

Institutional personalism and personalised behaviour: Electoral systems, candidate selection methods, and politicians' campaign strategy

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ABSTRACT

In this study, we investigate how two crucial political institutions – the electoral system and the intraparty candidate selection method – incentivise elite personalistic campaigning behaviour. We offer two contributions. First, we show the interactive effect of the two institutions on elite behaviour in campaigns, unlike most of the extant literature that focuses on parliamentary activity. Second, we apply the distinction between leader-focused (centralised) and individual-focused (decentralised) personalism to candidate selection methods. We argue that selection methods dominated by the party leader and ones employing primaries, two types of selection methods usually seen as opposites on established scales of candidate selection, are actually similar in their effect on politicians' personalistic behaviour during electoral campaigns.

Using a dataset combining candidate surveys and expert coding of party selection rules, we analyse 9320 candidate responses from 101 parties across 16 democracies. We demonstrate that primaries-based selection methods correlate with more personalistic behaviour than collegial selection methods under party-centred electoral systems but with less personalistic behaviour in the most candidate-centred electoral systems. Leader-dominated selection methods similarly correlate with more personalistic behaviour than collegial ones only in closed-list PR systems, while their effect is insignificant in more candidate-centred systems. Our findings have wide-ranging implications. They call into question the conventional conceptualisation of candidate selection methods and their effect on politicians' behaviour. They also refine the scope of intraparty institutions' impact, limiting it to party-centred electoral systems. Conversely, our findings serve as a reminder that students of electoral systems investigating their effects on elite behaviour must, at least in party-centred electoral systems, take intraparty institutions into consideration.

1. Introduction

In democracies, aspiring politicians must overcome two hurdles on their path to power. Obviously, they need voters to elect them. But before that, they (almost always) also need the members of their party selectorates to select them (be it the party leader, delegates, members, or supporters). That is, they face two institutions: at the party level, a candidate selection method, and at the national level, an electoral system. Electoral systems vary in the relative importance that they allot to the party label in comparison to the personal reputation of the candidate (see, e.g., Carey and Shugart, 1995; Farrell and McAllister, 2006; Shugart, 2001; Söderlund, 2016). Similarly, parties' candidate selection methods vary in the importance that they allot to widespread name recognition and personal charisma, loyalty to the party and the relationship with its activists, and the relationship with and loyalty to the party leader (Hazan and Rahat, 2010).

The diversity of electoral systems, candidate selection methods, and their combinations create various institutional incentives for prospective and elected politicians (Itzkovitch-Malka and Hazan, 2017; Shomer, 2017). The result is that, in some democracies, political parties were and

still are the focal point of politics. In others, *personalism* – when “political individuals are more important relative to political groups” (Pedersen and Rahat, 2021: 213) – is or has become more prominent. This article follows in the footsteps of studies that examine the degree to which institutions, such as candidate selection methods and electoral systems (Dudzińska et al., 2014; Rahat and Sheafer, 2007; André et al., 2014a; André et al., 2014b; Karlsen, 2011; Samuels and Shugart, 2010; Shomer, 2017; Itzkovitch-Malka and Hazan, 2017), incentivise behavioural personalism, that is, attitudes and activities that emphasise the person rather than the party.

We depart from previous studies by offering two contributions: First, unlike previous works that analysed the combined effect of intraparty and electoral institutions, and unlike most research about the “competing principals,” which analyses parliamentary activities such as voting (Carey, 2007; Crisp, 2007; Hix, 2004; Sieberer, 2015) or submitting questions (Fernandes et al., 2019; Zittel et al., 2019), our focus is on an extra-parliamentary activity, namely, the behaviour of individual candidates during electoral campaigns. Monitoring individuals' campaign behaviour is a real challenge for party leadership. For example, while we can expect party leaders in personal parties to be

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capable and motivated to monitor and influence legislatures' behaviour, we can expect more individual leeway in the case of campaign behaviour. This difference in focus has an added advantage in that we cover in our analysis all candidates rather than just the subset of incumbent politicians.

Second, we account – theoretically and empirically – for the now-established distinction between two types of personalism, centralised and decentralised (Balmas et al., 2014; Pedersen and Rahat, 2021). This distinction was recently applied in a study of the Danish electoral system (Pedersen and Kjær, 2024), but has yet to be empirically integrated into the research on the effect of institutions on the behaviour of political elites. In this article, to avoid confusion with geographical (de)centralisation, we call centralised personalism “leader-focused personalism” and decentralised personalism “individual-focused personalism.”

Applying this approach to intraparty candidate selection methods, we distinguish between *primaries-based* selection methods as manifesting individual-focused personalism and *leader-based* selection methods as manifesting leader-focused personalism. These terms relate to the intraparty power balance in candidate selection, specifically to the type of selectorate that plays a central role in candidate selection. While *leader-based* candidate selection is about concentrating power in the hand of the party leader (centralized personalism), *primaries-based* selection is about spreading selection power among many party members and even supporters or all voters in cases of highly inclusive selectorates. Finally, both concepts can be contrasted with the *collegial* selection methods, which rely on collective, representative selection institutions and manifest non-personalism.

Leader-based selection methods have been hitherto assumed to promote non-personalised behaviour, similar to collegial selection methods (e.g., Hazan and Rahat, 2010). In contrast, we argue that while leader-based selection methods give the party leader power over the candidates, they usually go hand-in-hand with reduced capacity to oversee each individual candidate. This reduced capacity results from the relative weakness of the organization of personal parties - where we should expect the leader to have a strong influence over candidate selection - which are “weakly institutionalised by design” (Kostadinova and Levitt, 2014, 492). Therefore, we expect observably different behavioural consequences of leader-based selection methods compared to collegial ones, similar to but distinct from that of primaries-based selection methods, with politicians selected by both primaries-based and leader-based selection methods exhibiting more behavioural personalism than ones selected by collegial selection methods.

Finally, we suggest that electoral systems constrain the effect of intraparty selection methods on electoral campaigning behaviour in a way that diverges from the findings of studies of parliamentary behaviour (e.g., Shomer, 2014). Candidate-centred electoral systems, where voters can change the ranking of the party selectorate, require the candidate to garner at least some degree of personal support. They will thus lead to more personalism – i.e., more emphasis on the candidate's personal reputation and less on the party brand – even when intraparty selection methods supply opposite incentives, i.e. to keep to the party line and messaging. Party-centred electoral systems, in contrast, do not expose candidates to the electorate to the same extent. In such electoral systems, “the importance of the selectorate for legislators' re-election success increases markedly” (Fernandes et al., 2020). We thus expect the effect of the intraparty candidate selection method on behavioural personalism to be stronger under party-centred electoral systems and weaker under candidate-centred electoral systems.

We test our hypotheses by combining the Comparative Candidate Survey (CCS, 2020) dataset with the Political Parties Database (Poguntke et al., 2016) for a dataset of 9320 candidates in 18 elections from 16 democracies. Our findings suggest that politicians demonstrate more personalised behaviour when selected by either leader-based or primaries-based selection methods and less when selected by representative party institutions such as delegate assemblies. However, the electoral system mitigates the impact of candidate selection methods.

The latter's effects are significant under party-centred electoral systems but not candidate-centred ones.

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses

Certain political institutions can emphasise individuals at the expense of political groups such as parties (Rahat and Kenig, 2018). They thus provide politicians with incentives for *behavioural personalism* (Pedersen and Rahat, 2021). In other words, institutions that give power to or incentivise the emphasis of individual political actors will likely produce a corresponding independent and self-promoting behaviour.¹ They will, for example, encourage politicians to express opinions that deviate from the party line during their campaign or emphasise their own characteristics and reputation rather than the party's headquarter-mandated messages. When serving in parliament or government, politicians may even be incentivised to vote independently from their parliamentary party group (Wagner et al., 2020). Since all (s)electd politicians are, at least to some degree, interested in being re-(s)electd (Mayhew, 2004), it is reasonable to assume that they will react to these institutional incentives, adapting their behaviour to either establish a personal, independent reputation or demonstrate party loyalty and stick to the party messaging, depending on which strategy is more likely to ensure their (re-)selection and (re-)election.

Probably the institution that has received the most attention in this context is the electoral system, which scholars have largely categorised as either *party-centred* or *candidate-centred* (Katz, 2007; Carey and Shugart, 1995; Renwick and Pilet, 2016; Shugart, 2001; Colomer and Josep, 2011; Shugart and Wattenberg, 2001). In party-centred electoral systems, such as the closed-list PR electoral systems used in Israel and Spain, the composition of parliament—the identity of the elected legislators—is solely decided based on the number of seats each party wins. In candidate-centred electoral systems, like the Single Transferable Vote in Ireland or the Swiss Panachage electoral system, citizens can “disturb” the candidacies put forth by the parties by electing specific candidates within and across party lists. There are, of course, other electoral systems that lie in between those extremes. For example, open list systems are perceived as being in between the extremes because, on the one hand, they allow voting for only one party and for a limited set of candidates selected by the party selectorate. Still, on the other hand, they do give the voter the opportunity to elect the specific person or persons representing her from within the party. Other middle cases are single-member district systems and mixed systems. As Shugart (2001), Farrell and McAllister (2006), and Söderlund (2016) demonstrate, most electoral systems mix personal and partisan elements, and the weight of each influences their location between the individual or partisan extremes.

According to this literature, candidate-centred electoral systems are individual-focused institutions incentivising legislators to cultivate a personal vote, building their reputation and public appeal. In contrast, party-centred electoral systems do not incentivise (individual-focused) personalism. Instead, these are supposed to cultivate non-personalism, as candidates' electoral fates wholly depend on their party's performance in the elections (André et al., 2014a; Karlsen et al., 2021; Makropoulos et al., 2021).

Politicians and candidates indeed appear to behave according to these incentives, manifesting in various activities: their campaign strategies (Zittel and Gschwend, 2008), commitment to constituency service (Bol et al., 2021), upholding party cohesion (André et al., 2014b), tabling bills (Friedman and Friedberg, 2021), and legislative voting (Carey, 2007). As a justification for such behaviour on the part of

¹ It should be noted, however, that this theoretical expectation, which leads us to expect a correlation between the various expressions of the personalisation of politics – institutional, media, and behavioural – is not always met (Rahat and Kenig, 2018).

politicians, voters were indeed found to react to the politicians' behaviour in response to these incentives (Söderlund, 2016; André et al., 2012; Gschwend and Zittel, 2015). However, reports from countries that employ party-centred electoral systems – Israel, the Netherlands, and Portugal – suggest that candidates there nonetheless aim to garner a personal vote (Hazan, 1999; Fernandes et al., 2020; Itzkovitch-Malka, 2020; Louwse and Otjes, 2016). How does personalism emerge where the electoral system does not warrant it? These studies attribute their findings to how aspiring legislators become candidates – rooted in their need to get (re)selected by their parties.

2.1. Candidate selection methods and behavioural personalism

Personalised campaigning does not always align with electoral incentives, especially in the case of party-centred electoral systems. These electoral systems require a more cohesive party image and messaging. Candidates' personalised behaviour could lead to tensions with party campaign goals under such systems. In such cases, parties may try to threaten deviating politicians with one or more of the following: (1) Loss of candidacy, (2) loss of party financial support, (3) increased support for competing candidates within the party, (4) marginalising the candidate and ensuring he or she will not be re-selected or re-elected.

However, parties vary in the extent to which they can effectively threaten candidates with these measures. First and foremost, a party's candidate selection method is often seen as the primary institutional factor determining its control over its representatives (Cordero and Coller, 2015; Rehmert, 2020; Rombi and Seddone, 2017; Sieberer, 2006). Candidate selection is almost always about selecting individuals (not teams of individuals or factions), yet different types of selection methods – differentiated by various properties – can be seen as being more personalised or more partisan (Atmor et al., 2011). The single most crucial aspect of the candidate selection method is, in this respect, the selectorate, and specifically its size and inclusiveness.

But why should intraparty selection methods influence candidates' behaviour in their (party's) electoral campaign at a stage when they have already overcome the obstacle of selection? One reason could be that intraparty selection serves as a filtering mechanism, leaving only (or mostly) candidates with corresponding predispositions. For example, a selection method that incentivises individual-focused personalism may produce a candidate pool of highly individualistic candidates who will continue to behave individually even when the electoral incentives do not call for it. Another reason is that, for most politicians, selection and election is a repeated game. Therefore, when it comes to electoral campaigns, politicians are motivated not only to ensure their election but also to maintain goodwill with their selectorate to ensure re-selection the next time around (Katz, 2014). Hence, we expect them to be responsive – and invest efforts in appealing to – those who select them also during the electoral campaign.

As mentioned above, most existing literature on intraparty selection methods has only differentiated between selection methods that incentivise personalism and those that do not. In contrast, we draw on the distinction between two types of personalism (Balmas et al., 2014; Pedersen and Rahat, 2021), a distinction that has only recently been applied to candidate selection methods (Tuttnauer, 2024) but has yet to be integrated into an empirical study of politician's behavioural personalism. Even some works on political personalisation, such as Rahat and Kenig's (2018), largely ignore this differentiation. In incorporating the proposed differentiation between *leader-focused* and *individual-focused* personalism, we posit that selection by party members or supporters (*primaries-based* selection) incentivises individual-focused personalism. In contrast, selection by a single leader (*leader-based* selection) incentivises leader-focused personalism.

The reference point for both kinds of personalism in candidate selection is the collegial, non-personal selection methods that are expected to create a non-personalised contest. Party delegates, who populate collegial selectorates such as party assemblies, are better informed and

less erratic and atomised than party members. They also tend to be more ideological and policy-seeking than either the less involved party members or the more pragmatic party leadership (Amitai, 2023). The deeper involvement of the delegates in intraparty politics, therefore, enables greater coordination for the sake of producing a somewhat balanced team of candidates (Rahat, 2008). The result is a powerful and capable “principal” that can compel the party candidates to toe the party line.

In contrast, primaries-based selection methods imply multiple principals – party members or supporters – to whom politicians are accountable. Those politicians must establish their reputation while distinguishing themselves from co-partisans and possibly from the party leadership. Such selection methods even encourage candidates to raise their own funding, form campaign teams, and enrol new party members explicitly and solely to support their intraparty campaign (Rahat and Kenig, 2018; Cross et al., 2016). In parties that employ such selection methods, therefore, the party leadership has the least power to keep the personalistic tendencies of its candidates in check.

As for leader-based selection methods, these have hitherto been primarily seen as the polar opposite of primaries-based ones. However, we expect to find a more complex picture. On the one hand, in parties where the leader selects the candidates, that leader is their most important principal (to use principal-agent theory language). The leader, therefore, has the institutional *power* to curtail her party candidates' individualistic tendencies in a way that the amorphous membership selectorate in primaries-based parties does not. The leader in a leader-based method also has more leeway in deploying this power than a leader in a party using a collegial selectorate. Therefore, candidates selected by leader-based selection methods may be incentivised to demonstrate unity and loyalty to the leader (Hazan and Rahat, 2010). However, we argue that what this leader lacks, compared to non-personalised parties, is the informational and organisational *capacity* to oversee her candidates' behaviour.

We believe it is uncontroversial to assume that all politicians are at least partially driven by individualistic aspirations. After all, “politicians are people too” (Jones, 2009), and of the more ambitious kind (Dynes et al., 2019). They, therefore, always have at least some tendency to promote themselves. In Carey and Shugart's words, “Maintaining party reputations is a collective action problem for politicians” (1995, 419). Because leader-based selection is usually a feature of leader-dominated parties, it goes hand-in-hand with a weakening of the party organisation, which may create more freedom of manoeuvre for the party elite, including its candidates and representatives (Kostadinova and Levitt, 2014; Katz and Mair, 1995). Certainly, this is the case compared to selection by a non-personalised selection of representative party selectorates who usually operate at the level of the electoral district. Such selectorates and the party activists that comprise them are much better equipped to supervise the candidates' campaign behaviour than a single party leader.

In other words, leader-based selection methods may give leaders leverage over their candidates regarding (re)selection, which puts the leadership at an advantage compared to parties using other selection methods. However, these leaders often lack the organisational capability to oversee each candidate closely, which limits the effectiveness of their power compared to parties using collegial selection methods. Indeed, Musella (2014, 233), analysing the Italian case, finds that a leader's domination of a party may breed behavioural personalism by its politicians and argues that a “new type of party model is on the horizon, where the strong position of a party's leadership is associated with a low degree of party cohesiveness.” Thus, lower overseeing capacity goes hand-in-hand with a system in which personalism is perceived as characteristic of successful leading political figures, leading to more personalistic behaviour of the individual candidates.

To summarise our elaboration above, in a collegial setting, personalised campaigning would be particularly low. In contrast, in an individual-focused setting, personalised campaigning would be high as

candidates emphasise their characteristics and positions that make one preferable over her copartisan candidates. In a leader-focused setting, the individual candidate will manoeuvre between showing loyalty to the team's captain (the party leader) and playing the personalised game, exploiting the party's organisational weakness and following the personalised party norms. These considerations lead us to expect that:

H1a. The behaviour of politicians selected by leader-based or primaries-based selection methods will be more personalised than those selected by collegial selection methods.

H1b. The behaviour of politicians selected by primaries-based selection methods will be more personalised than those selected by leader-based selection methods.

2.2. The interactive effect of electoral systems and candidate selection methods

By now, it has been acknowledged that electoral systems and candidate selection methods are two distinct but intertwined institutions. For example, the type of electoral system serves as an explanatory factor in studies explaining why parties choose specific selection methods (André et al., 2017; Hazan and Voerman, 2006; Lundell, 2004; Shomer, 2014). The two institutions can also interact to affect other phenomena, as in the case of the personalised behaviour studied here. However, the seminal works conceptualising the incentives for campaign behaviour focused on electoral systems and alluded to candidate selection methods only in passing and without allowing for variation between parties in the same polity (Carey and Shugart, 1995; Shugart, 2001). More recent works explicitly model the combined, interactive impact of candidate selection methods and electoral systems but only concern parliamentary behaviour, expressed in legislative voting cohesion (Shomer, 2017) and elite attitudes and norms (Itzkovitch-Malka and Hazan, 2017).² Hence, there is still a gap in the literature regarding the interaction of the two institutions in their effect on electoral campaign behaviour, which may be subject to different incentive structures due to the difference in the stage of the political cycle compared to parliamentary behaviour. We seek to fill this gap.

We argue that electoral systems vary in the degree to which they pose an additional personal obstacle to candidates' election beyond the intraparty selection stage. Party-centred electoral systems, where voters are given only a categorical choice to take or reject a given candidate list, leave most of the power in the hands of the party selectorate. In such electoral systems – considering that most candidates on party lists are either in an electorally “safe” position or do not stand a chance to gain a seat at all – candidates do not see voters as their primary principals. In these electoral systems, being selected by the party for a safe list position is the only way candidates can ensure their election. It is also the only part of the two-stage recruitment process (selection and election) they can control independently from the party campaigning apparatus. Therefore, those candidates who are either safe or hopeless could use the electoral campaign already with an eye to the next selection round. Therefore, candidates in parties with different selection methods will respond to varying incentives by being more or less individualistic. This is why we expect candidates from parties with personalised (primaries-based or leader-based) selection methods to behave individualistically, even in highly party-centred electoral systems.

While in party-centred electoral systems, selection is sometimes a sufficient condition for being elected, in candidate-centred electoral

systems, it is necessary but not sufficient. Candidate-centred electoral systems, where the voters can disturb the party ranking of candidates or choose whichever candidate they prefer, require candidates who can and do cultivate a personal reputation. No matter by what method they reach the ballot, all candidates must also be responsive to the voters in their electoral constituency. Therefore, even candidates selected by collegial or leader-based selection methods will be incentivised to present individualistic behaviour, and their parties and leaders will be incentivised to allow, if not encourage such behaviour.

In other words, candidates in party-centred electoral systems must busy themselves with and focus their behaviour on securing a good enough place on the party list (or a safe enough spot in a single-member district). Selection is their main obstacle and the only one they face alone. Whether they are elected or not depends primarily on their party, its reputation and, to an extent, its campaign. In contrast, candidates in candidate-centred electoral systems must individually overcome both intraparty selection and electoral obstacles. Importantly, candidates from all parties face (in a given district) the same final impediment the electoral system presents. In conclusion, we argue that collegial, non-personalistic intraparty selection and party-centred electoral system are each necessary but insufficient conditions for partisan behaviour. In this sense, we follow a similar argument by Baumann and colleagues (Baumann et al., 2017), according to which the party leaders are the politicians' principals only if both the electoral system is party-centred and the selectorate is exclusive.³ We thus hypothesise that:

H2. The effect of candidate selection methods on behavioural personalism will be stronger under party-centred electoral systems than under candidate-centred electoral systems.

The theoretical expectations are summarised in Fig. 1. We expect: (1)

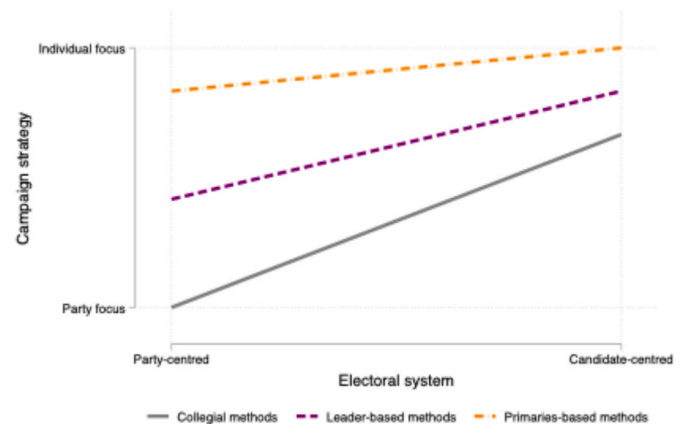


Fig. 1. Summary of the theoretical expectations.

Note: Plotted lines represent the theoretical expectations for candidate selection methods of three groups: collegial selection methods (solid line), leader-based selection methods (dashed line), and primaries-based selection methods (dash-dotted grey line).

² Another recent study (Fernandes et al., 2019) investigates legislators' parliamentary behaviour in Germany, Ireland and Portugal. However, that study differs from ours in its focus on (de)centralization of candidate selection methods rather than on their inclusiveness. Also, it does not systematically theorize the interaction between the electoral system and the intraparty selection method.

³ We should note that our expectations differ from previous studies on the interaction between the electoral system and intraparty selection methods. First, while we share Shomer's (2014) view that the electoral system conditions the impact of the candidate selection method on behavioural personalism, our argument, due to the focus on a different behaviour, leads to a conflicting expectation regarding the direction of the conditioning effect. Second, we differ from Itzkovitch-Malka and Hazan (2017), who theorise that intraparty institutions condition the effect of the electoral system, and not vice versa. While our results (and theirs) could be interpreted with any of the two institutions conditioning the effect of the other, we believe our approach makes more theoretical sense when studying campaign behaviour.

Per the literature on electoral systems, candidates in party-centred electoral systems to run, overall, less personal campaigns than those in candidate-centred electoral systems; (2) Candidates selected through primaries-based selection methods to be highly self-focused; candidates selected through leader-based selection methods to be less so; and lastly, candidates selected in collegial selection methods to run a non-personalised campaign; (3) Differences between candidates selected in different selection methods to be smaller in the case of candidate-centred electoral systems than party-centred electoral systems.

3. Methodology

To study the effect of electoral systems and candidate selection methods on politicians' electoral campaign behaviour, we needed the broadest available comparative data to have enough variation in our explanatory institutional variables. While information on electoral systems is widely available, we were more constrained by the availability of data on intraparty institutions and candidates' behaviour. We combine data on individual (elected and unelected) candidates' campaigns from the Comparative Candidate Survey (CCS) Round 2 with the Political Parties DataBase (PPDB) R2 (Poguntke et al., 2016), which was recently advocated for analysing candidate selection methods (Tuttnauer and Rahat, 2023).⁴ Excluding cases with missing data, we have 9320 candidates from 101 parties in 18 elections from 16 countries (see Table 1). Since the PPDB data were collected between 2016 and 2019, we limit our use of the CCS data to observations from 2014 and later.

3.1. Elite campaign behaviour

To measure the candidates' personalistic campaign behaviour, we constructed a *focus* variable based on the question: "What was your primary aim during the campaign? Where would you place yourself on a scale from 0 to 10," where 0 means "to attract as much attention as possible for me as a candidate" and 10 means "to attract as much attention as possible for my party." We recoded the original variable so that higher scores indicate a greater emphasis on the individual (higher personalism), whereas lower scores indicate a greater focus on the party (lower personalism) ($M = 3.34$, $SD = 2.91$).

Table 1

Case selection.

Country-year	Respondents	Parties	Electoral system
Norway 2017	713	7	Closed-list PR
Portugal 2015	297	6	Closed-list PR
Romania 2016	228	5	Closed-list PR
Spain 2016	104	4	Closed-list PR
Belgium 2014	557	12	Ordered-list PR
Czech Republic 2017	84	2	Ordered-list PR
Sweden 2014	1626	8	Ordered-list PR
Germany 2017	787	7	Mixed-member proportional
Canada 2015	392	4	Single-seat plurality
UK 2015, 2017	2540	11	Single-seat plurality
Chile 2017	101	5	Open-list PR
Greece 2015	380	5	Open-list PR
Switzerland 2015	853	4	Open-list PR
Finland 2015	306	8	Quasi-list PR
Ireland 2016	97	5	Single Transferable Vote
Australia 2016, 2019	255	8	Alternative Vote
Total	9320	101	

⁴ We decided against using the CCS's own intraparty selection variable, because the phrasing used does not distinguish between selection by the party leader (an individual) and party leadership (a small collegial group). This distinction is crucial for our conceptualisation of leader-focused versus collegial methods.

This measure has two possible drawbacks. First, we rely on the politicians' self-reports rather than an exogenous and more objective measure of their behaviour. However, we do not know of any such exogenous measure of behaviour which covers a wide enough array of countries and parties to allow the testing of our theoretical argument. Moreover, since we are interested in how institutions affect individual politicians' incentives and strategies, it is arguably better to measure how those politicians perceive their own behaviour rather than using an exogenous measure, which may contain noise emanating from contextual and random constraints.

Second, we rely on a single survey item as our dependent variable. While relying on a single item has serious disadvantages, this specific item has the advantage of representing the candidate's own assessment of his or her goals in a way that directly contrasts themselves with the party's. Additionally, this item was the only relevant item asked in all countries. Other items, asking respondents to rate how much they emphasised certain aspects in their campaigns, were not asked in Australia, Canada, Ireland, and Portugal. Of a battery including seven such items, two were clearly related to our behaviour of interest, personal vote cultivation: emphasising issues specific to the candidate's own personal campaign and emphasising personal characteristics and circumstances. A principal-component factor analysis further confirmed these two items load on a different factor from all other items in the battery, which had more to do with constituency-specific interests (e.g., providing services in the constituency, advocating policy demands of the constituency, *et cetera*). Furthermore, another factor analysis revealed that the two "personalistic" items and our *focus* item all load on one factor. We used various versions of dependent variables based on these additional items of personalistic emphasis in the robustness tests, as described below. Our results hold.

3.2. Candidate selection methods

Our first independent variable builds on the party selectorate(s), the most relevant feature for our focus on personalism in candidate selection methods.⁵ We build on Tuttnauer and Rahat's (2023) note that advocates for using the PPDB R2 dataset as a highly detailed source of comparative information on candidate selection methods. This dataset includes information on up to seven selectorates in each party, each playing up to four roles in the selection process.

We chose to focus on the major principals, the selectorates that perform the two most influential roles in the selection process – screening candidates and selecting the list – and to disregard the roles of suggesting candidates and engaging in post-hoc vetoing.⁶ We use a categorical variable to distinguish between parties in which the leader plays one of those main roles (leader-based personalism, 17 parties), parties in which members or supporters play one of the main roles (primaries-based personalism, 48 parties), and parties in which only

⁵ We put aside other dimensions that differentiate between candidate selection methods, like decentralisation, candidacy and voting/selection method, because they are much less relevant to our focus here.

⁶ In general, the pool of candidates is much larger than the pool of realistic candidacies. Thus, the preliminary inclusion in a suggested candidate pool is a less important stage in the selection compared to screening, in which the number of candidates in the pool is substantially reduced, and the selection stage when candidacy is almost always finalized. Vetoing specific outcomes of the selection process is also a relatively rare phenomenon, because it comes after candidacies were (often publicly) legitimized by other selectorates. In addition, since vetoing is a purely negative selection tool, potential candidates affected by it will end up being excluded from the party list, and, therefore, from our sample. See Amitai (2023) for a more detailed argument in this vein.

collegial bodies play these roles (collegialism, 36 parties).⁷

3.3. Electoral systems

Our second independent variable captures the incentives of the electoral system. We rely on Söderlund's (2016) elaboration of Farrell's and McAllister's (2006) scale for the coding of electoral systems on a scale from the most party-centred to the most candidate-centred. Farrell and McAllister rank various electoral systems along the combination of three components: the *ballot* structure, the level of vote *pooling*, and *district* magnitude (the latter in interaction with the former two).⁸ We recode the scale to reduce the number of categories for two reasons. First, some of Söderlund's original categories are empty in our dataset and acknowledging the ordinal nature of the scale, leaving these gaps makes no sense. Second, since some of the electoral system categories did not include all types of intraparty selection methods (e.g., no collegial candidate selection method in quasi-list PR or alternative vote), we further combined categories to end with five: a) closed-list PR (Norway, Portugal, Romania, and Spain), b) ordered-list PR (Belgium and Sweden) and Germany's mixed electoral system, c) single-member districts with plurality (Canada and the United Kingdom), d) open-list PR (Chile, Greece, and Switzerland), and e) quasi-list PR, Single Transferable Vote, and Alternative Vote (Finland, Ireland, and Australia, respectively). As described below in the robustness section, our findings also hold under other specifications, using either more or less distinct categories.

3.4. Control variables

We include several controls in the multivariate analysis. At the individual level, we control for candidates' experience level, which may be correlated with our independent measures while also affecting the dependent variable. Presumably, more experienced politicians could put more emphasis on themselves rather than the party compared to novice politicians. However, the reverse could also be plausible. Importantly, that correlation could be contingent on the selection method. We account for the number of previous elections in which the candidate participated and the number of previous elections in which they were successfully elected (out of the last six).

Additionally, we calculated a measure of subnational political experience since, in some electoral systems, having a local background is electorally beneficial (Shugart, 2005) and would, therefore, lead some candidates to focus more on their (personal) local experience. We counted each respondent's positive answers to a list of relevant questions: whether they held a local or regional party office, been elected to local or regional parliament, been a member of local or regional government, and whether they were elected or appointed as a mayor. Since each country survey asked a different subset of these questions, a candidate's subnational experience is expressed as their standardised deviation of this count from the country mean.

At the party level, we control for the party family, which could correlate with both the candidate selection methods used and norms regarding personalistic behaviour. We distinguish between communist and left parties, social democrats, greens, moderate right parties, far-right parties, and others, adding them as binary variables to the regression models. We capture any additional party-specific differences

⁷ Of the eight instances where both the leader and members played significant roles in the selection process, we regarded seven as centralised-personalised because the leader had a greater role and one (the Canadian Green Party) as collegial because both selectorates had equal powers.

⁸ Söderlund also uses a modification of Shugart's (2001) categorisation, of which Farrell and McAllister's is a refinement. Still, we prefer to side with the latter when it comes to the difference between the two in the rank-ordering of the systems.

through our use of hierarchical multilevel models.

At the country level, we control for the (logged) average district magnitude. As Tuttnauer (2024) points out, a lower district magnitude is associated with more districts, making it harder for an individual leader to oversee their candidates' behaviour, but not necessarily so for district-level party organisations.

4. Results

We first present the distribution of the candidates' reports on their campaign behaviour. For presentation purposes, we group the closed-list PR, ordered-list PR, and mixed electoral systems under one *party-centred* category and all other electoral systems under a *candidate-centred* category. Fig. 2 shows the distribution of answers to the campaign focus question, grouped, first, by electoral system category and second, within each group, according to the three candidate selection types.

As expected, following the "personal vote" literature, candidates in party-centred electoral systems reported that they worked harder at promoting their parties ($M = 2.38$, $SD = 2.77$) than candidates in candidate-centred electoral systems, who tended to be more focused on themselves ($M = 4.19$, $SD = 2.76$). The distributions for each type of intraparty selection method are visually distinguishable and statistically significant in countries with party-centred electoral systems (left). In line with hypothesis H1a, candidates from parties with collegial selection methods clustered at the bottom of the scale ($M = 1.80$, $SD = 2.58$), while candidates from parties with primaries-based selection methods had the highest scores ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 2.87$). In line with hypothesis H1b, candidates in parties with the leader-based selection methods were in between ($M = 2.38$, $SD = 2.54$). In contrast, in countries with candidate-centred electoral systems, the difference between leader-based ($M = 4.35$, $SD = 2.75$) and primaries-based selection methods ($M = 4.29$, $SD = 2.74$) is insignificant, while the difference between them and collegial selection methods ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 2.78$) is significant but relatively small at 0.40–0.45. This is in line with hypothesis H2.

We now turn to the multivariate analysis. Table 2 presents the results of multilevel Tobit regression models with respondents nested in party-year units. We also estimate the same model with an added level of countries (see Table A2 in the online appendix). We use Tobit instead of linear multilevel regression to account for the fact that the values of the dependent variable are limited to the range of 0–10. Otherwise, we risk our models predicting values outside of the possible range of the dependent variable. Tobit's disadvantage over linear regression is that the coefficients are less straightforward to interpret. We thus rely on predicted values and calculated marginal effects when presenting our findings.

Models 1 and 2 include the electoral system and candidate selection method variables additively, without and with the controls, respectively. Again, in line with the literature on personal vote cultivation, the effect of the electoral system is significant and positive. In contrast, the effect of candidate selection, while in the predicted direction, is insignificant. Neither candidates selected through primaries-based methods nor candidates selected in leader-based methods generally tend to run more self-focused campaigns than candidates in collegial methods. The additive models, therefore, lend no support for hypothesis H1a. Moreover, treating one of the personalised candidate selection methods as the reference category (not shown here) shows there is no significant general difference between primaries-based and leader-based methods in the additive models, lending no support for hypothesis H1b, either.

Model 3 introduces the interaction between the electoral system and the candidate selection method. The results support Hypothesis 2: the two types of intraparty personalism have a positive effect on personalistic behaviour when the electoral system is at zero (i.e., closed-list PR), evident from the significant and positive coefficients on the constituent terms. In a closed-list PR electoral system, a hypothetical candidate (holding all other variables to their observed values) selected by a leader-based method is predicted to have a value higher by 1.07 units

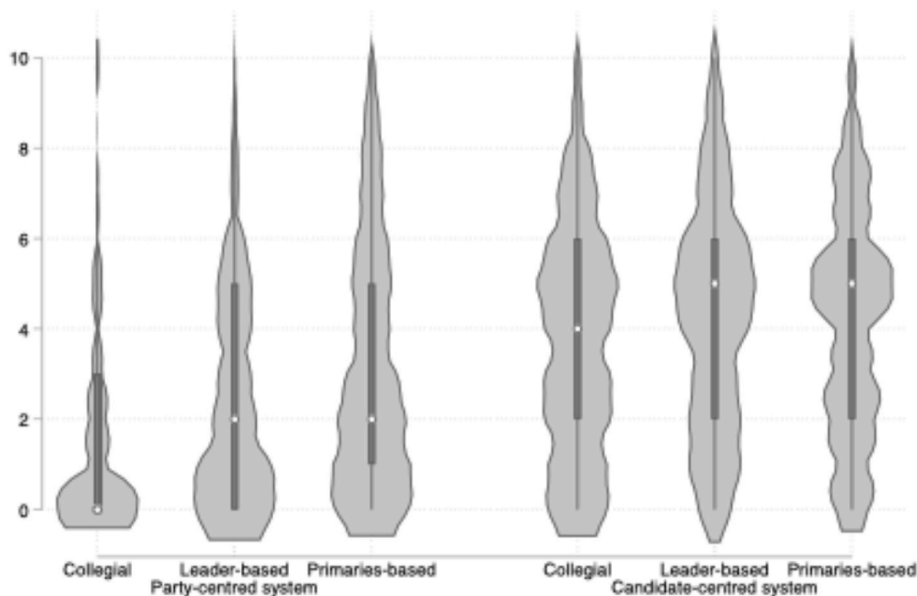


Fig. 2. Campaign focus by electoral system and intraparty selection method.

Note: Cases are grouped by electoral system (party-centred or candidate-centred) and in each category by intraparty selection method (collegial, leader-based or primaries-based). White dots represent medians. Grey boxes indicate the interquartile range. Spikes represent the upper- and lower-adjacent values. Grey areas represent the kernel density.

Table 2
Campaign focus, electoral systems and candidate selection methods.

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Electoral system	0.979*** (0.128)	0.863*** (0.101)	1.491*** (0.175)
Leader-based method	0.550 (0.506)	0.150 (0.399)	1.074* (0.524)
Primaries-based method	0.633 (0.388)	0.449 (0.315)	2.242*** (0.491)
Electoral * leader-based			-0.602* (0.259)
Electoral * primaries-based			-1.020*** (0.226)
Parliamentary experience		0.286*** (0.0644)	0.295*** (0.0641)
Electoral experience		-0.0105 (0.0118)	-0.00810 (0.0118)
Subnational experience		-0.0503 (0.0370)	-0.0495 (0.0370)
Communist/Left		-1.325* (0.574)	-1.320* (0.538)
Social Democrats		1.086* (0.505)	0.778+ (0.469)
Greens		-1.094* (0.550)	-1.265* (0.508)
Moderate right		0.922+ (0.456)	0.458 (0.434)
Far right		0.0510 (0.587)	-0.275 (0.548)
Average DM (logged)		-0.485*** (0.143)	-0.353*** (0.136)
Constant	0.885** (0.323)	1.723** (0.591)	0.877 (0.582)
Level 2 variance	2.486*** (0.412)	1.330*** (0.239)	1.083*** (0.195)
Observations	9320	9320	9320
AIC	40149.0	40094.4	40079.4
BIC	40191.8	40201.5	40200.8

Standard errors in parentheses.

+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

than an identical candidate selected by a collegial method. A candidate selected by a primaries-based method is predicted to have an even higher value, 2.24 units more than the candidate in the collegial method and 1.17 units more than the one in the leader-based method.

The negative and significant coefficients on the interactive terms mean that as we go up on the electoral system scale toward the more candidate-centred electoral systems, the effect of the intraparty selection methods diminishes. This trend is visualised in Fig. 3, which presents the average marginal effect of intraparty candidate selection, conditional on the electoral system. It shows that for both types of selection methods, the effect is positive and significantly distinguishable from zero in closed-list PR electoral systems, which includes 14.4% of our sample. The effect of leader-based selection methods loses its significance when moving to ordered-list PR electoral systems and beyond, while the effect of primaries-based selection methods is still significant at that point, accounting for an additional 32.7% of our sample, then losing significance afterwards. In first-past-the-post and more candidate-centred electoral systems, both types of intraparty selection have no significant effect. The effect of primaries-based selection methods even becomes negative in the most candidate-centred electoral systems. Crucially, the effects of the two types of personalised selection methods overlap in all values of the electoral system, further refuting hypothesis H1b and highlighting our argument that these are, in important respects, two sides of the same phenomenon rather than opposite extremes.

4.1. Robustness tests

As noted, we ran alternative versions of our analyses. First, we used different categorisations for the electoral system variable. One alternative was using Söderlund’s scale (adapted from Farrell and McAllister) of eight categories rather than our condensed five categories. The other was using the same binary distinction used in Fig. 2. The results hold (Table A1 in the online appendix).

We also ran multilevel models with a third level, the country, and used linear multilevel models instead of Tobit (Tables A2 and A3 in the online appendix, respectively). Furthermore, we ran our Model 3 with additional individual-level controls: age, gender, education level, and immigrant background (Table A4 in the online appendix). Our main coefficients always retain their signs and significance, with the only

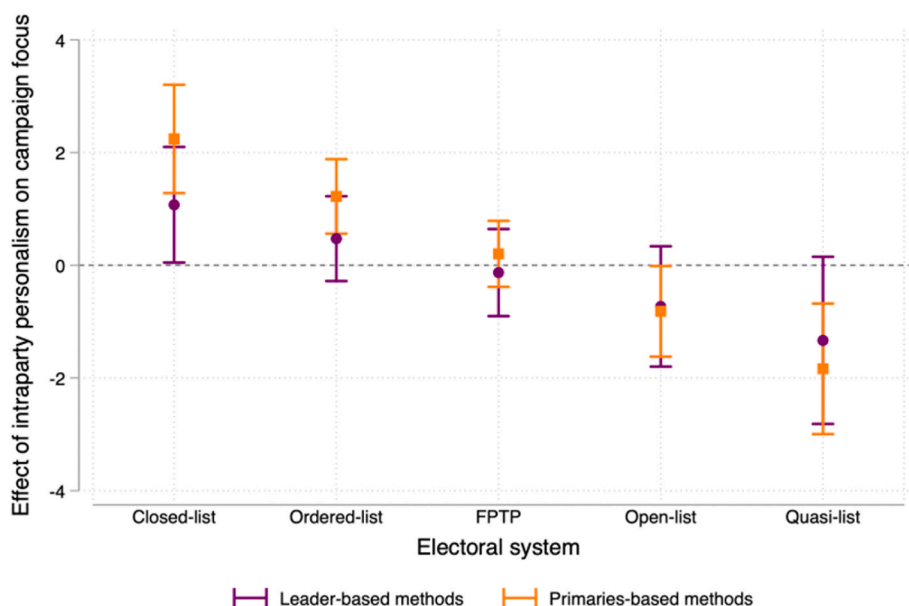


Fig. 3. Average marginal effects of intraparty personalism.

Note: Average marginal effects of leader-based selection methods (purple line, round marker) and primaries-based selection methods (orange line, square marker), based on model 3 in Table 2. 95% confidence intervals used.

exception being the interaction between the electoral system and leader-based selection methods in the 3-level multilevel model.

Additionally, we ran our models on different versions of the dependent variable. As mentioned above, respondents were asked to rank on a 1–5 scale their emphasis on various aspects during their campaign (items B7a–B7g in the Comparative Candidate Survey). We used this battery of questions to generate five additional dependent variables: 1) emphasis on “personal characteristics and circumstances”; 2) emphasis on “issues specific to own personal campaign”; 3) the average of 1 and 2; 4) the prediction of a principal-component factor analysis of the second factor (out of two), on which both items loaded; 5) the prediction of a principal-component factor analysis including the two above items and our original dependent variable, all loaded on the same factor. Although using these items significantly reduced the number of observations and removed four countries from the analysis, the results hold in all variations (see Tables A5a and A5b in the online appendix). Both types of selection methods have a positive effect on personalised campaign behaviour in closed-list PR electoral systems, with the effect becoming insignificant and/or negative (for primaries-based selection methods) the more candidate-centred the electoral system is.

Finally, we estimated Model 3, excluding one country each time from the analysis (Table A6 in the online appendix). The results suggest that no single country drives the results substantially, and no one omission annuls the significance of all the coefficients of interest. All main coefficients always retain their signs. The effect of the electoral system is consistently positive and significant, as is the effect of primaries-based selection methods (under closed-list PR). The effects of leader-based selection methods and their interaction with the electoral system are somewhat more sensitive to exclusions. However, this seems to result from the few parties employing leader-based candidate selection. Importantly, even these coefficients are always in the same directions as reported here and almost always reach statistical significance.

5. Conclusion

This study analysed the effect of candidate selection methods on politicians’ personalised campaign behaviour and its interaction with the electoral system, offering two novel contributions. First, we applied, for the first time in a study of elite political behaviour, the distinction

between intraparty institutions that provide incentives for leader-focused personalism and those that provide incentives for individual-focused personalism, differentiating between the two and between them and collegial institutions. Second, we went beyond the state-of-the-art by investigating the interactive effect of intraparty and electoral institutions on behaviour outside the parliamentary arena.

We find that the effect of candidate selection methods on campaign behaviour is indeed conditioned by the electoral system, being stronger under party-centred electoral systems than under candidate-centred electoral systems. In closed-list PR electoral systems, the most party-centred type of electoral system, the behaviour of the candidates selected either by leader-based or primaries-based selection methods was more personalised than politicians selected by collegial selection methods, i.e., by delegates in intraparty organs. The effect of primaries-based selection methods was somewhat stronger than that of leader-based selection. Unlike the latter, the former was significant also for the slightly less party-centred ordered-list PR electoral systems. In contrast, in more candidate-centred electoral systems, the effects of intraparty institutions became insignificant and even negative for primaries-based methods in the most candidate-centred systems.

Our theoretical argument, supported by the findings, has several important implications for scholars of intraparty democracy and its consequences. First, while the literature usually sees the party selectorate through the lens of inclusiveness, positioning selection by the leader as opposed to selection by members or supporters, we show that the two selection methods may have relatively similar consequences for candidates’ behaviour. This begs the question: has previous research, in conflating leader-focused (centralised) personalism with non-personalism, overlooked such patterns in other activities such as legislation or constituency service?

Second, while many have warned against the possible detrimental effects of intraparty personalism, especially of primaries, as leading to parliamentary party divisions, excessive maverick behaviour, and deviations from party lines (Cross et al., 2016), our findings clarify the possible scope conditions of this concern. At least in terms of campaign behaviour, the effect of intraparty institutions is substantial only in party-centred electoral systems, namely closed-list and ordered-list PR electoral systems. In more candidate-centred electoral systems, the (possibly) negative effects of intraparty democracy should not be

overstated, as the driving factor behind individualistic campaign behaviour is the electoral system, not the candidate selection method. Whether or not this is the case for other types of elite behaviour is an open question worthy of further research.

Third, and relatedly, our study joins other recent contributions calling for the larger literature on electoral systems and their consequences to seriously account for intraparty institutions. As mentioned above, the classic “personal vote” literature has largely disregarded intraparty institutions, or at the very least, the possibility and reality of their within-country variance. As our findings suggest, at least when discussing party-centred electoral systems, one cannot truly understand the electoral incentives for candidates’ behaviour without accounting for their selection method.

This study may also serve as a call for other researchers to overcome the obstacles we faced in terms of data availability and quality by issuing specialised surveys or refining existing, ongoing projects. For instance, future candidate or legislator surveys may explicitly distinguish between the party and its leader as the campaign focal points and not only between the candidate and her party. Our findings call for more nuanced coding and analysis. Such endeavours are, no doubt, resource-intensive, but we would argue our findings highlight their importance.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Or Tuttnauer: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.
Gideon Rahat: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Conceptualization.

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Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2025.102909>.

Data availability

Replication data and code are available at <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/TEWT1N>.

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