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Critical Candidates: Elite Attitudes Toward the Functioning of Representative Democracy

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Abstract: Although citizens see representative democracy today almost unanimously as the most desirable form of government, the institutions of advanced industrial democracies gain steadily more criticisms. In this chapter, we pay attention to an (often) neglected perspective, namely the criticalness of political elites toward representative democracy. Drawing on the Belgian Candidate Survey, the results of our analysis suggest that candidates' attitudes depend on how integrated they are in the current representative democratic system. Especially outsiders to the political system are more critical and, at the same time, more supportive for direct democratic arrangements. These findings invite to reconsider the power relations between critical and noncritical candidates in a representative system that remains unchanged despite the criticisms of a considerable number of both citizens and candidates.

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Introduction: From Critical Citizens to Critical Candidates

Although citizens see representative democracy today almost unanimously as the most desirable form of government, the institutions of advanced industrial democracies gain steadily more criticisms (Dalton 2004; Rosanvallon 2011). In this chapter, we pay attention to a crucial though neglected perspective in this regard, namely the criticalness of political elites toward representative democracy. It is indeed one thing to have critical citizens in a representative democracy, but it is quite another one to have critical candidates. A critical attitude from candidates would raise serious questions on the functioning of a representative democracy: Might the very actors who are supposed to make it work depreciate it? How can that be? At the same time, the absence of a critical posture among candidates is equally questioning for at least two reasons. First, an important opinion discrepancy would exist between citizens and those who seek to represent them. Second, democracy improves through debates fueled by criticism and the absence of these criticisms – including from candidates – would mitigate democracy’s dynamism. As Akkerman (2003, 157) puts it: “shifting attention to areas of discord rather than of concord can be positive for democratic debate.”

For the last decades, scholars have intensively scrutinized the perspective of citizens and voters toward the evolutions of democracy (Pharr and Putnam 2000; Dalton and Welzel 2014). Norris (2011) speaks of ‘critical citizens’ whose attachment to democratic principles remains unbroken while they give a critical assessment of how democracy works. She qualifies the growing discrepancy between citizen expectations and government performance as ‘democratic deficit’. Such confidence erosion has serious consequences for the functioning of representative democracy and the party-voter-candidate triad that lies at the ground of this book. Political parties experience increasing difficulties to attract members and many citizens do no longer identify with them (Wattenberg 2000; Van Biezen et al. 2012). Voters, in turn, disengage so that elections turnouts drop and with them the popular support that parliaments can base their legitimacy on (Dalton 2014). Candidates, finally, adapt their strategies toward more personalized, professionalized, and sometimes even negative campaigns which comprise ambiguous effects on the citizenry (Schmitt-Beck 2007; Fenno 1978).

Another scholarship has scrutinized intensively political representatives, but with quite a different focus. Their profile (Vandeleene 2016), efficiency (Navarro et al. 2012), and selection inside political parties (Rahat and Hazan 2001) have been studied extensively. By contrast, less research focuses on candidates’ democratic preferences and their attitudes toward democracy. Existing studies mainly research the influence of electoral outcomes on candidates’ satisfaction with the current functioning of democratic regimes. Andreadis (2012) found, for example, that the percentage of Greek candidates overly satisfied with the functioning of democracy in their country varies depending on whether their party belongs to the majority or the opposition. In Sweden, Esaiasson et al. (2013) showed that representatives in privileged positions (members of an executive and chairs of parliament or committees) are more satisfied with the functioning of their country’s politics than backbenchers.

Most interestingly, Bowler et al. (2006) conducted a comparative research in Australia, Germany, the Netherlands, and New Zealand analyzing what conditions candidates’ satisfaction with how democracy functions in their country and to what extent this influences their attitudes toward electoral system reforms. They found that candidates who won the election or whose party entered the government develop a positive affect for current institutions and a resistance to change, which leads them to conclude that “winners are reluctant to change the rules that made them winners” (444). This is in line with the literature on strategic electoral reforms (Benoit 2004).

In the wake of this literature, the present chapter pursues the analysis of political elites' attitudes toward the functioning of democracy. Given the increasing criticism toward representative institutions in advanced industrial democracies and the considerable challenges this poses to their functioning, the objective of this chapter is to examine (1) whether beside 'critical citizens', there are also 'critical candidates' and if yes, (2) who these are and (3) if they support reforms toward more direct forms of government.

The Belgian case is of wider interest in this prospect. Not only because Belgium is a laboratory for understanding politics among European countries (Peters 2006), but especially due to the elite-driven and consociational character of its representative democracy (Schiffino 2003). In the Belgian 'partitocracy', finding political agreements is indeed the responsibility of elites and notably political party leaders (De Winter and Dumont 2006), while the consociational institutional structure relies on conceding something to every political party when searching for the famous Belgian compromise (Deschouwer 2012). In short, studying candidates in Belgium is of particular interest because elites' attitudes are of crucial importance for the functioning of the country's representative democracy.

What is more, the chapter's focus on candidates is interesting insofar as the literature usually deals with MPs or executive office holders. This research enlarges the scope and offers a more comprehensive view on political elites by studying at the same time all those who aspire to hold public office and not only those who eventually succeed in doing so.

The remainder of the text is organized as follows. We use the BCS data and proceed in four steps. We first identify in the literature the four main sources of criticisms to current representative democracies: (1) the incongruence between public decisions and preferences of the majority of the population, (2) the lack of participatory opportunities, (3) the declining relevance of political parties as democratic linkage, and (4) the general loss of citizens' confidence. Second, we analyze for each of them whether candidates at an aggregated level supported or rejected these criticisms. Since our results show discrepancies and indicate that there are both critical and noncritical candidates, we build a general index of candidate Criticalness allowing further differentiation. Thirdly, we look for differences in attitudes among candidates using regression analysis. Our findings suggest that candidate attitudes toward current representative democracy depend on how integrated they are in the current representative democracy (their insider profile vs. outsider profile) and that especially outsiders to the political system are those who are critical. Fourthly, we try to assess whether candidates' degree of criticalness is associated with a higher support for direct democratic arrangements. Our results suggest that critical candidates are indeed more sympathetic to the implementation of public consultation in Belgium. Eventually, we discuss these results to consider what the criticalness of some candidates adds to the current picture of critical citizens and the democratic deficit.

Candidates' Attitudes Toward Representative Democracy and Its Alternatives

Four Sources of Criticisms Toward Representative Democracies

Contemporary representative democracies face major challenges (Rosanvallon 2006; Papadopoulos 2013; Pharr and Putnam 2000). This is not new since democratic government has always been under critique and transformed over time (Manin 1997). In the current era, it is possible to identify different sources of criticisms toward Western representative democracies. For the purpose of our analysis, we group them in four main categories. Thereby, the aim is not to discuss their intrinsic validity but rather to scrutinize elites' attitudes toward

them and hence to see whether the surveyed candidates are equally critical or not. In this subsection, we briefly discuss each of the criticisms.

A first category of criticisms concerns the incongruence between public decisions and the interests of the majority of the population. One key principle underlying the contemporary use of elections is that officials represent those who voted for them and that, consequently, the political majority acts in the interest of the majority of the population (as opposed to the interest of privileged minorities or factions) (Held 2006; Hamilton et al. 1999 [1788]). Several scholars and political actors argue, however, that this principle is not seen as being achieved in many representative democracies. They describe politicians as being perceived as selfish and pursuing their material self-interest (Hay 2007) – both in qualitative and quantitative research analyzing popular attitudes toward politics (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002; Grossman and Sauger 2017; Braconner and Mayer 2015). These studies show that especially less favored categories of the population do not feel the government being run to the benefit of the majority. In the public sphere, two kinds of actors criticize the lack of congruence between the will of the people and the public decisions that are taken. On the one side, grassroots movements like the Indignados in Spain or Occupy Wall Street in the United States argue that current policy orientations are overwhelmingly in favor of powerful economical elites (Ancelovici et al. 2016). These discourses find echoes in academic works that stress the increasing political and social inequalities as well as the dominant role of business interest in the shaping of contemporary politics (Bartels 2016; Crouch 2005). On the other side, the incongruence criticism is also observable in the discourses of populist party leaders (Mudde 2007). They underline an opposition between what they call ‘pure’ people and ‘corrupted’ elites who govern. While all these criticisms are of course diverse and tap into different ideological traditions, they share the common claim that current decisions taken by representative governments do not reflect the interest of the majority of the population.

A second category of criticisms concerns the lack of participatory opportunities. While the core idea of representative democracy is the delegation of power (Manin 1997), certain actors and theorists have accused this focus on the electoral act only for being too narrow (Barber 1984). For participatory democrats, citizens have the capacities to and should be more involved in the political community (Held 2006). Individuals, they argue, only become citizens when they deliberate and take decision about the future of the polity (Pateman 2012). According to this perspective, putting a voting bulletin in the ballot box is not sufficient. Instead, citizens should be an active part at every stage of the decision-making process. Over the last decades, these theoretical reflections have inspired the spread of institutions that aim to include lay citizens in politics beyond elections (Fung and Wright 2003; Smith 2009). The most standardized forms are participatory budgeting processes (Sintomer et al. 2016), deliberative mini-publics (Grönlund et al. 2014), and direct democratic tools (Ruth et al. 2017). These mechanisms differ in their design and potential influence on final political decision, but they share a common aim that is to develop opportunities for participation. Moreover, some studies have shown that this trend corresponds to a growing desire in the population (Neblo et al. 2010; Jacquet et al. 2015; Inglehart 1997), underlining the criticism to the electoral representative model of democracy for insufficiently developing participatory opportunities.

The third category of criticisms is connected to the declining relevance of political parties as democratic linkage. Traditionally, political parties are considered the key connection between voters and decision-makers in representative democracies (Müller 2000; Duverger 1954; Sartori 1976). This holds especially true in a partitocracy like Belgium (Deschouwer 2012; Mair 2008). However, the centrality/importance of such actors is challenged nowadays. In a context where voters become increasingly volatile and where the prevalence of traditional

ideologies decreases (Inglehart 1997; Drummond 2006), political parties remain important players but their function changes. The number of citizens who identify with parties decreases—jointly with their number of members (Wattenberg 2000; Van Biezen et al. 2012; Scarrow et al. 2000). According to the cartel model, parties are nowadays mainly catch-all enterprises, close to the state in order to secure resources and their presence in governmental teams (Katz and Mair 1995; Scarrow et al. 2000). The democratic contribution of political parties is contested since they do no longer constitute the major glue between the state and civil society, thereby losing their function of mass mobilization. As noted by Katz and Mair (1995, 22), the transformation of political parties implies that “democracy ceases to be seen as a process by which limitations or controls are imposed on the state by civil society, becoming instead a service provided by the state for civil society”.

Finally, a last group of criticisms that can be considered a consequence of the three previous ones is the dramatically decreasing level of trust in representative government. Longitudinal analyses show declining confidence toward representative actors and institutions among inhabitants of Western democracies (Pharr and Putnam 2000; Dalton 20132014). The extent of this decline can vary depending on a number of conjectural factors like corruption scandals. Cross-national long-term comparisons show, however, that the breadth of this pattern is common to almost every Western democracy (Dalton 2005, 20132014; Abts et al. 2012). Political scientists have debated the source of this trust erosion intensely. One part of this debate focuses on the demand side, showing that value evolutions and growing expectations toward government as well as the changing nature of social capital have affected the level of trust in government (Inglehart 1997; Norris 2011; Putnam 1995). Another part has focused on the supply side by analyzing how factors like the spread of privatization, the rise of neoliberalism, and the imperatives of competitiveness in an era of globalization have shaped citizens global attitudes toward politics (Hay 2007).

Despite their different focus, all the quoted studies underline the salience of citizens’ criticalness for the future of representative democracies. Citizens’ increasing distrust in those who are supposed to represent them raises indeed serious questions on both the stability and legitimacy of political systems and the functioning of representative democracy.

How Critical Are Candidates?

These four sources of criticisms adequately mirror the major grounds of citizens’ skepticism toward contemporary representative democracies. To assess whether there also exist candidates who share these criticisms and can hence be considered ‘critical candidates’, we need to scrutinize their attitudes for each of these four dimensions. In order to measure this, the four categories of criticisms have been translated into five indicators in the BCS questionnaire that correspond to the following affirmations.

1. The congruence between public decisions and the preferences of the majority of the population has been translated into two indicators accounting for two poles in this dimension:
 - 1.1 *Legislative responsiveness*: “Legislation reflects the interest of the majority of citizens”.
 - 1.2 *Legislative independence*: “Special interests have too much influence on law making”.
2. *Participatory opportunities*: “Citizens have ample opportunity to participate in political decisions”.
3. *Relevance of political parties*: “Political parties are the essential link between citizens and the state”.
4. *Declining citizen confidence*: “Our democracy is about to lose the trust of the citizens”.

For each of these affirmations, candidates had to indicate on a five-point scale whether they ‘fully agreed’, ‘agreed’, were ‘neutral’, ‘disagreed’ or ‘fully disagreed’. As the results in Table 12.1 show, the BCS candidates are somewhat skeptical toward the legislative responsiveness and many of them (41.9%) tend to disagree that legislation reflects the interests of the majority of citizens. At the same time, almost half (49.5%) sees the legislation as independent and not being influenced too much by special interests. When it comes to participatory opportunities, the BCS candidates are again skeptical and more (46%) tend to think that citizens do not have ample opportunities to participate in political decision-making. In turn, another rough half (47.9%) sees political parties as the essential link between citizens and the state. Finally, when it comes to citizens’ alleged confidence decline, a clear majority (68.9%) of the BCS candidates disagree and do not think democracy is about to lose citizens’ trust.¹

Table 12.1: Candidates’ attitudes towards the critical dimensions of representative democracy (%)²

	Fully disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Fully Agree
1.1. Legislative responsiveness	11.10	30.90	32.10	24.20	1.80
1.2. Legislative independence (neg.)*	15.30	33.80	30.80	18.20	1.90
2. Participatory opportunities	14.40	31.60	23.50	24.80	5.70
3. Relevance of political parties	5.10	18.50	28.60	39.50	8.40
4. Declining citizen confidence (neg.)*	22.10	46.88	20.10	8.50	2.60

* These affirmations have been formulated negatively.

While these trends offer a detailed view on the way candidates perceive each of the criticisms usually addressed to representative democracy, these results are only of limited meaningfulness. Not only are neutrality scores often as high as the others are but also do tendencies in favor and against the different affirmations remain ambiguous with many candidates on both sides of the scale – pointing to the possible existence of both critical and noncritical candidates. Therefore, what we need to know for further assessment is whether the same candidates are critical, neutral, or positive for each of the five variables. To assess the comparability of candidates’ positions, we calculated Cronbach’s alpha coefficient that measures the internal cohesion of candidates’ evaluations across the five variables.³ The coefficient corresponding to 0.69, we concluded that there was sufficient evidence in the data to consider candidates’ assessment of the five dimensions as internally cohesive.

Since candidates tend to assess the five variables largely in the same way, we constructed a single overall indicator for candidates’ attitudes toward current representative democracy. All variables have been coded so that high values correspond to a positive attitude while a low value points to the opposite. By adding up each candidate’s scores of all five variables (ranging from 1 to 5) and after subtracting five points to facilitate the interpretation, we finally obtained a single overall indicator (ranging from 0 to 20) that allows evaluating candidates’ degree of criticalness toward representative democracy.

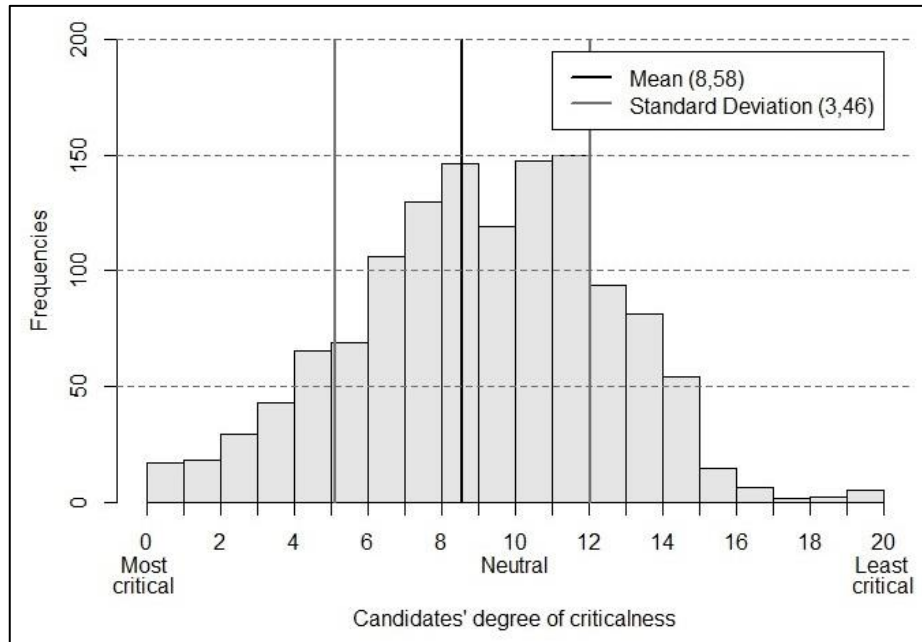
¹ Candidates running for the regional or the federal level of power share the same views. We tested indeed for discrepancies between candidates for the regional and federal elections but no significant differences were found between their attitudes. We ran Analyses of Variance for each of the five dimensions and p-values were all comprised between 0.11 and 0.57 (df = 1295). Moreover, we tested whether the federal-regional distinction changed something in the regression models of the next sections. It was neither significant nor did it change the measurements of other variables.

² The results were weighted based on party response rates and answer rates regarding the governance level (regional or federal) candidates were running for.

³ To standardize the directionality, we reversed the coding of indicators 1.2 and 4.

Figure 12.1 gives an overview on the distribution of candidates on this new variable. The histogram plot shows quite an important variety of opinions, the average candidate being slightly critical with a score of 8.6 on our scale (10 is the middle point, while 0 is “most critical” and 20 “least critical”). More importantly, it shows that beside those who are not critical, a substantive part of candidates are. Hence, there are not only ‘critical citizens’ in Belgium but also ‘critical candidates’. Now, the question is who these are?

Figure 12.1: Candidates’ degree of criticalness with representative democracy⁴



Who Are Critical Candidates: Insiders vs. Outsiders?

The reasons for a candidate to be critical can be quite diverse. They might share ordinary citizens’ attitudes and want to reform the current functioning of representative democracy. Alternatively, they might think, at least, that pretending so may be electorally rewarding. Now, what is the profile of these critical candidates? The degree of criticalness may be weaker if candidates own a secure position within the political system – in line with what has been observed for elites’ attitudes toward electoral reforms (Bowler et al. 2006) and their satisfaction with politics on the whole (Esaiasson et al. 2013). More specifically, we hypothesize that an important element distinguishing between critical and noncritical candidates is the degree to which a candidate has already been integrated in the political system, that is, if he is a so-called ‘insider’ or rather an ‘outsider’ (Bowler et al. 2006). Thereby, being an in- or outsider can mean different things. To capture these, we use three indicators.

First, we distinguish between professional and nonprofessional candidates, that is, those who indicated that politics is their sole and full-time occupation and those who indicated it is not. Insiders live off politics, just as Weber (1919) considered that politicians live from politics whenever it is their trade. They work as full-time representatives or in a political party. On the opposite, outsiders carry out political activities only on an occasional basis.

Second, we distinguish between candidates from traditional and nontraditional parties, that is, between those who have traditionally been in government and participated to power,

⁴ The results were weighted based on party response rates and answer rates regarding the governance level (regional or federal) candidates were running for.

and those who do not. Thereby, the classic mass parties of the traditional left-right axis without new forms of organization were considered as traditional, the others as nontraditional.

Third, we distinguish between candidates who already held an elected public office from those who did not. For this indicator, insiders were considered as candidates who have already been active at the heart of the representative system by exercising an office at the local, regional, national or European level. Outsiders have never held such a mandate.

Based on the expectation that outsider candidates are more critical toward the functioning of democracy because they are less integrated in the political system, our hypotheses⁵ read as follows:

H₁: No association exists between candidates' degree of criticalness and, respectively, their professionalism, their origin from a traditional party and the fact that they previously held an elected office.

H₂: Candidates that are professionals are less critical toward representative democracy.

H₃: Candidates who belong to a traditional party are less critical toward representative democracy.

H₄: Candidates who previously held an elected office are less critical toward representative democracy.

We test the potential association between these explanatory variables and the newly constructed response variable with four different regressions (i.e., Ordinary Linear Regression, OLS): one to account for each of the three indicators assessing the in- or outsider status of a candidate and one integrating all of them. For that purpose, the indicators were operationalized (binarily) as follows. As professional candidates, we considered those who indicated being a “full-time politician” as well as MPs, government and party employees (1: N = 224, 0: N = 994). As traditional party candidates, we considered those belonging to one of the three traditional Belgian party families born in the nineteenth century – socialists, liberals and Christian-democrats (1: N = 585, 0: N = 712). As previously elected candidates, we consider all those who had been previously elected at the local, regional, national or European level (1: N = 347, 0: N = 950). In addition to these theoretically derived variables, we added three control variables: gender, age (continuous), and educational level (in four categories). In the absence of previous studies with clear findings on this topic, we added these three socio-demographical variables as control variables without theory-driven hypotheses.

The results in Table 12.2 (*cf.* models 1, 2 and 3) indicate with at least 95% of confidence that being a professional candidate, coming from a traditional party, and having held elected office have a statistically significant relationship with candidates' degree of criticalness toward representative democracy. We can thus reject *H₁*, confirm *H₂*, *H₃*, and *H₄*, and conclude that, based on the positive sign of the coefficients, critical candidates are foremost political outsiders, i.e. non-professionals, from non-traditional parties and not having held elected office before. In addition, critical candidates tend to have a higher education level (at least Bachelor's). The effects of gender and education are ambiguous and cannot be associated with a clear tendency. The models' overall strength is underlined by highly significant *F*-statistics.⁶ Interestingly, while all three models are significant and contribute to explaining

⁵ Their numbering is consecutive throughout the entire chapter. *H₁* and *H₅* (*cf.* next section) are null hypotheses.

⁶ Regression diagnostics were conducted for the four models. In the data, there is no evidence for multicollinearity among the explanatory and control variables (VIF tests are all > 2). However, there is some evidence in model 2 and 4 for auto-correlation (Durbin Watson Statistics equal respectively 1.47 and 1.52). The models' residuals are normally distributed with skewness between -0.33 and 0.15, and kurtosis between 2.81 and 3.01. Since some

candidates' degree of criticalness, the highest amount of variability in criticalness can be explained by knowing whether a candidate comes from a traditional party or not ($r^2 = 18\%$). Even introducing all three explanatory variables in the same model does only add little to it. We did it in model 4 for comparative purposes, despite the fact that every explanatory variable captures on its own a different reality of the insider-outsider concept and should hence be considered separately.⁷

Table 12.2: OLS regression results for candidates' degree of criticalness

	Model 1: Traditional party		Model 2: Professionalism		Model 3: Elected previously		Model 4: Integrated	
	Estimated β_i	SE	Estimated β_i	SE	Estimated β_i	SE	Estimated β_i	SE
Intercept	6.17***	0.51	7.08***	0.56	7.32***	0.55	6.28***	0.51
Traditional party	2.77***	0.18	-	-	-	-	2.65**	0.18
Professionalism	-	-	0.65*	0.25	-	-	0.33	0.24
Elected previously	-	-	-	-	1.36***	0.21	0.59**	0.21
Age	0.15*	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.01
Gender (F=1, M=0)	-0.13	0.18	-0.11	0.20	-0.10	0.19	-0.15	0.18
Education (prim.)								
Secondary	0.29	0.41	0.71	0.45	0.58	0.44	0.24	0.41
Bachelor	0.94*	0.39	1.45***	0.43	1.29**	0.42	0.90*	0.39
Master	0.80*	0.37	1.29**	0.41	1.20**	0.40	0.61	0.38
	Mtp. $r^2 = 0.19$ Adj. $r^2 = 0.18$ $p(F-st.) < 2.2 \times 10^{-16}$ df = 1174		Mtp. $r^2 = 0.02$ Adj. $r^2 = 0.01$ $p(F-st.) < 3.8 \times 10^{-4}$ df = 1149		Mtp. $r^2 = 0.05$ Adj. $r^2 = 0.04$ $p(F-st.) < 6.3 \times 10^{-11}$ df = 1174		Mtp. $r^2 = 0.20$ Adj. $r^2 = 0.19$ $p(F-st.) < 2.2 \times 10^{-16}$ df = 1147	

p -values ($>|t|$): * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Critical Candidates and Direct Democracy

Knowing who critical candidates are, is one thing, knowing what they want is quite another. During the last decades, several political actors and scholars have proposed to use anticipatory tools to alleviate citizens' disenchantment with representative democracy (Geissel and Newton 2012). Among these proposals, direct democratic tools have been extensively discussed because they complement representative democracy with directly citizen-driven decision-making (Ruth et al. 2017). It is hence interesting to see what candidates think of the most prominently proposed alternative to purely representative democracy and to assess whether a difference of support exists between critical and non-critical candidates.

Based on the expectation that critical candidates are more skeptical toward representative democracy and hence potentially more open to more direct forms of democratic decision-making, our hypotheses read as follows:

H₅: No association exists between candidates' degree of criticalness toward representative democracy and their support for direct democratic decision-making.

H₆: Candidates who are more critical toward representative democracy are more supportive toward direct democratic decision-making.

heteroscedasticity was detected for models 1, 3 and 4 (NCV test p -values equaled respectively 6.57×10^{-6} , 6.30×10^{-6} , 0.03) only robust standard errors were reported (the largest difference corresponded to 4×10^{-5}).

⁷ Candidates' professionalism does no longer make a statistically significant difference in model 4. However, this can be due to the detected auto-correlation, cf. note 6.

To test these hypotheses, we use one more BCS question. We measure candidates' support for allowing citizens to initiate a nationwide popular consultation in Belgium by asking on a five-point scale whether they 'fully disagree', 'disagree', are 'neutral', 'agree', or 'fully agree' with the affirmation that "a certain number of citizens should be able to initiate a popular consultation on the federal level." The question is then operationalized as dependent variable with three categories (supporting, being neutral, or opposing a nationwide popular consultation) and a multinomial logistic regression is used to test its potential association with candidates' degree of criticalness toward representative democracy (operationalized as independent variable in this case). As control variables, we add again gender, age (continuous),⁸ and educational level (in four categories).

The results in Table 12.3 indicate with at least 99.9% of confidence that candidates' degree of criticalness has a statistically significant negative association with their support for a nationwide popular consultation. The probability to support a nationwide consultation indeed is much higher for critical candidates (78–89%) than for noncritical (7–18%).⁹ Equally, the probability to oppose a nationwide popular consultation is much higher for noncritical candidates (59–73%) than for critical (3–8%). This leads us to reject H₅, confirm H₆ and conclude that foremost critical candidates support direct democratic decision-making. Furthermore, difference in support for a nationwide consultation appears to be statistically significant for all control variables. The substantiveness of their differences varies, however.¹⁰

Table 12.3: Multinomial logistic regression results for candidates' support for a nationwide popular consultation

	Neutral vs. Supporting	Std. error	Neutral vs. Opposing	Std. Error
Intercept	4.72 ***	0.01	-0.50 ***	0.01
Degree of criticalness	-0.18 ***	0.03	0.11 ***	0.03
Age	-0.11 *	0.01	-0.03 ***	0.02
Age ²	0.01	0.01	0.01 ***	0.01
Gender (F=1, M=0)	-0.29 ***	0.08	-0.45 ***	0.07
Education (prim.)				
Secondary	0.31 ***	0.08	0.50 ***	0.06
Bachelor	-0.11 ***	0.07	0.24	0.05
Master	0.35 ***	0.06	0.64 ***	0.05

p-values (>|t|): * *p* < 0.05, ** *p* < 0.01, *** *p* < 0.001 – Akaike Inf. Crit.: 2217.077

What does critical candidates' support for direct democracy tell us? The literature on participatory democracy considers tools of direct democracy as an innovation (Smith 2009) and argues that the latter empower citizens and thereby improve democracy (Bouchard 2016). Criticalness of candidates toward representative democracy is in line with such findings if one considers that, by promoting direct democracy, critical candidates pay tribute to the critics of representative democracy. One should not forget that, at the same time, it might be precisely outsiders' external position to the political system that enhances their capacity to criticize representative democracy. Also, one should keep in mind that driving democracy back to its origins through direct arrangements can become problematic when the unmediated will of the

⁸ We added its square since we found the relation to be curvilinear.

⁹ The probability ranges for critical candidates correspond to a degree of criticalness of 0–4. For noncritical candidates, the probability ranges correspond to a degree of criticalness of 16–20.

¹⁰ While female candidates appear to be slightly less probable (21%) to oppose a nationwide consultation than male (25%), candidates under 30 are more probable (85–93%) to support a nationwide consultation than are those over 60 (3–10%). As for education, candidates with a Master's appear to be slightly more probable (24%) to oppose a nationwide consultation than those with a Bachelor's (23%), secondary (22%), or primary (18%) education.

people is supported by critical (populist) outsiders who deny the importance of institutional and constitutional restraints (Akkerman 2003, 156).

To Be or Not to Be Critical: What Stakes for Democracy?

At first glance, one might say that the presence of critical candidates alleviates the initially problematized democratic deficit, consisting in the discrepancy between citizens' expectations and government performance. Some elites indeed join the side of those whose expectations are not met. In view of such a prospect, critical candidates would be the ones who substantially hear critical citizens and resound their voice. In fact, one could even go one step beyond and consider that Hirschman (1970)'s idea of 'voice' applies to critical candidates and that their criticalness is an attempt to repair the relationship (Norris [2011] would say the democratic deficit) with critical citizens.

This idea is also close to the concept of 'tribunician' function by Lavau (1969). Parties and candidates who perform such a function offer some critical citizens the possibility of being defended and protected "against" the political system (Lavau 1969, 39). In such a perspective, critical candidates would be tribunician candidates disagreeing that legislation reflects the interests of the majority of citizens (41.90%) and that citizens have ample opportunities to participate in political decision-making (45.98%). Tribunician candidates would help in stabilizing the political system and the representative democracy. Indeed, following Lavau (1969, 19)'s conceptualization, the tribunician function leads to integration or neutralization of centrifugal forces.

This conclusion is, although pertinent, somewhat misleading on its own. Candidates' criticisms toward the functioning of representative democracy can be expected to put important challenges to the representative decision-making process and policy-making. While some critical candidates might question the system from within and think despite their criticisms that parties remain the essential link between citizens and the state (47.58%), others might want to challenge the system from outside and make even more radical (some say populist) claims for change (Akkerman 2003).

The lack of citizen support for the functioning of democracy has been proven to create problems for the political mobilization (citizen participation), legitimacy (popular consent) and stability (compliance with the rule of law) of a country (Norris 2011). Taken together with the considerations mentioned before, this raises at least three equally problematic questions on candidates' criticalness. First, what alternative do critical-outsider candidates put forward? Criticalness is constructive if it includes proposals for other democratic practices and experiences. Second, what would be the performance of candidates who are supposed to make a system work (if they are elected) while they do not support it? Third, seeing that even a large part of candidates is critical might worsen citizen's satisfaction of representative democracy and deepen the already present democratic deficit (if citizens do not feel supported, cf. the beginning of the discussion).

A predominant characteristic of noncritical candidates is their affiliation with a traditional party. It is among others the party discipline within traditional parties that can be expected to make candidates more compliant with the way democracy works. In a partyocracy, traditional parties have indeed developed as so-called 'cartel parties' (Katz and Mair 1995) who sought to remain in power by limiting political competition to managerial issues and thereby limiting criticalness as a whole. The dependency on the political system of professional candidates, who are previously elected candidates (living from and not for politics, [Weber 1919]), is

congruent with the process of cartelization. In this sense, candidates' criticalness might above all come with their independence from this cartelization.

Let us stress that our point is not to justify the change of current democratic institutions, nor to call on voting for those who want to. Indeed, one could validly argue that noncritical insider candidates come legitimately to power because citizens elect them. However, our findings invite to reconsider the domination of traditional parties facing critical candidates. By and large, representative democracy does not change despite criticism among a considerable number of both citizens and candidates. Is criticalness an answer to the democratic deficit? It is more certainly a way of improving democracy, the only political regime by now that has integrated criticism as an incentive for change.

Conclusion

Democracy is seen today almost unanimously as the most desirable form of government, yet the functioning of its institutions enjoy steadily less confidence. In this chapter, we have shown with the BCS database that this paradox, which has been observed for citizens over decades, does also hold for a significant part of electoral candidates. The findings of our analyses indicate that especially candidates who are outsiders to the representative democracy, i.e. nonprofessional, from nontraditional parties and without previous electoral mandate, are more critical toward the functioning of democracy.

This chapter represents one of the first attempts to tackle the critical attitudes of political elites toward representative democracy. It mainly focused on the existence of critical candidates in the Belgian context, and the relation with the insider-outsider profile. However, this emerging research area warrant further inquiry in order to deeply understand the origins and the consequences of such a critical posture. Three directions of investigation could be envisioned.

First, the practical consequences of the critical orientation could be investigated. Our research is based on an elite survey with Belgian electoral candidates. It provides insights into what political elites think about the functioning of the current representative system. Nevertheless, our study remains silent on what candidates actually do when they are (or not) critical. Research dealing with the candidates' behaviors are then needed to analyze how critical opinion is translated (or not) into political actions inside and outside democratic institutions. The reactions of noncritical political elites warrant also research to investigate whether the political system reacts to the development of such criticisms among political elites.

Second, we have adopted a synchronic approach of the degree of criticalness but more dynamic and diachronic analysis based on evolutions over time could also be developed. Do candidates change their mind, and if so, are these changes affected by election results and government participation? One could indeed expect critical candidates gaining responsible posts to become less critical toward the functioning of representative democracy. In order to test this hypothesis, a longitudinal research design would require both pre- and post-election survey research to analyze changes induced by election and government participation. These investigations could furthermore contribute to the analysis of the shift from an outsider position to an insider position. To what extent does exercising power change political elites? At individual (candidates) and meso (political parties) levels of analysis, is it still possible to have a critical position when being in office? This could also initiate a debate about the distinction between traditional and nontraditional parties. After how much time in office is a party no longer considered as a traditional one?

A last avenue for promising research concerns the link between critical candidates and critical citizens. This chapter is based on an analogy between citizens' and elites' attitudes toward the criticisms of current representative democracy. However, the link between both types of critical actors deserves more attention. Do critical citizens feel represented by critical candidates? Moreover, how do citizens perceive candidates' critical posture whereas these candidates compete to exercise power in the current democratic system?

The stakes for these questions to be resolved are high. Not only is it a matter of finding how to alleviate the already known democratic deficit between citizens and elites, but also about reinvigorating democracy, representative, or participatory, through constructive criticisms from both citizens and elites.

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