

The role of incumbency, gender and party factors in predicting candidate list placement in closed list PR

[Work in progress]

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Abstract

The legislative studies literature has largely ignored the role of candidate characteristics and party factors for the party gatekeepers' decisions to rank the various candidatures in closed list PR systems. This happened despite the fact that in such settings nomination on top positions on viable party lists is almost always equivalent with election. The article fills this gap by analyzing longitudinally the determinants of candidate list placement in Romania, a particularly puzzling case given its very low shares of re-elected incumbents and women MP.

We draw on an original data set that includes 10,912 candidates nominated by the Romanian parliamentary parties at the 1992 to 2004 elections. The results of our OLS regressions indicate that incumbents are placed higher up on the lists than newcomers, while woman candidates receive constantly lower list positions than men. Moreover, the positive effect of incumbency is greatly reduced for women incumbents and even more so for the incumbents of parties that are about to lose elections. The effects are robust to the introduction in the models of a number of controls: the type of candidacy, the length of the party list and the strength of the party in the constituency. A number of explanations are put forward, related with party strategies but also with the supply side of legislative recruitment.

Introduction

In closed list Proportional Representation (PR) nomination on the top positions of a viable party list determines election even before the first voters have entered the polling stations. In such conditions, the nomination decisions of party gatekeepers can make a statement about what kind of political qualities and personal experiences and characteristics are salient to the party. The beneficiaries of these eligible positions are usually members of the different party elites, parliamentary incumbents, respected technocrats, well-known female politicians, representatives of various minorities, or contributors to party finances. The proportions in which the members of these groups and others find themselves on top list positions are crucial for the quality of substantive and descriptive political representation (Mansbridge 2003) as well as for the likelihood of parliamentary professionalization (Semenova et al 2013). This key issue has been unfortunately largely ignored by legislative and electoral studies scholars.

The legislative recruitment literature that took into account the case of closed list PR has dealt almost exclusively with the issue of the centralization of the selectorate that this electoral system seems to encourage (Czudnowski, 1975: 221; Epstein, 1980; Lundell, 2004: 40; Matthews, 1985: 35–7; Navarro 2012; Kelbel 2014). Thus, with very few exceptions (Gherghina and Chiru 2010) scholars have not analyzed the impact of

candidate characteristics or party factors on the decision to rank the various candidatures on the list. Even when this was done, the analysis only looked at one point in time and targeted the very peculiar case of European Parliament elections (Gherghina and Chiru 2010; Kovář and Kovář 2013). This article fills this gap by investigating the determinants of candidate list placement in all Romanian parliamentary elections from 1992 to 2004.

Romania is a particularly relevant case for the research on candidate list placement in closed list PR for a number of reasons related to both the patterns of recruitment and their outcomes. First, despite the fact that a closed list PR system was used in all legislative elections from 1990 to 2004¹ Romanian parliamentary parties have failed to ensure the re-election of most of their incumbents. Beyond the turnover produced by large electoral volatility (Tavits 2008), this outcome is puzzling given that high rates of incumbency re-election are considered a prerequisite of parliamentary professionalization (Putnam, 1976; Best and Cotta, 2000; Crowther and Matonyte 2007; Semenova et al 2013). Because of this, high incumbency re-election rates should represent an attractive and relatively easy to reach target for party leaders in their attempts to stabilize the political systems and achieve an well functioning legislative body. Moreover, a high-level of re-nomination of incumbent legislators was also shown to help parties decrease electoral volatility (Gherghina 2012). Therefore, a virtuous circle could be created in which high incumbency re-nomination decreases electoral volatility which in turn helps the re-election of even more incumbents.

Second, the proportion of women MPs remained extremely low throughout the period, at an average of 7.1% (see Figure 1 below) although the view that closed list PR is advantageous for women representation is relatively widespread among empirical researchers² (Matland 1998; Ballington 2005; Jones and Navia 1999).

Third, legislative recruitment in Romania during the PR era was generally centralized (Stefan 2004) which should result in more clear patterns of nomination and list placement than if several party bodies or groups would have been involved in the process.

Taking all these elements into account the central research question of this article asks: 'What individual and party-related factors explain the (closed) list ordering in the Romanian parliamentary elections?'

The introduction is followed by a discussion of the theoretical framework and hypotheses of the study. The next section includes the research design: the data collection efforts, variables' operationalization and main descriptive statistics. The analysis section presents and discusses the results of the multivariate tests, i.e. OLS regression models of each election and of the pooled data. The conclusion synthesizes the results of the study and points to the further development of this research.

¹ In the closed list PR era each of Romania's 42 counties was a multimember district, with district magnitude varying between 4 and 28.

² See however the comparative analysis of Schmidt (2008) regarding the election of women in list PR system. His results indicate that ballot structure does not make a significant difference, the only institutional variable that enhances women representation being the presence of placement mandates.

Theoretical framework

The high rates of turnover in the Romanian Parliament (Chiru 2010) have a number of partially competing, partially complementary explanations. First, the structure of opportunities in Romanian politics has become along the years somewhat conducive to turnover, since many Romanian MPs prefer continuing their career in local or county politics particularly as mayors or presidents of county councils, as opposed to seeking parliamentary re-election (Stefan and Grecu, 2013). Second, it could be that many newcomers are preferred for nomination on the eligible positions at the expense of incumbents, because of various resources such as popularity, technocratic expertise, or good relations with party leaders. Nevertheless, because most party leaders are themselves parliamentarians and generally the party leadership was aware of the need to have a core group of experienced legislators we still expect that on average incumbents receive better positions on the list than newcomers.

H.1: Incumbents will be placed higher up on the list compared to newcomers.

The parliamentary under-representation of women in post-1989 Romania which has been well documented previously (Chiva 2005; Dubrow 2006) might be a consequence of women candidates being disadvantaged compared to male politicians when it comes to placement on top list positions. Indeed, in each legislative term from 1992 until 2008 half or more of the districts did not have a female representative in the Chamber of Deputies (Dubrow 2006: 98). Moreover, 21% of all districts failed to elect any woman MP for the entire 1992-2004 period (Dubrow 2006: 98).

Another factor also contributed to the likely discrimination of women candidates: the absence of women from party elites. Thus, high-level party politics was throughout the entire period an almost exclusively all-male business: generally female politicians have not gained high party leadership positions (Chiva 2005: 982) and only one became party leader, but this happened only in 2008 and in a marginal party, the Conservative Party (PC) (Chiru and Gherghina 2014: 151).

H.2: Women candidates will be placed lower up on the list compared to men.

The absence of women party leaders should be detrimental to incumbent women, since the centralized party elites which composed the selectorates would most likely start nominations for top list positions with themselves and only afterwards consider other incumbents, such as women MP. This is way we expect a weaker incumbency effect for women candidates.

H.3: The incumbency effect will be weaker for women candidates.

Scholars have claimed that when faced with the prospect of spending a term in opposition, Romanian parties tend to use the Parliament as a shelter for local and national elites who have lost their executive offices (Stefan and Grecu 2013: 212). If this is the case, then incumbent MPs of the parties that were in office in the term before the election should be disadvantaged in terms of list placement, because the

viable positions are reserved for these other members of the party elite. In the analyzed period each election brought the turnover of government.

H. 4: The incumbency effect will be weaker for incumbents of governing parties.

In addition to the hypothesized effects I control for the type of MP mandate the candidate was running for (Senate vs. Chamber of Deputies), the party list length in the constituency and the number of mandates won by the party in that constituency. Senate lists are shorter than those filled by parties for the Chamber of Deputies, and because of the higher age requirement for candidacy the Senate might attract different candidate (e.g. more experienced politicians). Party list lengths in the 42 constituencies vary considerably not only because of district magnitude but, also because of the differences in party organizational strength. Last but not least the number of mandates won by the party in the constituency is a proxy for how fierce the competition for an eligible position is in that case (Schmidt 2008: 193).

Research design

The data comes from 'The Romanian Parliamentary Candidates Study 1990-2012' (Chiru and Popescu 2014). For the purpose of this article the candidates competing for the reserved ethnic minority seats were excluded. Additionally the data sets on the 2008 and 2012 elections were not used, given that the 2008 reform replaced the closed list PR with an original mixed member proportional formula in which all candidates are elected in SMDs.³

For the 1992-2000 elections the names of the candidates, their party affiliation, list position and the county where they ran were retrieved from the official state journal, 'Monitorul Oficial', which publishes all official public documents including new legislation passed by the Parliament. The election reports published by Monitorul Oficial included the list of elected candidates as well as the list of substitutes - all unelected candidates on a county party list who would replace an MP in case of resignation or death. Unfortunately, the list of substitutes made sense and was reported only for those counties where the party won at least a mandate.⁴ For 1990 the list of election report published by Monitorul Oficial

For 2004, 2008 and 2012 Romanian Parliamentary Candidates Study contains all the candidates (from parliamentary, non-parliamentary parties and independents), the data having been obtained from the Romanian Permanent Electoral Authority. Several Freedom of Information requests were made to obtain the complete lists of candidates for the first four parliamentary elections (1990-2000) from the Permanent Electoral Authority, the National State Archives and the 42 County Tribunals. Virtually all of these attempts failed. Most Tribunals responding that they have destroyed the candidate lists

³ Only the candidates that win the absolute majority of votes in the district receive their mandate directly, while the others have to wait for the aggregation of party votes at county and national level. The latter compete with their fellow candidates from the same party for these redistribution mandates.

⁴ The latter aspect resulted mostly in having fewer UDMR candidates in the samples - since this party support is mostly concentrated in Transylvania.

considering them voting materials (such as voting ballots!), which under the law have to be destroyed three months after the elections.

We manually imputed data on the candidates' gender and incumbency status. For the latter, we considered a candidate incumbent if she acted as an MP during the last legislative term, irrespective of the duration of mandate, thus including those candidates that were substitute MPs or the MPs that had resigned.

Table 1 below presents the descriptive statistics of the dependent, independent and control variables.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of dependent variable and covariates

	Mean	Std. deviation	Min.	Max.	N
List position	5.538	5.043	1	38	10912
Incumbent	0.093	0.291	0	1	10912
Woman	0.130	0.337	0	1	10912
Woman incumbent	0.006	0.081	0	1	10912
Incumbent gov. party	0.048	0.213	0	1	10912
Senate candidate	0.324	0.468	0	1	10912
Party list length in const.	10.133	7.165	1	38	10912
Party mandates in const.	1.697	2.024	0	17	10912

Table 2 below presents the party affiliation of the candidate data used in this study. Although available, we did not include in the analyses the data on the candidates of minor non-parliamentary parties or independent candidates that ran in 2004 and failed to win representation. This decision is justified by our focus: the recruitment and list placement practices of parliamentary parties.

Table 2: Party affiliation of candidate data used by study

	1992	1996	2000	2004	Overall
PSD (PDSR/FDSN) ⁵	499	649	654	637	2439
CDR	563	657			1220
PD (FSN/ USD)	377	641	655	281	1954
PNL ⁶			657	356	1013
PRM	190	620	638	636	2084
UDMR	160	298	328	431	1217
PUNR	205	645			850
PSM	135				135

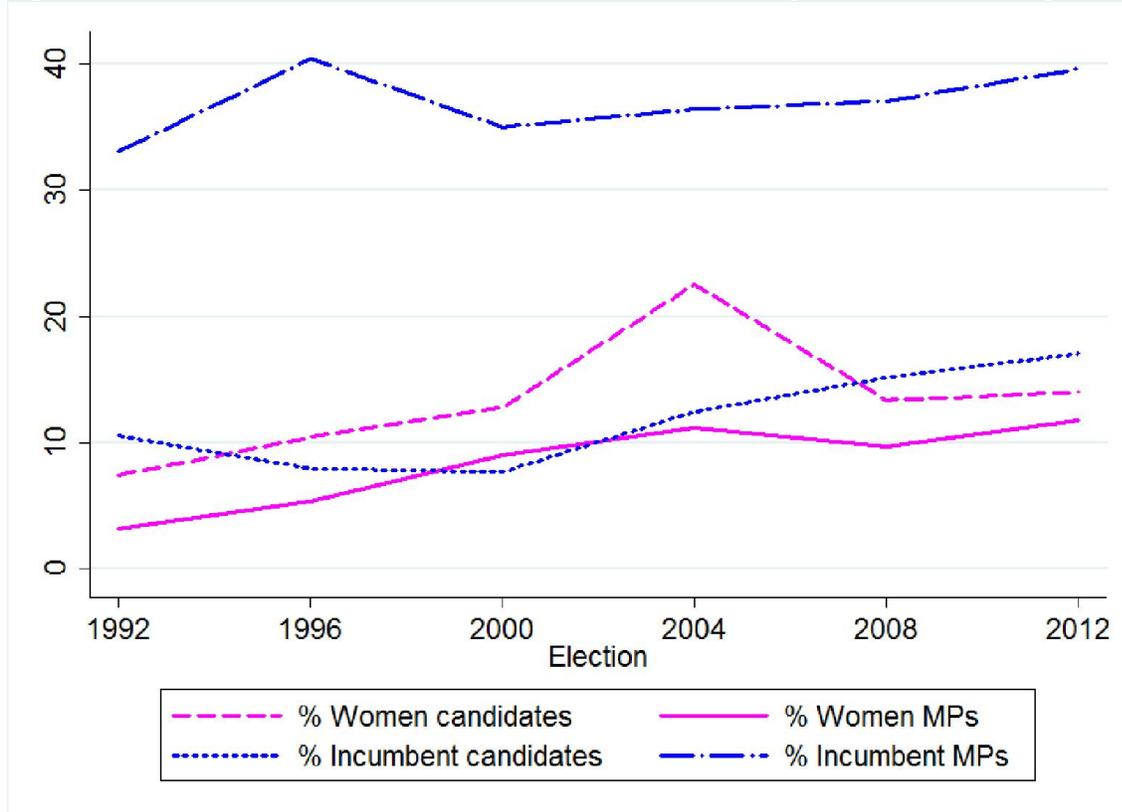
Figure 1 below presents the share of women and incumbent candidates nominated by parliamentary parties or parties that were about to gain parliamentary representation in that particular election, from 1992 until 2012. The figure also shows the proportions of women and incumbent MPs for the same period. Comparing the shares of incumbent candidates and re-elected MPs it is evident that incumbents seem to have better

⁵ It also includes the PSDR and PUR candidates who ran together with PSD in the Social Democratic Pole alliance in 2000.

⁶ In 1992 PNL failed to enter Parliament while in 1996 it ran in the CDR electoral alliance

chances of getting elected than newcomers. Generally, there seems to be a relatively good match between the supply side and the trend of women parliamentary representation.

Figure 1: Share of women and incumbent candidates (total and elected) 1992-2012



Analysis

Before discussing the results of each regression one must observe that the model fit is quite high for all regressions: all models explain more than half of the variation (53 up to 57%) in candidate list placement.

In all four elections and in the pooled model incumbents are placed higher up on the lists than newcomers, the effect varying from 3 to 4 list positions. On the contrary, woman candidates receive constantly lower list positions than men. The only election for which the effect is not statistical significant is 2000. For this particular election we lack data on the PNTCD and the candidates of its junior partners in the CDR 2000 alliance, because this governing party failed to pass the newly increased threshold for representation. Thus, its candidates were not mentioned in the election report published by Monitorul Oficial. This could influence the result of the 2000 regression since PNTCD was particularly conservative in its stances and promoted very few women into Parliament in the first three legislatures (Chiva 2005: 986-987). As hypothesized for woman incumbents the positive effect of incumbency is greatly diminished. Moreover, for one of the elections - 1992, the effect is not even statistically significant.

The positive effect of incumbency is also diminished or even reversed (1996 and 2004 elections and the pooled model) for the incumbents of the governing parties. Thus, it seems that indeed parties which are about to lose elections either tend to discriminate against their incumbent MPs or to treat them equally to newcomers.

Table 3: Determinants of candidate list placement in Romanian parliamentary elections (1992-2004)⁷

	1992	1996	2000	2004	Pooled model
Incumbent	-4.071*** (0.912)	-4.165*** (0.778)	-4.344*** (0.992)	-3.545*** (0.574)	-4.050*** (0.839)
Woman	1.329*** (0.349)	0.877*** (0.261)	0.367 (0.299)	1.081*** (0.158)	0.834*** (0.110)
Woman incumbent	-1.321 (0.804)	-3.079* (1.692)	-2.378** (1.173)	-2.288* (1.299)	-1.876* (1.052)
Incumbent gov. party	0.743 (0.457)	1.085*** (0.353)	-0.052 (0.362)	1.427*** (0.310)	0.827*** (0.285)
Senate candidate	0.082* (0.046)	0.164 (0.121)	-0.022 (0.033)	0.045 (0.051)	0.067 (0.045)
Party list length in const.	0.480*** (0.004)	0.484*** (0.013)	0.493*** (0.004)	0.497*** (0.006)	0.486*** (0.006)
Party mandates in const.	0.084*** (0.015)	0.084*** (0.022)	0.071*** (0.017)	0.095*** (0.030)	0.092*** (0.013)
1996					-0.137 (0.086)
2000					-0.114*** (0.032)
2004					0.003 (0.051)
Constant	0.797*** (0.062)	0.609*** (0.093)	0.757*** (0.088)	0.513*** (0.057)	0.753*** (0.034)
R ²	.536	.542	.566	.561	.550
Observations	2129	3510	2932	2341	10912

* Significance at * p < 0.10, ** p < 0.05, ***p < 0.01

** The models use robust standard errors clustered by county⁸

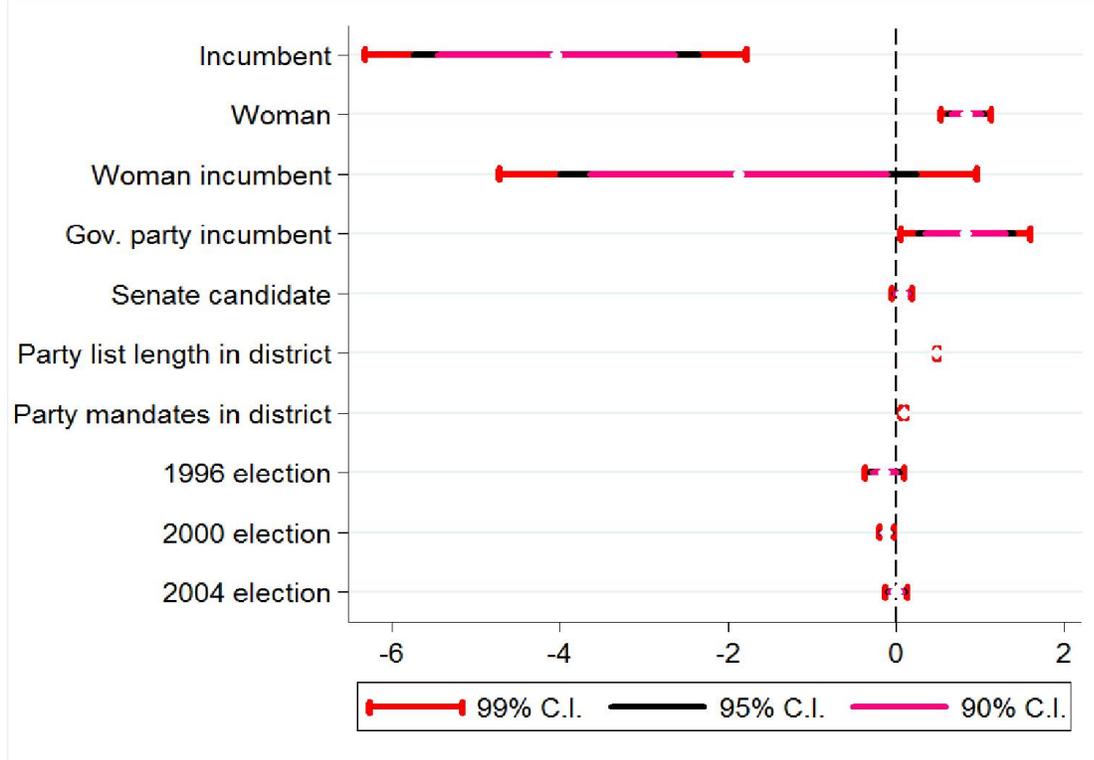
Of the control variables the party list length and the number of mandates won in the constituency appear highly relevant for the candidate list placement. With only one exception there seem to be no difference in the list placement practices for Senate and Chamber of Deputies candidates.

Figure 2 below plots the estimated effects from the pooled model with confidence intervals set at the three standard levels of statistical significance (90%, 95% and 99%).

⁷ The results are very similar if the OLS regressions are replaced with rank-ordered logistic regressions.

⁸ The regressions use county clustered standard errors to account for the variation in district magnitude and for other county level factors that could affect the candidates' list placement.

Figure 2: Estimated Effects with 90%, 95%, 99% Confidence Intervals (pooled m.)



Conclusion

The article illustrates how basic candidate characteristics and contextual factors that affect the party, such as the likely loss of elections, are crucial elements in shaping the party gatekeepers' ordering of the candidatures on the party ballot. The article emphasizes the rather constant discrimination of women candidates in Romanian politics during the PR era.

In the revised version of the article a number of additional control variables will be created and introduced in the models: the candidate's parliamentary experience, the number of times the candidate had run before for a parliamentary position, and the ideological profile of the party.

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