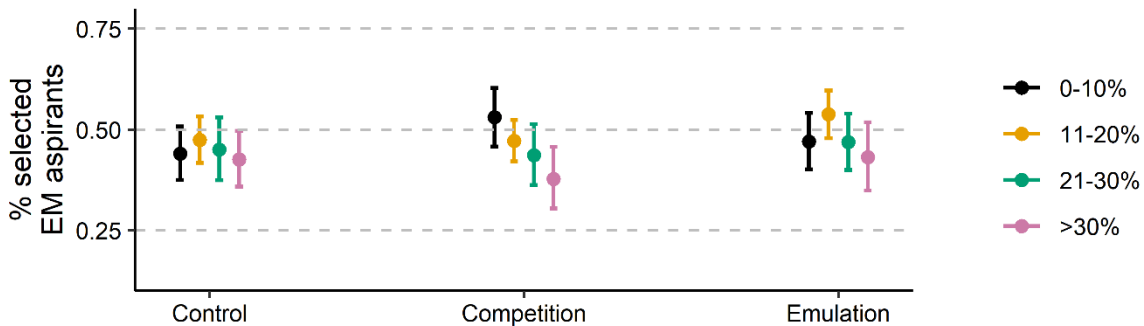
robustness check (N=431) considering that the results were more outspoken there than in the general model, as discussed above. The first plot shows that among the participants which were assigned to the ‘competition’ treatment, the more rightist participants perceived their local party, the less ethnic minority aspirants were selected. For the other treatments, the differences between participants belonging to the most leftist and most rightist parties are also statistically significant, although the overall effects are less outspoken. An additional plot was build based on a similar fractional regression model as depicted in Model 1 (Table 2), but in which the parties’ ideological position was replaced by the regional party affiliation of the local party branches. The results are included in Appendix 5 and confirm that a clear left-right difference is present among the respondents assigned to the ‘competition’ treatment. Therefore, hypothesis 2 is supported for competition but not for emulation. The second plot shows that there are significant differences between the participants who were assigned to the ‘competition’ treatment. Participants whose party only obtained a small vote share in 2018 ($\leq 10\%$) selected significantly more ethnic minority aspirants than participants whose party enjoyed great electoral success ($> 30\%$). Again, hypothesis 3 is partially confirmed. Finally, the third plot confirms that the effect of whether the party of the participants selected ethnic minority candidates in the previous elections in 2018 did not differ between the experimental treatments. Hypothesis 4 is therefore rejected.

FIGURE 2. PERCENTAGE OF ETHNIC MINORITY (EM) ASPIRANTS SELECTED, PER TREATMENT GROUP AND PARTY TYPE

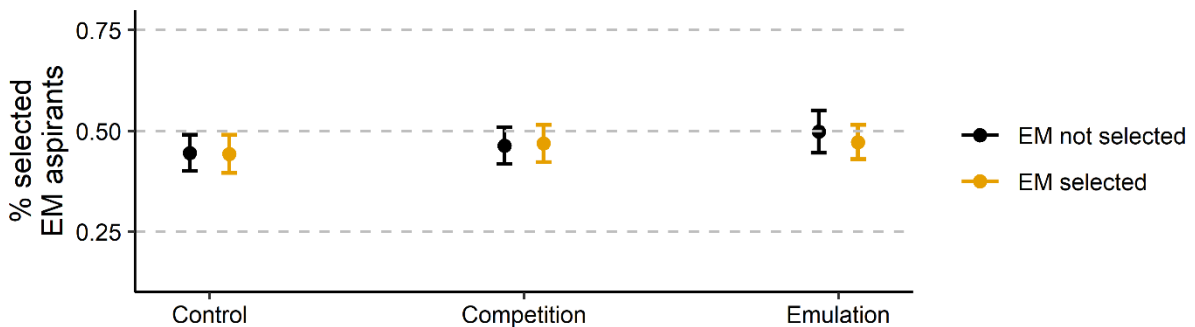
Parties' ideological position



Parties' vote share in 2018



Parties with(out) EM candidates on list in 2018

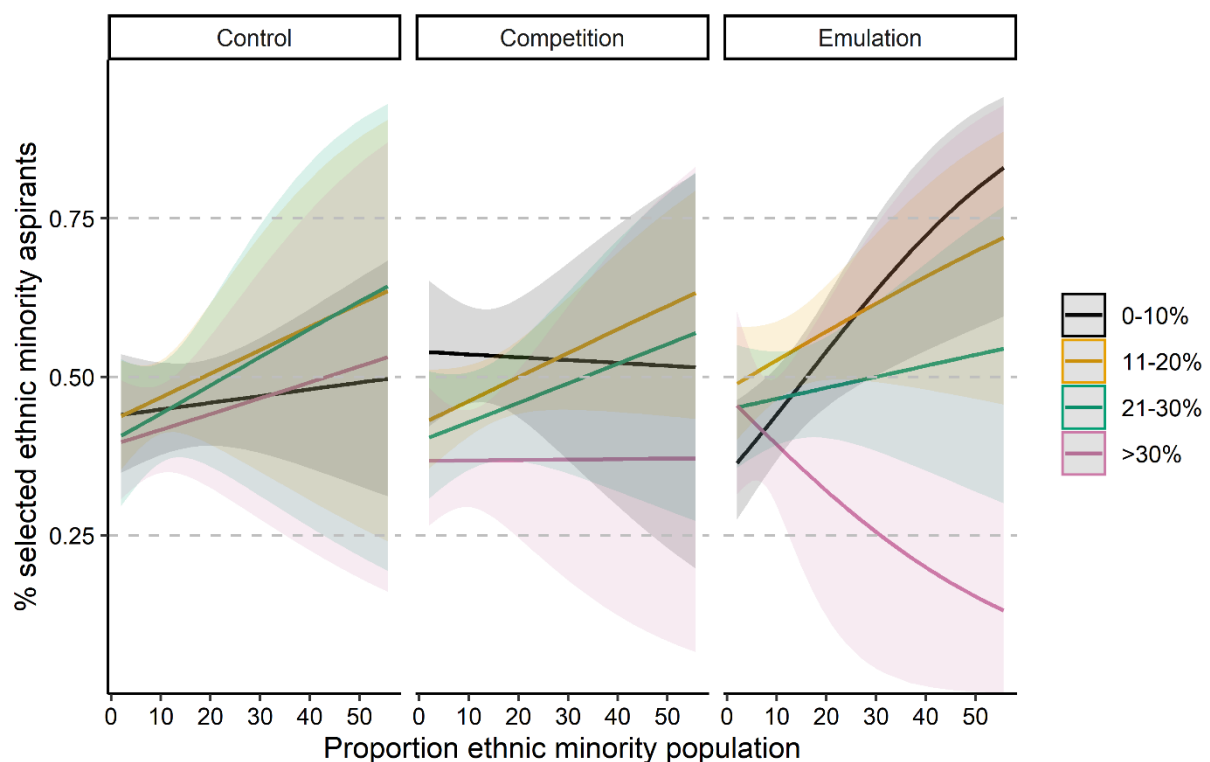


Notes: First and third plot based on the entire sample (N=468); second plot based on the robustness check (N=431). Marginal effects based on fractional regression models. Other continuous predictors are held constant at their mean. For categorical predictors, the proportions of the categories are averaged. 95% confidence intervals shown.

Finally, it was examined whether the size of the ethnic minority population influences parties' responsiveness to diffusion pressures. To start, the differences between how participants belonging to more leftist and more rightist parties responded to the competition treatment remained statistically significant in both less and more diverse municipalities (results not shown), which provides further support for hypotheses 2. Additionally, when computing a fractional logit regression including a three-way interaction between the treatment group, parties' vote share and the size of the ethnic minority population, it appears that the difference between participants belonging to the least and most successful parties is only statistically

significant in municipalities where ethnic minorities constitute approximately 5-15% of the population (Figure 3). The vast majority of the participants stemmed from these municipalities (Appendix 4), which explained why an overall significant effect was found between the least and most successful parties in Figure 2. This nuances the confirmation of H3, as in highly diverse municipalities, there is no significant difference between participants belonging to less and more electorally successful parties. At last, there were no significant differences between participants whose party selected ethnic minority candidates in the previous elections and parties whose party did not select ethnic minority in the previous elections.

FIGURE 3. PERCENTAGE OF ETHNIC MINORITY ASPIRANTS SELECTED, PER TREATMENT GROUP, PARTIES' VOTE SHARE AND SIZE OF THE ETHNIC MINORITY POPULATION



Notes: Plot based on the robustness check (N=431). Marginal effects based on fractional regression models. Other continuous predictors are held constant at their mean. For categorical predictors, the proportions of the categories are averaged. 95% confidence intervals shown.

6 Discussion and conclusion

Departing from previous studies establishing how diffusion has increased the representation of women on candidate lists, this paper tested whether similar mechanisms affect the selection of ethnic minority candidates. To these ends, a survey experiment was conducted among Flemish local party chairs in which they were first presented one of three hypothetical newspaper articles, after which they were asked to compose a candidate list out of a fixed pool

of aspirants. The newspaper article discussed the electoral success which other parties in the participant's municipality enjoyed in the 2018 local elections due to the presence of ethnic minority candidates ('competition' treatment), the democratic norms associated with a diverse candidate list rather than its electoral consequences ('emulation' treatment), or the campaign expenses of local parties (control group).

The results, however, provided limited evidence of diffusion patterns. To start, there was a general, although limited, effect of the emulation treatment across the participants. Party selectors thus appear to be slightly responsive to broader calls to comply with democratic norms. Alternatively, the effect of the competition treatment was dependent on several party characteristics. Participants belonging to leftist parties selected significantly more ethnic minority aspirants than participants belonging to rightist parties when assigned to the 'competition' treatment. Participants belonging to parties who were least electorally successful in the previous real-life local elections selected significantly more ethnic minority aspirants than participants whose parties were most successful in the previous elections, but only in moderately diverse municipalities. In highly diverse municipalities, there was no statistically significant difference between participants belonging to less and more successful parties.

Why is it that diffusion only appears to play a minor role in parties' decision to select ethnic minority candidates? On the one hand, it is plausible that some characteristics of the experiment led to an underestimation of diffusion effects. It is in this regard remarkable that the candidate lists across all experimental conditions were highly diverse. An average list comprised 21.08% ethnic minority candidates. This figure stands in sharp contrast to the pool of candidates running in the 2018 local elections for local branches of regional parties (including cartel lists). An examination of these candidate lists shows that an average candidate list counted 3.99% ethnic minority candidates. Considering that in 2018, 16.58% of the Flemish population has an ethnic minority background (Statistiek Vlaanderen, 2020), ethnic minority candidates were strongly under-represented in the 2018 elections, but over-represented in the experiment. Of course, the low hypothetical district magnitude of the experimental condition plays a role here as the list could only contain nine candidates, which implies that selecting only one ethnic minority candidate means that already 11.11% of the selected candidates had an ethnic minority background. In real life, however, local candidate lists can include on average 24,66 candidates and thus a larger number of ethnic minority candidates is required before similar percentages can be reached. It can nevertheless be presumed that other factors are at stake as well.

A potential explanation is that social desirability effects are at play. The visibility of the ethnic minority aspirants could have triggered the respondents to include a fair number of ethnic minority candidates on their lists out of fear of being perceived as conservative, maybe even racist selectors. If this were true, however, we should have found more outspoken differences between the general models and the robustness checks. Furthermore, if an outspoken social desirability bias would be at play, the ethnic diversity of all candidate lists should have been high, whereas we still found significant differences between, for instance, leftist and rightist parties and parties running in more and less diverse municipalities, findings which are in line with previous work.

More plausible is that many participants selected a high number of ethnic minority candidates because they were open for more political diversity and were presented with an (unrealistically) high supply of ethnic minority aspirants, amounting to 20% of the available aspirants (4 out of 20), which enabled the participants to easily diversify their lists. Especially in the Flemish local context, where parties have shown to be open to group representation, as testified by the adoption of far-reaching party and legal gender quota (Meier, 2004), and where both ethnic minority and majority voters support ethnic minority candidates (Teney, Jacobs, Rea, & Delwit, 2010), it is presumable that party selectors are willing to select ethnic minority aspirants when they present themselves. However, when ethnic minority aspirants are not present, party selectors need to actively recruit them before they can diversify their lists. Considering that party selectors' traditional recruiting networks generally do not include (a fair share of) ethnic minority aspirants (Tolley, 2019), the associated costs with recruiting potential ethnic minority candidates is higher. Therefore, party selectors might need extra incentives before making these investments. Such incentives can include gained knowledge about the electoral gains other parties have enjoyed due to the selection of ethnic minority candidates or how other parties have improved their party image by doing so. It is thus reasonable to suggest that diffusion patterns will be more outspoken in contexts where the supply of ethnic minority aspirants is smaller. If so, an important element is missing from current diffusion studies, which have thus far overlooked the importance of candidate supply.

On the other hand, there are reasons to assume that the experiment rightly indicated that diffusion only has a minor effect on the selection of ethnic minority candidates. To start, it could be that for stronger emulation effects to occur, more widespread, even international, pressures need to be present. Previous research has, for instance, shown that the diffusion of female candidacies was not only triggered by individual innovating parties, but also benefited from

broader calls for more gender equality in politics (Cowell-Meyers, 2011; Huang, 2015). To date, similar international movements advocating a better political inclusion of ethnic minorities are absent.

Finally, perhaps it is possible that the diffusion of ethnic minority candidacies in general is less outspoken than the diffusion of female candidacies. When deciding whether to select ethnic minority candidates (and if so, which candidates) parties need to find a balance between attracting ethnic minority voters and potentially losing ethnocentric ethnic majority voters. These inclusion dilemmas strongly differ between parties and between contexts (Dancygier, 2017), which makes it harder for parties to make plausible inferences about the potential consequences of diversifying selection strategies based on other parties' experiences with similar strategies. Additionally, in highly diverse municipalities, party selectors may primarily rely on the size of the ethnic minority population to estimate the potential electoral success of selecting ethnic minority candidates rather than to rely on other parties' strategies. In the regression analyses presented in this paper, for instance, the proportion of the ethnic minority population consistently had a strong positive effect on the selection of ethnic minority aspirants. Party selectors' decision to select ethnic minority candidates may therefore be more influenced by the broader context than their decisions to select female candidates, as women are evenly spread across electoral districts.

Although at this stage no clear answers can be provided to these issues, this study suggests that diffusion has a smaller effect on the representation of ethnic minorities than it has (had) on the representation of women. It calls for future research to examine the diffusion of ethnic minority candidacies in other contexts, and how aspirant supply affects the diffusion of candidate selection strategies. Attention should thereby be granted to how diffusion affects their numerical presence as well as the list positions ethnic minority candidates are assigned to. These insights will greatly enhance the scholarly understanding of how the interdependence between political parties shapes the political under-representation of ethnic minorities.

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8 Appendices

Appendix 1. Response rates per party

Political party	N	Response rate (%)
PVDA (Far-left)	9	33.33
Groen (Greens)	142	42.90
sp.a (Socialists)	100	40.32
CD&V (Christian democrats)	116	38.80
Open VLD (Liberals)	133	36.44
N-VA (Regionalists)	115	39.52

Appendix 2. Overview newspaper articles

1. Learning treatment

‘Wednesday 17 October 2018 – by L.B.

Diversity has success in “Municipality_respondent”

In last week’s local elections in “Municipality_respondent”, two parties competed for the support of the local population with candidate lists which included a notable number of candidates of Maghrebi origin. Partly because these candidates were able to attract a new group of voters, the vote share of the two parties increased significantly. Furthermore, the candidates of Maghrebi origin also obtained high personal scores. They received preferential votes from both voters with and without an immigration background.’

2. Emulation treatment

‘Tuesday 2 October 2018 – by L.B.

Diversity on candidate lists in “Municipality_respondent”

Next week Sunday in “Municipality_respondent”, two parties will compete for the support of the local population with a notable number of candidates of Maghrebi origin on their list. The party chairs of both parties emphasize the democratic importance of their choice. One of them elucidated their decision as follows: ‘For us, it is evident that we include candidates of Maghrebi origin on our lists. As a political party, we have the moral obligation to mirror the composition of the population and to defend the interests of all citizens, including citizens of foreign origin.’

3. Control group

‘Tuesday 2 October 2018 – by L.B.

Campaign expenses under maximum threshold

Since the beginning of the ‘*sperperiode*’⁴ on 1 July 2018, political parties are bounded by the double threshold for campaign expenses. Each candidate list is subjected to maximum budgets they can spend on the collective campaign and on the campaign of individual candidates. In the past, it has, however, become clear that local party lists spend less on their electoral campaign than these maximum thresholds. On average, they spend about €1 per citizen. Lists affiliated with a national party can nevertheless benefit from the campaign budgets reserved for the national campaign.’

Appendix 3. Survey design

Please read the following hypothetical newspaper. To ensure that you read it carefully, the ‘next’-button which leads you to the next step in this survey will only appear after 30 seconds.

[Random newspaper article shown.]

-- page break --

Imagine the hypothetical situation that local elections will take place in a few months’ time. We ask you to compose a candidate list for your local party which consists of nine candidates. You are requested to respect the legal gender quota.

You can chose from 20 hypothetical candidates with varying profiles, which you can find below. Candidates with an identical profile are interchangeable. A choice for ‘Veerle, active party member’ on list position 3 is, for instance, the same as a choice for ‘Liesbeth, active party member’ on list position 3 (these examples are not included in the list below).

The information about the candidates and the number of candidates you are requested to select is restricted. The situation presented here is thus a simplified version of the reality. We ask you to compose your candidate list as truthfully as possible. There are no wrong answers.

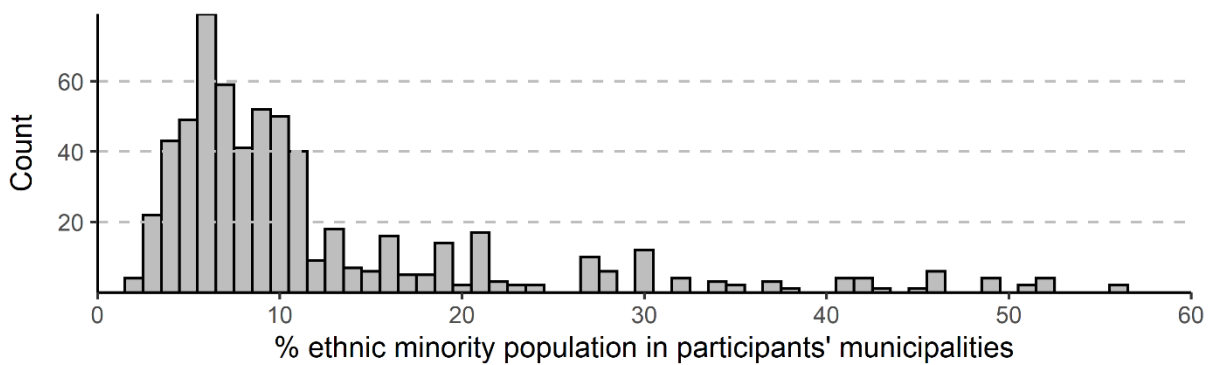
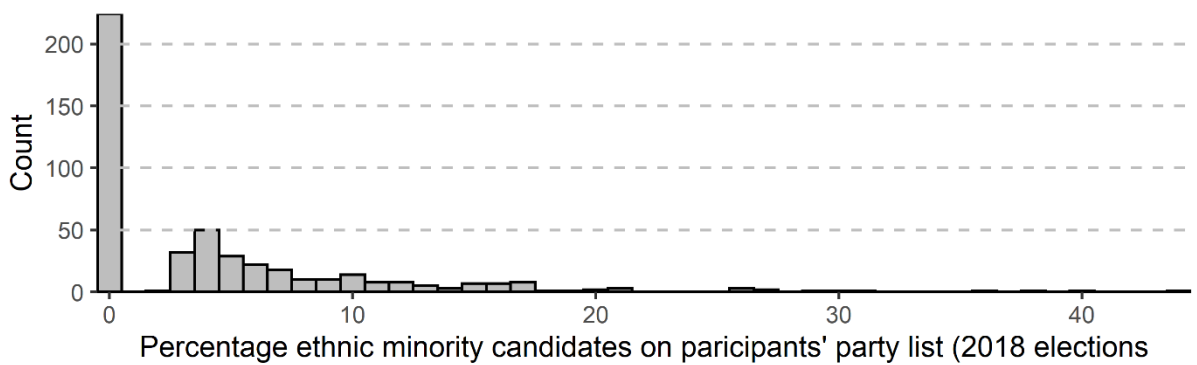
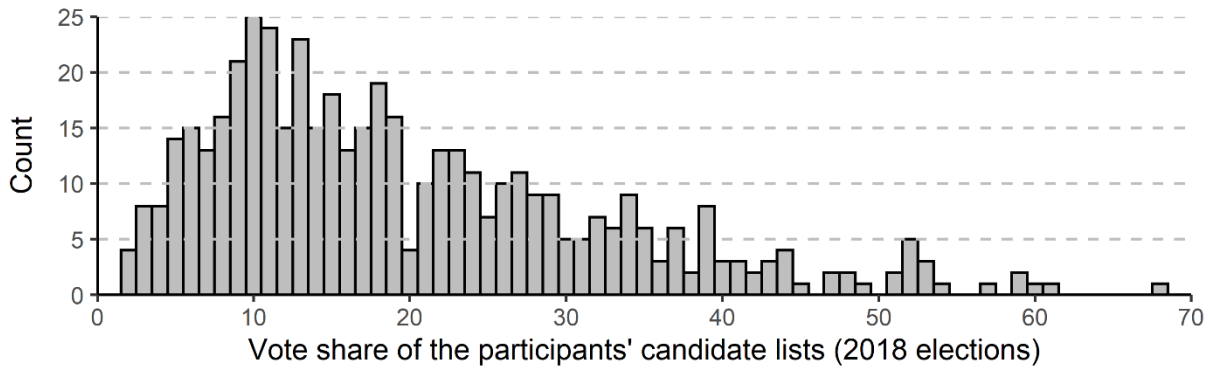
The candidates are presented in alphabetical order.

- Anna, active party member

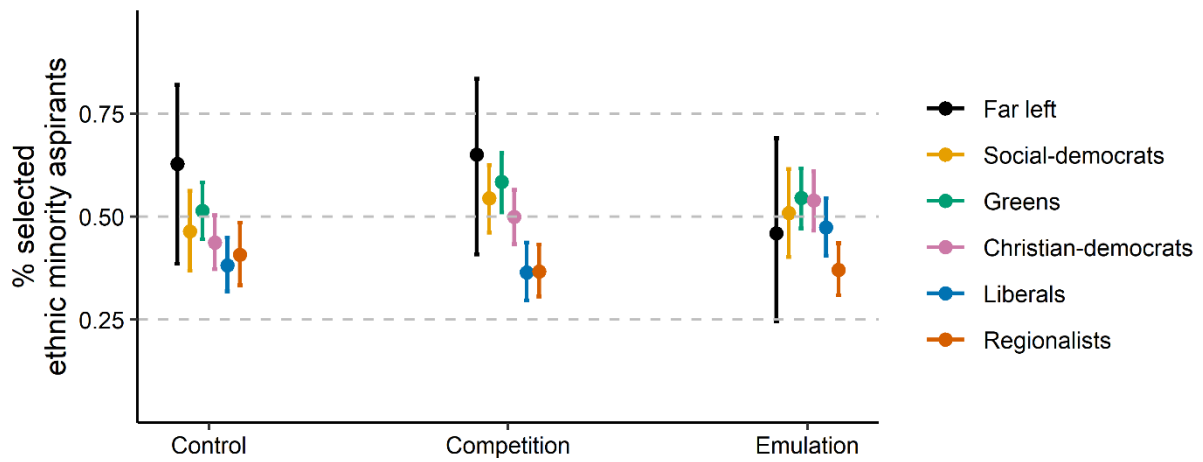
⁴ A period of time in which certain restrictions are imposed.

- Bart, incumbent
- Charlotte, active party member
- Fatima, active party member
- Filip, active party member
- Isabelle, active party member
- Jeroen, active party member
- Julie, incumbent
- Kristof, active party member
- Laura, active party member
- Marie, active party member
- Nathalie, incumbent
- Omar, active party member
- Pieter, active party member
- Samira, active party member
- Sofie, active party member
- Stefaan, incumbent
- Thomas, active party member
- Wouter, active party member
- Youssef, active party member

Appendix 4. Distribution of numeric predictor variables



Appendix 5. Percentage of ethnic minority aspirants selected, per treatment group and party affiliation



Notes: Plot based on the entire sample (N=468). Marginal effects based on fractional regression model. Other continuous predictors are held constant at their mean. For categoric predictors, the proportions of the categories are averaged. 95% confidence intervals shown.