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Selective Inclusion? Insights Into Political Parties' Recruitment of Immigrant Background Candidates in Bolzano

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Abstract

Political parties can be crucial gatekeepers to the political participation of immigrants. This article analyzes the political selection strategies of political parties at the local level. The case study focuses on the multi-ethnic city of Bolzano in Northern Italy, which is home to a significant migrant population as well as three autochthonous language groups: Italian, German, and Ladin. First, the article gives an overview of the political lists presented at the last local elections in 2020. Second, it discusses party strategies to recruit candidates with an immigration background. The presented insights are drawn from seven "elite" interviews (i.e., with high-ranking party representatives). Overall, the findings indicate that diversity stemming from migration does not have a significant impact on the recruitment strategies of the province's political parties': Despite electoral lists containing an increasing number of immigrants, who have migrated to South Tyrol since the 1990s, neither newer nor traditional parties adopt significant strategies to recruit candidates with an immigration background. Overall, the diversity on political lists mostly reflects the existing language cleavages of the autochthonous population, while diversity stemming from immigration is still largely overlooked. However, the results also show that while neither of the parties is fully inclusive or exclusive in their selection methods, we identify a tendency toward selective inclusiveness of certain immigrant groups.

Keywords

diversity; immigrants; immigrant background; local elections; political parties; political recruitment; selective inclusiveness

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1. Introduction

The representation of people with an immigrant background is a decisive indicator of a society's fundamental inclusion capacity (Alba & Foner, 2015). According to Mansbridge (1999), descriptive representation offers symbolic importance to minority groups. Yet, while most research focuses on elections and their outcomes for the representation of candidates with an immigrant background, the critical choices are already made beforehand, namely during political parties' candidate selection processes. Hence, political parties are crucial actors, deciding who can become a candidate and who cannot—and the representation of immigrant candidates therefore largely depends on political parties' strategic choices.

Local political parties are viewed as easily approachable, particularly for historically marginalized groups (Bird et al., 2010) and act as "gatekeepers" (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995) through candidate selection. Nevertheless, with a few exceptions (Buta & Gherghina, 2023; Soininen & Qvist, 2021), more focus is needed on the inclusiveness of processes to select candidates with an immigrant background, as this is a critical moment for representation. Despite the increasing number of immigrants residing in Italy, and the importance of immigrant representation in all spheres of society—including politics—research on the selection process of political candidates with an immigrant background is lacking. This research aims to fill that gap and offer first insights into the selection process of immigrant candidates. The results can provide a starting point for further research on the political integration of immigrant candidates into local political parties in Europe.

The province of South Tyrol, located in the North of Italy, is characterized by ethnic diversity—stemming both from migration and from the historical co-habitation of three autochthonous ethnolinguistic groups: German, Italian, and Ladin. In South Tyrol, 69.4% of the population belongs to the German, 26% to the Italian, and 4.5% to the Ladin language group (Autonome Provinz Bozen, 2023). These ethnic cleavages also translate into the societal and political sphere, as political parties in South Tyrol are either German or Italian. The need to include immigrant candidates in political parties is, however, crucial for the representation of increasingly important segments of society. Descriptive representation is not only of symbolic value but can mobilize others to integrate immigrants into the societal and political system (Bird et al., 2010).

As part of the thematic issue *The Political Representation and Participation of Migrants*, this article adopts a distinct perspective on immigrant representation and political participation. While Gherghina and Basarabă (2024) concentrate on the transnational level by examining voter turnout in the home country, and Finn and Ramaciotti (2024) delve into external voting on the national scale, our focus lies on the selection process of immigrants as political candidates at the local level.

We concentrate on the 2020 municipal elections and the candidate selection process of political parties in the provincial capital, Bolzano. This research comprises people with an immigrant background who are EU citizens or who have obtained Italian citizenship. Bolzano's population reflects the pre-existing language cleavages as well as new diversity stemming from migration. In the 2020 elections, for the very first time in its history, four candidates with an immigrant background were elected to the Bolzano local council. This case therefore provides insights into the extent to which political parties might change their strategies in the face of an increasingly diverse society, and the need to represent new segments of the population. We expect the pre-existing cleavages to have an impact on the selection strategies as the political landscape mirrors the language divisions, and can therefore pose a barrier to the representation of candidates with an

immigrant background. To shed light on the parties' selection strategies, we build on the theoretical framework proposed by Rahat and Hazan (2001) and ask: How inclusive are political parties' selection strategies at the local level?

Section 2 of the article provides an overview of South Tyrol's unique context and immigration history, followed by the theoretical and methodological framework. Finally, we shed light on political parties' candidate selection process by first pinpointing the general selection process before focusing on immigrants. The data for the article is drawn from "elite" interviews with high-ranking representatives of the political parties that currently (as of 2023) have seats in the local council.

2. Historical Context

Prior to 1919, the region of South Tyrol was under the dominion of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, serving as an integral component of the historical County of Tyrol. During that period, 89% of the region's inhabitants spoke German (Autonome Provinz Bozen, 2017; Rautz, 1999). Subsequently, there have been notable alterations in the population dynamics, territorial boundaries, and legal standing of the region, particularly after its annexation by Italy in 1919. Measures to promote Italian cultural assimilation in South Tyrol were implemented prior to the enactment of the 1948 statute granting the region self-government, which had little positive impact on the German and Ladin minority groups. In 1972, a revised autonomy act was successfully negotiated, resulting in significant improvements, and the current autonomy legislation passed in 2001, conferred a comprehensive array of rights and liberties to the province of South Tyrol. This legal framework empowers the province to safeguard the interests and well-being of the German and Ladin minorities, making South Tyrol a prominent example of how to effectively accommodate different minority groups (Woelk et al., 2008). The fundamental tenets of the autonomy statute include the provision of cultural autonomy for individuals who speak German and Ladin, linguistic parity among the three languages in state institutions, the assurance of equal rights for all citizens regardless of their group affiliation, the implementation of proportionality through a quota system, and the granting of minority veto rights.

The diversity stemming from migration supplements that of the autochthonous groups. Hence, immigrants are confronted with a multi-ethnic and linguistically diverse society (Medda-Windischer & Carlà, 2015). At the same time, the German and Ladin minorities must cope with the challenge of maintaining their cultural and linguistic distinctiveness within the Italian state (Wisthaler, 2016). Despite this challenge, decision-making processes need to include the increasing number of people with an immigrant background residing in the province (Wisthaler, 2016). The 2020 municipal elections can be seen as a turning point in this respect, as there had never been as many candidates with an immigrant background on the candidate lists, nor had they ever been as successful (Wisthaler et al., 2021).

Since the early 1990s, immigration to South Tyrol has increased for various reasons, including the end of communism, wars in the Balkans, and the EU enlargement. In the early 1990s, South Tyrol had around 5,000 immigrants, mainly from Germany, Austria, and other Italian regions. Between 1991 and 2006, immigration was engendered by significant historical events, such as the fall of the Berlin Wall and war in the former Yugoslavia. People fleeing wars and communist regimes in the Balkans, especially Albania, settled in South Tyrol up until 2002. Since 2000, immigration from all parts of the world has increased. European migration has mostly been due to the eastern enlargement of the EU, while many non-EU citizens, who had

illegally migrated to the region, were given amnesty/legal status by the declaration of validity (Sanatoria) that came into force on the entire Italian national territory in 2003. Starting around 2007, there has been an increase in the immigration rate from countries like Romania and Slovakia, and a decrease in immigration from German-speaking areas. In 2011, after long delays, the provincial government enacted a law for the integration of the immigrant population. Since then, and especially after the migration inflows in 2015, the number of immigrants residing in the province has increased (Medda-Windischer & Girardi, 2011).

We focus on the provincial capital, Bolzano, as it is home to the largest immigrant population in South Tyrol, making diversity in representation a more salient issue for parties. On the 31st of December 2021, 15,447 foreigners lived in the provincial capital—almost 30% of all foreigners in South Tyrol. About 11% of the immigrant population in South Tyrol comes from Albania, followed by Romania with 4,631, Germany (4,518), Pakistan (3,943), Morocco (3,644), and Slovakia (3,164). Hence, three of the top six source countries are EU member states (Landesinstitut für Statistik ASTAT, 2023). EU citizens have equal footing with Italian citizens in some areas, such as in freedom of movement and establishment, as well as employment. Immigrants from EU countries are also allowed to vote and stand as candidates for municipal elections.

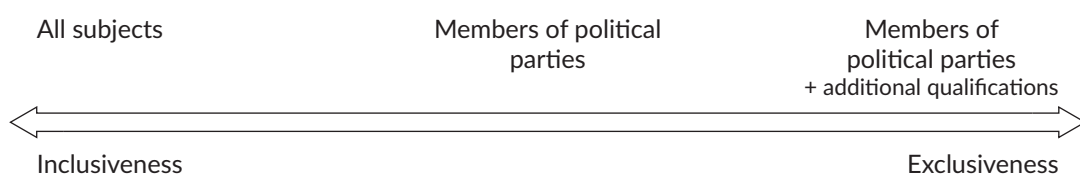## 3. Political Parties as Gatekeepers of Immigrants' Political Candidacy

Before going deeper into why minorities are underrepresented in politics, and how this connects to the candidate selection process and the role of local parties as gatekeepers (Black & Hicks, 2006), it is important to frame the (local) context of this research. The article focuses on the local level because it is the most accessible level of politics a person encounters when becoming politically active. In fact, people with immigrant backgrounds favor running in local elections, especially municipal ones, since the electoral role and the costs are lower, and the party structures are more adaptable than in national elections (Bird, 2004). The local level is therefore vital for the political integration of immigrants (Hepburn & Zapata-Barrero, 2014; Penninx & Martiniello, 2004) for two main reasons: First, standing as a candidate and voting in local elections are not strictly connected to citizenship, as EU citizens can stand as candidates and vote outside their home countries; and second, local parties are on the front lines of candidate selection and can either draw candidates into the political process or discourage them from entering (Bird, 2004). Local political parties are therefore considered essential gatekeepers (Soininen & Qvist, 2021) in the political integration of people with an immigrant background, as they are the vehicles through which new groups gain political entry and, to some extent, political power (Black & Hicks, 2006).

The selection of candidates to run for election is generally regarded as a process, rather than a single decision (Rahat & Hazan, 2010). Candidate selection, especially for immigrants, can therefore encounter several challenges and even barriers. South Tyrol's ethnolinguistic societal split is evident in the political, institutional, and educational domains, and influences the party system in ways that transcend other conventional divisions (Pallaver, 2008). For instance, the South Tyrolean People's Party (SVP)—which has held an absolute majority since 1948—represents first and foremost the German language group (Pallaver, 2016). Furthermore, the ideological position of parties influences candidate selection. Unsurprisingly, center-left parties offer more descriptive representation than center-right parties (Sobolewska, 2013). Bloemraad and Schönwälder (2013) hypothesize that newer and smaller political parties are more open to immigrant participation and representation. In contrast, right-wing parties very often hold anti-immigrant stances. While immigrant support may help to win elections in areas with high proportions of immigrants, it
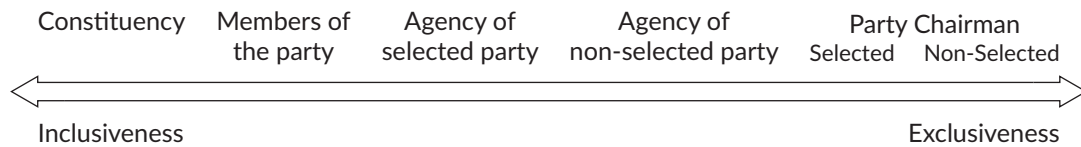
may result in the loss of native support. This leads to a fundamental strategic dilemma that local parties must resolve, especially in South Tyrol, where local parties (with few exceptions) select either German or Italian-speaking candidates. Indeed, sometimes local leaders may be driven to exclude candidates with an immigrant background, excluding them, to maintain their hold on power and decrease competition for already existing and well-known candidates (Claro da Fonseca, 2011). This practice of backing entrusted candidates for re-election is cited as one of the main hurdles for minorities. This is particularly relevant for the South Tyrolean context, given that historic parties with prominent and monolingual (Italian or German) candidates might be less inclined to put candidates with a different background or linguistic group on the electoral lists. Conversely, some local parties may also promote candidates with an immigrant background because they see an electoral advantage in doing so—most often in districts with a sizable immigrant population, with the intention of demonstrating to voters the party's inclusivity. Therefore, including minorities in the electoral lists could be a mechanism by which the parties signal their concern for the processes of social change, thereby demonstrating to the electorate that they are inclusive and "modern" (Vintila & Morales, 2018). This strategy is primarily aimed at voters with an immigrant background.

Drawing on the work of Norris and Franklin (1997), the concept of candidate selection is conceptualized within the framework of market-based dynamics, specifically referring to the "supply" of aspirants and the "demands" of party selectors. The candidate market exhibits similarities to other markets since it is characterized by inequities that permeate the entire process, leading to an uneven playing field for all possible candidates (Norris & Franklin, 1997). To clarify the selection process, we chose to employ the foundational version proposed by Rahat and Hazan (2001). This theoretical decision is driven by the distinctive case of South Tyrol, characterized by the coexistence of local, regional, and national parties, along with prevalent ethnic cleavages. The intricacies of this scenario call for a basic model to serve as a foundational framework upon which a more detailed discussion can be built. This research draws on two elements of the analytical framework by Rahat and Hazan (2001, 2010): the "candidacy" and the "selectorate" at the local level.

The first dimension of candidate selection is the candidacy as such. Here, restrictions are classified along an inclusiveness–exclusiveness continuum according to whether candidates must already be members of the party or if they can be drawn from the electorate in general. Political parties provide varying levels of support to individual candidates, with which they can mitigate the impact of disadvantages at the group level during the selection process. People with an immigrant background are largely underrepresented in political parties, but as evidenced by the case study on women (Matland, 2005), there is a substantial contingent of partisan supporters who consistently pursue political positions. Figure 1 shows the inclusiveness–exclusiveness axis building on the model proposed by Rahat and Hazan (2001).

Figure 1. Candidacy. Source: Rahat and Hazan (2001).

Figure 2. Party selectorate. Source: Rahat and Hazan (2001).

The second dimension of candidate selection is the selectorate. This is the in-party group that selects the candidates, and who are said to play the most influential role in shaping legislative recruitment (Field & Siavelis, 2008). Party selectors serve as intermediaries in the connection between the environmental setting and the process of legislative recruiting (Kunovich & Paxton, 2005). The selectorate can either be inclusive, consisting of the entire constituency or party membership, for instance, or exclusive, being limited to only a subsegment of party members, such as delegates, committees, executive branches, or individual party leaders (Rahat & Hazan, 2001). Figure 2 shows the inclusiveness–exclusiveness axis according to the model by Rahat and Hazan (2001).

Parties using multistage selection procedures may even include different selectorates at different stages of the selection process (Rahat & Hazan, 2001). This research focuses on local-level selection procedures. In the context of South Tyrol, political parties traditionally aim to represent specific segments of the local society, but party selectors are nevertheless inclined to prioritize electoral benefits over other considerations when a new target demographic shows potential for significant support (Claro da Fonseca, 2011).

4. Research Design and Methodology

In this article, we focus on selected political parties and the municipal elections of Bolzano in 2020. We focus on both traditional political parties and civic lists. Between them, they represent both the left and right wings, as well as all three autochthonous ethnolinguistic groups. Throughout the text, we will use the term "political party" also when speaking about civic lists, as for local elections there is no formal difference between political parties and civic lists. A civic list is a local political organization that aims to represent the interests of citizens at the municipal or local level. Civic lists are usually formed by citizens uniting around a specific political platform or common goal, rather than the ideological program or manifesto of a national party. The main objective of a civic list is to represent the interests of the local community, focusing on specific issues or local problems. Civic lists differ from traditional political parties as they tend to be less bound by specific ideologies or hierarchical structures (Zogu, 2021).

In the 2020 municipal elections, a total of 200 candidates across the province (4% of the 4,403 contestants) were born in a country other than Italy (Wisthaler et al., 2021). Most of the candidates with immigrant backgrounds stood for election in urban centers, mostly in Bolzano, where 39 out of 462 candidates were born in another EU or third country. Herein lies the relevance of the city of Bolzano, as it symbolizes the coexistence of the three autochthonous groups, as well as of immigrants. For this project, we focus on people with an immigrant background who are EU citizens or who have obtained Italian citizenship.

The municipal council is elected by eligible voters in the respective municipality, based on civic lists and nominations (lists) submitted by political parties for the electoral area. The principle of proportional representation applies: Parties or civic lists receive a number of council seats proportional to the percentage

of votes they receive. Which candidates are elected to the municipal council is not determined by their position on the list, but by the number of preferential votes they receive. The mayor is elected directly by the inhabitants of the municipality, by a simple majority. If no mayoral candidate achieves an absolute majority in the first ballot, a run-off election takes place. In total, 18 political parties stood for election, and 14 had candidates with an immigrant background. In the end, four candidates with an immigrant background were elected to the Bolzano city council—two as candidates of a civic list, one as a representative of Northern League (Lega), and another for the Brothers of Italy (Fratelli d'Italia [FdI]).

This highlights the importance of taking a closer look at the selection process and strategies of political parties and civic lists. We aim to mirror the linguistic and ethnic realities of the province by choosing ideologically contrasting parties and civic lists. We therefore identified the regional catch-all party, the South Tyrolean Peoples Party (Südtiroler Volkspartei [SVP]), the Greens (Verdi–Grüne–Vërc), and Team K, as well as the national parties, Lega, Democratic Party (Partito Democratico [PD]), and FdI. Second, we identified a relevant civic list: I Stand With Bolzano (Io sto con Bolzano). The latter was formed around the major candidate Angelo Gennaccaro a few months before the municipal elections. This civic list was formed in 2020 and four candidates were successfully elected, out of which two with an immigrant background. I'm With Bolzano is an interesting actor in the context of political recruitment in South Tyrol, as it had the highest share of candidates with an immigrant background in its list in the 2020 municipal elections. In addition, of all the candidates with an immigrant background, those of I Stand With Bolzano were among the most successful (Wisthaler et al., 2021). Table 1 shows an overview of the selected political parties and their characteristics.

In the first stage of the research, we analyzed the lists of candidates running for the 2020 municipal elections in Bolzano. The information on the candidates, lists, and municipalities was taken from the websites of the Autonome Region Trentino-Südtirol (2020) and the municipality of Bolzano (Stadt Bozen, 2020).

Second, we used a qualitative elite interviewing approach (Liu, 2018) and identified representatives holding positions of power in political parties. In the months of June, July, and August 2022, we conducted seven elite interviews with high-ranking representatives of the above-mentioned political parties. Interviews were conducted, following a semi-structured questionnaire, in the mother tongue of the party representative (Italian or German), audio-recorded and complemented with written notes. For this article, interview transcripts have been translated into English and pseudonymized. Finally, we used qualitative content analysis and analyzed the data with the assistance of the software Nvivo. For analytical purposes, Nvivo is a helpful application since it enables the following: (a) maintain project texts concurrently; (b) make each text easily accessible; (c) establish a system of categories; (d) designate categories by text-section markers; and (e) organize categories into networks and hierarchies (Mayring, 2015). The collected data is categorized in a coding frame, and codes are built deductive- and inductively. The first set of codes focused on the general selection strategies of the party, while the second set focused on how the party deals with the topic of migration and on the selection strategies of candidates with an immigrant background.

Table 1. Overview of the selected political parties.

Political party/political list	National/regional/local	Party characteristics
SVP	Regional	As an ethnic catch-all party, SVP wants to represent South Tyrol's German-speaking population as well as Ladin speakers. The party is mainly Christian-democratic, but nevertheless quite diverse, including conservatives, liberals, and social democrats. From 1948 to 2013 the party retained an absolute majority in the Provincial Council.
Team K	Regional	Team K was formed in 2018 by Paul Köllensberger who was elected to the provincial council as a candidate of the Five Star Movement (M5S) in 2013. It is a regionalist and liberal political movement active in South Tyrol, where it seeks to be an inter-ethnic centrist party.
The Greens	Regional	The Greens are a regionalist political party. Once the provincial section of the Federation of the Greens, the party is now autonomous and often forms different alliances at the national level.
FdI	National	FdI is a national-conservative and right-wing populist political party, the country's largest after the 2022 Italian general election. The party is led by Giorgia Meloni, the incumbent Prime Minister of Italy.
PD	National	PD is a social-democratic political party and was established in 2007 upon the merger of various center-left parties. The party's secretary is Elly Schlein, elected in the 2023 election.
Lega	National	Lega is a right-wing, federalist, populist, and conservative political party. In the run-up to the 2018 general election, the party was rebranded as Lega, without changing its official name. Its current elected leader is Matteo Salvini.
I Stand With Bolzano	Local	I Stand With Bolzano is a civic list which has been formed by Angelo Gennaccaro in 2020. In comparison to political parties, the civic list has no formalized structure nor a political program and is only active at the local level.

Sources: SVP (n.d.), Team K (n.d.), Verdi–Grüne–Vërc (n.d.), FdI (n.d.), PD (n.d.), Lega Nord (n.d.), IO STO CON Bolzano—Angelo Gennaccaro (n.d.).

5. Political Parties' Selective Inclusiveness

In this section, we delve into the findings from the interviews. It begins with an analysis of the incidence of candidates with immigrant backgrounds within political lists. We investigate the dynamics of inclusion and diversity in this context. Next, we examine the general selection strategies along the inclusive–exclusive dimensions adopted by political entities, revealing the complex web of factors that influence candidate selection. Finally, our investigation focuses on specialized recruitment strategies specifically designed to engage and empower candidates with an immigrant background. Through these distinct sections, the chapter sheds light on the nuanced strategies and challenges related to political representation.

5.1. Underrepresentation of Immigrant Candidates on Political Lists

For the municipal elections of 2020, there were a total of 28 candidates with an immigrant background on the selected parties' lists. While all political parties have at least one such candidate, the numbers remain low. In addition, candidates with an immigrant background are not listed among the first (more prominent) positions on the lists. Table 2 provides an overview of the total number of political candidates on the selected political parties and civic list. We selected seven political parties in the municipal council of Bolzano, including both the left and right wings, as well as all three autochthonous ethnolinguistic groups. The table also provides information about how many have an immigrant background, whether they are from countries within the EU or not, and how many candidates with an immigrant background are women.

The number of non-EU candidates (23) is almost four times higher than the number of EU candidates (six). In fact, the most represented countries were Peru (five candidates), Argentina (three candidates), and Albania (three candidates). These nations were followed by Germany, Austria, Pakistan, and Morocco with two candidates each. Poland, Hungary, North Macedonia, Switzerland, UK, Kosovo, Senegal, China, and Romania each had one candidate. Ten out of 28 candidates were women, and the party with the most foreign-born candidates was PD.

There are various reasons for the increased recruitment of the top three represented countries. First, the Peruvian community is very present in the area, accounting for nearly 3% of the Bolzano population. Language (Spanish–Italian) proximity is one of the factors that most facilitate the integration and subsequent participation of people with this background. In fact, some of the Peruvian candidates were very active in associations and trade unions (Zogu, 2021). Second, concerning the Argentinian community, both the linguistic affinity and the prominent Italian diaspora in Argentina play a role in their political participation. Third, the Albanian community is the largest immigrant contingent in Bolzano, constituting 15.5% of the population, and after Germany and Austria, it has been in the area the longest. Several studies reveal that it is easier to become politically active when one has been in the territory for a long time and has gained a certain status and trust (Claro da Fonseca, 2011; Mansbridge, 1999). Candidates from these backgrounds are usually already well-established personalities and are approached by the parties themselves (Zogu, 2021).

Table 2. Candidates with an immigrant background.

Political party	Total number of candidates	Candidates with an immigrant background	Candidates from the EU	Candidates from third countries	Female candidates with an immigrant background
FdI	59	1	0	1	0
Lega	29	4	2	2	2
I Stand With Bolzano	45	4	0	5	0
PD	30	7	0	7	3
SVP	45	5	2	3	4
Greens	37	4	1	3	0
Team K	27	3	1	2	1

Finally, four male candidates with an immigrant background were elected to the municipal council. Two of the candidates were from I Stand With Bolzano, meaning half of the candidates with an immigrant background on that list were successful. The other two elected candidates came from the right-wing parties of Lega and FdI, although the Lega's candidate left the party shortly after the election to join a civic list. This outcome highlights the fact that, although left-wing parties highlight migration as an important topic, their candidates were unsuccessful in the elections.

5.2. General "Inclusiveness/Exclusiveness of Local Political Parties"

In the following section, we focus on the general inclusiveness/exclusiveness of the candidacy and selectorate, before looking more closely at the recruitment process for candidates with an immigrant background.

Candidate recruitment in parties such as Lega and FdI takes place mainly among members of the parties themselves. However, they sometimes spontaneously recruit individuals for upcoming elections if the prospective candidate is aligned with their values and political goals. The Lega's recruitment of candidates follows a so-called "pyramid logic" which the representative describes as follows: "The pyramid system means that only militants can run for office unless we [party elite] make an exception. Prospective candidates have had a supporter's card for at least one and a half years and who do activities for the party who then become militants," outlines the Lega representative. The recruitment process of FdI and Lega illustrates the importance of party elites for the nomination of candidates and election processes (Lovenduski, 2016). The candidacy requirements of the right-wing parties can therefore be characterized as exclusive, as they follow a formal logic and candidates are recruited from existing members.

Nevertheless, depending on whether the election is municipal, provincial, or national, they consider which elements could enrich their list and sometimes have newer members run for office. The interviewees stress the importance of capacity and merit in their candidate choice. One party even conducts a background check on potential candidates to ensure they have a "clean slate." Both right-wing parties we interviewed repeatedly outlined that the meritocratic system is the basis for their nominations:

> There are definitely some ethical values such as fairness and respect for rules. We want decent people. This is one thing that sets us apart. And secondly, they must have certain skills. We really go for it [for a specific candidate] when we find that we [political party] lack maybe specific skills. (FdI representative)

This quote highlights that the right-wing parties sometimes shift between a generally exclusive approach and a more inclusive approach to candidacy, depending on the circumstances.

Candidate recruitment also works this way for the German catch-all SVP, in that prospective candidates should already be party members. It is important to note that the SVP focuses on attracting candidates from the German- and Ladin-speaking communities: "Our party...primarily tries to represent the German-speaking people of Bolzano" (SVP representative).

Candidate recruitment for the Greens and PD is more informal and inclusive. PD and Greens representatives reiterated that, for the most part, they actively look for candidates in local neighborhoods. Hence, both parties try to make themselves known at street level and recruit directly through neighborhood and direct contacts.

For PD, it is more important to have different "identikits" within the list and to "include everything" to reflect the diversity of the South Tyrolean society; for the Greens, sharing ideals with the party is central:

> There are people who revolve around the party. And if we're going to make a list of 40 people, there are specific ones that are attached. And then there are the ones that you go after—new candidacies—we try to have different profiles, different sketches. (PD representative)

Team K has a similar approach as left-wing parties and wants to reflect diverse segments of society, both genders, and candidates from all language groups. The Team K representative outlines that candidates on the political list of Team K are usually already members of the party, if they are not yet members, to run for office, they need to become members first. The last word in the selection process has the party elite: "This will then be decided by the board and the provincial committee of Team K" (Team K representative).

I Stand With Bolzano also wants to reflect diverse segments of society, both genders, and candidates from all language groups. The representative of the former stresses that, "Perhaps, in the South Tyrolean panorama, ours is the only list that in some way has grouped together everything that is today the photograph of our territory." For Team K, possible candidates approach the list themselves or are recruited by acquaintances who are already members. This shows the importance of immigrant networks, as they can influence the candidacy of people with an immigrant background.

5.3. Selective Inclusiveness as a Recruitment Strategy Toward Immigrant Background Candidates

Having discussed the general strategies of political parties, the article now addresses the specific selection of candidates with an immigrant background. The analysis shows common patterns along the left–right spectrum and a lack of clear recruitment strategies, while parties on both sides of the political spectrum have the tendency to use a strategy best described as "selective inclusiveness."

Regarding the recruitment of people with an immigrant background to the right-wing lists, we identify a standard line. Lega and FdI both stated that the candidate's ethnic background does not matter as long as they are "citizens who follow the rules, pay taxes, and behave with dignity." The FdI representative stresses that the party refuses to categorize people according to categories such as gender or immigrant background. Because candidates for the right-wing parties in this study are supposed to be militant members, the candidates themselves approached the party, as the party did not actively recruit or search for immigrant background candidates. They approached the parties with everyday life issues, received help, and later decided to stand as a candidate in the municipal elections:

> We don't go looking for the specificity of a provenance...These people I mentioned are the ones who approached us...for specific issues that concerned them [e.g., housing]. We dealt with them and so from there, a connection started, and they became an integral part of the group. (FdI representative)

Regarding the immigrant background candidates who ran for these parties, both representatives said they were "perfectly integrated people who are Italian citizens" (FdI representative; Lega representative). It is important that these people are very familiar with the Italian Constitution, that they make significant contributions within the party assemblies, but also that they are no longer perceived as "foreigners" by the

local population. Both representatives stress that the prospective candidate should be critical of immigrants who, in their opinion, are not integrated enough. Hence, while both right-wing parties do accept non-member candidates, and are therefore inclusive, they are very selective when it comes to the choice of which candidates with an immigrant background can then actually run for office.

The Greens' and PD's approach to recruiting candidates with immigrant backgrounds is more proactive and aims to enhance representation and dialogue with them at the political level. Both left-wing parties emphasized the importance of immigrant candidates' social networks. More specifically, PD and the Greens mentioned trying to have candidates with different backgrounds to attract more voters from immigrant communities. Hence, they aim to represent the South Tyrolean society in all its diversity: the three autochthonous language groups plus those with an immigrant background. This does not negate the requirement for the candidates to share the party's values.

The Greens stressed the need to empower specific groups by bringing them closer to politics, especially since many are citizens who have been residents for more than 25 years and are a significant part of the community. The Greens are also very passionate about the issue of women's political participation, and efforts have been made to include more women with immigrant backgrounds—so far with only limited success, however. They stress that it is difficult to motivate women with an immigrant background to run for election because of time constraints: "I understood that women are very often very busy because of family...the political engagement becomes then too much" (Greens representative).

The SVP representative had a different view. It is important to note here that the representatives' statements do not necessarily reflect the ideology of the entire party—SVP is a "catch-all" party with more conservative and liberal subgroups. The representative we interviewed speaks on behalf of the more conservative subgroup. According to this interviewee, candidates are selected according to specific characteristics. The representative emphasizes that German language proficiency is crucial for joining and running for office: "We just hope that it also helps them [the candidates with an immigrant background] to learn the second language [German] or the third language for them" (SVP representative).

The other factor considered relevant for the interviewee is religion. The emphasis is therefore on Christian and German-speaking immigrants, who, according to the interviewee, are easier to integrate into "our" society.

> They [Peruvians] have this advantage because they are easy to integrate. Also, they have a clear religious orientation, they are Catholics, and it is easier to get along with them. In Bolzano, this coexistence with the Italians works well despite fascism, because we share the same religion. (SVP representative)

For I Stand With Bolzano and Team K, no distinction is made between candidates with and without an immigrant background. However, in comparison to right-wing parties, they welcome candidates with immigrant backgrounds because of the diverse topics they cover. Hence, while they do not actively recruit such candidates, they are very open to including them to cover certain topics, such as housing:

> Recruiting specifically for migrants is something we have never done, also because we do not make this distinction between migrant, German, Italian. For us, there are only candidates who thematically

fit in with Team K or not. In the municipal elections we had some candidates with a migrant background, who then approached us and were interested. Of course, there was a place for them on the list. (Team K representative)

Also, the representative of I Stand With Bolzano outlines that the list does not actively approach candidates with immigrant candidates but they themselves do approach the party: "In short, one of our members, a new citizen, approached us to run for office. We didn't go looking" (I'm With Bolzano representative).

Overall, all the interviewees outlined that there is no specific person who deals with the recruitment of candidates with an immigrant background. Hence, we identify a relatively flexible selectorate. The selectorate on the local level can be best described as rather informal and unstructured. The absence of focus on candidates with an immigrant background might be the lack of a strong internal network for immigrant candidates. Internal networks are in fact considered a resource to support the selection of candidates from immigrant backgrounds, because once the group is already politically mobilized, this encourages the participation of new members (Celis et al., 2014).

6. Conclusion

The objective of this article is to shed light on the recruitment of candidates with an immigrant background within a multi-ethnic locality, focusing on the local level. Within this context, we have identified two particularly noteworthy findings.

Firstly, this study reveals a notable absence of formal strategies within political parties and civic lists to deliberately include candidates with immigrant backgrounds on their electoral lists. This observation underscores the limited extent to which parties aspire to mirror society and its inherent diversity. Interviews conducted with representatives of left-wing parties underscore their commitment to promoting diversity, particularly in terms of gender and language representation. In contrast, right-wing parties place less emphasis on this aspect. In general, political parties and civic lists associate the concept of diversity with linguistic and gender-related considerations. Notably, there is a distinct absence of explicit focus on candidates with an immigrant background as a distinct category of interest. Instead, the recruitment of such individuals is contingent upon their perceived value to the party, often reflecting a selective approach rather than a structured strategy for broadening inclusivity. Despite the increased presence of immigrants within the population, the pre-existing language cleavages persist, resulting in political lists that respond to autochthonous language groups. Consequently, the discourse surrounding diversity in the candidate selection process remains centered on linguistic factors, with limited regard for diversity stemming from immigration.

In other words, historical events are still very present in the region, including at the political level. Despite the salience of migration to South Tyrol since the 1990s, respondents consistently tied the discourse on diversity to region-specific matters, prominently exemplified by the ethnic cleavages. Indeed, a subset of respondents, when asked about diversity within their respective political parties, drew parallels between gender diversity and linguistic diversity. Remarkably, the topic of migration and inclusion did not organically emerge as a primary focal point, but rather surfaced as a secondary consideration, primarily when pointed out by the interviewer.

The second significant finding of this study centers on recruitment practices within political parties, characterized by a distinct strategy we term "selective inclusiveness." While overall recruitment remains exclusive toward candidates without immigrant backgrounds, left-wing parties in particular tend to recruit individuals with immigrant backgrounds for specific issues aligned with their agendas. However, the actual representation of immigrants on these lists does not significantly surpass that of other parties. Notably, candidates from civic lists have achieved comparable electoral success to those from national-level parties. It is conceivable that this success is attributable to the strategy of selective inclusiveness, where parties intentionally choose candidates with specific qualities that resonate with voters.

This article calls for future research to focus on political parties' perspectives, as well as those of people with an immigrant background, to understand the recruitment process. Furthermore, the newly introduced strategy we termed "selective inclusiveness" needs further exploration in different contexts. Exploration could extend to regions characterized by ethnic diversity, as well as urban settings, thus providing a more comprehensive understanding of the strategy's applicability and efficacy across diverse political landscapes.

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