

Candidate selection procedures and women's representation in Italy

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Abstract

Political parties play the most prominent role in shaping the gender composition of parliaments. Through political recruitment, parties might act in such ways as to promote or hinder gender equality in terms of women's chances of accessing parliamentary seats. While external factors, such as the electoral system and the presence of legislated gender quotas, have been widely studied as affecting parties' attitudes towards gender equality, candidate selection procedures are one of the most important, although still understudied, features internal to party organisation that have an impact on women's representation. By taking the Italian 2013 elections as a case study, our empirical analysis shows that inclusive selection methods, such as open primaries, increase female candidates' chances of getting elected in comparison to other, more exclusive methods, such as selection by party leadership.

1. Introduction

The claim for an equal representation of women in political institutions in Italy has entered the debate quite forcefully in the last few decades. Yet, as witnessed by the recent composition of the Draghi Government (13th February 2021), which includes only eight female ministers out of a total of twenty-three, gender balance in representation is far from constituting a well-established feature of Italian politics.

The prominent role of political parties in the promotion or hindering of gender equality in political representation is widely recognized (Kittilson 2006; Norris and Lovenduski 1995). Since candidate selection procedures, list ordering and safe-seat placement are in the hands of political parties, party gatekeeping (Norris and Lovenduski 1995; Kunovich and Paxton 2005; Pansardi and Vercesi 2017) is frequently called into question as one of the main explaining factors of the reproduction of gender differences in political representation. Parties' electoral strategies are generally understood as shaped by a set of external and internal constraints that have an independent effect on gender equality in representation. However, while external factors, such as the characteristics of the electoral system and the presence of legislated gender quotas, have been widely studied as affecting parties' attitudes towards gender equality in representation, parties' internal factors, such as intra-party dynamics and candidate selection methods, are a far less studied topic (Kittilson 2006; Gauja and Cross 2015).

Candidate selection procedures are one of the most important features of party organisation that have an impact on women's representation. According to the seminal work of Rahat and Hazan (2001), parties can opt for a fully inclusive candidate selection process, which may involve participation and voting by party members at the local level, or even be open to the entire national electorate, as in the case of open primary elections. On the other hand, parties can give party leaders and elites a good deal of discretionary power, adopting highly centralized procedures for selecting candidates and compiling and ordering lists. However, there is contrasting evidence in the literature about the impact of inclusive versus exclusive candidate selection procedures on women's representation.

In this article, we are interested in ascertaining whether different candidate selection procedures affect female candidates' chances of getting elected, taking the 2013 Italian election as a case study. The electoral system in place in 2013 consisted in a proportional system with majority bonus and was characterized by blocked electoral lists for each of the 26 multi-member constituencies in the lower chamber, with the order of candidates decided by each party before the elections. The main reason for selecting this case lies in the fact that 2013 showed an unprecedented and unreplicated variety of methods of candidate selection, led by the adoption of largely inclusive selection procedures by three of the main competing parties, the Democratic Party (Pd), Left, Ecology and Freedom (Sel) and the Five Star Movement (M5s) (Lanzone and Rombi 2014; Seddone and Venturino 2013; Sandri, Seddone and Venturino 2015). With almost all parties returning to centralized selection procedures in the 2018 election, the 2013 election is a unique case worth investigating.

By relying on original data from the 2013 Italian Candidates Survey (Di Virgilio et al. 2015; Di Virgilio and Segatti 2016), we empirically study whether selection procedures have different effects on male and female candidates' electoral vulnerability – i.e., uncertainty about their election prospects – and consequently on their chances to be elected. In particular, unlike previous studies which found mixed evidence of the effect of inclusive versus exclusive candidate selection methods on women's representation by studying the share of female candidates in party lists (Matland and Studlar 1996; Kittilson 2006; Aldrich 2020; Pruyssers and Cross 2016), we shift our unit of analysis to individual candidates, linking candidate selection procedures to subjective and objective measures of vulnerability to electoral defeat. Accordingly, by studying the impact of party choices on list or district placement (Rahat, Hazan and Katz 2008; Guaja and Cross 2015), we provide a more fine-grained analysis of the effect of candidate selection methods on women's representation.

The article is organized as follows. In the next section, we present our theoretical framework and introduce our hypotheses about the effect of candidate selection procedures on the electoral vulnerability of female candidates. In the second section, we introduce our case study, which focuses on the examination of the effects of selection procedures on candidates' electoral vulnerability in multi-member districts in the 2013 Italian general election. In the third section, we introduce our data operationalization and methods and in the fourth we present and discuss our empirical findings. Lastly, we conclude by assessing our results in the light of our main theoretical assumptions.

2. Political party gatekeeping and candidate selection

Women's under-representation in national parliaments is frequently explained, in international literature, by looking at two different, though intertwined, aspects. On the one hand, since candidate selection procedures, list ordering and safe-seat placement are in the hands of political parties, *gendered party gatekeeping* (Norris and Lovenduski 1995; Kunovich and Paxton 2005) is frequently called into question as one of the main explaining factors of the reproduction of gender differences in political representation. Party gatekeeping refers to the 'barriers of entrance' placed by long-term party members (Kittilson 2006), who detain most of the party's political resources, against groups of newcomers – such as aspiring female politicians – who might threaten their privileged position within the party and/or their parliamentary seat. On the other hand, voters might show unfavourable attitudes towards female candidates (Sanbonmatsu 2002; Pansardi and Pinto 2020), accordingly affecting women's descriptive representation both directly and indirectly: directly, by penalizing female candidates *vis-a-vis* male candidates at the ballot; indirectly, by influencing parties' candidate selection strategies and negatively affecting the promotion of female candidates.

Intra-party dynamics, however, such as candidates' selection methods, might have an independent effect on women's representation. While the literature agrees on assuming an effect of candidate selection procedures on women's representation, no agreement is to be found on the direction of the effect. Rahat, Hazan and Katz (2008) suggest the negative effect of more inclusive selection methods – such as open primaries – on gender balance in representation. This is so because open primary elections may suffer from gender-biased voting as much as general elections. Moreover, the electorate choices in primary elections might be influenced by the effect of incumbency and candidate visibility and reputation as much as in national elections, thus negatively affecting possible female newcomers. On the other hand, centralized selection by the party leadership might positively affect women's representation, because party leaders might choose to endorse gender equality either as a genuinely recognized political value (Kittilson 2006) or as an electoral strategy (Matland and Studlar 1996).

Between the two sides of the continuum, selection by party members – at the local or central level – is, according to Rahat, Hazan and Katz (2008), the candidate selection method that might have the most negative effect on women's representation. It is so because local and central party members are those whose privileges and power resources – and, potentially, whose parliamentary seats – are those most directly threatened by groups of newcomers such as aspiring female politicians (Kittilson 2006; Pruyssers and Cross 2016).

However, recent literature (Luhiste 2015; Aldrich 2020) has effectively problematized the link between the exclusivity of the selection method and the promotion of gender balance in Parliament. According to Aldrich (2020), more exclusive selectorates would be more effective in promoting women's representation only if there were an actual commitment to gender equality on the part of the party central elites. The results of previous studies on the role of selection procedures on women's representation are thus not conclusive: if party leadership is committed to a gender equality strategy, an exclusive selection process might be more effective as primary elections may replicate gender biased choices observed in the electorate (Rahat, Hazan and Katz 2008). On the contrary,

inclusive selection procedures can be more helpful in promoting women's representation in the event that party leadership is less favourable towards gender balance than voters at large or party members (Kittilson 2006; Matland and Studlar 1996). Accordingly, we present two alternative hypotheses:

H1a. *The more exclusive the party selectorate, the less vulnerable female candidates are to electoral defeat;*

H1b. *The more exclusive the party selectorate, the greater the vulnerability of female candidates to electoral defeat.*

3. The Italian 2013 election as a case study

In order to test whether women candidates are favoured or penalised by different selection procedures, we choose to focus on the 2013 Italian general election instead of the most recent one (2018). There are three reasons for this choice. First, there is almost no variance between candidate selection procedures in the 2018 election: most parties centralised the selection of candidacies both in single-member and multi-member districts, often 'parachuting' key candidates into safer districts, even in the absence of any link with the local constituency. The only party adopting an open selection procedure was the M5s, but only for candidates in the proportional tier. On the contrary, as mentioned in the Introduction, in 2013 we observed, for the first time, a huge variation in selection procedures across parties according to the selectorates' inclusiveness/exclusiveness dimension: from voters at large to party leadership. Accordingly, the 2013 election is a unicum in terms of the variety of candidate selection methods used by parties and is thus the best test for assessing their effects on women's representation. Secondly, the introduction of gender quotas in the 2018 election forced parties to increase the share of women in their lists and to alternate women and men in terms of list placement (Donà 2018; Regalia and Legnante 2018; Sampugnaro and Montemagno 2020), mitigating, therefore, between-party differences in terms of the promotion of women candidates and making this case less suitable for our kind of study. Thirdly, we have no individual level candidate data for the 2018 elections, while for 2013 we can take advantage of the data included in the Italian Candidates Survey (ICS).

The ICS collected original survey data with the aim of gaining new insights into the role of political elites, and specifically candidates in the Italian general elections held in February 2013 (Di Virgilio et al. 2015; Di Virgilio and Segatti 2016). Focusing on the relationships between candidates, parties and voters, the ICS covers several topics, including the candidate selection process.¹ In particular, the ICS directly asked candidates who made the decision about their nomination and at what level the decision was made. The replies to these questions allow us to operationalise the two main dimensions of the selection process identified by Rahat and Hazan (2001) and can be helpful in mapping selection procedures – which are often informal and occur in a non-standardised way – across parties and candidates. The ICS includes answers from a representative selection

¹ The ICS is part of the Comparative Candidates Survey Project, a cross national elite survey, which combines an internationally agreed core questionnaire and a locally adapted set of questions that try to capture the specifics of the national political and electoral systems.

of 672 candidates from the main political parties.² Accordingly, by relying on original data from the 2013 ICS, we empirically study whether selection procedures have different effects on male and female candidates' electoral vulnerability, and consequently on their chances of being elected.

4. Data and methods

Parties' candidate selection procedures constitute the main independent variable of our study. Rahat and Hazan (2001) provided a typology of candidate selection procedure based on two dimensions: the inclusiveness/exclusiveness of selectorates and the level of nomination. The first dimension varies from a pole coinciding with the entire electorate to that of a restricted élite. The second dimension varies depending on whether the selection of candidates is entrusted to a national body or to decentralised, regional or local bodies.

Based on these two main characteristics of the selection process, we produced a six-point selection index for each candidate by combining survey responses to two questions in the ICS. Firstly, in order to measure the *exclusivity* of the selectorate, each candidate was asked who made the decision for her/his nomination, coding the answers in four ways: voters at large; party members; an assembly of delegates of my party; party leadership. Secondly, in order to identify the degree of *centralisation* of the selection process, each potential representative was asked at what level the decision about her/his nomination was made. The answers were then classified according to two categories: local or national level. Bridging together candidates' individual responses to both questions, we created a six-point index of selection, in which the lowest level was ascribed to candidates selected with the most inclusive and decentralized selection mechanism: selection by voters at large at the local level. The next category depicts an internal procedure in which candidates were selected by party members at local level. The next two categories represent more informal selection processes in which candidates were selected by party elites either at the local or the national level. Finally, the last two categories describe selection procedures ruled by party leaders with or without local incentives (see Table 1).³

Table 1. Selection index

| Value | Category |
|-------|------------------------------------|
| 1 | Voters at local level |
| 2 | Party members at local level |
| 3 | Party delegates at local level |
| 4 | Party delegates at national level |
| 5 | Party leadership at local level |
| 6 | Party leadership at national level |

Note: the selection index combines the inclusiveness/exclusiveness of the selectorate and the level at which the nomination was made.

² For a discussion about response rates and the representativeness of the selection of candidates see Di Virgilio et al. (2015).

³ See Shomer (2009) for a similar index applied to the case of Israel.

It is worth noting that higher values of the selection index are related not only to different candidate selection procedures, but also to different incentives to cultivate a personal versus party reputation (Carey and Shugart 1995). When the party leadership has the final say in all the stages from recruitment to final selection, candidates' re-election depends exclusively on party decisions. Conversely, in open primaries, candidates are directly responsible for their final selection and thus re-election.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of the selection index computed by combining the inclusiveness/exclusiveness of selectorates and the level of nomination measured at the candidate's level across the parties included in our analysis. The recruitment of candidates in the Italian political system has long been concentrated in the hands of a few leaders, albeit with some differences in the degree of decentralisation of the selection process between the various parties. As mentioned above, the 2013 elections, however, contributed to breaking this pattern, since the M5s, the Pd and Sel organised a mechanism for the selection of potential representatives based on primary elections with very different characteristics in terms of both selectorate inclusivity and the degree of decentralisation of the selection process (Regalia and Valbruzzi 2016; Sandri, Seddone and Venturino 2015; Venturino and Seddone 2017).⁴

With respect to the first aspect, the M5s primaries were characterised by a greater degree of exclusivity than those of the Pd and Sel, limiting the vote only to party members. As a matter of fact, the M5s restricted the possibility of participating in the vote for the choice of candidates to those registered on the party's website before 2012 (just over 30,000 people). On the contrary, Pd and Sel opted for a more inclusive strategy, extending participation to voters at large. More precisely, the Pd and Sel allowed not only registered members to vote, but also all those who had participated in the November 2012 primaries to choose the leader of the centre-left coalition (a pool of more than three million people).

As regards the degree of decentralisation of the selection process, in all three parties the candidates were chosen at the local level, with a more or less marked involvement of the national leadership. In the M5s, candidate lists were proposed at the local level, but they required the final approval of the leader Beppe Grillo. National leadership had the authority to not validate the lists if they did not meet the very strict party requirements regarding eligibility to stand as a candidate. According to M5s' eligibility requirements, candidates were chosen from among party members who were at least 25 years old, had no legal debts, and who were resident in the constituency in which they competed. Finally, candidacy was only open to those who had previously run without being elected in the local or regional elections in which the M5s competed between 2008 and 2012. Sel and Pd opted instead for provincial lists with less stringent candidacy requirements. However, the national party leadership of the two parties reserved the right to nominate one candidate for every ten outside the mechanism of the primaries.⁵

Finally, there are differences between the three parties as regards the type of ballot used for the primaries that can be relevant for our analysis. The PD and Sel ensured

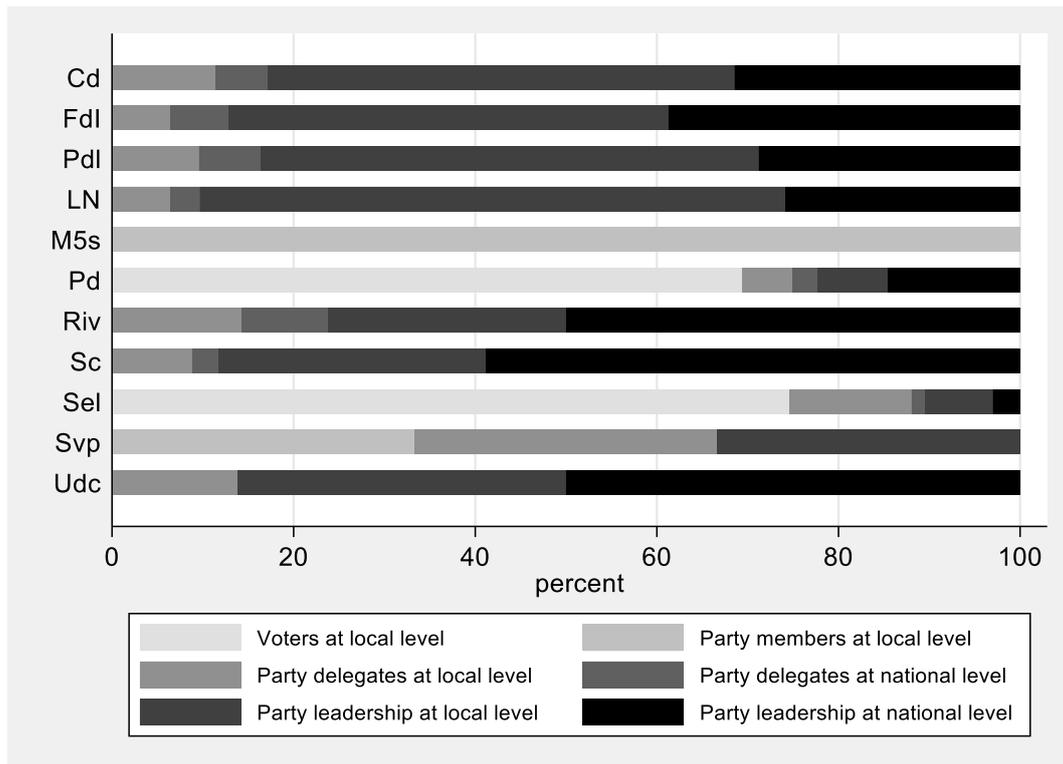
⁴ The Svp – a minor regional party – also organized a primary election in the context of the 2013 election (see Seddone and Venturino 2017 for more information).

⁵ The candidates indicated by the national leadership were placed in safe positions, so much so that only 67% and 51% of those elected to the Chamber of Deputies by Pd and Sel respectively were actually selected through the primaries (Pinto and Pedrazzani 2015).

gender balance by using a legal provision that allowed voters to express two preferences, one for a male and one for a female candidate. The M5s allowed up to three preferences without any formal provision on gender balance.

The other parties included in our analysis opted instead for more informal procedures characterised by a high level of centralization and direct involvement of the party leadership in candidate selection.

Figure 1. Candidates' selection procedures across parties (2013)



Party acronyms: Cd (*Centro democratico*, Democratic Centre); Fdl (*Fratelli d'Italia*, Brothers of Italy); Pdl (*Popolo della libertà*; People of Freedom); LN (*Lega Nord*, Northern League); M5s (*Movimento 5 Stelle*, Five Star Movement); Pd (*Partito democratico*, Democratic Party); Riv (*Rivoluzione civile*; Civil Revolution); Sc (*Scelta civica*, Civic Choice); Sel (*Sinistra, ecologia e libertà*, Left, ecology and Freedom); Svp (*Südtiroler Volkspartei*, South Tyrol Peoples Party); Udc (*Unione di centro*, Union of the Centre). Source: own elaboration.

In this study, we use the selection index described above in combination with candidate gender as our main independent variables in order to investigate whether women candidates are advantaged or disadvantaged by exclusive versus inclusive selection mechanisms. Unlike previous studies (Kittilson 2006; Pruyssers and Cross 2016; Aldrich 2020), in this article we do not investigate the effect of candidate selection procedures by relating it to the share of female candidates, but we explore parties' electoral strategies and potential gatekeeping more closely by looking at actual candidates' chances of getting elected in terms of electoral vulnerability: i.e., in terms of the impact of party choices on list or district placement.

While a candidate's own perception of her chances of getting elected can constitute a proxy of her actual chances, in this study we include both subjective and objective measures of electoral vulnerability. In particular, to assess women's chances of getting

elected, we follow Rahat, Hazan and Katz (2008) and, together with a measure based on the ICS data, we include a measure based on list position and seat safety. By assuming a stronger commitment to gender equality by those parties that place women in higher positions on the electoral list and in districts where they expect a larger share of votes, we are able to directly relate the party candidate selection procedure with their party gate-keeping strategy.

Given the nature of the electoral system used in the 2013 election – a bonus-adjusted proportional system with closed lists – we accordingly use as dependent variables two measures of electoral vulnerability (André, Depauw and Martin 2015). Our first measure concerns *subjective* electoral vulnerability and is based on ICS data with regard to candidates' expectations about their chances of winning the election. In particular, candidates were asked to rate their uncertainty about their election prospects on a scale ranging from (1) 'I thought I could not lose' to (5) 'I thought I could not win'. Higher values on this question correspond, therefore, to a greater perception of vulnerability. Although the perception of precariousness is strongly associated with actual measures of vulnerability, we also include in our analysis an *objective* electoral vulnerability indicator which reflects several features that can shape candidates' likelihood of being elected: list position, district magnitude and the seats won by parties in each district.⁶ Higher values of the objective indicator correspond to greater vulnerability.

The relationship between gender and selection on the one hand, and vulnerability on the other hand, is evaluated taking into account several covariates that are assumed to affect the latter. The use of survey data often allows a fine-grained operationalisation of the control variables. At the individual level, we first include a categorical variable associated to candidates' political experience. Combining questions related to prospective legislators' previous experience in elected institutions at the national or local level, we created a typology in which candidates are classified according to four categories: no political experience, experience only at the local level, experience both at the local and national level, or finally experience at the national level exclusively (Pinto and Verzichelli 2016). Second, we include a four-point index measuring candidates' level of education (1 = middle school, 2 = high school, 3 = university degree, 4 = Master or PhD). Third, we add a variable measuring candidates' age in number of years. Fourth, we compute a four-point index of localness according to whether a candidate is: neither born nor located in the district (1), born but not located in the district (2), not born but located in the district (3), born and located in the district (4) (Marangoni and Tronconi 2011). The higher the value of the index, the greater should be candidates' local bonds. Finally, we include a covariate measured at the district level controlling for the log-transformed value of district magnitude (Carey and Shugart 1995). Table 2 reports descriptive statistics by parties of the variables described above. We do not directly incorporate party dummies, but we control for party differences and potential unobserved factors by computing random intercepts at the party level.

⁶ In order to compute electoral vulnerability in closed list proportional systems, we use the following formula: $L/M(S + 1)$, where L is the candidate list position, S is the seats won by the party to which the potential legislator belongs, and M is the district magnitude. We add a one to the denominator in order to take into account those parties included in the ICS which did not win any seat (Pinto 2016). For a further discussion about the computation of electoral vulnerability in plurality and proportional systems with open or closed lists see André, Depauw and Martin (2015).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics by parties.

| | % of female among respondents | Sub./Obj. Vulnerability | Selection (Mean) | Career (Mode) | Education (Mean) | Age (Median) | Localness (Mean) |
|-------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------|-------------------|------------------|--------------|------------------|
| Cd | 14 | 4.25/0.26 | 3.66 | No exp. | 2.69 | 52 | 3.39 |
| Fdl | 19 | 4.21/0.28 | 3.94 | Local Politicians | 2.68 | 45 | 3.84 |
| Pdl | 21 | 3.86/0.12 | 3.62 | Local Politicians | 2.70 | 47 | 3.73 |
| LN | 28 | 4.10/0.12 | 3.52 | Local Politicians | 2.44 | 45 | 3.90 |
| M5s | 13 | 3.72/0.11 | 2.00 | No exp. | 2.54 | 38 | 3.77 |
| Pd | 45 | 3.17/0.04 | 1.20 | Local Politicians | 2.81 | 50 | 3.57 |
| Riv | 40 | 4.31/0.35 | 4.05 | No exp. | 2.76 | 52 | 3.49 |
| Sc | 16 | 3.91/0.14 | 4.19 | No exp. | 2.81 | 50 | 3.57 |
| Sel | 39 | 4.28/0.13 | 0.72 | Local Politicians | 2.67 | 50 | 3.67 |
| Svp | 0 | 4.33/0.10 | 2.00 | Local Politicians | 3.00 | 48 | 4.00 |
| Udc | 33 | 3.94/.22 | 4.00 | Local Politicians | 2.89 | 52 | 3.64 |
| Tot. | 28 | 3.81/0.14 | 2.58 | No exp. | 2.70 | 47 | 3.65 |

Source: own elaboration.

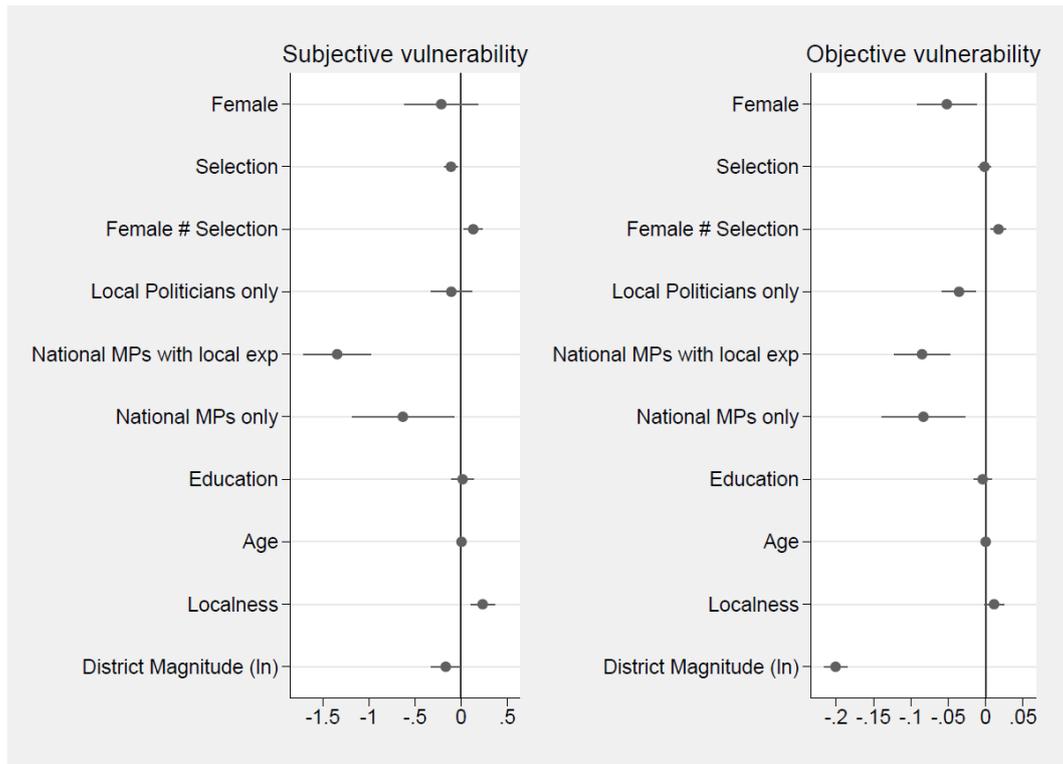
5. Findings

We perform our analysis using two multi-level models to account for the hierarchical structure of the data (i.e., candidates are clustered across different parties; for more details on the use of multilevel analysis, see Rabe-Hesketh and Skrondal 2012). Figure 2 presents the results of the multilevel models in a graphical way (see the Appendix for regression tables). The left panel uses as a dependent variable the measure of subjective vulnerability; the right panel uses instead the objective measure of electoral vulnerability. The graph should be interpreted as follows: dots represent regression coefficient, while segments refer to 95 percent CIs. When CIs cross the zero-line, the covariates' impact is not statistically significant. By contrast, when they are located on the right (left) of the origin, variables positively (negatively) influence candidates' precariousness.

In order to test whether or not women are penalised according to different selection procedures, we include in the models the interaction between gender and the selection index. As Figure 2 shows that the interaction is statistically significant in both models, however, in order to assess its substantive impact we rely on graphical interpretation as suggested by Brambor, Clark and Golder (2006). The dots in Figure 3 represent the contrast between genders, i.e. the difference between the average value of vulnerability predicted for men and women, plotted against each value of the selection index. The segments represent the 95 percent confidence intervals. When the confidence intervals are both below or above the horizontal zero-line the difference is statistically significant. Women candidates are more vulnerable than male colleagues when dots are above the

origin; on the contrary, female prospective legislators are less precarious than male candidates when dots are below the zero-line. Both the panels in Figure 3 highlight that, other things being equal, women are significantly more vulnerable than men when candidates are selected either by party elites or the party leader at the national or local level (selection index = 4, 5, 6). Substantially, these results support H1b, meaning that female potential legislators are located in more vulnerable positions in party lists than men when they are selected by a more exclusive selectorate.

Figure 2. Assessing electoral vulnerability under different candidates' selection procedures (2013)



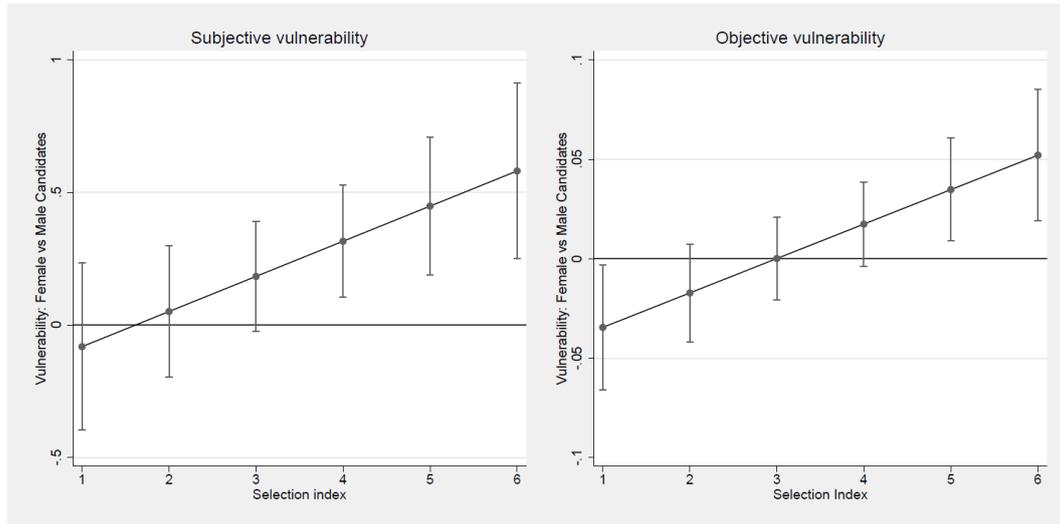
Note: Multi-level linear regression models. Constant term and inter-party variance components are not reported. N = 658/663. Omitted baseline category for political experience: no-experience. Segments represent 95 per cent confidence intervals. Source: own elaboration.

While our results clearly indicate that exclusive selection procedures are associated with greater vulnerability of female potential legislators, they are less robust with regard to the impact of inclusive selection practices. The right panel of Figure 3, which uses the measure of objective vulnerability, shows indeed that female candidates are favoured in comparison to men when selection is made with open primaries (selection index = 1).⁷ This result, however, is no more statistically significant when the measure of subjective vulnerability is used (left panel). Notwithstanding, our analysis shows that candidate

⁷ These results should also be read in the context of the parties that promoted open selection procedures. As mentioned above, the Pd and Sel guaranteed gender balance employing a 'double gender preference'. In the M5s primaries, on the other hand, all candidates with no political experience took part, thus negating any resource-based advantage for experienced male candidates.

selection procedures matter and are not completely neutral in relation to the promotion of women candidates.⁸

Figure 3. Contrast of electoral vulnerability between genders under different candidate selection procedures



Note: Contrasts are computed holding constant the values of the other variables.

Source: own elaboration.

Among the control variables, as Figure 2 shows, only a few covariates are strongly significant. Other things being equal, experienced candidates are on average less vulnerable than prospective legislators without experience (the reference category). Conversely, electoral precariousness is on average higher among candidates with stronger local bonds in the district. This result is in contrast with previous findings in the literature, as Shugart, Valdini and Suominen (2005), in their comparative analysis of six European established democracies, showed that, contingent upon electoral rules, having been born in one's district helps to win mandates. However, the same literature also underlines the importance of having gathered political experiences in district level electoral offices. Our models, indeed, show that candidates with local experience are less vulnerable than those without experience. Finally, both models emphasise that higher district magnitude implies, on average, a lower level of candidate vulnerability.

5. Conclusions

Our study shows that different candidate selection procedures have different effects on female and male candidates' electoral vulnerability. In particular, in contrast with Rahat, Hazan and Katz (2008), our findings show that for female candidates selected by party leadership the chances of being elected are significantly worse than those of their male counterparts. By contrast, our work on the 2013 elections confirms the findings of

⁸ As suggested by Berry, Golder and Milton (2012), we also test the other side of the interaction, i.e., the marginal impact of selection across genders. Results confirm that as we move towards more centralized selection procedures, women's vulnerability significantly increases, while men's precariousness decreases.

other descriptive studies (Regalia and Valbruzzi 2016; Venturino and Seddone 2017) and shows that, for candidates selected by open primaries, women have a better chance of being elected than men.

Accordingly, evidence suggests that the selection procedure has an effect on parties' electoral strategy that is different for male and female candidates. Women candidates selected with exclusive methods are subject to party gatekeeping and are penalized in terms of list placement, thus affecting their chances of gaining a seat in parliament. The opposite is true in the case of women candidates selected with inclusive methods. Not only does the negative effect of gender on list placement disappear in the case of female candidates selected by open primaries, but women candidates are promoted in comparison to their male counterparts. In this case, party gatekeeping is replaced by a gender positive bias, since parties exploit the primary-winning candidates' visibility, reputation and personal resources gained through competition in primary elections by placing them in higher list positions.

Although our analysis takes into account unobserved party-related factors by estimating random intercepts at the party level, it is worth noting that two of the parties which adopted more inclusive selection procedures in the 2013 elections (Pd and Sel) belong to the centre-left and left of the political spectrum, which is generally associated with a more positive cultural and ideological attitude towards gender equality in representation (Caul 1999; Kittilson 2006; Reynolds 1999; Rule 1987). Moreover, these two parties promoted gender balance in their primaries by allowing voters to vote for two candidates of different genders, and were the only ones to include statutory gender quotas for their participation in the 2013 elections. It is worth mentioning that these quotas only prescribed that no gender should appear on the lists for more than the 40% of times. Accordingly, they had no direct effect on female candidates' list placement in winnable list positions, and thus had no impact on reducing candidates' electoral vulnerability. However, it is certainly an expression of a stronger commitment towards gender equality by the party leadership of these parties *vis-a-vis* their competitors.

The elements reported above might affect female candidates' electoral vulnerability and potentially interact with the effect of the selection procedures for Pd and Sel. However, this is not the case for the M5s, whose positioning on the left-right continuum is rather ambiguous and never included mechanisms such as quotas for the promotion of female candidates. The M5s is actually the party which, overall, greatly contributed to the feminization of the 2013 legislature by attesting a rate of 34.3% female MPs – opposed to a mere 15.3% of female candidates on the electoral lists (Pansardi and Pedrazzani 2019). As a result of the online consultation for candidate selection (Lanzone and Rombi 2014), M5s members selected only a minority of female candidates, and yet, the majority of those selected were placed in winning position on the electoral lists. Accordingly, while we can assume that for Pd and Sel ideological factors interact with candidate selection procedures in the promotion of female candidates, the selection procedure alone seems to be able to explain the strong positive results of the M5s in terms of women's representation.

Overall, while international literature provides mixed evidence (Aldrich 2020; Gauja and Cross 2015; Luhiste 2015; Pruyssers and Cross 2016; Rahat, Hazan and Katz 2008) about the relation between selection procedures and women's representation, our

results are quite straightforward and show that more inclusive procedures grant women better chances of election. To offer more ground to attest the positive effect of inclusive selection methods on women's representation further studies are needed, in particular, studies that go beyond the single national cases until now produced and offer a comparative perspective on this topic. While studies of this type are complicated by the paucity of cases in which inclusive procedures, such as open primaries, are used to select prospective parliamentary candidates – in particular, in proportional electoral systems – an assessment of the impact of selection methods on women's representation can offer a further reason to students of party organization and gender politics to argue for more intra-party democracy.

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Appendix

Table A1. Assessing electoral vulnerability under different candidate selection procedures (2013)

| | (1) Subjective vulnerability | (2) Objective vulnerability |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Female | -0.214 (0.203) | -0.052 [*] (0.020) |
| Selection | -0.109 ^{**} (0.039) | -0.001 (0.004) |
| Female X Selection | 0.133 ^{**} (0.051) | 0.017 ^{**} (0.005) |
| Local Politicians Only | -0.105 (0.112) | -0.035 ^{**} (0.011) |
| National MPs with local exp. | -1.344 ^{**} (0.188) | -0.085 ^{**} (0.019) |
| National MPs only | -0.630 [*] (0.282) | -0.083 ^{**} (0.028) |
| Education | 0.017 (0.060) | -0.004 (0.006) |
| Age | 0.006 (0.004) | 0.001 (0.001) |
| Localness | 0.235 ^{**} (0.065) | 0.011 ⁺ (0.007) |
| District Magnitude (ln) | -0.166 [*] (0.080) | -0.201 ^{**} (0.008) |
| Constant | 3.834 ^{**} (0.546) | 0.788 ^{**} (0.059) |
| SD (Party) | 0.354 ^{***} (0.098) | 0.082 ^{***} (0.021) |
| SD (Residual) | 1.118 ^{***} (0.031) | 0.111 ^{***} (0.004) |
| AIC | 2060.059 | -967.958 |
| BIC | 2118.418 | -909.500 |
| N | 658 | 663 |

Note: Multi-level regression models. Omitted baseline category for political experience: no-experience. Standard errors in parentheses. + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$