Quotas and intersectionality: 
Ethnicity and Gender in Candidate Selection

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Abstract

It is increasingly acknowledged that gender equality is not fully realized when it is restricted to men and women of an ethnic majority. This article examines how gender quotas as a form of equality policy play out for ethnic minorities, and the gender balance within the group of ethnic minority candidates in particular. The analysis focuses on the selection of ethnic minorities in Belgium, where legal quotas are implemented, and the Netherlands with no quotas. Drawing on 23 interviews with central actors in four main parties in each country we find that the process of ethnic minority candidate selection is highly gendered: in both countries ethnic minority women are represented in larger numbers than ethnic minority men. But gender quotas only play a limited role. A more general concern with diversity and electoral lists, the institutionalization of gender/ethnicity in the party and party leaders’ strategic choices are more important explanations.

Introduction

Scholarly attention for the effects of equality policies, such as gender quotas, on diversity in politics is rising (Krook and Schwindt-Bayer, 2013; Hardy-Fanta, 2011). This is fuelled by intersectional theory, which conceptualizes gender, class, ethnicity, race, age, and sexuality as interrelated systems (Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1991). Recognizing diversity and intersectionality challenges perceptions that gender equality is established when ‘women’ are equal to ‘men’, without paying attention to ‘within group’ differences and inequalities (Squires, 2013; Prins and Saharso, 2013). It is increasingly acknowledged that gender equality is not fully realized when only the dominant group of women – in this case white, highly educated, middle-class, and heterosexual – is equal to their male counterparts.
Intersectional analyses of candidate selection, election processes, and political institutions are an emerging field (Mügge and De Jong, 2013). So far research has focused on the various ways in which intersecting identities influence the experiences of ethnic minority women in politics (Krook and Schwindt-Bayer, 2013: 568). Intersectionality, however, is not only about groups in marginalized positions; but also refers to power relations between different social groups (McCall, 2005; Verloo, 2006). Such a perspective is less developed in empirical studies (but see Hancock, 2009; Scola, 2007). This article evaluates the intersectional effects of gender quotas. More precisely, it studies the role of gender quotas in the gendered dimension of the selection of ethnic minority candidates in Belgium and the Netherlands. The attention for gender quotas derives from the observation that gender equality in West European politics, precede the demand for the political inclusion of ethnic minorities (Bird, 2004). This raises the question whether gender quotas have an effect on the inclusion of ethnic minorities: Do gender quotas foster the inclusion of ethnic minority women to the detriment of ethnic minority men? Or are both evenly included when candidate lists are opened up for ethnic minorities? Answering these questions generates in-depth insights in the different ways general forms of affirmative action play out for specific groups and in how the representation of ethnic majorities shifts when ‘new groups’ enter the political arena.

The extant literature on gender quotas raises contradictory expectations on the intersectional effects of quotas. A positive hypothesis suggests that gender quotas will increase ethnic diversity. Quotas boost the chance that a more heterogeneous group of politicians will come to the fore. The terms of including one group (women) may be easily extended to other groups (ethnic minorities). Furthermore, especially for ethnic minority women gender quotas provide strategic opportunities to renegotiate their position within the party. A contradictory hypothesis however predicts that gender quotas will not increase ethnic minority (women)’s
Gender quotas tend to reinforce within-group inequalities and hence predominantly cater for ethnic majority women’s—and not ethnic minority women’s—interests.

Our study finds that the ethnicization of candidate selection in both countries is highly gendered. The inclusion of ethnic minorities has occurred especially through the integration of ethnic minority women and ethnic minority women are better represented than ethnic minority men. This gender imbalance amongst ethnic minority candidates is most outspoken in the Belgian case where gender quotas are applied, but can not be explained by gender quotas alone. Instead, the gendered patterns of ethnic minority representation in the two countries can only be understood as part of the broader process of list formation that appears to be a complex ‘intersectional puzzle’ in which gender and ethnicity are only two of the candidate’s characteristics taken into account and depend on the incumbents’ identities. Furthermore, also the presence of intra-party networks and the party elites’ vote seeking and power maintenance strategies are key explanations for how the ethnicization of the candidate lists plays out in terms of gender.

The following two sections assess the literature and outline the methodology. A contextual section then presents an overview of the similarities and differences in ethnic minorities’ representation in Belgium and the Netherlands. The empirical body of the paper offers three explanations for the variation between the cases: list formation, the intra-party networks and party elites’ strategies.

**Gender quotas, diversity and intersectionality**
The question whether gender quotas have an intersectional impact or not has generated contradictory expectations in the literature on quotas. Some scholars assume that gender quotas improve the odds that a more heterogeneous group of women, including ethnic minority women, will be elected. Researchers indeed show that gender quotas increase the inclusion of rural women (Mehta, 2002), women with lower-status occupations (Bird, 2003), young women (Britton, 2005), and ethnic minority women (Hughes, 2011). There are multiple possible explanations for these trends. First, the terms of including one group may be easily extended to other groups (Norris, 2004). Because women are significantly underrepresented, any policy increasing their presence may enable a more heterogeneous group of women to be elected (Mansbridge, 1999; Paxton and Hughes, 2007). Second, gender quotas also provide ethnic minority women with more strategic opportunities to strengthen their candidacies (Paxton et al., 2006), especially given that the women’s movement today is much broader and more inclusive to ethnic minority women than in the past (Weldon, 2006). Third, the election of more ethnic minority women due to gender quotas may be related to majority men’s efforts to remain in power. Selecting ethnic minority women allows party leaders to ‘kill two birds with one stone’, preserving in the process white male dominance (Hughes, 2011). Ethnic minority women are also sometimes perceived to be more easy to negotiate with as they can switch between group loyalties (Fraga, et al., 2005) and be easier to exclude from real power through “racing-gendering” processes (Hawkesworth, 2003) that further bolster the image of the “experienced white male” politician (Meier et al., 2006: 50).

Another stream of literature suggests that gender quotas do not increase ethnic minority representation. First, dominant sub-group experiences (e.g. white women) are often taken as the norm in affirmative action. Singling out one dimension of inequality thus reinforces within-group inequalities (Strolovitch, 2007; Mansbridge, 2005; Hancock, 2004; Mink, 1998;
Collins, 1990; hooks, 2000; Weldon, 2011). Indeed, gender quotas generally cater for ethnic majority women, while ethnic minority quotas support ethnic minority men (Darcy et al., 1993; Krook and O’Brien, 2010). In theory ethnic minority women may benefit from gender-as well as from ethnic minority quotas, but they likely benefit from neither in reality (Hancock, 2009). The political representation of ethnic minority women only may be improved by tandem quotas which explicitly target ethnic minority women (Hughes, 2011).

Second, when gender quotas require elites to suddenly recruit a large number of women, they tend to rely on existing networks. This results in the recruitment of elite women close to men in power (Franceschet et al., 2012; Cowley and Childs, 2003). Third, gender quotas are not specifically designed to address within-group inequalities. Research on gender quota adoption highlights the importance of women’s mobilization (Krook and Schwindt-Bayer, 2013; Krook, 2006, 2009). However, ethnic minority women’s organizations generally do not participate in these campaigns. Other explanations given for quota adoption – elite strategies, political norms, and international norm diffusion and learning (Krook, 2009) – similarly give no reason to expect that gender quotas would increase ethnic minority women’s representation. In sum, the intersectional effect of gender quotas remains puzzling. By comparing Belgium (with legal gender quotas) and the Netherlands (without legal gender quotas), we put the contradictory assumptions to the empirical test.

**Methodology and case selection**

Belgium and the Netherlands are ‘similar systems’ with a number of characteristics in common. They share a history of pillarization (and de-pillarization), mechanisms of power-sharing and civil society consultation in policy-making, multi-party systems, and proportional list electoral systems (Deschouwer and Lucardie, 2003). In both cases, political parties play a
leading role in the recruitment and nomination of candidates although voters also have the possibility to give preference votes to individual candidates. But because individual candidates need a rather large number of preferential votes to breach the list order, they do not easily jump over candidates placed higher on the order of the list to get elected (Andeweg, 2008; Craeghs and Dewachter, 1998). Flanders and the Netherlands also have comparable ‘multiculturalist’ citizenship model (although the backlash against multiculturalism in the Netherlands has caused an overall shift towards assimilation). The other Belgian Francophone sub-states lean more towards the assimilationist-republican citizenship model (Loobuyck and Jacobs 2006). To strengthen the similar system design the analysis concerning Belgium will hence focus on the candidate selection in Flemish parties.

Belgium and the Netherlands also deal with diversity issues in remarkably similar ways (Celis et al. 2012). Since the 1970s, gender concerns have been institutionalized in the political parties, with several parties establishing intra-party women’s groups (Van de Velde, 1992; Van Molle and Gubin, 1998). One important difference between the two countries however relates to their different uses of gender quotas. In Belgium, many parties have applied voluntary gender quotas or targets since the 1970s, and the Belgian federal government installed legally binding gender quotas in 1994 and 2002 (Meier 2000). The first quota law in 1994 certified that not more than two thirds of the candidates on electoral lists could be of the same sex. But because this first law did not target the top positions on the list, it was not very effective and did not lead to a substantial increase in the proportion of female representatives. The second quota law of 2002 introduced gender parity on lists, as well as an alternation of the sexes at the top places on the list, and was consequently more effective. In the Netherlands, on the contrary, there has been far more reluctance to apply structural measures
to increase the number of women in parliament. Although the Greens, the Christian Democratic Party, and the Social Democratic Party have adopted voluntary target numbers, legally binding gender quotas have never been applied (Mügge and Damstra, 2013). Despite these different trajectories, women’s descriptive representation on the national level in Belgium and the Netherlands is quite similar: women currently make up 38.7% of the members of the Dutch Second Chamber and 39.3% of the members of the Belgian federal Chamber of Representatives (www.ipu.org, 2013).

Despite the initial prevalence of gender in political party inclusion strategies, ethnicity has increasingly become more salient in understandings of diversity in Belgium and the Netherlands in the past decade(s). In this article we define ‘ethnic minorities’ as non-western ethnic minorities whose political representation has become salient and politicized in the two countries and who have been subject of immigration or integration policies. This predominantly includes ethnic minorities who or whose parents have migrated from former colonies (Surinamese and Antilleans in the Netherlands; Congolese in Belgium) or in the context of a guest worker programs (Turks and Moroccans in both countries). To our knowledge, no prior qualitative study has examined the effect of gender quotas on ethnic minorities with a migrant background in European immigration countries. Existing work on gender quotas that does include ethnic minorities are large-N and largely focus on indigenous minorities.

Our qualitative analyses draw on 23 semi-structured interviews with the major parties in each country who have at least one ethnic minority MP in the national parliaments: the Green Party (the Dutch GroenLinks and the Flemish Groen), the Social Democratic Party (the Dutch PvdA and the Flemish Sp.a), the Christian Democratic Party (the Dutch CDA and the Flemish
CD&V), and the Liberal Party (the Dutch VVD and the Flemish Open VLD) (see appendix 1). In Belgium, the main party families typically consist of a Flemish and a francophone party. As mentioned above, in Belgium the interviews were limited to the Flemish parties to enhance the comparability with the Dutch data. Respondents have been selected on the basis of their expertise regarding recruitment and selection or diversity. References to interviews are indicated with N for respondents from the Netherlands and B for Belgian respondents. The interviews took on average 90 minutes and have been conducted by the authors between March and June 2013. The first part of the questionnaire aimed to identify the central actors supporting (or resisting) – such as party leadership or women’s organizations – the recruitment and selection of ethnic minorities. A second set of questions dealt with selection criteria to determine how the recruitment and selection of ethnic minority candidates is gendered, while the third part questioned how parties integrate diversity on candidate lists and into party structures. Finally, we inquired into the existence of patterns of competition or collaboration between identity groups.

**Ethnic Minorities in Parliament**

The first ethnic minority representatives entered the Dutch and Belgian parliaments for the social democratic parties in 1986 and 1995, respectively. Steadily ethnicity has become more important in party politics. During the interviews, the majority of the respondents underscore the importance of the inclusion of ethnic minorities, often for electoral reasons: “If you do not have any representative from this particular group, you lose voters” (N8). Indeed, the presence of ethnic minorities in Belgian and Dutch national politics has steadily increased over the years. At the time of writing (2013) the Dutch Second Chamber currently counts 15 out of 150 representatives (or 10 percent) with a non-western migrant background, a
proportion close to their share of the Dutch population. Nine out of 150 representatives in the Belgian Chamber (or 6 percent) have a non-western migration background, which is below the proportion of ethnic minorities in the Belgian population (Wauters and Eelbode, 2011).

The recruitment of ethnic minority candidates seems most natural in left wing parties. For instance, both Social Democrat parties in our study argued that “diversity is part of its genetic make-up” (N8). On the contrary, the Liberal parties explained that recruiting ethnic minorities does not abide with Liberal ideology: “It is not that we are hesitant to involve ethnic minorities in politics, but we consider people to be individuals and not members of a particular community” (B8). The importance of ethnicity also depends on the ethnic composition of the population. Especially in larger cities parties feel the necessity to include more ethnic minority candidates on their lists: “Elections in every large city will be won or lost with the ethnic vote” (B2). Similarly, in places with a low percentage of ethnic minorities parties tend be more cautious: “The party was really very careful and very scared to play the ethnic card at the wrong time and place” (N4).

Until the late 1990s the majority of ethnic minority MPs in both countries have been male. However, from 1998/1999 onwards, ethnic minority women entered the national/federal parliaments in Belgium and the Netherlands (see figures 1 and 2). The Belgian case confirms the finding of those studies discussed above that contend that gender quotas do not per se impact negatively on the gender balance amongst ethnic minority candidates by favoring the inclusion of ethnic minority women to the detriment of ethnic minority men.

[Figure 1: Ethnic minority MPs by gender in The Netherlands about here]

[Figure 2: Ethnic minority MPs by gender in Belgium about here]
The difference between the two countries is that the gender imbalance has been stronger in Belgium than in the Netherlands. In the Dutch parliament, 70 percent of the ethnic minority representatives in the Dutch Second Chamber were women between 2002 and 2010. After the 2010 elections, gender balance was achieved when an almost equal number of ethnic minority women and men were elected. In Belgium, the gender imbalance remains strongly in favor of ethnic minority women. From 2007 onwards, ethnic minority women have constituted 80 percent of elected ethnic minority representatives. In the period 1999-2003 the two ethnic minority MPs in Belgium were both women. This begs the question whether gender quotas actually did favor ethnic minority women to the detriment of ethnic minority men in the Belgian case and by doing so have been used to preserve “white male dominance”. As the comparative analysis in the next sections shows, gender quotas are however not the sole nor the dominant explanation for ethnic minority women’s representation.

**List formation as an intersectional puzzle**

A striking finding in the previous section is that the ethnicization of Dutch and Belgian politics has occurred mostly through the integration of ethnic minority women. This is surprising, given that several studies suggest that especially women of color might experience ‘double barriers’ or ‘double burdens’ in society and politics (Hull et al., 1982; St. Jean & Feagin 1998). One explanation for the similar results in Belgium and the Netherlands relates to the electoral system and to processes of candidate selection. Candidate lists in proportional electoral systems are more likely to include traditionally marginalized groups and to reflect the population in its full diversity than majoritarian systems (Norris, 2004; Leyenaar, 2004). Indeed, all respondents stated that recruitment of candidates and the eventual list formation is
a complex puzzle that is successfully solved when many characteristics are represented including gender, ethnicity, regional background, age, and expertise. In the words of a Belgian respondent:

Our first concern is not whether we have enough male or female candidates. Our first question is: who do we have among the incumbents and where do we have room for new people? ...If we have three female incumbents and one male incumbent, we include a male newcomer. The profile of this new male candidate ideally complements the profiles of the four incumbent candidates.... It’s a puzzle and candidates’ gender and ethnic origin are part of this puzzle (B8).

List formation is an intersectional puzzle of which gender and ethnicity are only two characteristics that parties take into account. Ideal candidates do not represent one particular segment in society. To appeal to different social groups simultaneously, the list as a whole needs to represent a combination of social characteristics. Hence, the profile of the incumbents largely determines the profile of the other candidates – and the latter will cash a ‘complementarity bonus.’ This means that a young female ethnic minority candidate is not selected simply because there are few women or ethnic minority candidates. She is selected because, on top of her competence, her specific profile – being a young female ethnic minority – complements those of incumbent candidates – often senior white men.

If list formation is an intersectional puzzle this may increase the competition between groups. There is a general competition among candidates for a strategic place on the list, the so-called ‘eligible spots.’ Depending on the size of the party – and during the campaign, the election polls – parties are able to roughly calculate the number of seats they are likely to win. The number of these strategic places on the list might be small. This means that there is a high level of competition for a relatively small number of spots in which a large number of characteristics need to be represented. Contrary to expectations generated by the literature, our interviews indicate that this competition does not occur between different groups (for
instance between women or ethnic minorities, or between ethnic minority women and ethnic majority women). Instead competition plays out between candidates with similar profiles: between ethnic minority women within the same party, between male candidates from the same region, or between women with similar socio-economic backgrounds. For example, in the Netherlands several interviewees emphasized fierce competition between ethnic majority women:

There is always competition in politics, but women are not particularly nice when push comes to shove. Men have their old boys network… women have the cat’s box [krabbenmand] which is the opposite […]. If one woman stands up the others pull her down. (N10)

The selection processes as described above work in surprisingly similar ways in both countries. Gender quotas do not reproduce a more strict hierarchy of gender over ethnicity in the candidate selection process in Belgium as compared to the Netherlands. In Belgium, the search for more women candidates after the implementation of the 2002 gender quotas did momentarily favor ethnic minority women candidates because they were needed to comply with the quotas and simultaneously complemented the incumbents’ ethnic majority profiles. However, this effect is already disappearing, arguably because the group of incumbent candidates in Belgium is increasingly gender balanced (and because ethnic minority men complement incumbent ethnic majority women on the top of the lists). Though less drastically, a similar pattern can be observed within Dutch parties, which implemented gender targets voluntarily (Mügge & Damstra, 2013).

The role of intra-party networks
In addition to the ‘complementarity bonus’, ethnic minorities’ representation might also benefit from the institutional recognition of ethnic minority groups within parties. Such intra-party groups put pressure on the party leadership to recruit ethnic minority candidates and select ethnic minorities for top list positions. The recognition of ethnic minority groups within the parties differs in important ways across the two cases. In the Netherlands, ethnic minority groups were set up in the mid-1980s in the Social Democratic and Christian Democratic party and by the Greens in the 1990s. Ethnic minority women’s groups followed in the mid-1990s. These networks were formally recognized, but did not have the same status as the women’s sections. Ethnic minority women’s groups have been particularly successful as they could use the institutional channels of the women’s sections (Mügge & Damstra, 2013). In Belgium, by contrast, no party, except the Greens, has ever established an intra-party diversity group. The Belgian interviewees more than once expressed their reluctance to integrate ethnicity on a structural basis in the party’s organization. Some parties feared that a separate section would essentialize ethnic minorities and would put too much emphasis on their ethnic background:

We believe that a person is more than his/her ethnic origin. (…) It is not the only thing that connects people. Even if you have a migrant background, you do not want to be pinned down on it. (B5)

Other parties envisioned a horizontal rather than vertical integration of ethnic minorities:

We only have such separate [i.e. vertical] sections for women, youngsters and the elderly. We do not have them for ethnic minorities, because we want attention for this latter group to be mainstreamed. (B4)

Differences between Belgian and Dutch parties in terms of the institutional embedding of ethnicity had important consequences for the political representation of ethnic minority candidates (men and women). Despite their status as advisory bodies, the ethnic minority
groups within Dutch parties also lobby for the nomination of ethnic minority candidates. The first candidates brought forward by these minority groups were men, largely because ethnic minority groups initially worked separately from the women’s groups. Soon, however, women’s groups and ethnic minority groups sought ways to cooperate rather than to compete over the nomination of candidates. The founder of the CDA ethnic minority group, for instance, refers to the reciprocal relationship that existed with the CDA women’s group:

I made sure that [...] I supported the majority women of the CDA women’s group, and then I asked them to support my candidates as well. (N3)

This proved a winning strategy, as both female candidates put forward by the ethnic minority group were well-ranked on the party list.

Ethnic minority women’s groups in the Dutch parties have also made various efforts to promote the political presence of ethnic minority women. These groups not only supported the candidacy and nomination of ethnic minority women, but also provided important institutional resources to ethnic minority women once they were elected. They organized networking opportunities for these women, as well as prepared them for their jobs as representatives, and as such substantially furthered their political careers (N9). Ethnic minority women’s groups were most powerful in the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s and this might explain the relatively strong presence of ethnic minority women in Dutch politics at the time (see figure 1). However, the intra-party groups gradually lost importance within the anti-multicultural climate of the 2000s. At the time of writing most ethnic minority networks have dissolved. The Christian Democrats and Greens still host such networks but resist organizing on the basis of culture or ethnicity: ‘color’ is the new principle. This might explain the decrease of the gender gap among ethnic minorities since 2010 (figure 1).
In Belgium, political parties did not witness the development of intra-party ethnic minority organizations. Some parties do keep in contact with civil society organizations for policy-related reasons but the majority of Belgian respondents resented the idea that ethnic minority organizations would influence the selection process and intervene in internal party matters. Autonomous migrant organizations do sometimes push their own candidates, and especially left wing parties report that organizations increasingly pick up this strategy:

I received a lot of phone calls from these organizations, lobbying for an alderman with a Turkish background. I was very surprised that they pluck up such courage to do so. I cannot imagine that I would lobby for a female candidate. (B3)

Similarly, diversity sections are not present in the women’s groups of the Flemish parties. Christian Democratic, Socialist, and Green parties do claim that the women’s groups support their parties’ attempts to bring more ethnic minorities to the party, but so far this support has not materialized into any structural solution. Given the absence of groups lobbying for their presence, the descriptive representation of ethnic minority women depends on other political opportunities, such as the presence of a progressive party leader and incumbent ethnic minorities.

According to the interviewees, the adoption of binding gender quotas in Belgium did not present a window of opportunity for ethnic minority women. The quotas obliged parties to actively recruit women and parties turned to their women’s groups for support. Due to the absence of ethnic minority bodies, and because women’s groups had integrated diversity measures only to a limited extent, female candidates brought forward by these women’s groups were mostly ethnic majority women. Some parties, especially the Socialists, did make efforts to put several ethnic minority women on the top of the list. Gender quotas thus did not
boost ethnic minority women’s presence in the same way as it did for majority women. Although there is no direct causal link, the absence of intra-party networks seems to have rendered the political representation of ethnic minorities more difficult in Belgium. Several ethnic minority respondents mentioned that they sometimes felt isolated and abandoned by their parties (B9).

**Strategies of party elites**

The previous section shows that ethnic minority representation has occurred mostly through ethnic minority women in Belgium, but that this is not the result of the existence of intra-party networks. Contrary to our expectations, gender quotas fail to explain the gender imbalance in ethnic minority representation as well. Rather, according to our interviews, the highly distorted gender balance in ethnic minority representation in Belgium needs to be explained by party leaders’ anticipation of voters’ response to ethnic minority candidates, as well as by leaders’ efforts to maintain a power balance within the party.

First, political parties in Belgium strongly assume that ethnic minority women are more attractive to voters. The woman politician of ‘the first generation of ethnic minority representatives’ was typically highly educated, well integrated into Belgian society, not connected to ethnic minority civil society organizations, and did not wear the Islamic veil or headscarf: “Ethnic minority women are the softer face of the emancipation of ethnic minority candidates” (B8). The selection of Muslim women was supposed to lessen the threat of Islamic religion: “A Muslim woman is perceived as a woman, less as a Muslim’” (B1). Ethnic minority men, in contrast, have been less attractive to party selectors, who expect voter rejection based on racist stereotypes about ethnic minority men being criminals. Ethnic
minority women were expected to attract the ethnic vote and at the same time not alienate the existing electorate. Indeed, they even provided an extra reason to vote for ethnic minority women by sympathizing with repressed Islamic women. Complementing the view that ethnic minority women are oppressed is the view that ethnic minority men are the oppressors:

The idea about the ethnic minority woman is: that is an oppressed woman, in need of help, deserving a voice. […] Voters prefer to cast their vote on ethnic minority women. […] that was often a sympathy vote: we support women’s emancipation. It was meant to be a positive thing, but the side effect was that in case of ethnic minority men, one thought: they want to keep their wives at home (B7).

Second, according to our respondents, ethnic minority men are perceived as being more threatening to the internal balance of power, i.e. to the power that ethnic majority men hold. Ethnic minority male candidates play the ‘political power game’ like ethnic majority men do, and are therefore a greater threat to white men in power:

This particular masculine culture in politics… ethnic minority men inscribe themselves more easily into it… than women. Going to the pub after the meeting is still a bit more difficult especially for women with children. (B2)

In contrast, ethnic minority women, especially younger women, are seen as complementary to incumbents who are predominantly white, older, middle-class men. In the search for complementary candidates during list formation, young ethnic minority women hence benefit more often from a ‘complementarity bonus’ than ethnic minority men.

Both reasons for why parties prefer ethnic minority women over ethnic minority men are also reported by interviewees in the Netherlands, albeit to a far lesser extent. Representatives of Dutch parties do not unanimously argue that ethnic minority women are preferred over ethnic minority men because they expect them to attract more voters. Only one interviewee
explicitly stressed that ethnic minority women are less perceived as a threat than men who may suffer from the “angry young man stereotype” (N9), while another argued that ethnic minority women are a ‘safer choice’ than ethnic minority men:

A woman uses different instruments to give a nice impression, to be good: it’s always safer. A man is more focused on the content. So if there is little room for diversity, a woman is a safer choice. (N6)

Conclusion

This article assessed how legally binding quotas affect the representation of ethnic minority women and men MPs. By comparing the selection processes of ethnic minority candidates in Belgium and the Netherlands we have shown that although gender quotas do not obstruct the election of ethnic minority women, they are not the key explanation. Coinciding with the general literature on the effects of quotas on the representation of women, it is rather the interaction between quotas – or voluntary target numbers – and other factors of which the intersectional puzzling of the list formation at hand, the degree to which gender and ethnicity are institutionalized within parties and strategies of the party elites to maximize their electoral support are decisive.

The analysis shows that the intersection of gender and ethnicity has multiplying effects. In both countries ethnic minority men were disadvantaged: they suffer from negative stereotypes (Belgium) and from the fact that mixed intra-party networks of ethnic minorities have a weaker position than ethnic minority women’s groups since parties fear an exclusive ‘ethnic’ lobby (the Netherlands). Consequently, the intersection of two disadvantaged positions turns out to be an advantage for ethnic minority women in both countries. Ethnic minority women satisfy the demand for women and ethnic minorities with a single candidate. In the
In the Netherlands, they moreover profit from the infrastructure of women’s networks and committees created by ethnic majority women within parties. In the Belgian case, the stark imbalance between ethnic minority women and men cannot be explained by gender quotas alone, but should be contextualized in the way parties manage ethnic diversity. In the Netherlands, intra-party ethnic minority networks have influenced the recruitment and selection processes, whereas in Belgium the party leadership decides and leaves next to no room for the lobby of ethnic minority or women networks.

Moving beyond the experiences of specific groups, we demonstrate that gender and ethnicity are part of a broader intersectional puzzle of list formation. Selectors aim to compile a diverse list in which a wide range of identities are represented in a limited number of candidates with which they expect their electorate will identify. The expectation is that this will in turn boost their electoral support. Gender and ethnicity are integral parts of this intersectional puzzle. Given the electoral demand to include ethnic minority candidates as well as women, combined with the underrepresentation of these groups amongst incumbent candidates, ethnic minority women have been able to cash a ‘complementarity bonus.’ In face of the demand for the inclusion of ethnic minorities, political parties in both countries favored ethnic minority women resulting in a gender imbalance in ethnic minority representatives. However, the leading positions on the list, the safe choices, are generally designated to white men. Depending on the elements that are missing in their profile the puzzle is completed. The party specificity in this game is for future research to unravel.

The similarities between the two countries of the gendered nature of ethnic minority candidate selection – in both countries ethnic minority women outnumber their male counterparts- speak against attributing too much importance to gender quotas. The gender imbalance within the
group of ethnic minority candidates is however more outspoken in Belgium when compared to the Netherlands. But our analysis did not find indications that ethnic minority women in Belgium were more strongly favored because of quotas.

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Figure 1: Ethnic minority MPs by gender, The Netherlands

Source: www.parlement.com, our calculation

Figure 2: Ethnic minority MPs by gender, Belgium

Source: www.lachambre.be, our calculation
References


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Appendix 1

**Interviews with Dutch parties**

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## Interviews with Belgian parties

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