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DEMOCRATIC NORMS AND PARTY CANDIDATE SELECTION

Taking Contextual Factors into Account

William Cross

ABSTRACT

This article argues that the relative significance of party candidate selection processes in influencing representational and policy outcomes varies across countries and parties. Five variables are identified that influence this relationship: the electoral system, the degree of inter-party general election competition, the openness of the system to the election of independent candidates, whether representational demands are accommodated within or among parties, and the role of elected representatives in determining policy outcomes. From this, a normative argument is made that the strength of the case for democratically organized candidate nomination contests varies depending on the relative importance of these contests in determining policy and representational outcomes.

KEY WORDS ■ candidate selection ■ electoral systems ■ party democracy ■ representation

Introduction

It has long been settled that candidate selection is one of the central functions of political parties. Scholars such as Sartori (1976: 64) have observed that the selection of candidates is the core activity that universally distinguishes parties from other political organizations. It is not surprising then that students of party organization and party democracy place considerable importance on norms of candidate selection when determining where power lies within a party. What has been considerably less studied, however, is the relative importance of party candidate selection among parties and across jurisdictions. In this article, I argue that the relative significance of party candidate selection varies depending upon a limited and identifiable set of contextual variables. While extremely influential in determining

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representational and policy outcomes in some states, candidate selection may have a marginal relationship with these in others. It follows from this that the strength of the normative argument for democratic organization of these processes is contextual rather than absolute, and thus varies across jurisdictions.

This article makes two contributions to the study of party candidate selection. Its primary purpose is to identify a set of criteria for determining the relative influence of party candidate nomination on representational and policy outcomes. Following from this, it makes the normative argument that the stronger the relationship is between candidate selection and these democratic outcomes, the stronger the case is for democratically organized nomination contests.

There is no shortage of literature identifying the centrality of nomination contests in intra-party power struggles. Schattschneider (1942: 101) captured this dynamic when he observed that 'the nominating process has become the crucial process of the party. He who can make the nominations is the owner of the party'. Ranney (1981: 103) concurs in suggesting that what is at stake in candidate nominations 'is nothing less than control of the core of what the party stands for and does'. Candidate nomination has also become an important test of the internal democratic strength of party organizations. Gallagher (1988: 1) has argued that 'the way in which political parties select their candidates may be used as an acid test of how democratically they conduct their internal affairs'. Reflecting the centrality of candidate nomination to the organizational life of parties, it often features in discussions of different party models. Candidate selection is examined within the context of better understanding both the dynamics of party organization and the changing distribution of power within a party in the cadre, mass, catch-all, professional, cartel and franchise party models (see, for example, Carty, 2004; Katz and Mair, 1995; Kirchheimer, 1966; Pannebianco, 1988). Kirchheimer (1966: 198) concludes that 'the nomination of candidates for popular legitimation as office holders thus emerges as the most important function of the present-day catch-all party'.

Candidate nomination is important beyond the confines of the political party. Crotty (1968: 260) identifies this when he suggests that:

The party in recruiting candidates determines the personnel and, more symbolically, the groups to be represented among the decision-making elite. Through recruitment, the party indirectly influences the types of policy decisions to be enacted and the interests most likely to be heard. Candidate recruitment then represents one of the key linkages between the electorate and the policy-making process.

The linkage function is not limited to the conveying of policy preferences between the local and the centre. Parties also offer one of the few opportunities for voters to engage in politics from their home communities. As Katz (2001: 278) suggests: 'Political parties are among the principal channels for popular participation in democratic polities.' There are, of course, different

manifestations of this imperative that typically include party member participation in policy development, leadership selection, election campaigning and candidate nomination. However, it is participation in candidate selection that routinely offers the best opportunity for rank-and-file voters to exercise influence within their party and to have an (indirect) influence on public policy. As Gallagher (1988: 3) has written:

Undoubtedly, ordinary members cannot realistically expect to play a role in laying down party policy or formulating election manifestos . . . Consequently, the contest over candidate selection is generally even more intense than the struggle for control over the party manifesto.

Katz's and Gallagher's conclusions relating to the importance of parties as vehicles for public participation, coupled with Schattschneider's and Ranney's observations that candidate selection is by definition one of the central activities of parties, provide a universal argument for the significance of nomination contests. For the reasons they enumerate, party candidate selection can be considered an important activity in every advanced democracy. On the other hand, Crotty's argument regarding the influence candidate selection has on the types of policy decisions made and the interests represented in the legislature is not constant but, rather, is highly dependent on identifiable contextual factors. As the representational and policy outcomes he identifies are at the core of democratic practice, the strength of the relationships between them and candidate selection influences the relative importance of party candidate nomination within a political process.

Candidate Nomination and Democratic Norms

There is substantial variance in the degree of democratization of candidate selection processes used by parties. These variations occur along two principal dimensions: centralization and degree of inclusiveness. Epstein (1980), Ranney (1981), Gallagher (1988), Katz (2001), Bille (2001), Rahat and Hazan (2001) and Lundell (2004) all consider these variables in their discussions of the democratic norms surrounding party candidate selection. In much of this literature, there is an implicit assumption that selection made at the local level is more democratic, as the decision is decentralized to those who will be represented by the candidate, and that the more persons eligible to participate in the selection process the better, as this enfranchises more voters.

The range of possibilities currently observable on both of these factors is significant. For example, the number of voters eligible to participate ranges from one (when a party's leader selects candidates) to a small party elite, to a larger party institution, to all party members, and, finally, to all voters who are partisans of the party. Most parties fall somewhere in between the two extremes, though there are cases that fall into each category. Similarly,

in terms of centralization, there is significant distribution of cases falling between absolute central party control and complete independence for local voters in selecting their candidates. Gallagher (1988: 237), for example, plots approximately 50 cases in terms of centralization in five categories ranging from a party primary to selection by the leader. Lundell (2004) finds an equally wide range of cases in terms of the degree of centralization.

As Pennings and Hazan (2001) suggest, the arguments regarding democratization of selection contests are more nuanced than the principles recounted above. For example, local processes have the potential of being as elite dominated as do centralized ones and potentially more voters might participate in a centralized than a local process. Illustrative of this is Lundell's (2004) categorization of national primaries as highly centralized even though they are often more inclusive in terms of participation than the more decentralized, but more exclusive, selection by a local party committee.

Some students of political parties reject the argument that parties should be bound by democratic principles that govern state-run elections. Their argument is that parties are private, voluntary associations, their affairs are their own business to be governed as they and their members deem appropriate, largely outside the public realm. Membership in political parties, they contend, is unlike membership in a state, as parties are voluntary associations and members have the options of exit, voice and loyalty (Hirschman, 1970). Allowing parties to develop their own norms of candidate selection, including restricting participation to a relatively small group of party elites, might be justified as a way of encouraging party-building and allowing parties to make their own organizational decisions. (For a full account of this argument, see Rahat and Hazan, 2005.) This argument is countered by those who contend that political parties are essentially extensions of the state. This is the position advanced by Epstein (1986) and van Biezen (2004) in describing political parties as the public utilities of modern representative democracy. Their argument is that the work of parties is 'increasingly seen as an essential public good for democracy and less exclusively as the private voluntary associations which are the instruments of civil society' (van Biezen, 2004: 702). To the extent that political parties are becoming financially dependent on state subsidies, this argument is bolstered (Katz and Mair, 1995).

What is missing from the literature on democratic norms and candidate selection is an analytical toolset allowing for evaluation of the arguments outlined above on the basis of the relative influence of candidate nomination in determining representational and policy outcomes. While the literature does acknowledge the relationship between candidate nomination and institutional factors such as the electoral system (Czudnowski, 1975; Epstein, 1980; Gallagher, 1980, 1988), it does not take the next step of evaluating how these contextual factors impact upon the relative significance of party candidate selection in determining democratic outcomes.

The argument presented here is that candidate selection may be highly determinative of representational and policy outcomes in one state while it

matters little in another. When candidate nomination is not a determinative event, the arguments advanced by those such as Rahat and Hazan have more merit, as their argument is dependent on the assumption that the general election is the crucial event in determining democratic outcomes. On the other hand, when party candidate selection is highly significant in terms of influencing policy and representational outcomes, arguments that favour leaving the norms of candidate nomination solely to the parties' discretion are more problematic. The key point is that the democratic standards by which we assess candidate selection contests must take into account contextual factors that influence their relative role in determining these democratic outcomes.

Determining the Relative Significance of Candidate Nomination

In operationalizing the relative 'significance' of candidate nomination, I am guided by Crotty's argument, recounted above, that candidate selection is important because it influences the personnel to be included among the decision-making elite and indirectly influences the types of policy decisions to be enacted. Both of the attributes identified by Crotty are fundamental dimensions of political competition in representative democracies. The argument here is that the strength of both the relationship between candidate nomination and who gets represented in the legislature and between candidate nomination and policy outcomes varies among states. When party candidate selection plays relatively little role in the ultimate selection of representatives, then it is a less central part of the democratic process compared with a state where the contextual factors are such that candidate nomination plays a more definitive role. Similarly, if individual deputies play an important role in public decision-making, the method of their selection is more salient to democratic outcomes than in a state where deputies have little influence over policy outcomes. Essentially, then, the strengths of these two relationships determine how central party candidate selection is to a state's overall democratic process.

The broad contextual factors that must be considered in assessing the relative importance of party candidate selection are the electoral system, the party system and the role of parliamentarians. These are subsequently operationalized into five variables. The argument is summarized in Table 1. For some of the explanatory variables the unit of analysis is the state, while for others it is the individual party. The electoral system, for example, is a variable that typically applies to all parties within a state, while the relative role of deputies in party and public decision-making may vary among parties within a state.¹ This may help to explain why variance in candidate selection practices is found both among parties from different states and among parties within some states.

Table 1. Factors influencing the relative importance of party candidate selection to representational and policy outcomes

	<i>Electoral system</i>		<i>Party system</i>		<i>Role of deputies</i>
More important	SMP, closed list PR	Low inter-party competition	Major parties hold monopoly on election of members	Representational cleavages accommodated within parties	Rank-and-file representatives have significant influence over policy outcomes
	Flexible list PR				
Less important	STV, open list PR	High inter-party competition	Independent candidates are regularly elected	Representational cleavages accommodated among parties	Rank-and-file representatives have little influence over policy outcomes

The variables examined are not fully independent of one another. As made clear below, the electoral system is the most significant factor influencing the importance of party candidate nomination on the selection of deputies. The choice of electoral system has considerable influence on some of the other variables at play, nonetheless each of them is significant in its own right. For each of these variables we observe variance among countries within the same electoral system family, meaning that the relationship is not wholly explained by the electoral system *per se*.

The Electoral System and Intra-Party and Inter-Party Competition

The logic of the relationship between the relative importance of candidate selection and the electoral system revolves around the degree of choice available to voters in the general election. In some systems, the party selection phase is most significant, as general election voters have little or no opportunity to influence the relative ranking of a party’s candidates, while in others general election voters have essentially unfettered choice in selecting which candidates, from a large pool, are elected. In jurisdictions using electoral systems offering general election voters no opportunity to influence which of a party’s candidates are elected, representational outcomes are largely determined at the nomination stage. This is consistent with Gallagher’s (1988: 2) assertion that:

[I]t is clear that the values of the selectorate, often a small number of activists, frequently have more impact than those of voters. This applies especially under electoral systems which do not permit voters any degree of choice between candidates of the same party; picking candidates then often amounts to picking deputies.

This is not to suggest that the candidate selection process is unimportant in some electoral systems. At a minimum, party candidate selection has a winnowing effect and significantly narrows the choices available to general election voters in all systems. This pre-selection process has been illustrated to have an important effect on the ability of traditionally under-represented groups, such as women, to be elected in equitable numbers (Childs et al., 2006; Norris, 1996). Nonetheless, for purposes of this argument, what is important is that there is significant range in the amount of choice offered to general election voters under different electoral systems.

For purposes of this discussion, I reduce the number of electoral systems to five: single-member plurality (SMP), proportional closed lists, proportional flexible lists, proportional open lists and the single transferable vote (STV).² General election voter choice can be both in the form of intra-party and inter-party competition. Consistent with Gallagher's formulation, I begin with consideration of intra-party general election competition. There are two dimensions of intra-party voter choice that are important to this discussion: the ability of voters to influence the order in which a party's candidates are elected and the size of the list from which voters are selecting their preferred candidates.

In both open list and STV systems, general election voters retain full authority to rank-order candidates. Voters in the general election determine which candidates move to the top of the list and in doing so improve the odds of their preferred candidates being elected. To paraphrase Gallagher, general election voters in these systems, and not exclusively the party nominating body, choose deputies. Details of the individual system matter. Systems generally characterized as open list vary dramatically. The crucial variable for our purposes is whether it is the party or the general election voter that determines which of a party's candidates are elected. In a truly open system, the determination of which candidates are elected from a party's list is wholly determined by voters. In these list systems, similar to STV systems, parties present a pool of candidates from which general election voters select representatives.

In many systems, often misleadingly included in open list categorizations, voters and parties share in the decision of which candidates from a list are elected. In these cases, the ultimate rank order of the candidates is not wholly determined by voters' preferences but is, to varying degrees, also influenced by the party's preferences. The mechanisms vary widely from requiring candidates to receive a set percentage of preference votes in order to move up from the rank order preferred by the party to using a default rule that voters who do not indicate a preference are accepting the party's preferred order. As Farrell (2001: 83–8) illustrates, systems such as that used in Belgium give the appearance of being open (since voters are permitted to express a candidate preference) while in practice they give substantial weight to the party's preferred candidate order. The result is that 'only a tiny proportion of seat allocations are affected by unusually large personal votes for individual

candidates' (p. 87). Shugart (2005: 42) correctly suggests that 'it is misleading to refer to all systems in which voters may give preference votes as "open lists", because the list is not very open in practice if voters may indicate a choice of candidate but such choices seldom have any impact on which candidates are elected'. The key distinction he identifies is whether 'the voter who opts not to cast a preference vote is delegating to the party the task of deciding the order in which candidates are elected' or 'to other voters' (p. 43). In the first of these types, better described as flexible list systems, decisions made by the party at the candidate nomination stage are highly influential in determining representational outcomes, often more so than the candidate-specific preferences expressed by general election voters.

Voters in STV jurisdictions have the opportunity to rank-order all of the candidates presented by all of the parties – not just those from their preferred party. These rankings directly determine which candidates are elected. However, in terms of intra-party choice, it is important to consider the size of the candidate pool available to voters. Unlike parties in open list proportional systems, parties in STV systems are generally discouraged from nominating significantly more candidates than that equal to the number of seats they are likely to win in an electoral district. This results from the logic of the system which penalizes parties that nominate too many candidates and thus see their vote-share dispersed.³ As Gallagher (2000: 90) concludes:

[V]ery often a party organization comes to the conclusion that if it is aiming to win N seats in a constituency, N is the optimal number of candidates to run, and it rarely runs more than N plus 1.

The 2002 Irish Dáil elections illustrate this point. In this election, even the major parties, Fianna Fail and Fine Gael, did not run a full slate of candidates in any of the 42 constituencies. Thus, while Fianna Fail won 49 percent of the seats in the Dáil, a significantly higher 76 percent of its candidates were elected; similarly, Fine Gael won 19 percent of the seats while 37 percent of its candidates were successful. These elections produced significantly less intra-party competition than is often thought to be the case under STV. In 18 constituencies, all of the Fianna Fail candidates were elected, as were all of the Labour candidates in 15 constituencies. Only in Fine Gael was it the norm for there to be more candidates offered than seats won by the party (and, at least in part, this was a product of the party faring far worse than its historical norm).⁴

This diminishes voter choice in comparison with truly open list systems. Most list systems have a district magnitude in the 10–20 range (Chang and Golden, 2003) and the major parties typically present a full complement of candidates. Because the proportion of votes a party wins mirrors its share of the popular vote, no single party wins all of the seats in a list constituency (and often not even a majority). Thus, if parties present a full slate of candidates equal to the number of seats to be allocated (which the major parties

typically do), general election voters retain considerable choice in selecting and deselecting their representatives. In STV systems the district magnitudes are typically smaller (though there is some range, with some of the Australian states having larger district magnitudes; see Farrell and McAllister, 2006: 85) and, for the reasons suggested above, parties are often more judicious in the number of candidates they present. The result is that voters have some intra-party choice in selecting a representative, but not as much as do voters in a true open list system.

Closed list proportional and SMP systems offer general election voters no say over which of their preferred party's candidates are elected. SMP contests are zero-sum with each party presenting one candidate to the electorate; and, the relative position of closed list proportional candidates is fully determined by the nomination selectorate with no opportunity for general election voters to influence it. Voters' role in these systems is reduced to determining how many deputies are allocated to each party. The parties have full determination over who these deputies are. As Shugart suggests, these are party centred systems, and voters' choice is limited to selecting their preferred party (Shugart, 2001).

Voter choice can also be in the form of inter-party competition. The interaction between the strength of inter-party competition and the choice of electoral system is significant, as the influence the relative degree of party competition has on the importance of candidate nomination is largely dependent upon the type of electoral system at play. General election inter-party choice is most significant in STV systems. At least in theory, STV provides voters with a maximum degree of choice, as they are not limited to selecting from among the candidates of their preferred party. However, in practice, voters' use of this choice is somewhat uneven. In the Irish and Australian state cases, there is a significant degree of transfer among parties, meaning voters are alternating their preferences among candidates from different parties (Farrell and McAllister, 2006: 133–8; Gallagher, 2000: 89–90). This is evidence that they see all of the candidates' names that appear on the ballot paper as valid options from which to select their preferences. In Malta, however, less than 1 percent of voters, for the two major parties, indicate a preference for a candidate from the competing party before exhausting all candidates presented by their favoured party (Gallagher, 2000: 89–90; Hirczy de Mino and Lane, 2000: 192–3). Indeed, most Maltese voters stop expressing preferences once they have rank-ordered the candidates of their preferred party. Similarly, in Australian Senate elections, the availability of 'above the line voting' results in:

a massive transfer of voters between candidates overwhelmingly within the same party in an electoral equivalent to program trading on the stock exchange. (Bowler and Grofman, 2000: 14)

Importantly, however, in both the Australian Senate and Maltese cases the choice of whether to express preferences for candidates from several parties

is made by the voter – unlike open list systems which typically restrict voters to expressing their preferences for candidates from a single party.

The degree of inter-party competition influences the importance of candidate selection in other systems as well. Inter-party competition can be reduced by the presence of a dominant party whose general election candidates are all but certain winners. The real choice of deputies in these circumstances is made at the time of candidate selection in the dominant party, with the general election reduced to little more than a formality. It is rare in mature democracies for a single party to be so dominant that it can be said to dramatically and universally reduce voter choice in a general election. However, it is not uncommon to have a regionally dominant party that, within its area of geographic strength, essentially reduces the general election to a formality with the real contest for the legislative seat occurring at its candidate selection stage. The following examples illustrate the point in SMP systems where this phenomenon is most common. In the 2005 British general election, Labour Party candidates dominated the 18 constituencies in the Glasgow and central Scotland regions. Labour candidates faced little competition in these areas, routinely racking up two- and three-to-one margins over their nearest challengers. Similarly, in the Canadian province of Alberta, Conservative Party candidates dominate, regularly winning similarly large shares of the vote. In these contests, the general election is a mere formality. The effective choice of a legislator is made at the nomination contest of the regionally dominant party. In this context, the outcomes of party candidate selection are extremely significant. The only opportunity to influence the selection of the dominant party's candidate (and the all but certain representative) is at the nomination contest. This can be contrasted with other constituencies in these same jurisdictions in which there are three or more competitive parties, providing general election voters with a real choice as to who their representative is. In this context, the nomination contest is relatively less significant, as the general election provides voters with a meaningful choice among potential representatives. Of course, this is only true for general election voters who, in making their voting decision, are willing to consider candidates from more than one party. For these 'floating' or 'swing' voters, the presence of strong inter-party competition increases the choices available to them at the general election.

This logic holds, though to a lesser extent, in party list systems, as an increase in competitiveness among parties increases the range of choice offered to general election voters. The more competitive the contest, the more voters are able to choose from among various options with confidence that several of them will reach the required threshold (either imposed explicitly or as a result of the electoral formula) and that their vote will assist their preferred party in winning legislative seats. The more competitive parties there are, the more expansive the menu of choices available to the general election voter. In this sense the dynamic is similar to that in SMP systems.

We can easily illustrate how the degree of inter-party competition in open and flexible list systems has an effect on the degree of choice available to general election voters. If one party wins most of the seats, the composition of its list takes on added importance, as a high number of its candidates are certain to become legislators. For example, general election supporters of a regionally dominant party may be constrained to selecting which 15 of their preferred party's 20 candidates are elected. In a more competitive environment in which no party elects more than 40 percent of its candidates, the general election voter supportive of the dominant party in the same constituency has more choice – selecting eight representatives from among the 20 candidates presented by the party.

However, in all of the proportional systems the degree of inter-party competition in general elections is not as important as it is in the SMP system, as the election in each constituency is not a zero-sum proposition. This results in greater likelihood, even if a dominant party exists, that more than one party will elect a representative in each multi-member constituency. For example, even in the highly regionalized Spanish case, there is significant inter-party competition in each electoral district. While the two major parties, the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party and the Popular Party, each have clearly identifiable areas of regional strength, the dominant party rarely wins a vote-share significantly exceeding 50 percent, resulting in the opposition parties winning a share of the seats in each district. If SMP rules were used and voter behaviour remained constant, the Spanish case would likely produce highly regionalized patterns with the nomination contests for the regionally dominant party becoming the main electoral contests.

Thus, solely in terms of the electoral system, party candidate selection is more determinative of the selection of individual deputies in SMP and closed party list systems, than in STV and open party list systems. Flexible lists fit into a middle category. In operationalizing the strength of the relationship it is necessary to consider details of the STV and list systems to fully capture the degree of influence voters have in determining which individual candidates are elected. In open list systems voters make this determination from a sizeable pool of candidates presented by their preferred party. In STV systems, general election voters may have less intra-party choice, but they have an opportunity to indicate their preference for candidates from more than one party. In both cases, general election voters play a significant role in determining which candidates offered by the parties are elected. Flexible list systems offer voters limited ability to influence the rank order of candidates. In terms of voters' influence, vis-à-vis the parties, in determining which candidates are elected, they rank below STV and open list systems and above closed list and SMP systems. The strength of inter-party competition can also affect the degree of choice available to voters and thus the relative significance of candidate selection.

The Party System

Two characteristics of the party system influence the relative importance of candidate selection: the opportunity for independent candidates to be elected and the method of accommodating competing representational demands. The logic underpinning the relationship between both of these characteristics of the party system and the influence of candidate nomination in determining representational outcomes is similar to that for the relationship with the electoral system. The more choice available to general election voters in choosing their representatives the less important candidate selection is.

It is well established that the party system is significantly affected by the electoral system. For example, proportional list systems tend to have a higher number of competitive parties than do their SMP counterparts (Farrell, 2001: 158–9). Nonetheless, jurisdictions with the same electoral system will differ in terms of the ability of independent candidates to be elected and in their method of accommodating representational demands. Thus, I treat these as being characteristic of a party system while acknowledging that they are closely connected to the choice of electoral system.

Competitiveness of Independent Candidates

If the party system is one in which independents are viable candidates for election, then general election voters are presented with the option of rejecting the outcomes of the parties' candidate selection processes and instead voting for non-affiliated candidates. While this does not eliminate the importance of party nominations, it does mean they are not as conclusive as they are in jurisdictions in which independents have no or little chance of election. In the latter cases, the parties are the principal gatekeepers to the legislature and all would-be deputies must first win their stamp of approval. Alternatively, in states where independents are viable candidates for election, there is an alternative route to the legislature, and voters are provided the option of rejecting at least some of the choices made by the parties.

The ability of independent candidates to stand for election is largely determined by the electoral system. In many party dominated systems, including open, flexible and closed list PR, independent candidates are typically either not eligible for inclusion on the ballot or are dramatically disadvantaged by the organization of the ballot paper and the logic of these party-based systems. The result is that voters' choice is essentially restricted to those candidates selected by the parties. In other electoral systems, independent candidates are provided with the opportunity to challenge the parties' nominees at the general election. However, it is not sufficient to classify this wholly as an electoral system effect, because it is not enough simply to determine whether independent candidates are eligible to seek office. Consideration must be given to whether a particular party system, and political culture, encourages viable independent candidacies. The options for both

voters to reject the parties' candidates and vote for an independent and for candidates to seek office independent of the parties are more meaningful in jurisdictions in which there is a tradition of non-affiliated candidates being elected to the legislature. As shown below, there are significant differences in this regard among states using similar electoral systems.

Weeks (2004) illustrates the varying rates of success enjoyed by independent candidates in STV jurisdictions. Examining election results in Ireland, Malta, Northern Ireland, Australia and Tasmania, he demonstrates that more than the generic type of electoral system is at play in determining the success rates of independent candidates, as they range from winning virtually none of the vote in some jurisdictions to approximately 10 percent in others. For several decades, Irish general elections have routinely resulted in the election of a significant number of independent candidates (Weeks, 2004). For example, in the 2002 Dáil elections, 13 independent candidates were elected. This large number of competitive independents provides general election voters with options other than those presented by the parties. As Murphy and Farrell (2002: 239) conclude of the Irish experience:

[R]ecent successes by micro-parties and (often single issue) independents has opened up the realistic possibility of alternative routes of entry to elective office by budding politicians.

Weeks' suggestion that this is not fully a result of the electoral system is buttressed by the experiences of Australian Senate elections in which only one independent was successful in the past three elections. In the 2004 elections to the Australian upper house, one-in-five candidates was not affiliated to a political party, and none of these candidates was successful. This is not a result of the STV electoral system *per se*, but rather results from the structure of the ballot paper and the high prevalence of 'above the line' voting in the Australian case which significantly disadvantages independent candidates' chances for election (see Farrell and McAllister, 2006). Independent candidates are even less likely to be elected in Malta, which last had a non-affiliated candidate elected in 1950. The impediment in Malta is not the STV electoral system, but rather a party system and political culture that have cultivated very strong partisanship, with almost all voters strongly attached to one of two major parties. As Hirczy de Mino and Lane (2000: 187) conclude: 'Notwithstanding the personalized nature of voting and the intense competition among individual candidates, election campaigns have always been very much a party affair in Malta.'

Even in the Irish case there has been a significant increase in the number of successful independent candidates in recent decades, while there has not been change to the electoral system, indicating that factors beyond the electoral system are responsible for this increase.

Similar dynamics, in terms of a varying success rate for independent candidates, are observable in SMP systems. In the six most recent elections to the Canadian House of Commons, there has been a cumulative total of one

successful candidate who was first elected as an independent. Essentially, the only path to election in Canada passes through a major party nomination contest. This means that general election voters' only meaningful choice is selecting from among the candidates presented by these parties. While this is somewhat a product of the electoral system, the case of India, which also uses an SMP electoral system, suggests that it is not wholly so. Recent elections in India have seen between five and nine independent candidates elected. Similarly, in the Japanese case, independents have fared relatively well since the country introduced a measure of SMP in its parallel electoral system. In the 2005 national elections, 18 independents were elected to the Diet from single-member constituencies.

In jurisdictions where independent candidates have a reasonable chance of being electorally competitive, such as Ireland and Japan, the relative importance of candidate selection is weakened, as general election voters may support (and elect) candidates not first vetted by the parties' nominating selectorates. The electoral system variable is partially helpful in determining this, as independent candidates normally have little or no chance of election in party list systems. However, in other systems, independent candidates are elected at significantly different rates. These varying rates of success for independent candidates influence whether general election voters are presented options other than those determined by the parties and whether candidates have a route to the legislature that does not require approval from one of the parties.

The possibility of successfully running for election as an independent also makes party candidate selection less important for maverick party politicians, as they have the opportunity of running as successful dissidents. An example of this is the Irish case of Jackie Healy-Rae, who unsuccessfully sought to be listed as a Fianna Fail candidate for the constituency of South Kerry in the 1997 election. Ultimately running as an independent he topped the poll and extracted significant concessions from the Fianna Fail party leadership, who looked to him for support in the subsequent minority parliament.

Patterns of Representational Accommodation

The salience of candidate selection processes is also influenced by the representational demands placed on a party system and the ways in which these demands are accommodated. Simply put, candidate selection takes on greater significance when representational demands are met within and not among the parties. Again, this is related to general election voter choice. In jurisdictions in which the relative representation of different groups is determined at the nomination stage (through intra-party competition and accommodation), candidate selection takes on more significance than in jurisdictions in which the major cleavages are represented by different parties that each present general election candidates.

No society is perfectly homogeneous. At a minimum, every jurisdiction faces representational demands arising from region and gender. Multi-ethnic and multi-lingual countries such as Belgium, The Netherlands, Switzerland, Canada and the United States have significant additional cleavages that require accommodation within the political system. Many advanced democracies have experienced significant immigration in recent years and, in those cases where migrants are granted citizenship, have begun to experience more complex representational demands on their political systems. Whether the norm is for these demands to be accommodated within individual parties or among different parties has a significant effect on the saliency of nomination contests for those concerned with representational parity.

There is considerable variation among states as to whether the principal representational imperatives are managed within parties or among them. Some representational demands are regularly accommodated within parties, with the party playing the role of broker among competing societal cleavages. The accommodating party finds some means of allocating scarce resources – such as nominations – among the groups petitioning for representation. In these cases, nomination processes are important for the group seeking access to the legislature and also for those voters generally concerned with representative electoral outcomes.

Gender is an example of a representational imperative that is traditionally managed within each party. There are some isolated examples of gender-specific parties, but these are rare. Instead, demands for greater gender parity in elective office are typically directed within individual parties. The result is that in many Western democracies, those interested in gender representation have focused on candidate selection processes as a key determinant of how many women are in the legislature (Childs et al., 2006; Htun, 2004; Young, 2000).

Other representational dimensions, such as religion and language, may be managed through intra-party or inter-party accommodation. When the latter is the case, we expect the different faces of these dimensions to be represented by competing parties. Voters concerned with the representation of their linguistic group, for example, in the legislature need not concern themselves with the candidate selection process, as they know that the party (or parties) representing their community will nominate candidates from their sect. On the other hand, if the major parties cut across the linguistic cleavage, then the candidate selection stage is crucial in determining whether there is a representative number of general election candidates from each community. In these cases there are no guarantees that each side of a salient cleavage will be represented in the general election by its own slate of candidates.

We can illustrate this point using the example of language communities in Canada and Belgium. In the Belgian case, there are no significant parties that cross the divide between the Dutch-speaking and French-speaking populations. Different political parties exist to serve the representational demands of each community. The result is that voters are assured that candidates

from both communities will be nominated by parties specifically representing their interests. They need not concern themselves with candidate selection processes – at least not for purposes of ensuring that the parties nominate a representative number from their community.

In the Canadian case, the tradition is for accommodative parties that attempt to bridge the regional and linguistic differences that characterize the country.⁵ The result is that the parties typically are neither exclusively French nor English. In this case, partisans interested in ensuring, for example, that francophones are elected in constituencies in the province of New Brunswick or Northern Ontario (both areas with considerable French-speaking populations) need to concern themselves with the candidate selection process of the major parties to increase the likelihood that members from these communities are presented as general election candidates. There is no francophone party (nor exclusively anglophone party) to ensure that candidates from these communities are offered in the general election. The only way for representatives of these communities to become viable candidates for election to the legislature is to first be nominated by one of the principal political parties. The nomination process is then of utmost importance to those seeking to increase the representation of these groups in elected office.

The difference between the Canadian and the Belgian cases is that there is no institutional certainty in the Canadian case that a representative number of French- and English-speaking candidates will be presented by the parties in the general election. This is determined not by institutional characteristics, such as the existence of parties representing each principal cleavage, but rather by the parties' nominating selectorates. In this type of system, in which the parties attempt to bridge the principal cleavages rather than to represent a single community, the candidate selection processes take on additional importance.

Influence of Parliamentarians on Policy Outcomes

To this point, we have assumed that it matters which individuals are elected to the legislatures. However, if individual legislators play little role in influencing policy outcomes, their identity matters less compared with a context in which individual representatives play a key decision-making role. Thus, in order to fully assess the significance of candidate selection it is necessary to consider the relative role of legislators in influencing policy outcomes.

There are two distinct components of the role of parliamentarians that require consideration in this regard. The first is the relative place of the legislature in policy-making; the second is the role of the individual member within the legislature. Generally speaking, the potential exists for individual members to play a more consequential role in systems in which the legislature collectively exercises considerable authority over policy outcomes, as opposed to those in which the executive dominates the policy process. This first dimension is captured in the work of Poguntke and Webb (2005)

in what they identify as a trend towards an increase in presidentialization in Western democracies. They find a growing concentration in important decision-making within the executive – reflecting a shift away from legislative and party authority.

The recent work of Arter (2006) is useful in setting out criteria permitting comparison of the relative importance of legislators in the determination of policy outcomes. Arter sets out a series of criteria – some of which concern the role of the legislature collectively and others the role of individual members. Consistent with the literature on ‘presidentialization’, the criteria relating to the relative role of legislatures include whether the legislature or the executive controls the policy agenda, whether legislative and executive leaders consult on strategic policy matters, whether the legislature regularly convenes to engage in policy deliberation, whether the legislature operates independently of executive control and whether the legislature has the resources and authority necessary to inform itself on policy matters (on this last point, see Ström, 1999). Arter finds that there is variance in all of these factors across Western democracies. If in a given jurisdiction a legislature does not meet these standards, then the legislature collectively and its members individually are less consequential to policy outcomes, thus diminishing the significance of candidate selection.

Alternatively, in jurisdictions where legislatures play a central role in policy outcomes, the potential exists for individual members to exercise significant authority. This, however, is not a given, but depends upon several variables, such as whether individual members have the right to initiate legislation independently of party leaders, whether committees of the legislature play a significant role in initiating and amending legislative proposals, whether supermajorities are necessary for the passage of important pieces of legislation and whether legislative coalitions are important to policy outcomes (Arter, 2006). When some or all of these conditions apply, individual representatives may have significant influence on policy outcomes, thus increasing the saliency of candidate selection.

Thus, if the legislature does not play a key role in policy-making, the selection of candidates by parties to stand for the legislature is not particularly significant in terms of influencing policy outcomes. The same is generally true, though less so in the aggregate, if the legislature plays an important role in policy-making but legislative authority is tightly controlled by its leadership. Alternatively, if the legislature plays a central role and individual members have both the ability and authority to operate independently of their party’s leadership, then the selection of candidates becomes more important as the views of rank-and-file members may have significant influence in policy outcomes. One of the factors Arter (2006) and Webb and Poguntke (2005) identify as influencing the role of the individual member vis-à-vis the party leadership is the strength of party discipline and cohesion within the legislature. When the leadership exercises strong control over its members, the ability for the legislature and its committees to influence

policy outcomes may not reach down to the individual member – particularly if he dissents from the party line.

While it is difficult to find fully comparable data across nations, Bowler et al. (1999) provide compelling evidence that there is a significant range in legislative party cohesion among advanced democratic states. They find, for example, particularly strong party cohesion in the Norwegian case, much weaker cohesion in Switzerland, and a middle ground occupied by states such as Spain. The neighbouring democracies of Canada and the United States also illustrate this point. In the United States, party discipline is relatively weak, with members of the House of Representatives voting with a majority of their party colleagues at a significantly lower rate than is the case in the Canadian House of Commons, where voting across party lines is a relatively rare event. And, Garner and Letki (2005) find that government bills in the UK are four times more likely to attract dissenting votes from the government caucus than are similar bills in the Canadian parliament. The variance is found not only among states but also among parties within a single jurisdiction. Scarrow (2002: 95), for example, finds the principal German parties ranged from 58 to 75 percent in terms of the proportion of named votes on which there was complete party cohesion.

The relationship between party candidate selection and degree of party cohesion has typically been explored from the ground up: that is, the influence of the method of selection on the degree of party cohesion (Bowler et al., 1999). This argument can be summarized as follows: if candidates are chosen in a decentralized process, legislators will have incentive to be responsive to local interests and concerns that may be at odds with the position of the central party office. In this case, we can expect weaker party cohesion, as MPs may diverge from the central party line in order to shore up support with the local nominating selectorate. Alternatively, if the central party exercises strong control over candidate nomination, we expect to find greater party cohesion as the party elites will tend not to select policy renegades and sitting MPs will have an incentive to support the central party's views in order to maximize their chances for reselection.

Other factors besides the method of candidate selection influence the degree of party cohesion. These include institutional design, prevailing political culture and the nature of electoral competition (Bowler et al., 1999). Thus the influence can also run in the opposite direction, with the strength of party cohesion affecting the influence party candidate selection has on policy outcomes. Elected representatives in legislatures with relatively low party coherency have greater personal discretion in determining how to vote and thus potentially have greater impact on policy outcomes.

Accordingly, in jurisdictions in which the legislature plays a key role in the policy process and party cohesion is weak, the policy views of individual members, independently of the central party's positions, can have significant influence in determining policy direction. In these cases, the norms of the nomination process determining which individuals are eligible for

election to the legislature take on greater importance. Alternatively, in systems with strong party coherency, the policy views of the individual legislator are less important to policy outcomes. Instead, the views of the party leadership, which in these cases may be imposed on the rank-and-file representatives, are of paramount importance.

As suggested above, it is also possible for individual legislators to play a key role in setting a party's policy through their participation in discussions of their party's legislative caucus or through the parliamentary committee system. In these cases, strong party cohesion may mask meaningful participation by rank-and-file parliamentarians in policy-making through responsive and inclusive caucus and committee decision-making (though the work of Poguntke and Webb [2005] and of others on the centralization of authority suggests these cases are relatively rare). The key point is that consideration of the significance of party candidate selection must take into account the relative influence of the rank-and-file legislator in determining policy outcomes.

Conclusions

Political parties are essential to the modern practice of representative democracy and candidate nominations are one of their defining activities. As noted at the outset, party scholars such as Sartori, Schattschneider and Ranney have long identified the importance of candidate selection to the distribution of power within parties. Crotty has contributed to this discussion by noting that candidate selection is important beyond the internal workings of the political party because of the influence it has on representational and public policy outcomes. This article has focused on Crotty's argument and suggests that the strength of the relationship between candidate selection and representational and policy outcomes varies significantly depending on a series of identifiable contextual variables. Because the outcomes identified by Crotty as being influenced by candidate selection are central to political competition in all representative democracies, the strength of the relationship between them and party candidate selection largely determines the relative significance of candidate nomination within a state. The essence of the argument is that candidate nomination is a highly significant part of the democratic process in some states, in so far as it is strongly connected to representational and policy outcomes, and less so in others.

In operationalizing this argument, five variables have been suggested as a method of measuring the relative significance of party candidate selection to representational and policy outcomes: the electoral system, the degree of inter-party competition, the openness of the system to independent candidates, whether representational cleavages are accommodated within or among parties, and the role of legislators in influencing policy outcomes. When party candidate selection is highly determinative of who gets elected

and when elected members play a significant role in policy outcomes, candidate nomination is more important than in cases where the electoral and party systems function in a way that general election voters have significant choice in the selection of representatives and where individual legislators do not play a significant role in policy outcomes. It is also established that there is significant variance across countries, and in some cases across parties within a state, on each of these measures.

By identifying that the significance of party candidate selection varies by country and by party, and in providing a way to measure the relative significance, a contribution is made to the debate between those who argue for democratically organized nomination contests (Cross, 2004) and those who favour more centralized and exclusive ones (Rahat and Hazan, 2005). A normative position is advanced that the strengths of these arguments must be considered consistent with the relative role of party candidate selection in a particular polity. In the case where the candidate selection process is closely related to representational and policy outcomes, the argument for inclusive and participatory selection contests is stronger than in the case where the connection is more remote.

This article suggests that, under certain circumstances, party candidate selection processes may be equally or more determinative of who ends up in the legislature than are general elections. These outcomes might occur, for example, when a single dominant party exists or when an electoral system provides general election voters with very limited choice. In these cases the arguments for democratically organized nomination contests have significant merit as these contests play an important role in determining democratic outcomes. Alternatively, in those systems where general election voters have significant choice, or where legislators have little influence over policy outcomes, there is considerable merit to the argument that other democratic interests (such as party-building) might best be advanced by permitting the parties to select their candidates in the method they believe most appropriate. The key point is that the full consideration of these arguments requires the ability to measure the relative significance of party candidate nomination within a particular political party and state.

Finally, the argument presented in this article may offer some explanatory value. The expectation is that partisans in different jurisdictions may apply varying degrees of pressure on the parties (and the electoral regime) to operate nominations in an open and democratic fashion depending on how significant they perceive these contests to be. This should vary by jurisdiction and potentially by party within a country, and indeed we do find a wide variance in the type of selection processes in use. While beyond the scope of this article, considering the relative significance of candidate selection may be a fruitful exercise in better understanding the wide variance found in party nomination processes.

Notes

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- 1 The exceptions are jurisdictions such as Denmark, where parties have the option of either presenting party-ordered lists of candidates (which can be influenced by voters casting personal votes for preferred candidates) or open, non-ordered, lists of candidates.
- 2 There are, of course, other types of electoral systems. However, considering party list, SMP and STV systems permits a full exposition of the argument. For example, mixed-member proportional and additional members systems are not considered separately as these are essentially combinations of others and thus each individual contest fits into one of our categories.
- 3 Much has been written concerning the optimal number of candidates a party should run in STV constituencies. See, for example, Cohen et al. (1975), Lijphart and Irwin (1979) and Katz (1981).
- 4 The disincentive to nominate a large slate of candidates is eliminated in STV systems such as that used for the Australian upper house. The opportunity for, and indeed the high incidence of, 'ticket voting' means that the parties are able to ensure an efficient distribution of their preferences and thus not be penalized for 'over-nominating'. Of course, this prevalence of 'above the line' or 'ticket voting' represents a diminishment of intra-party voter choice.
- 5 Parties have occasionally arisen, such as the contemporary Bloc Québécois, that represent the interests of a single province or region in the federal parliament. These, however, are exceptional.

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