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ARTICLE

Insiders, Outsiders, and Ideology: Explaining Variation in Ministerial Adviser Recruitment Patterns in Flanders (1999-2020)

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Abstract

This paper examines the recruitment patterns of Flemish ministerial advisers from 1999 to 2020, proposing a model that integrates resources and ideology to explain the recruitment pools used by different political parties when they recruit advisers for their ministerial offices. The study builds on two traditionally opposed perspectives in the literature: the partisan view, which emphasises political loyalty, and the technocratic view, which highlights expertise. It then introduces two key political science variables — resources (cartel vs. non-cartel parties) and ideology (left vs. right) — to offer a dynamic and explanatory approach to the recruitment of ministers' advisers. Using a unique dataset of 754 Flemish ministerial advisers and 5828 career positions, the analysis reveals that despite the apparent opposition between the partisan and technocratic perspectives, both can be observed in the recruitment of ministerial advisers. Nearly half of the ministerial advisers had political experience, supporting the partisan view, while 83.53% held advanced educational qualifications, aligning with the technocratic perspective. The study shows that parties' tendency towards either a partisan or technocratic recruitment pattern is influenced by explanatory variables such as resources and ideology. Non-cartel parties, such as the Flemish nationalists (N-VA), recruit more from outside sectors, whereas cartel parties draw more from insider pools. Additionally, ideology shapes these patterns: right-wing parties favour recruiting advisors from the private sector, while left-wing parties show a preference for academia and the public sector.

Keywords: Ministerial advisers, Political elites, Careers

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Introduction

In recent years, the academic community has intensified its scrutiny of ministerial advisers (MAs), adopting both theoretical and empirical approaches to shed light on these relatively invisible governmental actors (Blick, 2004; Eymeri-Douzans et al., 2015; Shaw & Eichbaum, 2023). These advisers, who play an influential role in day-to-day policy-making in various Western democracies, often remain in the background compared to other political or administrative elites. Questions in academic and popular literature include: Where do these advisors come from? What have MAs typically studied? Do MAs have any experience in the political or administrative realm, or do they come from other sectors? Indeed, a significant volume of research has been dedicated to understanding the recruitment processes of these advisors, probing into their professional backgrounds, levels of experience, educational qualifications, and potential biases in gender recruitment (Askim et al., 2022; Eymeri-Douzans, 2015; Rouban, 2012; Taflaga & Kerby, 2020). This paper explores these recruitment patterns for Flemish MAs between 1999 and 2020. We do not limit ourselves to a description of the backgrounds of these MAs but propose an explanatory model that explains the use of different recruitment pools.

We move beyond the state of the art by offering a dynamic model for recruiting ministerial advisers. Existing work, which spans across different sub-disciplines (public administration and political science) and linguistic communities (Anglophone and French-language literature), tend to depict recruitment as adhering to either partisan loyalty or technocratic expertise. In other words, existing works depict ministerial advisers to be recruited from either partisan recruitment pools or technocratic recruitment pools. In the following section, we build on these disparate theoretical perspectives (partisan vs. technocratic motivations) to come to our model for the recruitment of MAs. In doing so, we rely on two key political science concepts: the cartel party and its associated resources, on the one hand, and ideology, on the other. We use these concepts as variables that predict from which recruitment pool a MA is most likely recruited. We argue that cartel parties (with extensive government experience) can use insider recruitment pools as a resource that newer non-cartel parties do not have. The latter, therefore, need to turn more to outsider pools. Concerning ideology, then, in these insider and outsider pools, a distinction can be made between left-wing pools and centre/right-wing pools. Our proposed model considers the interaction between both resources and ideology and thus predicts from which sector recruitment is most likely to occur. This model explains why the recruitment of ministerial advisers is not static but rather a dynamic process that shifts between different types of recruitment pools (including but not limited to partisan or technocratic recruitment pools), depending on the interplay between resources and ideology.

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We conduct a first empirical test of our model using a career dataset of Flemish MAs from 1999 to 2020, extracted from LinkedIn profiles. This approach not only allows for an analysis of the descriptive patterns of recruitment, which holds value in itself for further research, but also allows for a fine-grained modelling of the careers of the MA that has been absent in preceding studies. We coded the sector for each of the 5868 career steps in the dataset, leading to a proportional representation of the sectors for each of the MAs in the dataset. The first (descriptive) research question explores the pre-recruitment career paths of MAs. The second (explanatory) research question evaluates whether our proposed model correctly predicts the recruitment pools from which the Flemish MAs are recruited.

RQ1: What are the pre-recruitment career patterns of Flemish MAs between 1999 and 2020?

RQ2: How do resources and ideology explain the recruitment pools from which Flemish MAs have been recruited?

Literature & Theory: Partitocracy vs. Technocracy

Partitocracy & Technocracy

Before discussing our model, we briefly review the existing literature on ministerial advisers and their recruitment. We define ministerial advisers as a specific type of political staffer working within ministerial offices, which are a subtype of executive advisory and support offices (EASO) (Meert et al., 2021). These offices vary in name and structure across administrative contexts. In systems of the Westminster tradition, they are referred to as ministerial offices (MOs), whereas in systems of the Napoleonic tradition, they are known as ministerial cabinets (MCs), which are distinct from the cabinet of ministers.

A previous literature review and accompanying citation analysis (Bellens & Brans, 2022) found that research on these offices is divided into two primary linguistic streams. The Anglophone literature predominantly focuses on systems of the Westminster tradition (Blick, 2004; Craft & Howlett, 2013; Goplerud, 2015; Orchard et al., 2024; Pickering et al., 2023; Shaw & Eichbaum, 2018) as well as Germanic (Hustedt, 2018), Scandinavian (Askim et al., 2022; Hustedt & Salomonsen, 2017), and systems of the Napoleonic tradition (Brans et al., 2017). Meanwhile, the Francophone literature primarily explores the dynamics of ministerial cabinets in France (Achin & Dulong, 2019; Eymeri-Douzans, 2003; Rouban, 2012; Sawicki & Mathiot, 1999).

Beyond linguistic differences, there are also disciplinary distinctions between political science and public administration. While political science has produced relatively few studies focused specifically on MAs, there is substantial research on parliamentary staff (Egeberg et al., 2014; Montgomery & Nyhan, 2017; Pegan, 2017;

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Stos, 2016). A central question in this literature concerns the democratic legitimacy of these legislative staffers (Egeberg et al., 2014; Hertel-Fernandez et al., 2019; Sabag Ben-Porat et al., 2020). Moens (2021) extends this inquiry to other political staff, including MAs, arguing that in Belgium, MAs serve as representatives of the electorate within the executive branch due to their direct ties to political parties. Bureaucrats, by contrast, are neutral actors and lack this direct accountability to the electorate. The public administration perspective, in turn, views MAs through a more critical lens, often portraying them as symbols of executive politicisation. From this standpoint, MAs are seen as undermining the neutrality of the civil service by infusing partisan politics into administrative processes (Bach & Hustedt, 2023; Hustedt & Salomonsen, 2014). In other words, public administration scholars are more concerned with the erosion of impartiality and professionalism in governance that MAs (could) bring with them.

This paper integrates these diverse perspectives, both linguistic and disciplinary, to examine recruitment practices in ministerial cabinets. From this synthesis, we outline two key perspectives: the partisan (partitocratic) perspective and the technocratic perspective, which are explained in detail below. While these existing perspectives provide important insights, they offer only a static view of recruitment practices. We aim to build on these perspectives by developing an explanatory model that accounts for the variation in the use of recruitment pools depending on party features. Drawing on established concepts from political science, this model seeks to explain how shifting political contexts influence the interplay between partisan, technocratic and other motivations in the recruitment of ministerial advisers.

In Belgium and Italy, the extensive influence of political parties over both the legislative and executive branches has been characterised as partitocracy (Baudewyns et al., 2022; Cotta & Verzichelli, 1996; De Winter, 2013, Forthcoming; van Haute et al., 2013). As to the recruitment of ministerial advisers, a partisan perspective is primarily rooted in Anglophone scholarship as well as public policy studies on the roles of MAs. Throughout this paper, we will use the terms "partitocratic" and "partisan" interchangeably. This perspective portrays ministerial offices as embodying the politicisation of the executive branch. According to Hustedt and Salomonsen (2014), ministerial offices exemplify both formal politicisation (the legal and procedural frameworks that establish and govern these offices) and administrative politicisation (MAs exercising political influence over the civil service) (Limbocker et al., 2022).

What does this mean for recruitment? Since the partisan perspective posits that ministerial cabinets are by their very nature politicised institutions, this would imply that the recruitment of MAs is also politically driven. An example is Belgium (and, by extension, the Flemish community), where ministerial cabinets have historically served as an interface between the political and administrative spheres (Bach &

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Hustedt, 2023; Brans et al., 2017). These political spheres then are dominated by the political parties (Baudewyns et al., 2022; De Winter, 2013), which means that ministerial advisers would be primarily recruited from partisan recruitment pools. Previous studies on the recruitment patterns of MAs support this perspective, highlighting that, more than they are reflecting ministerial preferences, career patterns are primarily shaped by parties' search for partisan loyalists. (Pelgrims, 2002, 2003; Walgrave et al., 2004). Accordingly, the partisan / partitocratic hypothesis posits the following:

H1: A significant portion of MAs have partisan experience.

Technocracy, then, refers to a form of policy-making in which decision-making is entrusted to experts rather than elected politicians or representatives. When it comes to ministers, the technocratic perspective emphasises nonpartisan, highly skilled experts who hold these ministerial positions (Pinto et al., 2017; Verzichelli & Cotta, 2018; Vittori et al., 2023). Regarding ministerial advisers, this technocratic viewpoint is predominantly discussed in French-language literature on the role of ministerial cabinets. Although recent discourse has become more nuanced, it remains widely held in France that these ministerial cabinets are a manifestation of bureaucratic dominance over the political sphere (Dulong, 2022, p.2). Bureaucrats in these cabinets, positioned at the intersection of politics and policy expertise, leverage their specialised knowledge to bridge the political and administrative spheres (Eymeri-Douzans, 2003, p. 11).

In countries of the Napoleonic tradition, such as France, a position in a ministerial cabinet is often considered a step in the cursus honorum for aspiring senior administrators (Sawicki & Mathiot, 1999, p. 252). Consequently, French cabinets are frequently staffed by individuals with prior administrative experience. This leads to the first hypothesis of the technocratic perspective:

H2a: A significant portion of MAs have experience in administration.

Discussions of technocratic elements in ministerial cabinets often focus not only on the roles of these advisers but also on their social and educational backgrounds. French studies frequently use prosopography to systematically analyse the sociographic profiles of MAs (Delpu, 2015; Lemercier & Picard, 2012), revealing that they often come from elite, upper-class backgrounds (Alam et al., 2019). These MAs are typically educated at prestigious grandes écoles, such as the École Normale d'Administration and Sciences Po, which serve as key training grounds for future civil servants and advisers (Alam et al., 2015a; Eymeri-Douzans, 2015). Belgium lacks an equivalent elite educational system. However, drawing parallels to Mark Bovens'

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work on the concept of "diploma democracy," where elected politicians around the Western world are increasingly highly educated (Bovens & Wille, 2017; Hakhverdian et al., 2012; Hooghe, 2013), it is reasonable to expect a similar trend among ministerial advisers.

H2b: A significant portion of MAs have high educational capital.

Expertise as a Resource and Ideology

The perspectives outlined above present two distinct approaches for explaining the recruitment pools from which ministerial advisers are selected. These perspectives are static in their description of recruitment and, on some points, oppose each other. This paper introduces a model that incorporates two key variables from political science: resources and ideology. By analysing recruitment through the dimensions of party resources (cartel vs. non-cartel) and ideology (left vs. right), this model provides a more dynamic framework for understanding how political parties adapt their recruitment strategies. Rather than replacing existing perspectives, these variables shed light on the factors influencing whether a party recruits MAs in a partisan, technocratic or another manner.

Expertise as a Resource

First, our perspective on resources is grounded in two well-established concepts from the political science literature. We rely on the concept of the cartel party to frame the debate on ministerial advisers and their recruitment. The notion of the cartel party, as initially defined by Katz and Mair, refers to "political parties employing the resources of the state to limit political competition" (Katz & Mair, 1995, 2009). Building on existing literature that views ministerial advisers as resources of the political party (Katz & Mair, 1993; Moens, 2023; Panebianco, 1988), we argue that a (cartel) party's ability to recruit highly trained, experienced civil servants into its ministerial cabinets should itself be seen as a valuable resource. This goes beyond the traditional understanding of resources as financial or organisational; it reflects the fact that cartel parties, due to their close ties with the state, are uniquely positioned to use the state as a recruitment pool for political purposes.

The concept of cartel parties thus provides a dynamic framework for understanding recruitment into ministerial cabinets. Previous studies have introduced the notion of outsider, insider, and partisan sectors in recruitment patterns (Meyer-Sahling, 2008; Silva, 2017). For the purposes of our paper, we slightly modify this categorisation by treating the partisan sector as an insider sector. We expect recruitment by cartel parties to be predominantly drawn from these insider pools: the political and administrative sectors. First, these parties have access to political staffers with experience in government, who naturally take precedence in recruitment. Second,

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cartel parties have long exerted influence over the civil service through political appointments and other means, allowing them to tap into administrative expertise when filling ministerial cabinet positions. This leads to the following hypothesis:

> *H3a: A significant portion of MAs in cartel parties' ministerial cabinets have experience in an insider sector (politics/public sector), compared to MAs in ministerial cabinets of non-cartel parties.*

For political parties outside the cartel structure, such as newer parties or those historically marginalised within the political system, the situation is quite different. These include anti-establishment parties, populist parties, and challenger parties (Hobolt & Tilley, 2018; Mudde, 2004; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2012; Sikk, 2005), as well as movement parties (Kitschelt, 2006). When these parties find themselves in a position to appoint advisers within the government, they often lack a pool of loyal government insiders.

The question arises: where do non-cartel parties find advisers when they suddenly need a trusted team? Due to the deep entanglement of cartel parties with state structures, distinguishing between loyal cartel partisans and government experts can be difficult. This presents a challenge for non-cartel parties, who often lack the resources to build and recruit from their pool of loyalist experts. In such cases, these parties are likely to turn to outsider-resource pools, such as the private sector or academia, to fill their ranks. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

> *H3b: A significant portion of MAs in ministerial cabinets of non-cartel parties have experience in an outsider sector, compared to their cartel counterparts.*

As noted earlier, introducing the resource variable provides a dynamic perspective. Non-cartel parties may begin to display characteristics of cartel parties after participating in government. Government participation grants access to state resources in terms of recruiting advisers with insider experience. Over time, this can shift recruitment patterns, as non-cartel parties gain access to insider sectors. We thus hypothesise:

> *H3c: When a non-cartel party accumulates government experience, its recruitment pools shift from outsider sectors to insider sectors.*

Ideology

A second explanatory variable we examine is ideology. There are several reasons to believe that ideology plays a determining role in pre-recruitment patterns of ministerial advisers.

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First, political science widely holds that ideology influences a party's relationship with both science and the public sector. In the case of the public sector, the link to left-wing ideology is self-evident: left-wing parties generally advocate for larger, interventionist governments in Western democracies, leading to a generally positive relationship with the public sector (Baskaran, 2011; Clark & Milcent, 2011; Cusack et al., 1989; Herwartz & Theilen, 2017). Conversely, right-wing parties, which often emphasise smaller government, privatisation, and market-driven solutions, tend to have a more negative or ambivalent relationship with the public sector. Similarly, concerning the academic sector, there is a high correlation between working in the academic sector and adherence to left-wing ideology (Gross, 2013; Klein & Stern, 2005; van de Werfhorst, 2020) which is one of the reasons left-wing parties are believed to rely more on scientific advice in policymaking (Bolsen et al., 2015; Hesstvedt, 2022). Hence, in the context of the present paper, we predict that left-wing parties will recruit more MAs from the academic sector compared to right-wing parties.

Second, the French-language literature on MAs has raised the question of how the rise of neoliberalism and the election of neoliberal presidents have influenced the profiles of ministerial advisers appointed to ministerial cabinets (Eymeri-Douzans, 2015; Rouban, 2012). The underlying assumption is that these governments tend to recruit more MAs from the private sector compared to left-wing governments. Based on this, the following hypotheses regarding ideology and recruitment patterns of MAs are formulated:

> *H4a: When a left-wing party recruits MAs, they tend to recruit primarily from the public sector and academia, compared to right-wing parties.*

Conversely:

> *H4b: When a right-wing party recruits MAs, they tend to recruit primarily from the private sector, compared to left-wing parties.*

A Perspective Combining Resources and Ideology

Finally, we propose that combining both explanatory variables-resources and ideology-offers a new, more dynamic model of MA recruitment. Our perspective goes beyond static descriptions of recruitment that fail to account for variation in the backgrounds of MAs or overtime changes from newcomer parties to cartel parties. Instead, we introduce a two-axis model. On the resources axis, recruitment can be from insider (partisan/public sector) or outsider (private sector/academic sector) pools. On the ideology axis, left-wing parties are more inclined toward the academic/public sectors, while right-wing parties lean toward the private sector. We expect

both sides of the ideological axis to recruit from the "partisan" sector, given that they are cartel parties.

This perspective then also reconciles the static partisan and technocratic perspectives into a dynamic explanatory framework. The partisan perspective holds when a cartel party has the opportunity to recruit MAs. In contrast, the technocratic perspective applies when a left-wing party is either non-cartel, in which case it recruits significantly from an outsider sector like academia, or cartel, where it recruits from an insider sector such as the public sector.

An important scenario that falls outside both traditional perspectives is the right-wing, non-cartel party, which is expected to recruit a significant number of MAs from the private sector.

H5a: Cartel parties are more inclined to recruit MAs from the partisan resource pool than other parties

H5b: Left-wing non-cartel parties are more inclined to recruit MAs from academia than other parties

H5c: Right-wing non-cartel parties are more inclined to recruit MAs from the private sector than other parties

This model potentially adds explanatory power by accounting for the diversity of recruitment practices across different political contexts. Our approach could help explain why ministerial offices and ministerial cabinets might exhibit tendencies that have been seen as either partitocratic, technocratic, or other, depending on their resources and ideological orientation. Ultimately, this perspective, given that it holds empirically, is expected to provide a more comprehensive framework for analysing how ministerial advisers are recruited across different political systems.

Data and Method

To conduct a first empirical test of this model we use a dataset comprising the career paths of 754 MAs at the Flemish level, covering seven governments between 1999 and 2020 (Bellens et al., 2025). The dataset includes 5,828 career positions, categorised by professional sector, along with variables for gender, age, and rank within the ministerial office. The dataset is built based on the LinkedIn profiles of the MAs. While we acknowledge that using LinkedIn as a data source may introduce some noise, the comprehensive size of our dataset offers a level of detail and robustness that compensates for potential limitations. The breadth of our data allows us to

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capture recruitment patterns that would be difficult to observe using smaller, manually collected datasets.

The sectors or recruitment pools are divided into private sector, public sector, civil society, and several subcategories within the political/partisan sector (ministerial office, legislature, local politics, and party central office). A complete table of these labels is provided in Bellens et al. (2025).

For this study, the career paths in the dataset have been transformed into weighted representations of the sectors where an individual MA worked prior to entering a ministerial office. For example, an adviser who spent four years in the private sector and two years in parliament before joining a ministerial office is represented as 0.66 private sector and 0.33 political sector (legislature). If a MA worked in multiple ministerial offices, each instance is recorded as a new row, with the first cabinet position included in the weighted representation. The following variables accompany each transformation: age, gender, hierarchical role in the ministerial office, the political party of the minister, and the government in which the ministerial office was located.

These weighted representations mark a departure from the conventional approach to operationalising pre-recruitment career patterns in this type of research. Existing studies typically consider only the final professional position before entry into the ministerial cabinet (e.g., Alam et al., 2015a; Di Mascio & Natalini, 2016; Silva, 2017). While we acknowledge that this approach is suitable for certain research designs, it also has a limitation. The last-held position before joining the ministerial cabinet may not fully capture an adviser's entire career trajectory: it could represent a brief interlude following years in a different sector or merely one phase in a career spanning multiple fields. For this paper, we believe it would be wrong to consider only the final career position. The weighted representations offer a more comprehensive view of the pre-recruitment careers of individual ministerial advisers, enabling us to account for the diversity and duration of their professional experiences.

The hypotheses are operationalised by constructing indices from these weighted representations and by coding new variables from the existing data. To operationalise the partitocratic perspective, three indices are employed:

- **Political Weight Index**: Represents the proportion of political functions (ministerial office, legislature, party central office, local politics) in the pre-ministerial office career.
- **Political Threshold Indicator**: A binary indicator set to 1 if political functions constitute at least 30% of the pre-MO career, and 0 otherwise.
- **Political Experience Presence Indicator**: A binary indicator set to 1 if any political function is present in the pre-MO career, and 0 otherwise.

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For the technocratic perspective, a similar method is applied. Two groups of indicators are developed: one reflecting public sector experience and the other reflecting academic experience. The academic sector is of particular interest as it often signals a higher-than-average educational background, which in French literature is seen as a hallmark of a technocratic elite. The same three types of indicators are used for both the public and academic sectors:

- **Public/Academic Weight Index**: Represents the proportion of public or academic experience in the total pre-MO career.
- **Public/Academic Threshold Indicator**: A binary indicator set to 1 if public or academic experience constitutes at least 30% of the pre-MO career, and 0 otherwise.
- **Public/Academic Experience Presence Indicator**: A binary indicator set to 1 if any public or academic experience is present in the pre-MO career, and 0 otherwise.

From the resources perspective, the concept of a cartel party is central. In the Flemish context (1999–2020), this categorisation is relatively straightforward. The Christian Democrats (CD&V), Liberals (Open VLD), and Socialists (sp.a) are considered cartel parties, as they have held power at local, Flemish, and federal levels for decades. In contrast, the nationalists (N-VA) emerged as newcomers, initially participating in government only minimally before later delivering the Minister-President of Flanders. To investigate hypotheses about the transition of a non-cartel party into a cartel party, the dataset divides N-VA ministerial advisers into two groups: those serving under the Peeters II (2009–2014) and Bourgeois (2014–2019) governments, and those under the Jambon (2019–2024) government. We argue that by the time of the latter government, the nationalists had gained substantial government experience at both the federal and Flemish levels, making them less aligned with the definition of a non-cartel party. This hypothesis is tested extensively through analyses conducted with and without this distinction for N-VA. Meanwhile, the Greens (Groen) are classified as a movement party, having participated in government only briefly at the start of the period under discussion (Wavreille & Pilet, 2013).

Additionally, the resource perspective considers the private sector as a potential recruitment source. Analogous to the political/public sector indicators, three private sector indicators are developed:

- **Private Weight Index**: Represents the proportion of private sector experience in the pre-MO career.
- **Private Threshold Indicator**: A binary indicator set to 1 if private sector experience constitutes at least 30% of the pre-MO career, and 0 otherwise.
- **Private Experience Presence Indicator**: A binary indicator set to 1 if any private sector experience is present in the pre-MO career, and 0 otherwise.

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In this analysis, we also test the concept of insider and outsider resource pools. For insider pools, we use the public and political sector indices, while for outsider pools, we rely on the academia and private sector indices.

The ideology perspective is operationalised by coding parties according to their left-right alignment: the Greens and the Socialist Party are coded as left-wing, while the Christian Democrats, nationalists, and the Liberals are coded as right-wing. In reality, CD&V identifies itself as a centrist party, but our theoretical model leaves no room for a third intermediate category and party scholars have identified the Christian Democrats as being more center-right than center-left; we classified it as such (Reuse, 2021; Van Hecke & Gerard, 2004; van Haute & Carty, 2011).

The methodological approach of this paper is divided into two parts: descriptive and explanatory. The first three hypotheses (H1, H2a, H2b) are descriptive and are not tested for statistical significance. Instead, we compare the proportions of the indices (weight, threshold, and presence) for each perspective. Each indicator is calculated based on the individual pre-MC career paths of MAs, with overall and party-specific averages produced. The confirmation or rejection of these hypotheses is based on reasoned comparison and estimation of these averages.

For the explanatory analysis, we test our new model in several stages. First, we examine the resources and ideology perspectives separately, followed by an evaluation of our proposed model. To test the separate perspectives, we compare the odds ratios for the thresholded indicators discussed earlier. For the resources perspective (H3a, H3b, H3c), we use a non-cartel party (N-VA) as the reference point, comparing each cartel party individually against N-VA for each index. This analysis is conducted twice: once with N-VA considered as a whole and once with N-VA split into its non-cartel and cartel components. Additionally, we compare the odds ratios for the cartel part of N-VA against its non-cartel part for each index.

For the ideology perspective (H4a, H4b, H4c), we categorise parties based on their left-right alignment and use the left-wing parties as the reference group in comparisons with right-wing parties across all indices. In both the resources and ideology analyses, we do not test for statistical significance in the conventional sense, but rather check whether the odds ratios fall outside the 90% confidence interval, focusing on whether the value 1 is excluded.

To evaluate the model, we fit a logistic regression that includes an interaction effect between cartel/non-cartel status and left/right ideology for each variable. To get the models running, we were forced to temporarily use the environmentalist Groen party as a leftist non-cartel party. Groen does meet that definition, but the quality of the data is relatively low for their governmental participations because these are longer ago, and a large part of the then MAs cannot be found on LinkedIn. We will discuss this in more detail in the results and discussion sections.

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Table 1 Summary of Variables and Operationalisations with Indicator Names

Variable	Operationalization
Indices (apply to all perspectives)	– **Weight Index:** Proportion of experience in a given sector (e.g., political, public, academic, or private) in the pre-MO career. – **Threshold Indicator:** Binary indicator: 1 if experience in a given sector exceeds 30%, 0 otherwise. – **Experience Presence Indicator:** Binary indicator: 1 if any experience in a given sector is present, 0 otherwise.
Partisan Perspective (Political)	– Applies the indices to political functions: ministerial office, legislature, party central office, local politics.
Technocratic Perspective (Public/Academic)	– Applies the indices to public sector and academic experience. – Academic experience may indicate technocratic elite status due to a higher-than-average educational background.
Resources Perspective (Private/Public/ Academia)	– Applies the indices to private sector experience as an outsider resource. – Applies the indices to public sector and academic experience as insider and outsider resources, respectively.
Cartel vs. Non-Cartel Parties	– Cartel parties (CD&V, Open VLD, sp.a) operationalized as long-term participants in power at local, Flemish, and federal levels. – Non-cartel party: New Flemish Alliance (N-VA), classified as a newcomer. N-VA MAs are split into two groups: Peeters II & Bourgeois governments vs. Jambon government.
Ideology (Left-Right)	– Left-wing parties: Greens, Socialist Party (sp.a). – Right-wing parties: Christian Democrats (CD&V), Liberals (Open VLD), New Flemish Alliance (N-VA).

Results

The original dataset, consisting of 745 Flemish MAs and 5828 career positions, was reorganised to focus on career paths leading to ministerial cabinet positions. The updated dataset now includes 1181 pre-MC career paths, as MAs can hold multiple ministerial office positions over their careers, resulting in several pre-MC paths for a single individual. Consequently, our analysis refers to (pre-MC) career paths rather than individual MAs. The following sections examine the pre-recruitment patterns of Flemish MAs from 1999 to 2020 (RQ1), utilising hypotheses derived from both partitocratic and technocratic perspectives. We then assess which perspective provides a stronger explanation (RQ2).

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Partitocratic Perspective

The political indices in Table 2 show that a significant portion of pre-MC career paths involved experience in the political sector. On average, MAs spent about 25% of their pre-MC time in political roles, indicating a notable presence of political experience in their recruitment. However, this 25% is not evenly distributed. Specifically, 45% of career paths included at least one political position, while 55% had no political experience at all. This means that 25% of the political experience is concentrated within only half of the sample.

Table 2 Political Indices Comparison by Party

Index	Global	VLD	sp.a	N-VA	CD&V
Political Weight (%)	25.55	28.05	23.10	25.52	25.10
Political Threshold (%)	31.97	33.98	28.95	33.20	31.28
Political Experience Presence (%)	45.04	45.70	38.95	49.03	44.92

Note: VLD refers to the Liberals, sp.a to the Socialists, N-VA to the Nationalists, and CD&V to the Christian Democrats.

Additionally, over half of this "political experience" comes from previous roles within Flemish ministerial offices. Other types of political experience, such as positions in the legislature, central offices, or ministerial cabinets at different levels of government, each account for roughly 13% of the total (see Appendix Table A.0). These proportions are generally consistent across all major political parties. When looking at gender, the distribution is fairly equal, with the political weight index averaging 26.77% for males and 23.93% for females (see appendix table A.1). Age-wise, the distribution shows that the older group (above the median age) had slightly more political experience (47.07%) compared to the younger group (41.08%). However, the weighted political experience for both groups converges around the overall average (global: 25.66%, below median: 23.89%, above median: 26.80%). Gender and age do not seem to have a particular influence on political experience.

Technocratic Perspective

The technocratic perspective reveals a similar pattern. Public sector indicators (Table 3) show that 17% of pre-MC time was spent in civil service roles. Yet, only 33.09% of MAs had this type of experience, meaning two-thirds did not work in the public sector before joining a ministerial cabinet. There are also differences across political parties. N-VA, CD&V, and sp.a align with the overall averages, though N-VA and CD&V have higher scores for the experience presence indicator. This indicates

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that while these parties placed more MAs in public sector roles than sp.a and Open VLD, the time spent in these positions was not necessarily longer. Conversely, sp.a hired fewer MAs from the public sector, but those they did hire had extensive, multi-year experience. Open VLD consistently scores below average for all public sector indicators. No significant differences are observed across gender and age for these indices (see appendix tables A.3 and A.4).

Table 3 Public Sector Indices Comparison by Party

Index	Global	VLD	sp.a	N-VA	CD&V
Public Weight (%)	17.02	12.46	17.54	18.24	19.04
Public Threshold (%)	21.13	14.45	22.63	22.39	24.06
Public Experience Presence (%)	33.09	26.56	30.00	35.91	37.17

Note: VLD refers to the Liberals, sp.a to the Socialists, N-VA to the Nationalists, and CD&V to the Christian Democrats.

Academic experience, another measure of technocracy, is lower but still noteworthy (Table 4). Only 15.29% of MAs had prior academic roles, with an average duration of 7.26% of their total career. Open VLD, N-VA, and CD&V are near the overall average, while sp.a's scores are slightly higher (11.43% for the weighted academic index). Again, gender and age show no significant disparities in the academic indices (see appendix tables A.5 and A.6). Finally, education levels show that 6.97% hold a PhD, 76.56% have a Master's degree, and 41.20% have earned more than one Master's degree, indicating that Flemish MAs are a highly educated group.

Table 4 Academic Sector Indices Comparison by Party

Index	Global	VLD	sp.a	N-VA	CD&V
Academic Weight (%)	7.26	5.73	11.43	7.53	6.00
Academic Threshold (%)	9.18	7.42	14.74	9.27	7.49
Academic Experience Presence (%)	15.29	12.50	17.37	17.76	14.44

Note: VLD refers to the Liberals, sp.a to the Socialists, N-VA to the Nationalists, and CD&V to the Christian Democrats.

Resources

As discussed in the introduction, we operationalised the non-cartel party in two ways: a filtered version of N-VA (considering only the Peeters I and Bourgeois I governments) and an unfiltered version (including the Jambon government). We

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start by discussing the odds ratios for the unfiltered version in comparison to the cartel parties sp.a, CD&V, and Open VLD, listed in Table 5. Regarding the outsider sectors, we observe that the Flemish nationalists recruit more from the private sector. The odds that an MA spent at least 1/3 of their career in the private sector are 53% higher for nationalist MAs than for the Christian Democrats, 74% higher than for Socialists, and 18% higher than for the Liberals. Two of these comparisons, Christian Democrats and Socialists, also differ within the 90% confidence interval, while those against Liberals do not.

Table 5 Odds Ratios Comparison Non-Cartel Party (N-VA) vs. Cartel Parties

Index	CD&V	sp.a	VLD
Political Threshold	0.84	0.68	1.23
Private Threshold	**0.47**	**0.26**	0.82
Public Threshold	1.19	1.27	0.65
Academia Threshold	0.81	**1.63**	0.62

Note: CD&V refers to the Christian Democrats, sp.a to the Socialists, and VLD to the Liberals.

Conversely, in the academic sector, the other outsider recruitment pool, the odds that nationalists recruit MAs with at least 1/3 experience in academia are 19% and 38% higher compared to Christian Democrats and Liberals, respectively. However, those odds are 63% lower against Socialists, with the difference falling within the 90% confidence interval.

For the insider recruitment pools, we find that the odds of a nationalist MA having at least 1/3 experience in the political sector are 16% higher than those of an MA from the Christian Democrats and 32% higher than those from the Socialists. For Liberals, the odds are 23% lower, with none of these differences falling within the 90% confidence interval. In the public sector, the odds of Christian Democrats and Socialists hiring an MA with at least 1/3 experience in the public sector are 19% and 27% higher than for a nationalist MA with the same experience, respectively. Against Liberals, the odds of nationalists hiring such MAs are 35% higher, with no differences falling within the 90% confidence interval.

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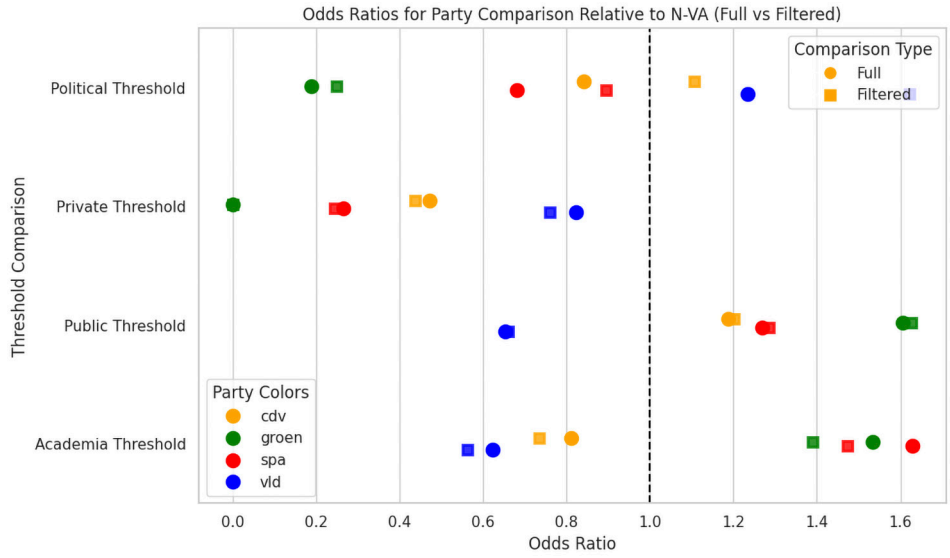

Figure 1 Odds ratios for a non-cartel party, N-VA compared to Flemish cartel parties

Next, we examine the split within N-VA itself (Table 6), focusing on the MAs who served the nationalists in the Peeters II / Bourgeois governments versus those in the Jambon government. Here, we observe slight differences in the outsider sectors that do not fall within the 90% confidence interval. There is a 19% drop in the odds that an MA from the Jambon government belongs to the private sector compared to an MA from the Peeters II and Bourgeois governments, while in the academic sector, we observe a 24% drop. Regarding insider sectors, there is a significant 94% increase in the odds that an MA was recruited from the political sector during N-VA's most recent governmental participation compared to earlier ones. This difference falls well within the 90% confidence interval. We do not see this difference for the public sector, where the odds ratio is very close to 1.

Table 6 Odds Ratios for Nationalist Recruitment in Jambon Government Compared to Other Nationalist Governments

Group	Political Threshold	Private Threshold	Public Threshold	Academia Threshold
N-VA (Jambon)	**1.94**	0.81	1.03	0.76

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Finally, from a resource perspective, we extend this filtering to compare with the cartel parties. For the nationalists, we focus solely on N-VA's first two governmental participations, excluding the Jambon government. Here, we observe a shift in the results. For the private sector, the difference with the cartel parties increases: the odds that an N-VA MA from the first two governmental participations has private sector experience are 56%, 76%, and 24% greater than if that MA came from CD&V, sp.a, or Open VLD, respectively. The first two comparisons fall within the 90% confidence interval.

In contrast, regarding the other insider sector, academia, we notice a decline. There is now a 27% smaller odds for Christian Democrats and 44% for Liberals that an MA from their ranks possesses at least 1/3 experience in the academic sector compared to an MA from the non-cartel N-VA. Meanwhile, Socialists continue to have a 43% higher odds of recruiting someone from the academic sector compared to nationalists, though this difference is no longer outside the 90% confidence interval when considering the filtered N-VA MAs.

Regarding outsider sectors, it is noteworthy that Christian Democrats shift from an odds ratio less than 1 to one (narrowly) greater than 1: the odds that an MA from the Christian Democrats has at least 1/3 experience in the political sector is now 11% greater than that of a nationalist MA. For Liberals, those same odds are 62% higher compared to the nationalists, with a difference that now lies outside the 90-percent confidence interval. In terms of the public sector, the odds ratios remain relatively unchanged against the unfiltered version of N-VA.

Table 7 Odds Ratios Comparison by Party

Index	CD&V	sp.a	VLD
Political Threshold	1.11	0.89	**1.62**
Private Threshold	**0.44**	**0.24**	0.76
Public Threshold	1.20	1.28	0.66
Academia Threshold	0.73	1.47	0.56

Note: CD&V refers to the Christian Democrats, sp.a to the Socialists, and VLD to the Liberals.

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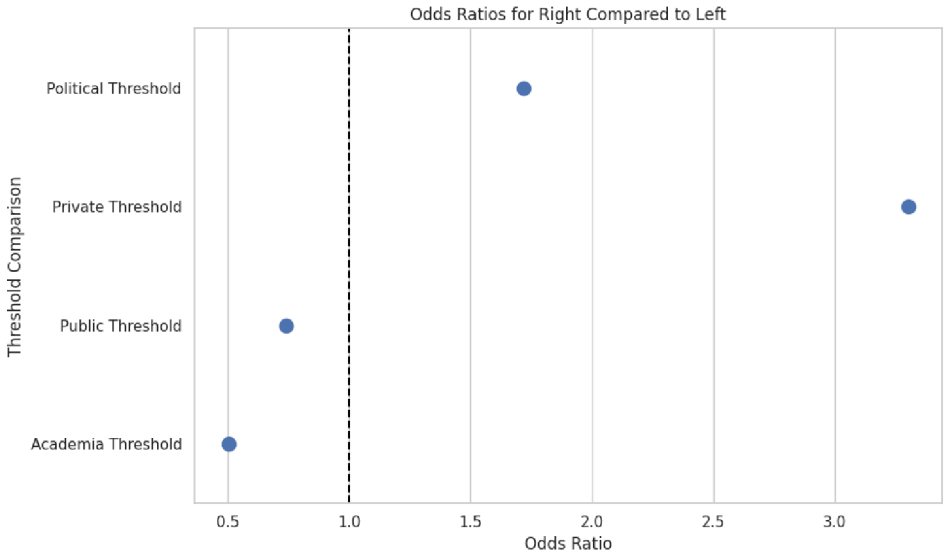

Figure 2 Odds Ratios for Right Compared To Left

Ideology

In examining the ideological perspective (Figure 2, Table 8), where right-wing parties serve as the reference point against left-wing parties, we observe high odds ratio values. Specifically, the resource pools assigned to left-wing parties score below 1. The odds that an MA from a right-wing party has at least 1/3 experience in the public sector are 26% lower than for an MA from a left-wing party. For the academic sector, these odds are 50% lower, with this difference falling outside the 90% confidence interval. For the private sector threshold previously associated with the right, we find that the odds that an MA from a right-wing party meets our private sector threshold are 330% higher than those from a left-wing party. This difference also falls outside the 90% confidence interval. In terms of the neutrally estimated political sector, the odds that a right-wing MA has at least 30% political experience are 72% higher than that of a left-wing MA. This result falls outside our theoretical expectations and warrants further interpretation in the discussion.

Table 8 Odds Ratios for Right-Wing Parties Across Thresholds

Group	Political Threshold	Private Threshold	Public Threshold	Academia Threshold
Right	**1.72**	**3.30**	0.74	**0.50**

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Resources x Ideology

The analysis presented in Table 9 reports the logit regression results across the four "presence indicators": political, private, public, and academia. These thresholds aim to evaluate recruitment patterns based on ideology (left vs. right) and party resources (cartel vs. non-cartel), including the interaction between these variables.

For the presence of political experience, the results show that left-wing parties are significantly less likely to recruit MAs with political experience compared to right-wing parties. The coefficient for the ideology variable (left) is negative and significant ($\beta = -0.4723$, $p = 0.0140$), indicating 37.66% lower odds for left-wing parties. In contrast, the resources variable (non-cartel) is not significant ($\beta = -0.2604$, $p = 0.1990$). The interaction term (Resources × Ideology) is significant ($\beta = -1.2202$, $p = 0.0410$), showing that right-wing cartel parties are 122.02% more likely to recruit politically experienced MAs compared to left-wing non-cartel parties.

Moving to the private experience presence, right-wing parties are 113.15% more likely to recruit MAs with significant private sector experience than left-wing parties, as indicated by the positive and significant coefficient for the ideology variable ($\beta = 0.7570$, $p = 0.0040$). However, the resources variable (non-cartel) is not significant ($\beta = -1.6422$, $p = 0.1160$). The interaction term (Resources × Ideology) is highly significant ($\beta = 2.5930$, $p = 0.0150$), indicating that right-wing non-cartel parties are 259.30% more likely to recruit from the private sector compared to left-wing cartel parties.

For the public experience presence, neither ideology nor resources appear to have a significant effect. The coefficient for ideology is negative but non-significant ($\beta = -0.0339$, $p = 0.9360$), and the resources variable (cartel) also fails to reach significance ($\beta = 0.0588$, $p = 0.8860$). The interaction between resources and ideology similarly does not provide any significant insights ($\beta = 0.0285$, $p = 0.9510$).

Lastly, regarding the presence of academia experience, the results highlight a significant negative intercept ($\beta = -1.4663$, $p = 0.0010$), indicating lower odds overall of recruiting from the academic sector. However, ideology does not have a significant effect on this threshold ($\beta = 0.0375$, $p = 0.9410$). Similarly, the resources variable (cartel) does not reach significance ($\beta = 0.0800$, $p = 0.8730$). The interaction between resources and ideology is also non-significant ($\beta = -0.3776$, $p = 0.5030$).

Overall, these results suggest that ideology and resources have varying effects across different recruitment sectors. While strong effects are observed for the political and private sectors, the public and academia thresholds do not show significant effects for ideology, resources, or their interaction.

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Table 9 Logit Regression Results for Political, Private, Public and Academia Thresholds

Political Threshold

Variable	Coef	Std Err	z	P>|z|	[0.025	0.975]
Intercept	0.0069	0.083	0.083	0.9340	-0.156	0.170
Ideology [Left]	-0.4723	0.193	-2.452	0.0140	-0.850	-0.095
Resources[Non-cartel]	-0.2604	0.203	-1.284	0.1990	-0.658	0.137
Resources x Ideology	-1.2202	0.597	-2.042	0.0410	-2.391	-0.049

Private Threshold

Variable	Coef	Std Err	z	P>|z|	[0.025	0.975]
Intercept	-1.7918	0.242	-7.419	0.0000	-2.265	-1.318
Ideology [Right]	0.7570	0.259	2.918	0.0040	0.248	1.265
Resources[Non-cartel]	-1.6422	1.044	-1.573	0.1160	-3.689	0.405
Resources x Ideology	2.5930	1.065	2.436	0.0150	0.506	4.679

Public Threshold

Variable	Coef	Std Err	z	P>|z|	[0.025	0.975]
Intercept	-0.6466	0.372	-1.737	0.0820	-1.376	0.083
Ideology [Right]	-0.0339	0.420	-0.081	0.9360	-0.857	0.789
Resources [Cartel]	0.0588	0.412	0.143	0.8860	-0.748	0.866
Resources x Ideology	0.0285	0.464	0.062	0.9510	-0.880	0.937

Academia Threshold

Variable	Coef	Std Err	z	P>|z|	[0.025	0.975]
Intercept	-1.4663	0.453	-3.238	0.0010	-2.354	-0.579
Ideology [Right]	0.0375	0.509	0.074	0.9410	-0.960	1.035
Resources [Cartel]	0.0800	0.500	0.160	0.8730	-0.899	1.060
Resources x Ideology	-0.3776	0.563	-0.671	0.5030	-1.482	0.726

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Discussion

In this paper, we set out to first describe the pre-ministerial cabinet careers of ministerial advisers (MAs) and subsequently provide an explanatory model for these career patterns. Based on the literature, we identified two dominant perspectives: the partitocratic and the technocratic views. However, these perspectives tend to be static, classifying advisers as either partisan, closely affiliated with political parties, or technocratic, characterised by high educational attainment and expertise in the public sector. To address this limitation, we proposed a dynamic model that integrates party resources and ideology as explanatory variables, with the pre-recruitment career trajectories of MAs serving as the outcome variable.

The findings of this study suggest that both the static partitocratic and technocratic perspectives hold merit. However, these perspectives can be reconciled within our proposed model, which explains the variation in recruitment practices across ministerial cabinets belonging to different political parties.

Partitocracy and Technocracy

Our first research question (RQ1) sought to determine the pre-recruitment career patterns of Flemish MAs between 1999 and 2020. The results present a dual picture. Firstly, we found substantial evidence supporting the partisan recruitment hypothesis (H1). Nearly half of the Flemish MAs in our dataset had at least one prior experience in politics, with approximately 25% of their pre-cabinet careers spent in the political sector. This aligns with existing literature on partitocratic systems (Alam et al., 2015b; Di Mascio & Natalini, 2016; Silva, 2017), although direct comparisons are challenging due to operationalisation differences. Nonetheless, our findings confirm that party influence remains a significant factor in ministerial cabinet recruitment.

Secondly, our results also support the technocratic perspective. The educational qualifications of Flemish MAs are notably high, with 83.53% holding a master's degree, a stark contrast to the general Flemish population, where only 51.6% possess a higher education degree ("Onderwijsniveau - Statbel", n.d.). This supports hypothesis H2b (A significant portion of MAs have high educational capital). Furthermore, 15% of MAs in our sample had professional experience in the academic sector, further reinforcing this technocratic element.

In terms of public sector experience, another key component of the technocratic perspective, we found that one-third of MAs had at least one experience in the public sector, accounting for 17% of the total duration of their career trajectories. This lends support to hypothesis H2a (A significant portion of MAs have experience in the administration).

Taken together, these findings confirm that both the partitocratic and technocratic perspectives apply to Flemish MAs. However, given that these perspectives

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are static and even contradictory at times, the question arises as to how our model reconciles them and explains variation across different political parties and cabinets.

Resources and Ideology: Explaining Variation in Recruitment

However, before addressing how our model integrates partitocracy and technocracy, we first discuss the independent effects of the resources and ideology variables.

Regarding resources, our findings confirm hypothesis H3b (A significant portion of MAs in ministerial cabinets of non-cartel parties have experience in an outsider sector, compared to their cartel counterparts). Non-cartel parties disproportionately recruit from outsider sectors such as academia and the private sector. More importantly, as these parties accumulate government experience and transition into cartel parties, this reliance on outsider sectors diminishes. This pattern aligns with hypothesis H3c (When a non-cartel party accumulates government experience, its recruitment pools shift from outsider sectors to insider sectors).

Interestingly, however, our results do not support hypothesis H3a (A significant portion of MAs in cartel parties' ministerial cabinets have experience in an insider sector (politics/public sector), compared to MAs in ministerial cabinets of non-cartel parties). While we observe that non-cartel parties recruit less from the public sector than their cartel counterparts (e.g., Christian Democrats and Socialists), this trend is not as pronounced as expected, suggesting that public sector recruitment remains relatively stable across parties.

Regarding ideology, we find strong explanatory power. Right-wing parties in Flanders recruit significantly more from the private sector, with 230% higher odds of doing so, confirming hypothesis H4b (When a right-wing party recruits MAs, they tend to recruit primarily from the private sector, compared to left-wing parties). Left-wing parties, by contrast, are more likely to recruit from academia (50% lower odds for right-wing parties) and the public sector (26% lower odds for right-wing parties), confirming hypothesis H4a (When a left-wing party recruits MAs, they tend to recruit primarily from the public sector and academia, compared to right-wing parties).

A surprising finding is that right-wing parties are also more likely than left-wing parties to recruit from the political sector, with 72% higher odds of doing so. While this was not a theoretical expectation, it suggests that right-wing parties, particularly cartel ones, leverage partisan networks more extensively than their left-wing counterparts.

Reconciling Partitocracy and Technocracy trough Resources and Ideology

Our second research question (RQ2) examined how resources and ideology explain the recruitment pools from which Flemish MAs are drawn. In this section, we discuss

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how these variables reconcile the seemingly contradictory perspectives of partitocracy and technocracy.

First, we find that right-wing cartel parties are more likely to recruit advisers with a partisan background. This is consistent with our previous finding that right-wing parties recruit more from political networks. It suggests that once a right-wing party accumulates governmental resources, it increasingly draws from insider partisan sectors. By contrast, right-wing non-cartel parties, which lack such resources, are forced to recruit more heavily from the private sector.

Second, left-wing parties exhibit a distinct pattern: they recruit more consistently from academia, regardless of whether they are cartel or non-cartel. This suggests that the technocratic perspective is particularly applicable to left-wing parties, as they consistently value academic expertise irrespective of their governmental status.

Third, right-wing non-cartel parties significantly recruit more from the private sector than any other group, a finding that remains robust even when controlling for ideology and resources. This further supports the idea that parties without established access to governmental resources must rely on alternative recruitment pools.

In sum, while both the partisan and technocratic perspectives hold in Flanders, we have demonstrated that recruitment pools are contingent upon party resources and ideology. Rather than viewing MAs as either rigidly partisan or technocratic, our model reveals that their backgrounds are dynamically shaped by party characteristics. This study offers a nuanced, empirically grounded understanding of ministerial adviser recruitment and paves the way for further research into how political contexts shape elite political appointments.

Limitations and Future Work

While these results are encouraging for our model, some aspects of the puzzle remain unsolved and will need to be addressed in future work.

Recruitment from the public sector has not been behaving as we theoretically would have expected. We found public sector recruitment to be equally distributed among cartel and non-cartel parties, and only a relatively weak effect of ideology. Our primary explanation for this is the widespread practice of secondment in Belgian ministerial cabinets, where civil servants are temporarily assigned to work in a ministerial cabinet (Eraly & Goransson, 2018; Göransson, 2015; Meert et al., Forthcoming). While based on the literature, we posited that left-wing parties had a more positive stance towards civil servants and that cartel parties had more access to this sector, secondment seems to be equally practised among all kinds of political parties. In other words, whether the political party is left or right, whether or not the party has access to resources, the practice of secondment seems to enable them to recruit advisers with public sector experience.

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Future research should look deeper into the variation in this secondment: do different kinds of parties have access to different types of civil servants (management or specialist)?

Secondly, related to this first point, a problem in our model is that the academic sector does not alternate between left-wing cartel and non-cartel parties. This might be a consequence of our left-wing non-cartel sample being relatively small in Flanders due to the earlier-mentioned fact that Flanders had no emerging left-wing parties in the last 20 years apart from the Greens. However, the share of this party and the quality of the data are relatively low because Groen participated in government in the first half of the 2000s. The party was a good temporary support to our model for calculating interactions for the right-wing parties. However, we would need more recent, high-quality data to infer recruitment behaviour about emerging left-wing parties (where we expect a bias toward the academic sector). Future research should, in the first instance, look into left-wing non-cartel parties to further validate this model.

Conclusion

This paper presents a dynamic explanatory model for understanding the recruitment patterns of Flemish ministerial advisers (MAs) between 1999 and 2020, significantly advancing existing scholarly discussions that have traditionally framed MA recruitment through either partitocratic (partisan-focused) or technocratic (expert-focused) lenses. Our approach moves beyond these static categories, integrating two essential variables from political science—resources and ideology—to explain the diverse recruitment pools from which MAs are selected.

Empirical analyses based on an extensive dataset of career trajectories revealed substantial evidence supporting both traditional perspectives. Approximately half of Flemish MAs exhibit clear partisan affiliations, and a significant majority possess advanced educational credentials or substantial public sector experience, aligning well with the technocratic viewpoint. However, our dynamic model shows that these perspectives are not mutually exclusive but rather interact dynamically, depending on party characteristics.

We find that party resources, particularly whether a party is cartel or non-cartel, significantly shape recruitment strategies. Non-cartel parties, lacking established political networks, predominantly recruit from outsider sectors such as the private sector or academia. Conversely, cartel parties rely heavily on insider sectors, notably political networks and administrative expertise. Ideology further refines these recruitment choices, with right-wing parties systematically preferring candidates from the private sector and political insiders. In contrast, left-wing parties demonstrate a marked preference for academic and public sector expertise.

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Nonetheless, this study has highlighted several avenues for further research. The role of secondment from the public sector emerged as an important but understudied practice influencing recruitment patterns, suggesting that future studies should explore the nuances of secondment and its variation across political parties. Additionally, the relative absence of high-quality data on left-wing non-cartel parties in Flanders necessitates comparative studies in other political contexts to validate and refine our model fully.

In conclusion, by integrating resources and ideology into the analysis of MA recruitment, this paper contributes to a more nuanced understanding of political appointments, bridging existing theoretical divides and providing a robust framework for future scholarly exploration.

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3. During the preparation of this work the authors used ChatGPT to improve language and readability. After using this tool/service, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.
4. Data and scripts are available upon motivated request to tom.bellens@kuleuven.be.

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Appendix

A Complementary Tables

Table A.0 Political Sector Breakdown

Sector	Percentage (%)
Government	52.59
Legislature	13.41
Local Politics	8.10
Central Office	13.39
Federal Government	12.50

Table A.1 Political Indices Comparison by Gender

Index	Global (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
Political Weight	25.66	26.77	23.93
Political Threshold	31.84	33.10	29.87
Political Experience Presence	44.71	46.18	42.42

Table A.2 Political Indices Comparison by Age Group

Index	Global (%)	Young (%)	Old (%)
Political Weight	25.66	23.89	26.80
Political Threshold	31.84	30.11	32.96
Political Experience Presence	44.71	41.08	47.07

Table A.3 Public Sector Indices Comparison by Gender

Index	Global (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
Public Weight	16.96	17.82	15.63
Public Threshold	20.83	21.28	20.13
Public Experience Presence	32.77	33.94	30.95

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Table A.4 Public Sector Indices Comparison by Age Group

Index	Global (%)	Young (%)	Old (%)
Public Weight	16.96	16.55	17.24
Public Threshold	20.83	21.29	20.53
Public Experience Presence	32.77	31.18	33.80

Table A.5 Academic Sector Indices Comparison by Gender

Index	Global (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
Academic Weight	7.40	8.12	6.29
Academic Threshold	9.31	10.29	7.79
Academic Experience Presence	15.41	16.97	12.99

Table A.6 Academic Sector Indices Comparison by Age Group

Index	Global (%)	Young (%)	Old (%)
Academic Weight	7.40	8.34	6.80
Academic Threshold	9.31	10.54	8.52
Academic Experience Presence	15.41	14.41	16.06

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