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When does ideology matter? Party-lists, personal attributes and the effect of ideology on intra-party success : When does ideology matter? Party-lists, personal attributes and the effect of ideology on intra-party success

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When does ideology matter? Party-lists, personal attributes and the effect of ideology on intra-party success

Abstract

Choosing a candidate can be difficult in open-list proportional representation systems, with many candidates on display. Under such circumstances, candidates' personal vote-earning attributes (PVEAs) become useful for voters since PVEAs function as information shortcuts (heuristics) that reduce the cognitive costs of casting a ballot. However, recent research has demonstrated that more cognitively demanding information, namely candidates' ideological positions, also matters for candidates' electoral success. Yet, much is unknown about the circumstances under which ideology comes into play. In this study, we demonstrate that the availability of easily applied heuristics (operationalized via the level of recognizable candidates on party-lists) conditions the effect of candidates' ideological positioning on intra-party success. Our analyses show that ideology matters most when the share of recognizable candidates with typical personal vote-earning attributes on the list is limited. The effect of ideological distance from the party gradually disappears as the share of recognizable candidates on the list increases. The results suggest that when the supply of candidates with personal vote-earning attributes is limited, voters use ideological cues as the base for their voting decisions.

Keywords: ideology, intra-party competition, personal vote-earning attributes, candidates, party-lists, OLPR

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1. Introduction

In the 2017 election, voters in New Orleans elected, for the first time, an African-American woman as their mayor. The two runoff candidates in the mayoral race shared the same gender, race, and party. Hence, the voters could not depend on these easily accessible cues to differentiate between the candidates. In this situation, with no simple heuristics available, the voters in New Orleans turned to more complex information on candidates' ideological positions to make their choice (Holman and Lay, 2021). With only two candidates in the race, the cognitive burden involved seems reasonable, but is it possible to generalize this observation to electoral contexts with a significantly higher number of candidates on display? In this study, we analyze whether the availability of simple cues affects the extent to which candidates' ideological positions matter for their electoral outcomes in the Finnish information-intensive open-list proportional representation (OLPR) electoral system. Backed by our empirical analysis, we hypothesize that when party-lists consist of less recognizable candidates with fewer personal vote-earning attributes (PVEAs) the ideological positions of candidates become more important for their electoral fortunes.

Election results are aggregates of individual vote choices, which is why our theoretical framework largely departs from the perspective of voters and their behaviors. Voting in open-list proportional representation electoral systems with large district magnitudes, mandatory preferential voting, and a large number of candidates is a demanding task, as voters are not only expected to identify a party of their liking, but also to select a preferable candidate (cf. Carey and Shugart, 1995). In this context, voters are more likely to adopt some decision rule to limit the number of possible choices, for example, by concentrating only on candidates from a limited number of parties or by searching for candidates based on their easily observable qualities, such as gender, age or locality (Valdini, 2006). However, regardless of the decision rule used, voters in OLPR systems are still likely to have to consider a large number of candidates. Thus, one could expect that voters confronted with such large choice sets spend less

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time learning about the ideological positions of candidates and are more likely to apply easily available (even irrelevant) heuristics when deciding how to vote (Cunow et al., 2021). Furthermore, a growing body of research on intra-party competition shows that possessing certain personal vote-earning attributes (politically relevant attributes that voters can detect with little cognitive effort) has a substantial impact on the electoral fortunes of candidates. Typical PVEAs include name recognition within (Dahlgaard, 2016) and outside (Arter, 2014) the political arena and locality (Shugart et al., 2005). Additionally, politically irrelevant factors such as beauty (Berggren et al., 2010) and ballot positions (Lutz, 2010) impact candidates' chances of winning votes.

Some recent studies show that cognitively demanding ideological positions of candidates can influence candidates' success in the intense intra-party competition for votes, which is typical for OLPR systems (e.g., von Schoultz and Papageorgiou, 2021). It appears that voters' choices are affected by the availability of simple cues (age, gender, name recognition, etc.) and factors that demand more cognitive engagement, such as individual candidates' ideological positions. Still to be established is in which electoral contexts voters are more likely to use more demanding information (see, e.g., Fortunato and Stevenson, 2019). Our contribution builds on recent studies of the effect of candidates' ideological positions in OLPR systems by analyzing the contextual conditions in which it appears. More specifically, we investigate the extent to which the availability of recognizable candidates on the party-lists conditions the effect of candidates' ideological positions. Theoretically, we expect that the availability of recognizable candidates – measured by their PVEAs – will diminish the effect of ideological positions taken by candidates. To investigate this, we use candidate register data from three Finnish parliamentary elections (2011, 2015, and 2019), the parliamentary candidates' ideological position estimates, and data on the party-list level showing significant variation in the presence of recognizable candidates between party-lists. We measure candidates' ideological positions as deviations from the party line in two dimensions (left–right and GAL–TAN).

While our analysis relies on a single case study and cross-sectional data,

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we deem the Finnish context suitable for testing our hypothesis. The Finnish electoral system with OLPR exhibits a combination of high levels of competition between and within parties (Karvonen, 2014). The institutionalized party system with vote-pooling at the party level provides the basis for vigorous intra-party competition. Furthermore, the long, generally non-ranked lists of nominated candidates and mandatory preferential voting make the system highly competitive in the intra-party dimension. In addition, the Finnish case involves a rich variation in the composition of party-lists, which are of specific interest in our study. To summarize, Finland can be considered a crucial case with favorable conditions, where we would expect ideological position-taking to matter for candidates' electoral fortunes. The Finnish case also allows us to single out the contextual variations in candidate ideology related effects.

Our findings show that when there are fewer recognizable candidates on party-lists, candidates that are ideologically distant from their party experience a negative effect on their intra-party vote share. However, the negative effect of deviating from a party's ideological position disappears in contexts with more recognizable candidates on the party-list. The results suggest that voters use candidates' ideological positions as the base for their vote choice (even in complex electoral settings) when candidates with easily detectable vote-earning attributes are absent.

2. Theory

2.1. Voters facing complexity

Gigerenzer and Gaissmaier (2011) suggest that individuals make decisions using three possible tools: logic, statistics, or heuristics. However, when faced with overwhelming amounts of information, the costs of using logic or statistical calculations to reach a rational decision start accumulating. The increasing costs likely incentivize individuals to look for more cost-effective solutions. These "bounded rationality" solutions are often called heuristics, shortcuts, or cues. Typically, using these heuristics means dismissing plenty of potential informa-

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tion and instead combining only fractions of information from various sources to reach a decision (Fortunato and Stevenson, 2019).

Similarly, research on voting behavior suggests that voters cannot live up to the theoretical expectations of the rational voter, presented in the classical theory of voting (Downs, 1957; Lau and Redlawsk, 1997). Only a limited number of voters cast a vote for a candidate (or a party) that most closely aligns with their preferences (Bartels, 1996; Converse, 2006). Most voters also refrain from gathering and systematically analyzing all available information on parties and candidates (Downs, 1957). Especially in more information-intensive settings, voters instead opt for bounded rationality (Rieskamp et al., 2006) – looking only for easily accessible information until they can select a suitable candidate. The extent to which voters apply such heuristics is contingent not only upon their individual capacity (Johns and Shephard, 2007; Zaller, 1990) but also on the electoral context in which they make their decision (Klingemann and Wessels, 2009; Kroh, 2003). Simplifying heuristics can involve secondary candidate information, such as gender, age, occupation, or ethnicity, which are more easily accessible, especially if presented on ballot lists. Voters can convert secondary information to estimations of candidates' policy preferences via stereotyping (Mcdermott, 1998). Primary information, including candidates' ideological beliefs, issue positions, and political experiences, is more demanding for voters to process but can lead to more informed choices (Brockington, 2003; Däubler et al., 2021). Voters can gather primary information about the ideological positions of candidates via multiple channels (e.g., social media, advertisements in traditional and digital media, TV, and radio). Moreover, Finnish voters can learn about candidates' issue stances from voting advice applications.

The context in which voters cast their vote varies substantially from one electoral system to another, also affecting the type of heuristics voters use (Fortunato and Stevenson, 2019). These contexts can also differ extensively within electoral systems, different districts and parties. Consequently, in some contexts, voters may choose between only a few candidates; in other contexts, the number is extensive. In candidate-centered proportional electoral systems with

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many parties and candidates, the choice that voters face can be described as a complex one (Muraoka, 2021) as voters need to consider the two-level structure of the electoral choice, with both candidates and parties being relevant actors. In these contexts, voters often use a two-step procedure in their decision-making (Oscarsson and Rosema, 2019). First, they exclude some options to create a more viable choice set. For example, voters may consider candidates from their preferred party or a small group of parties. In the second stage, they use available information and heuristics to choose candidates within this limited choice set. The first step is typically related to the inter-party competition in the electoral process, while the second step highlights the intra-party competition, which is the focus of this study.

Theoretically, a large number of candidates should lead to candidate dispersion (Ames, 1995; Cox, 1997; Persson and Tabellini, 2005), and more voters being able to identify their most proximate candidate (Powell, 2000; Taagepera and Shugart, 1989). Additionally, as the number of candidates increases, so does the likelihood of voters knowing some of the candidates personally (Järvi et al., 2021). However, the amount and complexity of information that an average voter should consider will increase the cognitive costs of information processing. Potentially detrimental effects of large choice sets (known as the "paradox of choice") have been identified in several fields of research (e.g., studies of consumer behavior) (Iyengar et al., 2006; Lenton and Francesconi, 2010; Iyengar and Lepper, 2000).

2.2. Candidate success in OLPR

2.2.1. Ideology

Ideology matters for electoral competition and ideological differences influence voters' party choices. Theories on information processing and heuristics lead one to expect that the role of ideology is not as salient in intra-party candidate choice as in party choice, where the number of parties is limited, and information on their ideological positions is more accessible (Fortunato and Stevenson, 2019). Contrary to the idea of voters avoiding information-intensive

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decision-making strategies, recent research indicates that candidates' ideological positions influence their intra-party electoral success, even in complex electoral settings featuring multiple parties and preferential voting (e.g., von Schoultz and Papageorgiou, 2021). These findings support the expectation that a broader set of candidates will increase the quality of representation, making it easier for voters to identify an ideologically proximate candidate (Powell, 2000; Taagepera and Shugart, 1989).

While ideologies are generally connected to parties as collective actors, candidate-centered electoral systems enable individual candidates to take different ideological positions within their party-lists and signal this to voters. In literature, it has been theorized that candidates in OLPR systems can benefit electorally from carving out distinct ideological positions (Cox, 1990; Ames, 1995; Persson and Tabellini, 2005) and offering voters a unique issue or ideological alternative. It is expected that parties accept and even encourage candidates to take distinct positions due to the parties' need to have a broad appeal (Kitschelt and Smyth, 2002). Parties have incentives to attract independent candidates with a large personal following since these candidates can bring in new supporters (Cain et al., 1987; Tavits, 2009).

However, recent empirical findings do not provide unconditional support for the idea that deviating from the party line is beneficial. Studies demonstrate that deviation from the party median is harmful to candidates' vote-winning prospects (Isotalo et al., 2020). This finding shows that candidates pursuing the (intra-party) median voter gather more votes, which could suggest the viability of the median voter theorem (see Downs, 1957); i.e., using the total electorate as a point of departure can be translated into the context of intra-party competition.[1] Partially opposite to these findings, Tromborg (2021) finds that non-incumbent candidates are more prone to deviate from the party line on specific political issues that are non-central for the party platform and unpopular among their constituents. Currently, research regarding the effect of candidates'

[1]However, van Erkel et al. (2017) finds a zero effect of ideological positions in Belgium.

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ideological positions in contexts with high levels of intra-party competition is inconclusive and still at an early stage. It is also important to note that studies have applied different techniques to single out candidates' ideological positions. While the studies based on Finnish data identify distinct ideological dimensions (left–right and GAL–TAN), not all studies in other electoral contexts differentiate between ideological dimensions (see, e.g., van Erkel et al., 2017). Previous studies have not paid attention to the varying electoral contexts that have the potential to either reinforce or mitigate ideology-related effects.

2.2.2. Personal vote-earning attributes

As mentioned above, voters that face large choice sets (i.e., many candidates) are primarily expected to use simplifying decision-making strategies to avoid the processing of large amounts of detailed information. It is not surprising that research has shown a tendency for candidates with PVEAs to be electorally successful, specifically when competing in contexts with high levels of intra-party competition (Shugart et al., 2005; Put and Maddens, 2015). Commonly recognized PVEAs include political experience, name recognition outside politics, and ties to a specific local community (Arter, 2014; Shugart et al., 2005; Fortunato and Stevenson, 2019).

Numerous studies have shown that the most valuable PVEA is holding legislative office, often labeled the incumbency advantage (Erikson, 1971; Gelman and King, 1990; Redmond and Regan, 2015; Dahlgaard, 2016). It has also been established that candidates tend to receive more votes closer to where they live (Fiva and Smith, 2017). While the positive effect of local ties can be due to several factors, it is generally linked to "knowing the area and its interests" (Shugart et al., 2005). Serving on a local council can further strengthen this effect, signaling both political experience and familiarity with local issues (Nemoto and Shugart, 2013; Shugart et al., 2005; Tavits, 2010). Name recognition beyond the political arena (for example, media, sports, or culture celebrities) can translate into political capital, which is valuable in personalized open-list electoral systems (Carey and Shugart, 1995). Celebrity status provides candidates with

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an instant platform (Canon, 1990) and functions as a cue for voters (Knecht and Rosentrater, 2021). This attribute can be particularly effective for attracting voters who emphasize candidate qualities over party profile (Arter, 2014) or voters who seek "political outsiders" (Marsh et al., 2010).

2.2.3. Conditional effect of ideology?

The primary focus of this study is the conditions in which candidates' ideological stances matter for candidates' vote-earning in intra-party competition. Even though voters in OLPR electoral systems have to navigate through complex information environments, the complexity of the choice can vary a great deal, depending on many factors, e.g., the supply of candidates included in a party-list or the availability of the types of simple heuristics that voters apply when facing such complex choice-settings (Cunow et al., 2021). Lists with many candidates without powerful PVEAs, such as name recognition, experience, or locality, will increase the cognitive demands placed on voters. If a substantial share of the candidates on a list are incumbents or hold a seat at the local level, voters can be expected to resort to these heuristics, rather than seeking other types of information. If the party-list includes a large selection of previously unknown (politically inexperienced) candidates or candidates with weak local anchoring, voters are left without easily accessible heuristics to assist them in their vote choice.

We test whether the level of recognizable candidates on the party-list moderates the importance of candidate ideology in intra-party success. Previous explorations of candidates' personal vote-earning have demonstrated that the effect of national-level incumbency or celebrity status trumps ideological positions (von Schoultz and Papageorgiou, 2021). It, then, seems plausible that voters' strategies in identifying a suitable candidate, could be affected by the availability of "low hanging fruit", i.e., the presence of candidates with powerful PVEAs. We empirically explore if voters resort to using more cognitively demanding heuristics, such as ideological positions, when other easier heuristics are in short supply, in an already complex setting. Based on theoretical

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expectations, we formulate the following hypothesis:

> *H1*: When a party-list is mostly composed of candidates whose level of recognizability is low, ideological positions matter for candidates' intra-party success.

3. The Finnish context

3.1. The Finnish electoral system

Finland is a unitary state with an OLPR electoral system and multimember districts in parliamentary elections. In the 2011 election, there were 15 electoral districts, and in the 2015 and 2019 elections, the number of districts was 13 (after two pairs of smaller districts were merged). In these districts, the number of seats varies between 6 and 36, except for the Åland Islands (single-member district, not included in this study). Altogether, 200 MPs are elected. Mandatory preference voting is applied, and voters cast a vote by writing a single candidate number on the ballot paper. Candidates are generally listed within their party-lists in alphabetical order, with only their candidate number, name, title, and home municipality displayed.

In each district, the maximum number of candidates for a party to nominate is the total number of seats (or 14 if the number of district seats is less than 14). Usually, parties aim to have full lists as each candidate can bring additional votes. About 2500 candidates were campaigning in the 2019 elections in total, and in the largest district (Uusimaa), there were almost 500 candidates for the voters to choose. Hence, the total supply of potential candidates is extensive, even if voters limit their choice to a single party. Voters still have to select their candidate from 14–36 candidates, and the number becomes higher, if their choice set includes more than one party. Therefore, the Finnish electoral system is a suitable context for testing our hypothesis on the conditional effect of ideology on candidate success.

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3.2. Ideological dimensions in Finnish elections

There are two relevant ideological dimensions in Finnish intra-party competition: left–right and GAL–TAN. The left–right dimension follows the political division of economic policies and the debate over the role of the public and private sectors in the economy. The GAL–TAN dimension represents a value spectrum with a green-alternative-libertarian (GAL) value combination at one end and a traditional-authoritarian-nationalist (TAN) combination at the other (see Marks et al., 2006; Rovny and Edwards, 2012). This dimension encompasses political issues relating to the environment, immigration, the rights of sexual minorities, international cooperation, traditional values, and authoritarian rule. The left–right and GAL–TAN dimensions capture most of the contemporary political conflict concerning socioeconomic and sociocultural issues (Hooghe et al., 2002; Van der Brug and Van Spanje, 2009; Bornschier, 2010).

Even though the Finnish party system mostly revolved around the left–right dimension during the 20th century, Kestilä-Kekkonen et al. (2018) note that (at least for Finnish voters) left–right does not constitute a so-called "super dimension" (ref. Inglehart and Klingemann, 1976, 244). It is not surprising that previous research has been supportive of Finnish politics being multidimensional. For instance, Paloheimo (2008) has suggested seven dimensions of relevance for Finnish party politics: 1) left–right, 2) center–periphery, 3) national–international, 4) people–elite, 5) Finnish–Swedish, 6) conservative–liberal and 7) ecology–materialism. Suuronen et al. (2020) note that most of the dimensions are still relevant for the Finnish electorate as voters of different parties have distinguishable ideological profiles in many of these dimensions.

We argue that stances on cultural issues reflected in national–international, people–elite, conservative–liberal and ecology–materialism dimensions have converged so that they can be represented by a single dimension: the GAL–TAN dimension. The increasing salience of the sociocultural dimension has been linked to the growing electoral influence of green and populist radical right parties (see, e.g., Abou-Chadi, 2016; Jungar and Jupskås, 2014), which is also the case in Finland. Arter (2020) points out that parties in extreme positions of the

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sociocultural dimension won 40% of the votes in the 2019 Finnish parliamentary election.

Paloheimo's remaining two dimensions, which cannot be fully represented by the left–right and GAL–TAN dimensions, are the center–periphery and Finnish–Swedish language dimensions. We believe that political conflict in these dimensions mainly takes place between parties, as the existence of the Centre Party and the Swedish People's Party relies on these dimensions. Hence, positions on the center–periphery and Finnish–Swedish spectrum are not as important from an intra-party perspective as the left–right and GAL–TAN positions. In addition, the most salient political issues structuring political debates in the past three Finnish parliamentary elections have been exclusively related to these dimensions, as issues relating to the EU, national debt, climate change, immigration, and elderly care have been the most prevalent (see Pernaa, 2012; Railo and Ruohonen, 2016; Arter, 2020).

4. Data and methods

4.1. Data

Voters' decision processes would ideally be studied using individual-level data that would sort out the cognitive steps and reasoning leading to the vote choice. One would require reliable data that connects individuals' thought processes to the vote choice. Unfortunately, such data is not currently obtainable, at least not in the Finnish case. Hence, we rely on register and VAA-based data on Finnish candidates in three Finnish parliamentary elections: 2011, 2015, and 2019. The dataset is limited to candidates from the eight main parties which enjoyed stable representation in parliament during the years studied (n = 4837 candidates). To ensure sufficient level of intra-party competition has taken place in the party-lists, we limit the dataset to only party-lists with at least 10 candidates running. In the case of party coalitions, we treat parties in coalitions as separate lists. This leaves us with a total of 267 party-lists, containing 4760 candidates, corresponding to these three election years.

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To measure candidates' ideological positions, we use factor scores on the left–right and GAL–TAN dimensions. These positions are based on candidates' voting advice application (VAA) responses obtained from the Finnish Broadcasting Company (Yle Uutisten vaalikone, 2011; Yleisradio, 2015, 2019) and *Helsingin Sanomat*, the most popular daily newspaper in Finland (Helsingin Sanomat, 2015, 2019). These VAAs are most popular among the Finnish electorate (see Borg and Koljonen, 2020). Moreover, VAA usage has been steadily increasing in Finland (Borg and Koljonen, 2020, 47). According to Statistics Finland, 49% of the electorate used at least one VAA during the 2019 parliamentary election (Suomen virallinen tilasto, 2019), whereas a survey conducted by Borg and Koljonen (2020) reported VAA usage to have been as high as 71%. These figures are exceptionally high in comparison to VAA usage in other European countries and can only be matched by usage rates in the Netherlands (Marschall, 2014).

Ideological positions are calculated for all candidates participating in the VAAs. In total, we end up with 4179 candidates, which is 86% of the total number of candidates running in the eight main parties. Additionally, these candidates accounted for 89% of the total votes cast in the three elections (93% of votes cast for their parties). Thus, the data reflects the ideological positions of nearly all relevant political candidates.

4.1.1. Dependent variable

The dependent variable is candidates' preference vote share. It is a ratio of votes cast for an individual candidate to the number of votes cast for the party in the same district. We chose preference vote share to measure candidate success as it is unaffected by changes in parties' overall level of support and focuses only on the intra-party competition. Therefore, the measure is comparable across elections, districts, and parties. Its values are found to range from 0.08% to 82% (mean = 5.9%). The highly positively skewed distribution of the dependent variable is presented in Fig. 1. We chose to perform a logit transformation, which is a commonly used technique to stabilize the variance of proportion data

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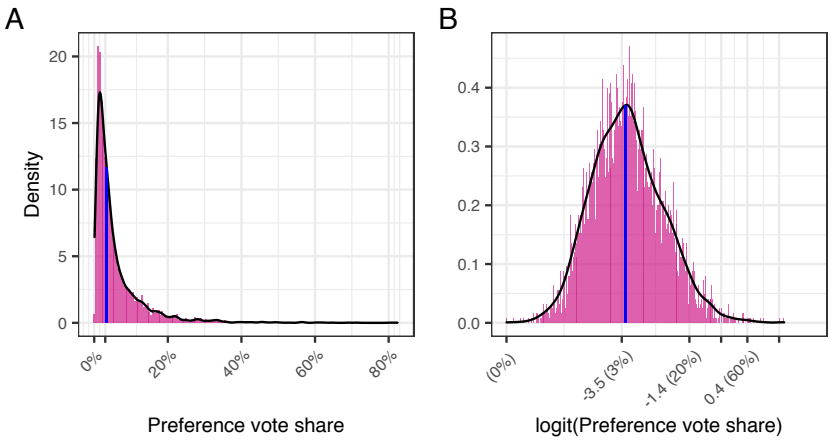


Figure 1: Dependent variable density plots with blue vertical line indicating the median. Panel A shows untransformed preference vote shares and panel B the same variable with a logit transformation (values in the original scale are in parentheses).

(see, e.g., Kieschnick and McCullough, 2003). The transformed variable has a mean of -3.30, and its values range from -7.04 to 1.54.

4.1.2. Control variables

Our control variables are mostly related to candidates' demographic attributes or PVEAs. Demographic controls include age (in decades), age-squared, gender, native language (native tongue being either of the two official languages, i.e., Finnish/Swedish, or another language), and whether a candidate has obtained a university education (self-reported). We also control for the natural logarithm of candidates' home municipality's size.[2] This variable is group-mean centered within party-lists (CWC, i.e., centered within clusters). Centering to parties' mean values in districts removes all between-cluster variation from the variable (see Enders and Tofighi, 2007).

PVEAs used in the analysis are related to political experience and celebrity status. Individual incumbency, a form of political experience, has been proven

[2]Candidates whose home municipality locates outside the district where they were running were coded to have a population of one ($log(1) = 0$), as these candidates cannot obtain votes from their area of residence.

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to be advantageous in the Finnish open-list PR system (Kotakorpi et al., 2017). Political experience of a candidate is measured by multiple indicators: 1) candidate is a municipal councillor; 2) ran for parliament in the previous election; 3) is an incumbent; 4) is part of the party leadership (deputy chair, party secretary, or a government minister during the previous electoral period); 5) is a party leader, i.e., chairperson of the party; and 6) is a Member of the European Parliament.

Enjoying a celebrity status outside of the political realm is also beneficial to candidates due to increased name recognition among voters (see, e.g., Zwarun and Torrey, 2011). Celebrity status is assigned to candidates based on a thorough media search. Finnish media regularly publish lists of so-called "celebrity candidates" before elections, so the coding derives from the media having ascribed them this status. Candidate celebrity status remains even if the candidate is elected. In addition, candidates' campaign spending is included in the analysis. It is expected that increased campaign spending enhances a candidate's chances of winning a seat (see Maddens et al., 2006). Finally, we add a variable measuring the number of candidates (divided by 10) on the party-list. A larger number of co-partisans will contribute to decreasing the average preference vote share of candidates.[3] Descriptive statistics of the control variables are shown in online Appendix A.1.

4.1.3. Ideological distance from the party median

Our first variable of interest ($|\mathtt{d_{L\text{-}R,G\text{-}T}|}$ `(CWC)`) measures candidates' Euclidian absolute ideological distance from their parties' national median candidates in two dimensions. Candidates' ideological distances are group-mean centered (CWC) for each party-list. According to Enders and Tofighi (2007), this is recommended when cross-level interaction in a multi-level model is of substantive interest, as "CWC yields a pure estimate of the moderating influence that a Level 2 predictor exerts on the Level 1 association between X and Y". The

[3]In the robustness checks we also include variables measuring the level of intra-party competition in party-lists. We use Crisp et al. (2021) formula to calculate these scores.

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two ideological dimensions (left–right and GAL–TAN) are constructed using exploratory factor analysis (EFA), with oblimin rotation on selected VAA statements, using the psych R package (Revelle, 2022).

We use ideological scales instead of individual political issues for empirical and theoretical reasons. From an empirical perspective, we consider constructed ideological scales to be more valid measurements of candidate positions than candidate answers on individual VAA statements, which can be unreliable (e.g., due to statement ambiguity). From a theoretical perspective, voters are likely to use candidates' ideological positions, as opposed to gathering information regarding candidate stances on all possible issues (see, e.g., Downs, 1957), which is why focusing on ideology rather than issues brings us closer to voters' actual decision-making process.

The VAA statements, which construct the dimensions, are based on two criteria. Firstly, a statement has to be substantively connected to either of the dimensions to be selected, and secondly, selected statements have to be as similar as possible in consecutive years while maintaining a similar issue balance. In this way, we set out to ensure that ideological dimensions measure the same left–right and GAL–TAN dimensions over time. The selected VAA statements are listed in online Appendix B. After selecting the VAA statements, Bartlett's test is performed to ensure that the statements have sufficient correlations to construct stable factors. Before the factor analysis, scree plots are used to confirm that the two-factor model is adequate for the selected statements in all election years, thus confirming that ideological differences among Finnish parliamentary candidates can be sufficiently modeled with two dimensions.

The factor analysis results are shown in online Appendix C. The factor loadings for all items are above 0.30. Cross-loadings emerge for statements regarding EU membership (in 2011 and 2015) and traditional values (2015). However, we do not consider these cases to be problematic as the support for the EU has traditionally been high among the Finnish center-right, and support for traditional values has consistently been a part of right-wing politics. Therefore, explaining why these statements contribute to both left–right and GAL–TAN

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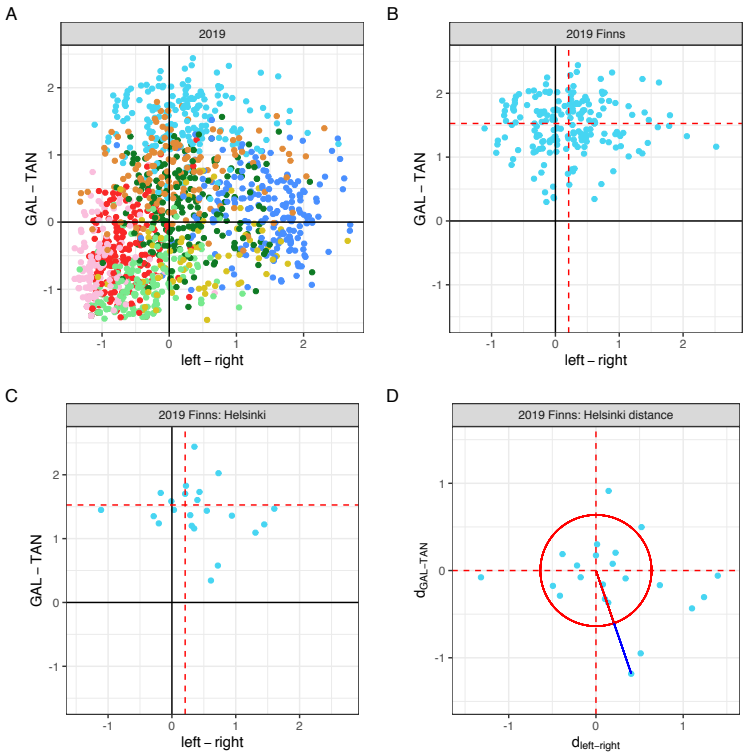


Figure 2: Illustrating the operationalization of the ideological distance variable.

dimensions.

Next, we calculate Cronbach's alphas for the statements constructing the factors. They are at an acceptable level, ranging between 0.73 and 0.87. Moreover, all calculated fit indices (e.g., CFI, TLI, RMSEA, and RMSR) are acceptable. The correlation between the two factors ranges from 0.19 in 2011 to 0.32 in 2019.

Candidates' factor scores were calculated with the regression scores method (see DiStefano et al., 2009, 4). The mean value of each factor is as close as possible to zero [-0.002, 0.007], and the standard deviations are near to one [0.887, 0.954]. Fig. 2 exemplifies this approach. Panel A shows all candidate positions in the ideological two-dimensional space for 2019. Panel B focuses on one party (the Finns Party) and presents the median candidate positions for both

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dimensions (see the intersection of red lines). Panel C examines more closely the Finns Party candidates in the electoral district of Helsinki. In panel D, the axes have been changed to represent the ideological distance from the national median candidate positions of the party (i.e., the red lines of panels B and C). The circle around the intersection point of the axes is the group-mean absolute distance from the party position, and the blue line highlights an individual candidate's distance from the group mean. The blue line in panel D exemplifies the group-mean centered operationalization of the ideological distance.[4] Ideological distances by party and political experience are presented in Appendix A.2.

4.1.4. Recognizability index

Our second variable of interest is the recognizability index (`RI`), measuring the electoral complexity that voters face when making their vote choice. The recognizability index is calculated as the sum of party-list candidates' political experience variables and celebrity status, divided by the number of candidates on a list (i.e., average recognizability of the party-list's candidates).

$$RI = \frac{Mep + Pl + Inc + Plp + Ce + Co + Rb}{n}$$

where `RI` stands for recognizability index, which is a list-level measure. `Mep` is the number of Members of the European Parliament running; `Pl` is party leaders on the party-list; `Inc` is the number of incumbents; `Plp` is candidates in party leadership positions, including government ministers; `Ce` is the number of celebrity candidates running; `Co` is the number of municipal councillors; `Rb` indicates the number of candidates who also ran in the previous election; and finally, `n` is the number of candidates on the list representing the same party.

Fig. 3 shows the recognizability index values for party-lists used in the anal-

[4]Instead of using the national level median-candidate as a reference point for ideological distance calculations, we use party-list median-candidate positions as an alternative reference point. With this operationalization, there is no need to perform group mean centering. We also use these ideological distances as a robustness check for our initial metric. We present the party-list median positions in Appendix A.2.

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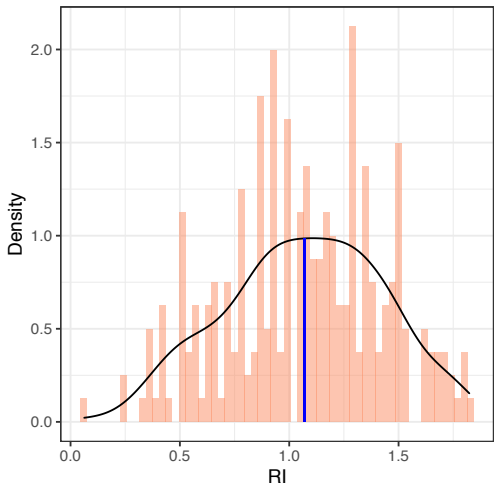


Figure 3: Party-list recognizability index values.

ysis. The mean value of the index is 1.07. Half of the observations lie between 0.84 and 1.36, and the minimum and maximum values are 0.06 and 1.82, respectively. A score of one in the index means that candidates on the list have, on average, at least one recognizable trait. In sum, the recognizability index reveals the concentration of political experience and celebrity candidates in party-lists. The more detailed district- and party-specific values of the recognizability index are visualized in Appendix A.3.

4.2. Multi-level regression analysis

To analyze the data, we apply a multi-level regression approach, as individual candidates are nested in parties, districts, and election years. The total number of party-lists (i.e., level 2 election-district-year clusters) is 267. We fit multi-level regression models with random effects, using the restricted maximum likelihood method, and apply the maximum likelihood method for model comparisons, using the *lme4* R package (Bates et al., 2015). Our models consist of random intercept models and models with more than one random effect, as it is suggested that random slopes be included for lower-level variables when performing cross-level interactions (see Heisig and Schaeffer, 2019). The p-values

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for fixed effects are calculated by Satterthwaite's method for approximating degrees of freedom for the t-test (see *lmerTest* R package, Kuznetsova et al., 2017). The *Interplot* package (Solt et al., 2021) is used to produce coefficient interaction plots. Predictor effects on the dependent variable are calculated with the *effects* R package (Fox and Weisberg, 2018).

We also perform extensive robustness tests. These tests include using various modeling strategies, multiple model specifications, changing the operationalization of our key variables of interest, and tests for interaction linearity. To ensure that our results are not driven by the logit transformation of the dependent variable we also perform the analysis with log transformation and additionally, using a log of normalized preference vote shares used by Ezrow (2008) as the dependent variable. Moreover, we test the robustness of our results by adding a control variable that measures the level of intra-party competition using the formula developed by Crisp et al. (2021) to test if the list-level recognizability index has a separate effect on candidate success when the level of intra-party competition is accounted for. We also perform the analysis with an alternative operationalization of the ideological distance variable. These models are reported in Appendix E.2. Similarly, we model interaction effects with alternative types of recognizability indices. These interaction results are shown in Appendix E.4.

In addition to fitting multi-level models with a transformed dependent variable, we use two different beta regression modeling strategies: 1) hierarchical beta regression, via the *glmmTMB* package (Brooks et al., 2017); and 2) hierarchical Bayesian beta regression, via the *brms* package (Bürkner, 2017). Beta regression is the standard method for analyzing proportion and fractional data (Kieschnick and McCullough, 2003). However, both beta models were riddled with high residuals and poor overall fit. Furthermore, significant overdispersion was detected in all beta model residuals via *DHARMa* R package diagnostics (Hartig, 2020), which prevented a reliable interpretation of the p-values of the

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independent variables.[5] These models and their diagnostics are reported in Appendix E.1.

Lastly, the linearity assumptions regarding interaction effects are also scrutinized, as suggested by Hainmueller et al. (2019) and Hainmueller et al. (2021). These robustness and diagnostics tests are reported in Appendix E.3.

5. Results

Here we present the results of our multi-level regression models. Our hypothesis (H1) expects the effect of ideology to be conditioned by the average recognizability of party-list candidates, with the effect of ideology being strongest when recognizability is low and the effect diminishing as recognizability increases. To test this, we add a cross-level interaction between ideological distance and recognizability in the multi-level regression model. In this model, we also include a random effect for the lower (candidate) level variable (ideological distance), as suggested by Heisig and Schaeffer (2019).

We report the main model with cross-level interaction and control variables in Table 1. The construction and expansion of the model are documented in Appendix D. These pre-stages in the model development include a null model, which contains an intercept and a random intercept, all control variables without the main independent variables, and all variables yet excluding interaction between ideology and recognizability index (RI). Additionally, we also fit a model where we separate the ideological distance into two variables (left–right and GAL–TAN distances), and these variables are both interacted with the recognizability index.[6]

The model in Table 1 with the single cross-level interaction provides the best fit to the data, based on the Akaike information criterion (AIC) and likelihood

[5] We interpret the poor performance of beta models to mean that our dependent variable could not be well represented by beta distribution, most likely due to the unexpectedly high concentration of successful candidates at the tail end of the distribution.

[6] We were unable to include random slopes for the two ideology variables as the model became too complex and encountered convergence issues.

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ratio (LR) test, in comparison to a model where ideological distance and recognizability do not interact ($\chi^2(3) = 16.1, p < 0.01$). The relatively low 0.08 intraclass correlation (ICC) for this model indicates that most of the variance in the residuals is within clusters (i.e., party-lists) and not between them. The results of the interaction are interpreted further below, with the help of figures, as the interacted coefficients should not be interpreted separately.

In the main model, nearly all candidate characteristics-related fixed effects have a statistically significant impact on candidates' logit-transformed preference vote share. Age has a curvilinear (inverted-U) relationship with candidate success. The effect of gender favors female candidates as they have a slight advantage to obtain higher intra-party vote shares than men. The effect is of a similar magnitude to obtaining a university degree. Not being a native Finnish or Swedish speaker decreases intra-party vote shares. Political experience is also unsurprisingly predictive of higher vote shares, the effect being the strongest for MEPs, party leaders, and incumbents. Celebrity status also has a positive effect. Having run in previous parliamentary elections and holding a seat in the municipal council affects candidate success positively but on a smaller magnitude. In terms of resources, higher campaign spending is a strong predictor of success. Having a home municipality that is more populated than the candidate average in the same list has a positive effect on preference vote share. As expected, the number of co-partisans running in the party-list (level 2 variable) has a strong negative effect on preference vote share. Table 1 also reports random effects and model fit indices.

The interaction effects of the main variables of interest are visualized in Fig. 4. As is evident from Fig. 4, the effect of the recognizability index on the coefficient of ideological distance is positive. Observing the coefficient of ideological distance conditioned by the recognizability index, we notice that it starts with a negative effect on vote share, but as the recognizability of candidates in the list increases (i.e., more candidates with PVEAs), the ideology-related effects fade away. In line with H1, the effect of ideology on candidate success is found to be the strongest when candidates with recognizable traits are absent from the

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Table 1: Multi-level regression analysis results.

	Dependent variable: *logit(Preference vote share)*	
	Estimates	Std. error
Ideology and interactions		
$\lvert d_{\text{L-R,G-T}}\rvert$ (CWC)	-0.33^{***}	(0.09)
$\lvert d_{\text{L-R,G-T}}\rvert$ (CWC) $\times$ RI	0.22^{*}	(0.08)
Electoral context (level 2)		
RI	-0.93^{***}	(0.06)
Num. of party cands. (/10)	-1.27^{***}	(0.26)
Candidate characteristics (level 1)		
Age (in decades)	0.10	(0.06)
Age-squared (in decades)	-0.02^{**}	(0.01)
Female	0.17^{***}	(0.02)
$\text{Language}_{\text{other}}$	-0.20^{**}	(0.07)
University education	0.18^{***}	(0.02)
MEP	2.14^{***}	(0.30)
Incumbency	0.69^{***}	(0.04)
Party leader	0.83^{***}	(0.16)
Celebrity	0.64^{***}	(0.06)
Party leadership	0.52^{***}	(0.07)
Mun. councillor	0.37^{***}	(0.02)
Ran in prev. election	0.26^{***}	(0.03)
$\text{Campaign spending}_{\text{not reported}}$	-0.56^{***}	(0.06)
$\text{Campaign spending}_{\text{under 5000}}$	-0.89^{***}	(0.03)
$\text{Campaign spending}_{\text{5-10 000}}$	-0.45^{***}	(0.04)
$\text{Campaign spending}_{\text{over 20 000}}$	0.57^{***}	(0.04)
log(Mun. population) (CWC)	0.03^{***}	(0.01)
Intercept	-0.19	(0.39)
Additional controls		
Year	Yes	
Party	Yes	
District	Yes	
Random effects		
Var(Residual)	0.41	
Var(Year-district-party)	0.03	
Var($\lvert d_{\text{L-R,G-T}}\rvert$ (CWC))	0.03	
n (Level 1)	4,179	
N (Level 2)	267	
ICC	0.08	
Marginal R^2 / Conditional R^2	0.647 / 0.674	
AIC	8608.593	
log-Likelihood	-4254.296	
Note:	*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001	

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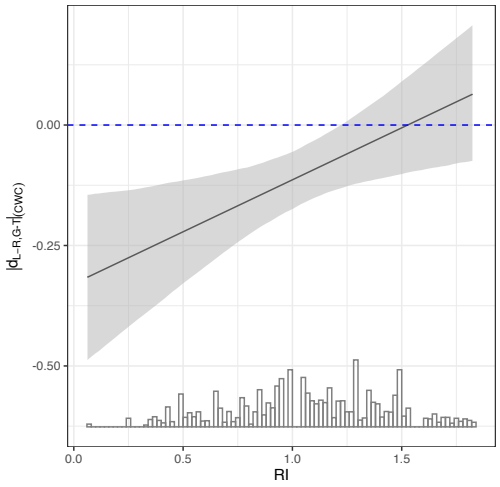


Figure 4: Conditional effect of ideological distance. Figure shows the interaction between the level of recognizability of the party-list and candidate's ideological distance to party position.

party-list, and the overall effect of candidate ideology disappears when there is a high share of recognizable candidates. The same interaction pattern, as in the main model, is found for distances in both left–right and GAL–TAN dimensions. However, the moderation effect of the recognizability index for the effect of GAL–TAN distance seems to be stronger than the moderation effect for left–right (see Appendix D).

To further investigate the moderating effect of the list recognizability, we plot predictor effects for the main model. Fig. 5 shows the impact of ideological distance on preference vote share, with varying levels of the recognizability index while other predictors are kept in their mean values. Ideological distance effects are found to be the strongest in party-lists with a low recognizability index (0.40–0.70), with a rapid decline in preference vote shares as ideological distance increases. In contrast, ideological distance does not play a role in party-lists where the RI was high (1.30–1.60), and the flat slopes of these lines confirm this.

Ideological distance effects seem to be large in certain contexts, although not quite on par with the most highly valued PVEAs. Nonetheless, high ideological

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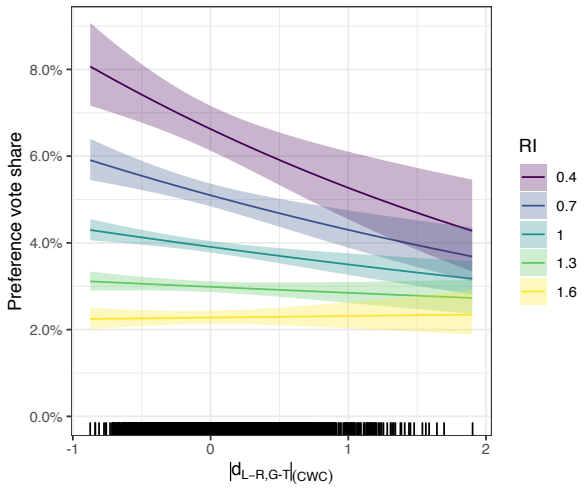


Figure 5: Ideological distance's effect on candidate's preference vote share with differing levels of recognizability index.

distance ($|d_{L\text{-}R,G\text{-}T}|$ (CWC) = 1) in contrast to locating at the party-list mean ($|d_{L\text{-}R,G\text{-}T}|$ (CWC) = 0) in lists with low RI (0.4) can diminish candidate preference vote share even up to 1.4 percentage points. This is a significant reduction in vote share, as the median preference vote share is three percent.

6. Discussion

In this study, we investigate whether the availability of easy-to-apply heuristics in a party-list conditions the effect of ideological positioning on candidate success in intra-party competition. The results reveal that such an association exists and that the effect of ideology on candidate preference vote share is greatest when the supply of candidates with established PVEAs on the list is limited. In contrast, the effect of ideology fades away when party-lists are filled with more established or recognizable candidates, thus confirming our hypothesis.

The results of this study are partially in conflict with previous research indicating that voters only resort to simple cues in complex electoral situations (Cunow et al., 2021). Our results show that in the absence of easily accessible pieces of information (e.g., political experience, locality, and name recognition),

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candidates' ideological positions become significant for their electoral success. Comparable results have been found in a different context. As already noted at the beginning of the paper, voters in New Orleans could not resort to traditional heuristics in their vote choice for the city mayor as the runoff candidates shared the same characteristics (Holman and Lay, 2021). Holman and Lay (2021) suggest that in the absence of typical shortcuts (gender, race, and party), voters in New Orleans used candidates' ideological positions as a decision-making tool. Our results are indicative of the same phenomenon: when information shortcuts are scarce (i.e., when there are fewer recognizable candidates on the list), other more cognitively demanding voting cues become more relevant.

This study has not determined the mechanisms by which voters inform themselves about candidates' ideological positions. Recent research on voter decision-making in the Finnish context, conducted by Christensen et al. (2021), suggests that voters often resort to VAA recommendations when selecting their candidate, confirming that voters use VAAs as a vote choice tool. This brings into question the cognitive demands of obtaining ideological cues in the Finnish context since candidate-centered VAAs are in high supply and popular among the electorate (see, e.g., Borg and Koljonen, 2020). Finland may be a special case among OLPR systems, with VAAs providing the electorate with a low-cost means of obtaining ideological and issue-related information regarding candidates.

Understanding the relationship between the electoral context and voters' responsiveness to candidates' ideological cues can help parties and candidates optimize candidate strategies and help them communicate their ideologies more efficiently to interested voters. Our results for individual candidates imply that those on party-lists with fewer recognizable candidates should stick with the party line if they want to maximize their intra-party vote share. In contrast, candidates on party-lists with a high concentration of incumbents, celebrities, and other recognizable candidates will most likely not hurt their electoral chances if they choose to deviate and take more distinct ideological positions.

Naturally, there are limitations to our study. It is based on observational

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data, meaning pinpointing the precise causal mechanism is difficult. There is a risk of endogeneity and omitted variable biases when working with non-experimental data. Endogeneity problems might be related to candidates' success in previous elections which can affect their current ideological positions. For example, not succeeding in elections might cause candidates to adopt ideological positions further away from the party median to increase their personal visibility. However, this behavior is not very likely when the candidates know that deviations from the party line do not typically increase their vote count. Furthermore, some of the losing candidates are loyal "party soldiers" (i.e., long-serving local party activists) who become candidates without a notable hope of getting elected but do so, because the party needs to fill its list. Thus, they are not likely to deviate significantly from party positions. Another problem may be related to the VAA data we used to measure candidate positions. Candidates' responses may be influenced by the central party office to show a unified party profile to potential voters. However, as far as we can tell, it is not customary for central party offices to engage in such activities in Finland, and we did not observe any intentional concentration of candidate answers (i.e., identical answers on key issues) for the eight main parliamentary parties. Yet, systematic research on the topic has thus far been non-existent, and we cannot exclude the possibility of party guidance.

Another limitation of this study is related to the generalizability of our findings. Due to the availability of high-quality data and the extensive contextual variation across party-lists, Finland offered an excellent test bed for our analysis. However, since we consider Finland to be a crucial case with favorable conditions, it provides a challenge to generalize our results (Gerring, 2007). We find it plausible that similar results would occur in other OLPR electoral systems with a large number of nominated candidates.

We also recognize that further investigation into the mechanics of vote choice and candidate success is needed to enrich our understanding of what makes candidates successful in intra-party competition in information-intensive OLPR systems. Our results develop new avenues for several unexplored research ques-

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tions, especially with voter-level data. First, we need more information on how individual voters use different heuristics, and how different types of information are combined. For instance, it would be interesting to know when voters migrate from one type of information to another. The second prospective avenue of research relates to voter sophistication: are more sophisticated voters more likely to resort to more complex information or are they more likely to combine and switch from one heuristic to another than less sophisticated voters? Finally, the way we measure electoral complexity is limited to the list composition. Other factors can affect the information context that voters face. For example, the level of inter-party competition may be reflected in voters' willingness to engage with more demanding decision-making processes as more competitive elections may increase voters' motivation to make more considered choices. Alternative metrics for electoral complexity should be developed to recognize differences between electoral settings.

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