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### The attractiveness of local and national list labels

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**Dodeigne, Jérémy, Min Reuchamps & Vincent Jacquet. 2019. “The attractiveness of local and national list labels: the role of socio-economic inequalities on the success of electoral lists”. *Local Government Studies*. Online first.**

## **Introduction**

The attractiveness of national parties at the local level is a widely discussed issue in electoral studies. Back in the 1960s, Rokkan (1966) hypothesized the full nationalization of local politics. According to him, this process is an inevitable consequence of the process of modernization with the increasing extension of suffrage and the development of mass-party organizations. More precisely, the industrialization of economy – and the conflicts it triggered in municipalities in terms of national cleavages – developed an electoral ground for national political parties. These parties offered electoral alternatives to the ‘old’ politics of notables in local elections. As they were competing on the new political cleavages, they better represented the distinct segments of societies. The urban areas were amongst the first to be affected by the process of nationalization of local politics. Later, the incremental modernization of rural municipalities as well as the spread of socialists and worker unions’ ideas to the countryside ultimately resulted in a similar nationalization of the peripheral areas. Overall, the process of modernization intensifies “the conflicts within the communes and made it impossible to retain the traditional system of single list voting for purely local lists” (Rokkan 1966, 251).

Nevertheless, many contemporary studies show that far from declining, local lists have even been growing in importance in several countries (Bäck 2003; Wille and Deschouwer 2007; Kjaer and Elklit 2010b; Steyvers et al. 2008; Ennser-Jedenastik and Hansen 2013). Most European local elections are characterized by the presence of both national and local lists (Boogers and Voerman 2010; Boogers 2008; Soós 2008). There is an interest in voters’ behaviour *for* the local and not only *against* the national (Marien, Dassonneville, and Hooghe 2015).

Rokkan’s prediction is not thus – systematically – observed in contemporary European local politics. Does this necessarily imply that we should reject the underlying hypotheses? This article argues the opposite. We show that a municipality’s socio-economic diversity – and the cleavages it triggers – remains a strong predictor of the success of national parties in local elections. National lists perform better in municipalities characterized by a strong socio-economic cleavage where voters ask for partisan and ideological choices. On the opposite, in the most egalitarian municipality, local ‘notable’ parties remain attractive to the voters with a localist doctrine promoting ‘consensual politics’ and ‘local politics of harmony’.

This article tests the nationalization hypothesis on an original dataset of 1.012 lists in Belgium (Wallonia), a polity characterized by an exceptionally large number of local lists according to European standards (Reiser, 2008). The structure of the article is the following. We first lay the theoretical foundations of this research before developing the hypotheses that are then tested on the empirical data and discussed in light of the literature on the nationalized local elections. The article concludes with a more general reflexion about the influence of socio-economic variables on electoral dynamics.

## **1. Socio-economic opposition and nationalized local politics: the hypothesis**

Following Rokkan's nationalization hypothesis developed in the late 1960s, an increasing literature has been analysing the influence of socio-economic diversity on the nationalization of (local) politics. At almost the same time, Hjellum (1967) had already developed the same kind of reasoning analysing Norway. He also emphasized the effects of modernization of economy – and the socio-economic diversity it caused – as a prerequisite for the penetration of national parties into the realm of local politics. Studying the nationalization of the British local party systems, Ashford (1975) also referred to the process of industrialization as one of the main factors explaining the presence and increasing electoral attractiveness of the Labour Party and the Conservatives in British councils.

This impact of socio-economic dynamic on local elections is also connected to issue of municipality size. According to Dahl and Tufte (1973), there is a correlation between municipality size and the type and number of parties competing in local elections. First, the diversity and complexity of issues at stake increases with municipalities size because the inhabitants of larger municipalities are socio-economically more heterogeneous than in smaller ones (Dahl and Tufte 1973, 101). Consequently, bigger municipalities offer a larger electoral market for additional parties. Second, because ideologically loaded conflicts increase with the size of municipality, local branches of national parties are more likely to stand for their ideology in larger municipalities. On the opposite, local lists best fit in the less conflictual electoral arena of smaller municipalities (Dahl and Tufte 1973, 98).

In this respect, Copus and Erlingsson (2012) have discussed two rival models about the role of local and national political parties along local patterns of conflict perception and resolution. On the one hand, local lists tend to promote a localist doctrine which emphasized 'consensual politics' and harmonic local governance that cannot be reduced to national political cleavages (Holtmann 2008; Boogers and Voerman 2010). According to Copus and Erlingsson (2012), this nonpartisan conception of local politics is more attractive in smaller municipalities

– with lower partisan conflictual interests – where local lists are seen “natural born loudspeakers” of consensual politics (Holtmann 2008, 14). On the opposite, with the increasing diversity of interests in bigger municipalities, there is an attraction for national parties to compete and stand for specific rival interests, i.e. parties as aggregators of segments of society instead of representing the society as a whole. In the same kind of reasoning, Newton (1982, 201) stated that “the larger and more urban the authority the more likely it is to have not just a party system, but also a developed and competitive party system”, i.e. a nationalized party system. Directly inspired from Dahl and Tufte and Newton’s theory, Kjaer and Elklit (2010a) recently tested and confirmed that the larger the municipality, the greater a national label is attractive. But as explicitly acknowledged by these scholars, municipality size is not the causal factor *per se*, but is a proxy indicator of the municipality’s socio-economic diversity and the conception of roles attached to local and national lists. Overall, the attractiveness of local and national party labels reflects the type of electoral markets: voters seek to elect representatives – other than the ‘old notables’ – in line with the degree of *socio-economic diversity* of modern local societies. Various scholars have, however, used municipalize size as a proxy for the socio-economic heterogeneousness of a local society.

We propose to contribute to this field of research by analysing directly the effect of socio-economic diversity on national and local lists’ success. We hypothesize that in municipalities with low socio-economic diversity (hence a more homogenous population), local labels will perform better than lists with national labels. As mentioned by Holtmann (2008, 14), the way citizen conceive the local political arena is based on an ardent desire for social harmony of one local community with dense and intensive interaction. This conception is also connected with emotional identification with ‘our village’ and ‘our community’. These different meanings attached to municipal politics may increase the attractiveness on list labels referring to the harmony and the homogeneity of the local community instead of ideological and agonistic cleavages.

On the opposite, as a mediator between society and its political system, national list labels become increasingly successful when socio-economic diversity increases – as the heterogeneousness of its inhabitants – and would prevail over local labels when inequality is the highest. National list labels are perceived beyond the mere local interests and reflect greater trans-municipal issues. In that case, voters appeal to national parties that are already familiar ‘political party’ dealing with problems alike those discussed during regional and national elections (Schaffner, Streb, and Wright 2001; Schaffner and Streb 2002; Garlick 2015). Finally, one can expect that lists covering a reference to both the local level and a national party (i.e.

mixed label lists) can electorally achieve the best of two ‘worlds’. As a result, we expect them to perform better than other lists, irrespective of the degree of diversity. Accordingly, our hypotheses explicitly refer to an interactive effect of the socio-economic equality of society on the success of list labels:

**H1:** Local list labels will perform better than national labels when a municipality’s socio-economic inequality is at its lowest score. This electoral advantage will, however, decrease when inequality increases. At the maximum value of inequality, national labels perform better than local lists.

**H2:** Lists with mixed labels perform better than other labels, irrespective of the degree of inequality.

## **2. Data and methods**

### ***2.1. Case study: Wallonia in Belgium***

This article analyses the 2012 Walloon local elections. Belgium, and Wallonia in particular, is one of the countries presenting the highest presence and success of local lists (Reiser 2008, 288). It can therefore be considered as an “extreme case” in Europe which is of particular interest to test causal mechanisms (Gerring 2001). Indeed, Wallonia presents a large number of local lists despite well-established and deeply rooted national parties at the local level (Deschouwer 2012). On the nominal dimension, there were actually more list with a local label (n=494) or a mixed label (i.e. national labels associated with local labels, n=40) than with a national party label (n=478). Furthermore, Wallonia presents interesting variance on our main variables of interest. First, the index of inequality of the 262 municipalities vary greatly as the following boxplot clearly shows that list labels are present on the whole spectrum of their index of inequality. Second, the four main Walloon national parties were all in government at elections time either at the regional (the Socialists, Christian Democrats and the Greens) or at the national levels (the Liberals). The absence of national parties in the opposition limits the potential of second-order effects (Reif and Schmitt 1980) where voters tend mostly to sanction government national parties and favour opposition (local and national) parties. This specific political context permits to better test our hypotheses while limiting ‘noise’ from other causal factors.

[Insert Figure 1 about HERE]

Before moving to the presentation of data, we briefly discuss some of the Walloon features of local governments and its local party systems. First of all, the ‘Code of local

democracy and decentralization' (that regulates local politics and elections in Wallonia) stipulates that lists are identified by one acronym. The latter is composed of maximum 12 letters or figures. According to article L4112-5§2 of the Code, the acronym is formed of initials of all or some of the words that compose the full denomination of the list. Furthermore, political parties represented in the Walloon regional parliament may request to forbid the use of some names<sup>1</sup>. Beside these limitations, local lists have much freedom for choosing their names, contributing to the observed large diversity in the names of the lists. The electoral system is the same for all municipalities: i.e. a proportional system with semi-open lists where the voter can either vote for the list or one or several candidates on the same list. The attribution of seats is based on the *Imperiali formulae* while there is a single electoral district that corresponds to the limits of the municipality (Bouhon and Reuchamps 2012). The number of seats to be elected in each municipality is proportional to the size of the municipality.

## **2.2. Data collection and operationalization**

We gathered an original dataset on the 2012 local elections in Wallonia. Our dataset is comprehensive and includes all the 1.012 lists that presented a valid list of candidates in the 262 Walloon municipalities in 2012. The dataset includes variables at both the list and the municipality levels (list label, composition of list, presence at the previous 2006 local elections, amateurism of the list, incumbent local majority, degree of urbanization, degree of inequality, size of the municipality, and type of party competition – including absolute majority). Data collection combined official information available online as well as data collected via interviews conducted with the leader of the lists (Dandoy et al. 2013). In this section, we present the operationalization of these variables as well as the descriptive statistics of our main variables of interests.

Our dependent variable is thus the electoral performance of list labels that we measure in terms of the percentage of votes obtained by a list at the 2012 local elections. In terms of operationalization, we are interested in national, local and mixed list labels. Labels should be taken seriously in their own right as signals sent to the voters. When local branches of national parties make all efforts to distinguish themselves from national labels, they make a strategic choice in sending a nonpartisan signal to the voters during the campaign. The literature has clearly established that the choice of a list label is nothing but neutral. Studies since Downs'

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<sup>1</sup> As in the previous elections, national political parties have asked to protect the use of their previous names such *POB* ("Belgian Worker Party"), which is the former name of the socialist party. Names as *Ecolo-Vert* ("Ecolo-Green") were also forbidden because it is ambiguous with the current name of the green party, *Ecolo*.

seminal work (1957) pointed out that parties provide information shortcuts to voters since they have little incentive to acquire costly information about candidates. List labels are one of the primary shortcuts that political parties offer to voters (Lau and Redlawsk 2001; Kam 2005). They provide them with information about their identity (Raymond and Overby 2014) and their ideology (Cox and McCubbins 1993; Aldrich 1995; Snyder and Ting 2002). In fact, Ashworth and Bueno de Mesquita (2008) have shown that party labels serve an informative purpose for voters and such labels should therefore be the result of a meaningful choice from candidates.

All local labels are labels that do not use national labels while national labels are one of the labels used (and legally protected) by the main political parties represented in the regional Parliament of Wallonia or in the Belgian Federal Parliament (Reuchamps et al. 2013; Reuchamps et al. 2015). We also included a mix category which adopt national labels in combination with a reference to local politics (such as the name of the municipality or a reference to local issues)<sup>2</sup>. The three categories present a large variance in electoral score with a minimum of 0.3 percent and a maximum of 100 percent. The mean is of 25.9 percent with a standard deviation of 19.9 percent. Considering the structure of the data (1.012 electoral lists are nested in the 262 municipalities), we specified a multilevel linear regression with a varying intercept (i.e. the average score of electoral lists) and a varying slope for the list labels according to the varying degree of the 262 municipalities' index of inequalities. In this regression equation,  $\beta_{0j}$  is the intercept,  $\beta_{1j}$  is the regression slope for our main explanatory variable of interest (List labels),  $\beta_{2j}$  to  $\beta_{9j}$  are the regression slopes for the control variables, and  $\varepsilon_{ij}$  is the usual residual error term. The subscript  $j$  is for the municipalities ( $j = 1 \dots J$ ) and the subscript  $i$  is for lists ( $i = 1 \dots n_j$ ). Because we hypothesized that the regression coefficient  $\beta_{1j}$  *List label* (a list-level variable) varies across municipalities, we use the explanatory variable  $\gamma_{01}$  *Index of inequality<sub>j</sub>* (a municipal-level variable) to explain how list labels affect electoral performance differently according to a municipality's socio-economic characteristics<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> We decided to extend the coding of national labels to the *The Workers' Party of Belgium (PTB)* because, even though they did not have parliamentary representation in 2012, they were receiving increasing national media attention reflecting their performance in electoral surveys. As a matter of fact, the PTB did obtain both regional and federal parliamentary representation at the 2014 joint elections.

<sup>3</sup> Caution in reading our multilevel regression results is warranted as omitted variables remain a potential concern, as our research design is not based on randomization or quasi-randomization.

$$\begin{aligned}
\text{Electoral performance}_{ij} = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{List label}_{ij} + \beta_2 \text{ENP}_j + \beta_3 \text{Mayor}_{ij} \\
& + \beta_4 \text{Complete List}_{ij} + \beta_5 \text{List XP}_{ij} \\
& + \beta_6 \text{Elected officials from other tiers}_{ij} \\
& + \beta_7 \text{Size of the Municipality}_j + \beta_8 \text{National resources}_{ij} \\
& + \beta_9 \text{Incumbent majority}_{ij} + \varepsilon_{ij} \\
& + \beta_{10} \text{Index of inequality}_j + \beta_{11} \text{List label}_{ij} \times \text{Index of inequality}_j
\end{aligned}$$

In this article we opted for a direct measure of inequality, instead of relying on a proxy (e.g. municipality size used in former studies but it correlates weakly with the index of inequality: 0.56). The main reason is that socio-economic inequality directly tackles Rokkan’s explanation of the attractiveness of national labels in local politics: “[i]n the more equalitarian primary economy communities of the South and the West the forces of territorial defence remained strong and vigorous and resisted effectively the pressures towards a polarization of local political life” (1966, 254). We use the index of income asymmetry published by the Federal Public Service Economy where lower values indicate greater equality between inhabitants and vice-and-versa for greatest values. The index of socio-economic inequality oscillates between 0 and 34, mean being of 16.5 while the standard deviation equals 6.5. For the municipality size, we use the number of voters registered at elections time. Municipality size varies importantly from 1.098 up to 245.701 inhabitants (mean: 13.979 and standard deviation: 22.586). Because of the larger number of small to medium-size municipalities, the variable is strongly skewed to the left. The variable was thus log-transformed<sup>4</sup>.

Finally, our models control for variables considered as influential in the list’s electoral success: incumbency effects, inter-party competition, degree of urbanization, size of the municipality, professionalism of the list’s availability of national resources. First, we control for the incumbency effects at two levels. On the one hand, at the municipality level, we control whether or not the list was part of the incumbent majority (either as a single-party majority or as part of a majority coalition) at the time of the elections in 2012. A dummy variable is created where the 354 lists in office at the moment of the 2012 elections. On the other hand, at the individual level, a dummy variable that distinguishes lists where the mayor was present as a candidate from other lists. Out of 262 mayors, 242 were once again candidates in the local elections, i.e. about one quarter of all lists (23.9 percent). We also controlled for the presence

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<sup>4</sup> The interpretation of the results for log-transformed variable can be summed up as a municipality twice bigger is associated with (beta of the municipality size variable\*ln (200/100)) change in electoral performance.

of elected officials at another level of government. A dummy variable distinguishes the presence on the lists of MPs as well as members of cabinets from other tiers of government (regional, federal and European). Finally, we can expect different electoral results because of the different resources available to the lists during the electoral campaign. In particular, local branches of national parties can benefit from the experience and material support of the national headquarters (in terms of staff, financial assets production of common campaign materials, etc.). Therefore, we control for list's availability of national resources by identifying the organizational tie of all the 1.012 lists with a party local branch. For that identification, we rely on the composition of the list in terms of party members present as candidates (Dandoy et al. 2013).

Second, we also control for the degree of inter-party competition which has direct mechanical effect on list's electoral performance: the larger the number of lists in competition, the lower the percentage of votes each of them can be obtained. This effect is, however, directly connected to the electoral strength of electoral lists. In this respect, a traditional way to measure inter-party competition is the effective number of parties, based on Laakso and Taagepera (1979)'s formula. Although it constitutes a post-electoral indicator, in the absence of local surveys in all 262 municipalities, it is the only reliable measure available. Besides, it is fair to assume that in most municipalities electoral results reflect the perceived electoral strength during the electoral campaign in the eyes of the voters and the parties. This trade-off is anyway much better than relying on the absolute number of parties. Indeed, whereas the means of the 'absolute' number of lists per municipality is 4.5 lists, there is on average 2.9 'effective' lists. Therefore, a great proportion of 'absolute' number of lists perform extremely poorly not representing genuine electoral competitors.

Third, the models control for the degree of professionalization of the list based on two indicators. A first very direct indicator is the completeness of the list in terms of candidates. A dummy variable is created to distinguish lists presenting as many candidates as the number of available seats (complete lists are coded 1 and incomplete lists are coded 0). A study on Wallonia (Vandeleene, Dodeigne, and Jaminet 2013) has demonstrated that most independent local lists are complete lists (n=827) while incomplete (n=185) lists present always a significant proportion of the vacancy of candidates (two thirds of the incomplete lists have less than 50 percent of candidates). Therefore, this dummy can be used as a proxy to control for minor and 'folkloric' lists that do not seriously compete with office-seeking goals but rather because of the low legal prerequisites. It distinguishes therefore more 'professionalized' lists that genuinely aim – at least in a formal way by presenting a list full of candidates – to obtain or

increase their representation in the council after the elections. Another indicator is the presence of the list at the latest 2006 elections. It is correct that to assume that new lists are not necessarily amateurs because a lot of lists are reconfiguration of former distinct list and past alliances. A dummy variable is created to distinguish lists that were not remotely present in 2006 (even after the change of name or through new alliances). This was possible thanks to data collected via interviews with leaders of the lists.

[Insert Table 1 about HERE]

### 3. Results

The results of the multilevel linear model are presented in Table 2 that assessed the impact of list labels – according to municipalities’ degree of socio-economic inequality – on a lists’ electoral performance. We first discuss the regression coefficients from table 2 while we discuss the substantial empirical results based on the plot of the interactive effects shown in figure 2 (marginal effects of the type of lists according to the socio-economic diversity of a municipality).

Firstly, in table 2, the coefficients of the local and mixed labels indicate a statistically significant enhancing influence on a list’s electoral performance *vis-à-vis* national list labels. As predicted by our two hypotheses, the interaction of local labels with the index of socio-economic inequality is, however, negative. The enhancing electoral performance of these local labels declines, therefore, in magnitude as inequality increases. In other words, hypothesis H1 is confirmed: local list labels perform better than national labels when a municipality’s socio-economic inequality presents lower score. And this electoral advantage decreases when inequality increases. On the opposite, the interactive term of mixed labels is not significant confirming that the positive association of this mixed list labels with stronger electoral performance – *vis-à-vis* national label lists – are always present, irrespective of the degree of socio-economic diversity. These results also confirm our hypothesis H2.

Secondly, to truly assess the conditional association of one variable on the other, we plot the interaction and marginal effects following the procedure recommended by Brambor et al. (2006, 74). Figure 2 shows how the marginal effect of the list labels on a list’s electoral performance varies with the index of inequalities. The X-axis displays variation in the index of inequality, the Y-axis presents electoral advantage respectively for the mixed labels (on the left) and for the local labels (on the right) *vis-à-vis* national list labels in percent. The histogram at the bottom of the figure shows the distribution of observations along the axis while the dotted

line indicates a zero-sum game electoral advantage.

[Insert Table 2 about HERE]

Figure 2 clearly shows that local list labels have a strong enhancing influence on a list's electoral performance when socio-economic inequality is at its lowest score. Hence, in the more equalitarian municipalities, the electoral performance of local label lists has an average effect of 16.3 percent (12.0 – 20.4 percent in the 95% confidence interval). Yet, as expected in H1, this electoral advantage declines when the socio-economic diversity increases. Where the index of socio-economic inequality is larger (26.0), local labels no longer have a significant enhancing impact on electoral performance *vis-à-vis* national label lists (i.e. the confidence intervals overlapping the null effect on the graph). Contrary to our expectations, national list labels are never electorally advantaged, even in the most unequalitarian municipalities (i.e. the marginal effects never become negative outside confidence intervals).

Above all, figure 2 confirms that mixed labels do have a positive association with a list's electoral performance (*vis-à-vis* national labels). Because of the large confidence intervals, we must conclude that the mixed labels' effects are constant and do not decrease (nor increase) when inequality varies. Yet, the confidence intervals crossed the zero-dotted line when the index of inequality is greater than 22.0, the mixed labels ceased then to be an electoral assent. In other words, H2 is almost fully verified: the choice of a mixed label does provide a positive influence *vis-à-vis* the national label, irrespective of changes in municipalize size. However, it does not provide such positive association where inequality is particularly high (i.e. higher than 22.0), beyond this limit there are no significant differences observed with a list flagging a national label.

[Insert Figure 2 about HERE]

In order to fully grasp the substantive implication of the findings, Berry et al. (2012) suggested analysing the number of observations that falls under the observed marginal effects (based on the histogram of observations indicated at the bottom of the graph). In this respect, 87.5 percent of the mixed labels and 87.8 percent of local labels in competition at the 2012 Walloon elections fall in the range covered by the positive marginal effects (respectively a score smaller than 22.0 and 28.2 points on the index of socio-economic inequality). This empirical reality strongly confirms that both mixed and local lists are a winning vote-seeking strategy for lists in a context of stronger equality while these enhancing effects *vis-à-vis* national list

labels decrease when inequality increases. Yet, contrary to expectations it never becomes a losing strategy for local labels even when inequality is at the highest score. Finally, we also had to check for possible differentiating results by political parties. Once we take into account individual – national – parties (as a categorical variable in the model), the results are a little bit more contrasted: in case of greater inequality, the use of the national label of left-wing parties (Ecolo, PS, PTB) performs better than in municipalities with lower inequality.

#### **4. Discussion**

In this article, we sought to test the electoral attractiveness of local and national labels at local elections. Following Rokkan's work, our research goal was to disentangle the nationalization mechanism that links the nature of cleavages – in particular socio-economic inequality – to voters' demand for national lists. Wallonia in Belgium presents a perfect case study to test that hypothesis because of its large socio-economic diversity and the exceptionally large number of lists with local labels (one-third with local labels, one-third with mixed labels and one-third with national labels). This case study thus offered a fertile ground of investigation to understand the role of the label – local vs. national – in electoral success.

Our study shows that the local labels do perform substantially better in municipalities with lower socio-economic diversity, but this advantage declines as municipalities become increasingly more diverse. In the most diverse municipalities only, do national lists present a similar electoral influence to local lists labels. How can this be explained? The first line of explanation present in the literature is that since national parties are decreasingly popular, the use of the national name may frighten potential voters (Steyvers et al. 2008, 173). In recent decades, Western democracies have been characterized by a decline of party identification and a growing distrust towards professional politicians (Mair and van Biezen 2001; Wattenberg 2000; Dalton and Welzel 2014; Holmberg 2007). Disaffection from partisan politics is a general trend observed in most comparative studies (Papadopoulos 2013). In this critical environment, lists with local labels may attract more votes because they appear as alternatives to national parties that are increasingly rejected.

Our – complementary – explanation is structural in nature based on Rokkan's theory on social cleavage. Previous works showed that local lists perform well in local elections, but not in all contexts (Reiser 2008). Our multilevel model clearly shows the influence of socio-economic inequality in this respect. Rising inequalities seems to go hand in hand with increasing willingness to vote for lists with national labels. In municipalities with a high level

of inequality voters opt for lists with a national label as they see them the most able to manage this type of issue. This is especially true for left-wing parties. Given the ideological stance of these parties on fighting socio-economic inequalities, they perform better in highly inequalitarian municipalities. In areas with medium-level inequalities, right-wing parties and parties at the centre of the political spectrum are likely to be more successful. In municipalities that do not face as much inequality, voters prefer local lists as they see them most appropriate for public office. Supporting a local label puts the emphasis on the local context and its specific needs. This strategy seems more appealing in equalitarian municipalities. There is, therefore, an important effect on the nature of the list labels according to the socio-economic context.

Beyond the electoral success of lists, the choice to adopt a national label or not is a decision of a group of candidates who want to compete in local elections. Our analysis suggests that this label has crucial impact on electoral results. While this article focused on lists' electoral performance, further research is thus needed to understand how and why labels are adopted in the first place. What are the strategic as well as organizational and ideological considerations discussed? Lists face a difficult trade-off. We have shown that structural factors like the degree of inequality provide different incentives. However, this is not the sole relevant factor that can influence this choice. On the one hand, adopting a local label may help integrate candidates whose ideological preferences do not fit with the national party's official position on certain policy issues (Vandeleene, Dodeigne, and Jaminet 2013). Similarly, a list that opts for a nonpartisan list name, and more specifically a local label, may also indicate other policy priorities. The distance from the national party also provides more flexibility and independence for the list leadership, especially when conflicts occurred between national party leaders and local leaders (Carty 2004). On the other hand, the national affiliation could secure a minimum of votes from voters that strongly identify with a national party. Some national parties also want to secure their presence in local elections. In fact, increasing one's name recognition in different electoral arenas may attract new voters for the national party (Soós 2008). This strategy is particularly important in a long-term perspective. These elements indicate that multiple structural and strategic factors are at play in explaining the adoption of a – national or local – label.

The consequences of this choice should be assessed not only in terms of vote-seeking strategy (the electoral performance at elections time), but, furthermore, in terms of office-seeking (namely coalition formation) and policy-seeking strategies (whether policies developed by lists with local labels differ from list with national labels). Such endeavour will help us to shed light on the complex process of nationalization.

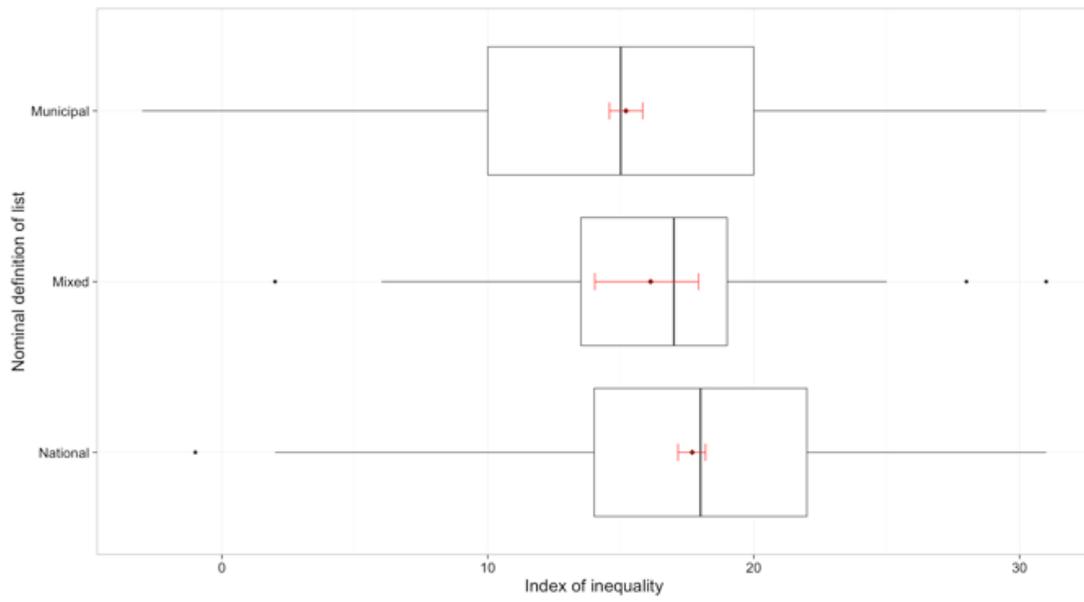
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**Figure 1.** Boxplots of list labels presence according to the index of inequality



**Table 1.** Summary of the operationalization of the variables

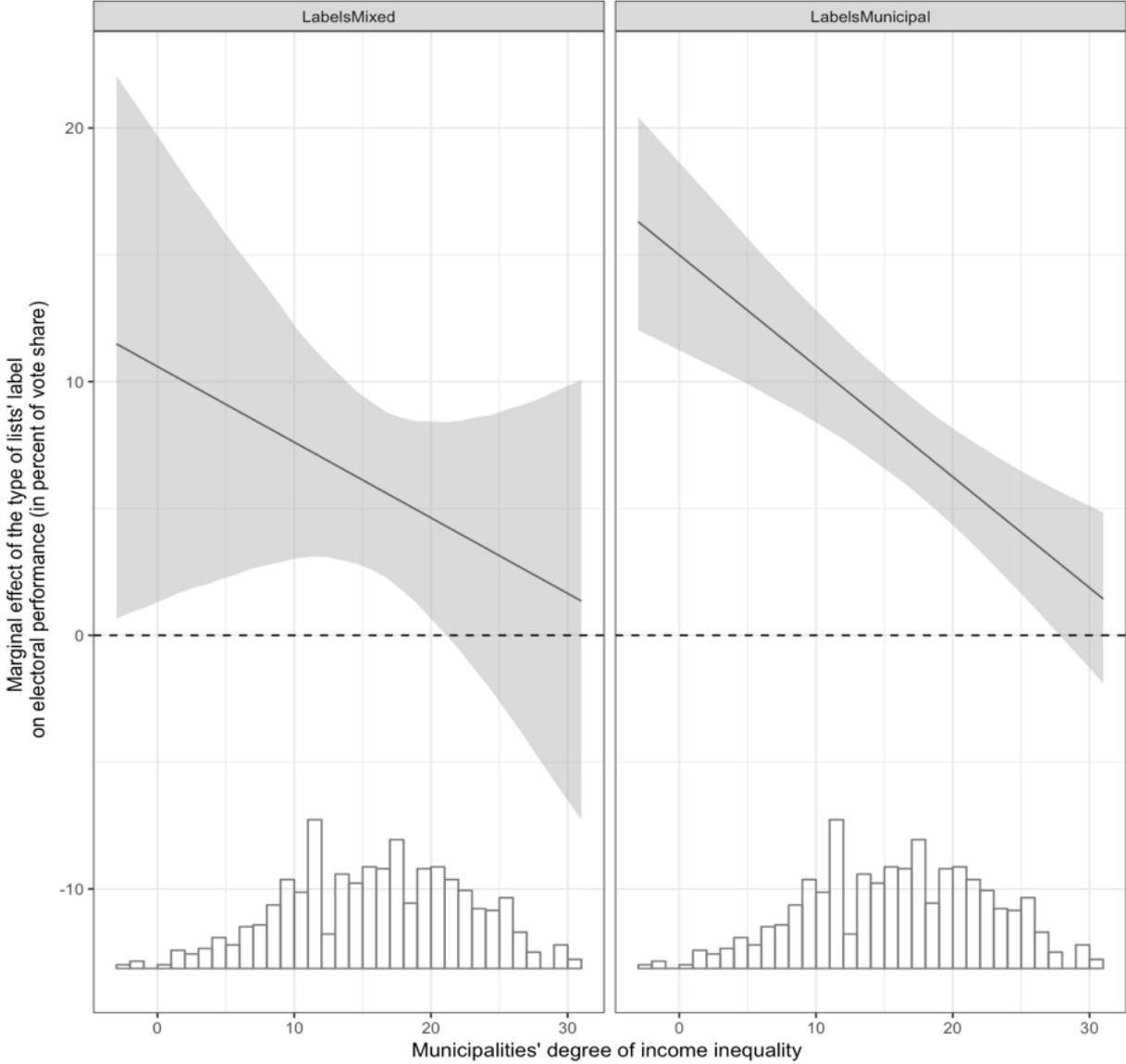
<b>Variables</b>	<b>Operationalization</b>	<b>Details</b>
<b>Dependent variable</b>	Continuous variable	List's share of votes (in percentages)
Electoral performance at elections		
<b>Main covariate of interest</b>		
List label	Categorical variable	Ref. = national list label
Index of inequality	Continuous variable	Asymmetry of income by municipality
<b>Control variables</b>		
Municipality size	Continuous variable	Log-transformed number of voters
<i>Incumbency</i>		
Presence of the mayor on the list	Dummy variable	Ref. = List without mayor
List part of the incumbent local majority	Dummy variable	Ref. = List part of the incumbent majority
<i>Personalization</i>		
Presence of elected officials from another tier of government	Dummy variable	Ref. = List without elected officials
<i>Professionalism</i>		
Presence in 2006	Dummy variable	Ref. = List not present in 2006
Complete list of candidates	Dummy variable	Ref. = List without a complete list of candidates
National resources	Dummy variable	Ref. = Local branches of a national party

**Table 2.** Multilevel linear model predicting list labels' electoral performance  
(in percent of vote share)

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Beta</b>	<b>Std. Error</b>	<b>sign</b>
Intercept	27.69	4.66	***
<i>List label (reference category: national list label)</i>			
Municipal list label	15.01	1.87	***
Mixed list label	10.57	4.67	*
Municipal list label   Degree of inequality	-0.44	0.10	***
Mixed list label   Degree of inequality	-0.30	0.27	
Degree of inequality	0.28	0.08	***
Effective number of party	-1.71	0.27	***
Presence of the Mayor on the list	18.90	1.08	***
Complete lists	11.12	0.82	***
List present in former elections	-0.09	0.67	
Presence of elected officials from other levels	6.59	1.05	***
National resources	-4.98	0.94	***
Size of the municipality	-1.89	0.61	**
Incumbent Majority	0.12	1.36	
Municipality with absolute majority	-2.04	0.76	**
Incumbent Majority   Municipality with absolute majority	14.30	1.70	***
AIC		7518.7	
Number of municipalities		262	
Number of lists		1012	

Note: \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.001; \*\*\*p<0.000.

**Figure 2.** Marginal effect of list labels on a list’s electoral performance (in percent of vote share), according to index of inequality



Note: The grey area indicates 95% confidence intervals.  
 The histograms of observations at the bottom of the graphs present the distribution of municipalities according to their degree of income inequality. Marginal effects built using estimate parameters from Table 2.