

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

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 gate-keeping 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

¹See 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.

²As 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 17th 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

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.

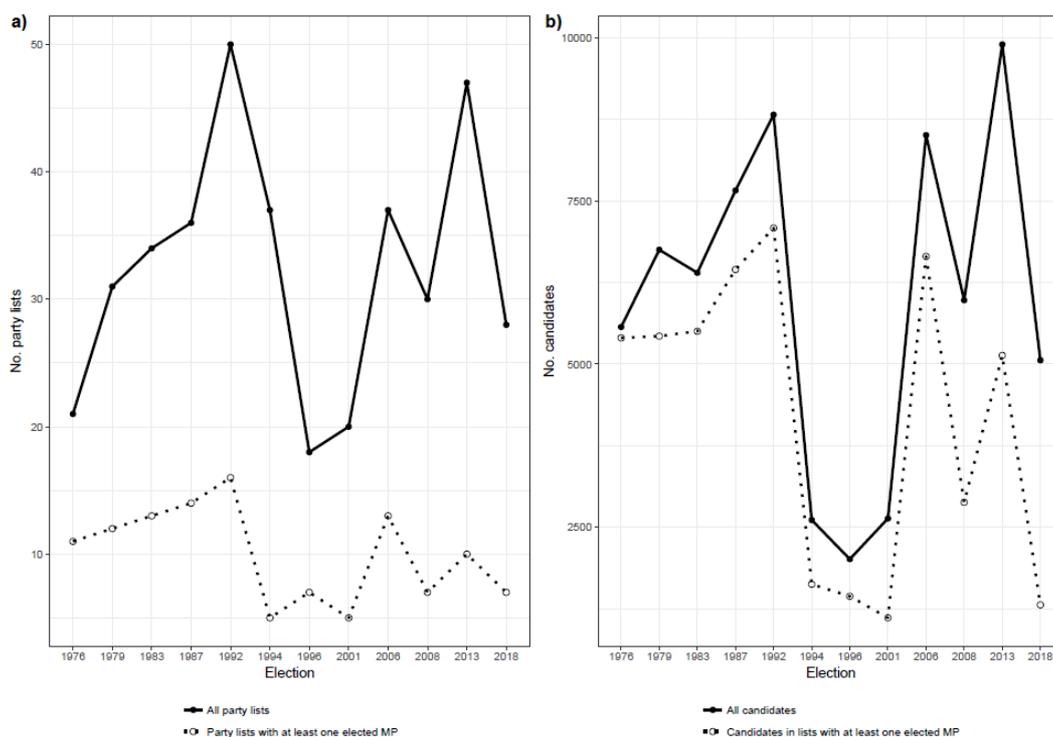
As for the 2018 Italian election, we can argue that, compared to the electoral rules in place in 2013, the Rosato law has raised the costs and reduced the expected benefits of participating in the electoral competition. Generally speaking, in 2018 costs were higher than in the previous election because 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

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

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

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?

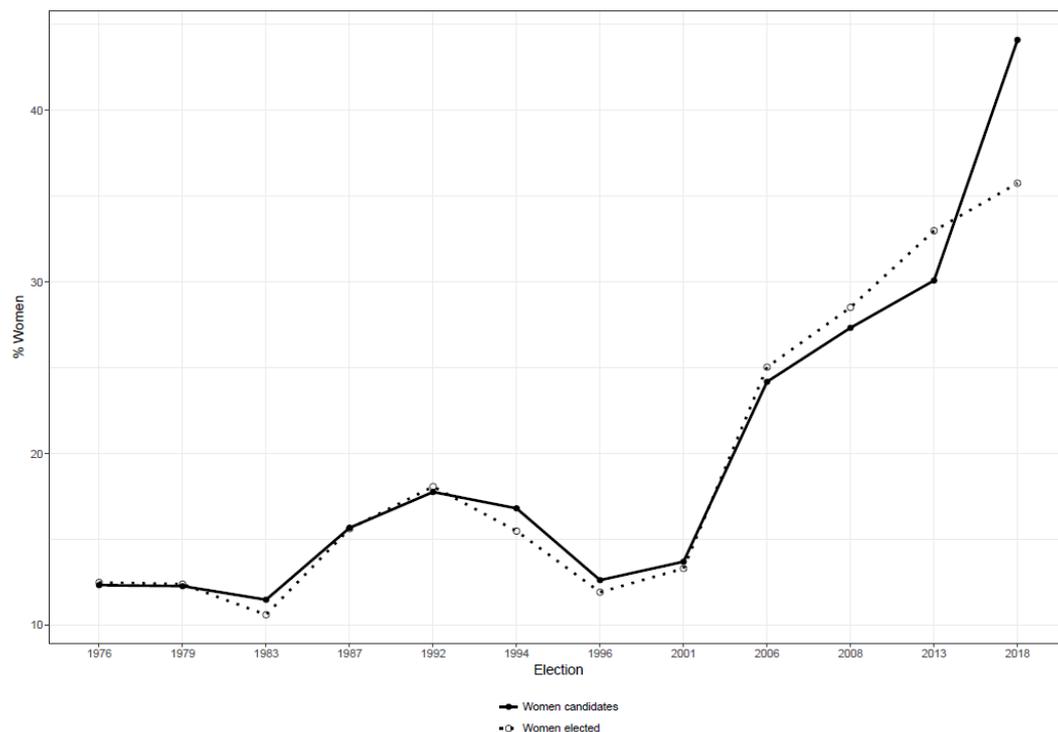
Starting with the Italian candidates' gender, Figure 2 shows the percentage of women among candidates for the Chamber and among elected deputies from 1976 to 2018. As illustrated by the solid black line, in four decades the percentage of female candidates has increased fourfold. While in the 1976 elections 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

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.

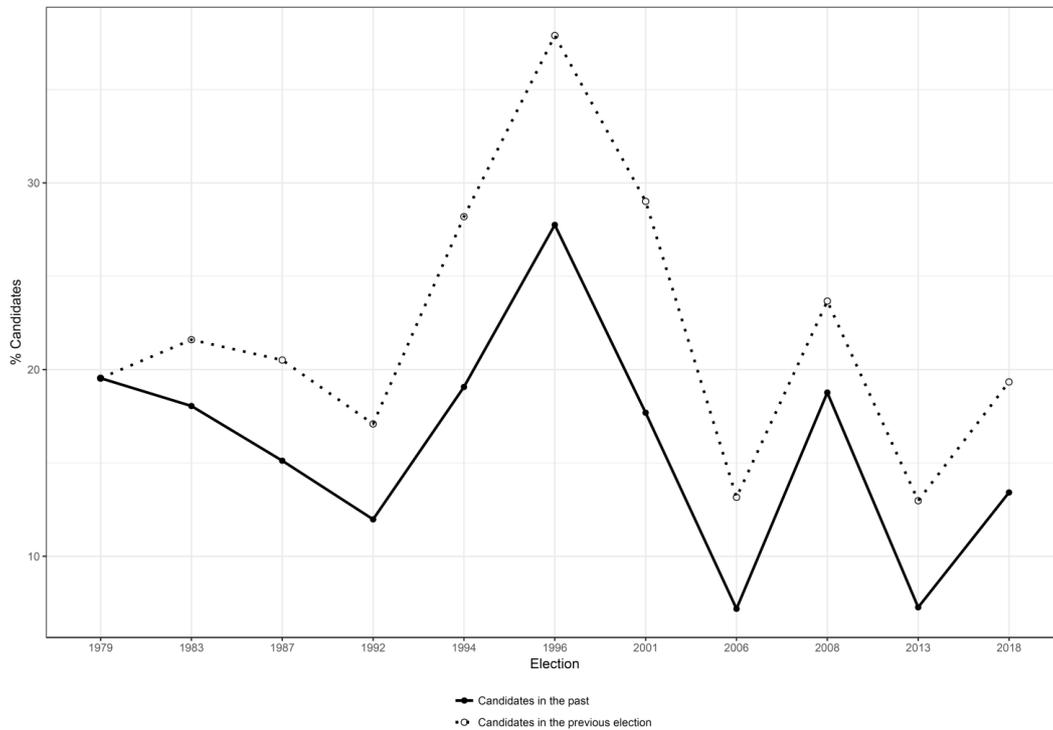
Table 4. Median age of Italian candidates, over time

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

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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