

# The impact of ideological positions and personal attributes of candidates in intraparty competition: A study under the Swiss open-list PR System

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## Abstract

Intraparty preference voting systems offer different incentives for candidates to cultivate a personal vote, but little is known about how the candidates' policy positions affect their electoral success in intraparty competition. This article analyses the effect of candidates' ideological positions and personal attributes on their preference vote share in the 2015 and 2019 Swiss Lower House elections. We used candidate survey data combined with official election statistics. Our findings demonstrate that the ideological distance between candidates' positions and their party's median position is of minor importance for their electoral success when compared to their personal attributes. However, ideological distance between candidates and their party's median position reduce their preference vote share.

## Zusammenfassung

Innerparteiliche Präferenzwahlssysteme bieten unterschiedliche Anreize für Kandidaten, eine personenbezogene Wahl zu fördern. Allerdings ist wenig darüber bekannt, wie die politischen Positionen der Kandidaten deren Wahlerfolg im innerparteilichen Wettbewerb beeinflussen. Dieser Artikel analysiert die Auswirkung der ideologischen Positionen und persönlichen Eigenschaften der Kandidaten auf ihren Vorzugsstimmenanteil bei den Schweizer Nationalratswahlen 2015 und 2019. Hierzu werden Daten aus Kandidatenbefragungen in Kombination mit offiziellen Wahlstatistiken verwendet. Unsere Ergebnisse zeigen, dass die ideologische Distanz zwischen den Positionen der Kandidaten und der Medianposition ihrer Partei weniger wichtig als für ihren Wahlerfolg ist als ihre persönlichen Eigenschaften. Die ideologische Distanz zwischen den Kandidaten und der Medianposition ihrer Partei verringert jedoch ihren Vorzugsstimmenanteil.

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## Résumé

Les systèmes de vote préférentiel offrent différentes incitations aux candidats pour cultiver un vote personnel, mais on sait peu de choses sur la manière dont les positions politiques des candidats affectent leur succès électoral dans la compétition intra-parti. Cet article analyse l'effet des positions idéologiques et des attributs personnels des candidats sur leur nombre de votes de préférence lors des élections à la Chambre basse suisse de 2015 et 2019. Nous utilisons des données d'enquête sur les candidats ainsi que des statistiques électorales officielles. Nos résultats démontrent que la distance idéologique entre les positions des candidats et la position médiane de leur parti est moins importante pour leur succès électoral que leurs attributs personnels. Cependant, la distance idéologique entre les candidats et la position médiane de leur parti réduit leur nombre de votes de préférence.

## KEYWORDS

ideological positions, intraparty competition, open lists, personal attributes, Switzerland

Electoral systems may provide candidates with different incentives and instruments to cultivate a personal vote (Carey & Shugart, 1995). Open-list proportional representation (PR) systems are a sort of a compromise in the continuum of personal vote seeking versus party vote seeking incentives (Crisp et al., 2013). In open-list systems, voters are allowed to choose among a party's candidates. However, candidates' preference votes are pooled at the party level. Seats are first distributed among parties; then, within each party list, preference votes entirely determine which candidates are elected. One consequence of intraparty preference voting (IPV) is that candidates from the same party must compete against each other in order to be elected. In those races, candidates' personal attributes (such as gender, age, incumbency, electoral experience and localness) become relevant factors in the intraparty election, as a number of studies have shown (Valdini, 2012, 2013; Dahlgaard, 2016; Jankowski, 2016; Passarelli, 2019). The literature has also found that the position of candidates on the ballot affects their chance of attracting preference votes (Darcy & McAllister, 1990; Miller & Krosnick, 1998; Lutz, 2010; Marcinkiewicz & Stegmaier, 2015; Blom-Hansen et al., 2016; Mustillo & Polga-Hecimovich, 2020; Söderlund et al., 2021).

The impact of candidates' ideological positions on their electoral success in intraparty competition has received less attention. One reason for this relative lack of attention in the literature is that the ideological positioning of candidates is assumed to be of low importance in intraparty competition (Katz, 1980; Isotalo et al., 2020). The second reason points to data availability. It is a time consuming and laborious task, but data on the personal attributes and ballot position of candidates can be gathered from official statistics, newspapers and parties' websites. Obtaining data on the political and ideological positions of individual candidates is a more complicated task. This requires specific candidate surveys or voting advice applications (VAAs), which were not available until recent years. Nevertheless, looking into the role of ideology is important to better understand what explains the electoral success of individual candidates in intraparty competition. It also sheds light on how citizens use preferential voting (van Erkel, 2021).

Three recent works (Isotalo et al., 2020; van Erkel, 2021; von Schoultz & Papageorgiou, 2021) have analysed the effect of candidates' political stances on their preference vote share. However, they obtain contrasting results. On the one hand, studies by Isotalo et al. (2020) and von Schoultz and Papageorgiou (2021), based on the Finnish open-list PR system, demonstrate that candidates' ideological positions matter for their electoral success, and that candidates who take on party-moderate

positions are more successful than their co-partisans deviating from the party median. Additionally, Isotalo et al. (2020) analysed whether the effect of ideological position is contingent on the ideological position of the candidates' parties. The findings indicate that the direction of candidates' ideological distancing matters, but only for candidates within centre, right-wing, and traditional, authoritarian, nationalist parties. On the other hand, the study by van Erkel (2021), based on the Belgian flexible list-PR system, finds that candidates' ideological positions with respect to their party line has no effect on the number of preference votes candidates receive.

In a contribution to this literature, this article examines the impact of candidates' ideological positioning and their personal attributes on their preference vote share in Swiss Lower House elections. The study is based on the assumption that open-list PR systems are complex electoral settings for both voters and candidates; therefore, voters are likely to rely on information shortcuts to discriminate among a party's candidates (Brockington, 2003; Valdini, 2012, 2013; Marcinkiewicz & Stegmaier, 2015; Mustillo & Polga-Hecimovich, 2020; Muraoka, 2021). Furthermore, the Swiss open-list PR system provides voters with broader freedom of choice over candidate selection than other open-list PR systems. It also poses some additional information demands on voters. In elections to the Swiss National Council (the Lower House), voters can cast multiple preference votes (as many as there are seats to fill in their constituency) and distribute them among candidates from multiple parties. Districts vary greatly in their magnitude. In the 2019 Swiss election, district magnitude in multimember constituencies ranged from two to 35 seats. Therefore, voters were permitted to support up to two candidates in the smallest district and up to 35 candidates from the same or different party lists in the largest constituency. However, the Swiss electoral system does not appear to be as complex as those where preference voting is compulsory and without pre-printed party ballots (e.g. the Finnish case). Under the Swiss open-list PR system, the casting of a preference vote is not compulsory. Additionally, Swiss voters are provided with pre-printed party ballots along with blank ballot papers, but parties use different methods to arrange their electoral lists.

The Swiss system therefore provides a good case study to find answers to the following questions: In an open-list PR system, which is more relevant for candidates' individual chance of getting elected—their own personal attributes or their ideological/policy position? In this kind of setting, with multiple preference votes, is it more advisable for individual candidates to position themselves ideologically closer to their party's median position in order to get more preference votes or to deviate from it? This article draws on previous works (Isotalo et al., 2020; van Erkel, 2021; von Schoultz & Papageorgiou, 2021). It expands the scarce empirical evidence on the electoral effect of candidates' ideological position in intraparty competition by analysing the Swiss open-list PR system. An additional advantage of our study is that we use candidate survey data instead of VAAs.<sup>1</sup>

## INCENTIVES TO CULTIVATE AN IDEOLOGICAL VOTE-EARNING STRATEGY IN INTRAPARTY COMPETITION

In most European countries, voters are permitted to choose among a party's candidates in parliamentary elections. There are different types of IPV-PR system, however: flexible lists, open lists, and the single transferable vote (STV), each of them offering different incentives for candidates of the same party to compete against each other to get elected. As several studies have underlined, the incentives IPV provides for intraparty competition diverge according to (i) whether preference votes are pooled at the party level; (ii) whether preference voting is optional or compulsory; (iii) whether there are one or more preference votes available to voters; (iv) whether preference votes fully determine the

<sup>1</sup>The study by van Erkel (2021) also uses candidate survey questions. The use of VAAs to analyse candidates' electoral strategies has two important limitations. Firstly, candidates' responses to questions are not anonymous, which may bias their answers. Secondly, parties may provide guidelines to candidates on their responses to VAAs questions (Isotalo et al., 2020). Self-selection and misreporting are the most critical problems for candidate surveys (Bundi et al., 2018), although they may also affect VAAs.

allocation of seats within party lists; (v) whether lists are alphabetical or party ordered; (vi) the length of party lists; (vii) the number of incumbent candidates running; (viii) the electoral support for the party list in which each candidate runs (Carey & Shugart, 1995; Miller & Krosnick, 1998; Lutz, 2010; Marcinkiewicz & Stegmaier, 2015; Renwick & Pilet, 2016; Mustillo & Polga-Hecimovich, 2020; Muraoka, 2021; Söderlund et al., 2021).

In open-list PR systems, a vote for an individual candidate is also a vote for the party. However, preference votes for candidates entirely determine their order of election within each party. Therefore, to get elected, candidates must try to differentiate themselves, individually or in sub-groups, from their co-partisans. They also face the challenge of striking a balance between their personal reputation and that of their party (Crisp et al., 2013). In systems using open-list PR, candidates can cultivate a personal vote by relying on their own political message and/or their personal attributes (Katz, 1980; von Schoultz & Papageorgiou, 2021). However, the literature on voting behaviour suggests that the two strategies are not equally effective. It outlines that the ideological positioning of candidates on a party list may be less relevant than their personal attributes (Isotalo et al., 2020; von Schoultz & Papageorgiou, 2021) or not relevant at all for their electoral success (van Erkel, 2021). These studies are based on the assumption that open-list PR systems are complex electoral settings (Brockington, 2003; Valdini, 2012, 2013; Marcinkiewicz & Stegmaier, 2015; Mustillo & Polga-Hecimovich, 2020; Muraoka, 2021). They pose a higher cognitive burden on voters than closed party lists, by asking voters to choose among a party's candidates. Additionally, intraparty competition involves a low-salience race. Electoral competition among candidates for the same party is of lower importance to voters than competition among parties. Under these conditions, voters have a limited capacity or willingness to acquire detailed information on each candidate's stance on political issues. Moreover, voting decisions among a party's candidates based on their policy positions are highly demanding in terms of information processing (Lau & Redlawsk, 2006), so incentives for voters to gather this type of information about candidates is expected to be low (von Schoultz & Papageorgiou, 2021). Voters thus have incentives to use shortcuts such as candidates' personal characteristics and other information cues available on the ballot to discriminate among a party's candidates (Brockington, 2003; Valdini, 2012, 2013; Marcinkiewicz & Stegmaier, 2015; Mustillo & Polga-Hecimovich, 2020; Muraoka, 2021). Candidates' names on the ballot contain politically useful cues for voters, such as name recognition, gender and ethnicity. Extensive research has demonstrated that incumbent candidates have an advantage over their co-partisans at the nomination and/or voting stage (Dahlgard, 2016). Firstly, incumbents are usually advantaged for reselection by their political parties in the nomination process (Golden & Picci, 2015; Fiva & Røhr, 2018). Apart from name recognition on the ballot, incumbent candidates may also have more media attention, receive more endorsements, and have easier access to campaign finance than newcomers during the voting stage. They may also benefit from their previous electoral campaign and parliamentary experience. Candidates' gender is also considered to be easily available information on the ballot that may open the door to stereotypes concerning their qualifications and positions on issues (Valdini, 2012). Gender stereotypes can be used as voting cues in IPV electoral settings, but these are not necessarily disadvantageous for female candidates (Sanbonmatsu, 2002), and they may, at an aggregate level, produce any given result (Wauters et al., 2010; Kunovich, 2012; Valdini, 2012; Spierings & Jacobs, 2014; Allik, 2015; Marcinkiewicz & Stegmaier, 2015; Mustillo & Polga-Hecimovich, 2020). If secondary information on candidates provided by the ballot is of little help, voters may rely on tertiary information, such as their ballot position (Brockington, 2003). A large number of studies demonstrate that the order in which candidates are listed on the ballot has an effect on their number of preference votes, finding that candidates receive fewer nominative votes the lower they appear on the party list (Darcy & McAllister, 1990; Miller & Krosnick, 1998; Lutz, 2010; Spierings & Jacobs, 2014; Marcinkiewicz & Stegmaier, 2015; Blom-Hansen et al., 2016; Mustillo & Polga-Hecimovich, 2020; Ragauskas, 2021).

Drawing on these arguments, we generate our first hypothesis:

*H1: Candidates' personal attributes will have a stronger effect on their electoral success than their individual policy positions.*

Even if the political message is expected to be of little importance in intraparty competition, the question that arises then is in what way the ideological position of candidates affects their number of preference votes. In open-list PR systems, is it more promising for individual candidates to position themselves ideologically closer to their party's median position or to deviate from it? The scarce literature on how candidates' policy positions affect their success in intraparty competition suggests that a deviating ideological position could have either a positive effect on their number of preference votes or a negative impact on candidates' electoral outcomes (Katz, 1980; Isotalo et al., 2020; van Erkel, 2021; von Schoultz & Papageorgiou, 2021). In open-list PR systems, candidates must differentiate themselves from their co-partisans to be elected. Firstly, deviating from the party's median position may be a promising strategy to draw attention to oneself and to establish a unique personal reputation (Carey & Shugart, 1995; van Erkel, 2021). Secondly, the literature on intraparty competition also indicates that preference voting undermines the ideological and policy cohesion of parties (Kitschelt & Smyth, 2002; Carey, 2007; Crisp et al., 2013; Catalinac, 2018), suggesting that candidates adopting distinct policy positions will be more electorally successful than their moderate co-partisans. Thirdly, candidates who deviate from the party line may attract voters who do not agree with the party platform on some ideological dimensions (van Erkel, 2021). In a fragmented party system, this strategy can also attract voters from other parties. In open-list PR systems particularly, where voters are allowed to vote for candidates from more than one party, deviating from the party's median position can be an effective way to attract supporters from other parties. This tendency towards centrifugal intraparty competition is also enhanced by the incentives for parties to nominate candidates with diverging opinions in order to broaden their electoral appeal (Kitschelt & Smyth, 2002). However, diverging too far from the party line may drive voters away (van Erkel, 2021). Strong party supporters can punish 'niche' candidates for not following the party line, by voting for more moderate candidates in the same party. They can also punish the entire party list in which extreme deviating candidates stand.

Additionally, we know from the literature that electoral systems affect incentives for candidates' and parties' ideological position-taking in interparty competition—that is, competition among parties or among candidates of different parties (Cox, 1990; Magar et al., 1998; Dow, 2001, 2011; Merrill and Adams, 2002; Ezrow, 2008; Catalinac, 2018; Martin & Hug, 2020). The literature on interparty competition leads to alternative expectations about how candidates' ideological position-taking strategies affect their electoral success under different intraparty voting procedures. Of course, there is one important difference between interparty and intraparty competition, which we take into account in our analyses: while there are no limits in the ideological range of candidates in interparty competition, deviating too far from the party line may drive voters away (Katz, 1980). According to this literature on interparty competition, the degree to which electoral systems create centrifugal and centripetal incentives for candidates to compete is affected by the electoral formula, the ballot structure (number and type of votes each voter is allowed to cast), district magnitude, and the number of competitors (Cox, 1990).

In open-list PR systems, seats are first distributed among parties according to one of the different PR formulas. All of them then use the plurality rule to allocate list seats in intraparty multi-member contests: those candidates with the largest number of preference votes are elected for the seats their party won. However, open-list PR systems differ in terms of the number of preference votes electors are allowed to cast, the constituency magnitude, and the number of competitors. In most of these systems (such as the Finnish one), voters are asked to cast a single preference vote; in others, voters are permitted to cast several preference votes. The bloc vote (voters have as many preference votes as there are seats in the district) with accumulation system (voters can give more than one preference vote to a candidate) is used in Luxembourg and Switzerland (Lower House elections). In Switzerland, voters are also allowed to cross-out candidates' names on party pre-printed ballots.

According to Cox (1990), office-seeking candidates position themselves differently in plurality multi-member contests depending on the number and type of votes voters are allowed to cast. In multi-member districts which combine the plurality rule with a single vote per voter, ideological competition will be centrifugal, candidates adopting dispersed positions across the ideological



spectrum (Cox, 1990). The underlying argument is that a larger district magnitude than the number of votes per voter will produce more competitors, who will avoid bunching together because of the disadvantages of being at the centre of the ideological spectrum (Catalinac, 2018). If we translate Cox's first proposition into intraparty multi-member contests with the plurality rule and a single preference vote per voter, candidates who deviate from their party's median ideological position will receive more preference votes than their party colleagues positioned closer to the median position.

On the other hand, in multi-member districts that combine the plurality rule with a bloc vote per voter, the ideological competition among candidates will be centripetal, converging on a centrally located position (Cox, 1990). If we translate Cox's second proposition into intraparty contests with the plurality rule and a bloc vote per voter, candidates who (slightly) deviate from their party's median ideological position will receive fewer preference votes than their party colleagues at the centre of their party's position. According to Cox (1990), where accumulation is allowed in bloc voting systems, centrifugal forces will always dominate. However, if, under the bloc plurality vote, voters are allowed to cross-out candidates' names on the ballot, incentives for centrifugal competition resulting from accumulation can be compensated by electoral costs resulting from the deletion of candidates' names. The tendency for centripetal intraparty competition is further supported by the fact that public divisions or confrontations among a party's candidates may negatively affect voters' assessments of the party's policy competencies and decrease voters' support for that party (Greene & Haber, 2015).

Previous empirical evidence does not support the translation of Cox's first proposition into intraparty contests. In elections to the Finnish Eduskunta, the plurality rule with a single preference vote per voter is used to allocate seats among a party's candidates. The limited empirical evidence, based on Finnish elections, outlines that candidates located closer to their party's median position have greater electoral success than their co-partisans deviating from it (Isotalo et al., 2020; von Schoultz & Papageorgiou, 2021). Isotalo et al. (2020) also investigated whether the effect of candidates' ideological distance is contingent upon their party's ideological position. The authors based their expectations on the directional model of ideological competition developed by Rabinowitz and Macdonald (1989). Consequently, Isotalo et al. argued that candidates in left-wing parties will enjoy an electoral advantage by positioning themselves further to the left of their party line. On the other hand, candidates within right-wing parties will enjoy an electoral advantage by positioning themselves further to the right of their party line. These findings demonstrate that the direction of candidates distancing from their party lines matters, but only for centrist, right-wing, and close to 'TAN' positions parties. Cox's second proposition has not been tested empirically in intraparty competition under an open-list PR system with bloc preference voting. The work by van Erkel (2021), based on the Belgian flexible-list PR system with bloc preference voting, indicates that candidates positioned close to their parties' stance are more successful than their party colleagues deviating from the party line. However, according to van Erkel, the ideological positioning of candidates (measured as either the absolute or directional distance) has no significant impact on their electoral outcomes.

Following these arguments, we will test our second hypothesis:

*H2: In open-list PR systems with bloc preference voting, candidates holding policy positions similar to their party's median position will receive more preference votes than their party colleagues who deviate from the party line.*

## THE SWISS ELECTORAL SYSTEM

Since 1963, the Swiss National Council has been composed of 200 members: 194 MPs are elected in 22 PR multi-member constituencies and six are elected in plurality single member districts. The number of seats to be distributed in the multi-member districts has ranged from two to 35. Voters are given as many votes as there are seats to be filled in their respective districts. They are allowed to vote for candidates of more than one party and to accumulate two votes on the same candidate in

multi-member districts. Voters can choose between blank and pre-printed party ballot papers (Selb & Lutz, 2015). Voters must fill out blank ballots or alter pre-printed party ballots by handwriting, and they are allowed to cross out or add candidate's names (from other parties) on a pre-printed ballot. They are also allowed to write a candidate's name twice on the ballot and candidate's names can be listed twice on pre-printed ballots. Around 65 per cent of Swiss voters choose to alter pre-printed party ballots (Däubler et al., 2021).

Seats are first distributed among party lists according to the total number of votes they receive. Electoral lists can be combined or sub-combined with other lists for the allocation of seats at the constituency level.<sup>2</sup> Most political parties field several lists (combined or sub-combined) in the same constituency, which results in a large number of candidates standing for election. Within each list, the regular practice is that political parties nominate as many candidates as there are seats in the district. Parties use different methods to order their candidates on each electoral list: party ordering, alphabetical ordering, or a combination of both (Lutz, 2010). The practice of ranking the candidates varies across the party lists in the same district and across districts. The Hagenbach-Bischoff quota with the highest remainders is used to allocate seats among party lists. Preference votes entirely determine the allocation of seats among candidates within each party list. Finally, voting is optional in Switzerland, resulting in one of the lowest turnout rates in national elections among established democracies (below 50 per cent since 1979; International IDEA, 2022). This electoral setting creates strong incentives for candidates to cultivate a personal vote in both interparty and intraparty competition (Selb & Lutz, 2015).

## DATA, VARIABLES AND METHODS

One of the contributions of this paper is that in order to test the hypotheses, we built up a unique dataset which combines candidate survey data from the Comparative Candidates Survey (CCS) with individual candidates' and parties' electoral data from the Swiss Federal Statistical Office. Over 47 per cent of the candidates standing for the last two elections to the National Council were interviewed in the CCS: 1,754 in 2015 and 2,131 in 2019. Keeping in mind our purposes, we restricted the candidate survey dataset in three important ways. Firstly, we took into account candidates standing in multi-member constituencies. Secondly, we narrowed the dataset to candidates from parties that achieved parliamentary representation in either 2015 or 2019 (Table 1). Thirdly, we limited the dataset to candidates from parties with eight or more interviewed candidates in the same district. These three conditions narrowed the number of candidates in the dataset to 2,920: 1,243 in 2015 and 1,677 in 2019 (Table 1). Table 1 offers an overview of the number of candidates competing and of the interviewed candidates per party in 2015 and 2019. Table 2 compares some personal characteristics of competing candidates, in terms of sex, age and incumbency, with those of the candidates interviewed in the CCS. With the exception of the overrepresentation of women in the 2015 survey, there are no significant deviations between the characteristics of the interviewed candidates and the candidates who stood for election.

Our dependent variable was the electoral success of candidates in intraparty competition, measured as their individual preference vote share. To calculate our dependent variable, the number of preference votes for a candidate was divided by the total number of preference votes cast for candidates from his/her electoral list in the district. This measure allowed us to compare the electoral success of candidates across districts and parties regardless of their respective party size.<sup>3</sup> As the distribution

<sup>2</sup>Party lists may be combined with other lists for the same or different parties. Conversely, list sub-combinations must involve lists with the same basic name, the only difference being that each has candidates of a specific gender, wing of the same group, region, or age.

<sup>3</sup>Under the Swiss open-list system, the casting of preference votes is not mandatory. Therefore, using the total number of votes cast for the party list as the reference point does not provide a standardized measure of candidates' electoral success across parties, as the number of preference votes cast for candidates within a party list varies across parties. Alternatively, using the total vote share of candidates (including preference votes and votes from unchanged ballots) makes no great difference. However, candidate names can be listed twice on pre-printed ballots. Candidates receive as many list votes as the number of times (up to two) they appear on a party list, but Swiss parties rarely use double nomination (Lutz, 2010).

**TABLE 1** Parties with parliamentary representation, number of competing and interviewed candidates in 2015 and 2019 Swiss National Council elections.

Parties	Candidates running	Interviewed candidates (CCS)*	Eight or more interviewed candidates per party and district	Party total vote (%)	Party seats
<b>2015</b>					
SVP	433	169 (39.3)	130	29.4	62
SPS	482	258(53.5)	214	18.8	43
FDP**	463	215(46.4)	184	16.4	33
CVP	442	223(50.4)	181	11.6	26
GPS	401	213(53.1)	187	7.1	11
GLP	362	186(51.4)	140	4.6	7
BDP	227	103(32.6)	57	4.1	6
EVP	214	103(45.4)	68	1.9	2
PdA	69	34.8(29.0)	18	0.4	1
Lega	8	4(50.0)	-	1.0	2
MCG	15	7(46.7)	-	0.3	1
Sol	55	17(30.9)	11	0.5	-
EDU	218	85(39.0)	53	1.2	-
TOTAL	3389	1607(47.4)	1243 (36.7)	97.3	194
<b>2019</b>					
SVP	569	202(35.5)	167	25.6	50
SPS	604	312(51.6)	292	16.8	39
FDP**	523	213(40.7)	173	15.1	29
CVP	702	355(50.7)	332	11.4	23
GPS	455	264(58.0)	243	13.2	28
GLP	477	244(51.1)	197	7.8	16
BDP	207	70(33.8)	48	2.4	2
EVP	306	180(58.8)	140	2.1	3
PdA	100	38(38.0)	24	0.6	1
Lega	8	2(25.0)	-	0.8	1
MCG	9	4 (44.4)	-	0.2	-
Sol	59	37(62.1)	23	0.5	1
EDU	114	50(.8)3	28	1.0	1
TOTAL	4133	1971(47.7)	1677 (40.7)	97.5	194

Source: Own elaboration based on data from the Comparative Candidates Survey (CCS) and the Swiss Federal Statistical Office. <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/> (last accessed 26/11/2021). \*Percentages in brackets.

Notes on parties: Swiss People's Party (SVP). Social Democratic Party (SPS). The Liberals (FDP/PLR). Christian Democratic People's Party (CVP). Green Party (GPS). Green Liberal Party (GLP). Conservative Democratic Party (BDP). Evangelical People's Party (EVP). Swiss Party of Labour (PdA). Ticino League (Lega). Genova Citizens' Movement (MCG). Solidarité (Sol). Federal Democratic Union (EDU). \*\* FDP and LPS merged at national level under the name "FDP. Die Liberalen" in 2009, with the exception of two cantons. They merged in the canton of Vaud in 2012. In the canton of Basel-Stadt, FDP and LP have not merged. Since the LP-BS are members of the "FDP. Liberals Switzerland", data on the LP-BS are included in the FDP group.

of candidates' preference vote shares was highly skewed towards zero, the dependent variable was transformed logarithmically.

Our main independent variables were the ideological position of candidates and their personal attributes. We tested for the electoral effect of candidates' position on the two main ideological dimensions that structure party electoral competition (Hooghe et al., 2002; Marks et al., 2006; Inglehart &



**TABLE 2** Personal attributes of competing and interviewed candidates from parties with parliamentary representation in 2015 and 2019 Swiss National Council elections (%).

	Candidates running	Interviewed candidates (CCS)	Eight or more interviewed candidates per party and district
<b>2015</b>			
Female	35.4	62.5	62.7
Age	40.0	40.6	40.1
Incumbents	4.7	3.6	3.5
<b>2019</b>			
Female	40.5	44.0	54.4
Age	41.6	44.2	42.2
Incumbents	3.3	2.4	2.4

Source: own elaboration based on data from the Comparative Candidates Survey (CCS) and the Swiss Federal Statistical Office. <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/> (last accessed 26/11/2021).

Norris, 2016; König et al., 2017; Hooghe & Marks, 2018): the left–right economic conflict dimension and the GAL–TAN cultural value conflict dimension. The Swiss party system also reflects the two ideological dimensions (Oesch & Rennwald, 2010; Bornschier, 2015). Additionally, the 2019 Swiss national elections were shaped by the prominence of two ‘unusual’ issues, gender and the environment, whereas two issues key to Swiss politics, immigration and Europe, played a minor role compared to previous elections (Gilardi et al., 2022; Giger et al., 2022). We used candidates' survey answers to measure their positions on the two ideological scales. We performed exploratory factor analysis to build the two ideological dimensions by using selected CCS questions. Candidates had been asked to indicate whether they strongly agreed (1), agreed (2), disagreed (3) or strongly disagreed (4) with several issue statements regarding the economy, immigration, the environment, gender equality, same-sex marriage, abortion, and the EU. Exploratory factor analysis allowed us to reduce the information pertaining to all the variables present in our databases to two constructs that corresponded to the two latent ideological dimensions (left–right and GAL–TAN). The analysis was carried out with SPSS 25 software, using the principal component reduction technique and VARIMAX rotation for the selection of variables. For this purpose, the variables were grouped according to their factorial weights (Table 3) into two dimensions. Subsequently, we carried out a Bartlett correlation test to verify the correlation between the selected variables for each dimension.

We then calculated the final fit of the model. Firstly, we assessed the reliability (or consistency) of the selected variables for each factor using the Cronbach's alpha test. In all cases, Cronbach's alpha was significant with a value above 0.8. Subsequently, we calculated the adjustment indices for the final model, specifically the CFI (0.976 for 2015, 0.912 for 2019) and RMSEA (0.08 for 2015, 0.09 for 2019), all presenting adequate adjustment values.<sup>4</sup> Finally, we calculated candidates' factor scores according to the regression score method. The mean value of each score was as close as possible to 0.0, and standard deviations were close to 1.0. Figures 1 and 2 offer an overview of the distribution of candidates per party on the two ideological dimensions compared to the overall distribution in 2015 and 2019. They show that parties can be clearly positioned according to the distribution of their candidates' positions on the two ideological scales, but parties are not homogeneous actors. On the left–right dimension, for example, Figures 1 and 2 indicate that most of the candidates from left-wing parties (SPS, GPS, PdA, EVP) are on the left, while candidates from right-wing parties (SVP, FDP) are mostly to the right. Candidates from centrist parties (CVP, GLP) are mostly at the centre. However,

<sup>4</sup>The goodness-of-fit index (GFI) is an index of the amount of variability explained by the model. Its values range between 0 (poor fit) and 1 (perfect fit). Values above 0.90 are considered to indicate an acceptable model fit. The most robust goodness-of-fit index proposed is the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). This index has been developed as an absolute measure of the difference in the structure of relationships between the proposed model and the covariance values in the measured population.

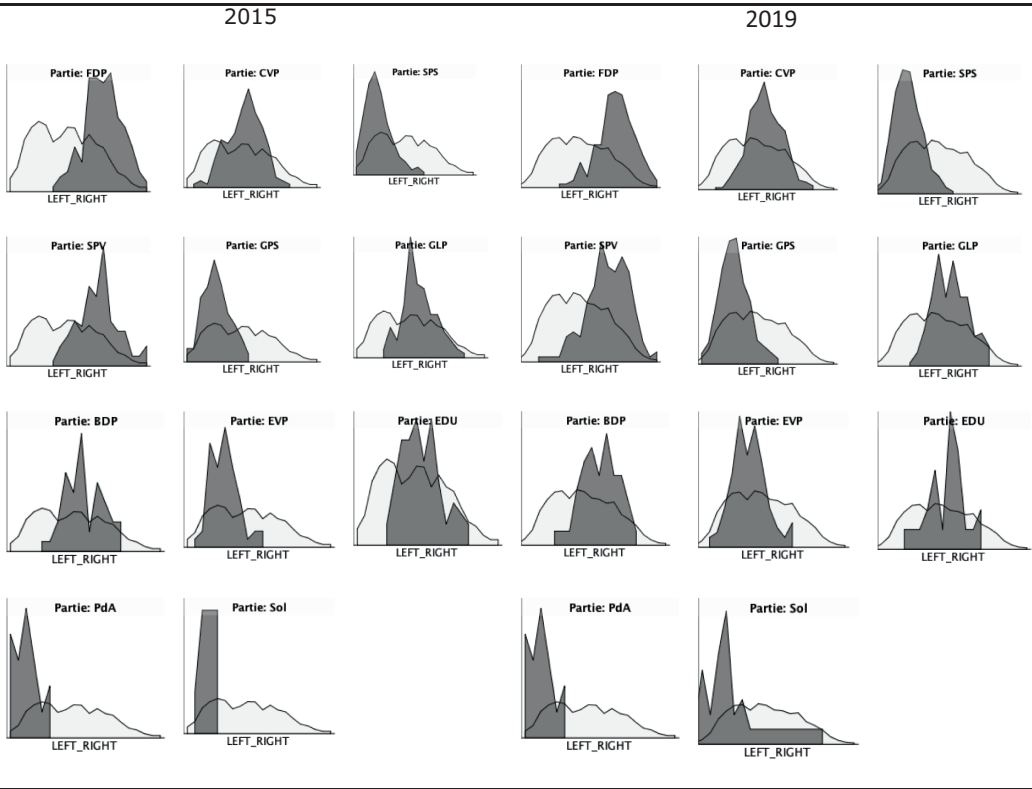
**TABLE 3** Rotated component matrix of the Left–Right and GAL–TAN dimensions in 2015 and 2019.

	2015 components		2019 components	
	Left–right	GAL–TAN	Left–Right	GAL–TAN
Immigrants should be required to adapt to the customs of the country	–0.496	0.560	–0.532	–0.504
Governments should abstain from intervening in the economy	–0.682	0.005	–0.632	–0.015
Stronger measures should be taken to protect the environment	0.646	–0.253	0.599	0.468
Same-sex marriages should be prohibited by law	–0.063	0.828	–0.091	–0.795
Women should be given preferential treatment when applying for jobs and promotions	0.614	–0.116	0.632	0.182
People who break the law should be given stiffer sentences	–0.506	0.508	–0.519	–0.474
Providing a stable network of social security should be the prime goal of government	0.698	–0.039	0.695	–0.062
The government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels	0.831	–0.154	0.852	0.092
Immigrants are good for the country's economy	0.295	–0.612	0.363	0.654
Women should be free to decide on matters of abortion	–0.027	–0.786	0.059	0.731
Left–Right self-placement	0.730	–0.429	–0.773	0.400
Austerity is the only way to solve the Eurozone crisis	–0.585	0.333		
Eurozone countries with financial difficulties should leave the Euro and return to the national currency	–0.447	0.357		
The EU and/or IMF should provide funds for more investment to stimulate economic growth	0.472	–0.136		
Adopt or reject the Framework Agreement negotiated between Switzerland and the EU			0.013	–0.640
Position of respondent's opinions on left–right scale			0.773	0.400
Extraction method: Principal Component Analysis	KMO and Bartlett	0.912		0.881
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser normalization	Sig	0.00		0.00

Source: own elaboration based on data from the CCS.

there are extreme candidates on both sides of their party line compared to the median distribution. Figures 1 and 2 also illustrate that interparty and intraparty differences on the left–right dimension are also greater than on the GAL–TAN scale.

To operationalize the positions of candidates with respect to their parties more accurately, we first used the average score for a party's candidates to represent the party position on the two ideological dimensions. This procedure has been used in previous studies as a valid indication of the official party line (Isotalo et al., 2020; van Erkel, 2021). In the Swiss case, we calculated parties' candidates' median position at both the national and cantonal (or district) level. These two alternative levels of calculation relied on two considerations: firstly, the Swiss party system is territorially fragmented at the cantonal level despite recent trends toward its nationalization (Bochsler, 2019); and secondly, intraparty competition occurs at the cantonal or constituency level, and, therefore, candidates of the same party compete against each other at the constituency level, and not at the national level. Next, we used two alternative measures of candidates' distance in relation to their parties: absolute distance and directional distance. Absolute distance takes the absolute value of the difference between the score of candidates and their party score. Directional distance was calculated by subtracting the position of candidates from their party's median position. Directional distance takes into account that the direction of candidates' distancing on the two ideological dimensions (more to the left/right, more GAL–TAN) may affect their electoral success differently. Additionally, following Isotalo et al. (2020), in order to control for the

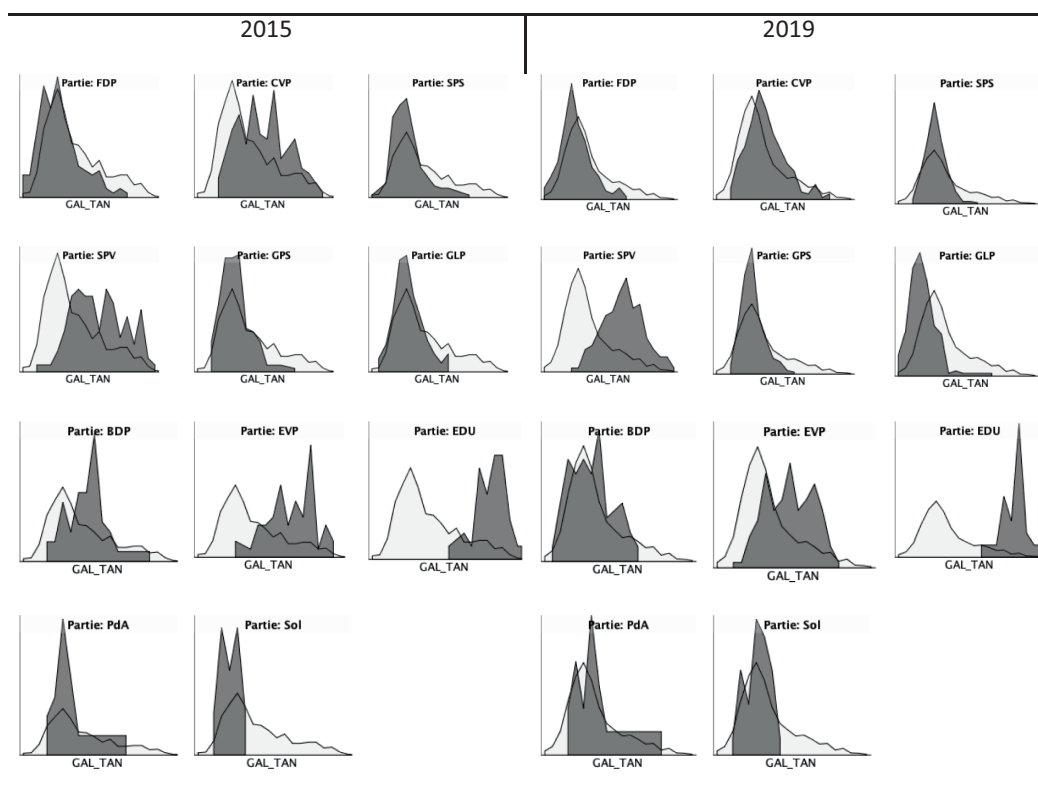


**FIGURE 1** Overview of ideological distributions of candidates on the Left–Right dimension in 2015 and 2019. *Note:* The graphs show the distribution of the scores of all the electorate (light area) and each political party's voters (dark area) on the Left–Right dimension/scale. Source: own elaboration based on data from the CCS.

direction of distance effects, we split the distance of candidates with respect to their party's median position into two categories on each dimension. On the left–right dimension, we differentiated left distance (if the candidate was more leftist than the respective party's median position) and right distance (if the candidate was more rightist than the party's median position). On the GAL–TAN dimension, we distinguished GAL distance (if the candidate was situated below the party's median position on the cultural dimension) and TAN distance (if the candidate was situated above the party's median position on it). Next, we classified the parties on the two ideological dimensions. We grouped the parties into three categories on the left–right dimension: left-wing if their mean candidate position was below  $-0.5$  points; right-wing if their mean candidate position was above  $0.5$  points; centre for parties with medians between  $-0.5$  and  $0.5$  points. We developed the same procedure for the GAL–TAN dimension.<sup>5</sup>

We also considered as independent variables the personal attributes of candidates, which could affect their election chances more than their ideological positions. These included gender, age, whether candidates were incumbents, whether they had electoral, party, and public office experience, and localness. Gender and age have been shown to have no consistent effects on the electoral success of candidates in intraparty competition (Wauters et al., 2010; Kunovich, 2012; Valdini, 2012; Spierings & Jacobs, 2014; Allik, 2015; Marcinkiewicz & Stegmaier, 2015; Mustillo & Polga-Hecimovich, 2020). Conversely, we expected incumbency, prior electoral, party and public office experience, and localness to be an advantage for candidates in intraparty competition (Dahlggaard, 2016; Jankowski, 2016).

<sup>5</sup>However, the direction of distance effects on the electoral success of candidates in intraparty competition was not statistically significant.



**FIGURE 2** Overview of ideological distributions of candidates on the GAL-TAN dimension in 2015 and 2019.

*Note:* The graphs show the distribution of the scores of all the electorate (light area) and each political party's voters (dark area) on the GAL-TAN dimension/scale. Source: own elaboration based on data from the CCS.

We coded gender as “1” for women and “0” for men, and we measured candidates' age in decades. Additionally, we included the squared term of age to capture a possible inverse U-curved effect. Incumbency is a dummy variable, coded as “1” for those candidates who were elected in the previous election or were MPs in the previous legislature, and “0” otherwise. We used several binary indicators to measure electoral, party and political experience (“1” for candidates with experience and “0” otherwise): (1) electoral experience in federal elections (for either the Upper or Lower Houses, coded as “0” for candidates standing for their first time); (2) party office experience at the regional and federal levels; (3) local political experience as a local councillor, member of the local government or city council major; (4) and regional (cantonal) political experience as a regional parliamentarian or member of the regional government. Additionally, living in the district may be beneficial for candidates running for election. We thus operationalized ‘localness’ as a scaled variable measuring the number of years a candidate had been living in the constituency with respect to her/his age, ranging from “0” (for candidates having never lived in the district they ran in) to “1” (for candidates living their whole life in that district).

Finally, we considered as control variables three characteristics of party lists in which each candidate appears. Firstly, we considered the position of an individual candidate on her/his electoral list, measured on a scale ranging from “0” (for the first candidate) to “1” (for the last candidate), given that the number of competing candidates varies from one list to another. In order to capture a possible inverse J-shaped effect of the ballot position, we also included its quadratic term (Söderlund et al., 2021). Secondly, we considered list length, which is related to district magnitude, and measures the number of candidates running from the party list of each candidate. Thirdly, list support

was considered as the percentage of total votes cast for the electoral list of each candidate in her/his district. A binary variable was introduced to control for the election date.

In our dataset, candidates (level 1) are nested in lists (level 2) within parties (level 3) in specific districts (level 4)<sup>6</sup> and across elections (2015–2019). Therefore, multilevel or mixed linear regression was considered to be the most appropriate method of analysis (Heck et al., 2014). We ran five multi-level linear regression models with the log transformation of preference vote share as the dependent variable to test our hypotheses on the effect of candidates' ideological position and personal attributes on their intraparty electoral success.

## RESULTS

We generated several regression models considering different sets of variables. Model 1 includes only our control variables (ballot position of candidates, their list length, and the percentage of total votes cast for their party list), for the purpose of comparison with subsequent models. Model 2 adds the absolute distance of candidates with respect to their party's median position on the two ideological dimensions. Model 3 additionally includes variables related to the personal attributes of candidates. Model 4 combines variables on personal attributes and ideological positions of candidates. Model 5 introduces the directional distance of candidates as an alternative to their absolute distance on the two ideological dimensions, also controlling for their respective party's median positions.<sup>7</sup> The regression coefficient results of the five multilevel models are shown in Table 4 and the average marginal effects in Figure 3.

In Model 1 and in subsequent models in Table 4, all our control variables were statistically significant. Candidates' ballot position has a J-shaped effect on their preference vote share. Additionally, and as could be expected, the length and size of candidates' party lists are negatively correlated with their vote winning, as the preference vote share each candidate receives decreases as both the number of co-partisan candidates on their party list and the total electoral support for their list increase at the district level. The results from Model 2 initially and partially support our expectations. Firstly, as shown in Table 4, the ideological position of candidates has a small effect on their respective preference vote share, as indicated by the improvement of model fit indices (AIC and BIC) and the increase in the value of  $R^2$  from Model 1 to Model 2. Secondly, the position of candidates on the left–right scale has a small effect on their electoral success in intraparty competition but it is nevertheless significant. Candidates deviating from their national party's median policy positions on the left–right scale receive slightly fewer preference votes than their party colleagues who are closer to them, as illustrated in Figure 4. Conversely, the ideological position of candidates on the GAL-TAN dimension is not statistically significant when explaining their preference vote share.

Model 3 includes the personal attributes of candidates, also controlling for their ballot position, the list length, and the percentage of the total votes cast for their party list. As the results from Model 3 show, candidates' personal attributes have a statistically significant impact on their respective preference vote share; the impact seems to be stronger than that of their ideological position, as indicated by the increase in the value of  $R^2$  and model fit indices compared to Models 1 and 2. The coefficients in Model 3 indicate that females, incumbents, and candidates with electoral, party and public office experience receive more preference votes than their male party colleagues, newcomers, and candidates without experience. Age has a curvilinear effect on preference vote share: preference vote share increases with the age of candidates until up to the late twenties (29 years old) and tends to decrease with age for older candidates. Localness, measured as the ratio of candidates' years living in the district with respect to their age, is positively associated with preference vote share.

<sup>6</sup>We ran four-level linear regression models, as Swiss parties usually field several electoral lists in the same district. Additionally, we ran cross-classified models, where candidates were nested within lists in a cross-classified combination of parties and districts. However, the respective results do not diverge.

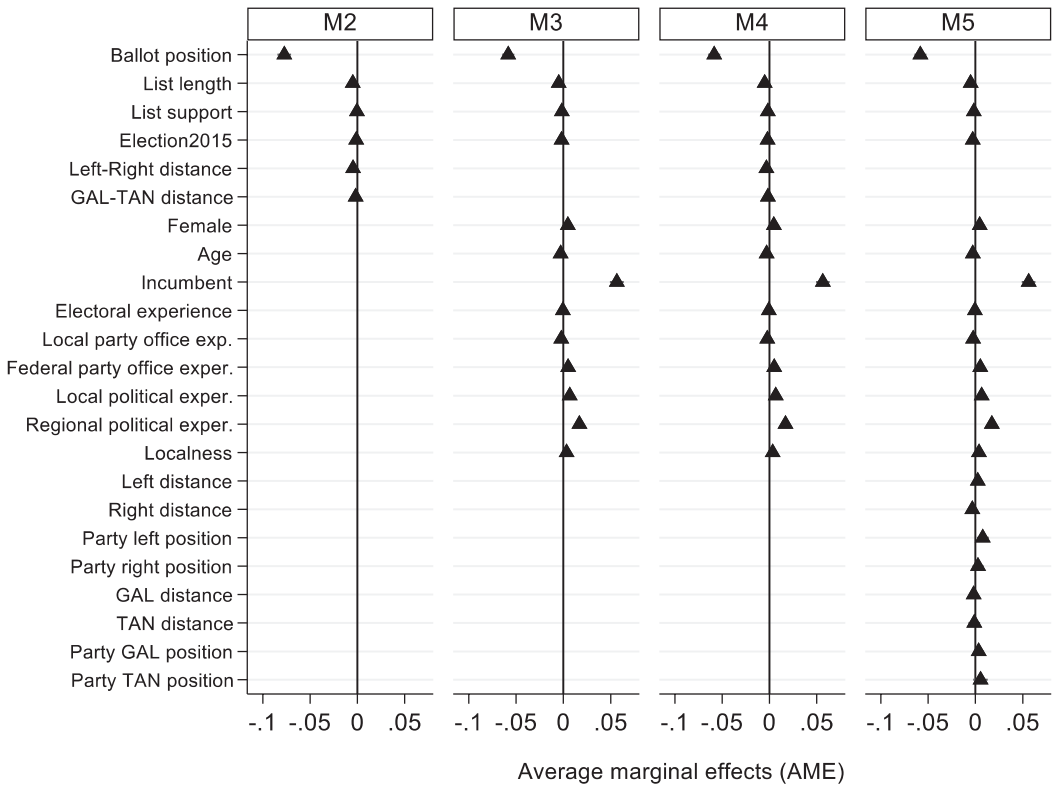
<sup>7</sup>In models 2, 4, and 5, the party's median position at the national level was used as the reference point for calculating the ideological distance of candidates on the two ideological dimensions. We also ran multilevel regression analysis, where our two main independent variables were calculated on the basis on the party's median position at district level. However, results were not statistically significant and are not displayed here.



**TABLE 4** Multilevel regression analysis. Effects of campaign focus, personal attributes, and ideological positions of candidates on preference vote share in 2015 and 2019 Swiss National Council elections.

	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)	Model (4)	Model (5)
Constant	-1.060***[0.038]	-1.024***[0.042]	-1.372***[0.087]	-1.313***[0.090]	-1.402**[0.098]
Ballot position	-2.048***[0.094]	-2.105***[0.098]	-1.487***[0.091]	-1.528***[0.094]	-1.524***[0.094]
Squared ballot position	1.321***[0.090]	1.373***[0.094]	0.946***[0.085]	0.985***[0.088]	0.983***[0.088]
List length	-0.064***[0.002]	-0.063***[0.002]	-0.063***[0.002]	-0.062***[0.002]	-0.062***[0.002]
List support	-0.006***[0.002]	-0.006***[0.002]	-0.021***[0.002]	-0.020***[0.002]	-0.021***[0.002]
Election_2015	-0.018[0.017]	-0.016[0.018]	-0.023[0.017]	-0.024[0.018]	-0.035[0.024]
Left-Right absolute distance		-0.058**[0.025]		-0.039*[0.023]	
GAL-TAN absolute distance		-0.023*[0.021]		-0.019[0.019]	
Female			0.055***[0.015]	0.058***[0.016]	0.057***[0.016]
Age			0.090**[0.037]	0.073*[0.039]	0.085**[0.039]
Squared age			-0.016***[0.004]	-0.014***[0.004]	-0.015***[0.004]
Incumbency			0.703***[0.041]	0.702***[0.043]	0.701***[0.043]
Electoral experience			-0.005 [0.016]	-0.007 [0.017]	-0.008 [0.017]
Regional party experience			-0.025[0.017]	-0.028[0.018]	-0.031*[0.018]
Federal party experience			0.054**[0.025]	0.062**[0.026]	0.064**[0.026]
Local political experience			0.089***[0.018]	0.083***[0.019]	0.083***[0.019]
Regional political experience			0.219***[0.021]	0.211***[0.022]	0.216***[0.022]
Localness			0.043*[0.023]	0.041*[0.024]	0.047*[0.024]
Left distance					0.031[0.025]
Right distance					-0.041*[0.024]
Party left position					0.097**[0.040]
Party right position					0.035[0.037]
GAL distance					-0.023[0.026]
TAN distance					-0.015[0.040]
Party GAL position					0.043[0.035]
Party TAN position					0.063[0.048]
Random effects					0.029
Var (district-party-lists)	0.162(0.022)***	0.161(0.022)***	0.222(0.024)***	0.222(0.025)***	0.224(0.026)***
AIC	3550.164	3279.217	2981.492	2775.554	2773.406
BIC	3609.899	3349.94	3100.544	2904.84	2937.952
R <sup>2</sup>	0.695***(0.465)	0.697***(0.463)	0.731***(0.438)	0.733***(0.436)	0.732***(0.436)
N	2,903	2,680	2,843	2,635	2,635

Note: Regression estimates and standard errors (in brackets) are shown. \*\*\*Significant at >P-value <0.01; \*\*Significant at P-value <0.05; \*Significant at P-value <0.10. Source: own elaboration based on data from the CCS.

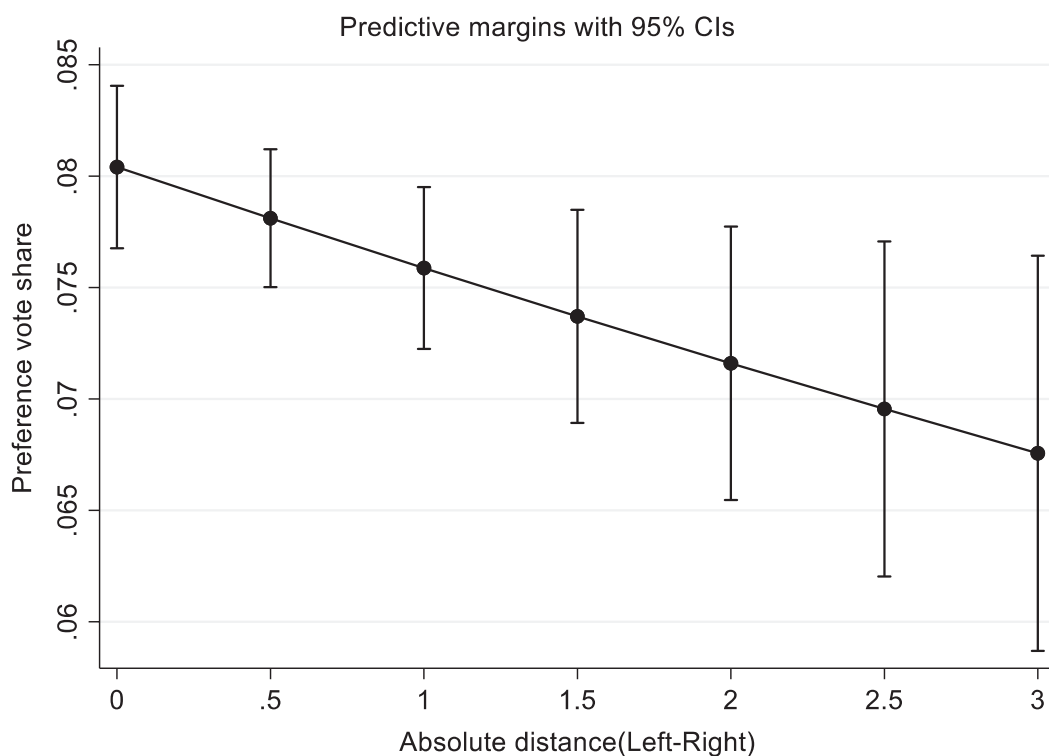


**FIGURE 3** Average marginal effects of candidates' personal attributes, and ideological positions on their preference vote share in 2015 and 2019 Swiss National Council elections.

Model 4 combines both sets of variables. It supports our previous findings regarding the relative importance of both candidates' personal attributes and their ideological position, and the robustness of our analyses. It confirms our Hypothesis 1: the results from Model 4 indicate that candidates' personal attributes have a stronger effect on their electoral success than their ideological position. Model 4 improved model fit indices (AIC and BIC), and the increase in the value of  $R^2$  was 0.03 points compared to Model 3. The results from Model 4 partially confirm our Hypothesis 2: they indicate that deviating from the respective party line has a small and negative impact on candidates' preference vote share, but the effect of candidates' ideological position is only significant on the left–right dimension.

To better understand the magnitude of the effects of candidates' ideological position and their personal attributes on preference vote share, we present (Figure 5) the marginal effects of significant predictors, all other independent variables included in Model 4 being held constant. Following the methodological choice of von Schoultz and Papageorgiou (2021) for the absolute distance of candidates on the left–right dimension, the first and third quartiles (Q1 and Q3) were used as anchor points. Figure 5 indicates that not all variables included in Model 4 have an equal impact on preference vote share. Moving from a party moderate position (Q1) to more deviating party position (Q3) decreases preference vote share by 0.2 percentage points. This can be compared to the marginal effect of incumbency. Being an incumbent has a positive effect of 7.6 percentage points on preference vote share. The attributes of candidates related to public office experience have more modest effects on their preference vote share. Political experience at the regional and local levels increases preference vote share by 1.8 and 0.6 percentage points, respectively. Being a woman has a positive effect of 0.5 percentage points on the preference vote share.

Coming back to our second research question (and H2), the results from Models 2 and 4 indicate that deviating from the party line has a negative effect on vote winning, but this is only significant on the left–right dimension. There are two possible explanations for these results. Firstly, intraparty



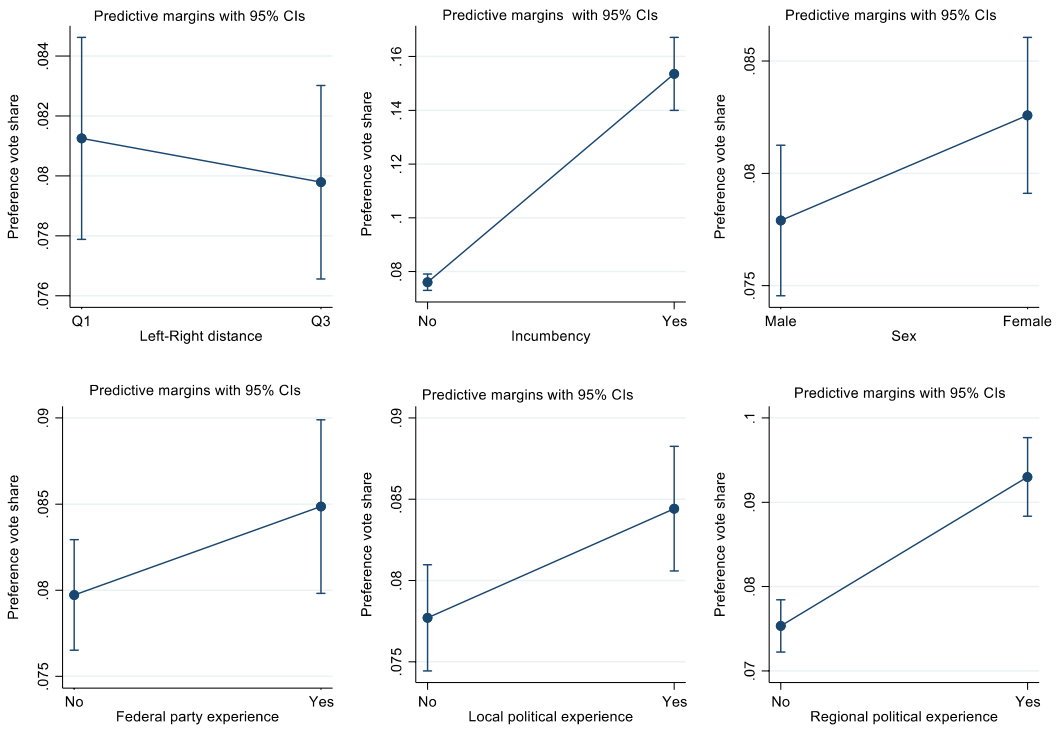
**FIGURE 4** Left–Right distance of candidates and preference vote share in 2015 and 2019 Swiss National Council elections.

differences on the left–right dimension are greater than on the GAL-TAN dimension, as illustrated in Figures 1 and 2. Secondly, although the Swiss party system experienced relevant changes in the last electoral processes, the left–right dimension may still be considered the dominant one for electoral competition, whereas the GAL-TAN cultural dimension might be more relevant for non-conventional political participation (Oesch & Rennwald, 2010; Bornschieer, 2015).

In Model 5, we used the directional distance of candidates' positions as an alternative measure to their absolute distance on the two ideological dimensions to test the effects of candidates' ideological position on their electoral success in intraparty competition. Candidates that lean more to the right than their party's median position received (slightly) fewer preference votes than their party colleagues aligned with their party's median position. Conversely, the effect of leaning more to the left or below/above their party's median position on the GAL-TAN dimension does not statistically significantly affect the preference vote share. The significant and negative effect of a candidate's more rightist position than the respective party's median could be explained by the polarized and multiparty Swiss system where a radical right party (SVP) is, by a large margin, the most voted for. In this context, leaning more to the right than the respective party position could be negatively perceived by voters. Additionally, in the 2015 and 2019 elections, parties focused their electoral campaign more on mobilizing their own respective electorate than on attracting voters from other parties (Bernhard, 2020).

## CONCLUSIONS

In most parliamentary elections in European democracies voters are allowed to show their preference (vote) for parties' candidates. Literature found evidence to support that candidates' personal attributes (such as gender, age, incumbency, and localness) have an effect on their electoral success in intraparty



**FIGURE 5** Marginal effects of Left-Right absolute distance of candidates, incumbency, sex, party and political experience on preference vote share in 2015 and 2019 Swiss National Council elections.

competition. Other contributions have also demonstrated that candidates' position on the ballot affects their preference vote share. Conversely, to what extent and how candidates' ideological position or political stance influences their success in intraparty competition has scarcely been explored.

This article contributes to the limited literature on the impact of candidates' ideological position on their intraparty electoral success by analysing the effect of candidates' personal attributes and political stance on intraparty competition in an open-list system with multiple preference votes. The Swiss open-list system constitutes an intraparty preference voting setting that creates strong incentives for candidates of the same party to compete against each other. In order to test our hypotheses, we used a unique dataset, built on the combination of candidate survey data (CCS) and the electoral results of individual candidates and their party, which had not been used before for these purposes.

Our results demonstrate that candidates' political stance (measured as the distance between their position and their party's median on the left-right and GAL-TAN dimensions) has a statistically significant though small impact on their preference vote share. These findings are in accordance with the very few previous studies on the topic—the two works on the Finnish open-list system (Isotalo et al., 2020; von Schoultz and Papageorgiou, 2021). Candidates closer to their party's median position on the left-right dimension receive more preference votes than their party colleagues deviating from it. The distance of candidates on the GAL-TAN dimension has no statistically significant effect on their preference vote share. Conversely, candidates' personal attributes are of greater importance for their electoral intraparty success: female candidates receive more preference votes than their male party colleagues; incumbents and candidates with electoral, party or public office experience are also advantaged in intraparty competition; and candidates' localness positively affects their preference vote share. Our results are also partially in line with the findings of a study on the Belgian flexible-list system with bloc preference voting (van Erkel, 2021), which also showed that candidates not deviating from their party position receive more preference votes than those deviating from the party line,

but this effect was not statistically significant. One explanation for the different results in our study may be that ideological differences among a party's candidates are smaller in Belgium than in Switzerland. Additionally, it should be considered that under the Belgian flexible system, the election of candidates is determined both by preference votes and party ordering of candidates, which incentivizes candidates to follow the official party line in order to keep/advance their position on the party list in subsequent elections. This is not the case in Switzerland, where deviating from the party's stance might be more important than in Belgium for election purposes.

Besides its contribution to an underdeveloped topic in research, this article also contributes to the literature showing that, in contrast to what some literature on intraparty competition suggests, IPV does not undermine the ideological cohesion of parties by favouring intraparty centrifugal competition. Moderate party candidates (in line with their party positions) are more successful than their party competitors with more radical positions. Furthermore, ideological competition between candidates of the same party has a marginal impact on their electoral success, the effect of candidates' position on the ballot being stronger than ideological intraparty competition. A final contribution of this article is that our results may have important implications for the linkages between voters, candidates and their parties, and for the behaviour of politicians concerning party discipline once they are elected.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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