

# Winds of Change: How Primaries Brought Renewal to the Italian Parliament

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## Abstract

In the lead-up to the 2013 parliamentary election, four Italian parties used primaries to select candidates. Primaries, which were autonomously decided upon by the parties' central offices, have operated according to different rules. These quasi-experimental circumstances allow an assessment of the effects of rules and selectors' predispositions in the promotion of legislator renewal. An examination of three aspects of renewal—gender balance, rejuvenation and turnover—found that party leaderships sometimes deliberately pursued renewal through biased rules. The cases in point are Partito Democratico and Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà regarding gender balance, and Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S) regarding turnover. Moreover, even when unconstrained by the rules, selectors have pushed for renewal, as shown by the rise in female representation in the M5S. In general, primary elections have demonstrated to be renewal-friendly. However, it remains unclear whether this is an idiosyncratic effect connected to a single election, or a general tendency due to the characteristics of primary voters.

## Keywords

Italy; parliamentary elections; primary elections; legislators

## **Winds of Change: How Primaries Brought Renewal to the Italian Parliament**

by FULVIO VENTURINO and ANTONELLA SEDDONE

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*Abstract. — In the lead-up to the 2013 parliamentary election, four Italian parties used primaries to select candidates. Primaries, which were autonomously decided upon by the parties' central offices, have operated according to different rules. These quasi-experimental circumstances allow an assessment of the effects of rules and selectors' predispositions in the promotion of legislator renewal. An examination of three aspects of renewal—gender balance, rejuvenation and turnover—found that party leaderships sometimes deliberately pursued renewal through biased rules. The cases in point are Partito Democratico and Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà regarding gender balance, and Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S) regarding turnover. Moreover, even when unconstrained by the rules, selectors have pushed for renewal, as shown by the rise in female representation in the M5S. In general, primary elections have demonstrated to be renewal-friendly. However, it remains unclear whether this is an idiosyncratic effect connected to a single election, or a general tendency due to the characteristics of primary voters.*

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## 1. *Introduction*

The general election held in February 2013 has been called out as a shock to the Italian political system. As in 1994, when Silvio Berlusconi and Forza Italia (FI) entered parliament, the Movimento 5 Stelle's (M5S) electoral results were unforeseen (Bordignon and Ceccarini 2013; D'Alimonte 2013). The party led by Beppe Grillo won nearly one quarter of the total votes and reshaped the Italian political scene (Newell 2014; Pasquino 2014): bipolarism faded away; left and right became obsolete categories; new policy issues entered the political and media agenda; innovative patterns of party organisation and intra-party democracy were introduced. The new parliament also registered an unusually high rate of renewal. There are various reasons for this change. The M5S contributed to renewing the parliamentary elite by fielding candidates with no previous experience in elected offices<sup>1</sup>. The 2013 parliamentary election was also atypical in its use of primaries – both open and closed – for the selection of candidates to be included on electoral lists. This practice represents an unprecedented novelty for the Italian political system: indeed, the majority of elected legislators received their nomination from intra-party democratic procedures. Even though primary elections are today very common among Italian parties (particularly left-wing parties), they had never before been used before at the parliamentary level. In 2013 four parties adopted primaries, making use of a variety of rules for achieving different levels of inclusivity among selectorates. Consequently, incumbent MPs were nominated through a number of very diverse methods, ranging from primaries to direct appointments by party leaders (Rombi and Seddone 2017).

This heterogeneity is particularly useful for research on primary elections, as it allows for the testing of the effects of different candidate selection methods within the same parliament. The possibility of clarifying whether and to what extent adopting different levels of inclusivity may have driven dynamics of renewal within the parliamentary elite makes Italy an interesting case for investigating the impact of selection methods on political recruitment.

Relevant studies have established that the systems adopted for electing MPs have an effect on both MPs' characteristics and their parliamentary behaviour once elected. Several studies have

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<sup>1</sup> At that time, Beppe Grillo spoke of «forcing the parliament as a tuna can»; cfr. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AtRVm\\_XWzCA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AtRVm_XWzCA).

pointed out that electoral rules are an important factor in explaining MPs' legislative behaviour once elected, for instance, in terms of responsiveness (Crisp et al. 2004; Jones et al. 2002). Similarly, research also suggests that electoral rules could determine the demographic features of elected officials. There is, for example, an extensive literature investigating the effects of gender quotas on the representation of women in politics (Paxton *et al.* 2010; Schwindt-Bayer 2009; Rule 1987). As electoral rules are recognised as a crucial factor influencing political recruitment, we could also assume that candidate nomination procedures might be a useful factor for understanding the changes among political elites. While several studies have clarified that the modalities used for nominations could deeply affect the characteristics of the political class (Hazan and Rahat 2010), the types of impacts remain in question. Does inclusivity in candidate selection methods boost renewal within parliaments? Does inclusivity hinder political parties from strengthening their gender balance? Does it promote generational renewal among political elites in terms of age or political experience? The literature remains inconclusive in these regards. Findings from the Israeli context suggest that primaries are far from improving women's representation in parliament (Hazan 1997). The same holds true in the Finnish, Dutch and Icelandic cases studied by Hazan and Rahat (2010). Cross and Gauja (2014) have made similar conclusions about the Australian case. Pruyzers et al. (2017) maintain sceptical positions in their comparative scrutiny of 19 democracies. Primaries' positive effects on gender balance have only been detected in Norway (Narud and Valen 2008), and to some extent—contra Hazan and Rahat (2010)—in Iceland (Indriðason and Sigurjónsdóttir 2014). In fact, there are arguments that a higher degree of gender equality among legislators is achieved when the party retains control over nominations. In addition, the research focusing on the renewal of party elites caused by inclusive selection methods is still underdeveloped. Even if there is agreement about the idea that primaries are a competitive arena for facilitating the entry of outsiders, reliable findings focusing on non-US cases are still lacking. Moreover, available research on party leaders suggests that younger and more inexperienced candidates are less likely to be selected when broad selectorates are involved (Sandri *et al.* 2015).

This article aims to offer further empirical evidence and analysis on this area of research. More specifically, building on the Italian case, the article sheds light on the capacity of different candidate selection methods to facilitate the renewal of the parliamentary elite. Did the adoption of inclusive candidate selection methods contribute to the renewal of the Italian parliament that resulted from the 2013 general elections, and to what extent? Italy, as stated above, provides an opportunity to compare the impact of different candidate selection methods within the same parliament, and – as will be clarified below – within the same party, in terms of the renewal of the parliamentary elite. We focus on three dimensions of renewal: a) gender, that is assessing whether inclusivity

in candidate selection methods may have contributed to increasing the quota of female legislators; b) generational renewal, or the age of MPs; and c) turnover, of the parliamentary entrance of newly elected MPs and their political experience before serving in parliament. Our findings suggest that inclusivity could affect elected officials' profiles in terms of renewal, but this impact may differ when considering gender, age or seniority separately. Furthermore, our analyses show that, actually, even if party members and sympathisers' participation in the candidate selection process ensures that there are greater chances of achieving renewal of political elites, parties continue to play a crucial role. Defining candidacy rules and ranking candidates within electoral lists are indeed crucial factors that affect the results of both the selection of nominees and, ultimately, their election to parliament.

This article is organised through the following sections. The next section offers a summary of the parliamentary composition that was the result of the 2013 election. The third section provides an overview of the rules and procedures for holding primaries adopted by the four parties who held primaries. The fourth section represents the core of this work by describing the step-by-step operation of primaries in terms of representation. The conclusion section sums up the results and sketches the main insights to emerge from our analyses.

## *2. The 2013 election: a new parliament*

In the 2008 parliamentary election, the right-wing coalition won a landslide victory. Yet, despite Silvio Berlusconi enjoying the largest parliamentary majority ever, this government term was plagued by a series of events that were unfavourable to the coalition. The coalition was shaken by partisan and personal struggles, through the occurrence of both financial and sexual scandals. When the state of the economy worsened, in November 2011, Berlusconi resigned under pressure (Marangoni 2011). Subsequently, a non-partisan government was formed by the independent Mario Monti, ruling until December 2012. The beginning of the Monti government coincided with the start of a prolonged electoral campaign which lasted until February 2013, when an early parliamentary election was called (Bosco and McDonnell 2012; Marangoni 2012). This election campaign was characterised by a negative climate of opinion. In addition to the financial crisis, the dissatisfaction with politics and politicians become an urgent issue on the political agenda. In particular, the M5S engaged in a political campaign against the ruling parliamentary elite, blamed the elite for its inability to cope with the economic problems affecting the Italian system, but also for its involvement in scandals, bribery practices, and the illegal use of public funds. The roots of these politicians' misconduct were precisely identified within electoral law, which, according to Beppe Grillo, enabled political parties to choose and then control elected officials. Since 2006, both houses of parliament

have been elected through a mixed electoral system. This was basically a PR system with a seat bonus which gave an advantage to the coalition with the most votes. This system has been severely criticised because of its inherent tendency towards governmental fragmentation and instability, especially due to the attribution of Senate bonuses. A second criticism of the electoral system addressed the use of closed lists, which were in turn censured as a cause of inadequate representation. According to detractors, candidates for parliament were to be chosen through a preferential vote. Although there seemed to be significant agreement on this point, parliament was unable to change the rules, so that the method of recruitment for parliamentarians came to be a major issue.

The rapidly-growing Movimento 5 Stelle ran in its first national election in 2013. Since its launch in 2009, the M5S had clearly demonstrated its populist and hyper-democratic ideology (Corbetta and Gualmini 2013). Both M5S leaders and grassroots denied the value of representative democracy. Thus, although disputing the impending parliamentary election, they relentlessly deplored the use of closed lists as an elitist and undemocratic tool through which to choose legislators. To obviate this lack of political involvement, and at the same time to emphasise their difference from traditional parties, the M5S resolved to make use of primary elections to compose their slates of candidates for both houses. The leaders then opted for closed primaries, reserved for part of the membership, which took place online from December 3 to 6, 2012 (Lanzone and Rombi 2014).

This first move by the Movimento 5 Stelle forced the other parties to react. In 2012, the right-wing coalition was disputing its leadership, and in the last months of the year, leadership aspirants were collecting signatures in order to enter an open primary election the selection of candidates for Prime Minister. If effectively held, this primary was seen to possibly eventually pave the way to the use of further primaries for the selection of legislators. The ageing Silvio Berlusconi's decision to lead the coalition for the sixth time halted the entire process, however, and the right-wing parties selected both their candidate for Prime Minister and their candidates for legislators through traditional, exclusive methods.

The left-wing parties followed a very different narrative. They had previously decided to form a coalition based on Partito Democratico (PD) and Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà (SEL), also supported by the Südtiroler Volkspartei (SVP), a small regionalist party representing the German-speaking minority. These parties had experienced intra-party democracy for at least ten years, and a few weeks earlier they had picked the PD's Pier Luigi Bersani as their candidate for Prime Minister, using a two-round open primary election (Gelli, Mannarini and Talò 2013). Partially following their usual practices of internal democracy, and partially due to a contagion inspired by the legislative primaries promoted by the Movimento 5 Stelle, the three left-wing parties also gave their supporters a say in the selection of candidates for parliament. In accordance with their previous experiences,

the PD and the SEL organised primaries open to all voters; the tiny SVP instead preferred to constrain the selectorate to party members. The two main parties held primaries on December 29 and 30, 2012 by the two main parties, while the SVP held their primary on 6 January 2013, a bizarre timing for Italian politics. However, thousands of poll stations were organised nationwide, receiving a turnout of about 2 millions of selectors (Musella 2014, 249).

In addition to the surprising electoral performance of the M5S, the 2013 election produced an unusual renewal at the parliamentary level. For instance, as shown in Table 1, the number of women in parliament reached 30.5 per cent of legislators, increasing by about ten percentage points in comparison with the previous term. Further, the mean age of representatives in the 2013 parliament is 48 years old, an innovation for a parliament usually featuring older legislators. The last column of the table shows that the share of newly elected legislators is 64.1 per cent. As pointed out by De Lucia (2013a; 2013b), such a high turnover is second only to 1994, when the right-wing coalition led by Berlusconi and Forza Italia entered parliament, launching the so-called Second Republic<sup>2</sup>.

TAB. 1 - *Main features of Italian legislators elected in 2013.*

Political party	Total legislators (N)	Female legislators (%)	Mean age (N)	Turnover rate (%)
Partito Democratico	406	38.7	49	65.4
Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà	44	27.3	46	95.5
Südtiroler Volkspartei	11	14.3	47	85.7
Monti coalition <sup>a</sup>	66	14.3	53	79.1
Popolo della Libertà	196	18.5	54	27.7
Fratelli d'Italia	9	12.5	48	0.0
Lega Nord	35	15.2	47	36.1
Movimento 5 Stelle	163	37.8	37	100.0
Others	15	18.2	47	83.3
<i>Total</i>	<i>945</i>	<i>30.5</i>	<i>48</i>	<i>64.1</i>

<sup>a</sup>: Scelta Civica, Futuro e Libertà, Unione Democratica di Centro.

*Note*: Data include Valle d'Aosta and foreign electoral districts.

*Source*: Adaptation from De Lucia (2013a) & CLS-Candidate and Leader Selection.

At glance, the four parties who made use of primaries to select their candidates contributed to the renewal of the parliament to a greater extent than those who did not use primary, on all the dimensions this study considers. Of course, a combination of factors may have facilitated such a change, and there are some remarkable exceptions, as in the case of the turnover triggered by Monti coalition. Nevertheless, in order to shed light on the pathways to parliament and to the renewal, candidate selection methods should be seriously taken into account. The 2013 election represents a very compelling case study in this regard. As a consequence of four parties' enlargement of their selectorates, 53 per cent of the new parliament is made up of legislators who obtained their nomina-

<sup>2</sup> As usual in Italian politics, even in the parliament elected in 2013, floor crossing has been practiced by hundreds of legislators. All figures used in this article refer to the situation at the moment of the formation of parliament, disregarding later parliamentary group changes.

tions by competing in a primary race. In particular, 17.9 per cent of MPs gained their place on an electoral list through a closed primary (M5S and SVP), while 35 per cent competed in open primary contests (PD and SEL). Other parties preferred traditional selectorates, such as selection by a narrow party elite or candidate appointment by the party leader. Consequently, the incumbent Italian parliament is composed by MPs who have gained their nominations through various selection methods.

### 3. Primary election rules

Selecting candidates through primary elections is above all a matter of rules, especially when primaries are private competitions organised by political parties without any given laws with which to comply. This being the case in Italy, the lack of public regulation allowed parties to autonomously choose the rules about candidates, selectorates and timing, resulting in a heterogeneous set of procedures. Before delving into the details of the rules adopted by each of the parties, a preliminary distinction is necessary. While Südtiroler Volkspartei and the Movimento 5 Stelle decided to let their party members select *all* of the nominees to be included on their closed candidate lists, the leadership of the Partito Democratico and the Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà instead kept control over the lists. This means that a quota of PD and SEL nominees—amounting to about a quarter of all elected legislators—was appointed directly by party leaders, which offered them a safe place on the lists (Regalia and Valbruzzi 2016).

It is now necessary to consider the rules used in defining *selectorate inclusivity*. Both the PD and the SEL resorted to open primary elections<sup>3</sup>. This meant that all party members and sympathisers were entitled to vote. Nonetheless, there were some limitations in practice. Both the PD and SEL allowed only selectors who had previously registered to vote in the open primary election for the *Italia Bene Comune* coalition, held in November 2012. By contrast, SVP and M5S organised a closed primary election where only party members were allowed to have a say on nominations<sup>4</sup>. Yet, while SVP permitted *all* of its 50,000 registered members to cast a vote on their preferences<sup>5</sup>, this membership condition was not enough for participation in the M5S primaries. For the M5S primaries, one needed to be registered as a M5S sympathiser on Beppe Grillo's blog platform by 30 September 2012; an identity card showing formal registration as a party member was also re-

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<sup>3</sup> Partito Democratico (2012), *Primarie Parlamentari PD, 29-30 Dicembre 2012, Regolamento per le candidature al Parlamento per le elezioni politiche 2013*; Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà (2012), *Regolamento per le candidature al Parlamento per le elezioni politiche 2013*.

<sup>4</sup> Movimento 5 Stelle (2012), *Regole per candidarsi e votare per le liste del Movimento 5 Stelle alle politiche 2013*; Südtiroler Volkspartei (2012), *Statuto della Südtiroler Volkspartei*.

<sup>5</sup> All party members registered by December 31, 2012 were eligible to vote. The party registered 654 new affiliations during the two weeks preceding primary election day, reaching the quota of 50,668 members.

quired by 2 November 2012. These two requirements aimed to avoid the risk of instant membership, and to prevent cross-voting by the supporters of other parties.

Further differences can be found when taking *candidacy requirements* into account. In the PD, all party members and sympathisers could run as a candidate, unless they had served in parliament for more than two mandates (or alternatively for a total of 15 years)<sup>6</sup>. Similarly, due to incompatibility with a national mandate, candidacy was not permitted for those serving in local, regional or EU institutions. Potential nominees were required to have the endorsement of 5 per cent of party members registered in at least three local party sections (*circoli*) of the electoral district where they sought candidacy<sup>7</sup>. Finally, the provincial party offices approved nominations and prepared the primary lists. Similar rules for candidacy were adopted by the SEL, but in their case, regulations did not provide any explicit instructions about endorsements. In the case of the SEL, the regional party leadership was entitled to set the primary list to be presented to selectors. As for the SVP, running in primary elections was defined by local party sections—the *circondari*—taking into account one restriction: candidacy was not allowed for those elected officials who had served more than 25 years in public office.

In distinction from the other parties' primary processes, the M5S's entire primary process was governed directly by the party leadership at the national level. Candidacy requirements for competing in a *parlamentarie* were also quite dissimilar. Firstly, aspiring candidates were asked to provide a certification of a lack of criminal record. Secondly, they had to prove that they were not a member of other political parties. Aspiring candidates were also required to residency in the electoral district where they presented their candidacy. Finally, candidacy was open only to those who had previously been a candidate but had *not* been elected in the local and regional elections in which the M5S had participated between 2008 and 2012. According to Gualmini (2013), the party suffered from a lack of experienced elected officials, so it was strategic to rely on candidates who had previously run in elections. Moreover, this also created a greater dependency on the central party, ensuring loyal parliamentary behaviour once elected<sup>8</sup>. The party leadership had the power to validate the list of candidates running in primaries.

Remarkable differences existed between parties in terms of the *expression of the vote*. PD selectors could cast up to two preferences within a unique list of candidates, without any distinction between the two houses, under the condition of selecting candidates of different genders. Two pref-

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<sup>6</sup> Derogations for ten candidates were conceded.

<sup>7</sup> A qualified majority of 2/3s by the regional party leadership could lower the endorsements required to 3 per cent. Those currently serving in parliament were exempted from collecting signatures endorsing their candidacy for primary elections.

<sup>8</sup> In this regard, an only exception was given to those running in the five foreign electoral districts. These candidates were only asked to fulfil the registered membership requirements.

erences for candidates of the same sex were voided. The SEL offered selectors the opportunity to cast up to two preferences by gender as well, but in their case selectors were provided with two different lists of candidates (one per gender) for each house. By contrast, SVP applied its usual rule for internal voting procedures: selectors could cast a number of preferences, adding up to 1/3 of the listed candidates<sup>9</sup>. M5S permitted up to three preferences without any formal provisions about equality between the sexes.

Parties also adopted different procedures regarding the *composition of lists*<sup>10</sup>. The main norm was the total number of votes won by a candidate. The PD and the SEL then combined the candidates selected through primaries with those picked by party leaders. Afterward, for the PD the procedure was complicated by the fact that all primary candidates were running within a unique list, without a distinction between lower and upper house. The distribution of nominees within the electoral lists was organised by the regional party leadership. In order to preserve and facilitate territorial representation, and taking into account the PD's results in the last general election, each province (district) was assigned a number of places within the list<sup>11</sup>. Then, nominees were fielded within the list in accordance with the result of the primary elections. To enhance gender balance, a principle of alternating between candidates of different genders was applied. Party lists have thus been arranged according to several criteria: territorial representation, primary results, leadership adjustment, age requirements set by the Italian constitution to be eligible for the Senate, and gender balance.

For the SEL, placing candidates was simpler. Since primary candidates were already divided between the two houses, the age requirements had been met in advance, and the party on had to consider primary results, leadership adjustments, and gender balance.

For the Movimento 5 Stelle, two criteria were considered: the number of votes achieved by a candidate and age. When composing the party lists, distinction was given to Senate candidates, considering the necessary age requirements. Once the lists for Senate were set, the remaining candidates were distributed into the lower house lists in accordance with their primary results. No gender criteria were explicitly applied. Similarly, the SVP appointed its nominees by taking into account the votes won in primary elections. Table 2 summarises the rules used in the 2013 legislative primaries by the parties discussed.

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<sup>9</sup> Even if no formal provision concerning gender balance was explicitly set in the voting rules, it must be pointed out that according to the SVP statute a proportion of at least ¼ of the all candidates in primary elections is usually reserved for women.

<sup>10</sup> To ensure minority representation, special provisions within the electoral system require SVP candidates to compete in one-member districts. Candidates from this party do not enter slates.

<sup>11</sup> The distribution of places per district has been accomplished according to the Sainte-Laguë formula.

TAB. 2 - Main features of primaries for selecting 2013 nominees.

Political party	Selectorate	Candidacy requirements	Expression of the vote	Electoral list composition
Partito Democratico	All voters	Less than two mandates as elected official at national level 5 per cent endorsements by party members	Up to two preferences (gender condition)	Territorial representation Number of votes Gender alternation Age requirement (Senate) Head of the list appointed by party leader
Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà	All voters	Less than two mandates as elected official at national level 5 per cent endorsements by party members	Up to two preferences	Number of votes Gender alternation Age requirement (Senate) Head of the list appointed by party leader
Südtiroler Volkspartei	Only members (without additional requirements)	Selection by local sections ( <i>circondari</i> )	Preferences allowed were at a maximum of 1/3 of candidates running	Number of votes
Movimento 5 Stelle	Only members (with additional requirements)	Having run as an M5S candidate (not elected) in previous local elections Any mandate as elected official	Up to three preferences	Number of votes Age requirement (Senate)

The process of selecting the political class could be described as a funnel. This is to say that each step leads to a restriction in the number of people involved. At the start, all citizens are in principle eligible to run for political office. However, as a result of self-selection which excludes those uninterested in politics, those who aspire to a political career make up only one part of the broader citizenry. Among these, an even smaller number chooses to enter politics. They have two main ways of pursue this aspiration. They may compete in an open race, as happens when a party promotes primary elections; alternatively, they can be appointed by party leaders or by a party board, through an exclusive process. Finally, those who survive these steps, and win a sufficient number of votes or an high position on a list, as based on different electoral systems, succeed in becoming elected legislators.

In this article, we consider the final stages of this process for the four Italian parties that ran primary elections in 2013<sup>12</sup>. To do so, we first consider those aspiring to enter a list of candidates for parliamentary elections, then the legislative candidates actually fielded, and finally the restricted group of elected representatives. It is helpful to begin by assessing those aspiring to enter a list of candidates, as shown in Table 3. The two houses of the Italian parliament are composed of 945

<sup>12</sup> As concerns the Movimento 5 Stelle, according to data released by organizers, 20,252 party members participated in the so-called *Parlamentarie*. This makes up 64.1 per cent of 31,612 eligible voters. The Partito Democratico mobilized 2,096,884 selectors, or about 24 per cent of the number of PD voters in the 2013 general elections (Musella 2014, 249). For the SEL's open primaries and the SVP's closed primaries, official participation data were not released by organizers.

seats<sup>13</sup>. There were 3,599 total candidates for a party nomination, with the regionalist SVP choosing among a very small number. The table reports the three selection methods described in the previous section.

TAB. 3 - *Aspirants to enter a list according to their partisanship and method of selection.*

Political party	Leader appointment		Closed primaries		Open primaries		Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Partito Democratico	249	21.8	0	0.0	894	78.2	1,143
Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà	499	52.2	0	0.0	457	47.8	956
Südtiroler Volkspartei	5	35.7	9	64.3	0	0.0	14
Movimento 5 Stelle	0	0.0	1,486	100.0	0	0.0	1,486
<i>All aspirants</i>	<i>753</i>	<i>20.9</i>	<i>1,495</i>	<i>41.6</i>	<i>1,351</i>	<i>37.5</i>	<i>3,599</i>

Source: CLS-Candidate and Leader Selection.

Table 4 shows that 2,674 of the original aspirants for candidacy—out of the original 3,599—were fielded as candidates by one of the four parties. While in the first stage the greatest number of candidates had to compete in closed primaries, most of these candidates were in fact selected through open primaries in the second stage. Further, avoiding party competitions, all candidates appointed by the leaders of their respective parties directly obtained a nomination.

TAB. 4 - *Legislative candidates according to their partisanship and method of selection.*

Political party	Leader appointment		Closed primaries		Open primaries		Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Partito Democratico	249	27.0	0	0.0	672	73.0	921
Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà	499	54.4	0	0.0	418	45.6	917
Südtiroler Volkspartei	5	35.7	9	64.3	0	0.0	14
Movimento 5 Stelle	0	0.0	822	100.0	0	0.0	822
<i>All candidates</i>	<i>753</i>	<i>28.2</i>	<i>831</i>	<i>31.1</i>	<i>1,090</i>	<i>40.7</i>	<i>2,674</i>

Source: CLS-Candidate and Leader Selection.

It has been well established that when PR with a closed list is used to elect a parliament, a candidate's position in a slate is crucial to gaining a seat. In practice, only candidates ranking near the top of the slate are competitive, while those filling the lower positions are simply currently following their party's instructions in order to eventually begin a political career in the future. Table 5 details the median slate position of the candidates fielded by the PD and the SEL in both houses, taking into account their selection method<sup>14</sup>. In the case of the PD, the median candidate picked by open primaries is ranked higher in the Lower House slate and lower in the Upper House slate, but in both cases the differences are unremarkable. When considering the SEL, by contrast the median candidates selected through open primaries are ranked significantly higher in both slates. This

<sup>13</sup> The Lower House features 630 representatives, while the Upper House is composed of 315 senators. Five additional non-elected senators with a life-long tenure are appointed by the President of the Republic.

<sup>14</sup> The SVP and the M5S cannot be examined from this point of view because in South Tyrol – the area where the SVP operates – a plurality based on single member districts is used, and no slate is therefore put together; the M5S has only made use of closed primaries so it is not possible to contrast their different selection methods.

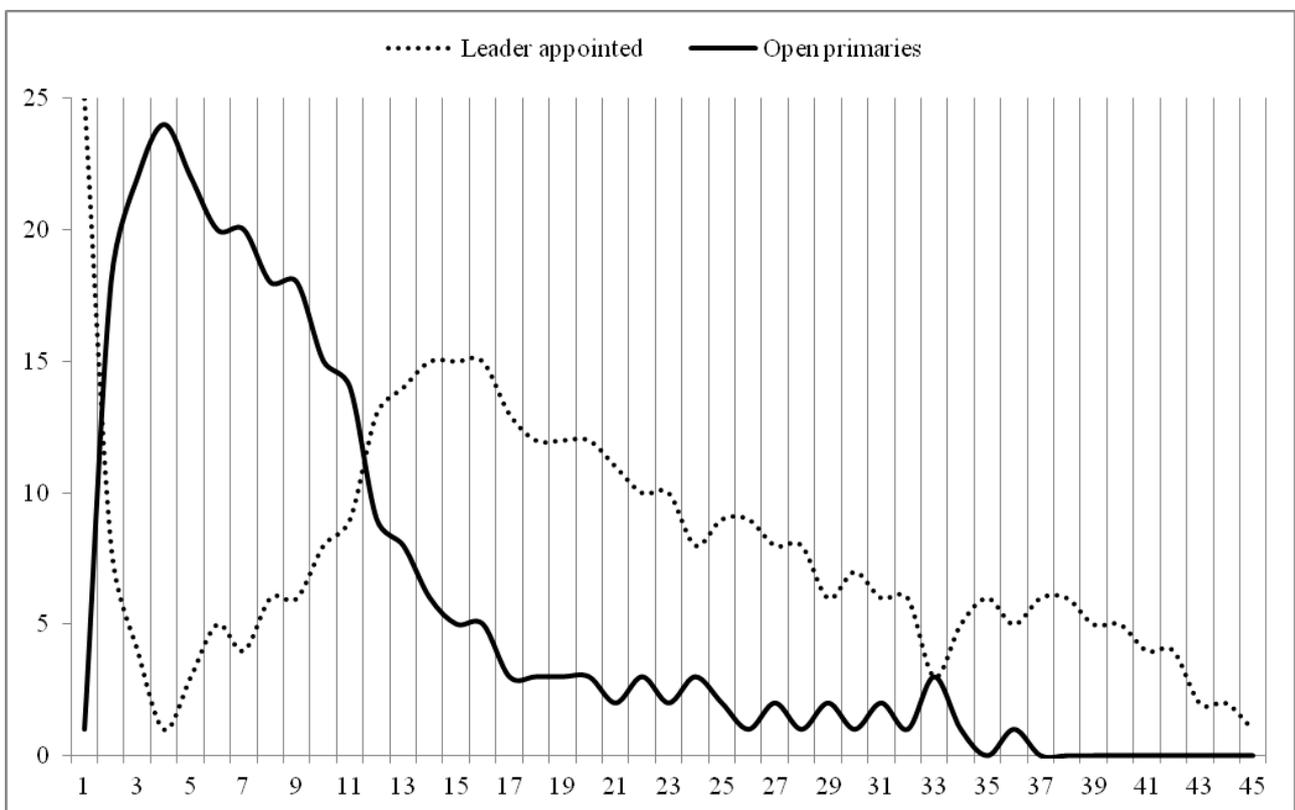
means that although leaders have appointed several candidates, they have not seized all safe slate positions. In sum, the use of primaries has been effective rather than ornamental.

TAB. 5 - *Partito Democratico and Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà, position in the list according to party, method of selection and House.*

Political party	House	Leader appointment		Open primaries	
		Median	N	Median	N
Partito Democratico	Lower House	16	158	13	458
	Upper House	9	87	10.5	214
Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà	Lower House	18.5	352	8	264
	Upper House	17	147	6.5	154

Source: CLS-Candidate and Leader Selection.

Figure 1 should clarify the situation. It shows the rank of legislative candidates to the Lower House fielded by the SEL, according to their selection method. It appears that the positions on the left—corresponding to a safe rank on the slate—are mainly filled by candidates selected through open primaries. It must be noted that the predominance of leader appointed candidates in the top position—rank 1—corresponds to a precise party strategy: being a leader-based party, the SEL decided to place its leader Nichi Vendola as the top candidate in 25 electoral districts. Having as a result been elected in several different districts, Vendola opted to represent one of these, paving the way to parliament for his party to be second-ranked in 24 districts, most selected through primaries<sup>15</sup>.



<sup>15</sup> Being in office as president of the Apulia region, Vendola served at the national level for just one month; on 16 April 2013 he resigned from his parliamentary seat.

FIG. 1 - Rank of the Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà legislative candidates according to their method of selection, Lower House (N=616).

The outcomes of these slate composition strategies is made evident in Table 6, where—focusing on the four parties under consideration—613 elected legislators out of 2,674 candidates are classified according to their partisanship and method of selection. To the extent that these four parties are considered, a majority of legislators (51.2 per cent) entered parliament after a selection based on open primaries, more than a quarter—thanks to the exceptional success of the M5S—were selected through closed primaries, and lastly a minority, just over one fifth (21.2 per cent) were leader appointed. The table makes clear that in the case of the two left-wing parties the use of appointment has been extensive, but open primaries still predominated.

TAB. 6 - Elected legislators according to their partisanship and method of selection.

Political party	Leader appointment		Closed primaries		Open primaries		Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Partito Democratico	114	28.6	0	0.0	285	71.4	399
Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà	15	34.1	0	0.0	29	65.9	44
Südtiroler Volkspartei	1	14.3	6	85.7	0	0.0	7
Movimento 5 Stelle	0	0.0	163	100.0	0	0.0	163
<i>All legislators</i>	<i>130</i>	<i>21.2</i>	<i>169</i>	<i>27.6</i>	<i>314</i>	<i>51.2</i>	<i>613</i>

Source: CLS-Candidate and Leader Selection.

Thus far we have illustrated the recruitment processes used by four Italian parties in the lead-up to the 2013 parliamentary election. We have seen that three of these parties preferred mixed strategies, while the M5S exclusively relied on closed primaries. We have considered three phases in the recruitment of legislators, corresponding to the screening of aspirants for candidacy to a candidate list composed through primaries or leader appointment, to the composition of the slates of legislative candidates fielded to contest the campaign, to the election of legislators. Looking forward, we now face the question of whether these steps are neutral. In other words, we will examine whether the process of recruitment is random, or rather whether a given type of candidate systematically prevails. To unravel this problem, in the next section we assess the different weights of gender, age and seniority in the consecutive recruitment stages.

#### 4. Stages of recruitment, methods of selection and candidate profiles

*Gender.* - Before beginning the analyses of the influence of recruitment on candidate profiles it is important to recall some caveats to our case study and the parties we are working on. Firstly, the role of the SVP is in practice irrelevant because of the low number of candidates fielded; secondly, and consequently, the results of closed primaries are entirely ascribable to the M5S's candidates; thirdly, the results referring to open primaries and leader appointments are jointly generated by the PD and SEL candidates.

In sum, even though candidate selection is heavily influenced by the political system at large and by electoral rules, parties are still the pivotal players. Thus, looking at Table 7, the attitudes of the M5S towards gender balance may explain the low number of female candidates to enter that party's candidate list. Women make up only 13 per cent of total candidates, leaving male candidate a huge majority of 87 per cent. However, the method of selection used by the M5S appears to be unquestionably woman-friendly. In fact, the primary results allowed 152 female candidates out of 194 total to be fielded, with a growth in percentage up to 18.3. Moreover, the female M5S nominees ranked high in the slates of both houses. The median rank for women was 6 for the Lower House and 5 for the Upper House, as compared with 12 and 9 in the case of male candidates. As a consequence, 63 female nominees were elected, boosting the percentage of the M5S's female legislators up to 37.4. It should be emphasised that this impressive promotion of female parliamentary representation has been accomplished without any endorsement coming from rules since the M5S's closed primaries did not include any form of gender equality.

TAB. 7 - Stages of candidate recruitment, methods of selection and the occurrence of female politicians.

Method of selection	Female aspirants to enter a list		Female legislative candidates		Female legislators	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Leader appointment	276	36.7	276	36.7	33	25.4
Closed primaries	194	13.0	152	18.3	63	37.3
Open primaries	657	48.6	534	49.0	133	42.4
<i>All methods</i>	<i>1,127</i>	<i>31.3</i>	<i>962</i>	<i>64.0</i>	<i>229</i>	<i>37.4</i>

Source: CLS-Candidate and Leader Selection.

As previously emphasised, appointments made by party leaders were used by the PD and the SEL. As this is a non-competitive form of selection, all 276 female aspirants for candidacy entered the slates of candidates for one the houses. However, only 33 were actually elected as representatives, dropping to a quarter of legislators selected through this method. Taking into account the female politicians who faced open primaries, we are dealing with a competitive selection, where the percentage of legislative candidates (49.0) is near equal to that of candidate for nomination (48.6). Moreover, the quota of female legislators, in comparison with that for candidates, is

substantial, dropping only from 49 to 42.4 percent. Therefore, open primary selection provided female candidates a good chance of winning a parliamentary seat, especially as compared to appointment by party leaders. However, it should be noted that this effect has not been produced by selectors' preference for female candidates during the primaries, or by a predilection among general voters for female legislative candidates. Rather, along all recruitment stages, the PD and the SEL have chosen rules that promote the presence of women among candidates in the primaries and the parliamentary elections. Again, the decisions of central party offices appear more significant than the methods of selection.

*Age.* - Figure 2 describes the age profile of the aspirants for candidacy to a candidate list, according to their partisanship<sup>16</sup>. The age cohorts from the youngest to about 50-years-old are clearly dominated by the M5S aspirants. The M5S's numbers plummet abruptly in the older age brackets, where the PD and SEL aspirants dominate with a similar profile. Descriptives provide an accurate measure of these differences. While the overall mean age of all aspirants for candidacy is 46, and the average for other parties' aspirants for candidacy—the SVP included—is 48, the aspirants fielded by the M5S average only 42-years-old.

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<sup>16</sup> SVP candidates are not reported in this figure because of their low numbers. Note that although in Italy the minimum age to be elected is 25 for the Lower House, and 40 for the Upper House, the SEL allowed a 22-year-old candidate to run in primary elections. He was later—inescapably—discarded from the party slate for the parliamentary election.

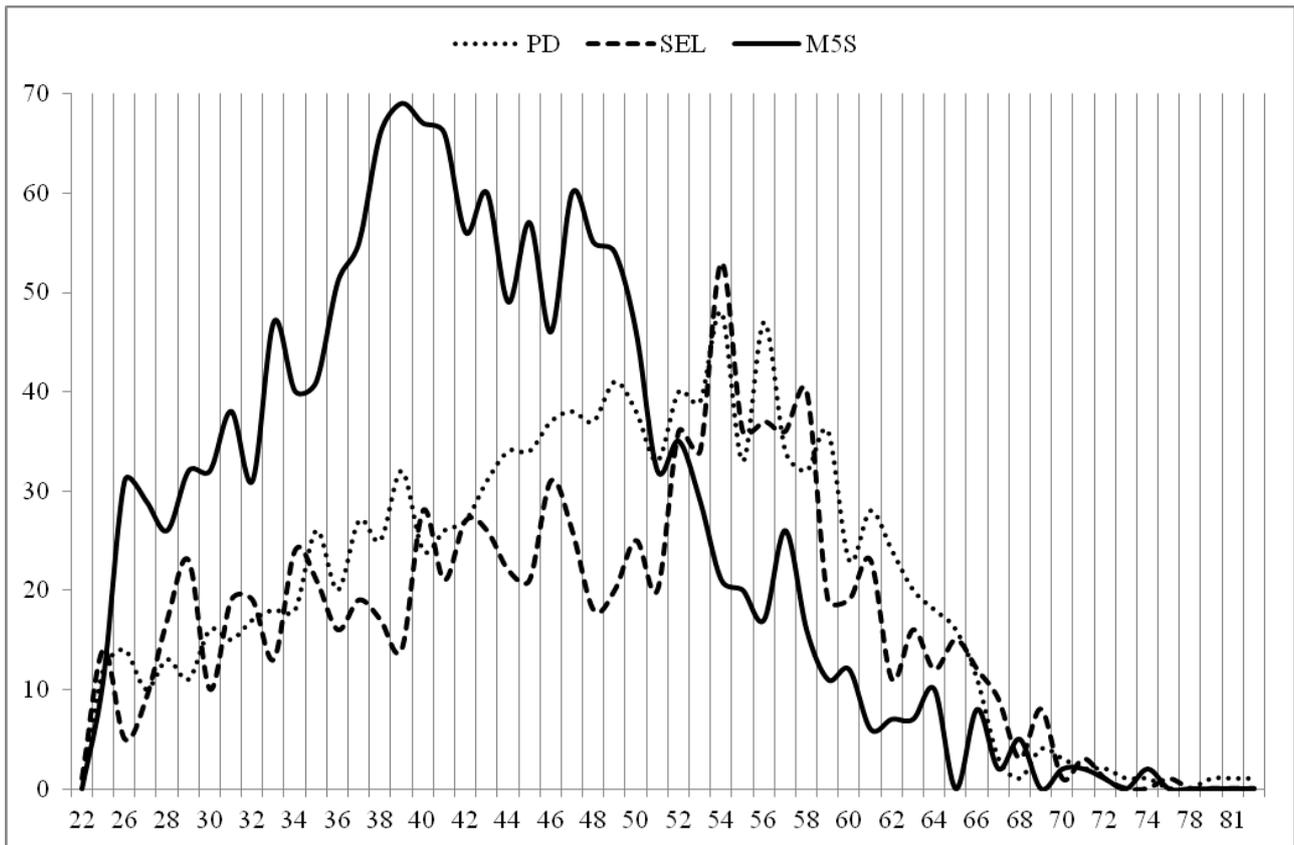


FIG. 2 - Age profiles of the aspirants to enter a list, by party (N=3,580).

In contrast to gender, the variable age may be measured according to different criteria. Here for the sake of clarity, we prefer to deal with two groups, half split according to the median value of the aspirants' age (46 years). Therefore, all politicians–aspirants to candidacy, candidates and legislators–above that age are considered senior, while those under that age are considered young. Like women, young and presumably less resourced candidates are supposed to be at a disadvantage in their efforts to enter parliament. Nevertheless, while the rules adopted by the two major left-wing parties were explicitly aimed at enhancing the representation of women, no provision was meant to enhance the representation of the young. Thus, the changes in the politicians' age profiles along the stages of recruitment shown in Table 8 should mainly be considered an outcome of selectors' unconstrained choices.

TAB. 8 - Stages of candidate recruitment, methods of selection and the occurrence of young politicians.

Method of selection	Young aspirants to enter a list		Young legislative candidates		Young legislators	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Leader appointment	298	39.6	298	39.6	39	30.0
Closed primaries	957	64.0	528	63.5	139	82.2
Open primaries	541	40.2	439	40.3	130	41.4
<i>All methods</i>	<i>1,796</i>	<i>50.0</i>	<i>1,265</i>	<i>47.3</i>	<i>308</i>	<i>50.2</i>

Source: CLS-Candidate and Leader Selection.

First, young politicians predominate among those selected through closed primaries, due to the Movimento 5 Stelle's organisation and recruitment strategies. While this is an obvious consideration, it is notable that in this party, younger people made up a vast majority of the aspirants for candidacy (64 per cent), and these aspirants to candidacy made it to the party's slates in more or less the same proportion (63.5 per cent). Above all, younger aspirants for candidacy did well in the primaries, and could be elected as legislators through a very large majority, amounting to 82.2 per cent of the M5S's parliamentary groups. The pattern is very similar for those politicians selected through open primaries. These politicians came from the two left-wing parties where senior politicians predominate. Hence, young aspirants to candidacy made up only 40.2 per cent of total aspirants for candidacy. However, they were screened through open primaries in the same proportion (40.3), and according to their success, were then elected as legislators in an analogous proportion (41.4 per cent). The story is different in the case of leader appointed younger politicians. These aspirants for candidacy were still fielded by the PD and the SEL, more or less in the same proportion (39.6) as the aspirants for candidacy facing open primaries. All of the leader-selected candidates entered the slates for the parliamentary election, avoiding any competition. They were evidently ranked quite low, and only 30 per cent became legislators.

The above analyses clarify how, in the 2013 parliamentary election, the outcomes for younger aspirants for candidacy improved when their selection took place through primary elections. This effect is even more noteworthy in the case of closed primaries. The latter should be attributed to the fact that the closed primary method was utilised by the Movimento 5 Stelle, a new party formed by young candidates, militants and voters<sup>17</sup>. Similarly, open primaries' friendliness to the young, although a factor, has been limited by the PD and the SEL's organisation practices. In these parties, young candidates appointed by leaders have been ranked low in the slates, resulting in their underrepresentation in parliament in comparison with their senior party co-members. It thus appears that leader appointments and primary elections play a very different role in the promotion of young candidates.

*Turnover.* - The Italian First Republic (1945–1992) featured typical mass parties. Constrained by those organisations, the careers of prospective politicians usually started at the local level. When successful, politicians advanced to the national level to experience some parliamentary terms. The governmental elite was regularly recruited from among parliamentarians. Today a *cursus honorum* still exists, but since the 1994 parliamentary election political careers have deeply changed (Verzichelli 1997). Initial political experiences may now be carried out at different levels of government,

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<sup>17</sup> On the age profile of the M5S voters cfr. Maraffi, Pedrazzani and Pinto 2013, 58; of the members cfr. Lanzone 2015, 95; of the legislators cfr. Lanzone 2015, 122-123.

from local, to national, to European. A direct entry in national politics while lacking previous experience in partisan or local politics is now common.

These changing patterns in the course of political careers make it difficult to differentiate the more experienced politicians from the less experienced. For the sake of simplicity, here we again make use of a dichotomous variable. Given that we are dealing with a national-level event—the 2013 parliamentary election—we consider as experienced politicians who have served at least one previous parliamentary term; those without any parliamentary experience are described as inexperienced. Table 9 presents the distribution of the aspirants to candidacy to enter a list according to their partisanship and national political experience. The innovative role of the Movimento 5 Stelle appears quite evident, due to its above-discussed selection rules, which, at every level, explicitly excluded aspirants to candidacy with any previous experience. The PD and the SEL also notably feature a huge majority of inexperienced aspirants to candidacy<sup>18</sup>.

TAB. 9 - *Aspirants to enter a list by political party and national political experience.*

Political party	Inexperienced aspirants		Experienced aspirants		Total
	N	%	N	%	
Partito Democratico	934	26.0	209	5.7	1,143
Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà	952	26.4	4	0.1	956
Südtiroler Volkspartei	13	0.4	1	0.1	14
Movimento 5 Stelle	1,486	41.3	0	0.0	1,486
<i>All aspirants</i>	<i>3,385</i>	<i>94.1</i>	<i>214</i>	<i>5.9</i>	<i>3,599</i>

Source: CLS-Candidate and Leader Selection.

Table 10 details the outcomes for inexperienced politicians along all three stages of the legislative recruitment process and in reference to their method of selection. First, closed primaries have permitted the election of a whole cluster of novices mainly made up of the M5S parliamentarians, with the only exception being an incumbent legislator from the Südtiroler Volkspartei. As noted above, this result has been completely predetermined by the M5S's leadership requirements for standing for nomination. The inexperienced performed quite well at open primaries. They made up 88.7 percent of all aspirants to candidacy, and a respectable 87.6 percent entered one of the slates of legislative candidates. Among these, however, only 69.7 percent were gained a parliamentary seat. It appears that the inexperience's primacy performance was sufficient for gaining a place on a slate, but not good enough to gain a safe ranking on that slate. Finally, among those aspirants to candidacy appointed by the party leaders, 92 percent were inexperienced. Elected legislators coming from

<sup>18</sup> An overlap may be suspected between inexperienced politicians and the younger aspirants to candidacy examined in the previous section. However, the inexperienced are nearly equally divided between younger and senior, using the definitions noted above. Out of 3,380 aspirants to candidacy for whom we have the necessary information, 1,762 were young and 1,618 were senior.

this group made up only 66.9 percent, a greater reduction in comparison with those selected through open primaries.

TAB. 10 - *Stages of candidate recruitment, methods of selection and the occurrence of inexperienced politicians.*

Method of selection	Inexperienced aspirants to enter a list		Inexperienced legislative candidates		Inexperienced Legislators	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Leader appointment	693	92.0	693	92.0	87	66.9
Closed primaries	1,494	99.9	830	99.9	168	99.4
Open primaries	1,198	88.7	955	87.6	219	69.7
<i>All methods</i>	<i>3,385</i>	<i>94.1</i>	<i>2,478</i>	<i>92.7</i>	<i>474</i>	<i>77.3</i>

Source: CLS-Candidate and Leader Selection.

According to these analyses, the 2013 parliamentary election brought about the unprecedented parliamentary entry of inexperienced legislators, especially due to the Movimento 5 Stelle's choice to field only novice candidates. It should also be noted that the methods of selection used by other parties have facilitated this renewal, but that not all methods have contributed in the same ways. Open primaries seem to be more friendly to the inexperienced than leader appointments, although not with the same strength revealed in the case of young and female politicians.

## 5. Conclusion

The analyses presented in this article have illustrated how, during the 2013 Italian parliamentary election, both closed and open primaries have promoted a process of renewal among the legislators of the four parties that used primaries. By examining the stages of candidate selection we have detected an innovation autonomously produced by primaries in all three dimensions of the renewal, specifically gender (re)balance, generational renewal, and turnover. Moreover, in all cases, primaries are considerably more renewal-friendly than leader appointments. This is true either when considering outcomes for aspirants to candidacy from the four parties using different selection methods, or when contrasting these parties with those—mostly right-wing—using only leader appointments.

More specifically, in the case of closed primaries, we noticed that the quota of women increases at each step of the selection procedure, and the same also applies for the age dimension. Even if the proportion of young legislative candidates is slightly lower than that registered for young aspirants to candidacy (0.5 percentage points) it appears that the vote of party members provided these aspirants to candidacy placement at the top of the party lists and thus election to parliament. This could be only partially explained by referring to the role played by the M5S, a new party entering parliament. A similar pattern is also registered for legislators who gained their nomination through open primaries. Here, we have showed that while the representation of women is in part affected by the specific rules used by the parties to strengthen the gender balance among MPs, there

are also signs of renewal related to the age dimension at each step of the selection procedure. In contrast, as concerns the dimension of seniority, we saw that what mattered most for facilitating renewal was the role played by the central party office and the requirements for running in primaries.

In any case, however, this is not the full story. We have discovered that inclusive selectorates are by and large renewal-oriented. Yet, this potential is to some extent constrained by the rules of selection, which are autonomously defined by parties themselves. Among the cases under investigation, the clearest case in point, of a fully constrained selectorate, with reference to candidacy, is voters in the Movimento 5 Stelle's closed primaries. In that case, the central office decided to field *exclusively* aspirants to candidacy who lacked any previous seniority or experience; thus, primary voters were allowed to select *exclusively* inexperienced candidates, and the resulting parliamentary group has been composed *exclusively* by novices. M5S members' support for political change is undisputable. However, when voting in their own primaries, from the point of view of seniority, they had the single option to renew.

The provisions applied in the PD and SEL's open primaries which sought gender balance, are an example of noteworthy, if not complete, constraints on voters' attitudes. In these parties' primaries, selectors were allowed to vote for two candidates, provided they were of different genders, but each selector was also free to vote for a single candidate. However, the slates for the parliamentary election were arranged *ex post* using the so-called zip method, alternating male and female candidates ordered according to the results of the primaries. In this practice, voters were quite free when casting their primary ballots, but in the last analysis the growing presence of women in parliament has been again largely predetermined by the rules created by the two parties' central offices.

In the case of all parties, young and presumably less resourced aspirants to candidacy have not been supported by specific rules as women have. Nevertheless, while younger politicians have been completely disregarded by the SVP, the term limits used by the two left-wing parties and the M5S at least indirectly advanced young candidates barring repeated candidacies by a number of incumbents. Those limits were enforced by the PD and the SEL, who nonetheless tolerated a number of exceptions in order to guarantee the re-election of some experienced legislators considered indispensable to the upcoming parliament. Among the aspirants to candidacy fielded by the PD and the SEL, the novices' mean age (47 years) was considerably lower than the incumbents' mean age (54); therefore, norms restraining the latter advantage the former. As this limitation was indirect, primary voters were completely free to vote for novices or incumbents at will.

Finally, sometimes primary voters' attitudes and preferences could be expressed without any constraints. This was the case of the SVP for all dimensions of renewal, and of the M5S for gender

balance. The last example is exceptional. Members turning out for the M5S's closed primaries were completely free to vote for male or female aspirants to candidacy. The latter were a tiny minority of the whole field (193, or 13 percent, compared with 1,293 male aspirants). However, as noted in Table 7 above, women performed exceptionally at the primaries and therefore a large proportion entered parliament. The case of women's parliamentary representation through the gains made by the M5S is probably a better perspective through which to consider an unconstrained selectorate's attitudes towards renewal.

Table 11 summarises how, and how much, primary rules may hinder selectors and eventually contribute to parliamentary renewal. It details a point often emphasised by scholars: as rules matter, rule-makers can use their privileged positions to disingenuously influence the process of candidate selection (Hopkin 2001; Katz 2001; Cross et al. 2016, chapter 4). This could be a minor problem when, as happens in the United States, primaries' rule-makers are public institutions not directly involved in candidate selection. In the case of private primary elections, i.e. those promoted by the parties themselves, the rule-maker is the party leadership, which is obviously interested in the results of the process of selection. For instance, using concepts proposed by Katz and Mair (1993), the central office of a given party is advantaged when the public office is held accountable. From this point of view, leader appointments are clearly preferable to primaries.

TAB. 11 - *Primaries rules constraints on the selectors' attitudes.*

Political party	Gender balance	Rejuvenation	Turnover
Partito Democratico	Strong	Weak	Strong
Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà	Strong	Weak	Strong
Südtiroler Volkspartei	None	None	None
Movimento 5 Stelle	None	Weak	Total

This is because all nominations by party leaders we have examined here are at best cautious towards renewal, if not openly oriented towards preservation. This means that when acting as candidate selectors, party leaders may easily pursue conservation and safeguarding. By contrast, when party members and sympathisers are given a say, they have preferred renewal. The image provided by the parliament elected in the 2013 general elections shows that a great renewal of the political elite has occurred. This renewal was the result of a combination of factors. As argued above, a new political party's entrance into parliament clearly boosted the number of newly elected legislators lacking experience at the national political level—especially in the case of the M5S, where candidates were required to be novices. There were also pressures for renewal which emerged from public opinion and led parties to implement procedures for increasing participation and promoting the renewal of the political elite. Inclusive candidate selection methods contributed to the extent that—as it has been observed—whereas selectors are allowed to have a say, their vote in open and closed pri-

maries went in the direction of a change of the political elite in terms of gender balance and generational renewal. However, parties kept control of selection by setting the rules of the selection procedures. Candidacy requirements and the principles used to allocate places on closed lists ultimately affected the final election results. All in all, our analyses have clarified that even if inclusivity in candidate selection methods may facilitate the renewal of political elites, the role played by central party offices when stating the rules still has a determinant effect. Again, rules matter—perhaps more than primaries and participation.

This leaves an unresolved question: is this inclination for change a standing attitude of all primaries' selectorates, originating from their recognised political sophistication and interest in politics? Or, rather, we have observed idiosyncratic behaviours deriving from Italian citizens' shifting opinions in a phase of populist criticism against parliament and legislators? This is, of course, a question we cannot answer in reference to a single election. As usual, more research is needed.

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