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Special Issue:
Who's the winner?
An analysis of the 2018
Italian general election

An introductory note

From former IPS Co-Editors:

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I t is with great pleasure that we welcome the new format of Italian Political Science (IPS) as an open-access, peer-reviewed, quarterly journal. It is, in some way, the journal's third life.

IPS was launched in 2007 by Maurizio Cotta with Giliberto Capano as a professional digital journal whose mission was to foster debate on problems relating to the development of Political Science in Italy and abroad. For the first time, the Italian political science community had access to an electronic tool, entirely written in English, to engage in the international debate.

In 2013, IPS was relaunched with a new editorial team, a new website, a new format and a section including book reviews. As a professional journal, IPS was faced with such challenges as the internationalization of teaching (first and foremost of PhD programmes), the evaluation of research, and the reform of academic programmes. While the SISP journal 'Rivista Italiana di Scienza Politica' was changing into 'Italian Political Science Review', IPS was conceived primarily as a forum to debate on traditional and emerging research issues or new teaching instruments. A number of interviews with the founding fathers of Political Science in Italy and with Italian political scientists in relevant international roles aimed at fostering the circulation of ideas, in combination with short but more structured articles. Special issues were devoted to specific new or neglected sub-fields of the discipline.

IPS has now turned into an open-access scientific journal with a broader scope. This is a new, exciting adventure. By fostering the understanding of political phenomena through the lenses of Political Science, IPS opens to a wider politically-minded public without losing scientific rigour. This new phase, aimed at further strengthening Italian Political Science in Italy and abroad, kicks off with a timely first issue focusing on the 2018 Italian general election. We believe that such a strong beginning will be upheld in forthcoming issues.

Good luck to the co-editors and to the new editorial team.

Introduction to the Special Issue: 'Who's the winner? An analysis of the 2018 Italian general election'

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An unprecedented election

Five years after the 'electoral earthquake' of 2013 (Chiaramonte and De Sio 2014), when the rise of the largest genuinely new political party that had ever appeared in Western Europe led to the collapse of the bipolar pattern of party competition that had characterized the so-called Second Republic (Bordignon and Ceccarini 2013; Maggini 2014; Chiaramonte and Emanuele 2014), Italian politics has been shaken by another turbulent election. Indeed, the election held on 4 March of 2018, while showing a substantial continuity in the tripolar competition pattern that emerged in 2013, has produced a radical shift in the balance of power among the three poles of the Italian party system, thus leading to at least five unprecedented results.

First, the centre-right coalition came first with 37% of the vote share but falling short of an overall majority by 50 seats. Here, Berlusconi's party is no longer the dominant actor of the coalition, as the new populist and nationalist Lega (The League) led by Matteo Salvini (Tarchi 2018) received more than 17% of the vote share, thus managing to overtake Forza Italia (Go Italy, FI) for the first time since 1994.

Second, the incumbent Partito Democratico (Democratic Party, PD) fell to 18.7%, its lowest result ever, and the centre-left coalition came only third with less than 23% of the votes. From a longitudinal perspective, the election was a disaster for the Italian left: if we consider the entire left bloc, including also the two leftist lists of Liberi e Uguali (Free and Equal, LeU) and Potere al Popolo (Power to the People), it received just 27.4% and less than 9 million votes, the lowest result since the foundation of the Republic. Just to make a comparison, in 2006, this bloc was twice as large with 19 million votes. More generally, today the Italian Left is the second weakest in Western Europe, just after France (Emanuele 2018a).

Third, under the new leadership of Luigi Di Maio, the Movimento Cinque Stelle (Five Star Movement, M5S) became the most voted party with 32.7% of the vote share, thus managing to achieve a sort of record. Indeed, all the previous cases of a successful electoral debut – such as Forza Italia in 1994, the Spanish Podemos in 2015, the Portuguese Democratic Renewal Party in 1985 or the Dutch Pim Fortuyn List in 2002 – suffered an electoral setback in the subsequent election (Emanuele and Marino

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2018). In this regard, not only did the Five Star Movement manage not to lose votes, but it also increased its vote share by almost seven percentage points compared to 2013.

Deeply intertwined with the previous points are the fourth and fifth unprecedented events that resulted from the 2018 election. In recent years, scholars working on electoral dynamics in the European context have started to consider the 'Great Recession' that hit Europe after 2008 as a sort of new 'critical juncture for the structuration of national party systems' (Kriesi 2017; Hooghe and Marks 2018). Specifically, the impact of the economic and sovereign debt crisis systematically led to the defeat of incumbent governments led by mainstream parties (Hérnandez and Kriesi 2016); the rise of new anti-establishment challengers (Bosco and Verney 2012; Emanuele and Chiaramonte 2016; Hobolt and Tilley 2016); increasing electoral instability with patterns of party system de-institutionalization (Chiaramonte and Emanuele 2017; 2018) and, especially in Southern Europe, high risks of government instability (Bosco and Verney 2016). Not only does the Italian election of 2018 fit perfectly into this path, but it is also the first time that anti-establishment forces (i.e., M5S and Lega), considered together, have won the overall majority of votes and seats. Moreover, and this brings us to the last point which is an absolute innovation in comparative perspective, after about three months of complex negotiations, the M5S and the Lega have eventually come to an agreement and have formed a new coalition government, thus putting the traditional mainstream parties (i.e., the PD and Forza Italia) out of power. Such an outcome will inevitably produce a deep change in the Italian political system, opening a transition whose final point of arrival is still difficult to predict.

Why this Special Issue

For all the above-mentioned reasons the Italian election of 2018 is a remarkable novelty not only for our national politics but also in comparative perspective. A usual and, in some way, unavoidable problem of the scientific community is that its production (books, journal articles) requires a great deal of time and the findings they deliver scarcely tap into the ongoing political debate. Consequently, the latter is dominated by journalists and non-academic commentators whose analyses generally convey superficial messages, without grasping the underlying dynamics of the political processes. Here is the rationale of this Special Issue. In a nutshell, it aims to provide the scholarly community with a suitable and timely tool to feed the scientific discussion about this election. It delivers cutting-edge analyses with original and, to a certain extent, unexpected findings, and will become an unmissable starting point for scholars aiming at developing further investigations on the same topics.

The Special Issue consists of six research articles, analysing the election and its outcomes from different perspectives and covering different topics: from the new electoral system to the electoral campaign and the use of media; from candidate selection and characteristics to the electoral results and the new parliamentary class. Notwithstanding the different approaches, all the articles share a predominantly empirical focus: they all present original data with the purpose of providing a fresh, descriptive (but theory-grounded) account of what happened on 4 March.

Content and findings of the Special Issue

To begin with, the article by Alessandro Chiaramonte and Roberto D'Alimonte focuses on the features of the new mixed-member electoral system introduced at the end of the past legislature, the so-called Rosatellum. This contribution is, to the best of my knowledge, the first scientific analysis of the new Italian electoral law and its effects after its first application. The article first highlights the political reasons behind the approval of the law – the fourth electoral reform in Italy in the last 25 years – then reviews the characteristics of the new system and the incentives and constraints it provides to voters and parties. Specifically, it focuses on the effects of the new rules on the election outcome, by testing whether the Rosatellum acted more as a proportional or a majoritarian system. In this regard, Chiaramonte and D'Alimonte find mixed results. Indeed, the building of pre-electoral coalitions witnesses the clear effect on parties' strategic coordination with the purpose of winning seats in single-member districts. However, this majoritarian logic had only a limited impact on voters' behaviour, as the impossibility of a split-ticket vote, the lack of information about candidates and their competitiveness and the large size of the districts led voters to vote for their preferred party instead of casting a strategic vote. Finally, the article assesses the level of disproportionality of the new electoral system. Overall, the distortion in the translation of votes into seats has been limited, making the Rosatellum closer to proportional systems than to majoritarian ones. Interestingly though, the authors find that this limited disproportionality is the result of the sharp geographical pattern of voting: the electoral system has produced relevant disproportionality both in the North (in favour of the centre-right) and in the South (in favour of the M5S). Therefore, the system has produced a remarkable majoritarian effect, but such disproportionality at the national level has been cancelled out by these contrasting geographical patterns.

The features of the new electoral system have influenced the coalition building process and all the choices related to the electoral supply, from the number of party lists to the use of multiple candidacies, up to the traits of candidates, with particular regard to their gender (given the gender-quota rules provided by the electoral law). In this respect, the article by Andrea Pedrazzani, Luca Pinto and Paolo Segatti investigates the characteristics of the Italian candidates running for a seat in the Chamber of Deputies in 2018 and compares them with those who have stood for office from 1976 onwards. The results show that the electoral system has played a role in balancing the population of the Italian would-be deputies in terms of gender and, thanks to the re-introduction of a plurality quota, has reduced the overall number of lists and candidates. Nevertheless, the number of those who run for office without any reasonable possibility of obtaining a parliamentary seat is still very high in comparative perspective. According to the authors, this finding is interesting as it testifies to the fact that there are still many who aspire to become part of the political elite in spite of the negative climate towards politics and politicians' privileges well rooted in Italian society and widely exploited by the media. Moreover, this finding suggests also that simplistic rationalistic accounts based on the analysis of institutionally-determined benefits and costs cannot fully account for the propensity of Italian citizens to enter the electoral arena. Furthermore, other features of the candidates display some novelties compared to the past, albeit not necessarily related to the electoral system change. First, due to a mix of factors, among which the decision

of the M5S to limit the renovation of their ruling class and rely on a cohort of experienced parliamentarians, the turnover rate of candidates was lower than in 2013, with 20% of candidates having participated in at least one election in the past. Second, the number of multiple candidacies was more limited than in the elections held under the Calderoli law and was used as a 'parachute' to secure the election of some prominent (but not so popular) politicians.

Beyond the role played by the electoral system and the characteristics of the candidates, the electoral campaign was decisive in boosting the political messages of parties and leaders. It was a short campaign, characterized by the scarcity of resources available for parties, due to the abolition of the electoral refunds approved in 2013. For such reasons, as Cristopher Cepernich and Roberta Bracciale argue in their article, social media have acquired greater importance compared to the past. Thus, they refer to it as a 'hybrid campaign', characterised by the intersection between traditional media (TV, radio, press) and new digital media (Internet). Their article analyses and measures the communication strategy of the main Italian leaders and political parties on Twitter (conceivable as the platform of intra-élite relationships) and Facebook (the platform of extra-élite relationships) through the use of a large amount of data and indicators concerning the social media activity of parties and leaders. The shift from a more traditional media system to a hybrid one seems to have favoured some parties more than others. In particular, the League and its leader Matteo Salvini seem to have benefitted from their massive use of social media: according to the data shown by Cepernich and Bracciale, the Lega has been the most productive and skilled political actor, namely the best in the broadcasting of its (top-down) messages and the most competent in using different features of the social media platform.

This general result is indirectly confirmed by the analysis performed by Giuliano Bobba and Franca Roncarolo, who focus on the comparison between populist and non-populist communication on Facebook. By relying on the bulk of literature on populism and starting from the theory-grounded expectation that populist actors have been favoured through proliferation on social media, the authors test whether populist messages and, more generally, populist leaders, tend to have more success than non-populist ones on Facebook. They find not only that posts containing populist claims get more likes than non-populist ones, but that this is particularly true for those messages including references to immigrants, namely what Bobba and Roncarolo define as 'complete and excluding populism'. Moreover, this polarization between parties and leaders employing populist messages (Lega, but also the M5S and Fratelli d'Italia) and actors employing non-populist messages (PD, LeU and, to a lesser extent, Forza Italia) has affected the entire political-media system. Populist parties and leaders have used their messages for mobilizing the electorate and allowing simplification of the political debate to We (the people) vs. Them (the outgoing, corrupt, PD-led political class). Non-populist parties were not ready to implement the effective countermeasures.

This innovative and polarizing campaign, of course, is likely to have affected the outcome of the election and the success of the two populist anti-establishment parties (i.e., the M5S and the Lega). In this regard, the article by Aldo Paparo, besides the indispensable analysis and interpretation of the electoral results – including the study of the geographical patterns of competition in single-member districts – provides an investigation into the

underlying dynamics of the vote. In particular, Paparo focuses on survey data to detect the socio-demographic characteristics of the four major parties' electorate. The M5S is confirmed as the most socially cross-cutting party, having become very strong even among public-sector employees, a former stronghold of the PD, which is instead significantly over-represented only among the elderly and retired people. Consistent with expectations, the League is particularly strong among the self-employed and blue-collars while, quite surprisingly, Forza Italia is the second most-voted party among the unemployed, after the M5S. Through the use of original ecological analyses of the transition matrices in 11 Italian cities, Paparo then looks at the electoral shifts between 2013 and 2018. In a context of relevant voters' electoral mobility (confirmed in the aggregate by the very high level of electoral volatility, see Emanuele 2018b), two main phenomena emerge. Between 2013 and 2018 there were substantial movements of voters from the centre-left to the M5S, who, in turn, lost relevant portions of its voters to the League.

Finally, besides the electoral results and voting patterns, another important outcome of the election took place at parliamentary level, with the election of a renewed parliamentary class. In this respect, Eugenio Salvati and Michelangelo Vercesi analyse the legislative turnover – conceived as the percentage of new MPs out of total membership, compared to the previous legislature – in the Italian Parliament and its determinants. They adopt a longitudinal perspective, by focusing on the general elections held since 1994 and disentangle their analysis across the main Italian parties. Empirical evidence shows that legislative turnover has been very high in 2018, with roughly two-thirds of new MPs compared to the previous legislature. Moreover, the turnover has involved all parties, irrespective of their electoral performance. As far as the determinants of legislative turnover are concerned, they find that the prominent legislative turnover recorded in 2018 – comparable to that in other two turbulent elections, namely in 1994 and 2013 – is not fully accounted for by those factors that are traditionally highlighted by the literature on the topic (i.e., systemic factors), such as high electoral volatility, the emergence of new parties, or the presence of new electoral rules. Conversely, the main explanatory factors of the 2018 election have to be sought at intra-party level. Salvati and Vercesi find that how parties work and organize, selection criteria, and leadership styles seem to influence the degree of renewal in the party's parliamentary class. Between 2013 and 2018 all the main parties excepting Forza Italia changed their party leader and allowed for a strengthening of leaders' control over nominations: therefore, the high turnover could be explained by the leaders' will to form reliable parliamentary groups in the Chamber of Deputies.

What are the prospects for the Italian political system?

To sum up, the articles of this Special Issue highlight many interesting results regarding the evolution of the Italian political system after the general election of 2018. These pieces of research will stimulate further investigation along a number of different lines, from political communication to voting behaviour up to the study of the institutional framework. However, we are aware that the main findings included in the articles of this Special Issue are unable to provide the final word on the ultimate direction the Italian political system will take in the near future. This is because, given the persistent state of electoral fluidity and 'party system de-institutionalization' (Chiaramonte and

Emanuele 2017; 2018), Italian politics and, more specifically, parties, leaders and the interactions between them, can change or evolve in unexpected directions in a relatively short period. At the time of writing, it appears that this process of change may lead in one of two alternative directions: either a consolidation of the tripolar party system that has emerged since 2013 or the start of a new bipolar phase in Italian politics.

Even though the final result of this process of change is still very unclear, it is likely that it will be affected by two different, albeit interrelated factors. The first change is a possible new electoral reform, which may soon be placed on the political agenda. While a more proportional new electoral system might favour the consolidation of the existing tripolar configuration, a shift towards a majoritarian system may lead to a new bipolar setting.

The second driver of change is linked to the consequences of the new government formed by the M5S and the Lega. Such a coalition agreement has brought to power the two main anti-establishment parties and has put the two mainstream parties, the PD and Forza Italia, together in opposition for the first time since 1994. If this new schema lasts beyond the time of this government, expanding to the local level or becoming a structural pattern of competition also in subsequent elections, it is clear that it will reshape the Italian party system in a completely new direction, creating a novel bipolar phase based on the 'globalization cleavage' (Kriesi et al. 2012; Hooghe and Marks 2018).

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The new Italian electoral system and its effects on strategic coordination and disproportionality

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Abstract

On 26 October 2017, the Italian Parliament approved a new electoral system nicknamed *Rosatellum* after Ettore Rosato, head of the Partito Democratico's (PD, Democratic Party) parliamentary group in the Chamber, who was the first proponent of the law. The new electoral system is the fourth since 1993. It is a mixed system, like the others, and it applies to both the Chamber and the Senate. Roughly two thirds of the seats are assigned with a proportional formula in multi-member districts. The remaining seats are assigned in single-member districts with plurality rule. The impact of the new electoral system in terms of party representation has been more proportional than majoritarian. No party or coalition won an absolute majority of seats. However, if we look at its overall performance the picture is mixed. After all, the SMDs are a potent tool and they have made the difference in terms of voting behaviour and pattern of competition. Two pre-electoral coalitions have been formed, the centre-left and the centre-right, which presented themselves, along with M5S, as potential government alternatives. The agreements made among their members acted as a constraint on possible post-electoral alliances making difficult to form a government. This is one of the main reasons of the long stalemate.

Introduction: Why this electoral system?

On 26 October 2017 the Italian Parliament approved a new electoral system nicknamed *Rosatellum* after Ettore Rosato, head of the Partito Democratico's (PD, Democratic Party) parliamentary group in the Chamber, who was the first proponent of the law. The law passed with 76% votes in favour in the Chamber and 77% in the Senate[1]. It was supported by all the main parties with the exception of the Movimento 5 stelle (M5S, Five Star Movement).

The new electoral system is the fourth since 1993. The first was introduced with the Mattarella law and was a mixed system based on a combination of 75% plurality rule in single-member districts (SMDs) and 25% proportional (PR) seats (D'Alimonte and Chiaramonte 1995; Giannetti and Grofman, 2009; Katz 2001). It applied to both branches

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[1] These percentages are based on votes cast. In the Chamber the votes were 307 in favour, 90 against, 9 abstentions. In the Senate there were 214 in favour, 61 against, 2 abstentions. PD, Forza Italia (FI, Go Italy), Lega Nord (LN, Northern League), Alleanza popolare (AP, People's Alliance), Alleanza Liberalpopolare-Autonomie (ALA, Liberal-Popular Alliance-Autonomies) voted in favour. M5S, Movimento democratico progressista (MDP), Democratic Progressive Movement), Sinistra italiana (SI, Italian left) voted against.

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of Parliament. The second was introduced in 2005 with the Calderoli law (D'Alimonte 2007; Di Virgilio 2007; Pasquino 2007; Renwick, Hanretty and Hine 2009). It was also a mixed system, but the mix was different. All the seats were assigned with a PR formula, but the party or the coalition with a plurality of votes at the national level (Chamber) or at the regional level (Senate) would get a majority prize. In the Chamber the prize was majority-assuring. With this system the prize replaced the SMDs as the majority component of the mix.

The third system, nicknamed *Italicum*, was introduced in 2015 during the Renzi government and in connection with constitutional reform. It was another mixed electoral system. As in the Calderoli system, all the seats were assigned with a PR formula, but the party (not the coalitions) with at least 40% of the votes would get a majority prize, allowing it to obtain 54% of the seats. If, however, no party won 40% of the votes, the two parties with the most votes would face a run-off, the winner obtaining 54% of the seats. The losers would split the remaining 46% proportionally, based on first round results. The Italicum applied only to the Chamber. The fourth, discussed here, is also a mixed electoral system, but it is not the end of the story[2].

In addition to these 'parliamentary' electoral reforms there have been two other reforms dictated by the Constitutional Court. The first was introduced in January 2014 with ruling no. 1/2014 and it modified the Calderoli law. The main changes were the abolition of the majority prize and the introduction of the preference vote. The original Calderoli law provided for the majority prize to be assigned with no minimum percentage of votes received by the winner. In the 2013 elections the centre-left coalition won the prize with only 29% of the votes. This outcome reinforced the opposition to this electoral system on constitutional grounds, as the potential disproportionality was deemed excessive. Following this logic, the Court abolished the prize. In doing so, it basically transformed the existing mixed electoral system into a proportional one. With the same ruling it deemed unconstitutional another provision of the system, that is, the closed list of candidates, which according to the Court, included too many candidates.

The third 'parliamentary' electoral reform mentioned above, the Italicum, was a response to this decision by the Court. It was, however, approved only for the election of the Chamber of Deputies, the reason being the connection with the Renzi-Boschi constitutional reform which was to have changed the composition and functions of the Senate. The decision to introduce a new electoral system for the Chamber left in place the electoral system of the Senate introduced by the Constitutional Court with ruling no. 1/2014. This created a peculiar situation whereby the two branches of Parliament would be elected by two radically different voting systems: the system for the Chamber was two-round and majority-assuring, whereas the system of the Senate was single-round and proportional.

The second electoral reform dictated by the Constitutional Court was introduced in January 2017 with ruling no. 35/2017. This second decision was made after the rejection of the constitutional reform in the referendum held on 4 December 2016[3]. In this case the Court deemed unconstitutional the run-off provided for by the Italicum. What was

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[2] For a comprehensive analysis of (at least some of) the main Italian electoral reforms since 1993 and their effects on the party system see Baldini (2011) and Chiaramonte (2015).
[3] On the 2016 constitutional referendum and the reasons leading to the rejection of the Renzi-Boschi constitutional reform see Bordignon and Ceccarini (2017) and Pasquino and Valbruzzi (2017).

left after the ruling of the Court was still a mixed system but no longer majority-assuring. If a party obtained 40% of the votes it would be given a prize, allowing it to have 54% of the seats in the Chamber, but if nobody reached the 40% threshold all the seats would be assigned proportionally. This system would apply only to the Chamber. The Senate would still be elected with the proportional system introduced by the Court with its 2014 ruling.

This is the background to the fourth and last (for the time being) 'parliamentary' electoral reform. After the second intervention of the Court, the status quo was based on two electoral systems, both designed by the judges. The system for the Chamber included a majority prize and a 3% threshold for winning seats. The system for the Senate was a proportional system without a majority prize and an 8% threshold. Added to this heterogeneity we must mention the fact that the two chambers are elected by two different electoral bodies, as voters in the 18-24 age group vote for the Chamber but not for the Senate. Given the fact that Italy's bicameral system assigns exactly the same powers to both branches of Parliament, this could be a serious problem. In light of these anomalies one can understand the concern of many observers, and particularly the President of the Republic, that voting with these different systems might produce confusion, and possibly different outcomes. These concerns led to several attempts to change the status quo. The one that came close to being successful before the final decision was reached on the present system was based on the German model. The proposal was approved in the Committee for Constitutional affairs in the Chamber with the support of all the major parties, including the M5S, but it was defeated once it reached the floor. The subsequent attempt was the Rosato law.

1. The new rules of the electoral game

With the new electoral system, the differences between the Chamber and the Senate have disappeared. The two systems have finally been harmonized as their main features are basically the same. Both systems are mixed with roughly one third of the seats allocated in SMDs with plurality rule and two thirds by a proportional formula.

District structure. The allocation of seats, both in the Chamber and in the Senate, occurs according to a three-tier system. The first tier is made up of SMDs, of which there are 232 in the Chamber and 116 in the Senate. The second tier involves the election of the remaining candidates in multi-member districts (MMDs). Excluding those who are elected in a separate constituency by Italian residents abroad (12 in the Chamber and 6 in the Senate), 386 deputies and 193 senators are elected by PR in MMDs. There are 63 of these districts in the case of the Chamber and 33 for the Senate. The number of seats per district ranges between 3 and 8 in the Chamber and 2 and 8 in the Senate. The last tier is represented by the 28 constituencies of the Chamber and the 20 regions of the Senate.

List and candidates. SMDs candidates, party lists and coalitions are the actors who participate in an interdependent game. SMDs candidates cannot run alone. They have to be affiliated to a single party list, as happened in the 2018 elections for all the M5S candidates, or to a coalition formed by different parties, as in the case of the centre-right and centre-left. Each coalition can be associated with just one SMD candidate and vice versa, but each member of the coalition has its own list of PR candidates. These PR lists are connected to the MMDs discussed above. They are closed lists, i.e., no preference votes are permitted. For both branches of Parliament, the number of candidates in the list cannot

be less than half of the number of seats assigned in the MMD and cannot be more than the total. However, regardless of the number of seats in any MMD, the number of candidates in each party list cannot be less than two or more than four.

Table 1. Constituencies, SMDs, MMDs, PR seats and total seats (Chamber of Deputies and Senate)

Chamber of Deputies					Senate				
Constituency	SMDs	MMDs	PR seats	Total seats	Constituency	SMDs	MMDs	PR seats	Total seats
Piedmont 1	9	2	14	23	Piedmont	8	2	14	22
Piedmont 2	8	2	14	22					
Lombardy 1	15	4	25	40	Lombardy	18	5	31	49
Lombardy 2	8	2	14	22					
Lombardy 3	8	2	15	23					
Lombardy 4	6	2	11	17					
Veneto 1	8	2	12	20	Veneto	9	2	15	24
Veneto 2	11	3	19	30					
Trentino-Alto Adige	6	1	5	11	Trentino-Alto Adige	6	1	1	7
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	5	1	8	13	Friuli-Venezia Giulia	2	1	5	7
Liguria	6	2	10	16	Liguria	3	1	5	8
Emilia Romagna	17	4	28	45	Emilia Romagna	8	2	14	22
Tuscany	14	4	24	38	Tuscany	7	2	11	18
Umbria	3	1	6	9	Umbria	2	1	5	7
Marche	6	2	10	16	Marche	3	1	5	8
Lazio 1	14	3	24	38	Lazio	10	3	18	28
Lazio 2	7	2	13	20					
Abruzzo	5	2	9	14	Abruzzo	2	1	5	7
Molise	2	1	1	3	Molise	1	1	1	2
Campania 1	12	3	20	32	Campania	11	3	18	29
Campania 2	10	3	18	28					
Apulia	16	4	26	42	Apulia	8	2	12	20
Basilicata	2	1	4	6	Basilicata	1	1	6	7
Calabria	8	2	12	20	Calabria	4	1	6	10
Sicily 1	9	3	16	25	Sicily	9	2	16	25
Sicily 2	10	3	17	27					
Sardinia	6	2	11	17	Sardinia	3	1	5	8
Aosta Valley	1			1	Aosta Valley	1			1
Abroad - Europe			5	5	Abroad - Europe			2	2
Abroad - North America			4	4	Abroad - North America			2	2
Abroad - South America			2	2	Abroad - South America			1	1
Abroad - Rest of World			1	1	Abroad - Rest of World			1	1
Total	232	63	398	630		116	33	199	315

No candidate can run in more than one SMD, but an SMD candidate, as well as any PR list candidate, can run in up to five MMDs. These multi-candidacies are the preserve of the most influential party members. They serve a double purpose. On the one hand they give visibility to the list and might attract votes on the basis of the popularity of the candidates. On the other hand, they offer some privileged candidates more chances to be elected. As happened in the last elections, a number of these candidates lost in their SMD, but were 'saved' by the PR list in which they were included. The candidate winning the seat in more than one MMD is elected in the MMD where her list received the lowest share of votes of the total votes cast.

Each list has to field candidates in at least two thirds of the MMDs in any given constituency and must file candidates in all the SMDs in any given MMD.

A complex set of gender provisions are included[4]. In the PR lists in MMDs, candidates of different genders have to be placed in alternate order. In the Chamber single lists or coalitions cannot field more than 60% of candidates of the same sex in the SMDs. The percentage applies at the national level. As to the MMDs, the first place on the list cannot be assigned to candidates of the same sex in more than 60% of the districts[5]. Also, in this case the limit applies at the national level. All of these provisions apply at the regional level for the Senate.

Voting structure. A great deal of attention has been given to ballot structure and to voting procedures. The ballot is designed in such a way as to provide voters with readily available information. Each SMD candidate is listed with his/her name next to the party or coalitions of parties that support him/her. On the ballot, voters can read not only the name of the SMD candidate but also the names of all the PR candidates of each party running in the MMD which includes the given SMD. Voting choices are limited. One of the most controversial elements of this electoral system was the choice between fused vote and split vote. The former eventually prevailed. Voters cannot vote for an SMD candidate and for a party list not affiliated to her. They have the following options: 1. They can vote just for the SMD. All of these votes are transferred *pro quota* to the parties affiliated to SMD candidates on the basis of the PR votes they get in the relative MMD. 2. They can vote for a party list. In this case their vote is automatically assigned also to the SMD candidate affiliated to the same list. 3. They can vote for an SMD candidate and for one of the lists affiliated to her. As mentioned above, voters cannot modify the order in which PR candidates are placed in the MMD lists. It is a 'take it or leave it' choice. Whether they like it or not, with one vote they get the entire package.

Formulas and thresholds. Plurality is the rule for winning SMDs. In a tripolar context, as it exists in Italy today, this means that most seats can be won with less than 50% of the votes. In the March elections this was the case in 188 SMDs out of a total of 232 (81%) in the Chamber. The largest remainder Hare quota is the method for the allocation of the PR seats. The procedure is top down. For the Chamber the distribution of the seats among parties is done first at the national level. The second step involves the 28 constituencies.

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[4] In the 2018 election these gender provisions proved to be effective, in that a record number of women were elected (34%).
[5] This provision may be (partially) circumvented by strategically placing the same female candidate as list head in multiple constituencies in order to promote the election of different male candidates following in the list.

The last step takes place at the level of the MMDs. For the Senate the procedure is the same, but the first step is at the regional level.

Thresholds of representation play an important role. They apply to both single parties and coalitions. In the case of single parties, the threshold is 3% of the valid votes calculated at the national level. This threshold does not apply to parties representing ethnic minorities. For these parties a threshold is set at 20% in their region. In addition, only for the Senate, any party can gain PR seats if it gets 20% of the votes at the regional level. In the case of coalitions, the picture is more complex. Coalitions as such participate in the allocation of PR seats only if they get at least 10% of the votes at the national level *and* if they include a party with not less than 3%. If these conditions are met, then the coalition can count on the votes received by all of its members which obtain at least 1% at the national level. However, only the parties in the coalition which have at least 3% of the votes can obtain a proportional share of the PR seats assigned to the coalition. This set of thresholds creates a situation by which the votes of party members of the coalition getting between 1% and 3% contribute to the total votes of the coalition for the benefit of the parties that have more than 3%[6].

2. How disproportional the new electoral system has been

The introduction of this new electoral system raised the question of whether it could have produced a winner in terms of an absolute majority of seats in favour of one of the main competitors. The widespread and largely misleading expectation in the public discourse was that this outcome could have materialized if either the centre-right coalition, the centre-left coalition or the M5S had gained at least 40% of the votes. Actually, to be precise, this would have happened only if any one of these three competitors had put together 40% of the PR seats and 70% of the plurality seats. As it happened, none of them came close to the target. In terms of PR seats, the centre-right was not too far off, with 39.1% in the Chamber and 39.9% in the Senate. But it fell way short in terms of SMD seats, as it won only 47.8% in the Chamber and 50% in the Senate. The conclusion is that the electoral system did not generate the kind of disproportionality that would have been required for a majority winner.

As we can see from Figure 1, at the systemic level the degree of disproportionality in the 2018 election – as measured through the Gallagher (1991; 1992) index – is, with one exception, significantly lower than that of the elections of the Second Republic and very similar to that of the elections of the First Republic.

More specifically, comparing the level of disproportionality of this election with that of the elections held under the pure PR electoral system in place during the First Republic, we do not see a significant difference, in spite of the fact that with the electoral system used today one third of the seats are attributed to SMDs under the plurality rule.

Moving from the systemic level to the level of individual actors, the picture is slightly different. Table 2 shows the share of votes and that of plurality and total seats for each of the main competitors (both for the Chamber and the Senate). If we look at the

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[6] In other words, if any party gets less than 1% of the votes, its votes cannot be used by the other members of the coalition who have more than 3%. These votes are effectively wasted, just like those of single parties who get less than 3%, as regards the allocation of PR seats. Not so for the allocation of SMDs seats because they are automatically transferred to the candidates in the SMDs.

plurality side, the level of over- and under-representation is indeed significant. In the case of the centre-right we are talking about 11 percentage points (pp.) in the Chamber, and even more in the Senate. In the case of the M5S it is about 7 pp. in the Chamber and 6 in the Senate. As to the centre-left, under-representation is 11pp. in both branches. However, taking into account the PR seats, the general picture shows a level of overall disproportionality which is relatively modest.

Figure 1. Level of disproportionality (Lsq, Gallagher index) in the Italian elections of the Chamber of Deputies between 1948 and 2018
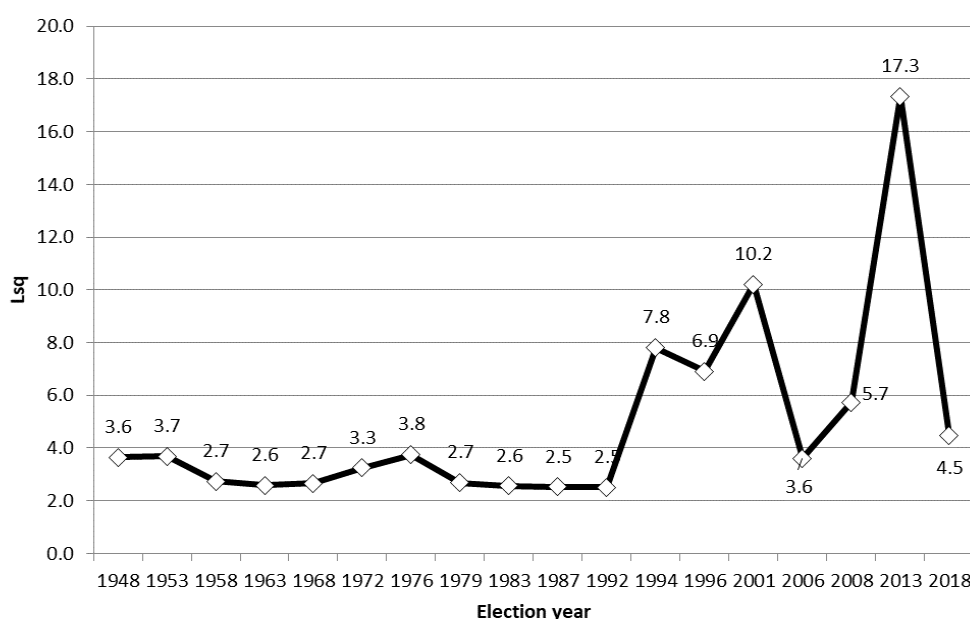
After all, this result should not be considered as surprising as it was perceived by the general public. There are three reasons that explain it. The first has to do with the nature of the electoral system, given the asymmetry between the share of PR seats and that of plurality seats. The second reason is that the share of wasted votes was quite low. As mentioned above, these are the votes cast for party lists running alone and receiving less than 3% nationwide and also for parties which are members of coalitions but get less than 1% of the votes. The sum of these votes turned out to be about 5% both in the Chamber and in the Senate. Such a low percentage has made a small difference in terms of over/under-representation for the parties above the threshold. The third reason is a sort of paradox.

This election has shown a clearly distinct territorial pattern of disproportionality. In the north of the country 87% of the SMD seats in the Chamber were won by the centre-right. In the south 83% of them were won instead by the M5S. In other words, the large disproportionality in favour of the centre-right in the north was almost entirely cancelled out by the large disproportionality in favour of the M5S in the south (see Table 3), and vice versa. The loser in this game was the third main actor, i.e. the centre-left coalition, which used to be dominant in the four regions of the so-called 'red belt' of the country. This is no longer true, as this coalition won only 40% of the SMD seats here. A mediocre performance in this area, combined with its abysmal performance in the north and in the south, left this coalition with a significant under-representation at the national level.

Table 2. Over- and under-representation of the main political actors (Chamber of Deputies and Senate)

Coalitions/parties	% votes	% plurality seats	% total seats	dis-representation	
	(a)	(b)	(c)	(b) - (a)	(c) - (a)
Chamber					
Centre-right	37.0	47.8	42.1	+10.8	+5.1
M5S	32.7	40.1	36.0	+7.4	+3.3
Centre-left	22.9	12.1	19.4	-10.8	-3.5
Senate					
Centre-right	37.5	50.0	43.5	+12.5	+6.0
M5S	32.2	37.9	35.6	+5.7	+3.4
Centre-left	23.0	12.1	19.0	-10.9	-4.0

Table 3. Over- and under-representation of the main political actors in each of the three geo-political areas of Italy (Chamber of Deputies)

Coalitions/parties	% votes	% plurality seats	% total seats	dis-representation	
	(a)	(b)	(c)	(b) - (a)	(c) - (a)
North					
Centre-right	44.2	86.8	62.6	+42.6	+18.4
M5S	23.7	4.4	16.8	-19.3	-6.9
Centre-left	24.8	8.8	18.9	-16.0	-5.9
'Red Belt'					
Centre-right	33.0	47.5	39.8	+14.5	+6.8
M5S	27.7	12.5	23.1	-15.2	-4.6
Centre-left	30.6	40.0	35.2	+9.4	+4.6
South					
Centre-right	31.8	12.9	25.7	-18.9	-6.1
M5S	43.4	83.2	59.2	+39.8	+15.8
Centre-left	17.6	4.0	12.1	-13.6	-5.5

3. A proportional system after all? Not really

The preceding analysis has shown that the impact of the new electoral system in terms of party representation tends to be more proportional than majoritarian. However, if we look at its overall performance the picture is mixed. After all, the SMDs are a potent tool and they have made a difference in terms of voting behaviour and pattern of competition. Voters and parties have been affected by them, the latter more than the former, as parties have adapted better to the incentives of the new system.

This has to do with strategic coordination (Cox 1997). The clear evidence of strategic coordination by parties has been the building of pre-electoral coalitions. Italy already experienced this type of coordination between 1994 and 2001 when the Mattarella law was in place. The techniques for implementing this strategy were developed in that period. They included the selection of common coalition candidates, the ranking of SMDs in terms of electoral risk, and the proportional distribution of the common candidates among coalition members. These techniques were used with an electoral system that allocated three quarters of the seats by plurality rule in SMDs. They have been used again today with a system where the plurality rule applies to only one third of the seats. In other words, the smaller number of SMDs have still turned out to be a sufficient institutional incentive for parties to coordinate strategically.

From the point of view of voters' behaviour, the impact of the SMDs has been more limited. On the one hand, a number of factors made it difficult for voters to vote strategically. The first was the lack of information on the candidates and on their relative competitiveness. The large size of the districts, particularly those for the Senate, did not help[7]. The second, and most relevant, factor is the fused vote[8]. As we already explained, voters cannot vote for an SMD candidate and for an unaffiliated party list. This feature constrains voters' behaviour. From a purely majoritarian perspective, a strategic calculation would lead voters not to vote for their preferred SMD candidate who happens not to be competitive, but for the better liked candidate among those perceived as having a chance to win. This 'majoritarian' logic does not apply to our case, precisely because voting for an SMD candidate and voting for a party list are not separate. In other words, in order to vote for their most preferred party list, voters might have to forego casting a strategic vote in their SMD, the more so since the share of PR seats is twice that of SMD seats.

SMDs have had another kind of impact on the performance of the electoral system. It has to do with the nature of the pre-electoral coalitions and with their impact on the process of government formation. The point is that these coalitions have shaped the pattern of competition in a majoritarian fashion. That is to say that voters have cast their vote not only for a party, as they would do in a purely proportional arena, but also for a coalition since they perceived the two coalitions and the M5S as viable alternatives for government. Party leaders themselves have fostered this perception, by emphasizing in their campaign the possibility that the coalitions or the M5S could have gained an absolute majority of the seats, being able, therefore, to form a cabinet. This expectation per se might have affected voters' behaviour, giving them a reason to defect from parties

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[7] The average population of each SMD was about 250,000 in the Chamber and 500,000 in the Senate.
[8] By definition, a fused vote generates an effect of 'contamination' between the majoritarian and proportional logics. On the contamination effects in mixed electoral systems see Chiaramonte (2005) and Ferrara, Herron and Nishikawa (2005).

with no chance of winning at the national level. At this stage this is just a hypothesis. We will need data to check it, but it is a plausible hypothesis.

Last but not least, the existence of pre-electoral coalitions had a further effect which goes beyond the actual vote. The fact that parties presented them as potential government alternatives and that voters perceived them as such has consequences on the process of government formation. In a purely proportional context, after the vote parties are free to pursue whatever coalitional strategy suits their pursuit of office and policy. Post-electoral coalitions are rarely conditioned by pre-electoral agreements. In the Italian system it is not so. The agreements made for electoral purposes act, to a certain extent, as a constraint on possible post-electoral alliances aimed at forming a government. Voters expect parties to abide by their promise to stay together after the vote. In the realm of democratic regimes accountability is not always taken into consideration by party leaders and in Italy even less so. Nevertheless, it is potentially risky not to respond to voters' expectations. The cost associated with this risk does enter into strategic calculations by parties. This is precisely one of the reasons for the stalemate which characterized Italian politics immediately after the March election.

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Italian candidates
under the Rosato law

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Abstract

Candidates for public office are part of the politically 'active minority' that serve as a fundamental link between voters and the ruling class. The selection of candidates can also define the traits of political personnel in the major political institutions and, more in general, the very nature of democratic representation. The study of candidates is particularly interesting in the case of the 2018 Italian elections as it allows us to understand the extent to which Italian citizens are willing to run for office despite a negative climate towards politics, and despite parties' choices under the new mixed electoral system – the so-called 'Rosato law'. This article investigates a number of key characteristics of the Italian candidates running for a seat in the Chamber of Deputies in 2018 and compares them with those who stood for office in the past elections from 1976 onwards. In particular, we focus on the following aspects: the overall number of candidacies and party lists, the use of multiple candidacies by different parties, and some relevant traits of candidates such as their age, gender and past experience as candidates. Results highlight the impact of the new electoral institutions, as in 2018 the overall number of Italian candidates and lists has decreased if compared to the 2013 elections. However, the new rules have not substantially reduced the number of those who run for office without any reasonable possibility of obtaining a parliamentary seat. In addition, the population of Italian would-be deputies has become more balanced in terms of gender – though not any younger – and the turnover rate among Italian candidates seems to be somewhat lower than in 2013. Furthermore, moving from 2013 to 2018, the leaders of Italian parties have made more moderate use of multiple candidacies as a tool for controlling party members. In the last elections, multiple candidacies were employed mostly for safeguarding the election of some prominent politicians.

1. Introduction

Candidate selection received extensive attention during the campaign preceding Italy's 2018 general elections. This is unsurprising, as the identity of candidates for parliament and the way in which they are selected are considered by most commentators to be newsworthy. First of all, candidates are part of what we could label a politically 'active minority' in society – i.e., those citizens whose level of political participation is neither simply restricted to a periodic act of voting, nor equals that of active party supporters or party members. In this sense, candidates for elective offices serve as a fundamental link between voters and the ruling class and are part of what, about a century ago, Gaetano Mosca (1982: 1015) defined as the 'second stratum' of the political class. Candidates' social and intellectual profiles provide an insightful view of the linkage connecting society at large with the political realm. In addition, the recruitment of

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candidates is 'the secret garden' (Gallagher and Marsh 1988) of any party democracy, as the outcome of the selection process can affect the traits of political personnel in the major legislative and executive institutions and, more in general, can define the very nature of democratic representation (Di Virgilio and Segatti 2016). Parties are the gatekeepers of that garden and the electoral system is the context defining the incentives for the gatekeeping role parties have.

If, then, candidacies are always an important topic in any study of nation-wide elections, they should be extremely interesting in the case of the 2018 Italian elections, in particular for two reasons. On the one hand, analysing candidates allows us to understand the extent to which Italian citizens are willing to participate in politics by running for office, and to identify the would-be representatives (at least in terms of some basic traits such as age and gender). This is especially interesting in the current phase, which in many accounts appears to be a turning point in national history: evaluations of parties and political institutions are starkly negative in public opinion, but new parties seem to be a venue for novel political mobilisation. On the other hand, the new mixed electoral system (the so-called 'Rosato law') provides parties with new incentives to fulfil their role as gatekeepers.

This article aims to analyse several key characteristics of the candidates running in the 2018 Italian general elections and compares the 2018 candidates with those who stood for office in past Italian elections from 1976 onwards. In so doing, we concentrate on the candidates for a seat in the lower house of the Italian Parliament (the Chamber of Deputies), for which data are available for a longer time period. In particular, we expect that the new electoral system has affected candidacies in 2018 with regard to three main aspects. The first is the overall number of candidates, which can be considered as a proxy of Italian citizens' willingness to participate in politics, in spite of a popular climate that is negative towards politics. Has the Rosato law increased or decreased the size of the active minority of the Italian population? The second relates to multiple candidacies. Is there any variation in the use of multiple candidacies among parties? And what are the differences from the past? The third concerns some key traits of candidates such as their age, gender and past experience as candidates. How have the new electoral incentives affected the recruitment choices made by party leaders?

The article is organized as follows. The next section summarizes the main features of the electoral system that can affect the choice of candidates. The third section presents a longitudinal analysis of the number of party lists and candidates that have participated in general elections in Italy over the 1976-2018 period. In the fourth section we concentrate on the 2018 election and analyse how party leaders made use of multiple candidacies. The fifth section deals with the age and gender of Italian would-be representatives. Moreover, we assess the degree of renewal of the population of candidates in Italy. The last section concludes and discusses some possible avenues for future research.

2. The new electoral system

Providing a full account of the new electoral system is clearly outside the scope of the present article. However, it is worth highlighting some peculiarities of the new electoral

rules that can be hypothesized to substantially affect the process of candidate selection.[1] One of these key features is the mixed nature of the new electoral system, whereby 37% of legislative seats (232 out of 630 in the Chamber of Deputies, 116 out of 315 in the Senate) are assigned by plurality and 61% of seats (386 and 193, respectively) are allocated through PR in multi-member constituencies. In each chamber, the remaining 2% of seats are elected by Italian voters living abroad. Although largely based on a proportional principle, the new electoral system could be expected to limit the number of party lists participating in the elections as well as the number of parties actually entering Parliament. This is mostly because the presence of a plurality tier should drive parties to coordinate and build electoral alliances in order to present common candidates in each single-member district.[2]

A second element which shaped parties' decisions concerning candidacies is related to the representation threshold established by the new electoral law. According to the previous Italian electoral system (the 'Calderoli law'), parties could enter Parliament only if they achieved at least 2% of votes (if part of an electoral coalition) or 4% of votes (if they ran alone). Moreover, thanks to the so-called 'best loser' clause, also the largest coalesced party below the threshold was entitled to enter Parliament. The Rosato law establishes instead a single threshold that corresponds to 3% of votes for both coalesced and non-coalesced parties. As a consequence, under the new rules, the best way in which the leaders of minor parties can win a legislative seat is by participating in an electoral alliance with larger parties and negotiating with them the possibility of running as candidates in a supposedly safe single-member district. On the whole, we expect that the new threshold might reduce the number of electoral lists compared to 2013.

Third, multiple candidacies are still allowed by the new rules. In particular, the same candidate can run for office in a single-member district and, at the same time, can be included in a party list in up to five multi-member constituencies. Although multiple candidacies were allowed also by the previous electoral system, in 2018 they seem to have been used by party leaders also as an instrument for securing the election of prominent members of the party (see below). Indeed, several well-known politicians who ran in a single-member district managed to win a seat only because, while defeated in the district, they had also been nominated at the top of their party's list in one or more constituencies in the PR tier. By the same token, the inclusion of high-ranking politicians at the top of (short) party lists forced party leaders to make hard choices between potential candidates, thus excluding some eminent members of the party.

Fourth, the Rosato law features a set of provisions aimed at balancing the presence of men and women in the Italian Parliament. More precisely, party lists in multi-member constituencies must be filled in such a way that each candidate cannot be followed by a candidate of the same gender. Moreover, neither male candidates nor female

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[1] See Pedrazzani and Pinto (2015) for a review of studies of how electoral rules can be expected to shape the selection of candidates and their behaviour.

[2] As for the PR part of the new electoral system, the relatively small magnitude of multi-member constituencies (about 4) might be in principle expected to reduce the fragmentation in the electoral supply (Carey and Hix 2011; Cox 1997). However, it should be taken into account that such a hypothesized effect on fragmentation is moderated by the provision of a top-down seating allocation system: the percentage considered for the allocation of seats is not calculated in the single multi-member constituency, but on the basis of the votes obtained by party lists at the national level (for the election of the Chamber of Deputies) or at the regional level (for the election of the Senate).

candidates from the same party can be at the top of the list in more than 60% of the multi-member constituencies. Similarly, for any party neither gender can be present in single-member districts more than 60% of the times.

A further aspect that received considerable media attention before the vote concerns the formal requirements that parties had to fulfil in order to participate to the elections. Indeed, the rules that applied to newcomers are substantially different from those that applied to the parties that were already in Parliament at the end of the 17[th]Legislature (2013-2018). While incumbent parties were exempted from collecting signatures, a new party that wanted to run in the whole country had to collect a minimum of 20,000 signatures. Moreover, it had to present lists in at least two-thirds of the multi-member constituencies in a region.[3] Although the required number of signatures was certainly accessible, new parties had a relatively short time period for collecting them: the deadline for presenting the collected signatures was on 29 January 2018, one month after the day in which the President of the Republic Sergio Mattarella dissolved Parliament (28 December 2017). Such rules hindered the participation of several small parties that were not already in Parliament, while favouring some minor groups that were in Parliament during the 17th Legislature. In this respect, a particularly illuminating example is +Europa, a new party headed by Emma Bonino. This party was encountering difficulties in collecting the required number of signatures and was eventually able to participate in the 2018 elections only when Bruno Tabacci 'offered' the symbol of his party (Centro Democratico, CD), which was already present in Parliament, to Bonino's list.

Finally, the general elections of March 2018 were the first in which Italian parties were not entitled to receive any refund from the state for the expenses sustained during their electoral campaign. The so-called 'electoral refunds' were introduced in 1999 as a 'disguised' form of public financing of parties, and regarded any party achieving at least 4% of votes in the general elections. This relatively low threshold, which was subsequently lowered to 1% and then raised to 2% in 2012, had allowed many minor parties to obtain public funds. A law cutting electoral refunds was enacted in 2014, and public refunds were totally abolished from 2017 onward. The absence of electoral refunds increased the costs of participation in 2018, especially for smaller parties.

Our goal is, then, to assess how these provisions affected candidacies in the 2018 elections. Has the new system increased or decreased the size of the active minority of the Italian population that is willing to run for parliamentary office? How have party leaders made use of multiple candidacies? Have the new rules increased the presence of women in the Italian Parliament? Have they contributed to a renewal of candidacies in general?

3. Candidates and party lists in Italy: a longitudinal analysis

A first element that is worth emphasizing concerning candidacies in Italy is the relatively high number of those who run for office at election time. In March 2018, as many as 5,058 candidates grouped in 28 party lists were in the running for the election of the Italian Chamber of Deputies. As illustrated in Table 1, in absolute terms this figure is

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[3] According to the Rosato law, the whole territory of Italy is divided into 27 broad regional constituencies, and each of these is divided into a number of multi-member constituencies.

higher than the number of candidates in any other European country. According to the reported data, which are taken from the Comparative Candidate Survey (CCS), the number of candidates for the lower chamber was slightly above 4,000 in Austria (2008) and the United Kingdom (2010).[4] Those who stood as candidates in the general elections were about 3,900 in Sweden (2014) and Switzerland (2015), and 2,700 in Germany (2013). In other terms, the absolute number of candidates in Italy is higher than in those European countries that adopt a pure PR system, as well as in the UK where a plurality system is in place. Also, the number of Italian candidates is about twice the number of candidates in Germany, where a mixed electoral system is in place. Of course, the number of candidates fielded by parties also depends on the overall number of legislative seats that are at stake, as well as on the type of electoral system. If we divide the number of candidates by the number of available seats, we can note that the number of candidates per seats in Italy 2018 is clearly below that observed in purely PR systems like Austria and Switzerland. However, this does not disprove our findings about the huge volume of Italian citizens that are willing to stand as candidates. How can we then account for such a marked propensity to run for public office in Italy? And to what extent may this be related to institutional factors, i.e. the characteristics of the electoral system?

Table 1. Number of candidates for the lower or only chamber in European democracies

Country	Year	Number of candidates	Candidates per seat
Austria	2008	4,080	22.30
Denmark	2011	784	4.38
Estonia	2011	789	7.81
Finland	2011	2,315	11.58
Germany	2013	2,776*	4.41*
Greece	2015	1,384*	4.61*
Hungary	2014	840*	4.22*
Iceland	2009	756*	12*
Ireland	2007	466	2.95
Italy	2018	5,058 (1,957*)	8.18 (3.17*)
Netherlands	2006	489	3.26
Norway	2009	1,972*	11.67*
Portugal	2011	1,150*	5.00*
Romania	2016	1,928*	5.86*
Sweden	2014	3,888	11.14
Switzerland	2015	3,873	19.36
United Kingdom	2010	4,042	6.21

Notes: Data are taken from the Comparative Candidate Survey, Module I and II (http://www.comparativecandidates.org/). For more details, see Di Virgilio and Segatti (2016).
* Data refer to all the candidates of the parties represented in the lower house, and not to the entire universe. For Italy both the data are provided.

[4] These data are taken from Module 1 and 2 of the CCS. More recent data about candidates in several European countries cannot be discussed as comprehensive data from Module 2 are not yet available.

The choice of entering the electoral arena can be understood as a strategic decision where those who are thinking of becoming a candidate weigh up the expected costs and benefits deriving from creating a party list and running for public office (Cox 1997; Hug 2001; Tavits 2006). In this calculation, benefits and costs are prominently determined by key aspects of the electoral rules. More precisely, benefits are the payoffs expected from winning a certain number of legislative seats and depend on the chance that the party list gains enough votes to see some of its members elected to Parliament. Such a chance is in turn conditional on the electoral norms adopted in a given country. Costs are related to the formal requirements that have to be met in order to participate in the electoral competition – that is, the collection of a certain number of signatures and possible monetary payments. The higher the costs, the greater are the resources that potential candidates have to spend. Costs can be lower when party lists have access to public funds dispensed by the state as a way of sustaining parties' electoral campaigns.

As for the 2018 Italian election, we can argue that, compared to the electoral rules in place in 2013, the Rosato law has raised the costs and reduced the expected benefits of participating in the electoral competition. Generally speaking, in 2018 costs were higher than in the previous election because of the new rules concerning signature requirements and the abolishment of electoral refunds. Newcomers were indeed discouraged from participation. At the same time, the new representation threshold has reduced small parties' chances of entering Parliament. It does not come as a surprise, then, that from 2013 to 2018 both the number of lists and individual candidates have markedly decreased. Party lists amounted to 47 in 2013, while being just 28 five years later. Likewise, candidates for the Chamber of Deputies have declined from 9,897 to 5,058.

The impact of the new Italian electoral system can, however, be better understood by comparing 2018 data with a longer time period. For this purpose, Figure 1 graphically illustrates the trends in the number of lists and candidates per election over the last four decades. As stated above, only candidates and lists presented for election of the Chamber of Deputies are considered. The 1976-2018 period covers elections regulated by several electoral systems. In particular, a PR system with open lists was in place until 1993, a mixed member majoritarian system (the Mattarella law) was used in the elections of 1994, 1996 and 2001, a PR system with majority bonus (the Calderoli law) was adopted for the elections of 2006, 2008 and 2013, and finally a new mixed system was established by the Rosato law in 2018.[5] As the black solid line in the right panel of Figure 1 shows, the number of candidates for the Italian Chamber has almost always been greater than 5,000. There were more than 5,500 would-be deputies in 1976, about 6,500 in the 1979-1983 elections, and slightly fewer than 8,000 in 1987. The number of candidates reached an approximate total of 9,000 in 1992, when the last parliamentary elections of the so-called Italian First Republic took place. Roughly the same figures were observed in the elections under the Calderoli law: the candidates for the Chamber numbered more than 8,500 in 2006, about 6,000 in 2008 and as many as 10,000 in 2013. The number of candidates was significantly smaller in the 1994-2001 years, when a mixed member majoritarian system was in place. According to the Mattarella law, 75% of the seats (475

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[5] Our analysis does not consider the 'Italicum' electoral system (PR with majority bonus and possibility of run-off between the two most voted party lists), which was approved by the Italian Parliament in 2015 but has never been used in any election.

over 630 in the Chamber) were allocated by plurality in single-member districts, and 25% of seats (155) were assigned through PR in 27 multi-member constituencies. In the three elections held under this system, the number of candidates was very low, remaining between 2,000 and 2,500. This is because Italian parties faced strong incentives to coordinate and form pre-electoral coalitions to run in single-member districts (Di Virgilio 2002). As the right panel of Figure 1 shows, the mixed nature of the current Italian electoral system has had some effect in reducing the number of candidates. Its impact is, however, weaker than the impact of the Mattarella law, which is probably due to the smaller size of the plurality quota in the new electoral system.

Figure 1. Number of candidates for the lower or only chamber in European democracies
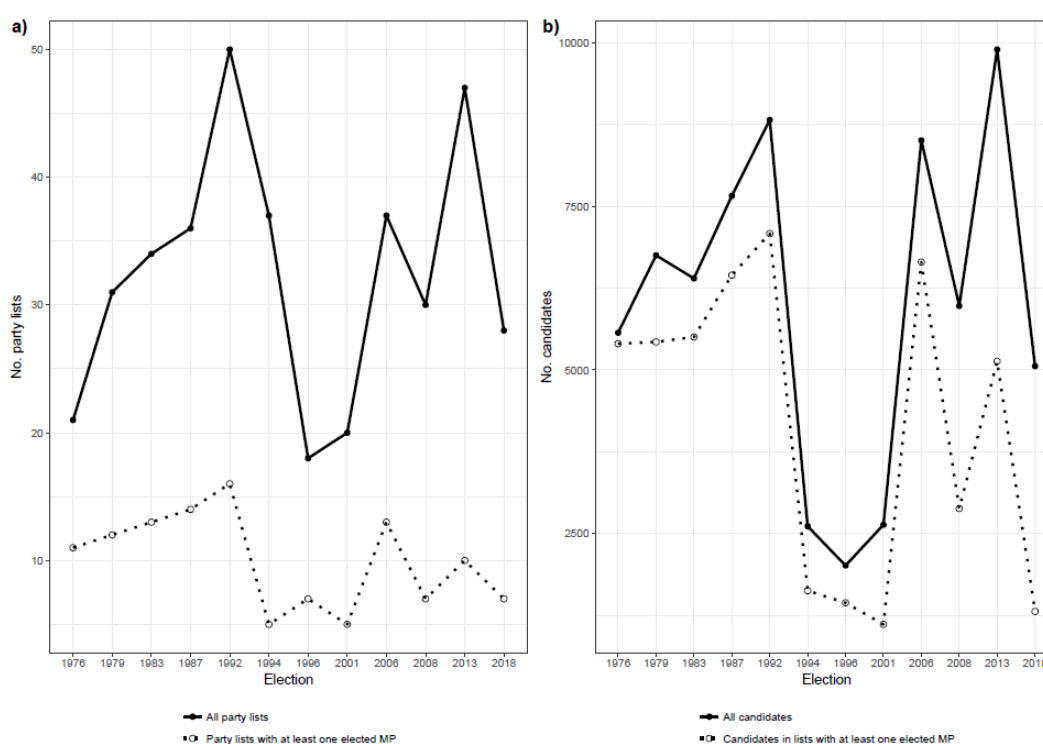
Notes: Data cover only candidates for the Chamber of Deputies. With regard to the elections of 1994, 1996, 2001 and 2018, the number of party lists and the number of candidates in lists with at least one elected MP were calculated by considering only the PR tier of the electoral system. Multiple candidacies are counted just once. Italian candidates running in the abroad constituency are excluded.
Source: Authors' elaboration using data taken from the website of the Ministry of Interior.

A similar trend can be observed if we consider the number of lists presented at the time of general elections. The solid black line in the left panel of Figure 1 shows that the historically minimum number of lists for the Chamber was recorded when the Mattarella law was in place (just 18 lists in 1996), while the two maximum peaks were reached under PR systems: 50 lists in 1992 and 47 lists in 2013.

The dotted lines in Figure 1 correspond to the number of party lists that obtained at least one seat in the Chamber (left panel) and the number of candidates included in those lists (right panel). The number of lists that were able to enter Parliament increased during the last period of the First Republic, thus signalling the growing fragmentation of

the party system that had been established in Italy soon after the Second World War. The same occurred with the number of candidates included in lists with at least one seat. The trend was interrupted by the adoption of the mixed member majoritarian system in 1994. In 1994 and 1996 we observe the historically minimum number of lists obtaining representation in the Chamber (5). The party lists that entered the Chamber increased again in number with the Calderoli PR system, although not reaching the same figures of the last period of the First Republic. Under the Rosato law, just seven lists have been able to obtain a seat in the Chamber – the same value recorded in 1996 and 2008. The seven parties that have achieved representation in 2018 constitute 25% of the total lists that participated in the election.

As the right panel of Figure 1 illustrates, in 2018 about 3,700 candidates (out of a total of 5,058) were members of lists that have not gained representation. This value is remarkable and is not so distant from those observed in the two previous elections (about 3,100 in 2008 and 4,800 in 2013). The huge volume of would-be deputies who run for office in lists that do not enter the Italian Parliament seems to suggest that simplistic rational accounts, where the choice of running as a candidate depends on institutionally determined benefits and costs as well as on the probability of success, do not fully account for candidates' individual decisions. There are indeed a variety of further motivations that could be added to the picture in order to better explain Italian candidates' decisions. Among these are attempts to build a personal reputation as a loyal member of the party or as a prominent personality in a given geographical territory (Pedrazzani, Pinto and Segatti 2016; Pinto 2016).

4. The use of multiple candidacies

So far, we have talked about candidacies, presuming that each individual candidate runs for office in a particular election and therefore presents her/his own candidacy in a given territorial constituency. However, some candidates – the so-called 'multi-candidates' – play their cards in more than one electoral arena. The Italian electoral system allows the same candidate to run in a plurality district and in up to five multi-member constituencies. Let us note that the possibility of multiple candidacies is not new to electoral competition in Italy, as they have been admitted by all the electoral rules adopted by the Italian Republic. The PR system that was in place over the entire First Republic allowed candidates to run in up to three multi-member constituencies. However, the same system enabled voters to cast preferences for candidates in open party lists, which seriously hindered any strategic use of multiple candidacies by party leaders.

Multiple candidacies were allowed also under the mixed member majoritarian system employed for the 1994, 1996 and 2001 elections. A candidate for a seat in the Chamber could appear in her/his party list in up to three multi-member constituencies. Remarkably, the same candidate could run both in the proportional tier and in the plurality tier. In 2005, the enactment of the Calderoli law eliminated any limit in the number of multiple candidacies: a candidate could appear in her/his party list in every multi-member constituency at the same time. This provision transformed multiple candidacies into a powerful instrument in the hands of party leaders, who could design the (blocked) lists of their party in such a way as to favour the election of those candidates who were most loyal to the leader. This is because multiple candidacies create a pool of

vacant parliamentary seats, whose allocation depends mostly on party leaders' choices. This phenomenon was so relevant that in the 2006 elections, 40 candidates were elected in more than one constituency, thus controlling as many as 261 seats in the Chamber. In 2008, 19 deputies elected in more than one constituency controlled 137 seats (Pinto 2017).[6] These candidates, who turn out to be simultaneously elected in more than one constituency, have to choose just one of them. As a consequence, a pool of seats remains vacant and will be assigned to the first among those candidates in the party list who were initially not elected. In other terms, multiple candidacies increase the centralization of the candidate selection process, granting leaders greater post-election influence: once in Parliament, those legislators whose parliamentary office depends mostly on the leaders' choices will be particularly unlikely to vote against party line, as shown by analysing the records of roll-call votes in the Italian Parliament (Pinto 2017).

These considerations lead us to examine how multiple candidacies have been used by Italian parties in the general elections of 2018. How many multi-candidates were there in the last election? And which combinations of multiple candidacies were used most? Tables 2 and 3 report these types of data for the electoral coalitions running in single-member districts and for all the parties that passed the 3% threshold for obtaining representation in the Chamber.

Table 2. Distribution of candidates across single- and multi-member constituencies by coalition and party list (%)

Constituency	Centre-right	Centre-left	LEU	M5S
	FI+FDI+LEGA+Others	PD+Others		
Only multi-member	70.81	65.53	36.39	45.41
Only single-member	13.77	17.29	44.50	41.18
Both	15.42	17.18	19.11	13.41
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Notes: Data cover only candidates for the Chamber of Deputies. Candidates in single-member constituencies supported by a coalition of parties are classified under 'centre-left' or 'centre-right' labels.
Party acronyms: Forza Italia (FI, Go Italy), Fratelli d'Italia (FDI, Brothers of Italy), Lega (League, former Northern League), Liberi e Uguali (LEU, Free and Equal), Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S, Five Star Movement), Partito Democratico (PD, Democratic Party).
Source: Authors' elaboration using data taken from the website of the Ministry of Interior.

Table 2 provides information about the distribution of candidacies across the two tiers of the new electoral system, i.e. single- and multi-member constituencies. Liberi e Uguali (LEU, Free and Equal) was the party that most used the possibility to nominate candidates both in single- and multi-member constituencies. LEU was also the party with the highest number of candidates running only in one single-member constituency. The latter choice possibly cost re-election for many prominent politicians, such as Massimo D'Alema, former leader of PD and co-founder of LEU, who ranked last in the

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[6] In 2013, the larger parties intentionally chose to moderate the use of multiple candidacies for two main reasons. The first was to counter the popular argument that the members of the Italian Parliament were largely nominated by party leaders, rather than directly elected by people. Second, several parties such as Partito Democratico (PD, Democratic Party), Sinistra Ecologia Libertà (SEL, Left Ecology Freedom) and Movimento 5 stelle (Five Star Movement, M5S) organized primary elections for selecting their candidates (Di Gregorio and De Vitis 2013).

district where he ran. Conversely, centre-left and centre-right coalitions present the lowest proportion of candidates running only in single-member constituencies. However, these figures depend mostly on the fact that single-member candidates of the two main electoral alliances are the result of a process of coordination between the parties forming them. For this reason, it is probably better to exclude from the analysis the candidates running only in single-member districts and concentrate on those competing in multi-member constituencies, as in Table 3, for whom it is possible to identify with precision to which party list they belong.[7]

Table 3. Multiple candidacies by party (%)

Formula	FI	FDI	Lega	LEU	M5S	PD
1+0	77.00	84.24	76.85	65.57	77.20	75.56
1+1	10.33	3.94	8.87	24.06	22.80	19.11
2+0	6.10	4.93	6.40	4.72	0.00	1.78
2+1	2.82	1.97	3.45	1.42	0.00	0.89
3+0	0.94	0.00	0.49	0.47	0.00	0.89
3+1	2.35	0.99	0.49	0.94	0.00	0.00
4+0	0.00	0.99	0.99	0.47	0.00	0.00
4+1	0.00	0.49	1.48	1.89	0.00	0.44
5+0	0.00	0.49	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
5+1	0.47	1.97	0.99	0.47	0.00	1.33
Total	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**

Notes: Data cover only candidates for the Chamber of Deputies. In the first column reporting the possible combinations of multiple candidacies, the number on the left indicates the number of multi-member constituencies where a candidate ran, while the number on the right indicates whether or not a candidate stood in a single-member district. For instance, 2+1 refers to the percentage of candidates from the party who ran as candidates in two multi-member constituencies and at the same time as candidates in a plurality district. For each party (column), percentages are calculated considering only those candidates who were present in multi-member constituencies. Candidates who only ran in a single-member district are not considered.
Party acronyms: Forza Italia (FI, Go Italy), Fratelli d'Italia (FDI, Brothers of Italy), Lega (League, former Northern League), Liberi e Uguali (LEU, Free and Equal), Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S, Five Star Movement), Partito Democratico (PD, Democratic Party).
Source: Authors' elaboration using data taken from the website of the Ministry of Interior.

Each row of Table 3 corresponds to a possible combination of multiple candidacies for a candidate whose name was present at least in a multi-member constituency: being a candidate only in a multi-member constituency (1+0), being a candidate both in a multi-member constituency and in a single-member district (1+1), being a candidate in two multi-member constituencies (2+0), being a candidate in two multi-member constituencies and at the same time in a single-member district (2+1), and so on. The most 'extreme' formula is when a candidate appears in five multi-member constituencies and at the same time in a single-member district (5+1). As shown in the table, the right-wing Fratelli d'Italia (FDI, Brothers of Italy) is the party that made the least extensive use of multiple candidacies in 2018: about 84% of those who ran in multi-member

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[7] Quite interestingly, some recent analyses of the 2018 elections show a very limited degree of 'personalized' vote. Only about 1,200,000 Italian voters cast their vote just for a candidate in a single-member district – and not for any specific party list associated with that candidate (Fruncillo and Giannatiempo 2018).

constituencies under the FDI label stood as candidates only in one constituency. LEU was instead the party that made the largest use of multiple candidacies: two-thirds of LEU candidates in multi-member constituencies ran in just one district, while one-third of them were multi-candidates.

Albeit the party with the lowest number of multi-candidates, FDI is at the same time the party with the largest use of 'extreme' multiple candidacies. Four of the FDI extreme multi-candidates are female candidates, among whom the leader of the party Giorgia Meloni. Another well-known – and criticized by the media – instance of extreme multi-candidacies regards the outgoing PD minister Maria Elena Boschi, who ran as a candidate in Bolzano single-member district and, at the same time, in five multi-member constituencies (one in Lombardy, one in Latium and three in Sicily). However, let us underline that the use of extreme multiple candidacies is to be considered as a marginal – albeit meaningful – phenomenon, as it regarded at most 2% of the candidates of a party.

Generally speaking, the most used combination of multiple candidacies is the 1+1 formula: one-fourth of LEU and M5S candidates, one-fifth of PD candidates, and about one-tenth of Forza Italia (FI, Go Italy) and Lega (League, former Northern League) candidates appeared at the same time in one single-member district and in one multi-member constituency. In this regard, it is worth noting that the 1+1 combination was the only type of multiple candidacy employed by the M5S in 2018. In particular, the M5S used the 1+1 formula for those candidates who were already members of the Italian Parliament during the 17th Legislature (52% of M5S multi-candidates were incumbent legislators). This presumably indicates an attempt to secure the presence of a group of M5S with some legislative experience in the new Parliament.

The preference of Italian parties for a 'moderate' form of multiple candidacy – the 1+1 formula – suggests a change in party leaders' strategies from the recent past. In 2018, multiple candidacies were used as an instrument for controlling party members only to a limited extent. This may of course be related to the fact that, while under the past electoral rules a candidate elected in more than one constituency could choose the constituency in which she/he would be proclaimed as winner, the Rosato law no longer allows this. If the same candidate is elected in more than one multi-member constituency, she/he now wins the seat in the constituency where her/his party has obtained the lowest percentage of votes. Moreover, a candidate elected both in a single-member district and in one or more multi-member districts automatically wins the seat that was at stake in the single-member district.

In 2018, multiple candidacies have been used mostly as a 'parachute' for prominent – but presumably not so popular – politicians whose success in a single-member district was considered uncertain by the party leadership. Among those who lost in their single-member district but were elected anyway because they were included at the top of their party list in (at least) one multi-member constituency, let us recall some ministers of the Gentiloni cabinet (Dario Franceschini, Marco Minniti and Roberta Pinotti, from PD), the outgoing speakers of the Chamber and Senate (Laura Boldrini and Pietro Grasso, LEU), as well as a number of well-known politicians such as Matteo Orfini (PD president), Pier Luigi Bersani (formerly PD secretary and currently one of the LEU leaders), Mara Carfagna and Stefania Prestigiacomo (former ministers in the centre-right cabinets, FI). At the same time, some particularly appealing candidates have been placed in

the party lists of more than one multi-member constituency in order to attract votes in certain geographical areas. This is the case of the abovementioned FDI leader Meloni.

A further element that is worth pointing out with regard to multiple candidacies is the rather high number of female candidates among the multi-candidates (above 50%). This may also indicate that party leaders have used multiple candidacies in such a way as to meet the formal requirements of the Rosato law concerning gender equality in the selection of candidates. Reasonably, the seats left vacant by a woman elected in more than one constituency are probably assigned to a male candidate placed after her in the party list. These considerations bring us to one of the topics of the next section.

5. The profile of Italian candidates: gender, age and past experience

The present section deals with three key traits of the candidates running for office in 2018: their age, gender and past experience as candidates. Throughout the article we have presumed that the new electoral rules give extensive powers to party leaders in the selection of candidates. What kind of candidate, then, has been selected? As discussed in the second section of this article, the Rosato law includes a number of provisions aimed at balancing the presence of men and women in the lists that participate in the general elections as well as in the Italian Parliament.[8] Has the presence of women grown among elected politicians? In addition, the topic of the renewal of Italian politics has been around for a long time in the public debate. How old is the minority that actively participates in Italian general elections? How many of the Italian candidates of 2018 are really new to politics?

Starting with the Italian candidates' gender, Figure 2 shows the percentage of women among candidates for the Chamber and among elected deputies from 1976 to 2018. As illustrated by the solid black line, in four decades the percentage of female candidates has increased fourfold. While in the 1976 elections just 12% of Italian would-be deputies were women, in March 2018 women were 44% of the total pool of candidates for the Chamber. Let us note that the proportion of female candidates gradually grew until 1992, but subsequently decreased in the 1994-2001 period under the mixed member system established by the Mattarella law. This system forced party leaders to coordinate and to accurately choose the candidates (one for each pre-electoral coalition) to be presented in the plurality districts. This reduced the percentage of women candidates, especially in single-member districts. For instance, in 1994 female candidates made up 45% of the candidates in multi-member constituencies, but just 8% of the candidates in single-member districts. The percentage of female candidates started to grow again in 2006, after the adoption of a PR system, approaching half of the overall number of Italian candidates under the Rosato law.

Although the Rosato law has broadly balanced the presence of males and females among Italian candidates, things are substantially different if we look at the presence of women in the Italian Parliament. The dotted line in Figure 2 shows a general growth in the percentage of female deputies after 1976: the percentage of women elected in the Chamber

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[8] See Norris (1985, 2004) for analyses of the composition of political elites in terms of gender in contemporary democracies.

in 2018 is three times that observed forty years ago. However, in 2018 the percentage of women among elected deputies is just 36%, which is well below the percentage of female candidates (44%). Whereas up until 2013 the percentage of female deputies was close to the percentage of female candidates (and indeed the former was greater than the latter in the 2006-2013 period), in 2018 the two have become distant from each other. In other terms, the increase in the percentage of female candidates artificially produced by the Rosato law has not been paralleled by a similar increase in the percentage of female deputies.

Figure 2. Percentage of women among candidates and elected deputies, 1976-2018
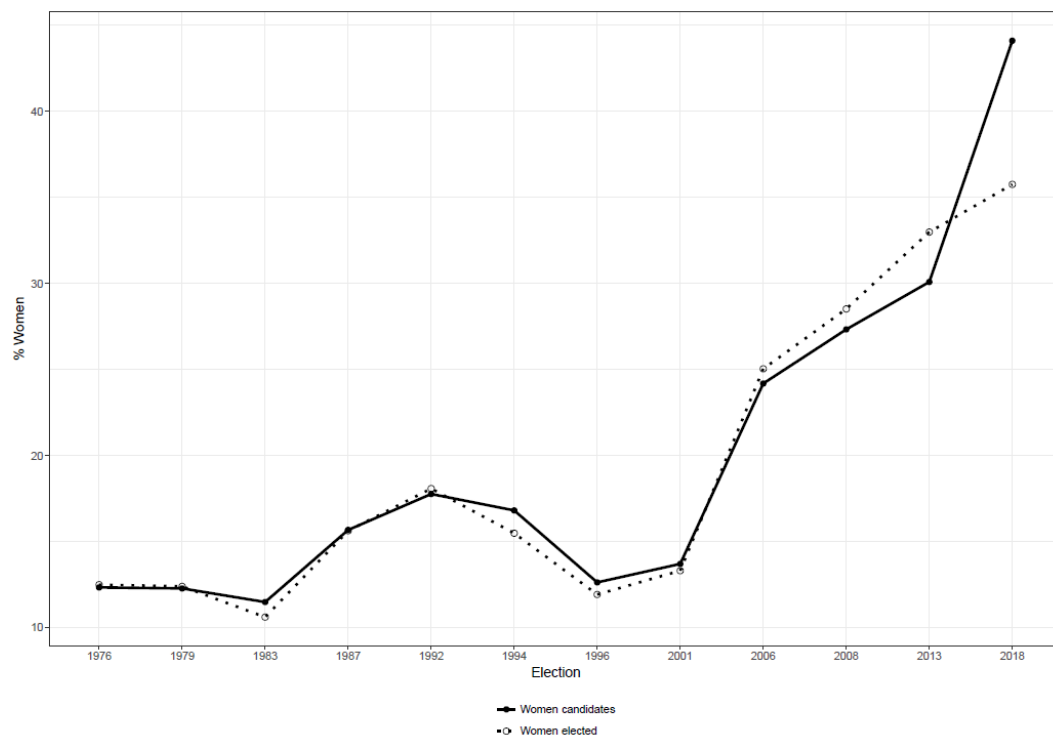
Notes: Data cover only candidates for the Chamber of Deputies. Multiple candidacies are counted just once. Italian candidates running in the abroad constituency and deputies elected in the abroad constituency are excluded.
Source: Authors' elaboration using data taken from the website of the Ministry of Interior.

This adds to a couple of elements that we have discussed above. One is the 'gender penalty' that seems to affect female candidates in single-member districts (Herrnsson et al. 2003), as happened in Italy under the mixed system employed during the 1994-2001 period. The other is the high number of female candidates among the multi-candidates in 2018. The seats left vacant by elected women are presumably assigned to male candidates from the same party. These considerations imply that formal rules are not enough to grant a more equal representation of men and women in Parliament. Probably only party leaders' choices concerning the selection of candidates could definitely reduce the representation gap between genders.

With regard to Italian candidates' age, Table 4 reports the median value calculated in each election since 1994 for the entire population of candidates for the Chamber of Deputies. As the data for the last 25 years demonstrate, we cannot detect a specific historical trend. In spite of the shift from the First to the Second Republic (and for some

observers even to a Third Republic), the almost complete restructuring of the party system and the reorganization of electoral supply, and the success of new political formations such as the M5S, the median age of Italian candidates in the 2018 election is 47, which is indeed two years older than the median age of those who aspired to a seat in the Chamber in 1992. The lowest value in the 1992-2018 period was observed in 2013 (44 years) and was mainly due to the young age of M5S candidates: only individuals with no previous parliamentary experience could be included in the M5S lists. The overall increase in the median age of Italian candidates from 44 to 47 may then depend on a 'cohort effect', as at least part of the 'freshmen' who made their first appearance in an electoral list in 2013 stood again for office in 2018.

Table 4. Median age of Italian candidates, over time

Year of election	Age (median)
1992	45
1994	46
1996	46
2001	48
2006	47
2008	45
2013	44
2018	47

Notes: Data cover only candidates for the Chamber of Deputies.
Source: Authors' elaboration using data taken from the website of the Ministry of Interior.

Another factor is crucial in understanding the extent of renewal in the population of Italian candidates: the proportion of those with some past experience as a candidate. In this regard, Figure 3 displays two relevant pieces of data: the percentage of candidates for the Chamber who ran as candidates in the past election (the solid line), and the percentage of candidates for the Chamber who have run as candidates at least once since 1976 (the dashed line). The two indicators follow the same trend. In particular, a cautious renewal of Italian candidates seems to have been in place towards the end of the First Republic. The adoption of a mixed electoral system in 1994 (with a lower number of available posts in the party lists) forced party leaders to make hard choices between potential candidates, which brought about an increase in the fraction of candidates with some past experience. Under the Calderoli law, the number of available posts in the party lists increased again, leading to particularly low percentages of would-be deputies with past experience as candidates. An actual renewal of the population of Italian candidates took place in 2013, when several parties selected their candidates through primary elections. As a result, just 13% of the 2013 candidates had some past experience as candidates, and only 7% had run in 2008. The renewal rate shrank again in 2018: about one-fifth of the 2018 candidates had participated in at least one election in the past, and 13% of them had stood as a candidate in 2013. This may be related to a mix of factors: the smaller number of posts available in the party lists under the Rosato law, the above-mentioned decision of the M5S to rely on a cohort of experienced parliamentarians, and the very limited use of party primaries before the 2018 elections.

Figure 3. Candidates with past experience as candidates, 1979-2018
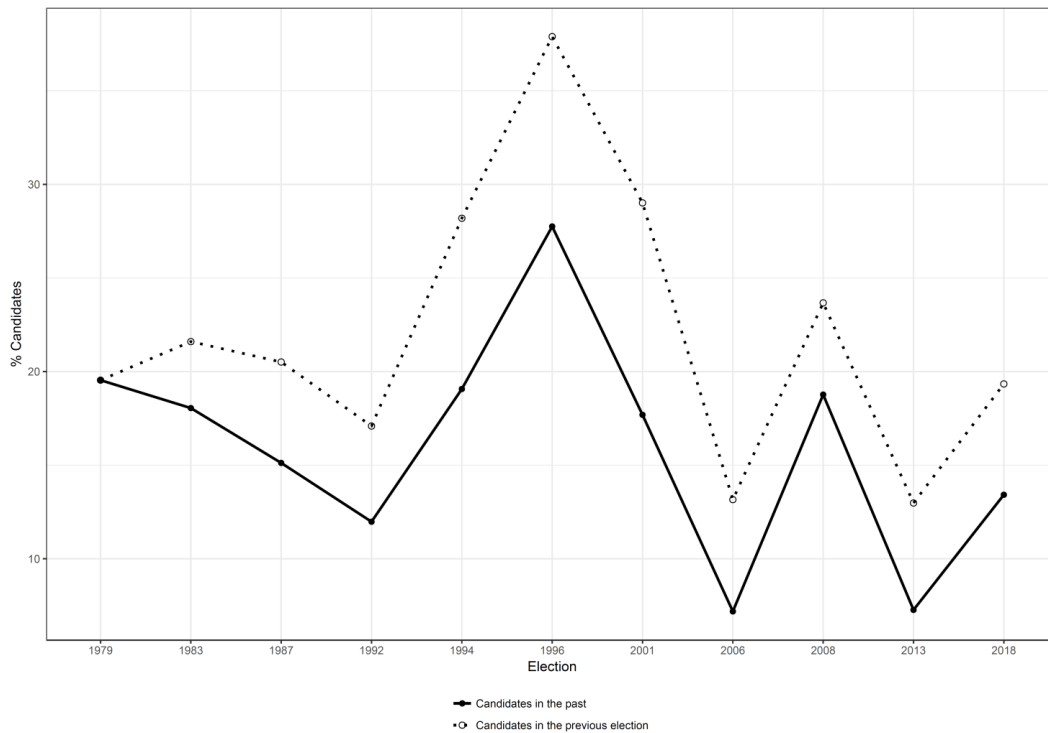
Notes: Data cover only candidates to the Chamber of Deputies. In the case of the 1979 elections the two indicators present the same values because both of them were calculated by comparing 1979 with 1976. No data for candidacies are available before the 1976 elections.
Source: Authors' elaboration using data taken from the website of the Ministry of Interior.

6. Concluding remarks

Studying candidates for public offices provides considerable insights into what can be considered as a politically active minority in society, as candidates help to connect citizens with political institutions and determine the profile of representatives. A first message that can be drawn from our analysis is the relatively huge size of such an active minority in Italy. Despite the fact that the general climate is negative towards politics, and politicians' privileges are harshly stigmatized by the media, there are still many who aspire to become part of the 'casta' (the 'clique') in Italy. For sure, the new electoral system – the Rosato law – has reduced the overall number of Italian candidates compared to the 2013 elections. However, the new rules have not substantially decreased the number of those who run for office without any reasonable possibility of obtaining a parliamentary seat. This seems to suggest that any explanation of candidates' participation which is based on merely institutional factors is insufficient in accounting for the propensity of Italian citizens to enter the electoral arena. Let us also note that, compared to the past, the pool of Italian would-be representatives has become more balanced in terms of gender, but has not become younger. In addition, the turnover rate among Italian candidates seems to be somewhat lower than in 2013. However, it should be noted that the electoral earthquake associated with the 2013 and 2018 elections, although similar in magnitude to the one registered in 1994, is different when the political personnel turnover is taken

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into consideration. In 1994 and the following elections, voters seemed to have moved, while candidates changed only in part. On the contrary, in 2013 and 2018 voters switched as candidates changed.

Candidates, however, do not run as single individuals in the electoral arena, but as members of a team. The Rosato law provides party leaders with some powerful instruments for controlling and steering the population of candidates, including the possibility of multiple candidacies. This article has shown that, moving from 2013 to 2018, the leaders of Italian parties have made a more moderate use of multiple candidacies as a tool for controlling party members. In the last elections, multiple candidacies were mostly employed for safeguarding the election of some prominent politicians. Our analyses have also pointed out that, in spite of the presumably genuine intentions of its proposers, the Rosato law has increased the presence of women in the Italian Parliament to a much lesser degree than might have been expected. In practice, several provisions of the law have been applied by party leaders, whether or not on purpose, in such a way as to penalize female candidates.

In providing an overview of Italian candidacies in the 2018 elections, this article opens up some interesting avenues for future research. A first avenue of investigation originates from the need for a better understanding of how the provisions of the Rosato law have been applied by different parties, each with a specific organizational structure and leaders oriented towards particular aims. Secondly, the degree of renewal of the Italian Parliament undoubtedly deserves greater attention. To this purpose, the new cohorts of candidates should be analysed in depth. Are newcomers different from those candidates who have already run for office or who have already been in Parliament? A further avenue for future research is to look at the conduct of candidates once elected. For example, candidates elected in plurality districts could be expected to behave differently from candidates elected in multi-party constituencies in terms of their loyalty to the party in legislative votes, or with regard to the type of legislation they promote, or considering how much they engage in constituency service. Hopefully, further answers to these questions will be provided by new survey data collected from among Italian candidates.

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Hybrid 2018 campaigning: the social media habits of Italian political leaders and parties

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Abstract

The electoral communication flows produced by leaders, parties, and the main candidates are the result of hybrid media logics and this is due to the environment in which they develop, and to the communicative strategies used. These strategies are generated by the intersection of traditional media logics (TV, radio, press) with digital media logics (Internet). This article investigates the social media communication habits of the main Italian leaders and political parties on Twitter and Facebook. To understand how the hybrid campaign developed in the Italian context, specific indicators were identified to operationalize social media habits related to: (a) communicative strategy, based on the productivity of the account (broadcast) and on its degree of interactivity (conversational), (b) skillfulness, regarding the capability to use different features of the social media platform; and (c) engagement, related to the capacity of the account to involve the audience. Results show that a more skillful use of the platforms, combined with a conversational communication strategy, produce more engaging messages regardless the specific political actor (leader or party). Finally, the outcomes show a significant strengthening of hybrid media campaigning during the last Italian general elections on 4 March 2018.

1. Hybrid Campaigning

The political campaign during the last Italian general elections on 4 March 2018 shows a significant consolidation of hybrid media campaigning. The electoral communication flows produced by leaders, parties and the main candidates are the result of hybrid media logics, because such is the environment in which they are structured. In fact, according to Chadwick's definition, a hybrid communicative strategy is generated in the integration – but we could better say in the intersection – of traditional media logics (TV, radio, press) with digital media logics (Internet). A hybrid communication system, therefore, 'is built upon interactions among older and newer media logic – where logics are defined as technologies, genres, norms, behaviours, and organizational forms – in the reflexively connected fields of media and politics' (Chadwick 2013: 4). In this perspective, the old/new media dichotomy is nowadays impractical both in the professional practices of communication and in those of research. The elements at the root of contemporary electoral campaigns are found by focusing attention on 'the flux, in-betweenness, the interstitial, and the liminal' (*ibidem*).

Recently, Wells *et al.* have demonstrated that 'Trump's efforts to court media attention, through staged events, unscheduled interactions, and social media activity, were largely successful' (2016: 675). There are different relevant cases of communicative

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hybridization also during the latest electoral campaigns such as the 'live' Facebook streaming of public events. In this regard, the electoral rally has become a fundamental element of the electoral narrative. Sociological studies on the performance of politics have shown that the performative action of leader becomes a generative factor of media narratives. It functions both as an internal bond within the communities of supporters and militants, and as a unifying collective representation of a wider segment of voters: '[...] the struggle for power becomes theatrical. Candidates work to present compelling performances of civil competence to citizen audiences at a remove not only geographically but also emotionally and morally. It is the success of these performances that determinate how whites, blacks, Jews, Catholics, and women distribute their precious votes, and the opinions of these supposedly demographic groups shift significantly in response to coding, narrative, tone, metaphor, setting, and performance in the course of campaign time' (Alexander 2010: 9).

As a second significant case of communicative hybridization in the electoral context, live tweeting during TV talk shows is a feature that enhances the direct interaction between politicians and the public through second screen vision. In fact, a growing number of citizens comment on live TV programmes as they are being transmitted, simultaneously using more than one screen, such as a smartphone or a tablet. This produces a collective re-framing of the mainstream information flow, especially when live tweeting performances are used. It is the viewertariat public 'which we define as viewers who use online publishing platforms and social tools to interpret, publicly comment on, and debate a television broadcast while they are watching it' (Anstead and O'Loughlin 2011: 441).

The hybrid campaign is *correlated* to the penetration of digital technologies in the field of politics, as social networks are the hub of any hybrid campaign (Wells *et al.* 2016). They work as the primary connection factor between media and real space (Stromer-Galley 2014). Different strategic set-ups of the hybrid campaign give shape to equally different social media habits: that is, different functional uses of social networks in the economy of the hybrid campaign. For this reason, the digital set-up of the hybrid campaign is the subject of this research.

The literature, albeit in a fragmented way, shows a qualitative leap in different levels of the electoral campaign model, especially if contrasted to the 'postmodern' model (Andretta and Bracciale 2017).

On a first level, the digital communication system has definitively reinforced the primacy of the network logic in electoral campaigns, defined on the criteria of the spreadability of the content and the connectivity between people. This network logic operates in everyday life through personal media, social network sites (Facebook, Instagram and Pinterest), microblogging platforms (Twitter, Tumblr), and messaging apps (WhatsApp, Telegram, Snapchat).

On a second level, the communicative style of political actors is increasingly personalized (Bentivegna 2015). Symmetrically, this determines the personalization of messages with an increasing use of targeting and microtargeting techniques. We have seen them work with instruments such as Google AdWords and Facebook adv, which efficiently profile people's interests. On a third level, the media that form the basis of the hybrid campaign are now those typical of the disintermediation process, taking place through the efficient integration of channels. Among the dynamics at the base of

this we can find: (a) the spreadability of contents, or virality, an essential feature to increase the volume of circulation of online messages, their visibility and, when possible, to inform the media agenda; (b) direct and immediate contact with citizens and voters, and (c) the re-acquisition of interpersonal communication into the campaign structure, focusing on the reactivation of 'molecular leaders' as a hub of informal communication in the most personal daily environment of each citizen-elector (Cepernich 2017). Thus, politicians return to participate in public events and to talk in the squares in the form of rallies. These are typical forms of pre-media election campaigns which feed the voracious social network circuits with ever-fresh content and support for the construction of the media agenda.

On a fourth level, the network-logic infrastructure is active in all phases of the campaign. In this scenario, the main factor of the digital campaign is the mobilization capacity of all relational networks available to the individual and to the collective political actors. The networked campaign is developed by giving the offline mobilization an online organization. In fact, individual willingness to mobilize is positively influenced by the quality of the structural connections, determined especially by the use of technological platforms. Networking is a powerful factor in the activation of behaviour. The influencer, especially when his or her actions are linked to the real social sphere, and not only to the technologically mediated one, becomes the most effective testimonial, bringing into the interactive situation a capital of trust often unavailable to the political figure.

Finally, on a fifth level, the political campaigns during the digital age face the great challenge of engaging and participating in an increasingly apathetic and fickle electorate that tends towards emotional and sometimes reactive voting behaviour. The post-medial logic of the network, which states as fact the direct involvement of individuals and the revitalization of individual microcosms, and online and offline communities, involves the empowerment of individuals. In this sense, the hybrid campaign is post-medial and implies the recovery of the 'human factor' of communication as a relational factor.

The hybrid campaign structure takes places at the intersection of three main dimensions of the campaign process: real space, Internet and television. All these were clearly present in Barack Obama's campaign for the 2008 US Primary (Chadwick 2013: 139). To illustrate the hybridization of electoral communication in Italy, we can consider the metamorphosis affecting some traditional propaganda material such as commercials, leaflets and posters. This is a consequence of an irreversible digital switch. Seizing the opportunities arising for disintermediation, propaganda communication has found in the information bubbles of social networks a very fertile ground for the mobilization of voters (Cepernich 2017; Novelli 2018). A first example of this is the TV adv historically strangled in Italy by the *par condicio* law on equal conditions for political communication, which actually inhibits its circulation on national TV circuits. This has found new life in non-places (Augé 1995), such as large railway stations in major urban areas, and in digital ecosystems with a high rate of partisanship and emotionalization (Brader 2006; Cepernich and Novelli 2018). A second example is the old flyer, now reproduced on timelines in the form of promotional postcards and infographics with an extensive use of numbers that certify an inevitably partial representation of the reality.

A third and final example is the electoral manifesto which has disappeared from city walls, a sort of substitution effect of the physical territory with the digital one.

Unexpectedly, the use of manifestos – above all the invasive 6x3 format – is no longer customary, with the exception of leaders or parties with significant starting deficits in brand awareness. This is the case, for example, of Pietro Grasso (Liberi e Uguali), the new face of the leadership of a debuting party, and Giorgia Meloni (Fratelli d'Italia), a well-known leader but at the head of a small political force in a coalition overwhelmed by exuberant political and media personalities such as Silvio Berlusconi (Forza Italia) and Matteo Salvini (Lega). Berlusconi also rediscovered the 6x3[1] manifestos, although on a drastically minor scale compared to the past, in the urgency of rebranding himself as a public figure, no less important than his party. They have found on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram a more effective communication channel. The acquired centrality of social networks is explained by the availability in those arenas of increasingly large and, at the same time, active publics who support the political leaders' communication, but also because of the possibility of new strategies of message profiling at very low costs compared to traditional advertising forms.

Two important scenario conditions supported the digitalization upgrade of campaigning during the Italian election. Firstly, this was the first low-budget campaign in Italian politics, due to the abolition of electoral refunds to parties[2]. Secondly, the reduced time available for campaigning, which was concentrated within a period of just two months, forced the protagonists to make huge efforts in order to optimize the scarce available resources. In fact, efforts were focused almost exclusively in February. For these reasons, social media became the key production and dissemination channels for disintermediate propaganda and the main nodes of hybrid campaigning: Twitter with more intra-elite dynamics, Facebook more extra-elite.

Following these preliminary assumptions, this research investigates the social media communication habits of the main Italian leaders and political parties on Twitter and Facebook. The leaders' communication habits cannot be explained independently from those of their parties, and vice versa. In a strategic perspective, the leaders' communication is strictly interdependent with that of their parties. Based on their respective structural features, staff often assign different and integrated functions to each social media. For example, Twitter is more inclined towards media-oriented communication, and Facebook to a public-oriented one. The increasing personalization of the communicative style produces differentiation in the strategic use of the channels, not the replacement of one with the other.

In the first part of this work, specific indicators are identified to operationalize social media habits on Twitter and Facebook (Bracciale and Martella 2016). Later, the first outcomes of the monitoring activities conducted by Policom.online[3] on the strategic use of social networks in electoral communication by political actors are presented in a descriptive form. Finally, we try to underline similarities and differences in the approaches to the 2018 election campaign strategies on social network sites.

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[1] The extensive use of the 6x3 format electoral manifesto was introduced by Berlusconi in the 2001 general election campaign in response to the *par condicio* law (n. 28 of 2000), known as the law on equal conditions of political communication in an election context, which limited the broadcasting of television commercials to very limited spaces, in fact, by blocking it.

[2] Electoral refunds were abolished by Decree-Law No 149 of 28 December 2013, signed by the former Prime Minister, Enrico Letta.

[3] See link: http://www.policom.online.

2. Measuring social media habits

In order to translate this conceptual background into an empirical analysis and to understand how the hybrid campaign was developed in the Italian context, we have used as proxy the social media habits of both leaders and their parties. Specifically, we have identified three dimensions of the social media use habits that fit with the logic of the digital environment outlined above: the communicative strategies adopted by both leaders and political parties; the skills that they need to best seize the specific social media affordances, and their capacity to engage their audiences.

The outlined hybrid campaign attributes are not mutually exclusive in relation to a specific dimension of social media habits as there could be different motivations behind each communicative action. For instance, the spreadability of a content can be related to the communicative strategies adopted by the accounts and at the same time can depend on its capacity to engage citizens. Personalization, due to the disintermediated context in which political actors can interact directly with followers, can be disclosed by the possibility of both being able to communicate directly to the public and the capacity to address someone by the use of mentions or tagging a specific user.

To summarize, the social media habit dimensions are related to (a) communicative strategies: (i) broadcast, based on the productivity of the account, and (ii) conversational, based on the degree of interactivity in the platform; (b) skilfulness: regarding the ability to use different features of the social media platform, and (c) engagement: regarding the capacity of the account to involve the audience. The social media habits have been operationalized based on these dimensions, identifying specific indicators for both Facebook and Twitter.

Although the specific affordances of both platforms may differ, in the case of public Facebook pages we can find many similarities to Twitter profiles if we consider the structure of the social networks they configure. In fact, relationships on both Twitter and Facebook pages are asymmetric – unlike private Facebook profiles where friendship is mutual. Indeed, a user can follow a Twitter account or a Facebook page without being followed, i.e. without the relationship becoming bidirectional. In this scenario, the two social network sites and their habits become more correctly comparable.

This analysis considers the Facebook pages and Twitter accounts of the main Italian political leaders and their parties: Silvio Berlusconi and Forza Italia; Emma Bonino and +Europa (+Europe); Luigi Di Maio and Movimento 5 Stelle (Five Stars Movement); Pietro Grasso and Liberi e Uguali (Free and Equal); Giorgia Meloni and Fratelli d'Italia (Brothers of Italy); Matteo Renzi and Partito Democratico (Democratic Party); Matteo Salvini and Lega – Salvini Premier (League - Salvini Premier).

The timelines of the leaders and parties were downloaded[4] through Twitter Rest API and Facebook Graph API, from 2 January 2018 to 3 March 2018. In total we collected 7,673 tweets and 8,940 posts. The indicators were operationalized both with metadata gathering by Twitter and Facebook APIs and with some text parsing tools using the R software.

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[4] See link: http://www.policom.online.

2.1. Social Media Habits Dimensions

2.1.a. Communicative Strategies

Political actors still use social network sites mainly for broadcasting messages, following a top-down communication model. The pursued strategy of maximizing the visibility of both the leader and the party in the public debate has three main goals:

1. To promote the leader's or party's image through (re)branding activities and self-promotion actions;
2. To influence media coverage through the over-production of self-generated content then made available to journalists and taking advantage of the rapidity and voracity of the digital information system, due to media hybridization;
3. To foster direct communication with the audience and voters.

In the light of the foregoing, the first communication strategy that should be considered is productivity, namely each account flow and coverage capacity. Indeed, according to the broadcast communication rule, the greater the communication flow, the greater will be the available potential of visibility. Table 1 shows the specific indicator used for the analysis.

Table 1. Communicative Strategies: broadcast (productivity indicators)

Twitter Indicators	Facebook Indicators
1. frequency: daily average of produced tweets during the analysed time period.	**1. frequency:** daily average of produced posts during the analysed time period.

Table 2. Communicative Strategies: conversational (interactivity indicators)

Twitter Indicators	Facebook Indicators
1. mentions done: percentage of tweets with a mention out of the total number of produced tweets during the time period considered **2. replies done:** percentage of replies out of the total number of produced tweets during the time period considered **3. retweets done:** percentage of retweets out of the total number of produced tweets during the time period considered	**1. tags done:** percentage of posts with a tag out of the total number of produced posts during the time period considered **2. comments done:** percentage of replies to comments out of the total number of produced posts during the time period considered [percentage of comments made by the account to its posts]

The analysis considers another important strategy, the conversational one. This is pursued through the interaction practices supported by the leaders' and parties' Twitter accounts and Facebook pages. As shown in Table 2, the degree of interaction is measured by the propensity to mention, reply, and especially on Twitter, to retweet. While retweets could be seen as a simple act of resharing content generated by others, they offer the opportunity to engage new users in a discussion thread, contributing to creating 'a

conversational ecology in which conversations are composed of a public interplay of voices that give rise to an emotional sense of shared conversational context' (boyd, Golder and Lotan 2010: 1). This indicates a greater inclination towards dialogue and including other users in the communication flow.

Therefore, if at a first level a tag mostly measures the propensity of the political actor to directly interact with another political actor or an influencer in any respect, the number of comments made is an indicator, instead, of the tendency to interact with users. This allows the candidate's style to be positioned according to the broadcast vs conversational polarization.

It should be pointed out, however, that often the interactivity strategies are functional to, and not an alternative for, the predominantly broadcast use of the social network during electoral campaigns. Indeed, historically speaking, the politicians' recourse to web-based interactions has mainly aimed to build a shareholders' interaction rather than a real one with users. In other words, the goal has been to create 'an illusion of face-to face relationship' (Stromer-Galley 2014: 91), because of both a widespread distrust towards the process outcome, and the objective difficulty of operatively managing a large-scale real interaction with users in an efficient and effective way.

2.1.b. Skilfulness

Skilfulness reflects the degree of the politicians' communication expertise in managing the structure flow on Twitter and Facebook. Certainly, the communication format is an element of major importance for effective communication. It is the outcome of the organization of contents, the style through which they are expressed, the emphasis and relevance given to certain elements, and the communicative grammar of the medium (Altheide and Snow 1979). In other words, skilfulness measures the complexity degree of the communicative syntax. The following table (Table 3) specifies the indicators which measure the skilfulness strategy, such as the resort to hashtags and hyperlinks, explaining the characteristics of each platform.

Table 3. Skilfulness indicators

Twitter Indicators	Facebook Indicators
1. hashtags: Percentage of tweets with a hashtag out of the total of tweets produced during the time period considered **2. links:** percentage of tweets with a link out of the total of tweets produced during the time period considered (over 280K) **3. photos:** percentage of tweets with an image out of the total of tweets produced during the time period considered.	**1. hashtags:** Percentage of posts with a hashtag out of the total number produced during the time period considered (ad hoc publics) **2. links:** percentage of posts with a link out of the total number produced during the time period considered **3. photos:** percentage of posts with an image out of the total number produced during the time period considered **4. videos:** percentage of posts with a video out of the total number produced during the time period considered

Hashtags on Twitter, as a matter of fact, offer different functions. They emphasize a particular content, making it searchable on the information flow of the platform (Bruns and Burgess 2012). They can also set the agenda on specific arguments (Small 2011), allowing political actors to monitor and manage the communication flow indexed by a '#', an efficient tool for audience enlargement (Segerberg and Bennett 2011). Lastly, hashtags enable the creation of ad hoc communities (Bruns and Burgess 2012), overcoming the limit of one's own network of followers.

On Facebook, instead, hashtags play a marginal role, even if they technically offer, especially on public pages, almost the same functions as those on Twitter, such as thematization, post searchability in the information flow, and cross-networking, among other functions. Verifying their use is one of the aims of the monitoring activities, as it would represent a significant case of hybridization between the two most important social platforms.

The use of hyperlinks, on the other hand, makes the flow structure even more complex. They allow users to exceed the 180-characters limit (240 nowadays) (Boyd, Golder and Lotan 2010), to share existing content (Zhao and Rosson 2009), and to complete the message with additional text. Furthermore, photo and video contribute to increasing audience engagement and interactions, thus giving the content more visibility due to the algorithm that hierarchizes the timeline news (Wang 2016).

2.1.c. Engagement

Engagement is undoubtedly the most interesting analytical dimension in the digital campaigning context. This is determined according to its potential for activating online supporters, as necessary as they are difficult to obtain, in fact, especially for parties (Greffet and Wojcik 2017; Lilleker 2016). The strategic use of online engagement represents the first step towards hybrid campaigning as the activation of online supporters is a key condition for offline activation. This network building is fundamental for hybrid electoral campaigns, which are based on the 'creation, cultivation, and maintenance of ties with supporters that staffers could mobilize for collective social and symbolic action' (Kreiss 2012:10).

For example, retweets (on Twitter) and shares (on Facebook) enhance the political actors' capacity to reach a secondary audience. Indeed, this process allows a specific account or page to communicate with a public beyond its number of followers (primary audience). This is crucial for the diffusion of the political message, and consistent with studies which have analysed the relationship between the number of followers and influence on political attitudes and behaviour (Bond *et al.* 2012; Cha *et al.* 2010; Zhang *et al.* 2009). Hence, the retweet and share rates are necessary for measuring the overall efficacy of the communication strategies (tab. 4).

Moreover, the ability of a Facebook page to prompt comments and interactions in general is a key element in increasing content visibility, apart from the number of fans. In fact, the Facebook news feed gives visibility to those posts that have comments from a user on a friend's[5] timeline.

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[5] See link: https://www.facebook.com/help/327131014036297/.

Table 4. Engagement indicators

Twitter Indicators	Facebook Indicators
1. retweets received: average of received retweets out of the total number of produced posts during the time period considered. **2. likes received:** average of received favourites out of the total number of produced posts during the time period considered.	**1. comments received:** average of comments received out of the total number of produced posts during the time period considered **2. likes received:** average of likes received out of the total number of produced posts during the time period considered **3. shares received:** average of shares received out of the total number of produced posts during the time period considered

3. Twitter Habits during 2018 campaign

All the main Italian political leaders and their parties had active accounts on Twitter, which were opened before the 2018 general elections. The two new political formations – Liberi e Uguali and +Europa – are obvious exceptions, as both opened their profiles at the end of 2017. These 2018 general elections also marked the debut of Silvio Berlusconi's official Twitter account. The late landing could be the reason for the low number of followers of the latest arrivals. This was probably remedied by the enhancing of productivity (using a broadcast strategy) during the campaign.

The *broadcast strategy* managed by political actors on Twitter was verified through two indicators: the average of the original tweets produced, and the average of the total activity given by the sum of tweets, retweets and replies. The first is a measure of the strategic investment in communication built *ad hoc* for its followers; the second is an indicator of the 'coverage' of the online presence.

Except for Matteo Salvini and Silvio Berlusconi, higher frequencies and higher activities seem to be part of the strategic communicative style of parties, while the leaders show lower levels of productivity.

Regarding the interactivity dimension (*conversational strategy*), fringe parties and their leaders seem to be more inclined to involve other users in the discussion. This is the case of Pietro Grasso, Liberi e Uguali, Emma Bonino, and Più Europa, as well as Forza Italia.

With respect to Replies, these are generally very few in number, with the exception of two of the centre-right parties: Lega - Salvini Premier (32.3%) and Forza Italia (65.8%). The FI data appears particularly interesting, because it prefigures the use of tactics that are significantly different from the others. This aspect needs further investigation. Finally, the Movimento 5 Stelle and the Partito Democratico are the parties most inclined to act on their strategy on Twitter through the practice of retweeting content produced by other accounts.

In relation to *skilfulness,* defined as a dimension of reinforcement in the construction of the message through a more informed use of platform features, the data shows that about three fourths of the posts by Giorgia Meloni, Silvio Berlusconi, Matteo Salvini, Matteo Renzi and +Europa contain at least one hashtag. More than 50% of tweets by the

Movimento 5 Stelle, Luigi Di Maio, Fratelli d'Italia and Lega - Salvini Premier contain a hyperlink. This practice of adding a link to an external web page is usually employed to exceed the textual limits imposed by the platform[6]. Furthermore, it represents an opportunity for self-promotion, driving traffic into other platforms (for example from Twitter to Facebook and vice versa) or advertising participation in TV programmes, radio, newspaper interviews, etc.

Giorgia Meloni, Movimento 5 Stelle, Partito Democratico and Fratelli d'Italia included a photo in more than half of their posts, usually portraying the leader participating in a television broadcast or speaking with ordinary people during a rally.

The last analytical dimension considered in this research is the *engagement* capability of Twitter users. This competence is mainly expressed through retweet (RT) and likes (favourites) that each tweet on the profile obtained through its strategic game. The political actors who most effectively created engagement were Luigi Di Maio, with over 500 RT for each tweet; followed by Matteo Renzi, with over 370 RT and the Movimento 5 Stelle with over 230 RT. Compared to the number of likes, the positions in the table of Renzi and Di Maio are reversed: over 1,300 favourites for the former and 1,150 for the latter.

Table 5. Twitter habits of Italian political leaders and parties from 02.01.2018 to 03.03.2018.

Account	Productivity (Broadcast)	Interactivity (Conversational)			Skilfulness			Engagement	
	Frequency	v.% mentions	v.% reply	v.% rt	v.% #	v.% URL	v.% Photo	Mean RT	Mean Likes
Silvio Berlusconi	19.0	21.5	1.1	1.6	81.5	4.5	45.5	33.5	88.4
Emma Bonino	2.9	85.8	1.3	53.1	68.9	29.0	5.5	80.5	255.8
Luigi Di Maio	1.6	24.5	0.0	52.2	27.6	77.6	33.7	543.4	1152.3
Pietro Grasso	1.4	53.3	2.3	47.4	39.1	47.8	47.8	175.8	498.4
Giorgia Meloni	3.0	30.0	5.6	13.4	75.5	19.0	61.5	179.6	596.4
Matteo Renzi	2.7	7.8	0.9	22.1	91.6	44.0	28.3	374.2	1302.9
Matteo Salvini	18.8	24.4	1.1	3.2	81.8	24.3	46.2	128.2	435.2
Forza Italia	0.8	98.9	65.8	33.5	54.3	11.3	13.1	16.3	1.1
Più Europa	6.7	71.5	1.1	2.3	97.2	20.1	47.4	38.3	104.4
M5S	2.2	38.3	0.2	72.4	51.8	59.6	67.4	236.5	424.5
Liberi e Uguali	9.1	58.3	1.6	58.2	44.7	34.0	44.9	36.0	75.3
Fratelli d'Italia	13.0	5.8	0.1	5.0	7.1	92.9	94.8	7.9	18.6
PD	4.6	48.5	0.3	82.0	38.4	46.5	75.4	113.6	230.6
Lega	36.4	32.3	32.3	0.0	9.3	98.8	0.0	7.0	14.0
Total	**21.7**	**42.9**	**8.1**	**31.9**	**54.9**	**43.5**	**43.7**	**140.8**	**371.3**

4. Facebook Habits during 2018 Election

The Facebook pages of Italian parties and leaders have a rather heterogeneous number of fans. In general, the leaders' pages have larger audiences than those of the parties, with the exception of Forza Italia which has close to two million likes preceded only by Matteo Salvini who has exceeded the threshold of two million fans.

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[6] At the beginning the textual limitation imposed by the platform was 140 characters, today 280.

The analytical dimension of *productivity (broadcast strategy)* is characterized by the high frequency of the Lega - Salvini Premier party with around 60 posts per day. The other parties published fewer than 16 posts per day. Among the leaders, however, the most active in terms of frequency were Salvini, Di Maio and Meloni with an activity rate of over 10 posts per day.

Interactivity (conversational strategy) is a characteristic feature of Pietro Grasso's communication strategy. In almost 60% of his posts there was at least one mention and his response rate to comments was 72%.

With regard to platform use skills *(skilfulness)*, the syntax of posts is a good indicator of the heterogeneity of formats that is presented to the public. Matteo Salvini and +Europa use hashtags in about half of their posts. Hashtags are a typical Twitter format which, due to the effects of hybridization between platforms, has been imported into Facebook, albeit with little success.

Fratelli d'Italia uses at least one hyperlink in over 80% of their posts. This is a much more intensive use of this syntax than its competitors. In fact, the League, which uses the second largest number of hyperlinks, includes links in just 30% of its posts. The use of images is quite widespread among the political actors' Facebook pages. More than half of the posts of +Europa, Silvio Berlusconi, Forza Italia, Partito Democratico, Lega - Salvini Premier and Liberi e Uguali contain at least one. The recourse to use images (photos, but also infographics and postcards) is a significant indicator of technical expertise, because images offer a better chance of engaging the audience than just using written text. The use of videos is also quite widespread: Matteo Salvini, Movimento 5 Stelle and Forza Italia publish them in over 40% of their posts.

Table 6. Facebook habits of Italian political leaders and parties from 02.01.2018 to 03.03.2018

Page Name	Productivity (Broadcast) frequency	Interactivity (Conversational) v.% mention	v.% reply	Skilfulness v.% #	v.% URL	v.% photo	v.% video	Engagement Mean comments	Mean likes	Mean share
Silvio Berlusconi	3.3	55.6	0.0	12.7	3.1	62.2	34.7	1213.8	3738.6	648.3
Emma Bonino	2.0	34.4	0.0	7.2	25.4	47.5	21.3	25.9	267.2	32.0
Luigi Di Maio	11.2	23.9	4.9	5.4	28.8	31.1	36.9	1545.2	7513.2	4062.8
Pietro Grasso	1.4	59.3	72.0	1.1	17.3	39.5	22.2	30.4	3493.8	772.5
Giorgia Meloni	8.7	7.1	19.6	35.2	14.5	39.2	32.1	117.3	3901.5	954.0
Matteo Renzi	2.5	7.9	20.0	28.4	7.2	28.3	38.8	639.3	8470.7	1530.4
Matteo Salvini	11.8	1.1	1.2	55.5	16.9	31.2	46.6	527.5	8571.2	2208.9
Forza Italia	6.4	2.6	33.3	2.5	2.3	55.8	41.4	22.7	633.6	206.1
Più Europa	3.8	42.4	11.6	45.2	7.4	63.8	24.0	70.3	1700.3	308.3
M 5 Stelle	15.6	20.7	0.1	4.4	32.5	23.9	43.2	199.4	2354.1	1697.9
Liberi e Uguali	3.8	23.0	24.2	2.6	20.7	49.6	25.7	236.8	435.5	216.6
Fratelli d'Italia	12.0	1.0	0.0	4.6	82.9	7.8	9.2	151.8	374.5	68.9
PD	6.7	47.1	61.0	11.3	16.1	54.6	25.4	2596.8	1380.5	587.5
Lega	58.8	0.4	0.1	37.8	37.6	49.7	12.5	1812.1	240.2	68.4
Total	**10.6**	**23.3**	**17.7**	**18.1**	**22.3**	**41.7**	**29.6**	**656.4**	**3078.8**	**954. 5**

Finally, we also consider the last analytical dimension of *engagement* for Facebook. The element of personalization seems to play a key role in the number of likes collected: Matteo Salvini, Matteo Renzi and Luigi Di Maio get an average of around 8,000 Likes for each post. Other leaders also show a favourable engagement performance. Overall, Giorgia Meloni, Silvio Berlusconi and Pietro Grasso have discreet success with over 3,500 likes per post. The only real exception is Emma Bonino, whose Facebook management reaches just 250 likes for each post. As to the average of shares, the situation changes substantially. In addition to Di Maio and Salvini, the Movimento 5 Stelle appears able to generate an important sharing activity from fans in the community.

5. Conclusion

What communicative habits can we then highlight for the political leaders and their parties on Facebook and Twitter?

First of all, we must remark on the prevalence of the broadcast strategy, especially used by centre-right political actors, in line with previous research on the relationship between politics and innovation technologies. Lega is the political actor with the strongest focus on broadcast strategy, both on Twitter and Facebook.

Of particular interest is how the parties' daily mean of production is significantly higher than that of the political leaders. The only exception is Silvio Berlusconi's Twitter account which is more active than that of his party Forza Italia, whose index of productivity is quite low. This suggests a precise functional differentiation between the use of the channels by parties and leaders.

The adoption of a broadcast communicative model by political actors highlights the adhesion of a specific cultural form which is characterized by a one-way, centralized communication flow. The adoption of this model implies the reluctance of the political actor, more or less consciously, to establish a direct relationship with citizens and voters in sharp contrast to the social and conversational nature that distinguishes social media.

In any case, there is no direct correlation between flow capacity and public engagement. For example, on Twitter, Luigi Di Maio is the least productive leader (daily mean 1.6), but he obtains better results with the number of retweets and likes he receives (tweets mean 543.4 RT and 1,152.3 likes). In this regard, numerous studies have shown the importance of the number of retweets collected by the account, as this directly influences the political actor's ability to reach a secondary audience to which he/she would otherwise not have any access (Vaccari and Valeriani 2015).

As for the parties, data on engagement capability seems to show a scenario in which the smaller parties try to manage the account to reduce the communication gap with the larger parties (Gibson and McAllister 2015). However, this strategy seems to generate negative effects. The data shows a normalization of the online presence that reproduces the existing offline gaps in terms of popularity (Margolis and Resnick 2000).

Indeed, a communicative model which is mainly broadcast is characterized by a low response rate to users' comments. In this respect, this electoral campaign on Facebook confirms what has already been observed by different studies regarding the use of social media by political actors: it is a sort of bullhorn simply aimed at self-promotion (Graham *et al*. 2013).

On the contrary, the adoption of a conversation communicative model, besides using the potentialities of the medium, conveys a greater predisposition towards dialogue and an effort to regain a direct relationship with voting citizens (Bentivegna 2015). This last is directly related to the nature of the platforms. Conversational strategies are pursued less on Facebook than on Twitter. A confirmation of this seems to be a shared abandonment of the interactive use of Facebook (the platform of extra-élite relationships), as opposed to Twitter (the platform of intra-élite relationships).

The analysis shows a disposition, by the centre-right and the Movimento 5 Stelle political actors, to adopt a more conversational and interactive strategy, which is a historically rooted characteristic of these actors. Furthermore, a tendency emerges towards a more coherent use of the platforms by some of the parties, namely PD and Liberi e Uguali, and their leaders. For example, Pietro Grasso and Liberi e Uguali show a significant capacity for interaction on Facebook

The Movimento 5 Stelle practices an interactive strategy more on Twitter than on Facebook. This results in increased interactivity in the elitarian communicative Twitter flow, a platform mostly oriented to the diffusion of political opinions (Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan 2013) and characterized by a strong tendency towards polarization (Enli and Skogerbø 2013). As a matter of fact, Facebook is a more generalist social network. The radically interactive Twitter strategy of Forza Italia should be highlighted. Regarding Facebook, the strategies seem to be more balanced between broadcast and interactive. Nonetheless, the functional diversification between leaders' and parties' channels does not seem to be significant.

On average, skilfulness is higher in the channels of the parties rather than in those of the leaders, especially on Twitter. In general, Fratelli d'Italia is the party that presents more articulated grammar, principally on Twitter because of the use of photos (present in 95% of tweets) and links (present in 93% of tweets). Following this party, Movimento 5 Stelle and +Europa, Renzi and PD, are the ones that more systematically use the complex potentials of the platform. For example, +Europa and PD resort more to hashtags and Lega more to links.

Skilfulness on Facebook in mainly linked to the use of photos and links. In the posts by Lega, which present the highest levels of skilfulness among the political actors considered for this study, pictures are present in 42% of its posts. In the posts by +Europa, these elements are present in 64% of the total number of posts. However, consideration should be given to the use of hashtags on Facebook, usually intense but reductive. These are present in almost half of Salvini's posts, in 45% of the ones by +Europa, 35% of the posts produced by Meloni, and 28% by Renzi. This means that the use of hashtags on Facebook is spreading, probably because they are useful to define the priority of a particular issue. This represents, evidently, a substantial trace of hybridization between the main social platforms for electoral communication.

Finally, we monitored the political actors' engagement capacity, which directly affects the opportunities to spread the content of the message beyond their circle of followers on Facebook and Twitter. In general, we have observed that a more skilful use of the platforms, combined with a conversational communication strategy, seems to produce more engaging outcomes for the message of both the political leaders and parties. This last is notably true for the leaders' profiles and pages which tend to be more

engaging than those of the parties. Our monitoring corroborates a leader-centrism effect of communication on social media, specifically as it regards this fundamental dimension of electoral communication.

Thus, Luigi Di Maio and Matteo Renzi are the most engaging political leaders on Twitter, followed by Meloni, Grasso, and Salvini. Below the average we then find Bonino and Berlusconi. On Facebook, Di Maio confirms his primacy over Salvini, who prefers generating engagement on the more generalist extra-élite relationship platform. Lastly, Renzi presents an above-average engagement capacity on Facebook, while Bonino's engagement is much more about content. Around the average we find the rest of the political leaders: Meloni, Berlusconi, and Grasso. Regarding the political parties, the only one with an engagement capacity above the average is the Movimento 5 Stelle, both on Twitter and Facebook.

In conclusion, this monitoring aimed to provide a picture, as complete as possible, of the social media habits of political leaders and their parties during the 2018 Italian general elections. This is only the first interpretative step of a wider research programme on the hubs of the hybrid campaign, which aims to explain the most recent developments in the Italian political context.

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The likeability of populism on social media in the 2018 Italian general election

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Abstract

This article focuses on the controlled communication that the main Italian political leaders – Silvio Berlusconi, Luigi Di Maio, Pietro Grasso, Giorgia Meloni, Matteo Renzi, Matteo Salvini – published on their Facebook profiles during a period of four weeks before election day. Taking the 2018 Italian general election campaign as an illustration, this article aims to clarify whether and to what extent populist communication on Facebook differs from non-populist communication in terms of volume and likes received. Facebook was selected as the source, since digital politics and social media are becoming increasingly relevant for both political parties and citizens. The article shows that, in general, messages containing populist claims get more 'likes' compared to non-populist messages. However, only messages containing references to immigrants – namely complete and excluding populism – appear to be significantly correlated with the number of likes.

1. Introduction

The 2018 general election was thematised as a clash between antithetical conceptions of politics. It was structured around a series of antithetical dimensions: new against old politics, people against the elites, responsible against irresponsible candidates, and honest ones against the unacceptable. The election campaign – involving a divided centre-left, a compact centre-right, and the 5 Star Movement (M5S) – was defined by all kinds of journalists and commentators as the ugliest ever, centred on fake news, insults and false promises.[1] It also reached high levels of conflict between the incumbent Matteo Renzi, leader of the Partito Democratico (Democratic Party, PD) and the two most active competitors: Luigi Di Maio, political leader of the M5S, and Matteo Salvini, leader of the Lega Nord (Northern League, LN).

The election results returned a deeply changed political balance, in which, despite the fact that forming a government remains a big issue, winners and losers are clear. Undoubtedly to be counted among the winners is the M5S, whose result certifies both the growing attraction of its proposals and a deep discontent with the performance of traditional parties. The growth of the right, that the polls had recorded both in terms of voting intentions and increasing hostility towards migrants (Demos & Pi 2018), has rewarded

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[1] 'Elezioni 2018, la campagna più brutta della storia. Anche i talk show ridotti a monologhi', *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, 19 February 2018; 'Una campagna elettorale ferma a 70 anni fa', *Il Giornale*, 11 February 2018; Enrico Mentana: 'Questa è la più brutta campagna elettorale', *L'Aria che tira*, 2 March 2018.

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the LN at the expense of more moderate allies, such as Forza Italia (Go Italy, FI) and more radical ones, such as Fratelli d'Italia (Brothers of Italy, FdI). Finally, the decline of Renzi and PD approval attests that the former mayor of Florence failed not only to convince Italians during his term but also to mobilize his electorate during the election campaign (Emanuele 2018).

Within this big picture, this article aims to study an aspect which has been poorly empirically analysed so far, namely the use of a populist style of communication by political leaders on social media. As is well known, social media have changed the way politicians communicate with and relate to their constituencies during election campaigns and routine periods alike. In particular, it has been observed that they provide a powerful tool for populists to mobilise their followers, in addition to the traditional channels of political communication and mainstream media (Kriesi 2014: 367). If, in the 1990s, populist parties obtained visibility thanks mainly to tabloid media coverage (Mazzoleni 2003), the advent and widespread diffusion of social media platforms (such as Twitter and Facebook) among citizens has now provided them with a way to communicate directly and more spontaneously with their audience (Bartlett 2014). Despite the growing importance of social media, few studies have examined the features of online populist communication and addressed the question of how to assess the success of online posts (Bobba 2018; Ernst et al. 2017).

This study focused on the controlled communication that the main leaders published on their Facebook profiles during a period of four weeks before the election day. The material collected was analysed for content to assess the presence of populist elements. Facebook was selected as the source, since digital politics and social media are becoming increasingly relevant for both political parties and citizens: in 2017, Italy had 73% of Internet penetration and 34,000,000 (56.1%) Facebook users (Digital in Italia 2018).

The structure of the article is as follows: in the next section, the key elements of populist discourse are discussed. The second section presents the research questions and methodology, while the third presents the results. The article shows that not all messages containing populist claims get more 'likes' compared to non-populist messages. Though populist posts against elites or immigrants are the largest ones, only messages containing references to this second issue – namely complete and excluding populism – are significantly correlated with the number of likes.

2. The key elements of populism

Populism is a contentious concept. Generally, scholars agree on a minimal definition. Populist discourse relies on the juxtaposition of a 'good people' with a series of 'bad elites'. Moreover, in the case of right-wing populists, the people's values, their identities and rights are considered to be endangered not only by the elites but also by the action of a series of 'others' that would receive preferential treatment by the elites (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2015; Kriesi 2014; Mudde 2007, 2014; Taggart 2000; Canovan 1999). The key elements of populist discourse are thus 'the people', 'the elites' and 'the others'.

Usually, populists in Western democracies present themselves as the 'real' democrats, the only ones able to denounce what went wrong, who is to blame, and what is to be done to reverse the situation (Betz and Johnson 2004: 323). In their storytelling,

democracy should reflect the will of the people, but it has been usurped and exploited by the 'elites'. The elites and 'others' (namely non-elites who are also considered as not part of 'the people') are held responsible for the difficult situation in which the people find themselves. 'The people' must express their voice and power through the populist leader and party.

Populism is centred on the idea of 'the pure people' (Mudde 2004: 544), a homogeneous and virtuous community, a place where, as Zygmunt Bauman (2001: 12) observes, 'it is crystal-clear who is ''one of us'' and who is not, there is no muddle and no cause for confusion'. The people are – or should be – united and sovereign. Potential divisions are caused by political, intellectual and media elites (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008: 5-6; Taggart 2000: 92). For populists, politics is therefore a direct and non-mediated expression of the general will of the people (Mudde 2004: 544).

Populism relies on a 'Manichean outlook' that combines the positive valorisation of the people with the denigration of their enemies, namely the elites and the 'others' (Panizza 2005: 16-17). The elites are generally accused of being incompetent and self-interested when not actually conspiring against the people and seeking to undermine democracy. They comprise political, media, financial, judicial and intellectual elites. The identity of 'the others' is country dependent but, for right-wing populists in Europe, it usually includes out-groups such as immigrants, homosexuals, Roma communities and other specific social categories that are held not to be 'of the people'.

Empirical evidence has also revealed that populist parties have been favoured by the proliferation of social media, and especially by the effective use that populist actors have made of these new platforms. This has made populist messages central to the public debate as well as in the daily life of ordinary citizens (Engesser et al. 2016; Aalberg et al. 2016). Moreover, candidates use populist style not only as a form of communication but also as a mobilization resource to effectively reach their constituencies (Roncarolo 2017).

As regards our case study, it is worth noting that Italy has experienced innovative and durable forms of populism compared to other European countries in the last few decades. It has been defined, among others, as the 'promised land' (Tarchi 2015), an 'enduring market' (Bobba and McDonnell 2015) and a 'breeding ground' for populism (Bobba and Legnante 2016). The emergence of the LN in the late 1980s and the unexpected performance of Silvio Berlusconi at the head of Forza Italia (FI, 'Go Italy') in the early 1990s were the first stages of the recent history of populism in Italy. Since 2012, also FdI has reached the right-wing populist field. Finally, the success of the Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S, 'Five Star Movement') since 2013 has expanded the varieties of populism (Caiani and Graziano 2016) to include non-right-wing parties. Some scholars, have also described the Italian situation as characterized by the presence of an 'endemic populism' that overflows from strictly populist precincts into the general political discourse (Bracciale and Mazzoleni 2018).

3. Research questions and methods

In the last few years, the role of the Web in explaining the success of populist parties and movements has been stressed by the literature addressing the study of the new wave of populism in Europe (Bartlett 2014; Kriesi 2014). Recent research has also showed empirically that social media are highly compatible with populist communication (Bobba

2018; Ernst et al. 2017). The underlying concept of these interpretations is that populists can reach a broader range of citizens through social media and thereby are able to increase support for issues that were not so popular previously. As such, a first research question is:

>**RQ1:** *Do leaders of populist parties get more likes than leaders of non-populist parties in their FB communication?*

In addition, moving from populist as the source of communication to the presence of populist contents within a message, a second intertwined question is:

>**RQ2:** *Do populist messages get more likes than non-populist messages on FB?*

Finally, considering that populist posts could stress and combine different aspects related to the key elements of populism – the people, elites, others – the last question is:

>**RQ3:** *Which types of populist message get more likes on FB?*

To tackle these questions, a quantitative content analysis was conducted of the messages posted by the main Italian leaders – Silvio Berlusconi, Luigi Di Maio, Pietro Grasso, Giorgia Meloni, Matteo Renzi, Matteo Salvini – on their official Facebook accounts. All messages posted on these accounts – except for shares, links, images or event announcements without any text – were gathered and analysed for the last four weeks of the election campaign (31 January – 3 March 2018). In total, the sample consisted of 1,459 posts.

As regards our cases we made our selection and classification relying both on the literature and on empirical evidences of the 2017 Chapel Hill expert survey (CHES, see Polk et al. 2017). In the literature, LN is considered as a classical example of radical right populism (Betz 2018) or ethno-regionalist populist party (Spektorowski, 2003). FI has been defined as neoliberal populist (Mudde 2007: 47). M5S, though harder to classify due to its eclectic mix of right- and left-wing policies, presents a populist ideological profile in terms of opposition between the people and the elites (Fabbrini and Lazar 2013). Research focused on FdI as a populist party is scarce so far. However, when studying the Italian political context, some scholars have included it in the populist field (Castelli Gattinara 2017; Mazzoleni and Bracciale 2018).

As regards CHES data, in 2018 for the first time the survey also includes two questions related to the core definition of populism: people-centrism[2] and anti-elitism[3]. Three out of six parties are clearly considered populist by the experts interviewed: LN,

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[2] 'Some political parties take the position that "the people" should have the final say on the most important issues, for example, by voting directly in referendums. At the opposite pole are political parties that believe that elected representatives should make the most important political decisions. Where do the parties fall on this dimension?' Chapel Hill Expert Survey 2017 Codebook: www.chesdata.eu.

[3] 'Next, we would like you to think about the salience of anti-establishment and anti-elite rhetoric for a party. How important was the anti-establishment and anti-elite rhetoric to the parties in their public stance?' Chapel Hill Expert Survey 2017 Codebook: www.chesdata.eu.

M5S, and FdI[4]. On the other side, PD and Movimento Democratico e Progressista (the major party of the left-wing electoral cartel, Liberi e Uguali, included in the survey) scored a low level of populism. Finally, Forza Italia shows an intermediate result.

Combining these two sources of data, we therefore considered as non-populist parties PD and LeU, and as populist parties the other four: LN, M5S, FdI, and FI. For this latter party we are aware that something is probably changing in terms of populist attitudes of the party. Still, we preferred to be conservative by considering FI a populist party.

Two coders content-analysed the messages to assess which posts were or were not populist, by the presence of the three key elements of populist discourse outlined previously: 'elites', 'the people' and 'the others'. An intercoder reliability test was conducted on a subsample of 150 posts (10 per cent of the entire sample) and yielded satisfactory results (Krippendorff's Alpha, KA >0.67). In particular, in the category 'the people' (KA 0.87), we placed references to the 'common man', Italian identities, Christian tradition, made in Italy, etc. The category 'elites' (KA 0.81) contains criticism of blame attribution to politicians, banks, the media, the judicial system, the EU, etc. Finally, in the category 'others' (KA 0.85) was coded criticism of or blame attribution to immigrants, Roma communities, Muslims, homosexuals and welfare recipients.

Relying on the idea that on social media 'populism manifested itself in a fragmented form' and that this fragmentation 'could be an empirical expression of populism's ''thin'' nature and ''inherent incompleteness''' (Engesser et al. 2017: 1121-1122), all the posts containing at least one reference to the aforementioned key elements have been considered as an expression of populism. Following the typology of populist discourse by Jagers and Walgrave (2007), the three key elements were then combined in order to identify different types of populist messages:

> COMPLETE POPULISM: posts containing references to all three key elements;
> EMPTY POPULISM: posts containing only references to 'the people';
> EXCLUDING POPULISM: posts containing references to 'the others' and posts containing references to 'the people' and 'the others';
> ANTI-ELITIST POPULISM: posts containing references to 'the elites and posts containing references to 'the people' and 'the elites';
> CONTENTIOUS POPULISM: posts containing references to 'the elites' and 'the others'.

Complete and empty populism are operationalized as in Jagers and Walgrave: in the first case, each post including all the key elements together were coded, while in the second one, those posts referring only to 'the people' were coded. As regards excluding and anti-elitist populism, besides considering the references to 'the elites' and 'the others' in a given post, the combination of these with 'the people' is also taken into account. Finally, contentious populism is a combination that highlights the aggressive and contentious nature of messages that are at the same time against both 'the elites' and 'the others'. A typical example consists in the blaming of immigrants by attributing

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[4] The average score of people-centrism and anti-elitism items (1-10 scale) is 9,88 for the M5S, 7.84 for the LN, 6.65 for FdI, 3.68 for FI, 2,61 for PD, and 2,14 for Movimento Democratico e Progressista, the major party of the left-wing electoral cartel, LeU, included in the survey.

responsibility to some kind of elite, such as politics, international finance, or the media. Since it is a combination of 'the elites' and 'the others', only right-wing populists could publish this type of claim.

4. Findings

Table 1 shows the number of posts published by leaders of populist and non-populist parties as well as the number of likes they received. As mentioned, Berlusconi, Di Maio, Meloni, and Salvini have been considered as leaders of populist parties, while Grasso and Renzi as leaders of non-populist parties. These data allow us to provide an initial response to RQ1.

Leaders of populist parties appear more active and their posts more liked: on average, populists publish 4.5 times more posts than non-populists, while they receive about 1,000 likes more for each post. Looking deeper into the data, Berlusconi stands out for being the least active and popular, while Salvini published more posts (around 15 per day), and Di Maio received more likes (9,446). Among non-populist leaders, on the one hand, Grasso appears to be little focused on social media for the election campaign, while on the other hand, Renzi – whose favourite medium is Twitter – gets a considerable amount of likes when compared to Di Maio and Salvini. The figure of the PD leader shows that likeability is dependent on several factors linked not only to the content, but also to the type of message (text, video, image, etc.), to the source that publishes a post, and to the frames and/or emotions the post contains. Nonetheless, populist contents, in this particular age, are certainly among those elements capable of increasing the communication success of a party/leader on social media.

Table 1. Activity and likeability of leaders of populist and non-populist parties on FB

	N	Likes (Mean)	Median	FB Fans (N)
Leaders of populist parties (Mean)	327	6,252	4,197	
Berlusconi	136	2,826	1,740	1,061,607
Di Maio	329	9,446	5,595	1,621,552
Meloni	362	3,828	1,972	834,740
Salvini	482	8,909	6,672	2,213,012
Leaders of non-populist parties (Mean)	75	5,376	3,874	
Grasso	55	3,507	2,864	144,080
Renzi	95	7,244	4,667	1,124,102
Total	**1,459**	**6,890**	**4,159**	

As regards the populist content of the message, Figure 1 and Table 2 show that populist postings received more likes than non-populist ones almost continuously during the campaign. The general trend highlights three peaks linked to the particular success of three individual posts. On 6 February, Salvini published a video containing his speech to the European Parliament against the EU on the subject of immigration, achieving 74,000 likes. Di Maio is instead the author of the other two posts that move the average of likes upwards. The first one was posted on 13 February and concerns the so-called

'reimbursement scandal' involving the M5S (130,297). M5S requires its MPs to donate a part of their salary to a fund which helps small enterprises. However, some MPS have made only fake bank transfers instead of actually donating money. Di Maio in this post promises to expel from the party all those who have not been honest. The second very popular message was posted on 2 March. It contains an appeal to vote, namely a letter entitled 'Despite everything, we will change Italy' that achieved 107,612 likes.

Figure 1. Trend of populist and non-populist messages in the last four weeks before election day (average number of likes)
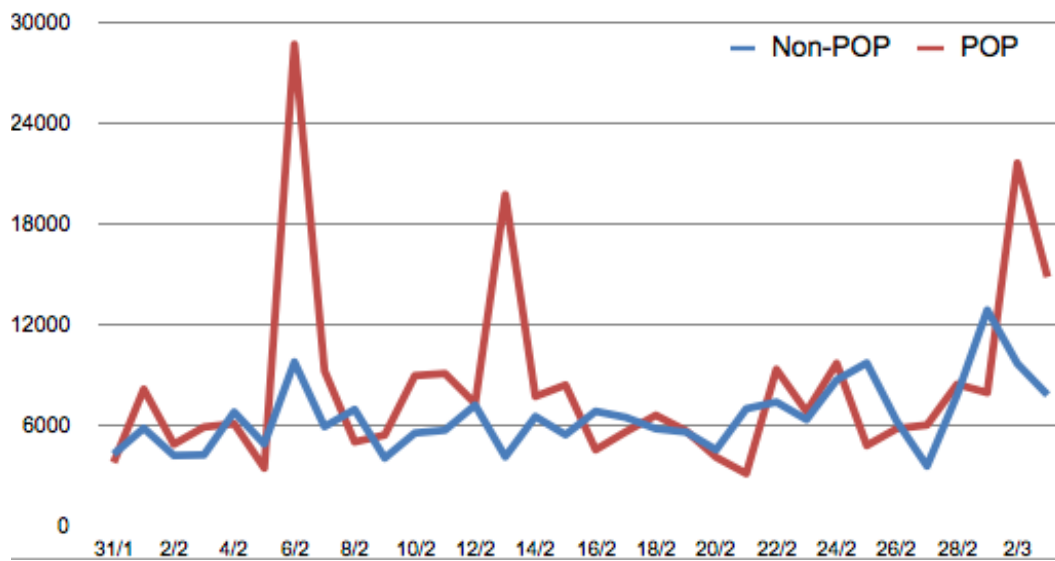
Table 2 shows the relevance of populist contents within the leaders' FB communication. The data allow us to clearly identify two groups. On the one hand, Salvini, Meloni and Di Maio show a relevant percentage of populist messages (between 20.1% of the M5S leader and 30.1% of the FdI leader). On the other hand, Renzi, Grasso and (contrary to the literature) Berlusconi, show percentages no higher than 11.6%. Not surprisingly, the messages of populist parties leaders also achieve a greater number of likes when compared with their respective non-populist messages as well as with the messages of non-populist party leaders.

Table 2. Activity and likeability of leaders of populist and non-populist parties on FB

	Non-populist					
	% (N)	**Likes (Mean)**	**Std. Dev.**	**Min**	**Max**	**Median**
Berlusconi	91.9 (125)	2,812	3,333	373	21,920	1,633
Di Maio	79.9 (263)	9,085	12,267	733	118,806	5,779
Grasso	92.7 (51)	3,603	2,955	272	15,959	2,929
Meloni	69.9 (253)	3,815	6,634	147	79,719	2,026
Renzi	88.4 (84)	7,139	7,277	724	32,039	4,636
Salvini	77.6 (374)	8,583	7,859	407	73,702	6,493
Total	**78.8 (1,150)**	**6,695**	**8,706**	**147**	**118,806**	**4,068**

		Populist				
	% (N)	**Likes (Mean)**	**Std. Dev.**	**Min**	**Max**	**Median**
Berlusconi	8.1 (11)	2,986	2,098	532	8,772	2,508
Di Maio	20.1 (66)	10,881	20,711	909	130,297	4,732
Grasso	7.3 (4)	2,286	1,704	1,240	4,814	1,545
Meloni	30.1 (109)	3,858	6,025	360	41,299	1,857
Renzi	11.6 (11)	8,044	6,784	2,318	21,405	5,531
Salvini	22.4 (108)	10,038	9,346	1,397	74,060	7,435
Total	**21.2 (309)**	**7,616**	**12,073**	**360**	**130,297**	**4,451**

Turning to the type of populist message, Table 3 shows that the more frequent type is excluding populism (101 posts), closely followed by anti-elitist (92). On the contrary, complete (15) and contentious populism (32) are the least frequent types. In terms of likes received, complete populism, though the least frequent type, obtained the highest level of likes (11,223), while its opposite, empty populism, the lowest level (5,209).

Table 3. Types of populism published by the main Italian political leaders on FB

	% (N)	**Likes (Mean)**	**Std. Dev.**	**Min**	**Max**	**Median**
Non Populist	**1,150**	**6,695**	**8,706**	**147**	**118,806**	**4,068**
Populist	**309**	**8,132**	**10,398**	**360**	**130,297**	**4,451**
Empty	72	5,326	6,001	533	30,233	3,494
Complete	15	11,223	11,915	1,088	47,810	7,601
Excluding	98	8,447	14,409	532	130,297	5,280
Anti-Elitist	92	7,874	14,326	360	107,612	3,754
Contentious	32	7,787	5,339	494	23,742	6,733

Table 4. Types of populism published by Salvini, Di Maio, and Renzi on FB

	Salvini			Di Maio			Renzi		
	AVG Likes	**Median**	**N**	**AVG Likes**	**Median**	**N**	**AVG Likes**	**Median**	**N**
Non Populist	8,583	6,493	374	9,085	5,779	263	7,139	4,636	84
Populist	10,038	7,435	108	10,881	4,732	66	8,044	5,531	11
Empty	7,891	5,315	22	8,070	4,127	11	6,749	4,605	9
Complete	16,602	12,503	8	-	-	0	-	-	0
Excluding	10,172	8,286	38	13,303	4,185	16	-	-	0
Anti-Elitist	10,072	5,560	20	10,681	5,448	39	13,873	13,873	2
Contentious	9,486	8,797	20	-	-	0	-	-	0

The likeability of the most popular leaders – Salvini, Di Maio, and Renzi – seems to be differently linked to populism. Table 4 clearly shows that all these leaders improved their results when they published populist posts: on average more than a thousand likes for Renzi, about 1,500 for Salvini and almost 1,800 for Di Maio. Still, the populist content of these posts differs greatly.

On the one hand, as mentioned, Renzi makes little use of populist rhetoric and when he does so, he mainly posts appeals to the people (9 posts out of 11). These are the types of claim defined by Jagers and Walgrave (2007) as empty populism typical of all parties' election campaigning. The last two messages in the sample contain instead anti-elitist claims that refer to a Manichean view of politics. What is striking about these few populist posts is that the empty populism ones receive few likes (on average 6,749), while anti-elitist ones double the result (13,873). On the other hand, Salvini and Di Maio – besides being among those who post more populist contents – are the two leaders that benefited more in term of likes from this type of communication. Salvini especially gets likes in response to complete, anti-elitist and excluding populism, while only these last two types are relevant in the communication of Di Maio. As in the case of Renzi, here again a similar pattern is found, suggesting that heated and contentious communication probably produces more engagement with users on Facebook.

Table 5. Users engagement with different types of populist posts on Facebook

	B	SE		
Empty populism	-1,053.34	1,114.41		
Complete populism	4,991.26*	2,385.84		
Excluding populism	2,037.57*	973.67		
Anti-elitist populism	746.21	999.58		
Contentious populism	1,082.75	1,653.45		
Salvini	1,309.47	1,033.54		
Di Maio	1.965,21▪	1,071.78		
Meloni	-3,844.76***	1,063.95		
Berlusconi	-4,524.66***	1,223.72		
Grasso	-3,842.29*	1,550.10		
Renzi	(omitted)			
(constant)	7,328.05***	943.90	N = 1459	R^2 = 0.085

Note OLS regressions. Dependent variable: Likes count. Entries are non-standardized B-coefficients and standard errors
***$p < 0.001$, **$p < 0.01$, *$p < 0.05$ ▪$p < 0.1$

A thorough look at the different types of populism through an Ordinary Least Square (OLS) regression model (Table 5) offers some evidence of this suggestion. Three main features stand out. First, complete populism – although the least frequent type – significantly affects the number of likes: messages containing references to the people, elites, and the others together gained around 5,000 'likes' compared to other messages. Second, also a simple reference to immigrants, minorities, welfare recipients – namely excluding populism – contributes to the explanation of likeability, even though it appears to be less relevant in terms of magnitude of the correlation coefficient compared to complete populism. Third,

all the other types of populism – empty, contentious, and anti-elitist – are not significantly correlated with the likeability of a given post, meaning that the amount of likes they receive is independent from populism. In addition, as regards the leaders, Di Maio is the only one who is significantly and positively correlated to the number of likes: a post published by the leader of the M5S received around 2,000 likes more than Renzi (reference category) regardless of its – populist or not-populist – content.

5. Conclusions

A recent strand of research has highlighted social media as being a fertile ground for populist actors (Engesser et al. 2017). Taking the 2018 Italian general election campaign as an illustration, this article follows this line, aiming to clarify whether and to what extent populist communication on Facebook differs from non-populist communication in terms of volume and likeability. Our findings confirm the existence of different patterns of communication. Indeed, we find evidence that posts containing populist claims get more likes than non-populist ones on Facebook. However, not all populist messages were equally popular over the period analysed. In our sample only complete and excluding populist messages boost the number of likes of a given post. This means that right-wing and M5S leaders put great emphasis on 'the other' and that these messages were also the most popular among their fans on FB. On the contrary, anti-elitism – though relevant in terms of size – does not impact on the likeability of leaders' communication.

In the light of the data presented, an element clearly emerges: in the 2018 Italian general elections the debate was polarized between leaders and parties using populist communication and leaders and parties that did not use it. This was particularly evident on social media but, more in general, this division structured the entire campaign, influencing both media coverage and the action of all political actors.

The adoption by LN, M5S and FdI of populism as a communicative macro-frame pursued a twofold objective. On the one hand, it was used to mobilize the electorate by exalting the opposition Us vs. Them, the people threatened in its integrity, its values and its wealth by the immigrants and the outgoing political class (led by Renzi). On the other hand, it allowed a simplification of the political debate by interpreting everything through a Manichean division between right and wrong, good and bad, honest and corrupt, new and old. The success of this rhetoric and contents imposed on the other parties their agenda and rhythm. This found both the centre-left (PD and LeU), and FI not entirely ready to implement effective countermeasures. The result was an election campaign sparsely articulated in terms of content, but strongly connoted in terms of the use of populist communication that had a polarizing effect on the entire political-media system.

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Challenger's delight: the success of M5S and Lega in the 2018 Italian general election

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Abstract

The results of the 2018 general election were shocking. Although the main competitors were the same as in 2013 (the centre-right coalition, the centre-left coalition, and the Movimento 5 Stelle), great uncertainty surrounded the electoral outcome because of the application of a new electoral system, and polls data indicating the competitiveness of the multiple political formations and the high number of undecided voters. For the first time in Western European history, a successful debutant managed not to lose votes in the subsequent election. In 2013 the Movimento 5 Stelle had actually been the most successful debutant in Western Europe since 1945, and it gained over 7 percentage points, coming close to one third of the votes. At the same time, the Lega (Nord) achieved the best result in its history, with 17.3% of the national votes. Thus, these two challenger parties combined received over 50% of votes, while the two mainstream parties, national wings of the major European Parliament party families, both hit their historical lows, together winning less than a third of the votes. The election resulted in a hung Parliament. The centre-right coalition was first, but with far from a majority of seats. The Movimento 5 Stelle was the most voted party, finishing second, but close to the centre-right. The centre-left was outdistanced. In this article we describe and discuss the 2018 electoral results and their strange, largely unexpected outcome. More specifically, we look at voter turnout and the results of the vote, both at the overall national level and with a geographical breakdown, comparing and contrasting them with Italian electoral history and the 2013 results in particular. Finally, we conclude by analysing survey data and vote shifts between 2013 and 2018 to assess the electoral dynamics behind the results.

1. Introduction

In this article we present the results of the 2018 Italian general election and interpret them by placing them in the context of Italian electoral history and analysing socio-demographic survey data and electoral shifts between 2013 and 2018. In short, we will show the unprecedented success of challenger parties, confirming the extraordinary intensity of the turbulence which has shaken the Italian party system in recent years, and provide some preliminary arguments about how this came to be.

A series of historical events occurred in the election, not just as regards Italian electoral history, but in a Western European comparative perspective. First, the two main challenger parties (Movimento 5 Stelle, M5S, and Lega Nord, LN – now running without the 'Nord' in its symbol) received the majority of the votes and, as a consequence, they eventually appointed the first cabinet in Western Europe to include no national wing of the European Parliament (EP) mainstream party families. Secondly, a successful debutant managed not to lose votes in the subsequent election. Actually, the 2013 M5S has been the single most successful debutant in the whole of Western Europe since the end of WW2, and not only did it manage not to lose votes, it gained over 7 percentage points, coming just short of one third of the votes. At the same time,

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the LN reached the best result in its history, with 17.3% of the national votes while the two mainstream parties (Partito Democratico, PD, and Forza Italia, FI), national wings of the major EP party families, both hit their historical lows and received, combined, fewer votes than the M5S alone.

The election yielded a hung Parliament. Although the centre-right coalition was first, it had nowhere near a majority of seats in either House. The M5S was the most voted party, finishing second, close to the centre-right. The centre-left coalition was outdistanced. As anticipated above, the M5S and the LN would then form a coalition government, after a three-month gestation period.

The article is structured as follows. In the next section we discuss voter turnout and its variations compared to the 2013 election. We then move to the electoral results: we look at vote and seat distribution, for both the Chamber and the Senate. Finally, we present vote shifts in selected Italian cities and survey data on socio-demographics, to assess the electoral dynamics that generated such results. The conclusions follow.

2. The Italian political system from 2013 to 2018

Before entering into a discussion of the results, let us briefly introduce the political context in which they happened, by summarizing the main political developments characterizing Italian politics since the previous general elections. In 2013, the Italian party system suffered a massive earthquake, which wiped out the fragile transition towards a bipolar pattern of competition (D'Alimonte 2013). The most successful debutant party in post-WW2 Western Europe emerged (M5S), and no pre-electoral coalition secured a majority of seats in either Parliament branch, despite the majority bonuses then granted by the electoral law (Pasquino 2007; Renwick, Hanretty and Hine 2009).

Consequences were just as unprecedented. First, there was the first-ever re-election of a President of the Republic, after Parliament had wrapped itself in a dangerous gridlock. The first post-electoral grand coalition cabinet of the history of the Republic was then formed. The whole legislature was made up of cabinets supported by the PD and (parts of) Berlusconi's PDL (Popolo della Libertà), after the main part of the party left the government following Berlusconi's request in September 2013, to recreate FI.

Electoral results during the XVII legislature followed the typical U-shaped pattern for the PD, parallel to the popularity trend of centre-left-led cabinets. This was extremely evident in the spring of 2014, when the PD achieved historic success in the EP election (Segatti, Poletti and Vezzoni 2015). Then it gradually declined, and electoral outcomes for the centre-left were more and more disappointing in regional and municipal elections up to the crucial 2016 constitutional referendum (Ceccarini and Bordignon 2017). Although their popularity rating was a little better during the Gentiloni cabinet, in the municipal elections held in the spring of 2017, those immediately preceding the 2018 general election, results for the centre-left did not improve, and in fact the centre-right re-established itself as a contender for the national government, especially by re-establishin its unity. It is worth mentioning that the LN, under the leadership of the new leader Salvini, abandoned the pro-north platform to become a classic nationalist radical right-wing party (Tarchi 2018), which proved quite successful in electoral terms, and was important for the re-establishment of the centre-right as a potential winner.

The main achievements of the legislature were the constitutional reform, rejected by Italian voters in December 2016, and the electoral reform, ruled unconstitutional in January 2017. In order to avoid holding the elections under two different systems (none of which was designed by Parliament) in the two branches, a new electoral law was approved in November 2017, featuring a mix of roughly one third of FPTP (first-past-the-post) SMDs (single-member districts) and two thirds of PR (proportional representation) MMDs (multi-member districts) for both the Chamber and the Senate (Chiaramonte and D'Alimonte in this journal).

As a consequence of the new electoral system, both centre-left and centre-right pre-electoral coalitions were formed to support common candidates in SMDs, while the M5S ran on its own. However, while the centre-right presented a unified front, the centre-left failed to do so. The PD and its various left-wing fractions that split during the XVII legislature ran separately. The latter federated with other left parties in a list called Liberi e Uguali (LeU) running on its own, while the PD formed a coalition with three minor centrist parties.

3. Voter turnout

We begin our enquiry by looking at voter turnout. Overall, at the national level, it was 72.9%, the lowest in the history of the Italian Republic, 2.3% down compared to 2013 (Figure 1). However, if we consider the historical turnout trend, the observed drop is absolutely in line with the physiological drop rate of a little less than half a point per year, due to the effect of generational replacement – older cohorts voting more than new ones replacing them in the electorate. Thus, while the 2013 election saw a particularly substantial fall (-5.3% compared to 2008), the 2018 election was, in terms of turnout, back to normal after the shock of 2013 (Chiaramonte and De Sio 2014). We will see shortly that results tell a different story.

Turnout geography is in line with Italian electoral history (Figure 2, left map). A higher turnout is concentrated in the central and northern parts of the country. In particular, all 18 provinces in the first sextile are in the zones in the past characterized by either red or white subcultures (Galli 1968; Diamanti 2009). Turnout remains relatively quite high in the rest of the north, while it decreases gradually moving south, to reach its minimum in the extreme periphery of the peninsula and the island regions. All 16 provinces with the lowest turnout are in Calabria, Sicily, or Sardinia.

If we turn to turnout variations from 2013 (Figure 2, right-hand map), however, we notice that the 2.3-point drop recorded at the national level was not uniform. Actually, the pattern appears quite symmetrical to the map with turnout level on its left. Smaller drops (and some actual turnout increases) are concentrated in the south, although with the visible exception of Rome. Turnout drops are more visible but still below average up to the Apennines. Further north, we find the areas where turnout shrank most: this was particularly concentrated throughout Emilia-Romagna, Lombardy, Veneto, and Liguria.

Figure 1. Voter turnout in legislative elections for the Chamber of Deputies, 1948–2018
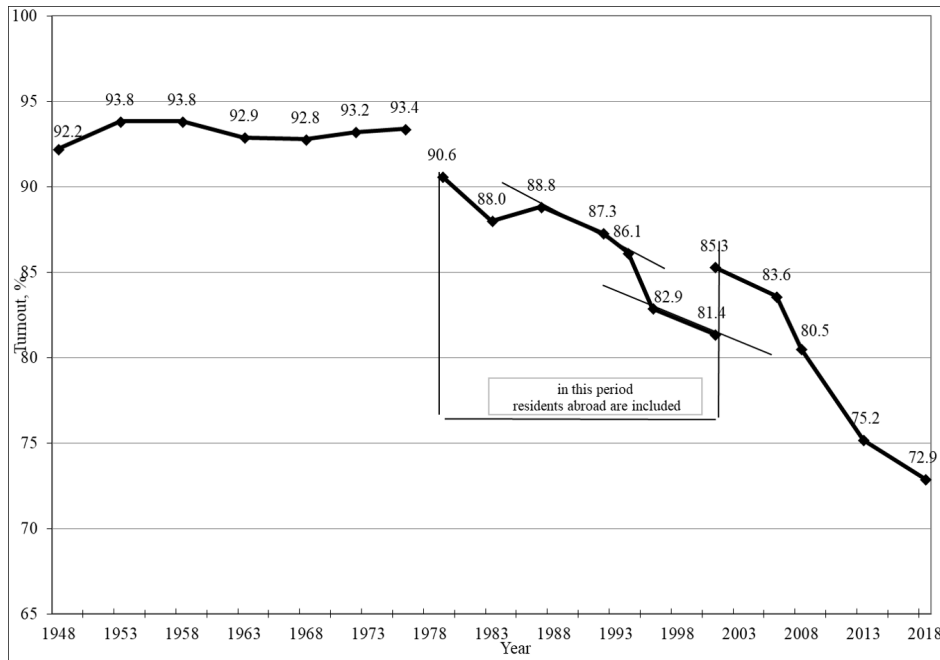
Percentages of voters going to the polls out of overall registered voters. Data are relative to the whole set of registered voters between 1979 and 2001, to only registered voters living in Italy until 1976 and since 2001. For 2001, then, we report both percentages: 85.3 is relative to Italian residents only, 81.4 is relative to the whole set of registered voters (thus both those living in Italy and abroad). This is done to show the negative effect on turnout which the inclusion of the latter constituency had in the previous period.

Figure 2. Voter turnout in the 2018 Italian general election (left map), and variations from 2013 (right map), province-level sextiles
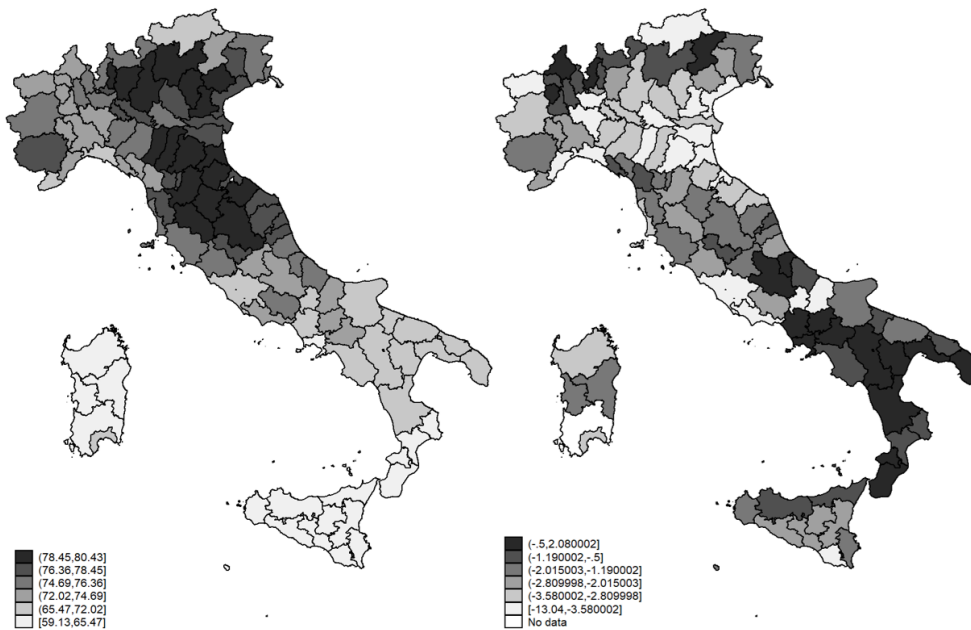
Source: Ministry of the Interior. The South Sardinia province was established in 2016: this is why the Ministry does not provide the 2013 turnout and the province appears blank (missing data) on the right-hand map.

As a consequence, although the turnout rate in the south has remained lower than in the rest of the country, the gap closed somewhat in 2018. In the south turnout dropped 1.6%, from 69.8% to 68.2% (with a variation rate of -2.4%), while elsewhere the drop was 2.8% (-3.5%). As a consequence, the participation gap between south and centre-north moved from 9.8% in 2013 to 8.6% in 2018.

This evidence represents the renewal of a trend observed throughout the whole of the Second Republic, but also a reverse from 2013, when, on the contrary, the abovementioned national 5.3-point drop compared to 2008 was smaller than that in the centre-north and larger in the south. Such gap enlarging was then attributed to the reduction of resources available for patronage, and the disappearance of the 'southern issue' from the national political agenda (Tuorto 2014).

It is reasonable to believe, in particular in light of the electoral results and our analyses of electoral shifts (see below), that in 2018 the M5S had a higher mobilizing appeal for southern voters. This might be due to the presence of Di Maio as political leader, the first southern candidate for leading the cabinet and with a chance of actually doing so, since when, in 1994, elections came close to a direct appointment of the Prime Minister. A second factor which might account for the higher mobilizing role of the M5S in the south is its signature campaign issue – the basic income, which is particularly appealing where unemployment is higher.

All this considered, it appears quite difficult to interpret the gap closing observed in 2018, and consequently predict whether it will continue in the future (thus yielding a further homogenization of the country in terms of participation) or was rather driven by these specific features of this election.

4. The electoral results

The centre-right coalition won a plurality of the votes, with 37% (Table 1),[1] gaining almost 8% (Table 3), and increasing its vote total by over 2 million compared to the 2013 election. The LN achieved the historic overtaking of FI as the most-voted party of the coalition (17.3% and 13.9%, respectively). Fratelli d'Italia (FDI) received 4.4%, thus overcoming the 3% national threshold to gain PR seats, which the 'fourth leg' of the coalition (Noi con l'Italia-Unione di Centro, NCI-UDC) failed to do. The latter was chosen by 1.3% of voters, enough for its votes to be useful to coalitional parties.[2]

Compared to 2013, the LN gained over 13%, multiplying its votes fourfold. FDI more than doubled its results, both percentagewise and in vote number. By contrast, Berlusconi's party, down by over 7%, lost over a third of its votes. Although since 2013 the party had suffered the split of the Alfano-led wing, given the low results of both parties to emerge after it – NCI and Civica Popolare (CP) who together took less than 2% of the votes – and the significant overall increase of the coalition so far led by Berlusconi, FI's electoral retreat is definitely something worth stressing.

The M5S was the largest party, with 32.7% of the votes, gaining 2 million votes, and advancing 7%. This unprecedented trend for a debutant party indicates both the

[1] In Italy, thus including votes in the Aosta Valley but not those cast in the Italian-Abroad constituency.
[2] The electoral law states that parties in coalitions receiving between 1% and 3% of the votes do not win any PR seats, but their votes are summed to coalitional partners above the threshold to determine coalitional overall results, which are used in the PR seat allocation.

intensity of the systemic turbulence the Italian political system is undergoing, and the ability of the M5S to strategically adapt to this turbulent environment.

The centre-left coalition scored historically disappointing results. The coalition as a whole received 22.9% of the votes, losing 2.5 million votes (a quarter of the total), and roughly 7%. The PD maintained the position of second-most-voted party, but it stopped at 18.7%. No other party in the coalition managed to overcome the 3% threshold.[3] Furthermore, two minor centre-left parties (CP and Insieme) failed to meet the 1% threshold. Thus, their votes were not useful at all for seat allocation. Conversely, votes received by +Europa (between 1 and 3% – 2.6% to be exact) were counted for the purposes of PR seat allocation and they were considered exactly as if they were PD votes.[4]

The other party that won PR seats was LEU. It received 3.4% of national votes, thus significantly improving the result achieved in 2013 by the list then running to the left of the centre-left coalition, namely Rivoluzione Civile. However, it failed to meet pre-electoral expectations, and the actual result was considered quite disappointing.[5] Minor parties outside coalitions received 4.1% of the votes,[6] with two parties on opposite ends of the ideological spectrum getting the most. The extreme left Potere Al Popolo was voted by 1.1% of voters; while 'third-millennium fascist' CasaPound Italia was just a little short of 1%.

Table 1 also reports, on the right, the results for the Senate elections. Only citizens who are at least 25 years old can vote for the Senate. As a consequence of the different voting age requirements, almost 4 million citizens who vote for the Chamber are not eligible to vote for the Senate: 8% of the total Chamber voters. Overall, Senate results are extraordinarily similar to those observed in the Chamber. The centre-right moves from 37% to 37.5%, with both FI and LN slightly larger, while the M5S loses half a point in the Senate – from 32.7% to 32.2%. Virtually no difference between the two Houses emerges for the centre-left as a coalition, although the PD is slightly larger among Senate voters.

This generalized homogeneity appears quite surprising if we consider that Italian electoral history has been characterized, especially in recent years, by visible discrepancies between the results for the two Houses. For instance, in 2013 the M5S was about 2 pp. smaller in the Senate than in the Chamber, which clearly indicated its better electoral performance among younger voters (De Sio and Cataldi 2014). The great similarity between Chamber and Senate results in 2018, on the contrary, indicates that this time younger voters have voted very similarly to the rest of the electorate. Moreover, this homogeneity, which is also replicated at the district level, might be considered an indication that the role of candidates in SMDs was very limited in determining electoral choices.

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[3] The SVP, although not meeting the 3% threshold, was able to participate in PR allocation thanks to a clause in the electoral law guaranteeing parties representing linguistic minorities. As a consequence, it won two PR seats in the Trentino-Alto Adige/South Tyrol region in the Chamber and one in the Senate.
[4] See footnote 2.
[5] This was stated by Grasso himself. See http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/politica/grasso-delusi-risultato-leu-va-avanti-1501320.html.
[6] Thus, the overall quota of valid votes not being used in the PR seat distribution amounts to just over 5%. This means a 5% over-representation for parties above the threshold.

Table 1. Results of 2018 general election (Chamber of Deputies and Senate)

Lists and coalitions	Chamber of Deputies						Senate					
	Votes		Seats				Votes		Seats			
	No.	%	PR	FPTP	Abroad	Total	No.	%	PR	FPTP	Abroad	Total
Lega Nord (LN)	5,705,925	17.3	73	50	2	125	5,334,049	17.6	37	21	-	58
Forza Italia (FI)	4,586,672	13.9	59	43	1	103	4,358,101	14.4	33	22	2	57
Fratelli d'Italia (FDI)	1,440,107	4.4	19	13	-	32	1,286,887	4.3	7	11	-	18
Noi con l'Italia-Unione di Centro (NCI-UDC)	431,042	1.3	0	5	0	5	362,131	1.2	0	4	0	4
FI-FdI-Mov.Nuova Valle D'Aosta[a]	5,533	0.0	-	0	-	0	5,223	0.0	-	0	-	0
Total Centre-Right	12,169,279	37.0	151	111	3	265	11,346,391	37.5	77	58	2	137
Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S)	10,748,372	32.7	133	93	1	227	9,747,701	32.2	68	44	0	112
Partito Democratico (PD)	6,153,081	18.7	86	21	5	112	5,788,103	19.1	43	8	2	53
+Europa	845,406	2.6	0	2	1	3	716,136	2.4	0	1	0	1
Insieme	191,489	0.6	0	1	-	1	163,903	0.5	0	1	-	1
Civica Popolare (CP)	180,539	0.5	0	2	0	2	152,505	0.5	0	1	0	1
SVP-PATT	134,613	0.4	2	2	-	4	128,336	0.4	1	2	-	3
PD-UV-UVP-EPAV[b]	14,429	0.0	-	0	-	0	15,958	0.1	-	1	-	1
Total Centre-Left	7,519,557	22.9	88	28	6	122	6,964,941	23.0	44	14	2	60
Liberi e Uguali (LEU)	1,114,298	3.4	14	0	0	14	990,715	3.3	4	0	0	4
Others	1,354,919	4.1	0	0	2	2	1,226,064	4.0	0	0	2	2
TOTAL	32,906,425	100	386	232	12	630	30,275,812	100	193	116	6	315

Source: Supreme Court for results in the domestic arena (except Aosta Valley), Ministry of the Interior for results in Aosta Valley and seats abroad.
[a] Electoral coalition among FI, FDI and a local movement in Aosta Valley.
[b] Electoral coalition among PD and ethno-regionalist parties in Aosta Valley.

In the SMD-FPTP arena (Figure 3), again, the centre-right coalition won, with the M5S second, and the centre-left third, a long way behind. Out of 232 Chamber SMDs, centre-right candidates won 111 times (48%), while in the Senate they won exactly 50% of the SMDs. Looking at the internal distribution, LN candidates won 50 Chamber SMDs, and FI candidates 44. By contrast, in the Senate, FI had more winning candidates in SMDs than LN (22 v. 21). The centre-right won virtually all SMDs in the north and expanded in the Red Zone, while they had very few victories in the south.[7]

M5S candidates won 40% of the Chamber SMDs (93), and 38% of Senate districts (44). This result is particularly surprising as it was widely expected that the new electoral system would damage their performance in the plurality arena, given the party's choice not to form a coalition. On the contrary, the M5S won a higher fraction of FPTP seats compared to PR seats – 34% and 35% in the two Parliament branches. This happened thanks to the geographical concentration of M5S votes in the south, where it got more than 40% of the votes (Tab. 3), thus recording a landslide victory.

The centre-left performed poorly in the SMDs. Overall, its candidates won 12% in both Houses: 28 in the Chamber, 14 in the Senate. Their victories are concentrated in the core of the Red Zone, and in the central SMDs of metropolitan areas, especially in the north with not a single victory in either House south of Rome.

Figure 3. Map of winners in Chamber SMDs in 2018 (left), and 2013 most-voted coalition in the territories forming 2018 SMDs (right)
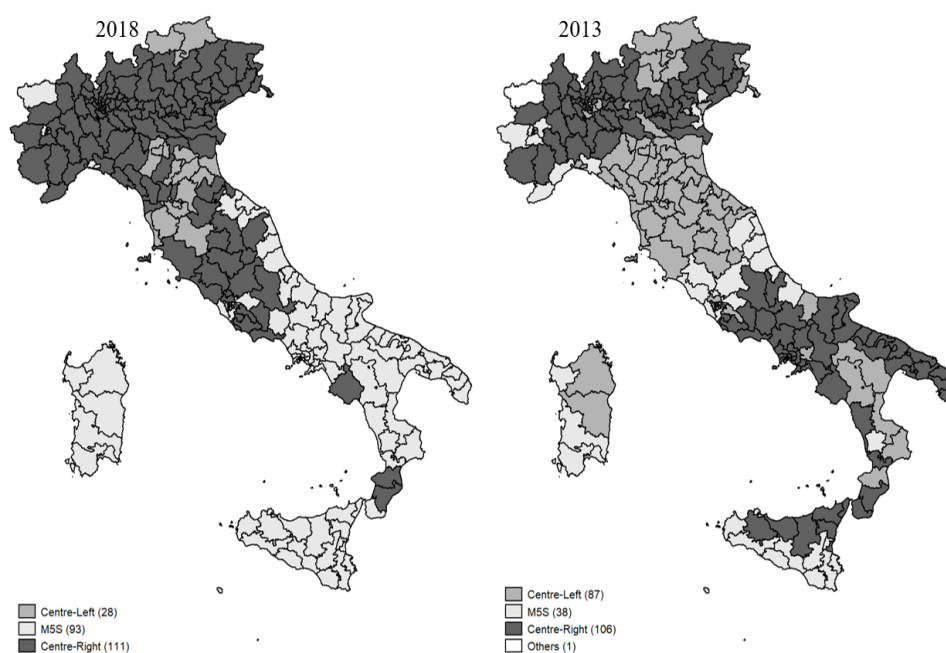
Overall, in the south (the largest of the three zones), centre-left candidates were either first or second in only five Chamber SMDs out of a total of 101 (Table 2). Moreover, the centre-left lost its advantage in the Red Zone: in both Houses centre-right candidates

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[7] The Red Zone is composed of Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany, Marches, and Umbria. The north is made up of the 7 regions further north than this 'Red Belt', while the south is made of the 9 regions south of it.

won a plurality of the SMDs, three more than the once hegemonic coalition. Furthermore, considering the M5S hegemony in the south (over 80% of the SMDs in both Houses, with the centre-right a distant second – 15% on average), and the even stronger centre-right dominion in the north (over 85% of SMDs, with M5S and centre-left alternating as further distant second – 20% on average), the Red Zone is now the most competitive part of the country. No coalition won a majority of SMDs in either House, all three contenders have significant portions of both first and second places, and on average victory margins are much smaller (7%).

Table 2. Competition patterns in SMDs

	First- and second-most-voted coalitions/parties in SMDs	Geo-political area			Italy
		North	Red Zone	South	
Chamber of Deputies	M5S first, Centre-right second	3	5	83	91
	Centre-right first, M5S second	47	9	13	69
	Centre-right first, Centre-left second	32	10	0	42
	Centre-left first, Centre-right second	8	14	4	26
	Centre-left first, M5S second	0	2	0	2
	M5S first, Centre-left second	1	0	1	2
	Total	**91**	**40**	**101**	**232**
Senate	M5S first, Centre-right second	1	3	40	44
	Centre-right first, M5S second	22	4	8	34
	Centre-right first, Centre-left second	18	6	0	24
	Centre-left first, Centre-right second	5	7	1	13
	Centre-left first, M5S second	1	0	0	1
	Total	**47**	**20**	**49**	**116**

The geographical analysis of SMD competition patterns leads us to the more general discussion of the electoral results in geographical terms (Table 3). Compared to 2013, the M5S is basically stable in the centre-north, while it grows substantially in the south, gaining 16%, from 27.3% to 42.3%. Conversely, the centre-right is basically stable in the south, and it increases by over 10% in the rest of the country. This is mostly due to the LN. FI went down quite evenly in the different areas (7/8%), maintaining its 2013 geography, characterized by relative strength in the south. The LN gained just enough to keep the coalition stable in the south, and 10 points more than that in the rest of the country. Salvini's party is now the largest party in the north (with 27.3%), quite strong in the Red Zone (18.7%, which, curiously, is exactly the national result for the PD), and definitely relevant in the south as well (8%). These results indicate the (remarkable though partial) success of Salvini's strategy to transform the LN from an ethno-regionalist party of the north into a national radical right-wing party.

The PD and its coalition have proven to be more resilient in the north, where they lost about 5%, compared to the Red Zone and the south where their losses have been twice as high. In Table 3 we can observe the end of the left hegemony in Red Zone. We have seen above that centre-right candidates won a plurality of SMDs there. Now we can see that, in terms of votes received, the PD comes behind the M5S in both Houses for most-voted party, and the centre-left coalition is behind the centre-right as well.

Table 3. Electoral results in 2018, 2013 for major coalitions and parties by geopolitical area

	Party/ Coalition	Geopolitical area									Italy		
		North			Red Zone			South					
		2018 %	2013 %	Δ %	2018 %	2013 %	Δ %	2018 %	2013 %	Δ %	2018 %	2013 %	Δ %
Chamber of Deputies	LN	27.3	9.4	17.9	18.7	1.5	17.2	8.0	0.2	7.8	17.3	4.1	13.3
	FI (PDL)	12.7	19.4	-6.7	10.2	17.1	-6.9	17.5	25.6	-8.1	13.9	21.6	-7.6
	Centre-right	44.1	31.2	12.9	33.0	21.1	11.9	31.8	30.8	1.0	37.0	29.2	7.8
	M5S	23.5	23.7	-0.2	27.7	25.7	2.0	43.4	27.3	16.1	32.7	25.6	7.1
	PD	19.5	24.3	-4.8	26.7	35.4	-8.7	14.2	22.0	-7.8	18.7	25.4	-6.7
	Centre-left	25.4	28.1	-2.7	30.6	38.9	-8.3	17.6	26.8	-9.2	22.9	29.6	-6.7
Senate	LN	27.3	9.9	17.4	18.8	1.6	17.2	8.5	0.2	8.3	17.6	4.3	13.3
	FI (PDL)	13.0	19.8	-6.8	10.4	17.7	-7.3	18.3	26.4	-8.1	14.3	22.1	-7.8
	Centre-right	45.2	32.9	12.3	33.9	22.1	11.8	33.2	33.3	-0.1	37.5	31.0	6.5
	M5S	23.9	21.8	2.1	27.7	24.2	3.5	42.8	25.2	17.6	32.2	23.6	8.6
	PD	19.8	26.1	-6.3	27.3	37.6	-10.3	14.8	23.7	-8.9	19.1	27.3	-8.2
	Centre-left	25.2	29.6	-4.4	31.3	40.6	-9.3	18.1	28.9	-10.8	23.0	31.4	-8.4

The combination of the seat distribution for the two arenas (SMD-FPTP and MMD-PR) generated a hung Parliament in both the Chamber and the Senate. In both arenas, the centre-right turned out to win a plurality of seats, with a little over 40% of the total. The M5S won 36%, and the centre-left a little less than 20%.

5. Beyond the results: vote shifts and socio-demographics

In this final section we move beyond the electoral results, to investigate the dynamics generating them. Looking merely at the electoral results in 2018 and 2013, the minimum portion of voters who have changed their vote is slightly larger than a quarter, which is quite high even for the recent turbulent times in Italy (Chiaramonte et al. forthcoming). However, this does not give us the whole picture of vote transitions. In order to have a more complete understanding of such phenomena, we have estimated the transition matrices in 11 large Italian cities using the Goodman (1953) model.[8] In short, our

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[8] The methodological challenge to estimate these transition matrices lies in the ecological fallacy – the error of trying to infer individual-level behaviour from population-level data (Robinson 1950). The classic method to overcome this fallacy was proposed by Goodman (1953, 1959). Goodman's model formalizes the logic of ecological inference in a simple regression model where the relationship to be studied is a linear one. More recently, alternative techniques have been developed to overcome the ecological fallacy issue when studying non-linear relationships as well. In this article, we employ the classic Goodman model in order to maintain comparability of our findings with the Italian vote shift

estimates show that overall volatility is actually quite a bit larger than the one measured by the Pedersen (1979) index: close to 33%.

In addition to providing a more complete picture of volatility, the analysis of the electoral shifts between the 2013 and the 2018 Italian general election allows us to answer several crucial research questions, such as: what are the most relevant paths for the third of voters who changed their vote? Or, where do new voters of the M5S and the LN come from?

In this regard, from our analyses two main phenomena emerge. There were relevant transitions of voters from the 2013 centre-left to the 2018 M5S, while in turn the 2013 M5S lost relevant portions of its 2013 voters to the 2018 LN.

With reference to the ability of the M5S to increase votes from the 2013 centre-left coalition, we can see that between 20% and 30% come from voters who preferred the centre-left in 2013, especially in the central and northern cities, while the further south you go, fewer left voters in 2013 chose the M5S in 2018 (Tab. 4). In the north between 15% and 20% of 2013 centre-left voters preferred the M5S in 2018 (Tab. 5). Conversely, in the south, the M5S was able to remobilize voters who did not participate in the 2013 elections, and to attract some votes also from the centre-right.

Turning to the LN, our analyses indicate that between 40% and 50% of its votes come from 2013 centre-right voters. In the central and northern cases between 30% and 40% of LN votes come from voters who chose the M5S in 2013: there, between 18% and 30% of 2013 M5S voters chose the LN in 2018. In the south this source is much less relevant, though always significant: between 15% and 20% of the (though smaller) southern LN electorate comes from 2013 M5S voters. In the north-west there are also significant shifts from 2013 centre-left voters to the LN, and these are even greater in Emilia-Romagna.

PD votes show quite a stable pattern: around 70% voted for parties in the coalition led by Bersani in 2013, 20% for Monti, a little less than 10% for Berlusconi. The plurality of Monti's voters voted for the PD almost everywhere, sometimes even a majority (Messina), or more than 2013 centre-left voters themselves (Naples). Furthermore,

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literature (Micheli 1976; Schadee and Corbetta 1984; Corbetta, Parisi and Schadee 1988; Mannheimer 1993, De Sio and Paparo 2014). It is important to stress that among the assumptions for the model to generate reliable estimates, coefficients have to be constant among the units. This means that, in all the different polling stations, transition rates are the same (Corbetta and Parisi 1990). This is realistic only in very homogenous areas, such as within a single municipality. This is why the analyses are conducted city by city. Furthermore, with specific reference to the 2018 Italian general election, we should also consider the electoral supply varied by SMD. As a consequence, we performed separate analyses in each of the SMDs of the Chamber in Naples, Turin, and Genoa, then re-aggregated into the city the estimates reported here. Cities were selected according to availability of data at the polling station level, and in order to provide a balanced mix of cities in the different geographical parts of the country. Furthermore, we only present those analyses for which the VR values were overall acceptable. Row- and column-variables were selected according to their electoral size. Estimates for too small groups are not reliable, so we unified the coalitions in 2013, as each of them only had one large party. In 2018, however, the four selected parties all had sufficient electoral size, and we could estimate separate transition towards each of them, which is particularly interesting. Following Schadee and Corbetta (1984), in each city we eliminated electoral polls with fewer than 100 voters (in the 2013 or the 2018 general election), and those whose variation rate in the number of registered voters was above 15% (both increasing and decreasing). Average VR values are 12.6, 14.4, and 13.3 in Naples, Turin, and Genoa respectively. Municipal territory for each of the remaining cities is part of a single SMD, so a single matrix was estimated. Values of the VR index are 12.9 in Cagliari, 15.3 in Venice, 14.1 in Messina, 15.3 in Prato, 8.8 in Reggio Calabria, 17.6 in Padua, 16.5 in Rimini, 16.4 in Reggio Emilia.

coefficients from 2013 centre-right to 2018 centre-left are, with few exceptions, significant. This indicates that the strategy aimed at gaining moderate votes in the centre of the ideological spectrum has somewhat succeeded. However, in a system which has lost its bipolar configuration, this is definitely not a sufficient condition to win elections. And our data, showing the much larger losses to the M5S all over the country, and those to the LN in the historical left strongholds of the Red Belt and northern industrial cities, contain the answer to why this was not the case.

FI received around 70% of its votes from past centre-right voters. Our analyses also show FI's ability to remobilize voters who did not turn out in 2013, and to attract some voters from the 2013 centrist coalition – although not in the south, and generally less so than the PD.

Table 4. Electoral shifts between 2013 and 2018 general elections for the Chamber of Deputies in selected Italian cities (sources)

City	Party	Results, % on voters	2013 Electorates				
			Centre-Left	Centre	Centre-Right	M5S	Non-voters
Turin	PD	17.9%	67%	23%	9%	0%	0%
	FI	8.3%	2%	15%	66%	1%	13%
	LN	11.5%	9%	1%	47%	39%	4%
	M5S	17.2%	22%	0%	2%	69%	7%
Genoa	PD	14.6%	72%	20%	7%	1%	0%
	FI	7.1%	2%	14%	62%	1%	15%
	LN	11.4%	11%	5%	39%	38%	7%
	M5S	21.8%	20%	0%	0%	77%	3%
Venice	PD	15.0%	71%	20%	5%	0%	0%
	FI	6.0%	0%	29%	62%	0%	0%
	LN	15.8%	0%	0%	53%	37%	6%
	M5S	20.2%	26%	0%	3%	71%	0%
Padua	PD	17.6%	68%	28%	3%	0%	0%
	FI	7.4%	0%	17%	63%	0%	2%
	LN	16.5%	0%	0%	68%	32%	0%
	M5S	15.7%	30%	0%	4%	66%	0%
Reggio Emilia	PD	21.3%	84%	11%	1%	3%	0%
	FI	6.5%	0%	5%	66%	7%	13%
	LN	10.6%	28%	4%	36%	30%	0%
	M5S	20.9%	28%	0%	9%	60%	4%
Rimini	PD	16.6%	69%	18%	13%	0%	0%
	FI	8.4%	7%	8%	72%	0%	13%
	LN	13.5%	22%	0%	37%	36%	5%
	M5S	23.0%	14%	0%	4%	80%	2%
Prato	PD	22.0%	83%	8%	5%	3%	0%
	FI	8.2%	0%	12%	77%	0%	6%
	LN	12.5%	5%	0%	53%	38%	5%
	M5S	18.1%	32%	0%	0%	51%	15%

City	Party					
Cagliari	PD	11.0%	70%	11%	19%	0%	0%
	FI	9.5%	0%	0%	84%	1%	10%
	LN	6.9%	0%	4%	47%	20%	18%
	M5S	22.3%	21%	0%	0%	63%	16%
Naples	PD	8.4%	68%	22%	7%	1%	0%
	FI	9.4%	1%	13%	77%	4%	4%
	LN	1.5%	33%	16%	30%	15%	0%
	M5S	31.2%	13%	0%	11%	39%	29%
Reggio Calabria	PD	7.7%	78%	11%	7%	4%	0%
	FI	10.9%	0%	0%	61%	0%	28%
	LN	3.8%	2%	12%	48%	21%	17%
	M5S	23.3%	0%	0%	2%	60%	31%
Messina	PD	9.6%	45%	41%	4%	0%	0%
	FI	12.1%	0%	0%	70%	1%	26%
	LN	3.1%	26%	0%	40%	14%	0%
	M5S	27.4%	0%	0%	4%	55%	42%

Percentages indicate the portion of row-party votes in 2018 coming from the column 2013 coalition/party electorate.

Table 5. Electoral shifts between 2013 and 2018 general elections for the Chamber of Deputies in selected Italian cities, (destinations)

City	Party	2013 Electorates				
		Centre-Left	Centre	Centre-Right	M5S	Non-voters
Turin	PD	47%	45%	9%	0%	0%
	FI	1%	13%	32%	0%	4%
	LN	4%	1%	32%	23%	2%
	M5S	15%	0%	2%	61%	5%
Genoa	PD	41%	39%	8%	1%	0%
	FI	0%	14%	32%	0%	4%
	LN	5%	7%	33%	18%	3%
	M5S	17%	0%	0%	72%	2%
Venice	PD	41%	36%	4%	0%	0%
	FI	0%	20%	22%	0%	0%
	LN	0%	0%	50%	28%	4%
	M5S	20%	0%	4%	68%	0%
Padua	PD	46%	43%	2%	0%	0%
	FI	0%	11%	23%	0%	1%
	LN	0%	0%	56%	30%	0%
	M5S	18%	0%	3%	59%	0%
Reggio Emilia	PD	49%	29%	2%	3%	0%
	FI	0%	4%	31%	3%	5%
	LN	8%	5%	27%	18%	0%
	M5S	15%	0%	12%	68%	4%

Rimini	PD	45%	40%	12%	0%	0%
	FI	2%	9%	33%	0%	5%
	LN	12%	0%	26%	21%	3%
	M5S	13%	0%	4%	79%	2%
Prato	PD	59%	27%	6%	4%	0%
	FI	0%	14%	38%	0%	2%
	LN	2%	0%	39%	26%	3%
	M5S	18%	0%	0%	51%	12%
Cagliari	PD	35%	17%	12%	0%	0%
	FI	0%	0%	45%	0%	3%
	LN	0%	4%	18%	7%	4%
	M5S	21%	0%	0%	74%	12%
Naples	PD	33%	35%	3%	1%	0%
	FI	0%	23%	41%	2%	1%
	LN	3%	5%	3%	2%	0%
	M5S	22%	3%	20%	86%	22%
Reggio Calabria	PD	38%	18%	3%	2%	0%
	FI	0%	0%	38%	0%	7%
	LN	1%	9%	10%	5%	2%
	M5S	0%	0%	2%	82%	18%
Messina	PD	27%	64%	2%	0%	0%
	FI	0%	0%	46%	1%	8%
	LN	5%	0%	7%	3%	0%
	M5S	0%	0%	6%	90%	28%

Percentages indicate the portion of column 2013 coalition/party electorate voting for row-party in 2018.

To try to understand the social dynamics behind the observed electoral transitions, we report survey data concerning vote choice by socio-demographic characteristics (Tab. 6), which can tell us which social groups changed their vote. In general, the M5S has become more socially cross-cutting, by growing more in those groups where it was weaker in 2013. For instance, it is still below average among older, or low-education, or retired, or highly-religious voters, but much less than it was in 2013, having gained more than 10% in each of these groups. These are the groups providing the M5S with most of its new votes, along with women. Thus, the M5S now shows very stable results, between 30% and 37% across all groups, with only public-sector employees above 40%, and older voters and retired below 30%. The gap between M5S's results among public- and private-sector employees is the only one opening up in 2018, as in 2013 the two groups showed no difference in their favour towards the M5S. Students are the only group voting in fewer numbers in 2018 for the M5S than in 2013 (-5%), while also among college graduates no increase is found. The LN has grown at least 9% among each group. Particularly high increases are visible for blue-collar and self-employed workers (roughly 20%), so that it is now larger than FI among the latter, and twice as large as the PD among the former. The LN has also increased substantially among voters holding a lower-secondary diploma, and those between 50 and 64 years old. For the latter, the

strong campaign emphasis by the LN on the abolition of the pension reform gradually increasing pension age according to life expectancy might provide an explanation.

The PD has lost everywhere, but particularly so among its traditional sociodemographic strongholds, both those already unsteady in recent elections (such as blue collars or unemployed), and those still standing in 2013 (such as retired, or older, or public-sector, or less religious voters). On the contrary it was basically stable among managers, entrepreneurs, and lost little among the self-employed and highly religious voters. As a consequence, the PD is now the most-voted party only among the oldest class of voters, and those who are retired; it no longer shows any increase among public-sector employees compared to private-sector ones, and it is significantly stronger among the most religious voters. This data seems to indicate that the adversarial stance adopted by Renzi in pushing certain reforms (for the job market or public education) might have had a significant electoral cost for the party among the social groups traditionally closest to it.

FI has definitively lost its prevalence among housewives, by losing more than 13%, almost half of its votes. It is now basically voted by housewives to the same extent as the PD, and much less than the LN. FI has halved its votes from private-sector employees, blue-collar workers, and the least-educated voters. It is the most-voted party of the centre-right only among managers, or particularly religious voters, as well as among inactive sectors, such as retired (and oldest), and the unemployed.

6. Conclusion: The success of challengers in a dealigning political landscape

The results of the 2018 Italian general election we have discussed in this article saw the unprecedented success of challenger parties. The M5S and the LN combined received the majority of the votes, while the two principal mainstream parties, the cores of the two coalitions dominating the bipolar politics of Italy since 2013, amounted to less than a third of the votes, actually less than the M5S alone.

To recap, the M5S was the first successful debutant in Western Europe to gain in its second election (+7%). The electoral growth of the M5S was concentrated in the south (+16%), where it won virtually all SMDs in both Houses (over 80%), thus overcoming the potential underrepresentation issue posed by the new electoral law. The centre-right coalition was the most-voted one, with 37% of the votes, and an even larger increase from 2013 than the M5S (+8%). Their candidates won more than 85% of SMDs in the north, and a plurality of those in the Red Zone. Overall, the four centre-right parties won over 40% of the parliamentary seats, but not enough to form a government. FI lost between 7 and 8% with no relevant geographical variations, while the LN gained 13% nationwide (thus becoming the largest centre-right party). The LN has grown much less in the south (+8%) than in the rest of the country (+18%). As a consequence, the centre-right was stable in the south and gained more than 10% elsewhere. The centre-left coalition was the clear loser of the election. It lost almost 7% compared to 2013, won only a tiny minority of SMDs (in the Red Zone and non-southern metropolitan areas), and was outdistanced by the other two poles.

Table 6. Electoral results by socio-demographic characteristics, 2018 and 2013

	PD			FI			LN			M5S		
	2018	**2013**	**Δ%**	**2018**	**2013**	**Δ%**	**2018**	**2013**	**Δ%**	**2018**	**2013**	**Δ%**
Whole sample	**18.8**	**25.5**	**-6.7**	**14.0**	**21.6**	**-7.6**	**17.4**	**4.1**	**13.3**	**32.9**	**25.5**	**7.4**
Gender												
Male	18.9	25	-6,1	13.8	20	-6,2	17.1	4	13,1	32.8	29	3,8
Female	18.7	26	-7,3	14.1	24	-9,9	17.6	5	12,6	32.9	22	10,9
Age class												
18-34	15.3	19.7	-4.4	12.4	20.9	-8.5	17.8	4.6	13.2	35.3	31.4	3.9
35-49	15.9	20.4	-4.5	13.9	19.4	-5.5	17.6	4	13.6	35.4	33.2	2.2
50-64	16.5	27.8	-11.3	13.0	21.2	-8.2	19.7	3.4	16.3	34.0	24.6	9.4
65 or more	27.3	37	-9.7	16.1	27	-10.9	14.6	4	10.6	27.1	10	17.1
Education level												
Elementary-school diploma	25.2	29	-3.8	12.9	27	-14.1	17.6	8	9.6	30.0	14	16.0
Lower-secondary diploma	15.9	23	-7.1	15.2	23	-7.8	22.4	4	18.4	33.3	18	15.3
High-school diploma	16.1	25	-8.9	14.3	18	-3.7	14.3	2	12.3	36.1	31	5.1
University degree	21.8	27	-5.2	12.1	15	-2.9	11.3	2	9.3	29.3	29	0.3
Profession												
Entrepreneurs, managers	22.5	23	-0.5	13.4	17	-3.6	12.9	3	9.9	31.2	25	6.2
Self-employed	11.7	15	-3.3	17.6	20	-2.4	23.6	3	20.6	31.8	29	2.8
Teachers, clerks	18.9	25	-6.1	8.6	15	-6.4	14.5	5	9.5	36.1	31	5.1
Blue-collar workers	11.3	20	-8.7	12.5	24	-11.5	23.8	5	18.8	37.0	29	8.0
Unemployed	10.3	18	-7.7	20.4	25	-4.6	18.2	4	14.2	37.2	33	4.2
Students	17.1	23	-5.9	11.7	11	0.7	15.0	1	14.0	32.3	37	-4.7
Housewives	15.4	22	-6.6	15.7	29	-13.3	19.8	5	14.8	36.1	21	15.1
Retired	27.6	37	-9.4	16.1	25	-8.9	14.6	4	10.6	26.4	11	15.4
Employment sector												
Public-sector employees	17	29	-12.0	8.7	14	-5.3	12.8	4	8.8	41.6	31	10.6
Private-sector employees	17.6	21	-3.4	10.5	20	-9.5	18.7	5	13.7	34	30	4.0
Church attendance												
Never	19.8	28	-8.2	10.8	17	-6.2	15.9	2	13.9	33.7	32	1.7
Seldom	16.4	27	-10.6	13.3	22	-8.7	19.3	4	15.3	34.9	26	8.9
Monthly	13.9	21	-7.1	17.9	25	-7.1	19.5	4	15.5	31.4	26	5.4
Weekly	22.4	25	-2.6	16.2	23	-6.8	15.7	6	9.7	30.9	19	11.9

Source: IPSOS Public Affairs. Digits indicate the percentages of the socio-demographic row category intending to vote for the party in the column. Data were collected from 29 January to 2 March on 16,626 respondents (out of 75,609 contacts) for 2018, and 11,026 respondents (out of 107,229 contacts) in 2013. Samples are representative of the Italian voting-age population for gender, age, education, occupational status, region and demographic class of municipality. Respondents were interviewed using a mixed methodology including computer-assisted web interviewing (CAWI), computer-assisted tele-phone interviewing (CATI), and computer-assisted mobile interviewing (CAMI). The margin of error for a same-N probabilistic sample with reference to a population as large as the Italian voting-age population would be between +/- 0.2% e +/- 2.8%. Samples were weighted according to the actual electoral results.

These are just the highlights of the electoral results. In this article, however, we have also discussed additional features of what happened. For instance, we have underlined some elements potentially indicating a stabilization of the Italian party system, such as the homogenization of turnout among different geographical areas (participation is still lower in the south, but less so than in 2013), and of electoral results between Chamber and Senate (indicating that, contrary to what happened in 2013, 18-24-year-old voters voted like the rest of the electorate).

Nevertheless, we have also observed quite numerous elements indicating that a new stable pattern does not appear to have been achieved yet. For instance, volatility has remained quite high, marking, for the first time, two consecutive elections in Italian history. The minimum portion of voters who changed their vote is 26.7%, but it is in fact quite a bit larger than that. In particular, our analyses of vote shift have repeatedly shown relevant transitions across various Italian cities from the 2013 centre-left to the 2018 M5S, and from the 2013 M5S to the 2018 LN. Furthermore, looking at the social characteristics of the electorate of the main parties, we have witnessed the erosion of traditional alignments between social groups and political parties. The PD lost blue-collars a long time ago (Corbetta and Ceccarini 2010) but is now not even the favourite of public-sector employees (42% of which voted for the M5S). FI was defeated by the LN (in addition to the M5S) among housewives, and it was below average and only the fourth party among uneducated voters.

The political landscape emerging after the 2018 elections is completely unprecedented. Bipolarism, at least the one we had known for the past 25 years, is definitely over. The consolidation of the M5S in the south has brought the end of competitiveness in an area that has been pivotal until now for winning elections, and at the same time we observe the rise in competitiveness of the Red Zone, where the centre-left is not only no longer hegemonic but is actually not winning. This is now the only competitive part of the country.

Overall, these pieces of evidence seem to indicate that the Italian party system might being experiencing a dealignment process (Dalton et al. 1984). In this volatile, unstable context, it is very hard to determine what the future might hold. In particular, the formation of the Conte cabinet, supported by M5S and LN, and its political activity will have a crucial role in shaping future developments. For instance, we have seen that most of the new M5S voters come from a previous centre-left political background. It would not be surprising if they were to abandon the M5S in consequence of this national alliance. For the LN there are risks as well. Although many of its voters voted for the M5S in 2013, most come from the Berlusconian centre-right. Thus, governing with the M5S might be costly unless policies desired by centre-right voters are enacted.

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Party Organizations and Legislative Turnover: Signals of an Unstable Parliamentary Class?

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Abstract

Parliamentary turnover is an important question in political science due to its connection to salient topics like elite circulation and parliamentary roles, legislature institutionalization, executive-legislative relations, and the quality of the policy-making process. In this article we contribute to the debate by focusing on the Italian case from a longitudinal perspective. The 2018 general election was conducive to a relatively high level of turnover. This level is roughly equivalent to two previous electoral rounds. However, the empirical evidence shows that the conditions usually thought to account for another two exceptional elections seem not to apply to 2018. After introducing the literature on legislative turnover and arguing that this topic is worth tackling, we stress the usefulness of the Italian case for comparative research and we provide a picture of our case study, presenting the theoretical puzzle and research questions. Subsequently we tackle this issue, claiming that the usual explanations fit only partially with our case. In particular, we argue that neglected intra-party factors can be a viable explanatory alternative. The article ends with a brief discussion of the findings.

1. Introduction

Parliamentary turnover is an important question in political science due to its connection to salient topics like elite circulation and parliamentary roles, legislature institutionalization, executive-legislative relations, and the quality of the policy-making process. Despite its importance, it is a relatively underdeveloped research field. Starting from the two influential works by Polsby (1968) and Rosenthal (1974), the great bulk of studies on turnover have focused on single cases (Moncrief et al. 1998; Samuels 2000; Manow 2007; Kerby and Blidook 2011); only rarely have they attempted to engage with cross-country analyses (Matland and Studlar 2004; Kuklys 2013; Gouglas et al. 2017). The main exception is the stream of studies on subnational parliaments. Following the US tradition, these works have provided within-country comparisons (Squire 1998; Moncrief et al. 2004; Heinsohn and Freitag 2012; Heinsohn 2014).

In this article we contribute to the debate by focusing on the Italian case from a longitudinal perspective. The 2018 general election was conducive to a relatively high level of turnover. This level is roughly equivalent to two previous electoral rounds, with rates 'definitely deviant for a context of democratic continuity' (Verzichelli 2009: 61).

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However, the empirical evidence shows that the conditions usually thought to account for another two exceptional elections seem not to apply to 2018. This suggests that we should look for further explanatory factors.

After introducing the literature on legislative turnover and arguing that this topic is worth tackling, we stress the usefulness of the Italian case for comparative research and we provide a picture of our case study, presenting the theoretical puzzle and research questions. Subsequently we tackle this issue, claiming that the usual explanations fit only partially with our case. In particular, we argue that neglected intra-party factors can be a viable explanatory alternative. The article ends with a brief discussion of the findings.

2. Legislative Turnover: Definition and Determinants

Parliamentary turnover is linked to two facets of the life of legislatures: institutionalization and professionalization. Polsby (1968) has defined the turnover rate as the central element that can help measure the degree of institutionalization achieved by a parliament. According to him, long legislative careers and low turnover rates play a central role in the strengthening of a legislature. This is why a stable group of incumbents within legislatures is fundamental to structure and routinizing organizational behaviours. Moreover, they promote specialization and differentiation, which are considered crucial features of efficient legislature.

Professionalization refers to a condition in which MPs can conceive of their parliamentary activity as their main occupation. Professionalization can be measured by three indicators: the MPs' remuneration and benefits, length of legislative sessions, and availability of resources (staff, working spaces, funds, etc.) (Squire 1988, 1992, 1998). Often, subnational legislatures are less professionalized, being thus inherently much more exposed to high turnover rates (Squire 1992; Moncrief et al. 2004; Heinsohn and Freitag 2012; Heinsohn 2014).

Following Matland and Studlar (2004: 92), legislative turnover can be defined as the proportion of membership that changes from one election to the next. A new legislature is composed of re-elected MPs, incoming MPs elected for the first time and former MPs who come back after an interruption (Francois and Grossman 2015; Salvati 2016a).

Legislative turnover defines the level of renewal or continuity of parliamentary elites and membership stability within an institution (Squire 1998). Additionally, it indirectly tells us something about the criteria that parties follow to select their personnel and/or party gate-keeping strength. Studies on parliamentary turnover can be gathered into two groups: the micro-level approach looks at individual motivations for exiting, while the macro-level approach takes institutional factors into account. Francois and Grossman (2015) have suggested three levels for studying turnover: the legislature (macro-level), the parliamentary party (*meso*-level), and, finally, the individual (micro-level). According to the two scholars, micro and macro levels are not *per se* adequate for studying turnover. Indeed, only the party level could account for party strategies, party elites' circulation, and party selection processes. All in all, a concomitant consideration of both party and legislative factors seems to be the most fruitful approach.

The nature of the exit of MPs from parliament can be either voluntary or involuntary. Voluntary exits stem from individual choices, determined by cost/benefit analyses of running for office (Squire 1988; Hall and Van Houweling 1995; Matland and Studlar 2004; Kerby and Bildook 2011). On the other hand, an involuntary exit may be due to party gate-keeping or failure to get re-elected (Somit et al. 1994; Moncrief 1998; Matland and Studlar 2004).

The most important source of involuntary turnover is electoral volatility, that is, the degree of change in voting behaviour between elections (Matland and Studlar 2004; Moncrief et al. 2004; Manow 2007; Heinshon 2014): higher volatility increases the likelihood of higher turnover and substantial changes of parliamentary seats (Rosenthal 1974; Matland and Studlar 2004). Overall, we can expect to find higher turnover rates when there is institutional instability, parties and party systems characterized by lower institutionalization, and high electoral volatility (Matthews 1984; Gouglas and Maddens 2017).

A second determinant of involuntary turnover is the electoral system: proportional systems tend to increase turnover, while majoritarian and double-list systems are conducive to higher re-election rates (Mutland and Stadlar 2004; Manow 2007; Heinsohn and Freitag 2012). In majoritarian systems, candidates rely on their status and resources; in contrast, in closed party lists in proportional environments, candidates depend more on parties' decisions (Heinsohn and Freitag 2012; Francois and Grossman 2015). Parties take a step back in their gate-keeping activity in majoritarian systems because they 'fear the loss of what is perhaps a personal vote' (Matland and Studlar 2004: 101). Party selection prior to the campaigning phase has proved to be a major factor in explaining the entry of newcomers into parliament (Gouglas and Maddens 2017). However, it remains a neglected aspect of turnover research. Frequently, turnover is affected by the inability of incumbents to obtain re-nomination (Moncrief 1998; Swain et al. 2000; Marino and Martocchia Diodati 2017). Re-nomination can fail due to resignations, party deselection (more frequent in PR systems), and death (Gouglas and Maddens 2017).

In addition to the electoral system, Heinshon (2014) has listed four further variables that can affect turnover rates:

1. *length of the legislative term*: the more frequent the elections, the lower the turnover rate;
2. *level of professionalization*: MPs are less likely to abandon the legislature when benefits are greater and the institutional context is professionalized (Squire 1988; Hibbing 1999; Kerby and Blidook 2011; Gouglas et al. 2017);
3. *degree of institutionalization*: the stronger and more influential the legislature, the less likely it is that MPs will leave voluntarily (Sisson 1973; Hall and Van Houweling 1995; Hibbing 1999; Matland and Studlar 2004; Salvati 2016a);
4. *legislature size*: lower numbers of seats have a negative effect on turnover.

Overall, the literature tells us that legislative turnover calls for a continuous research effort, due to the complexity produced by the interaction between variables at both the institutional and individual levels. Furthermore, it is extremely interesting to consider turnover in relation to the institutionalization of parties and to party system stability. From this viewpoint, high turnover can be interpreted as an indicator of structural de-institutionalization (Huntington 1968).

3. The Italian Case between Stability and Deep Transformations

Italy has proved to be an interesting case study for the analysis of legislative turnover in a twofold sense. On the one hand, it is possible to observe significant variations over time in the structural conditions that are likely to affect turnover ratios. This allows us to make longitudinal comparisons within the same context of democratic continuity, thus keeping fixed the possible effect of intervening regime and cross-country idiosyncratic factors. On the other hand, the relevance of the Italian case ensues from the empirical mixture of stability and quick renewals which has characterized the parliamentary class over the years. As noticed by Verzichelli (2009: 60), this research topic has great potential, especially when it comes to investigating political change in Italy from the 1990s.

We operationalize legislative turnover simply as the percentage of new MPs out of the total membership, compared to the previous legislature (Matland and Studlar 2004; Gouglas et al. 2017). We do not distinguish between newcomers and those who re-enter after a 'break'. Finally, we decided to focus only on the first parliamentary chamber. This choice is the most beneficial strategy from a comparative perspective, for reasons of lower comparability between second chambers due to their deep inter-chamber differences (e.g., Vercesi 2017). In this regard, it is worth noting that, however, the low share of passing between the two parliamentary branches in Italian history (usually ranging between 4% and 8% of the total number of MPs) does not appear to be a potential significant source of bias (Verzichelli 2009: 61).

Circumscribing the focus to the republican period only, we notice that – from the first general election in 1948 to 2013 – Italy has shown relatively high levels of turnover compared to other Western European countries. However, there has been a general increase especially from 1994 onwards (Gouglas et al. 2017). Before 2018, the turnover rate of the Chamber of Deputies surpassed the indicative threshold of 50% only in three circumstances: in 1948, 1994, and 2013 (Verzichelli 2009: 53). Excluding the exceptional case of the 1948 election, held to substitute the then Constitutional Assembly with the new democratic Parliament, we easily find – *mutatis mutandis* – important similarities between the two remaining periods. The general election of 1994 was the first held with a new electoral system since 1953 and marked the final breakdown of the former party system (Bartolini and D'Alimonte 1996); this ground-breaking phase was subsequently followed by the new stabilization of the parliamentary class (Verzichelli 2006). In 2013, the party system underwent a new earthquake, due to the pressing entry of the Five Star Movement (M5S) in Parliament and the consequent shift from bipolarism to tripolar party competition (D'Alimonte 2013). Both electoral rounds were characterized by significant voter realignment and high electoral volatility. In Table 1, we present descriptive statistics on electoral turnout, volatility and legislative turnover since 1994, including 2018 for comparative purposes. Information about the mean age of the elected and the number of 'new parties' in Parliament is also included. To exclude minor changes, we consider as new parties only those that were not in the previous Parliament with a parliamentary group and reached at least 5% of votes. However, we do not count those lists resulting from the merger of former parties. Electoral volatility is calculated following in the footsteps of Pedersen (1979) and Chiaramonte and Emanuele (2015).

With regard to the 2018 general election, an interesting puzzle stems from our picture. The percentage of legislative turnover is as high as the one of the two critical

passages which established the birth of the so-called 'Second Republic' in 1994 and its end in 2013 (Almagisti et al. 2014). The 2018 turnover equals the ratio of 66% of 2013 and it is only one percentage point below that of 1994. The mean age of MPs can be a further indicator of turnover. Indeed, the more people that get re-elected, the greater is the likelihood of older Deputies. In this regard, the data are striking: in 2018 the age reaches its historical minimum, that is, 44 years.[1] However, we observe a concomitant significant decrease in overall electoral volatility, compared to the previous election. In 1996, the downfall of volatility appeared together with the stabilization of a new parliamentary class compared to 1994: between 1994 and 1996, the legislative turnover moved from 67 to 44 percent. Moreover, the two peaks of legislative turnover in 1994 and 2013 are coincident with the entry of three and two, respectively, new major parties in the legislative arena. Nothing similar has happened in 2018: all the largest parties had already run the previous electoral campaign. This would lead us to argue that volatility has not involved new party actors.

Table 1. Electoral turnout, volatility, and turnover in the Italian Chamber of Deputies, 1994-2018

Election	Turnout (%)	Total volatility (%)	Legislative turnover (%)	Mean age	New parties
1994	86.3	39.3	66.8	47.1	3
1996	82.9	12.3	43.5	48.1	0
2001	81.4	20.4	41.9	50.4	0
2006	83.6	8.2	42.3	52.2	0
2008	80.5	11.3	40.8	50.8	0
2013	75.2	36.7	65.5	45.7	2
2018	72.9	26.7	65.9	44.3	0

Note: data for 2018 volatility are drawn from the 'New Data Release (May 2, 2018)' of Emanuele (2015).
The parties People of Freedom (*Popolo della Libertà* – PDL) for 2013 and Go Italy! (*Forza Italia* – FI) for 2018 have been counted as the same party (e.g., Vercesi 2015). The same applies when a party has changed its label.
Sources: data from the archives on the Italian parliamentary class of CIRCaP (University of Siena) presented in Verzichelli (2006, 2009) and Cotta and Verzichelli (2016: 78), Emanuele (2015), Openpolis (2018: 9), and own update based on data from the website of the Italian Ministry of the Interior (www.interno.gov.it).

We have touched upon the fact that electoral volatility and party system changes are major factors when it comes to explaining legislative turnover (Gouglas et al. 2017). Overall, our data on the Italian Chamber of Deputies from 1994 and 2018 confirm this tendency. The positive Pearson correlational value between the two measures is indeed 0.91 (p< 0.01); if we exclude 2018, it even rises to 0.95 (p< 0.01). Overall, the 2018 general election appears to be a deviant case. If it cannot be explained by electoral volatility as straightforwardly as previous rounds, *what accounts more for the prominent legislative turnover of 2018? Are there any factors that hold for 2018 and that distinguish this election from previous ones in terms of elected candidates?*

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[1] It is worth remembering that the minimum age to be elected for the Italian first chamber is 25.

4. Legislative Turnover in the 2018 Italian General Election: What Role for Parties?

Recent changes in legislative turnover rates in Italy have been theoretically associated with a couple of conditions: the emergence of new parties, voters' realignments, changing electoral rules, the decline of mass-based parties, and the change of the multi-level state structure which provides career opportunities to ambitious politicians at other levels of government (Lanza and Piazza 2002; Verzichelli 2006; Cotta and Verzichelli 2016: 78, 177; Grimaldi and Vercesi 2018). We have seen that the first two conditions are not fully convincing when accounting for the high level of 2018. The fourth and fifth, in turn, can perhaps explain differences between the pre-1994 period and subsequent increases, but they cannot explain oscillations from one election to the next (e.g., Verzichelli 2010). The electoral system, too, does not account for all the variations between subsequent legislative terms. Moreover, it is worth pointing out that similar turnover rates in Italy in 1994, 2013, and 2018 were reached under three different electoral laws. In contrast, the significant decrease in 1996 occurred with the same mixed system of 1994 in force. In 2018, candidates were elected through a new system that allocates a minority part via single member districts and the majority of votes proportionally to closed party lists, on which the same candidate can be placed for more than one district. However, no split-vote was allowed. Except for the majority premium, the rule applied in 2013 resembled this logic to some extent (Chiaramonte 2015).

If we discard the usual explanatory arguments, we need to look for alternatives. We have seen that political parties remain an intriguing option in this respect. Regression analyses have found no evidence of an impact of ideological positions (Gouglas et al. 2017: 18). According to Gouglas and Maddens (2017), selection is often more important than election as a drive behind new entries into Parliament. With regard to Italy, the impact of political parties seems visible in the higher percentages of non-rerunning outgoing MPs after 1994, associated with higher turnover rates (Verzichelli 2009: 54). Gouglas et al. (2017: 20-21) have mentioned the possible effect of intra-party rules. In particular, they have suggested analysing turnover at the party level and looking at factors such as quotas and candidate selection methods. What they do not directly mention is the impact that strong leaderships can have.

Scholarship on Italian political parties has underlined the flourishing of personalist/personal parties after the breakdown of the 'First Republic' (Pasquino 2014; Musella 2015). These parties have become increasingly dependent on their own leaders in terms of functioning and party strategies. To one extreme, leaders of these parties use party organizations as vehicles for their own success, undermining the notion of party as a composite and autonomous organization (Blondel and Thiébault 2010; Vercesi 2015; Musella 2018). It has been claimed that even the Democratic Party – traditionally based on cadres and a thicker organization – has recently moved in this direction (Salvati 2016b).

Here, we posit that large renewals of parliamentary elites can be the result of a specific way of organizing parties. In particular, we argue that leader-centred parties boost turnover, because in these parties 'loyalty to the leader is the basis on which asymmetrical power relationships are established [...]. A key indicator of this would be the authority to make unilateral decisions on nominations' (Kostadinova and Levitt 2014). Thus, our

expectation is that legislative turnover in 2018 in Italy has ensued from a substantial convergence of political parties towards a personalist model, larger than in the past.

Before entering into an overall comparison, we first check if in 2018 turnover affected some parties more than others. Moreover, we gauge whether the renewal of MPs is proportional to the gains of votes for parties with better electoral performances. This allows us to observe if there was a cross-party trend and to pinpoint possible parties where selection was more important than election to reshape parliamentary groups (Table 2).

Table 2. Variation in votes, turnover, and candidate renewal by party in 2018 (Chamber of Deputies)

Party	Votes 2013 (%)	Votes 2018 (%)	Variation in votes (%) 2013-2018	Turnover (%)	New candidates (%)
M5S	25.6	32.7	+7.1	72.3	75.0 (85.8)
PD	25.4	18.7	-6.7	34.5	54.3 (57.5)
League	4.1	17.4	+13.3	87.8	92.7
FI	21.6	14.0	-7.6	64.7	76.1
FdI	2.0	4.4	+2.4	85.2	94.7
Centre-right	27.6	37.0	+9.4	79.2	75.4 (only SMD)
LeU	-	3.4	+3.4	21.4	84.8 (91.9)

Note: calculations based on proportional votes to party lists, national territory (Aosta Valley excluded). FdI: Fratellid'Italia, Brothers of Italy; FI: Forza Italia, Go Italy!;LeU: Liberi e Uguali, Free and Equal; M5S:Movimento 5 stelle, Five Star Movement; PD: Partito democratico, Democratic Party. Only parties with parliamentary representation in 2018 are included. For simplicity's sake, the counting of new candidates is based on a stricter criterion, compared to that used to calculate turnover. We indicate the percentage of candidates without previous parliamentary experience in plurinominal lists. Values between brackets refer to single member districts. In the latter case, the PD ran in coalition with other minor parties.
Sources: Openpolis (2018), Istituto Cattaneo (2018a), Italian Ministry of the Interior's website (www.interno.gov.it), and own updates.

Data show that parties have promoted high levels of turnover, irrespective of their electoral performances. If we look at the 'new candidates' placed on party lists, we see that a significant majority had not had previous parliamentary experience. However, the net difference between new candidates and turnover confirms what previous research has shown: often, new candidacies occupied lower positions on the party lists, thus decreasing the likelihood of election (Istituto Cattaneo 2018a). In this respect, the cases of the PD and LeU are clear-cut examples. However, it is interesting to note that the PD was affected by a renewal of 35% of its MPs, although it lost 7% of its votes. In this regard, a caveat must be addressed. As we have said, the electoral law used in 2013 provided for a majority premium, which granted about 55% of seats in the first chamber to the coalition or list with more votes (Chiaramonte 2015). In particular, this overrepresented the Democratic Party (PD) and the electoral coalition it had led which won the election with less than 1% of votes, compared to the centre-right coalition; the M5S, in turn, ranked third, about 4 percentage points below the winning coalition. The move towards lower disproportionality could be seen as a possible drive behind the high turnover of some parties other than the PD. For example, the M5S has more than doubled its number of seats in 2018 subsequent to an increase of only 7% of votes, thus being confronted with the need to allocate a proportionally higher percentage of new seats. On the other hand, the loss of

the majority bonus together with the decrease in votes should have reduced the PD's room for manoeuvre to change representatives beyond its parliamentary elite. However, we observe indications of high turnover in this party as well. All in all, thus, our numbers suggest that the trend towards the renewal of the parliamentary class involved all parties, albeit with different gradients.

To answer our questions, we compare a few central characteristics of parties in 2013 and 2018, so that we can see any changes within the same organizations. For control purposes, we double-checked our findings with similar information about parties in 1994 and 1996. According to classic explanations, after a round of adjustment, new stabilization should have come. This was true in 1996, but not in 2018. By conducting the comparison by pairs of elections, we should be able to see if there are clues that party factors actually could play a role. If the degree of variation between 1994-1996 and 2013-2018 is similar, then we should reject our conjecture.

A first rough indicator of party change is the change of leadership from one election to the next. Parties can become more personalized by modifying the actual functioning, but substantial moves are more likely if there is a new leader. In addition, we present a few proxies of party personalism and leader's strength over nomination. They refer to leadership powers and intra-party democracy (Poguntke et al. 2016). Building on Sandri et al. (2013), we look at the selectorate's inclusiveness of leadership contests: we argue that inclusive methods can lead to more personalized leaderships (plebiscitary effect); however, if there is no election and the leader holds the position 'by right', this probably further increases his or her strength within the party. Another important aspect is the possibility and the likelihood of being able to remove the leader from his or her office: stronger personal leaderships are hard to remove. Moreover, we need to focus on the leader's actual control over nominations. We also refer to Hazan and Rahat (2010: 35) to distinguish between inclusive and exclusive candidate selection methods: once more, moving from party circles to broader selectorates would foster personalization, but turnover should be even more likely when the single leader decides on his or her own. Finally, we claim that more inclusive candidacy (Hazan and Rahat 2010: 20) favours turnover.

We provide the overview of party changes in Table 3. For clarity's sake, we limit our focus only to the four largest parties in parliament in 1996 and 2018, so that we can exclude parties with residual impact on turnover.

Changes in party organizations are marked in italics in the table. Findings support our expectations. While from 1994 to 1996 no substantial changes occurred (except for the change of party leader in the PDS), between 2013 and 2018 three out of the four main Italian parties moved in the expected direction. Methods of leader selection moved towards higher inclusivity. On the other hand, leaders increased their control over the party. Moreover, unlike in 2013, in 2018 all leaders had a final say on nominations, often raising complaints among excluded party cadres, former MPs nominated in the lower positions of party lists, and underrepresented party minorities.

FI did not experience substantial changes in its organizational arrangements, but this indicates nothing but the confirmation of Berlusconi's role of absolute party *dominus*. FI's lists were formed with the aim of opening lists to civil society and specifically to a new wave of MPs recruited from Berlusconi's enterprises (as previously happened in 1994): this renewal was pursued together with confirmation of the most loyal party

members.[2] Even in a personal party such as FI, this method has been conducive to tensions with excluded candidates and penalized incumbents.[3] The impact on turnover has been amplified by the poor electoral performance of FI, which suffered from an intracoalitional competition with Salvini's League, which was able to attract many former FI voters (Istituto Cattaneo 2018b).

Table 3. Party Features, 1994-1996 and 2013-2018

	1994				1996			
	PDS	**FI**	**AN**	**LN**	**PDS**	**FI**	**AN**	**LN**
Leadership change	No	-	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
Leader's selectorate	Party convent.	Party council	Party convent.	Party convent.	Party convent.	Party council	Party convent.	Party convent.
Leader's deselection	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Control over nominations	Very low	Very high	Low	High	Very low	Very high	Low	High
Candidate selection	Party council	Single leader	Party council	Party council	Party council	Single leader	Party council	Party council
Candidacy	Citizens	Citizens	Citizens	Citizens	Citizens	Citizens	Citizens	Citizens

	2013				2018			
	M5S	**PD**	**LN**	**PDL**	**M5S**	**PD**	**League**	**FI**
Leadership change	-	Yes	Yes	No	Partial	Yes	Yes	No
Leader's selectorate	Single leader	Voters	Party convent.	Party convent.	Members / single leader	Voters	Members	Party convent.
Leader's deselection	No	Party congress	No	No	No	Party congress	No	No
Control over nominations	Very high	Moderate	High	Very high	Very high	Very high	Very high	Very high
Candidate selection	Members	Members/ single leader	Party elite	Single leader	Members / single leader	Single leader	Single leader	Single leader
Candidacy	Members + requirements	Citizens	Citizens	Citizens	Citizens	Citizens	Citizens	Citizens

Note: see Table 1. PDS: Partito democratico della Sinistra, Democratic Party of the Left; AN: Alleanza nazionale, National Alliance; LN: Lega Nord, Northern League.
Party convent. stands for party convention.
Sources: Sandri et al. (2013); Pasquino (2014: 561), Vercesi (2015), and own elaboration and updates based on party statutes.

The nomination process proved to be less complicated for the League, where Salvini and his deputy secretary Giorgetti had total control of lists. Such centralization was facilitated by the transformation of the League from regional to national party.[4]

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[2] See: https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2018/01/30/elezioni-berlusconi-schiera-indagati-e-fedelissimi-le-liste-cambiate-nella-notte-de-girolamo-litiga-con-carfagna/4126607/ (first access: 10 May 2018).

[3] See: http://www.napolitoday.it/politica/forza-italia-liste-candidati-degirolamo-laboccetta.html (first access: 10 May 2018).

[4] See: https://www.ilfoglio.it/politica/2018/01/24/news/lega-matteo-salvini-candidati-collegi-uninominali-sud-174968/ (first access: 11 May 2018); http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/politica/bongiorno-bagnai-tutti-i-candidati-lega-1488411.html (first access: 10 May 2018).

PD's path was more tortuous: for the first time, the definition of party lists was centralized in the hands of the party leadership (i.e., Renzi and his inner circle). The internal opposition was almost deleted from party lists (or, however, from the most secure positions), in order to guarantee the formation of parliamentary groups loyal to the party leader.[5]

Finally, the only party that in the 2013 election requested some specific requirements for candidacy – the M5S – not only followed in other parties' footsteps by opening candidacy to all citizens (thus enhancing the possibility of the renewal of the parliamentary class), but it also gave to the central party leadership (i.e., Di Maio and Grillo) the opportunity to personally select the candidates collocated in the top positions of the closed party lists.[6]

5. Discussion and Conclusion

We have seen that the 2018 Italian election has not caused an earthquake in the format of the party system. Thus, party system deinstitutionalization cannot be a viable explanation for turnover rates.

Beyond electoral volatility and party performances, data show that it is fruitful to investigate intra-party factors and selection procedures to improve our knowledge about turnover determinants. Albeit with different nuances, the empirical evidence points in the direction of the strengthening of leaders' control over nominations. Overall, this seems to highlight a certain systemic transformation of selection criteria within parties for the 2018 election.

How parties work and organize, selection criteria, and leadership styles seem to influence the degree of renewal in the parties' rank-and-file. Considering that all the four main parties have shown significant centralization (with the partial exception of the M5S with regard to selection), it seems that the combination of highly personalized leaderships and a strong control over nominations is a valuable clue (among others) to solve the turnover enigma.

With the exception of FI, all the main parties moved, where possible, towards more inclusive leadership selection methods between 2013 and 2018: this kind of legitimation can account for the enforcement of more leader-centred forms of candidate selection. It is fundamental to remember that three out of four of the main parties changed leadership after 2013 (the M5S defined its own leadership); the high turnover could be explained by the leaders' will to form reliable parliamentary groups in the Chamber of Deputies.

To conclude, we can argue that a large part of the turnover is likely to be determined by what occurs before the elections and that the new frontier of turnover studies should probably be found in the analysis of intra-party organizational factors (leadership, organization size, party territorial dimension, party role in institutions, etc.), party

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[5] See: https://www.panorama.it/news/politica/le-liste-del-pd-annunciano-una-nuova-scissione/ (first access: 9 May 2018); and also: http://www.repubblica.it/politica/2018/01/27/news/pd_trattativa_a_oltranza_nella_notte_per_le_liste_renzi_non_ci_sara_condivisione_totale_-187372869/ (first access: 9 May 2018).

[6] See: https://www.panorama.it/news/politica/nuove-regole-per-il-movimento-5-stelle-addio-agli-incendiari/ (first access: 10 May 2018).

electoral performances, and nomination of party candidates (Gouglas and Maddens 2017; Gouglas et al. 2017). It is worth bearing in mind that these three aspects are strictly intertwined. This means that there is a reciprocal influence behind the shaping of the empirical effects.

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