Italian Political Science, VOLUME 16 ISSUE 1

How and why do Italian Party Leaders survive in office or come to an end?

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is twofold: to explore the dynamics of party leadership change in Italy, and to try to assess which (if any) characteristics of the leadership race (LR) to appoint (or re-appoint) the party leader, in combination with other conditions, could favour leadership re-selection in office at the end of the term, rather than a more or less forced early departure. To this end, we have taken into account about thirty LRs promoted by four Italian political parties over the last three decades, relying on a methodology which is new in this field of research: qualitative comparative analysis.

1. Introduction

A recent comparative article (Vicentini and Pritoni 2021) applied Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) to assess whether the two separate moments in which party leaders are selected and de-selected may be connected. More specifically, the authors investigated which (if any) characteristics of the selection system – in combination with other conditions such as participation in government and party electoral support – could favour leadership re-selection in office. They concluded by indicating four different combinations of conditions and suggesting different paths for future research, including a qualitative in-depth analysis to explain deviant cases and better understand country and party peculiarities, as well as the specific idiosyncratic characteristics of some LRs. This explains the decision to complement that study by focusing on a single country during the same period (approximately the last thirty years).

The choice to focus on the Italian case is motivated by different reasons. It is well known that in the early 1990s the old party system collapsed, and a new majoritarian electoral law was introduced (Cotta and Verzichelli 2020). It created a new basis for the internal organization of Italian political parties, which became more and more centred around the leaders. In this regard, the personalisation of political life (Rahat and Kenig 2020) and the presidentialisation of political parties (Passarelli 2015) affected the process and visibility of leadership selection and leadership change. In fact, Italian political parties are currently characterised by very different mechanisms of leadership selection, which are expected to produce different effects. It was no coincidence that we witnessed very solid leadership on the right side of the political spectrum (from Berlusconi to Salvini) and extremely fragile leaders on the centre-left side.

Volume 16, Issue 1, 23–39.
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That said, as far as party selection is concerned, we take into account the same four parties analysed in the comparative study, as they cover the whole left-right *continuum* and they are the only parties that were present on the Italian political scene for the entire thirty-year period under consideration. Actually, during this period they all underwent various changes in names and/or in organizational structure, following merges with other parties and/or internal ideological revisions (Cotta and Verzichelli 2020). Therefore, the huge variability over time in terms of organizational structure, electoral support, government participation and coalition potential (Sartori 1970) clearly had a significant impact in terms of leadership dynamics, which guarantees variability in the dataset. These parties are: the mainstream centre-left party [Democratic Party of the Left (PDS) until 1998, thereafter Democrats of the Left (DS) and finally Democratic Party since 2007 (PD)]; the mainstream centre-right party up until a couple of years ago [Forza Italia (FI) up until 2008, thereafter People of Freedom (PDL) and finally Forza Italia (FI) again since 2013]; a small leftist party that was an important coalition partner for about twenty years but has not been in Parliament since 2008 [Communist Re-foundation (PRC)], and a former regional right-wing populist party that has recently became the most voted Italian party thanks to its 'sovranist relocation' [Northern League (LN) /League (for Salvini Premier)].[1]

This contribution proceeds as follows: the next section introduces the theoretical framework, while section 3 is devoted to the calibration of both conditions and the outcome, and also offers the chance to describe the characteristics of the LRs promoted by the four parties under scrutiny over the last thirty years. Section 4 briefly presents the dataset and the main dynamics of party leadership change in Italy. Section 5 applied QCA to look at the different combinations of conditions which lead to the (possible) renewal of the party office *vis-a-vis* a more or less conflicting departure. Finally, in the conclusions, the findings relating to the Italian case are discussed in relation to the original comparative work (Vicentini and Pritoni 2021).

2. Theoretical framework and hypotheses

In their comparative study, Vicentini and Pritoni (2021) structured a novel theoretical framework by bringing together different strands of literature such as leadership selection, leadership survival, party change, etc. We refer to the same framework here, briefly recalling the main points and hypotheses to be taken into account for the successive QCA analysis.

While recent studies (Scarrow et al. 2017) show a certain uniformity regarding the core architecture of party organization, they also found variation between countries and party families in terms of their internal processes, with particular regard to how internally democratic they are, especially in terms of leadership selection procedures. However, over the

[1] As is well known, both PD and PDL came from the merging of, respectively, DS and FI with two other parties (the Daisy and Alleanza Nazionale), coming from a distinct political tradition and presenting a different organizational structure which may be interesting to consider in terms of leadership dynamics.Still, we prefer not to include those two parties in the analysis because of the need to have a balanced (though small) sample with only a mainstream centre-left and centre-right party vs. a smaller left-wing and right-wing populist/radical party. Moreover, while PDS/DS already existed in the 1990s before dissolving within PD, this is not the case for the Daisy, so it would have created a further problem of temporal continuity.

last few decades, the enhancement of intra-party democracy has often accompanied the growing personalisation of political life and presidentialisation of Western political parties (Poguntke and Webb 2005; Passarelli 2015; Rahat and Kenig 2020).This has entailed increased academic attention to the methods through which parties choose their leaders (Scarrow 1999; LeDuc 2001; Caul Kittilson and Scarrow 2006; Kenig 2009; Hazan and Rahat 2010; Cross and Katz 2013; Pilet and Cross 2014; Wauters 2014; Cross and Pilet 2015; Kenig*et al.* 2015; Vicentini 2020). However, there have been considerably fewer studies focusing on how and why leadership tenures end (Cross and Blais 2012; Gruber *et al.* 2015; Ennser-Jedenastik and Schumacher 2015-2020). Most of the few studies in the field suggest that leaders chosen by more inclusive methods face greater risks of de-selection (Bueno de Mesquita*et al.* 2002; Ennser-Jedenastik and Schumacher 2015; Ennser-Jedenastik and Müller, 2015; Schmacher and Giger 2017; Ennser-Jedenastik and Schumacher 2020). However, there are also scholars who suggest that a growing intra-party democracy will increase the legitimacy of the party leadership, securing greater organizational autonomy (Mair 1994; Sandri and Pauwels 2011; Ramiro 2016). Accordingly, we do not have clear expectations concerning the direction of the relation, but still we assume that the size of the selectorate affects leadership re-selection (H1).

Furthermore, the degree of approval that party leaders receive from their *selectorate* – even in the case of 'coronations' of a single candidate (Kenig 2008), i.e. with the absence of a formal opponent – is indicative of the extent to which they are in danger of being dismissed in the near future (Ennser-Jedenastik and Muller2015). In turn, a contested LR (namely a race with more than one candidate running for the leadership) which is also competitive (as it ends with very close results between the first two candidates) is more likely to be divisive for the party, which may contribute to further enhancing internal factionalism (Ware 1979; Hazan and Rahat 2010;Wichowsky and Niebler2010).Thus, when LRs are very competitive, we assume that parties are very internally fragmented, and therefore the office of party leader is particularly at stake (H2a). Similarly, even in the absence of an opponent, we expect a party leader selected or re-selected with a low approval rate to be less likely to be re-selected (H2b).

That said, leaders who overcome the hurdle of the first mandate are expected to exert a stronger control over their own party, which means that they are more likely to survive in office in subsequent years (Ennser-Jedenastik and Muller 2015). Accordingly, we hypothesise more chances of re-selection in successive LRs for incumbent leaders (H3). However, a party leader cannot stay in office indefinitely without showing signs of 'deterioration' (Vicentini and Pritoni 2021). In fact, quantitative studies on leadership survival (Andrews and Jackman 2008; Houriuchi *et al.* 2015) have demonstrated that younger party leaders tend to stay in office for a longer period compared to older colleagues.

Furthermore, previous research has found that electoral defeats and being stuck in opposition increase the probability of leader replacement (Andrews and Jackman 2008; Ennser-Jedenastik and Müller 2015). However, losing and winning elections may have a completely different meaning for mainstream and challenger or niche parties. Likewise, government participation is likely to be beneficial only for leaders of senior government parties, whereas the impact on leaders of challenger parties might go in the opposite direction (Ennser-Jedenastik and Muller 2015). In fact, smaller (challenger) parties may have different party goals and tend to consider policy purity (or ideology) more important than

winning votes or taking government office (Harmel and Janda 1994). Accordingly, regardless of electoral performance, we assume that a leader of a big mainstream office-seeking governing party is less likely to be removed from his/her party office, notably if he/she is simultaneously the head of government (H4a), while we expect the contrary in the case of smaller parties (H4b).

All these things considered, Vicentini and Pritoni (2021) identified five main conditions which are likely to affect the re-selection to office *vis-a-vis* de-selection/departure, both alone and in combination with each other: 1) whether there is an outgoing leader running for re-election (incumbency); 2) broad inclusiveness of the LR called to appoint the party leader; 3) a large victory (namely low competitiveness in contested LRs or high approval rates in coronations of a candidate); 4) participation in government during leadership tenure, and 5) party electoral support during tenure (whether the candidates run to become leader of either a big mainstream or small niche/challenger party). Though being aware that there are a number of other potential conditions that may be considered (leader personality, institutional context, external events etc.), it is not worth including too many conditions in QCA (Schneider and Wagemann 2012). This is particularly true if we only consider the Italian case, which of course presents a much more reduced dataset with respect to the one employed for the original comparative study. Either way, the focus on Italy just allows us to better complement the QCA findings with qualitative reflections concerning other specific factors that may have affected LRs as well as early terminations in office, especially in order to explain possible deviant cases.

3. Calibration

The first step in each fs-QCA is the 'calibration' of sets (both the conditions and the outcome), which can be conducted directly or indirectly (Ragin 2008, 85-105). This fundamental process, which should be as transparent as possible, (Schneider and Wagemann 2010, 403), allows us to investigate in detail the characteristics of the party leaders and LRs under scrutiny. We used the 'indirect method' – which requires the grouping of cases into set-membership scores on the basis of the individual researcher decision (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 35) – for calibrating the outcome as well as all conditions, except for that of 'Big Party', for which we opted for the direct method. Still, with respect to Vicentini and Pritoni's (2021) comparative paper, a few conditions (i.e. inclusiveness, winning margin and party electoral size) have been slightly re-calibrated in order to better adapt to the Italian context.

3.1. Incumbency

The operationalization of the first causal condition (incumbency) is easily explained: we assign '1' when the outgoing party leader runs for re-appointment in office, against other candidates or in uncontested races. Instead, '0' is assigned to all LRs presenting new candidates, including people who have been party chairs years before. Of course, in the case of contested races, it is not taken for granted that 'incumbent' party leaders will be reconfirmed in office. Theoretically, this is not the case for single candidates either, as there might be a threshold to be reached (normally 50 per cent). Yet, not reconfirming an incumbent leader in a coronation is very unlikely.

3.2. LR inclusiveness

According to the literature on candidate and leader selection, the main indicator to be taken into account to assess LR inclusiveness is the type (and size) of the *selectorate*, i.e. the group of people called on to choose the party leader. Scholars usually consider six 'pure' types of *selectorates*, ranked from the most to the least inclusive (Kenig 2009; Pilet and Cross 2014; Spies and Kaiser 2014, Kenig *et al.* 2015): electorate (open primaries), membership (closed primaries), party delegates, party council, party parliamentary group or party top organs, and party leader.

Thus, we assign '1' to open primary election, which allows all party sympathisers to choose the party chair. Far fewer people – from a few thousand to hundreds of thousands, depending on party membership – are (potentially and actually) involved in closed primaries, which nonetheless represents a fully inclusive system of leadership selection (we thus assign a '0.6' coefficient). Instead, the most typical *selectorate* called to appoint the party leader in the European context, namely the delegates to the party Congress, is coded with '0.4', just below the inclusiveness threshold. Not only do party delegates rarely surpass 1,000 people, but they are often required to approve a single candidate rather than choose between more competitors. Then, '0.2' is assigned when the appointment of the party leader is entrusted to the formal vote of the party top organs, normally made up of a few hundred people. Finally, '0' refers to uncontested races wherein the party leader is chosen (or reconfirmed) by informal negotiation within the party elite or he/she is self-proclaimed.

3.3. Large victory

The literature on primary elections and OMOV systems has estimated competitiveness in several different ways: through dichotomous (Hacker 1975; Bernstein 1977) or metrical variables (Piereson and Smith 1975; Grau 1981), or by using only the results of the winner, of the two most voted candidates, or of all the competitors (Atkeson 1998; Kenig 2008). We opted for a simple ordinal scale: very competitive, somewhat competitive, barely competitive, not at all competitive. A similar criterion was applied for measuring the winning margin of a single candidate: we assume 80% approval as the threshold between a (somewhat or very) large victory for the newly elected or reappointed leader and a (somewhat or very) disappointing result which may indicate a certain level of internal opposition. Accordingly we assigned '0' to very competitive contested LRs (less than 10 percentage points between winner and second candidate) and coronations with approval rates lower than 70%; '0.33' to somewhat competitive LRs (winning margin between 10 and 20%) and coronations with approval rates between 70 and 80%; '0.67' to barely competitive LRs (winning margin between 20 and 30%) and coronations with approval rates between 80 and 90%; '1' to not at all competitive LRs (more than 30 percentage points between a single intended winner and the second candidate) and coronations wherein the party leader is almost unanimously appointed (with an approval rate greater than 90% or by acclamation) or is automatically appointed with no formal vote.

3.4. Government participation

As far as participation in government is concerned, we first distinguish between chairs whose party was mostly in government during the leadership tenure and chairs whose party was mostly in opposition during tenure. Moreover, we also distinguish between party leaders who personally serve as heads of government (Berlusconi, Renzi, etc.) and party leaders who lead their governing party from the outside (or perhaps hold some other executive positions but not the 'main' one). Keeping these two criteria together, we came up with a five-point scale: we assigned '1'when the party is in government during the leadership tenure and the party leader is also the head of government, while '0.8' indicates that the party is the major party in government during the leadership tenure but its leader is not the head of government. '0.6' is assigned when the party is more in government than in opposition during tenure or is in coalition as junior partner. '0.3' is assigned when the party is mostly in opposition during the leadership tenure or at most provides external support to the government. Finally; '0' is assigned when the party remains in opposition for the entire leadership tenure.

3.5. Party electoral support

As anticipated above, for the last condition – namely party electoral support – we adopted the 'direct method' of calibration, taking into account the vote percentage in the closest general election in the course of the leadership tenure. Accordingly, we looked at electoral results for the four political parties under scrutiny in the 30-year period considered, taking into account the proportional vote in the Chamber of Deputies. More precisely, considering the traditional fragmentation of the Italian party system over the last 30 years (Cotta and Verzichelli 2020), we established a 15% threshold as the 'point of maximum indifference' between big and small parties. 15% indeed represents the average value of electoral support in our dataset, considering all the four parties over the last thirty years. Consequently, we set a 25% threshold for identifying 'full membership' (in that all parties obtaining more than 25% of electoral votes are undoubtedly 'big parties'), and a 5% threshold for identifying 'full non-membership' (in that all parties which cannot reach at least 5% of electoral votes are undoubtedly 'small parties').

3.6. Leaders' departure

Finally, we need to explain the calibration of the outcome. Reappointment in office represents the most 'positive' outcome for a party leader, which we assume to be 'qualitatively' different from any kind of departure, voluntary or not. Accordingly, we assigned '1' to party leaders who were reappointed in office at the end of the tenure.

The literature suggests that reasons for departure can be divided into five categories, ranging from the one showing the lowest level of conflict between the outgoing leader and his/her party to the highest level of conflict (Cross and Blais 2012; Gruber *et al.* 2015). These are, respectively: force majeure, voluntary resignation, post-election resignation, resignation under pressure, formal removal. The first category refers to cases where the party leader dies or the party disappears. In this case we do not know what would have happened otherwise: maybe the party leader would have been re-selected in the subsequent LR, maybe not. Accordingly, we assign '0.6' to party leaders who leave

their office because of force majeure, which is assumed to be the conceptual threshold between a positive and a negative outcome.

Thereafter we have three distinct types of resignation. The first, coded with '0.4', is the truly voluntary resignation in which the leader autonomously decides to leave. This means that the leader could remain in office if he/she wanted to, but it may also hide some internal tensions. The second category encompasses what has been said previously concerning the relation between leadership survival and electoral failure. Here we consider resignations that occur within one month of an election with 'national value', namely general and European elections. The third type (resignation under pressure) includes cases where there was a broad, organized movement calling on the incumbent to resign from the leadership (Pilet and Cross 2014), regardless of a negative electoral outcome, although the two things are often interlinked. Yet we prefer to collapse these two categories into one (Gruber *et al.* 2015), assigning it '0.2'.

To conclude, the 'formal removal' category (coded with '0') originally referred to a specific instrument through which a party top organ votes against the leader to remove him/her from office, which is typical of Westminster systems. However, here we adopt this definition to refer to cases in which the outgoing leader is formally challenged and defeated by other contenders at the end of a (more or less defined) fixed term, for instance in a party congress. From this point of view, formal removal (or de-selection) is just the opposite of re-selection.

4. Leadership selection and change in four Italian parties

Our sample includes 33 LRs/coronations accounting for both the party leader's first appointment in office and all the reappointments at the end of the term, for a total of 18 different party leaders. About half of the considered party leaders were not re-elected to office. Among those who were successfully reappointed (eight), five completed three or more terms in office. This seems to confirm that once the hurdle of the first mandate is overcome, party leaders are more likely to be reappointed. As far as the reasons for departure are concerned, there are only a few cases of party leaders who came to an end because of force majeure (Fassino) or formal removal (Franceschini, Martina), while 'voluntary resignations' and 'post-election/under pressure resignations' represent the most populated categories.

That said, it is worth noting that ten out of 18 considered party leaders chaired the mainstream centre-left party in its various forms (PDS, DS, PD). In this regard, the changing organizational structure and the progressive democratisation of leadership selection procedures did not help to solve the atavistic weakness of centre-left leaders. In the early nineties the PDS used to select its chair by a formal vote of the party top organs, which was the typical system characterising its predecessor, the Italian Communist Party (PCI). In ten years, three different leaders ran the party from its foundation in 1991: Occhetto, D'Alema and Veltroni. Instead, the DS had only a single party chair (Fassino), elected by the entire party membership for three consecutive terms. In April 2007, during the last DS Congress, Fassino was reconfirmed as DS chairman for a few months with the specific mandate to dissolve his own party in view of the forthcoming foundation of PD.

In a context of growing personalisation and presidentialisation of Italian politics (Passarelli 2015), open primaries represented a foundational myth for PD and reflected the 'thin ideology' characterising the party's overall organizational model, which was intended to merge two parties coming from completely different traditions: Communist and Catholic. In 2007, 3.5 million voters crowned Veltroni as first chair of the newly born party. Thereafter, this new system of leadership selection (accompanied by a preliminary vote by the party membership intended to reduce the number of candidates) was introduced in the party Statute. Since then, PD has resorted to open primaries to select its party chair four more times. In the last one (2019), voters were fewer than half compared to 2007, which shows a growing disaffection towards the instrument, going hand in hand with the PD erosion of electoral support. Meanwhile, leadership volatility further increased: in March 2021, the party appointed its eighth leader since its foundation in 2007, following the unexpected and contentious resignation of Nicola Zingaretti, the umpteenth party chair forced to resign because of internal conflicts and/or disappointing electoral results. In fact, no PD leader has been able to conclude a four-years term in office and obtain reappointment, notwithstanding the large victories they all had, once elected, in their first term. This is true for the four leaders selected by open primaries (Veltroni, Bersani, Renzi, Zingaretti) but also for those elected by a much less inclusive selectorate (Franceschini and Martina),[2] who then failed to be reappointed as they were both largely defeated in the subsequent open primaries. Only Matteo Renzi was able to be re-appointed by winning open primaries in 2013 and 2017, but just after a period of interruption in which the party was temporary led by Guglielmo Epifani. Still, Renzi's second term finished just one year later, following a severe electoral defeat in the 2018 general election.

Still, leadership volatility is not a 'leftist' characteristic. In fact, the PRC had much more durable leaders compared to the PD. Over the years, the party has not changed its practice of leadership selection: since its foundation in 1991 the choice is formally entrusted to party top organs, a system borrowed from the PCI. From 1994 to 2008, the party alternated (troubled) times as a government coalition party with periods of external support and opposition, also facing some serious electoral defeats, but the leadership of Bertinotti remained largely unchallenged. After Bertinotti's voluntary resignation, the party found another quite long-standing leader (Ferrero) from 2008 to 2017 but progressively became an opposition force which was largely irrelevant on the national political scene, losing all its seats in Parliament and its 'coalition potential'. The trend did not seem to reverse with the recent change of leadership.

Moving to the other side of the political spectrum, leadership volatility is even lower. Bossi's leadership of the LN was undisputed from its foundation in 1989 till 2012. The party leader was formally elected as a single candidate by Congress delegates, but

[2] In the case of the early resignation of the previous leader, the appointment of the new party chair is not entrusted to open primaries but to the party National Assembly, a body made up of about 1,000 persons, most of them selected during the previous party Congress (in fact, this system may be compared to the vote of party delegates in terms of inclusiveness). Actually, the PD Statute also established that in the event that none of the candidates for Secretary obtained 50% in the open primaries, the same National Assembly had the right to choose the new party leader. However, this event has never occurred in practice and it was formally prevented after the Statute's amendment in 2019, as only the first two candidates (according to party members' votes) qualified for the successive open primaries.

differently from PD and PRC, he/she did not serve for a fixed term. In fact, the LN did not hold any National Congress to renew internal offices between 2002 and 2012. Still, in 2012, the historical LN leader was forced to resign because of a scandal of the alleged appropriation of party funds for the private affairs of his family, although no pressure to leave apparently came from within his own party. Since then, after the short leadership of Maroni, the party radically changed its system of leadership selection, opting for closed primaries. Under the new leadership of Matteo Salvini (since 2013), the League has progressively become the most voted Italian party, reaching its peak in the 2019 European elections with 34% votes. Still, the new party, renamed 'League for Salvini Premier', was still unable to see its leader as head of government, although it served as (junior) coalition partner (though keeping some opposition attitudes) from 2018 to 2019 and in the current Draghi government. Thus, we expect Salvini as bound to keep his party office in the years to come, unless he suffers a resounding defeat in the next general election. In fact, the evidence pointed out by Vicentini and Pritoni's (2021) comparative work seemed to suggest that leaders of big parties are more subject to the effect of electoral swings compared to leaders of small parties. This is because, in the case of small parties, there is predictably less internal competition to become party chair as the leader has fewer resources to distribute, for instance in terms of government offices. In any case, for both the League and the PRC, the 'radical' political culture may contribute to explain the preference for a strong and durable 'charismatic' leadership. On the one hand, rightist forces tend to be more leadership-dominated (Schumacher and Giger 2017); on the other hand, parties coming from a communist tradition tend to disregard challenges to the dominant coalition (Vicentini and Pritoni 2021).

Still, leadership change does not seem to be an issue in the case of a personal party such as FI/PDL/FI, based on Berlusconi's charismatic leadership (Calise 2015). In fact, the party founder is still formally the party chair after almost 30 years, notwithstanding his old age, judicial problems and recent huge electoral losses. It also implies the lack of formal leadership selection procedures at the national level, as Berlusconi's leadership is self-proclaimed. Even in the (sporadic) cases when FI or PDL held a national congress (four in almost three decades), the reappointment of Berlusconi was not submitted to a formal vote of the delegates, but simply to audience 'acclamation'. In fact, Italy has been defined as the country of 'extreme selectorates' (Kenig 2009: 437): on the one hand, we have maximum inclusiveness with regard to the mechanism of selection of PD/centre-left leaders and candidates; on the other, a case of 'self-enthroned' leadership.

5. Exploring the determinants of party leaders' re-selection with QCA

Now we return to fuzzy-set QCA[3] in order to move from the explorative and descriptive overview of party leadership change in Italy presented above to more explicative reflections concerning the combination of conditions that might contribute to clarifying whether and how a party leader is reconfirmed in office or forced to resign.

In QCA terms, the four hypotheses presented in section 2 above can be addressed in terms of necessity and/or sufficiency: a scarcely or largely inclusive LR is necessary

[3] We use the software fsQCA 3.0 (Ragin and Davey 2017).

and/or sufficient for the party leader to be re-selected (H1); a large victory when originally appointed is necessary and/or sufficient for the party leader to be re-selected (H2), incumbency is necessary and/or is sufficient for the party leader to be re-selected (H3); the combination of presence in government and large party electoral support is sufficient for the party leader to be re-selected (H4a); the combination of absence in government and limited party electoral support is sufficient for the party leader to be re-selected (H4b).

Table 1. Truth table

Incumb	BroadIn	LargeVic	Gov	BigPar	N	Outcome	Raw cons	PRI cons	SYM cons
1	1	1	1	1	4 (12%)	0	0.65	0.50	0.50
1	**0**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**3 (21%)**	**1**	**0.84**	**0.79**	**0.79**
1	**0**	**1**	**1**	**0**	**3 (30%)**	**1**	**0.83**	**0.80**	**0.80**
1	0	0	0	0	3 (39%)	0	0.73	0.64	0.74
0	1	1	0	1	3 (48%)	0	0.57	0.36	0.36
0	**0**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**3 (57%)**	**1**	**0.88**	**0.82**	**0.86**
1	**0**	**1**	**0**	**0**	**2 (63%)**	**1**	**0.90**	**0.89**	**0.89**
0	1	1	1	1	2 (69%)	0	0.49	0.13	0.15
0	**0**	**1**	**0**	**0**	**2 (75%)**	**1**	**0.86**	**0.81**	**0.81**
1	**1**	**1**	**1**	**0**	**1 (78%)**	**1**	**0.84**	**0.79**	**0.79**
1	**0**	**1**	**0**	**1**	**1 (81%)**	**1**	**0.93**	**0.92**	**0.92**
1	0	0	0	1	1 (84%)	0	0.60	0.45	0.45
0	**1**	**1**	**0**	**0**	**1 (87%)**	**1**	**0.98**	**0.97**	**0.97**
0	0	1	1	0	1 (90%)	0	0.62	0.41	0.41
0	0	1	0	1	1 (93%)	0	0.75	0.65	0.65
0	**0**	**1**	**0**	**1**	**1 (97%)**	**1**	**0.84**	**0.62**	**0.62**
0	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**1 (100%)**	**1**	**1.00**	**1.00**	**1.00**

Note: All other combinations of conditions are logical remainders.

- PRI: Proportional reduction in consistency
- SYM: Symmetrical consistency
- Theoretical assumptions (directional expectations) for intermediate solution:
    1. Outgoing leader running for re-election (incumbency) should contribute to the outcome when it is present;
    2. No theoretical assumptions (directional expectations) for broad inclusiveness;
    3. Large victory should contribute to the outcome when it is present;
    4. No theoretical assumptions (directional expectations) for presence in government;
    5. No theoretical assumptions (directional expectations) for big party.
- In **bold** all single truth table rows included in the 'Boolean minimisation process'.

The analysis of *necessary* conditions for leader reappointment shows that no condition (or its non-occurrence) was necessary for the outcome (or for its non-occurrence)[4]. This is not even the case for sufficient conditions taken alone. Yet, our analysis shows that five different combinations of conditions are *sufficient* for being reconfirmed as a party leader. More precisely, in QCA, an empirical test of sufficiency set-relations between combinations of conditions and the outcome is conducted with a "truth table".

[4] All the consistency thresholds were lower than 0.9, which is the value above which empirical evidence supports the claim that a condition is necessary for the outcome (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 278).

Specifically, the process proceeds as follows. *i)* We convert the data matrix into the abovementioned truth table. *ii)* Single truth table rows are assessed for their consistency scores regarding whether they count as sufficient conditions for the result. Finally, *iii)* if they count as sufficient conditions, they are included in the "Boolean minimization process"; otherwise, they are not. See, on this, Table 1 above.

When logical remainders (i.e., combinations of conditions which are characterized by no empirical cases in the dataset at hand) exist, such as in this case, the solution formulas – complex, parsimonious and intermediate – are not interchangeable. In QCA, solution formulas differ on the basis of assumptions on logical remainders. The complex solution does not include remainder rows when minimizing the consistent rows with cases. The parsimonious solution treats remainders as 'don't care', stimulating outcome values to obtain parsimony. Conversely, the intermediate solution evaluates the plausibility of remainders in accordance with the researcher's simplifying assumptions based on theoretical or substantive empirical knowledge. In these cases – even though the most advanced methodological literature does not reach consensus on this issue (Thiem 2016; Thiem et al. 2015) – it is generally suggested that one should consider the intermediate solution to reduce the risk of drawing incorrect inferences about the automatic counterfactuals used in the parsimonious and complex solution (Ragin 2008, 175; Jano 2016, 15).[5]

That said, please see Table 2 presenting solutions terms, consistency, coverage and cases covered of the intermediate solution, which is as follows:

~BigParty*~Government*LargeVictory +
BigParty*Government*~BroadInclusiveness +
LargeVictory*~BroadInclusiveness*Incumbency +
~BigParty*LargeVictory*Incumbency +
~BigParty*~Government*~BroadInclusiveness*~Incumbency

Table 2. Intermediate solution: solution terms. consistency. coverage and cases covered

Solution term	Raw coverage	Unique coverage	Consistency	Cases covered (membership > 0.5)
~BigParty* ~Government *LargeVictory	0.342718	0.037379	0.863081	Salvini1 (LN) (0.96,1) **Maroni** (LN) **(0.88, 0.4)**, Bossi1 (LN) (0.7,1), Bertinotti1 (PRC) (0.67,1), Ferrero2 (0.67,1)
BigParty* Government* ~BroadInclusiveness	0.262621	0.084466	0.818457	**Epifani (PD) (0.8,0.4)**, Veltroni1 (PDS) (0.8,1), Berlusconi1 (FI) (0.6,1), Berlusconi2 (FI) (0.6,1), Berlusconi3 (PDL) (0.6,1), **D'Alema (PDS) (0.6,0.4)**, **Martina (PD) (0.6,0)**

[5] For the sake of transparency, as Thiem (2016) suggests, we also present the parsimonious solution.

LargeVictory* ~BroadInclusiveness* Incumbency	0.359709	0.072816	0.881094	Berlusconi2 (FI) (1,1), Berlusconi3 (PDL) (1,1), Berlusconi4 (FI) (1,1), Bertinotti2 (PRC) (0.67,1), Bertinotti3 (PRC) (0.67,1), Ferrero2 (PRC) (0.67,1), **Martina (PD) (0.6,0)**, Bossi1 (LN) (0.6,1), **Bossi2 (LN) (0.6,0.2)**
~BigParty *LargeVictory *Incumbency	0.251456	0.035922	0.836834	**Bossi2 (LN) (0.97,0.2)**, Salvini2 (LN) (0.96,1), Bossi1 (LN) (0.88,1), Bertinotti2 (PRC) (0.67,1), Bertinotti3 (PRC) (0.67,1), Ferrero2 (PRC) (0.67,1)
~BigParty* ~Government* ~BroadInclusiveness*~ Incumbency	0.166990	0.045146	0.895833	Ferrero1 (PRC) (0.8,1), Bertinotti1 (PRC) (0.8,1), **Maroni (LN) (0.6,0.4)**

- Intermediate solution coverage (proportion of membership explained by all paths identified): 0.689806
- Intermediate solution consistency ('how closely a perfect subset relation is approximated') (Ragin 2008, 44): 0.840828.
- Raw coverage: proportion of memberships in the outcome explained by a single path
- Unique coverage: 'proportion of memberships in the outcome explained solely by each individual solution term' (Ragin 2008, 86).
- Empirically contradictory cases are shown **in bold**.
- Complex solution: Incumbency*~BroadInclusiveness*LargeVictory + ~Incumbency*~BroadInclusiveness*~Government*~BigParty + ~Incumbency*LargeVictory*~Government*~BigParty + ~Incumbency*~BroadInclusiveness*Government*BigParty + Incumbency*LargeVictory*~BigParty(coverage: 0.66; consistency: 0.85)
- Parsimonious solution: ~Incumbency*~LargeVictory + BroadInclusiveness*~BigParty + ~BroadInclusiveness*Government*BigParty + BroadInclusiveness*~LargeVictory + ~LargeVictory*Government + ~Incumbency*~Government*~BigParty + LargeVictory*~Government*~BigParty + Incumbency*BroadInclusiveness*~Government + Incumbency*LargeVictory*~Government + Incumbency*~BroadInclusiveness*LargeVictory + Incumbency*Government*~BigParty + Incumbency*~BroadInclusiveness*Government (coverage: 0.74; consistency: 0.86)

Theoretically, the (intermediate) solution above means that re-selection in office is associated with five different combinations of conditions: first, leaders of small opposition parties who win the party office with a large victory are more likely to be re-selected. This solution term confirms theoretical expectations, as previous studies have shown that government participation is not beneficial for challenger or niche parties (Vicentini and Pritoni 2021). We only have a single deviant case here, namely a party leader who was not re-selected to office while presenting the abovementioned conditions: Roberto Maroni. Yet this contradictory case is easily explained. Maroni succeeded Bossi as League chair after the latter's forced resignation in 2012, and voluntary left the office one and a half years later, a few months after being elected President of the Lombardy Region. Although there are no internal party rules establishing the formal incompatibility between the two offices, Maroni declared he was leaving the position in order to work full-time for the Region, where he governed in coalition with the other centre-right forces (which may have not appreciated a President widely considered to have a partisan point of view). Thereafter, the new party leader, Salvini, progressively started the

national and 'sovranist' repositioning of the (Northern) League, which would have been much harder if the party had remained in the hands of the Lombardy President.

Secondly, re-selection to office seems to be more likely for big parties in government whose leaders have been selected by a non-inclusive selectorate. This might confirm the concerns of those scholars who suggested that inclusive procedures of selection are detrimental for leadership survival. Still, the contrary is not confirmed either, as shown by the short leadership of the two contradictory cases of PD leaders Epifani and Martina, both selected by a scarcely inclusive selectorate (the party National Assembly). In fact, their leadership was largely transitional (in view of the subsequent 'real' leadership selection by open primaries) and simply reflected the lack of valid alternative candidates and the necessity for a very fragmented party to show a certain unity in a delicate moment. As for the other deviant case, namely D'Alema, his resignation as PDS leader in 1998 may be explained with an argument similar to that made above with regard to Maroni. D'Alema was nominated Prime Minister, and although there was no formal incompatibility with his role of party chair, he preferred to leave in order to focus on the country's government. In fact, the fragile balances to keep united the contentious centre-left coalition implied a complex mediation between the interest of the various parties, which was probably easier to pursue while not being a leader of one of the parties at stake. In this regard, party traditions and the political context are also to be taken into account, as some parties are more likely to keep separate party offices and (monocratic) institutional offices.

Thirdly, leadership re-selection is apparently favoured by the absence of inclusiveness counterbalanced by a large victory once re-elected as party leader (incumbency). This is also in line with theoretical expectations, as incumbent party leaders are much more likely to be reconfirmed in office by scarcely inclusive selectorates. It is no coincidence, because political parties tend to adopt more inclusive procedures of selection as a consequence of a leadership crisis or electoral defeats (Cross and Blais 2012), possibly when the course of a long-standing leader is over. Furthermore, an incumbent leader is also quite likely to have a large victory once re-selected, unless he/she has started to show some signs of 'deterioration' because of age or the too-long administration of power within the party. Yet this does not seem to be the case for Berlusconi, as his leadership of FI is a structural feature linked to the 'personal' nature of the party (Calise 2015). Rather, 'deterioration' may have played a certain role in Bossi's resignation, which indeed appears as a deviant case. The fact that he was largely defeated by the young and still little-known Salvini in the 2013 primaries when he tried to win back his party office demonstrates that the grassroots had had enough of his 23-year leadership. As for the other deviant case, Martina, what we said above holds true.

Fourth, an incumbent leader of a small party who wins a large victory once elected is also more likely to be re-selected at the end of his/her term. The interpretation here is similar to what we said about the previous solution term: incumbent leaders are more likely to have large victory once re-elected. Moreover, leaders of small parties are likely to be less subjected to political contingencies.

Finally, the logical minimisation of the truth table shows that non-incumbent party leaders of small opposition parties elected through a scarcely inclusive LR have more chances of being reappointed to office. Actually, this solution only explains two

empirical cases referring to the first appointment of then long-serving PRC leaders, while Maroni turns out to be a deviant case again, for the reasons already explained.

6. Concluding remarks

In this paper, we have employed QCA in order to explore which (combinations of) conditions could favour the reappointment to office of Italian party leaders. We identified five different combinations: large victory, once elected as party chair of a small opposition party; scarce inclusiveness of the LR to select the leader of a big governing party; large victory but scarce inclusiveness of the LR to select an incumbent leader; large victory once re-elected as (incumbent) chair of a small party; scarce inclusiveness of the LR intended to select a brand-new leader (non-incumbent) of a small opposition party.

Thus, the Italian case presents few differences with respect to the findings shown by Vicentini and Pritoni (2021) in their recent four-country study. More precisely, starting from the same five conditions, they identified four solution terms: incumbency; small party electoral support and absence from government; absence from government counterbalanced by a large victory once elected as party leader, and inclusive procedure of selection and limited party electoral support. Still, some evidence remains valid for both studies: leaders who have already served for one or more party mandates seem to be more likely to be reconfirmed in office. At the same time, being in opposition is not necessarily an obstructing condition for a leader's reappointment, especially in the case of small parties and broad success in the previous LR. This latter condition is generally (but not always) a mirror of party unity and convinced support for a candidate with particular 'leadership skills'. Instead, the assumed legitimisation that may be associated with an inclusive process of selection does not guarantee re-selection.

Actually, with respect to the comparative study, the Italian case seems to confirm that party leaders selected by very inclusive procedures (i.e. open primary elections) are more in danger of being dismissed. However, while it is undeniable that PD leaders are particularly unstable, it is arguable that it may be a consequence of open primaries. Rather the recourse to open primaries to select the party chair (and the chief executive candidate) may also be considered as an attempt to compensate with popular legitimisation for the chronic weakness of centre-left leaders. Furthermore, the Italian case has to be interpreted considering the very peculiar nature of the (centre) right parties under scrutiny. If Berlusconi's party was undoubtedly a 'personal party' for at least two decades (Calise 2015), Bossi's Northern League was also close to that model, and it has clearly affected the dynamics of leadership selection and (the lack of) leadership change over the years. The progressive decline of Berlusconi's leadership, the new ascent of Salvini's League, the current and apparently irreversible political irrelevance of PRC and the continuous re-positioning of PD (in terms of alliances and internal political balances) would suggest replicating the same study in the next few years in order to assess the magnitude of change.

In any case, the present empirical analysis demonstrates the importance of focusing on the combined effects of different conditions to assess leadership re-selection and de-selection not only in a comparative perspective but also when dealing with a national case study. Yet, it also suggests caution in making generalised inferences. Accordingly, on the one hand, we are convinced that this novel methodological approach may inspire

different paths for future research in the field of party leadership selection and leadership survival. On the other hand, our study is a reminder of the importance of qualitatively considering country and party specificities in order to really understand the drivers and dynamics of leadership change in the different contexts.

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