

The electoral agency of Muslimahs: an intersectional perspective on preferential voting behavior.

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Abstract

Muslim women are often portrayed as submissive and oppressed, and blamed for a lack of political agency. At the same time, intersectional studies point out that Muslimahs manifest a pious critical agency while engaging in political activities. Yet, quantitatively and electorally speaking, less is known about gender differences in vote choices of Muslims, notably which candidates they support. This paper addresses this gap in the literature by examining the gendered preferential voting behavior of Muslim minorities at the local elections of 2018 in the largest city of Belgium (Antwerp), based on an innovative analysis of combined demand side exit-poll data with supply side data on the candidate profiles. While our analyses show that Muslims vote more gender congruent and more religious congruent than non-Muslims, this is because male Muslims vote more for male candidates, more for Muslim candidates, and more for the intersection of both of them rather than that female Muslims vote for one of their own. However, this does not mean that Muslim women are not gender sensitive or religiously conscious. Interestingly, Muslimahs do not differ substantially from non-Muslim women in gender congruent or religious congruent voting.

“representation is vital
otherwise the butterfly surrounded by a group of moths
unable to see itself
will keep trying to become the moth”
Rupi Kaur (2017)

Key words: Intersectionality, Muslim, gender, preferential voting

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Introduction

The growing concern with the lack of elected bodies mirroring society's diversity has led to an increase of scholarly literature on minorities' voices in decision-making processes (Wauters et al., 2020; Mansbridge, 1999). Scholars point to the benefits of a 'politics of presence' of minorities in providing minority groups a sense of inclusion and an improvement of the quality of policy output because it accounts for a more inclusive set of political needs and interests (Sinno, 2012; Phillips, 1995). One important precondition to achieve 'descriptive representation' in office, are voters electing candidates that 'descriptively/demographically' resemble them (Mansbridge, 1999).

Accordingly, studies have looked into the voter side of political representation by studying voting patterns of marginalized minority groups such as women and ethnic minorities. These studies often evaluate the presence of affinity voting based on the assumption that voters tend to vote for candidates who look like them (Cutler, 2002) especially when they are marginalized (André et al., 2017). In general, the findings demonstrate that they are indeed more likely to vote for candidates alike, also referred to as gender and ethnic congruent voting (Wauters et al., 2020). As for Muslims, while ethnicity and Islam are generally strongly intertwined, the salience of Muslims' religious identity as an identity marker, seems to have risen above that of their ethnic background (Dancygier, 2014; Voas and Fleischmann, 2012). Scholars refer to this trend as the 'ethnicization of Islam' (Fadil, 2005; Kanmaz, 2003).

However, research on Muslims' preferential voting behavior and its intersections with other minority markers is extremely scarce. As far as we know, only Heath et al. (2015) and Azabar et al. (2020) have recently pointed out that Muslim voters are more prone to vote for Muslim candidates in societies where Islam is subject to a fierce debate. Nevertheless, up till now, research on the particularities of intersectional voting behavior of Muslim men and women is almost non-existing.

The absence is somewhat surprising since the increasing demographic presence of Muslims in the West has been problematized and is associated with the rising controversy on Muslims' political integration. The alleged incompatibility of Islam and western liberal democracy has been stressed even more since the 9/11 attacks (Statham and Tillie, 2016; Cesari, 2013). Notably, Muslims' gender ideology is often identified as conservative and thus one of the main challenges to their socio-political integration. As a consequence, Muslimahs are, allegedly, more inclined to vote for male Muslim candidates and thereby discriminate against candidates who resemble them the most descriptively (Dancygier, 2017).

However, intersectional scholars (Salem, 2013; Mahmood, 2005) criticize the wide-spread portrayal of religious women as uniformly oppressed and suffering from false consciousness. In addition, a growing scholarship on Muslim women and their lived realities paint a more complex picture of their political agency and feminist views within an Islamic framework while rejecting the idea that (only) secularism acts as a *guarantor* of women's rights (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Joly, 2017; Tanner Lamptey, 2018). Yet, it cannot be denied that the bulk of this intersectional research uses ethnographic data of a more qualitative nature while focusing on non-electoral forms of political participation. However, we don't know how this political

awareness manifest itself in the electoral field. In this respect it would be very good to bridge the gulf between this intersectional literature and the literature on political representation, but also the strongly quantitatively oriented electoral studies.

Interestingly, research on intersectionality and political representation concentrates primarily on the presence and success of female representatives of Muslim origin in assemblies (Celis and Erzeel, 2014; Mugge and Erzeel, 2016). These studies provide an interesting supply side explanation for the relative overrepresentation of female Muslim candidates (compared to male Muslim candidates) by pointing at a strategy of party selectorates to favor female Muslim candidates who do not threaten the power bases of white, male incumbents. However, none of these studies provide conclusive evidence regarding the origins of the votes for these female candidates. Are these candidates supported (primarily) by Muslimahs? Our study addresses this lacuna and diverges from earlier studies on affinity voting since they deal with one single socio-demographic characteristic at a time even though real vote choice is likely to be affected by multiple allegiances related to characteristics such as race, class and gender (Goodyear-Grant and Tolley, 2019).

Our research aims are threefold. First, we focus on a much-disputed but understudied group on the intersection of Muslim belonging and gender, notably Muslimahs, by scrutinizing their voter preferences and reflecting on their power bases in the political system. We hereby highlight not only the voting behavior *between* groups, but also *within* groups in order to properly address intersectionality issues related to Muslim and gender voting. In short, we will study *who* among the Muslim electorate votes for whom reflecting on how these choices affect the nature of minority inclusion. Second, this study wants to look at preferential voting behavior in a reliable way by focusing on the Belgian proportional electoral list system where several parties with long lists seemingly guarantee the necessary religious and gender diversity among candidates on the lists. This is an ideal context to study intersectional voting because, at least in theory, it gives voters the chance to cast a (multiple) preferential vote(s) based on shared identification independently of their ideological preference. Moreover, we will register the multiple preferential vote in a reliable way by using a mock ballot (questionnaire that perfectly resembles the ballot list) embedded in an exit poll (survey taken immediately after leaving the voting booth). Third, contrary to earlier explanatory designs that exclusively relied on voter (demand) characteristics to explain the voting preferences, we also account for supply side features (see also Azabar et al., 2020). Since female (and) Muslim candidates are generally found lower on the lists and often have less political experience, it is essential to control for variables such as ballot list position and incumbency. Theoretically speaking our analytical approach answers Choo and Ferree's (2010:134) call for cross-classified multilevel studies of intersectionality "capturing both the agency of individuals in making the world they inhabit and the enabling and constraining forces of the world as it has been produced".

We find evidence of Muslims casting a gender and religious congruent vote compared to non-Muslims. However, the propensity to vote religious congruent is lower among female Muslim voters compared to male Muslim voters. More interestingly, female Muslim voters are also less

likely to cast an intersectional vote compared to male Muslim voters. This does not mean that Muslim women are not gender sensitive or religiously conscious. In fact, Muslimahs do not differ substantially from non-Muslim women in gender congruent or religious congruent voting. Our study thus stresses the importance of an intersectional approach.

1. Affinity voting: *between* and *within* groups

In line with Choo and Ferree's (2010) and Weldon's (2008) endorsement of an "intersection-plus" model to study intersectionality, we will not only focus on the interaction effects, *in casu* the intersection of Muslim and gender belonging, but also on the main effects respectively gender and religious congruent voting. Only by looking at the full picture one can prioritize the effects of different inequalities. In this respect we will first look at the evidence regarding gender and religious congruent voting in order to have some baselines to start our discussion of the intersectional vote of Muslimahs.

In Belgium's flexible proportional system, a handful of studies found evidence of gender congruent voting at the municipal elections (Marien et al., 2017) and at the national/European elections (Erzeel et al., 2018). The effect was stronger for men. However, when accounting for supply side features, scholars nuanced earlier findings. Some found that the stronger effect of men voting for male candidates disappeared (Marien et al., 2017; Erzeel et al., 2018), while others even found a moderate effect for women voting for candidates based on gender (van Erkel, 2019: 10). The supply side characteristics of candidates are crucial in this regard. Not so much the number but the position of women on the list matters (Thijssen, 2013: 159; Marien et al., 2017:328), revealing the structural inequalities at the candidate level imbedded in the political system. Male candidates are mostly ranked as first candidate, occupy more executive mandates and get more media attention, explaining the success of male candidates.

On the other hand, systematic research on the relevance of Muslims' religiosity on preferential voting behavior is scarce (Cesari, 2014; Just et al., 2014). Most research tend to focus on the ethnic minority belonging, revealing ethnic congruent voting (Van Heelsum et al., 2010; Teney et al., 2010). As far as we know, Heath et al. (2015) and Azabar et al. (2020) provided the first systematic analyses of religious congruent voting of Muslims. They showed that Muslim voters in India and in Belgium are more prone to cast a vote for Muslim candidates at the elections. Moreover, both studies pointed out that it is important to control for 'electability chances' in terms of variables such as 'ballot position' and 'political experience'.

An intersectional approach

Intersectionality is the phenomenon where social inequalities occur along different intersecting axes. The intersectional approach emphasizes the interaction between different inequality dimensions such as race, gender and religion (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins 2019). It criticizes the essentialist tendency to treat social groups (e.g. women or Muslims) as homogeneous entities with the same specific interests (Collins, 2019; Severs et al., 2016:348) while focusing on privileges and disadvantages associated with the various social identities. For instance, Muslim women have specific interests and needs different from women from the majority and from

Muslim men (see also Crenshaw, 1991). So, to approach them solely as women or solely as Muslims, as if there are no differences within groups is beyond accurate.

Additionally, scholars refer to ‘invisible intersectionality’ arguing that a person with multiple subordinate-group identities such as Muslim women become ‘invisible’ for policy makers relative to those with a single subordinate-group notably women and Muslim men (Crenshaw, 1991; Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach, 2008). Scholars developed a critique on how a discourse aimed at either women or Muslims fails to account for respectively religious discrimination and patriarchy in their battle for social justice leading to a reproduction of Muslim women’s subordination in both cases (see also Crenshaw, 1991).

Similarly, Joly (2017) argues that although the discourse of discrimination in Britain and France affected Muslim men and women alike, Muslim women suffered additionally due to the prevailing prejudices as women of Muslim background. The author demonstrated that Muslim women are positioned within complex relations (e.g unequal gender relations intersecting with their religious group and majority society) and found obstacles and facilitators governing their capacity to act politically. Likewise, in Belgium, van den Brandt (2019) elaborated on how Muslimahs belonging to a feminist and antiracist movement (BOEH!) engage in political protest against the ban on veils introduced by the local government for imposing a normative white secular model of emancipation.

Clearly, Muslim women have been the focal point in many public and scholarly debates (re)shaping dominant oppressing systems (Salem, 2013). One repeatedly expressed concern is the conservative gender ideology of Muslim immigrants (Inglehart and Norris, 2003) affecting political behavior. Dancygier (2017) demonstrated that because Muslim candidates obtained more preference votes in Brussels they could leapfrog other non-Muslim candidates on the ballot list. However, male Muslim candidates made relatively greater jumps than female Muslim candidates (Dancygier, 2017:163) which seems to suggest that Muslim voters vote more for male Muslim candidates. According to the same author, Muslims’ conservative attitudes towards gender roles could explain why male Muslim candidates outperform their female counterparts at the polls in urban cities. Parties are therefore more inclined to field Muslim male candidates to cater to the Muslim electorate, compromising the ideological integrity of parties in the long run. Dancygier warns against a potential inclusion dilemma in the electoral field due to a trade-off between the inclusion of Muslims and women stating that *‘if parties want to aggressively court the Muslim vote, the goal of gender parity will suffer’* (2017:163).

However, recent empirical studies point to the shrinking gap of gender traditionalism between Muslims and non-Muslims when considering subsequent Muslim generations socialized in Western countries (Diehl et al., 2009; Schlieble and Fleischmann, 2013), intergenerational transmission (Kretschmer, 2018) or female Muslims (Röder, 2014; Röder and Mühlau, 2014). The recent findings reject the hypothesis that gender inequality is inherent to Islam. Interestingly, female immigrants seem to adapt gender egalitarian attitudes more straightforwardly than their male counterparts, as women have a particular self-interest in embracing more egalitarian ideas. On top of these findings, several studies on Muslim women’s agency criticize the stereotype of the ‘submissive Muslim women’ as part of an Orientalist

discourse, while stressing the use of Islam as a flexible resource to interpret gender relations (Benhadjoudja, 2018; Schleible and Fleischmann, 2013). In this respect, Rinaldo (2014) introduces a 'pious critical agency' referring to Muslim women as political activists who engage critically and publicly with religious texts demanding a greater equality or rights for Muslim women. Hence, the question to what extent the interaction of gender and Muslim belonging shapes the electoral behavior of Muslims can provide crucial complementary insights.

Recent studies have already pointed at the importance of integrating the intersectionality perspective in the work on political representation (Severs et al., 2016). As Celis and Erzeel (2014) argue that by selecting young ethnic minority women parties can diversify their lists both in terms of gender and of ethnicity, thereby killing two birds with one stone so to say. Furthermore, parties prefer young ethnic minority women because, by putting them on the list, they can increase the descriptive representativeness of parties without jeopardizing their electoral effectiveness (Severs et al., 2016; Celis et al., 2014). Moreover, these specific profiles could attract the ethno-religious vote, without alienating the majority voters. In connection to this, selectorates might also prefer female Muslims because they can be portrayed as a product of successful social integration. After all, their political engagement seems to contradict patriarchal structures and belief systems constraining women, especially when these candidates are not veiled (Dancygier, 2017: 150, Celis and Erzeel, 2014). In addition, Martin and Blinder (2020) demonstrated that Muslim candidates are penalized, especially when they express support for pro-minority policies.

Based on the aforementioned affinity voting studies and considering the marginalized position of Muslimahs, it seems fair to assume that Muslimahs will be more inclined to vote for *one of their own* when possible. Earlier intersectional research in the US has demonstrated that black women endorse black female candidates over black male candidates (Philpot and Walton, 2007). Evidence further shows that female Latina voters support female (Latina) candidates (Bejarano, 2014) focusing on the US elections of 1982 to 2010. However, simply comparing US and Belgium is beyond accurate due to the different political systems and cultures.

Based on the available research in Belgium, we distinguish two possible explanations for the lack of an intersectional vote among Muslimahs in Belgium. The first explanation refers to Muslims' conservative attitudes that will benefit male Muslim candidates, discriminating against female Muslim candidates. A second explanation relates to intersectional studies on political representation who have demonstrated that parties select a candidate profile complementary to the privileged ones (white male incumbents) in order to not threaten the power status-quo. Depending on the prioritization of the constitutive baseline identities (Gender, Muslim, or their intersection) and the base of comparison (non-Muslim women or male Muslims) this can have different meanings. We will evaluate these distinctive meanings by testing following hypotheses:

H1 Female Muslims more often cast a preferential vote for a female candidate than male Muslims for male candidates

H2 Female Muslims less often cast a preferential vote for a Muslim candidate than male Muslims

H3a Female Muslims more often cast a preferential vote for a female Muslim candidate than male Muslims for male Muslim candidates

H3b Female Muslims less often cast a preferential vote for a female Muslim candidate than male Muslims for male Muslim candidates

H4 Female Muslims less often cast a preferential vote for a female candidate than female non-Muslims

H5 Female Muslims more often cast a preferential vote for a co-religious candidate than female non-Muslims

H6 Female Muslims more often cast a preferential vote for a female co-religious candidate than female non-Muslims

2. The Antwerp case

We focus on the local elections of 2018 in Belgium's largest city, Antwerp, to scrutinize the preferential votes of female Muslims in a proportional list system with compulsory voting. This is an interesting context because, in theory, it is a most likely case to find intersectional voting. The city has about half a million inhabitants with a perfect gender balance and a high diversity rate with more than 174 nationalities (Stad in Cijfers, 2018). Antwerp is a majority-minority city: different migratory minority groups¹ (50.1%) make up the majority of the local population (Stad in cijfers, 2018) (see Appendix 1). Antwerp is also home to a large Muslim community (OSF, 2011) although 'the exact number of people of Muslim culture or Islamic faith living in Belgium today is difficult to determine, as there is no official registration of the population's ethnic and religious ties' (Fadil, 2014: 83).

First, politically Antwerp has become a stronghold of (radical) right-wing parties providing us a very interesting context to study the preferential voting of Muslim voters. The presence and success of the radical right party Vlaams Belang and the right-wing nationalist party N-VA could pressure (female) Muslim minorities to vote for candidates to ensure a policy that does not disadvantage them. Governmental rules restricting religious practices such as a ban on veils and religious slaughter and a troubled relationship with mosque boards could evoke a reaction of Muslims who stress their threatened religious identity and act upon it in order to defend Islam – referred to as reactive religiosity (Nagra, 2011; Voas and Fleischmann, 2012). Similarly, scholars point at the important role of Muslim women in organizing political protests against the Antwerp local government due to the ban on veils for front office employees, while this government consisted of (female) Muslim councilors (Severs et al., 2016; van den Brandt, 2019). Van den Brandt (2019) argues that the exclusion of Muslimahs in political discussions about their interest and needs, generated Muslimahs' activism insisting that their voices and

¹ Ethnic minorities are defined as Antwerp citizens whom at least one of the parents has a non-Belgian birth nationality (Stad in cijfers, 2018).

experiences be recognized by politicians and policy makers.

Second, in the Belgian proportional flexible list system, voters have the opportunity to cast a vote for a party (list vote) or for one or more candidates within the same party (multiple preferential votes). Many studies are confronted with contexts where parties can only field one candidate with the result that the number of female and/or ethnic minority candidates is low. On the contrary, in Antwerp, all traditional parties field a long list of up to 55 candidates containing both male and female Muslims (except for the radical right party Vlaams Belang). Hence, whatever the ideology of voters they can vote for *one of their own*. In addition, candidate lists with up to 55 candidates make it impossible for voters to be totally informed about the different stances of all candidates resulting in a low information context which tend to stimulate ‘identity voting’ (Wauters et al., 2020).

Third, in 2002 a strict gender quota law regulation imposed an equal presence (50:50) of male and female candidates on party lists, as well as a female candidate ranked as first or second candidate (Meier, 2004). However, in most cases the first position on candidate lists is still preserved for male candidates (Marien et al., 2017). Furthermore, many parties use informal quota with respect to ethnic minorities. In sum, the system of multiple preferential voting in Antwerp (Belgium), the strong diversity in terms of both voter and candidate level, the presence of (in)formal quota and the success of the radical right party– together with the compulsory voting – constitute a context to test the presence of identity voting among (female) Muslims.

3. Data and research design

Earlier research on preferential voting often relied on candidate survey data in combination with the aggregate voting (supply side) to study the most desirable candidate characteristics. However, these studies could not fully capture the decision-making process of voters. In search for answers on voter-candidate similarities, voter survey data are more suitable (demand side). Yet, as argued by Erzeel et al. (2018) and van Erkel (2019), these demand data need a link with supply side characteristics such as ballot list position. We therefore model voters and candidate traits together by looking at dyadic relationships (van Erkel, 2019: 7). Data were gathered on both levels namely demand side/voters’ level and supply side/candidates’ level.

Demand side data - An exit poll was organized by an inter-university consortium² at the local elections of 2018 resulting in the Belgian Local Elections Survey. In Antwerp, 14 randomly selected polling stations were covered by a team of pollsters, which provided us with more reliable exit-poll data compared to standard post-electoral surveys. On the election day, from the opening at 8h until the closing time at 15h, highly trained interviewers - equipped with a tablet – approached every fifth voter leaving the polling booth. Several measures were taken to reach Muslim respondents. 6 polling stations situated in an area with a large Muslim minority were oversampled by deploying extra interviewers with a Muslim background. A total of 34 pollsters were stationed in 14 Antwerp polling stations.

² UGent, UAntwerpen, VUB, UHasselt, ULB, UCL and UNamur

Before the face-to-face interview with voters - consisting of questions on socio-demographic traits, voting behavior and political attitudes - a mock ballot was presented in order to reliably record the (multiple) preferential votes. The mock ballot perfectly resembled the design of the ballot list on the computer screen in the polling booth. Next to asking for their (preferential) voting behavior, the respondents were interviewed about their religious belonging³, the importance of gender parity in politics⁴, and whether respondents, in their preferential voting, are guided by the charisma, the competence or their connection with the candidate⁵.

Supply side data - The candidate database is composed of information of official governmental documents containing party lists with the candidate names and ballot list position. In Antwerp, 12 political parties – with a total of 487 candidates - submitted candidate lists for the 2018 local elections. To retrieve information about incumbency – having experience in a local council - the formal website of the city council was used, next to the website tracking all political mandates in Belgium (<http://www.cumuleo.be>). We used the onomastic procedure (name recognition) in order to code gender. In order to identify Muslim candidates, we developed a three-step approach due to the lack of official statistics taking ethnicity or religious belonging into consideration. Firstly, inspired by Heath et al. (2015) we used name recognition to define Muslim minorities. This makes sense since Antwerp Muslims are mainly of Maghrebian or Turkish descent. However, obviously a name alone does not suffice to reliably code religious belonging. Secondly, the identification was also based on the self-definition of candidates as being of a member of Muslim culture. Concretely, background checks of the belonging dimension of candidates were made via websites of candidates, news articles, their political party and their social media. If candidates referred to themselves as Muslims, we confirmed their Muslim belonging. Lastly, where possible we used peer assessment of fellow political candidates: we asked candidates of several political parties if we identified their colleagues rightfully as belonging to Muslim faith or not. We nevertheless acknowledge that defining the religious belonging of candidates has its limitations. However, when religious diversity and Islam is so politicized as during the Antwerp local elections of 2018, it is a bit easier to collect such information (e.g. Azabar et al., 2020).

Combined data - Linking voter and candidate data ended up in a stacked data matrix (N=32357) with a binary dependent variable indicating whether a voter casted a vote for a specific candidate (no=0, yes=1). The combined stacked data allows us to test whether voters prefer candidates alike, while at the same time controlling for candidate characteristics, such as their political experience and their ballot position.

Our main independent variables focus on voter-candidate similarities: Gender congruence (no=0, yes=1), Religion congruence (no=0, yes=1) and the intersection of both identities

³ Would you consider yourself as belonging to any specific religion or philosophical denomination? If yes, which one?

⁴ On a scale from 0 to 10, how important is it according to you to have an equal share of men and women in politics?

⁵ What has been the main reason that motivated you to cast a preference vote for your most preferred candidate? Possible answers are a) the personality/charisma of the candidate (Examples: charisma, honesty integrity, accessibility, kindness) b) the competence of the candidate (Examples: work done as local councilor, alderman or mayor, education, expertise, experience, work ethic, intelligence, pragmatism, vision) c. I know the candidate d. I don't know.

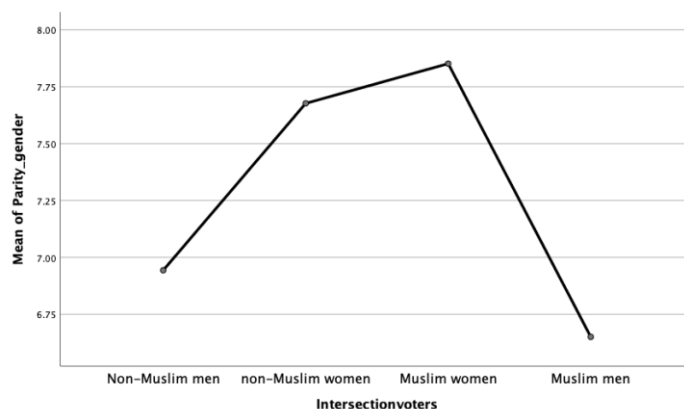
4. Findings

Descriptive results

Demand side data - We ended up with a response rate of 51% in Antwerp city resulting in 972 respondents. Our sample contains 49% female and 51% male voters. 29% of the respondents consider themselves belonging to Muslim faith. Approximately 70% of the Antwerp voters casted one or more preferential votes, with the majority of those respondents voting for 1 or 2 candidates (86%). Since we are interested in voter-candidate similarities, we only focus on voters who casted one or multiple preferential votes (N=608). This subsample consists of 50% male and 50% female voters. 26 % belong to Muslim faith (or Muslim=1), 74% are non-Muslims. Among the Muslim voters (N=174) 51% are male Muslim voters and 49% female Muslim voters. Interestingly, female Muslims neither significantly use a preferential vote less than male Muslims (compared to a list vote) nor do they use it less than female non-Muslims (see Appendix 2). This finding thus provides a first contradiction for the limited political agency of Muslimahs.

When comparing average support for equal representation of women between the four intersectional groups (non-Muslim men, non-Muslim women, Muslim women and Muslim men), we find a significant difference among groups ($F(3.527)=4.672$; $p=0.003$). Notably, Muslim men are less supportive of equal gender representation compared to Muslim women ($p=0.035$) and non-Muslim women ($p=0.025$). There is no meaningful difference between female Muslims and female non-Muslims, which goes against the stereotype of the submissive and conservative Muslim women. Interestingly, female Muslim voters even show the highest mean among voters (see figure 1), while Muslim men show the lowest level of support for gender parity in politics. Here we find a second contradiction for the limited political agency of Muslimahs.

Figure 1 Plot Means of importance of gender parity by the intersection of voters– *On a scale of 0 to 10, how important is it according to you to have an equal share of men and women in politics?*



When analyzing the motivations⁶ to vote for their most preferred candidate, competences⁷ were generally mentioned the most. Interestingly, this motivation was even more important among Muslim women (42%) than Muslim men (37%). On the other hand, charisma⁸ was mentioned more by Muslim men (31%) than by Muslim women (24%). Furthermore 13% of Muslim men stated that they knew the candidate compared to 15% Muslim women. An equal share of male Muslims (5%) and female Muslims (6%) stated that charisma *and* competences were important when choosing their most preferred candidate (Table 2).

Table 2 Motivations to cast a vote for most preferred candidate by Muslim men, Muslim women, non-Muslim men and non-Muslim women

Motivations to cast a vote for most preferred candidate	Muslim men	Muslim women	Non-Muslim men	Non-Muslim women
Charisma	28 (31%)	20 (24%)	25 (12%)	36 (16%)
Competence	33 (37%)	36 (42%)	104 (52%)	100 (45%)
Charisma and competence	5 (6%)	4 (5%)	12 (6%)	20 (9%)
Know the candidate	12 (13%)	13 (15%)	33 (16%)	34 (15%)
Missing/Don't know	12 (13%)	12 (14%)	27 (13%)	30 (14%)
N	90	85	201	220

Supply side data- Our supply side file contains 50% of male candidates and 50% female candidates, due to the strict quota regulations where parties have to maintain a 50:50 gender quota. 20% (98) is coded Muslim. These Muslim candidates were fielded by D-SA (30)⁹, the radical left party PVDA (14), the ecologist party Groen (13), the Social Democrats s.pa (11), the Christian Democrats CD&V (10) and Be.One¹⁰ (8). The Liberal Open Vld (6) and the nationalist party N-VA (3) fielded less candidates with a Muslim background. The far-right party Vlaams Belang had no such candidates on their list (see Appendix 3). In short, one out of five candidates are Muslim, confirming earlier studies claiming that when the proportion of the Muslim electorate is sizeable, so will the proportion of Muslim candidates on the lists (Heath et al., 2015; Teney et al., 2010). Interestingly, the high percentage of Muslim political candidates is partly due to new niche-parties focusing on the Muslim electorate. When considering only traditional parties, only 15% (57 of 385) of the candidates has Muslim roots.

⁶ When multiple motivations were given, and they knew the candidate we analyzed this as 'know the candidate'

⁷ Competences is referred to as education, expertise, experience, work ethic, intelligence, pragmatism, vision, work done as local councilor, alderman or mayor

⁸ Charisma is referred to as honesty integrity, accessibility, kindness

⁹ D-SA is a smaller new, local migrant party who presented a list with 37 candidates.

¹⁰ Be.One is a smaller new, local migrant party who presented a list with 10 candidates.

Analyzing the ballot list position of Muslim candidates makes clear that - considering all parties - 31% of all candidates positioned in the first quintile¹¹ has Muslim roots. This percentage drops to 25% when focusing exclusively on traditional parties (see Appendix 4). When considering traditional parties, the first Muslim candidate generally obtains a relatively high position on the ballot list but never a top position. Interestingly, the first Muslim candidate is mostly female and ranked 2nd or 3rd on the ballot list. These results are in line with Celis and Erzeel (2014) demonstrating that female ethnic minority candidates get better positions than male ethnic minority candidates since they better fit the vote-seeking and power maintenance strategy of party elites because female Muslim-candidates are perceived as less of a threat.

Combined data - The combined data reveal the casted preferential votes: 48% were gender congruent, 72% were religion congruent (overlapping Muslim/non-Muslim identity). When considering only Muslim voters, 55% of the votes casted were gender congruent and 43% were Muslim congruent. Only 25% of the votes casted can be considered as an intersectional vote notably that gender and Muslim belonging of a voter resemble the gender and Muslim belonging of the candidate.

When further exploring the preferential votes – not accounting for supply side features - it is clear that all voters cast a preferential vote most often for a male non-Muslim candidate (see Table 3). Interestingly, with regards to the preferential voting of Muslim women, female and male Muslim candidates are least popular. For male Muslim voters the least preferred candidates are female candidates. Yet, because these descriptive findings do not control for the absolute number of candidates on the lists for the four intersections a multivariate analysis is necessary.

¹¹ The first quintile consists of ballot position 1 to 11. A list consists of maximum 55 candidates.

Table 3 Candidate preferences of voters by intersection of gender and Muslim belonging, not accounted for supply side features

Voters	Candidate preference 1		Candidate preference 2		Candidate preference 3		Candidate preference 4
Female Muslims	Male (38%)	non-Muslim	Female Muslim (30%)	non-	Female Muslim (16%)	+ male Muslims (16%)	
Male Muslims	Male (37%)	non-Muslim	Male (31%)	Muslim	Female Muslim (16%)	+ female Muslim (16%)	
Female Muslim	Non- Male (45%)	non-Muslim	Female Muslim (32%)	non-	Female Muslim (15%)		Male Muslim (8%)
Male Non-Muslim	Male (45%)	non-Muslim	Female Muslim (41%)	non-	Female Muslim (11%)		Male Muslim (3%)

Multilevel analysis

Table 4 shows the results of the cross-classified multilevel logistic analysis combining voter and candidate data to explain whether a voter casts a preferential vote for a particular candidate or not, notably with a specific focus on the main effects. The first model presents the main effects of gender congruence (voting for candidates with same gender=1, otherwise 0), whilst also controlling for religion congruence. Additionally, we control for several supply side features, namely first and last candidate (so-called list pullers and list pushers), the ballot position and previous political experience in a local council. At the voter side, we control for the number of preferential votes casted, to account for the fact that some voters casted more preferential votes than others.

Based on prior research we expect voters to cast a gender congruent vote. However, the results of Model 1 do not support this expectation. The main effect of the independent variable gender congruence is not significant. Hence, voters are not more prone to cast a gender congruent vote at local elections ($B = -0,07$). However, the baseline interaction in this paper is that female voters do vote significantly more gender congruent. The effect for the interaction ‘Female voter X Gender congruence’ is indeed slightly positive ($B = -0.41 + 0.66 = 0.25$) compared to the negative effect for ‘Male voter X Gender congruence’ ($B = -0.41^*$). Although, this last effect is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), meaning that male voters are less inclined than female voters to vote gender congruent, the effect sizes are modest. The chance that a female voter votes for a candidate increases with 0.25% when the candidate is female while the predicted probability that a male voter votes for a candidate decreases with 0.40% when the candidate is male. The main effect regarding ‘Religion congruent’ voting in Model 1 is more robust ($B = 0.49^{***}$). Yet, the interaction effect for ‘Muslim X religion congruence’ in Model 2 reveals that co-religious voting is significantly more common among Muslims ($B = 0.14 + 0.80 = 0.94^{***}$) than among non-Muslims ($B = 0.14$).

In Model 3, we additionally test whether Muslim voters are more likely to vote gender congruent compared to non-Muslim voters. Interestingly, the positive effect of the interaction ‘Muslim voter X Gender congruence’ ($-0.25+0.64=0.39^{***}$) indicates that Muslim voters are more likely to vote gender congruent than non-Muslim voters ($B=-0.25$). In Model 3, we also test whether female voters vote more Religion congruent than male voters. Yet, the small effect of the interaction ‘Female voters X Religion congruence’ ($0.83-0.66=0.17$) reveals that it is rather the male voter who significantly more often votes religious congruent ($B=0.83^{***}$). Again, the effects are rather weak.

Table 4 Multilevel cross-classified logistic model with ‘casted a preferential vote for a candidate’ as a DV (N=32357)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
Intercept	-4.45***	(0.25)	-3.93***	(0.30)	-4.51***	(0.29)
Gender congruence	-0.07	(0.08)	-0.41*	(0.16)	-0.25**	(0.09)
Religion congruence	0.49***	(0.10)	0.14	(0.19)	0.83***	(0.15)
Number of pref votes casted	0.15***	(0.01)	0.16***	(0.01)	0.16***	(0.01)
Ballot list position	-0.04***	(0.00)	-0.04***	(0.00)	-0.04***	(0.01)
Incumbency	1.36***	(0.19)	1.25***	(0.19)	1.38***	(0.20)
List pusher	2.41***	(0.39)	2.37***	(0.39)	2.44***	(0.40)
List puller	3.97***	(0.33)	4.21***	(0.33)	3.98***	(0.34)
Female voter			-0.47**	(0.18)	0.31	(0.17)
Muslim voter			-0.48*	(0.24)	-0.39*	(0.18)
Female voter x Gender congruence			0.66*	(0.28)		
Muslim voter x Religion congruence			0.80*	(0.37)		
Muslim voter x religion congruence					0.64***	(0.19)
Female voter x Religion congruence					-0.66***	(0.18)
AIC	5785.50		5634.52		5621.20	
BIC	5953.19		5835.00		5821.68	

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, + $p < 0.1$. We control for political party

Yet, our central hypotheses all revolve around three-way interactions that are often difficult to interpret. In order to make the findings more transparent we will split our analyses in two; one series of analyses for Muslim voters (Table 5; N=8911) and one series for non-Muslim voters (Table 6; N=23390). Based on the results in Table 5 we can test hypotheses 1, 2, and 3. While hypotheses 4, 5, and 6 can be tested by a comparison of the effects in Table 5 and 6.

In Model 4 of Table 5, we see that there is a positive effect for gender congruence ($B=0.33^*$) which is in line with the findings of model 3. In other words, Muslims do vote gender congruent.

Interestingly, this positive effect cannot be attributed to female Muslims because the effect of the interaction ‘Female voter X Gender congruence’ in Model 5 ($B=0.53-0.36=0.17$) is not significant. While the tendency of male Muslims to vote for male Muslim candidates is only significant at the 0.1 level ($B=0.53^+$), we can nevertheless reject hypothesis 1: Female Muslims do not more often cast a preferential vote for a female candidate than male Muslims.

In Model 4 of Table 5 we also see a strongly positive effect for ‘Religion congruence’ ($B=1.32^{***}$). As was noticed by Azabar et al. (2020), Muslims are more likely to vote for Muslim candidates. We expect female Muslims to be less likely to vote for Muslim candidates compared to male Muslims, since they are not prototypical members of the Muslim group. The effect of the interaction ‘Female Muslim voter X Religion congruence’ is non-significant in Model 5 but the main effect of Religion congruence indicates that male Muslim voters do vote more Religion congruent ($B=1.54^{***}$) than female Muslim voters. We therefore confirm hypothesis 2 because female Muslims less often cast a preferential vote for a Muslim candidate than male Muslims.

Last but not least, in Model 6 of Table 6 we see a negligibly small effect of the intersectional effect ‘Muslim congruence X gender congruence’ ($B=0.04$). In general, Muslims do not seem more inclined to vote for an electoral candidate that is congruent both in terms of gender and Muslim belonging. Yet, the results of Model 7 point out that this effect might be different for female and male voters. Based on the affinity voting these, we hypothesized (H3a) that female Muslim voters will be more inclined to vote ‘intersectional’ than male Muslims. After all, they remain somehow “invisible” since they are neither prototypical members of the first-order social group ‘gender’ nor of the ‘Muslim group’. Accordingly, they will affirm their doubly marginalized status by voting for candidates that share their gender as well as their religion. However, the effect of the intersectional interaction ‘Female voter X Muslim congruence X gender congruence’ ($B=1.11-2.14=-1.03^*$) is negative and hence definitely smaller than the positive effect for male Muslims ($B=1.11^+$). We thus reject hypothesis 3a which states that female Muslims more often cast an intersectional vote than male Muslims. However, the counterhypothesis H3b expects Muslimahs to vote less intersectional than their male counterparts as female Muslim candidates are specifically chosen by the electorate to maintain the status quo. In addition, Muslim candidates who want to change the status quo are discriminated against by non-Muslim voters (Martin & Blinder, 2020). Interestingly, the main effect of both Muslim and Gender congruence is significant ($p<0.1$) indicating – with caution – that the propensity to vote intersectional is higher among male Muslim voters than female Muslim voters.

In order to test hypotheses 4, 5, and 6 we compare the aforementioned interaction effects for ‘female Muslims’ from models 5 and 7 of Table 5 with the corresponding effects for ‘female non-Muslims’ in models 9 and 11 of Table 6. For instance, based on the results of Model 5 we concluded that the interaction effect ‘Female Muslim voter X Gender congruence’ ($B=0.53-0.36=0.17$) was not statistically significant. We can see that the effect of the interaction ‘Female non-Muslim voter X Gender congruence’ in Model 9 ($B=-0.80+1.07=0.27^{***}$) is significant but marginally positive. All in all, we can confirm hypothesis 4 which assumes that female

Muslims less often cast a preferential vote for a female candidate than female non-Muslims. Interestingly, female voters have an inverse relationship with their male homologues: while male Muslims vote more gender congruent than female Muslims ($B=0.53^+$), male non-Muslims vote less gender congruent than female non-Muslims ($B=-0.80^{***}$).

Also based on model 5 in Table 5 we noticed that the interaction 'Female Muslim voter X Religion congruence' is not significant but that male Muslims vote more Religion congruent. The results of Model 9 in Table 6 also show that the effect of the interaction 'Female non-Muslim voter X Religion congruence' ($B=0.80-0.83=-0.03$) is not meaningful at all. Consequently, hypothesis 5 cannot be confirmed as female Muslims equally often cast a preferential vote for a co-religious candidate compared to female non-Muslims. Interestingly, as male Muslims vote more co-religious ($B=1.54^{***}$) than their female counterparts, the same goes up for male non-Muslims ($B=0.78^{**}$).

Finally, regarding hypothesis 6 we compare the effect of the intersectional interaction 'Female Muslim voter X Muslim congruence X gender congruence' ($B=1.11-2.14=-1.03^*$) in model 7 with the effect of the corresponding intersectional interaction 'Female non-Muslim voter X Religion congruence X Gender congruence' ($B=-0.28-0.40=-0.68$) in model 11. Once again, we have to reject hypothesis 6 which posits that Female Muslims more often cast a preferential vote for a female co-religious candidate than female non-Muslims. After all, the effect for female Muslims ($B=-1.03^{***}$) is clearly smaller than that for female non-Muslims ($B=0.12$).

Table 5 Multilevel logistic model with ‘casted a preferential vote for a candidate’ as a DV, only Muslim voters (N=8967)

	Model4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Intercept	-5.35*** (0.46)	-5.58*** (0.50)	-5.59*** (0.52)	-5.26*** (0.51)
Gender congruence	0.33* (0.17)	0.53+ (0.30)	0.52 (0.36)	-0.04 (0.44)
Religion congruence	1.32*** (0.29)	1.54*** (0.33)	1.50*** (0.41)	0.91+ (0.48)
Number of pref votes casted	0.59*** (0.07)	0.59*** (0.07)	0.59*** (0.07)	0.59*** (0.07)
Ballot list position	-0.06*** (0.01)	-0.06*** (0.01)	-0.05*** (0.01)	-0.06*** (0.01)
Incumbency	0.74* (0.36)	0.75* (0.36)	0.78* (0.36)	0.83* (0.35)
List pusher	1.67* (0.79)	1.71* (0.78)	1.68* (0.78)	1.81* (0.78)
List puller	4.00*** (0.49)	3.96*** (0.49)	3.93*** (0.49)	3.99*** (0.47)
Female Muslim voter		0.49 (0.36)	0.49 (0.37)	-0.09 (0.45)
Female Muslim voter x Gender congruence		-0.36 (0.51)	-0.37 (0.51)	0.71 (0.72)
Female Muslim voter x Religion congruence		-0.44 (0.34)	-0.43 (0.34)	0.71 (0.64)
MuslimGender congruence			0.04 (0.34)	1.11+ (0.61)
Female Muslim voter x MuslimGender congruence				-2.14* (1.01)
AIC	1313.60	1317.27	1388.88	1316.39
BIC	1441.43	1466.40	1474.97	1479.57

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, + $p < 0.1$. We control for political party

Table 6 Multilevel logistic model with ‘casted a preferential vote for a candidate’ as a DV, only non-Muslim voters (N=23390)

	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11
Intercept	-4.34*** (0.32)	-4.34*** (0.36)	-4.32*** (0.36)	-4.37*** (0.39)
Gender congruence	-0.20* (0.09)	-0.80*** (0.18)	-0.67* (0.28)	-0.56 (0.46)
Religion congruence	0.32 (0.21)	0.80** (0.25)	0.78** (0.26)	0.83** (0.31)
Number of pref votes casted	0.15*** (0.01)	0.15*** (0.01)	0.15*** (0.01)	0.15*** (0.01)
Ballot list position	-0.04*** (0.01)	-0.04*** (0.01)	-0.04*** (0.01)	-0.04*** (0.01)
Incumbency	1.42*** (0.21)	1.32*** (0.21)	1.33*** (0.21)	1.37*** (0.21)
List pusher	2.71*** (0.44)	2.79*** (0.44)	2.78*** (0.44)	2.84*** (0.45)
List puller	4.22*** (0.38)	4.56*** (0.39)	4.56*** (0.38)	4.51*** (0.39)

Female voter	non-Muslim	-0.05	(0.28)	-0.13	(0.29)	0.02	(0.43)
Female voter	non-Muslim	1.07***	(0.31)	1.03**	(0.31)	0.73	(0.75)
Female voter	non-Muslim	-0.83***	(0.23)	-0.73**	(0.24)	-0.92*	(0.46)
Religion	Gender			-0.13	(0.24)	-0.28	(0.50)
Female voter	non-Muslim					0.40	(0.83)
AIC		4373.70	4200.73	4201.67		4203.40	
BIC		4526.84	4377.09	4386.00		4395.74	

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, + $p < 0.1$. We control for political party

Table 7 Overview of tested hypotheses

H1 Female Muslims more often cast a preferential vote for a female candidate than male Muslims for male candidates	Rejected
H2 Female Muslims less often cast a preferential vote for a Muslim candidate than male Muslims	Confirmed
H3a Female Muslims more often cast a preferential vote for a female Muslim candidate than male Muslims for male Muslim candidates	Rejected
H3b Female Muslims less often cast a preferential vote for a female Muslim candidate than male Muslims for male Muslim candidates	Confirmed
H4 Female Muslims less often cast a preferential vote for a female candidate than female non-Muslims.	Confirmed
H5 Female Muslims more often cast a preferential vote for a co-religious candidate than female non-Muslims.	Rejected
H6 Female Muslims more often cast a preferential vote for a female co-religious candidate than female non-Muslims	Rejected

Conclusion and discussion

Do voters cast a vote based on gender, Muslim belonging and/or a combination of these marginalized identities? Our study goes beyond a 'single-axis' approach and scrutinizes Muslim women's preferential behavior by shedding light on the complexity of electoral candidate preferences in Antwerp (Belgium) using the theoretical framework of intersectionality of gender and religion while considering a secular context. We do so based on accurate exit poll data delivering a detailed insight on the preferential votes of an understudied and much-disputed group, Muslimahs. Our findings provide new and crucial insights in Muslims' preferential behavior which could have implications on strategies of political parties concerning which candidates they should field at local elections.

Our analyses show that Muslim voters cast a gender-based vote. First, we find evidence of female Muslim voters to be less likely to vote gender congruent compared to male Muslims (H1). Second, Muslims do vote religious congruent, but again, female Muslims vote less for Muslim candidates compared to male Muslims (H2). More interestingly, based on an intersectional approach to affinity voting, we hypothesized that female Muslim voters – due to their double marginalized identities- will be more inclined to vote 'intersectional' than male Muslims (H3a). Clearly, this is not the case. We even find -with caution- the contrary, notably that male Muslims are more likely to vote intersectional than female Muslims (H3b).

So why do Muslim women do not vote for candidates alike? Are they, in the words of Kaur, butterflies who mimic moths? Not exactly, in terms of their preferential voting, Muslimahs are sensitive to their own femininity as well to their Muslim identity. Yet, this does not lead to more voting for Muslimah candidates. In this study we referred to two possible explanations. First, Dancygier (2017) argued that female Muslim voters will prefer male Muslim candidates due to their conservative religious views, our analyses suggest that this is not the case in Antwerp, Belgium. Moreover, support for an equal share of women and men in elected office is even higher among female Muslim voters than among female non-Muslim voters (fig.1). Our findings are rather related to research of Celis and Erzeel (2014) implying that female Muslim candidates are mostly chosen to not turn off the non-Muslim majority electorate and to enhance the internal gender and ethnic diversity instead of Muslimahs' interests and needs. Moreover, Martin & Blinder (2020) stated that Muslim candidates who want to change the status quo are discriminated against by non-Muslim voters.

Consequently, it is possible that the double disadvantage is not expressed via a vote for Muslimahs, but rather via a vote for candidates who do not look like them but act for them. Do Muslimahs doubt about the descriptive-substantive link regarding to these representatives (Schwindt-Bayer & Mishler, 2005)? The assumption is then that the Muslimah candidates do not fully represent the Muslimah interests. In other words, to what extent is the reluctance of Muslimahs to vote for Muslimah candidates, based on the perception that this does not lead to increased policy responsiveness? For one, the fact that Muslimahs are active in protests against the local government related to policy issues that specifically affect female Muslims, such as the ban on veils, seems to go against the assumption that they do not have particular

intersectional interests. However, the doubts regarding the descriptive-substance link by Muslimahs, could also be based on the perception that most Muslimah representatives do not share their interpretative horizons. Moreover, if Muslimah candidates are often selected by party selectorates because they are perceived to be less fanatical and more acceptable for non-Muslim voters this is not completely illusive (Celis and Erzeel, 2014). In sum, the absence of an intersectional vote on the part of Muslimahs does not necessarily amount to the absence of intersectional awareness. To the extent that Muslimah representatives are perceived as less convincing to serve the gender cause than other women and less convincing to serve the Muslim cause than other Muslims, they could be seen as rebels without a cause. Yet, more in-depth qualitative data on motivations (not) to vote for Muslimah candidates is pivotal in order to better explain the absence of an intersectional vote among Muslimahs.

Moreover, earlier literature stressed how Muslim women engage as political activists led by a pious critical agency (Rinaldo, 2014). Scholars (Salem, 2013; Mahmood, 2005) point to the need to reconceptualize the notion of agency into the understanding of Muslim women's lives, which is lacking within Western feminist frameworks. In this respect, we encourage further explorations of how Muslim women's political agency is shaped in non-Muslim societies and the challenges they pose to more secular/liberal interpretations of women's agency (see also Mahmood, 2005).

Our study illustrates the complexity of voters' political choices being shaped by their membership of multiple groups and suggest scholars to not only study differences *between* groups but also *within* groups. The intersectional approach highlights which groups within minority groups are represented, and who has been forgotten leading to ever marginalized positions in society and politics (Collins, 2019). Our study reveals that the fact that a voter has the double disadvantage of belonging to two minority groups at the same time, does not necessarily lead to cross-sectional preferential votes for candidates belonging to both minorities. Yet, this does not mean that Muslimahs are not intersectionally aware because it is wrong to posit a one to one relation between an intersectional perspective and descriptive representation in terms of the intersection. In the end, the importance of intersectionality is that one goes beyond the difference between 'the' moth and 'the' butterfly.

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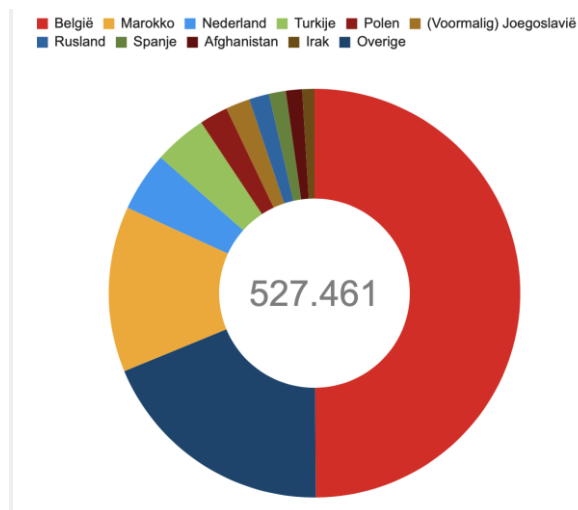
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Appendices

Appendix 1 Demographic share of citizens with a migration background in Antwerp, Belgium



Source Stad in cijfers

Appendix 2 Logistic regression with 'Casted a preferential vote or not' as DV among Muslims (N=233) and Women (N=442)

Muslim sample (N=233)

	B	S.E.
Female Muslim	-0.11	0.31
Education(ref High)		
Low		
Middle	-0.37	0.42
	0.40	0.31
<i>Nagelkerke</i>	0.29	
<i>R square</i>		

Female sample (N=442)

	B	S.E.
Muslim	0.40	0.26
Education(ref High)		
Low		
Middle	-0.32	0.32
	-0.26	0.24
<i>Nagelkerke</i>	0.01	
<i>R square</i>		

Appendix 3 Number of - (fe)male - Muslim candidates within political parties at the Antwerp local elections of 2018 (N=487)

Party	Number of female Muslim candidates	Number of male Muslim candidates	Number of Muslim candidates/Number of total candidates - % of Muslims on the list
<i>Traditional parties</i>			
Radical left	8	6	14/55 (25%)
Greens	5	8	13/55 (24%)
Socialists	7	4	11/55 (20%)
Christen Democrats	4	6	10/55 (18%)
Liberals	3	3	6/55 (11%)
Nationalist party	3	0	3/55 (5%)
Radical right	0	0	
<i>New migrant parties</i>			
Be.One	5	3	8/10 (80%)

