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ARTICLE



Women and the Italian general election of 2018: selection, constraints and resources in the definition of candidate profiles

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ABSTRACT

Based on public databases hosted by the Ministry of the Interior and drawing on data collected by the OpenPolis Foundation on parliamentarians, the study analyses the socio-demographic and political profiles of female candidates for the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies in the single- and multi-member constituencies after adoption of the ‘Rosato Law’ and the introduction of ‘gender quotas’. The new rules enhance the presence of women in politics, but candidate selection and candidates’ positions in constituencies also depend on the regulatory frameworks of individual political parties and on informal rules and practices in the secret garden of politics. For this reason, the research takes into account the parties’ internal rules (as revealed by statutes, regulations and other documents) but also the concrete processes to which the selected women were subject. These refer to their social and political profiles, including their political allegiances and previous political careers in local government and Parliament; their statuses as newcomers or incumbents; the types of constituency for which they are chosen. For outgoing MPs only, the study also takes into account other indicators such as level of productivity, ‘changing political colours’ and rebel votes. The study throws light, on the one hand, on the way in which electoral mechanisms explain the under representation of women in Parliament, on the other hand, on the determinants of women’s political careers in individual parties.

KEYWORDS

Rosato law; party gender politics; gender quotas; political participation

Introduction

In 2017, the so-called Rosato law no. 165, introduced a quota mechanism applying to single-seat and multi-member constituency nominations. It did this by stipulating the list positions to be occupied by candidates of different genders, and the minimum number of candidates of a given gender that could be fielded by parties and coalitions of parties. The law aimed to rectify the then existing gender imbalances by establishing a minimum quota of female candidates to appear on each electoral list (but without stipulating – as, for example, through a system of reserved seats – minima for the proportion of candidates of each gender that were to be elected). The result of the general election of 4 March 2018 cannot be considered satisfactory: the number of women elected increased

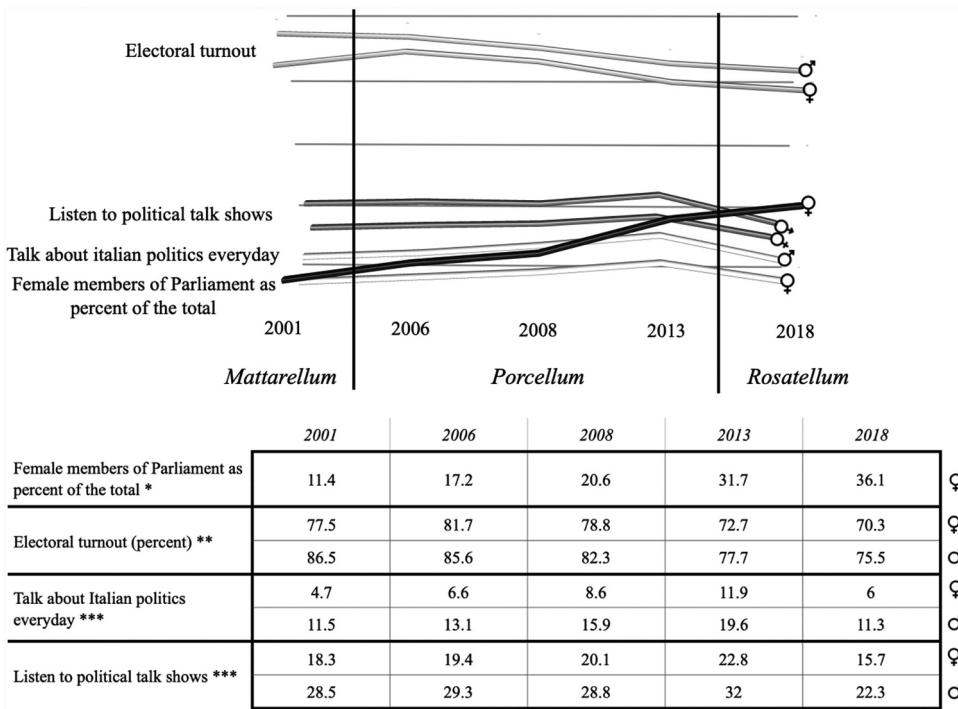


Figure 1. Women’s political participation in Italy, 2001–2018.
 Sources: * Chamber of Deputies and Senate web sites; ** Ministry of the Interior; *** Istat (2019)

in percentage terms, bringing the proportion of female parliamentarians in Italy to an historic high (Figure 1); however, if compared with the result of the previous general election, the increase was very modest.

What was responsible for this outcome? The new electoral rules enhanced the presence of women in politics, but we suggest that the outcome was also the result of formal and informal rules operating within individual political parties. We propose to look at upstream and downstream aspects of the process. On the one hand, through documentary analysis, we look at the principles and general rules governing candidate selection choices; on the other, using an inductive approach, we analyse the socio-demographic profiles of candidates and the decisions concerning their list placements and the constituencies in which they were fielded. Analysis of the selections made and the constituency placements suggest – despite the premises and a greater sensitivity to the need for gender rebalancing – the presence of further explanatory elements clarifying why the electoral law has not resulted in balanced gender representation.

The legislative framework, quota policy and parties’ self-regulation

In 2010, the World Economic Global Gender Gap Report stated, ‘Italy continues to be one of the lowest-ranking countries in the EU and deteriorated further over the last year’ (2010, 21). This assessment was particularly affected by economic and political indicators, especially the indicator measuring the quality of representation.¹ In fact, the

evaluation of participation propensity is a complex question: as in other countries, we can observe an increase of women in Parliament and a reduction in the gender gap in terms of turnout (with young women participating more than their male contemporaries) without a concomitant increase in other conventional modes of participation (Stevens 2009; Sarlo and Zajczyk, 2012). Explanations for the 'traditional gender gap' in political participation (Butler and Stokes, 1969; Andersen, 1975; Mannheim and Sani, 1987) have been questioned by more recent studies (Brooks and Manza, 1998; Inglehart and Norris 2003; Corbetta and Ceccarini, 2010). Nevertheless, some studies continue to emphasize women's political backgrounds or their interest in politics (Bolzendahl and Coffè, 2010; Sartori, Tuorto and Chigi 2017), highlighting limited engagement in non-electoral political activities such as campaigning and protest activities (Beauregard 2014; Marien, Hooghe, and Quintelier 2010), even in the presence of high levels of integration in economic activities. Some studies have focused on changes affecting women, especially the younger generations: they have shifted to the left (opening up a new, modern gender gap) because of their increased interest in welfare protection (Inglehart and Norris 2003). Furthermore, young women are more committed to participatory activities that are 'cause-' and 'civic-oriented', though with some unusual features: the preference is for direct activities such as boycotting, fundraising or petitions and for small-scale and local associations where they can immediately see the results of their activities (Elder and Greene 2003). However, research still confirms an imbalance in political knowledge and in interest (Burns, Schlozman, and Verba 2009; Fraile 2014; Dassonneville and McAllister 2018) which may be decisive for participation in second-order elections (Kostelka, Blais, and Gidengil 2019), and for direct political engagement. In Italy (Istat 2019), frequencies for the items 'watching political talk shows' or 'talking about politics every day' highlight the persistence of gender differences against the background of a more generalized crisis of political participation (Figure 1).

Political interest and knowledge are fundamental to understanding 'opportunity structures' (Schlesinger 1966), and critical aspects of access to politics. Selection and subsequent election depend on their combination, according to the logic of a 'multi-step ladder of recruitment' (Lovenduski and Norris 1995) involving the application of increasingly selective criteria as one passes from aspirant to candidate, and from candidate to elected office holder. This process identified by the authors (*ibid.*) is situated in a political-institutional context influenced by macro-level variables (concerning the electoral rules, the party system and the political culture) and meso-level variables concerning, for example, the nature of parties and specific selection mechanisms (Hazan and Rahat 2001, 2010; Kittilson 2006), within each political system.

As regards the macro-level variables, we should firstly remember that full political rights were acquired in Italy (Pezzini, 2016) relatively late in history: not until after the second World War (1946). Secondly, women's rights to representation achieved 'constitutional' rank, especially through article 51, which stipulates: 'Any citizen of either sex is eligible for public and elected offices on equal terms'. The adoption of a proportional electoral system would make it easier for women to enter Parliament. According to one line of research, strong proportionality and large, multi-member constituencies favour the presence of women. If the electoral list is long, parties tend to represent more social groups (and therefore women). High exclusion thresholds also play a role: these are thought to operate by blocking access to small parties that fail to ensure

balanced lists. Such thresholds were not introduced, however. The move away from gender-blind laws was to be long and troubled, and occurred later than elsewhere in Europe (Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2008). The establishment of a Ministry for Equal Opportunities in 1996 under the first Prodi Government would not be sufficient to introduce elements of discontinuity, or to accelerate regulatory changes. The ‘Rosatellum’ (as law no.165 was dubbed) was preceded by the adoption of measures designed to support women’s participation in local government (see Carbone and Farina, this issue; see Cerruto, 2017; Cunial and Terreo, 2016) and in the European institutions (see Legnante and Regalia, this issue) but also by numerous judicial rulings which undermined the same measures. A decisive step forward was taken with the introduction of closed lists as part of the so-called ‘Porcellum’ (i.e. electoral law no. 270 of 2005), combined with the gender quotas informally adopted by many parties (Brunelli, 2016; see Del Re, 2010): in the Chamber of Deputies, the proportion of women rose from 17.5% in 2006 to 31.4% in 2013 (De Lucia 2013).

With the introduction of the ‘Rosatellum’, a further improvement was expected. The law introduced a mixed, non-compensatory, electoral system. About 37% of the seats (i.e. 116 in the Senate and 232 in the Chamber) were distributed according to the single-member, simple plurality system. The remaining seats (63%) were distributed proportionally through small multi-member constituencies with a 3% national threshold for the Chamber and a 3% regional threshold in the case of the Senate.² The rules affected all nominations, with significant repercussions for gender representation (Pinto, Pedrazzani and Baldini, 2018). The law allows any one candidate to be fielded in a single-member constituency and to be included in up to five of the lists fielded in the multi-member constituencies. However, it specifies which seat must be taken up in the event that the candidate wins more than one them.³ From the point of view of gender representation, some important innovations were introduced. A number of them had already featured in laws for the election of regional councils. Under penalty of inadmissibility, the quota mechanism applied to the single-member constituencies established that neither gender could exceed 60% of the candidates fielded by a party or party coalition. In multi-member constituencies, the law established a ‘zipper system’, i.e. the alternation of candidates by gender on each list. This criterion was reinforced by another stipulating that heads of lists could not be represented by candidates of either gender in more than 60% of the cases.

Despite these common rules, the proportions of women and men fielded as candidates were not equal, perhaps due to the presence of different models of political recruitment within the main Italian parties. This suggests the relevance of the so-called meso-level variables: the parties still act as gatekeepers of the political process and as selectors of politicians and can offer important arenas for the promotion of women’s political participation and for their advancement through all the main stages of their political careers.

Equality in representation is, firstly, an issue that emerged as part of an attempt to democratize party structures and to increase openness to minorities, young people and women. For a long time, strategies were limited to equality rhetoric: ‘a fig leaf of political correctness’ (Norris 2001, 90), based on apparent changes in electoral programmes and some public speeches of leaders and appeals designed to attract more women and minorities. However, this was a decisive step towards more effective policies for

rebalancing representation. In Italy, as in the rest of Europe (Fornengo and Guadagnini 1999; Lovenduski and Norris 1993), it preceded the shift towards policies to promote equality: affirmative action programmes (training sessions, special funding) to remove the ‘barriers’ to entry to political roles.

To various degrees, parties with different political traditions have been increasingly opening up to women and feminist claims (Childs and Webb 2011; Celis and Childs 2014), thus advancing the cause of women’s political representation well beyond the political parties of the left; but it is true that the ‘contagion’ originated among parties of the left. Since the end of the 1960s, it has characterized socialist parties, thanks to the presence of feminist movement activists and because of ‘an egalitarian ideology particularly compatible with this type of demand’; but also due to ‘the desire to mobilize the female electorate ... which has become more mobile’ (Guadagnini 2018, 199). In the Italian case, this involved the creation of women’s branches in mass parties (and by extension also in non-socialist parties), and the intensification of political training programmes dedicated to women (party schools, seminars, etc.). This long phase, which lasted more than 20 years, prepared the next step towards equality guarantees or positive discrimination strategies. The latter aim at a numerical rebalancing of representation (Pitkin 1967; Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2008) and introduce the logic of quotas (candidatures or reserved seats on the basis of ascribable criteria). The new approach is not limited to reinforcing the initial prerequisites for candidates, but aims to guarantee the representation of women: gender becomes a criterion for the selection of officials, elected members of internal bodies and candidates (Lovenduski 2005, 90–1; Norris 2001, 90–1). Here, too, this step occurs earlier in the political formations that evolved from the social-democratic parties, and in the green parties. In the latter, policies aimed at rebalancing representation had gradually become established as early as the late 1970s (Krook 2008; Norris 2001).

Nevertheless, formal rules do not eliminate stereotypes that consider women to be less qualified, less equipped, and less willing to participate in politics even though, as Sanbonmatsu (2010, 39) observes, ‘sometimes female politicians are aided by voters’ stereotypes’: for example, women seem ‘more honest than men’, and can reassure voters in the face of political corruption. Parties reflect contextual social practices and attitudes, and for this reason, they are still seen as ‘institutionally sexist organizations’ (Lovenduski 2005, 48). Women’s gains are not automatic or widespread but are the result of top-down choices (often of women in top party ranks) and bottom-up pressures that come from new issues or movements (Kittilson 2006). The gradualness of the measures would reflect, on the one hand, very different recruitment models in terms of centralization and selectorate and, on the other, a progressive post-ideological approach, following the crisis of the organizational model of mass parties.

Adopting the quotas system was easier for the parties with exclusive selectorates and highly centralized processes of selection. This selection approach is typical in political organizations that were the descendants of parties using ‘pure party’ selection models. According to the reconstruction of Cotta (1979), the latter had become consolidated in the postwar period, at the same time as the ‘clientelist’ and the ‘élite’ (*notabiliare*) party selection models. The centralization of the recruitment process had already allowed the Partito Comunista Italiano (Italian Communist Party, PCI) to exercise control over the representativeness of the parliamentary class with respect to those who constituted the

electorate and, consequently, also over the presence of women in the legislature. To sum up, these reflections confirm that women had greater prospects of election in systems where the selection criteria were rule-bound and decentralized (Lovenduski and Norris 1995), than they did in patronage systems where consolidated networks of pre-existing relationships prevailed. It is also true that very formalized procedures could block the way for outsiders (Hazan and Rahat 2010) or potential newcomers (Bjarnegård and Zetterberg 2019). These would be ‘unintended gender consequences’ of ‘seemingly gender neutral party rules’ (ibid., 3–5): for example, registration requirements (1 or more years) ended up restricting access for women with more recent and more intermittent political activism, and favouring male incumbents. As some scholars note (Papavero and Zucchini 2017), recruitment methods are influential in determining the quality of representation, affecting the autonomy of parliamentary work and interpretations of the role.

After Tangentopoli, in the context of a radical change in the party system, the opportunities for outsiders increased. Forza Italia (FI), for example, inaugurated a new, centralized recruitment model that would encourage the participation in politics of women drawn from civil society (see Di Virgilio and Giannetti 2011, 231). In the effort to democratize parties (Ignazi 2019), the need for greater openness of the selectorate and attention to gender representation emerged, thus favouring re-legitimation of the parties. In effect, this led to a differentiated response that can be observed by assessing the weight of gender issues in the official documents of political parties, including those regarding the general elections of 2018.

In the last 15 years, a broadening of the selectorate has been taking place, affecting the recruitment processes of the PD, Fratelli d’Italia-Alleanza Nazionale (Brothers of Italy-National Alliance, FdI-AN) and the Movimento Cinque Stelle (Five-star Movement, M5 s).⁴ With regard to the continuum traced in the analytical framework⁵ of Hazan and Rahat (2001), the study of Cerruto, Raniolo and Facello (2016) places Sinistra, Ecologia, Libertà (the Left, Ecology and Freedom, SEL), the Lega Nord (Northern League, LN) and the Unione di Centro (Union of the Centre, UDC) in an intermediate position, with a role reserved for regional committees.⁶ At the other extreme, occupying a maximally exclusive position, is the Popolo della Libertà-Forza Italia (People of Freedom-Forza Italia, PdL-FI), which reserves the choice of candidates for European and general elections to the National President in consultation with the Office of the President. Decisions are then formalized by the National Political Secretary, without the need to involve any sub-national bodies.

As in the past (Cerruto, Facello, and Raniolo 2016), it was also possible in the 2018 elections to reconstruct the processes of candidate selection using documentary analysis (based on statutes, regulations and newspaper articles). The selection of candidates was influenced by party statutes and contingent choices. In general, considering the role played by Matteo Renzi, Matteo Salvini, Luigi Di Maio and Georgia Meloni, a process of ‘verticalization of the selectorate’ was apparent, with some important repercussions. The choices reflected a certain ‘pluralism of lists’ and the recourse to a ‘series of new proposals’ emerging from various contexts to avoid a ‘regression towards elitist modes of formation of the political class’ (Tronconi and Verzichelli 2019, 214). The M5 s supplemented its Statute and Code of Ethics with specific regulations⁷ for each election,

which, together, rendered the selectorate an exclusive one,⁸ especially when it came to selection of the candidates to be fielded in the single-member constituencies.

As far as eligibility is concerned, within the PD and *Liberi e Uguali* (Free and Equal, LeU)⁹ the requirements were maximally inclusive. The LN is in an intermediate position: the criteria for the selection of candidates at each election took account of the length of time for which they had been enrolled in the party.¹⁰

Although adopting an inclusive approach, FI allowed its leader, Silvio Berlusconi, to identify the characteristics of the ‘perfect candidate’ and to adopt a genuine ‘casting’ process for candidate selection.¹¹ In the PD, the general secretary assumed the role of mediator in a number of instances, leaving the final decision to the national executive committee.¹² In LeU, lists taking account of the range of candidatures emerging from the Regional Assemblies of LeU¹³ were approved by the Presidency of the Assembly.

As far as the measures designed to rebalance gender representation are concerned, the statutes and regulations for 2018 applications contain specific rules. Berlusconi, leader of FI, drew up the ‘identikit of the FI candidate’, stating that it was ‘better if [the candidate were] female’. Article 9 bis of the party’s statute, moreover, provides that ‘pursuant to article 51 of the Constitution, Forza Italia pursues the objective of gender equality in collegial bodies and for elective offices [...] in the competition for elective offices the participation of women and men on equal terms is guaranteed. Except as required by law, neither of the two genders may be represented in a proportion of less than one third’. In the same way, article 15 of the LN’s statute ‘promotes gender equality in collegial committees and elected offices established by the Statutes by providing that in applications neither of the two sexes may be represented by more than two thirds of the candidates’. The PD is committed to removing obstacles to gender equality in political participation, ensuring equality in nominations for elected assemblies and pursuing the objective of equality between men and women in appointments to institutional and monocratic internal positions. Article 3 of the party’s statute also ‘ensures the financial resources to promote the active participation of women in politics’. In its 2018 regulation, LeU promotes gender balance and the expertise of women and men. The M5 s, on the one hand, makes no mention of gender equality in its regulations for the selection of candidates for the general election of 2018 but, on the other hand, is particularly sensitive to this issue in the selection of candidates in multi-member constituencies. As regards the lists to be compiled on the basis of the votes of activists on the occasion of the *Parlamentarie*, article 3 provided that a candidate’s list placement would depend on the number of preferences they had received in the *Parlamentarie* while placements would also alternate by gender. Once the voting was over, in the event of the minimum threshold of gender representation not having been reached in some constituencies, the *Capo Politico* (literally, ‘Political Head’) had the right to nominate candidates belonging to the under-represented gender. Article 5 requires gender quotas for heads of lists: ‘at the end of the vote, we will proceed to verify that the gender quotas for the heads of list have been respected’ and, if they have not, we will ‘consider rebalancing mechanisms’.

The formal rules of the parties seem increasingly oriented towards greater openness and democratization in the processes of candidate selection. In practice, the methods adopted have often produced more exclusive results than required by the statutes and regulations.

Recent studies show some distortions that can explain why there is a difference between the proportion of candidates, and the proportion of those elected, who are of a given gender. On the one hand, there is a higher number of multiple candidatures in the case of women; on the other, males are on average selected for single-seat constituencies with a higher probability of victory. A study by De Lucia and Paparo reveals that ‘the main parties show a concentration of men well above the national average in their areas of greatest strength’ (2019, 40). The same does not happen in parties headed by women – such as Più Europa (‘More Europe’) with Emma Bonino and FdI with Giorgia Meloni, ‘the only ones that do not place women in the least winnable constituencies’ (ibid, 42). The outcome of the 2018 election seemed to reflect the placement of women in less winnable constituencies, as shown by a study based on opinion polls in the weeks leading up to the vote (Regalia and Legnante 2018). Under the spotlight are the ‘multiple’ female candidates, especially as heads of list in multi-member constituencies. We should mention Maria Elena Boschi, PD representative and ex minister, candidate in a single-member constituency and head of list in five multi-member constituencies. As De Luca (2018) says, an ‘important new element in electoral reform, namely gender representation’ was undermined by the obligation on the parties to present candidates in alternating order in terms of gender and with at least 40% and no more than 60% of heads of list of the same sex. Female candidates who were heads of lists in several multi-member constituencies were elected several times but, since they could only accept one seat, the others were left to male candidates. The ‘technical’ circumvention of the norm depended on the leadership of the parties, even if multiple candidatures might have reflected a different logic: for example, the ‘scarcity of personnel of the female gender available to the party leadership when compiling the lists’ (De Lucia and Paparo 2019, 55).

The supply of and demand for candidates

As part of the candidate selection process, the party rules guaranteeing the representation of women, ethnic minorities, religious groups and so on can be explicit and formalized (through voluntary political party quotas) or else can remain informal or even hidden within the secret garden of politics (Krook and O’Brien 2010). In the latter case, the opacity of the processes prevents us from evaluating them directly (Reiser 2014; Gallagher and Marsh 1988; Bartolini and Mair, 2001), but we can observe the result and apprehend its logic inductively.

According to an influential model, there is an interactive process between *supply side factors* (aspirants) and *demand side-factors* (party selection criteria). Both those who propose and those who select have an effect on the overall result (Lovedusky and Norris, 1995), even if it is often observed that ‘supply is endogenous to demand’ (Bjarnegård and Zetterberg 2019, 3), i.e. that the final step in the process is determined by a change in the rules that shape the demand. Studies concerning the motivations behind supply are unfortunately more fragmented than those concerning demand, because it is harder to study the aspirations and expectations of the candidates but, above all, to evaluate how much informal influences have affected them: the support or discouragement of the parties or their leaders, or the presence of a women’s organization (Cheng and Tavits 2011; Sanbonmatsu 2010; Kittilson 2006). Nevertheless, it is possible to analyse some variables that could influence the selection process. These include, on the one hand, the

selection of constituencies and the multiple candidatures reserved for women, taking into account predictions for the constituencies considered safe (Regalia and Legnante 2018). On the other hand, they include the traditional elements of the analysis of candidatures (Bjarnegård and Zetterberg 2019; Kenny and Verge, 2016), namely, background (ethnicity, geographical area); political experience (in local, regional and national institutions); capability (qualifications, specific knowledge); electability (leadership experience, incumbents). If parties prefer selection criteria linked to background and experience, men are favoured; if, on the contrary, the prevailing criteria are electability and capability, women are advantaged.

This study asks about the application of selection mechanisms and the criteria adopted, partly disregarding the formalization of the criteria, and looking at the profiles of the candidates. The general hypothesis is that the process of selecting candidates was different for men and women and that, in turn, the parties used partially different selection mechanisms on the basis of gender. The elements taken into consideration are political experience (political experience and parliamentary activity) and electability, considering in the first case the indicators related to a political career, and in the second the position of the incumbent. It is conceivable that the criteria used to identify female candidates are different from those used for men, requiring outgoing parliamentarians to be more productive and new candidates to have longer political experience in order to obtain a post with a high probability of election.

The study analyses the profiles of the candidates for the 2018 elections representing the main political parties.¹⁴ In particular, data were obtained from the web sites of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, the Ministry of the Interior and the OpenPolis Foundation. For all candidates, information was collected on their socio-demographic characteristics (gender, age, place of residence); on the characteristics of their candidature (type of candidature, constituency, list or coalition, list position, number of multiple candidacies, whether running inside or outside the region of residence); on their political career (years of political experience in local, regional, national and European institutions). Information was also collected on any other lists the candidates might have represented during their political careers, with the aim of identifying any shifts from one party to another. Finally, as regards the incumbents – those who had occupied a seat in Parliament in the seventeenth legislature – we gathered information on their political activity during their tenure: level of productivity¹⁵; changes from one parliamentary group to another; rebellion.¹⁶ In addition, the competitiveness¹⁷ of the single-member constituencies was considered, using a study by Vassallo (2018). Though the election results did not exactly mirror expectations based on Vassallo's model, the parties will almost certainly have referred to the model, or similar models, at their candidate selection and nomination stages.

What woman candidate? The choices of the parties between constraints and strategies

The extensive database includes 2560 candidates (1707 for the Chamber of Deputies and 853 for the Senate: For the universe of candidacies, see Ministero dell'Interno (2018)). The under-representation of women could also be a consequence of the proportion of candidates: considering our selection (Figure 2), men represent 56% (1430) while women

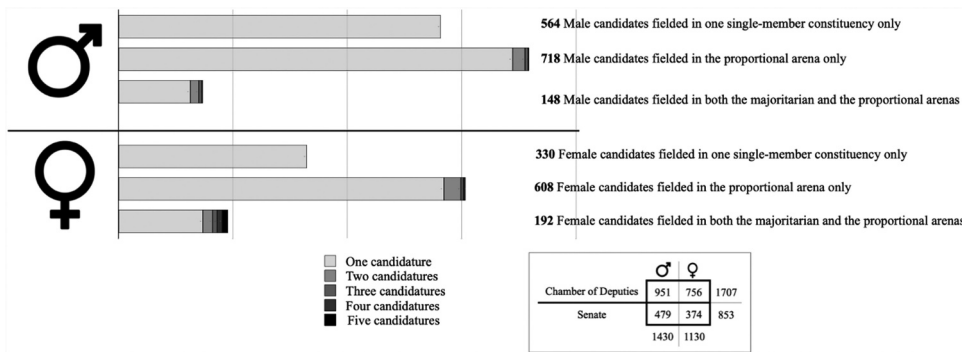


Figure 2. Types of candidature and gender – general election 2018.

represent 44% (1130). Of these women, only 293 (26%) were elected, while 520 (36%) of the men won a seat in Parliament. Why, despite the provisions of the law, is the number of female candidates lower than the number of male candidates? The answer is quite simple: women candidates are fewer in number because there were larger numbers of multiple candidacies among them than among men. In the case of women, 29% were fielded exclusively in a single-member constituency, whereas the proportion among men was 39%. In most cases, candidates were fielded in one single-member constituency and were included in one coalition or party closed list, which in many cases guaranteed that they would be elected.

Other interesting practices involving the use of multiple candidatures can be found. The term, in a strict sense, refers to candidates who compete for three or more seats. In the present case, it applied to 60 women and 21 men. The success of multiple candidacies was high (67%) and, among them, some prominent personalities were elected: Valeria Fedeli and Maria Stella Gelmini with three candidacies; Laura Boldrini with four, and Maria Elena Boschi, Giulia Buongiorno and Marianna Madia with five. Multiple candidacies were more widely resorted to among the parties of the centre right (60% of the multiple candidacies were attributable to FI and the League). However, they were also used by the PD (23.3%) and LeU (16.7%) – though not by the M5s which prohibited them. Twenty-five of the 60 women who were candidates in more than one place ran in both single-member and multi-member constituencies. The remainder ran in more than one multi-member constituency, and 82.9% occupied first place on the list. Of these, 26% were candidates in a region other than their region of residence. The ‘outside’ positioning of candidates was a safe strategy only in the cases of politicians with a national-level notoriety. Most of the women (i.e. 32% or 53.3%) fielded in more than one constituency were incumbents who had key political roles in their parties and also demonstrated a high degree of autonomy from them.¹⁸ 47% were ‘long-term’ politicians with high career values (see note 20). 33% had occupied a seat in Parliament in previous legislatures and 18.3% had also taken up administrative positions. They were not young. 65% were between 46 and 56 years of age. This shows the importance of women’s political careers. It is necessary to look at the dimensions of these careers more closely.

Parliamentary experience (measured by productivity; changes of parliamentary group; rebellion¹⁹) favoured incumbents, acting as a ‘protective mechanism’ with regard to the chances of being fielded as a candidate on a subsequent occasion. Looking at candidates’ list placements (Figure 3), high levels of productivity guarantee list placements we can

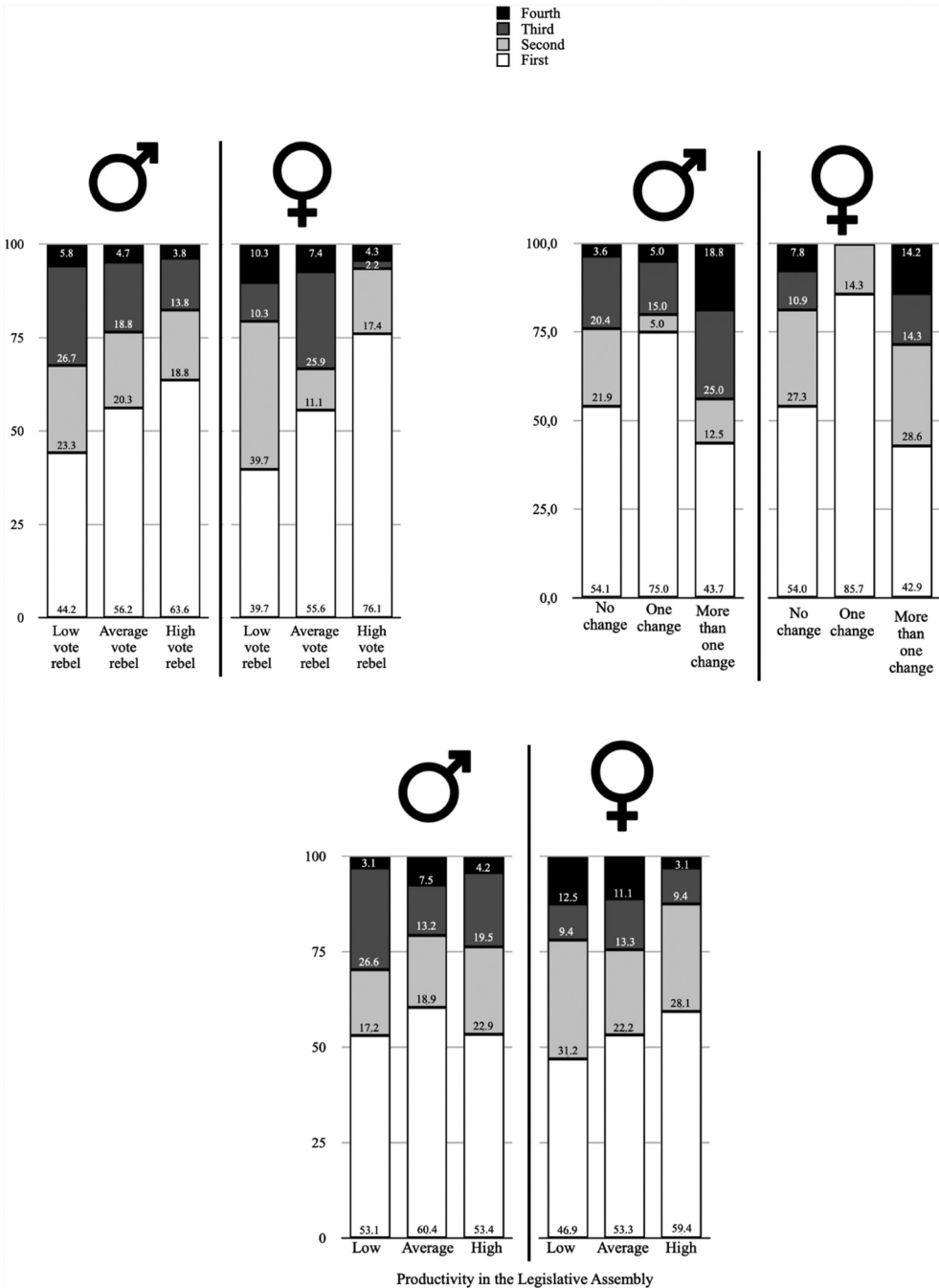


Figure 3. Incumbents and political activities in the seventeenth legislature.

consider ‘protected’ with a high probability of election, and rebellion acts in the same way: higher rates of rebellion bring even greater protection, especially for women. Loyalty to the parliamentary group does not seem to have significant repercussions except to advantage those who have been selected at least once. In this case, the figure is distorted by those who moved between parliamentary groups and had subsequently landed in another party (e.g. Meloni or Daniela Santanchè).

The aim of the law was to change the structure of opportunities, favouring the inclusion of women in electoral lists, with a probable generational change. In fact, newcomers are on average younger (48.3) than incumbents (50); and, looking at the distribution by gender (Figure 4), this trend is slightly more accentuated for women: 45.6% of the women are found in the first two age groups (up to 35 and from 36 to 44) as compared to 38.4% of the men.

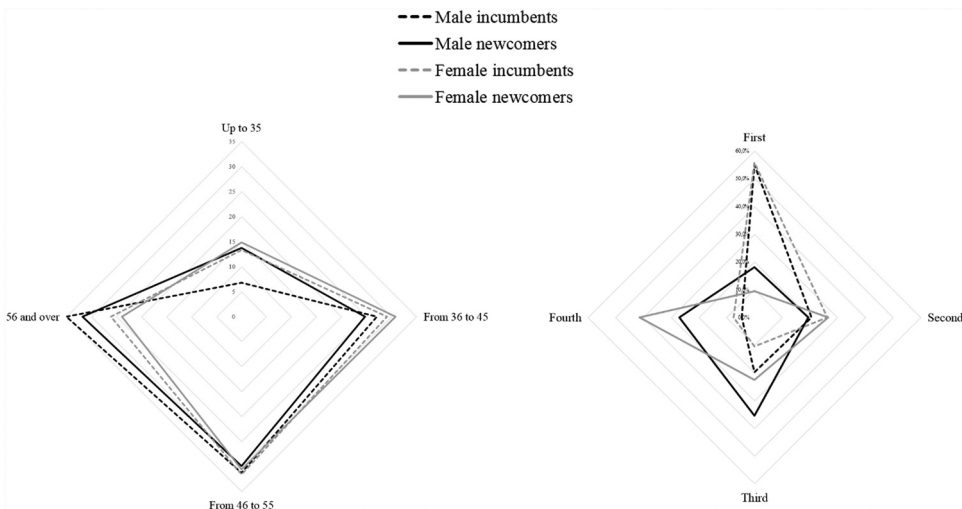


Figure 4. Newcomers and incumbents: age classes, list positions and gender.

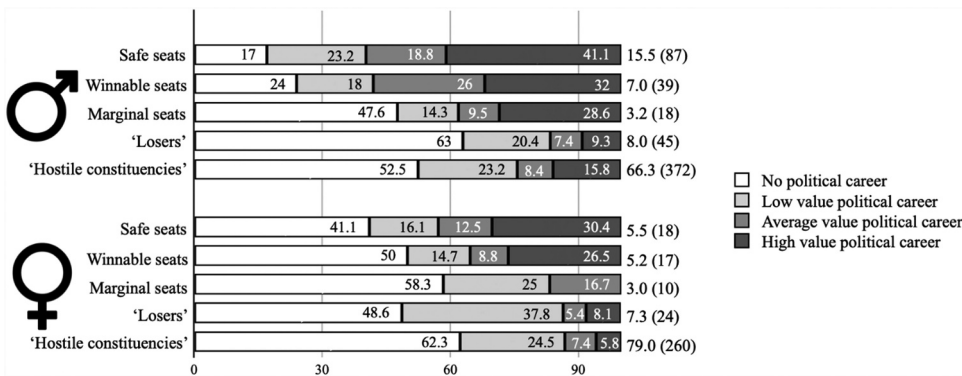


Figure 5. 'Winnability' of single-member constituencies, and political careers, by gender.

Table 1. Political careers of newcomers and incumbents (row percentages).

	No political career	Local career	Regional career	Regional + local	National career	National + local	National + regional	Nat. + Reg. + Loc.
Incumbents	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	55.0	29.9	6.8	8.4
Newcomers	58.8	27.4	3.4	5.6	1.7	2.1	0.3	0.7
Tot	46.0	21.5	2.7	4.4	13.3	8.1	1.7	2.4
Incumbents	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	60.0	33.9	4.2	1.8
Newcomers	70.7	25.3	1.5	1.6	0.5	0.3	0.1	0.1
Tot	60.4	21.6	1.2	1.3	9.2	5.2	0.7	0.4

Among the new male candidates, 31.8% are over 56, in which category we also find politicians with lengthy political careers. Table 1 shows that only just over 29% of newcomer women have previous political experience, generally acquired locally. For newcomer men, this percentage rises to 41.2% and highlights the presence of ex-parliamentarians, regional administrators and regional councillors.

Newcomers and incumbents do not have the same degree of protection with regard to the likelihood of their being selected for inclusion in candidate lists: new candidates are less protected, and, among them, women have lower levels of protection (Figure 4). List placements among the women are on average more favourable for incumbents than for newcomers. In these cases, the differences in position compared to men are evident. First places are reserved for 55% of incumbent men and 55.9% of women as compared to 18.2% of male newcomers and only 9.5% of female newcomers. In the single-member constituencies classified according to the Vassallo (2018) study (see also Regalia and Legnante 2018), the assignment of safe seats appears to be directly related to political career stages, especially for men. Well over three quarters of the secure or winnable constituencies are attributed to those who have previous political careers and especially to those whose previous careers have been lengthy. Overall, women with political careers of given lengths are assigned more favourable placements than men. Newcomers with no elective political experience obtain 41% of the secure seats, 50% of the winnable seats, and 58.3% of the marginal seats. The new structure of opportunities, as defined by law, is able to open new 'windows of access' to politics, even in the presence of certain containment factors. However, if we look at the distribution of the seats (here we consider only the candidates fielded exclusively in one single-member constituency only), the offer of safe or winnable seats to women is extremely low (only 18), and in most instances, they are assigned to the least winnable seats.

In fact, these general trends presuppose a very different idea of women's representation in the parties analysed: the lack of previous administrative political experience seems to be a common trait of the candidates. The young age of the candidates is reflected in the low value of their previous political careers²⁰: 46% of men have never held institutional positions and 24% have low-value political careers; similar considerations apply to women, where as many as 60.4% say they have never held any kind of political office before. Female candidates were more likely than male candidates to be fielded in both single-member and multi-member constituencies, though there are partial differences between parties. 14% of the women representing the parties of the centre right were nominated for one single-member constituency only, while 68.3% were fielded in one multi-member constituency only. 34.7% and 37.1% of the women representing the centre left and

LeU, respectively, were fielded in only one single-member constituency while 46.9% and 44.7%, respectively, were fielded in two constituencies. The single-member constituencies were places of innovation, in the sense that it was here that the parties fielded ‘personalities outside the traditional recruiting circuit’ (Tronconi and Verzichelli 2019, 238) such as Lucia Annibali (PD) and Lorenzo Fioramonti (M5 s). However, the likelihood of victory in single-member constituencies is different for men and women and for different political formations: success in single-member constituencies is generally low for women except for those representing the M5 s, which make up 26.3% of its elected members. The result is better among those women fielded in the multi-member constituencies only. The success of double candidacies (Table 2) is slightly more modest.

The candidate selection processes highlight the relevance of previous political experience, especially for some parties. The centre right, especially the League, and the centre left (largely the PD), select new female candidates by drawing on a pool of aspirants elected in local institutions, attributing value to their previous careers. At the 2018 election, the weight attributed to previous political participation when it came to selecting candidates decreased, especially the weight given to experience gained through elective positions at local level or in party positions at national level (Tronconi and Verzichelli 2019, 226–27). However, our data show the importance of previous assignments, especially for new candidates. Considering separately the types of political experience (Table 3), absolute beginners account for 94.3% of M5 s candidates. The percentage drops to 74.7 for LeU; to 59.7% for the coalition of the centre right, and to 49% for the PD and its allies. The centre right and the centre left can count on a political class of local female administrators, some of whom have high visibility, not only in the media. Mayors and former provincial presidents on the one hand, and provincial councillors on the other, respectively, represent 5.7% and 11% of the candidates for the centre right and 9.0% and 18.1% of those for the centre left. Minor experiences (such as having served as municipal or provincial councillors) are important, even for the M5 s with 4.5% of its candidates having been municipal councillors. On the whole, however, the pool of experience to draw from is narrower than it is in the case of men: women face a delay in access to politics deriving from limited previous participation. If we look at the political career index by individual party, the situation remains unbalanced, even among parties of the centre right, which have boasted a greater sensitivity to gender

Table 2. Types of candidatures on the part of candidates and MPs for given coalitions and parties.

	Candidate			Elected MPs		
	<i>Single-member constituency only</i>	<i>Proportional arena only</i>	<i>Majoritarian and proportional arenas</i>	<i>Single-member constituency only</i>	<i>Proportional arena only</i>	<i>Majoritarian and proportional arenas</i>
Centre right	24.3	67.8	7.9	29.5	59.4	11.1
Centre left	43.4	46.5	10.1	13.0	65.0	22.0
LeU	48.7	37.6	13.7	0.0	21.4	78.6
M5 s	46.6	42.8	10.6	38.1	46.6	15.3
Centre right	14%	68.3	17.7	14.7	51.0	34.3
Centre left	43.7	46.9	18.4	10.2	49.0	40.8
LeU	37.1	44.7	18.3	0.0	40.0	60.0
M5 s	29.2	53.8	17.0	26.3	53.3	20.4

Row percentages for candidates, and elected MPs.

Table 3. Newcomers and political careers – general election 2018.

	National institutions		Regional institutions		Local institutions				
			<i>Regional president or member of the regional executive or member of coordination board in Regional Assembly</i>	<i>Regional councillor</i>	<i>Municipal councillor; provincial councillor; deputy mayor; provincial president</i>	<i>Member of municipal or provincial executive</i>	<i>Mayor or provincial president</i>	<i>No political career</i>	<i>Political career index</i>
	<i>MPs</i>	<i>Parliament</i>							
Centre right	6.6	0.5	5.8	14.0	45.8	16.4	13.7	43.8	9.0
Centre left	6.4	5.3	8.0	20.7	46.3	14.9	23.4	34.0	11.5
LeU	1.8	0.7	0.7	2.1	31.1	8.2	8.9	61.1	4.2
M5 s	0.3	0.0	0.0	1.7	5.6	0.3	0.0	92.0	0.4
Centre right	3.2	0.6	1.9	3.2	34.6	11.1	5.7	59.7	4.1
Centre left	0.0	0.0	5.2	4.5	42.6	18.1	9.0	49.0	5.7
LeU	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.6	21.7	8.4	1.6	74.7	2.8
M5 s	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.8	4.5	0.4	0.0	94.3	0.2

With the exception of the extreme right-hand column, cell entries are the percentages of each coalition's or party's candidates having had the previous political experience described at the head of each column.

representation. The index describing the number of years and relevance of positions held still indicates a deep gulf in terms of the positions occupied by men and women, both in the coalition of the centre left (5.73 versus 11.50) and in the coalition of the centre right (4.17 versus 9.09).

Conclusion

This study has focused on the sociology of women candidates as well as on the way in which the individual political parties provide actual opportunities to women to traverse the different stages of the political recruitment process, from eligibility, to candidacy, nomination and election. The passage of the Rosatellum had led observers to think that the eighteenth legislature would bring gender balance in parliamentary representation, thanks to the mechanisms introduced by the electoral law. The rules established by the law were the result of a lengthy debate on quotas in parties and of a long and complex process of transforming electoral legislation in order to ensure greater gender balance in the representative institutions. **The electoral system appears finally to be in tune with the selection policies declared by the parties through their statutes, regulations and documents (see also Belluati, this issue). In all political organizations, fairness in political representation becomes a goal to be pursued by means of concrete actions. However, the modesty of the progress in the number of women elected in comparison with the previous legislature suggests that at the 2018 election other criteria guided the selection of political personnel. Therefore, looking at the candidates and the women elected, and disregarding in part the provisions made in the official documents, the study focuses on the socio-demographic and political profiles of women in order to understand the selection criteria from a different, inductive, perspective.** Political experience on the one hand, and electability on the other, are resources that can partly explain the choices of the parties and in particular the level of

protection reserved for candidates, both incumbents and newcomers. As in other research (Sanbonmatsu 2002, 805–6), comparison of men and women confirms the presence of **different opportunity structures in the same party by gender**, as well as interaction between men's opportunities for office and those of women.

The law had the merit of enabling a large number of women to access the political circuit, women with lower average ages than incumbents, **but with little previous political experience (see Pansardi and Pinto, in this issue)**. This is certainly a positive result because the opening up of spaces for participation (which, in certain respects, was externally enforced), has induced the parties to modify the 'political supply'.

In fact, this push factor introduced into the political circuit a political class of women who had accumulated experience within local and regional institutions. The parties, especially those, such as the League and the PD, which had large numbers of members/supporters in visible and prestigious positions in local government, have legitimized these experiences. This is not true of the M5 s, which still has a limited presence in local government and which explicitly restricts the accumulation of offices and mandates. The same criteria acted differently in relation to the 'protection' of candidatures. The best positions on the proportional lists are reserved for female incumbents – often fielded as heads of lists in several constituencies or in competitive single-member constituencies – and among these, for those that have distinguished themselves for their productivity and autonomy of action. **Compared to the single-member constituency seats, the 'safe' or 'winnable' seats assigned to women are significantly fewer than those assigned to men**, even if the parties reserved a proportion of the safe seats to women who were absolute beginners in politics. The intention behind the provisions of the Rosatellum, of finally bringing about gender balance in representation, was defeated by the **mechanism of multiple candidacies and the assignment of safe seats, ensuring that the impact of the law was smaller than had been intended**. However, the provisions of the Rosatellum must be regarded with a degree of optimism as the parties show a growing sensitivity both to the gender gap within political institutions and to the need to close it.

Notes

1. Italy was ranked 69th out of 142 countries in 2014 and 88th in 2017. The report estimates equal opportunities in four main areas: participation and economic opportunities, education, political power, health and survival.
2. A small number of parliamentarians (12 in the Chamber and 6 in the Senate) were elected from a foreign constituency, with a proportional system and preference voting (Sampugnaro 2017).
3. The candidate must take up the single-member constituency seat in the event of victory. Otherwise, in the event of victory in more than one of the multi-member constituencies, s/he must take up the seat in the constituency in which her/his list has obtained the lowest percentage of votes.
4. Open primaries in the cases of the PD and FdI-AN; closed primaries in the case of the M5 s, which reserves selection of its political leaders to 'certified members' only.
5. From maximum inclusivity to maximum exclusivity: electorate, party members, party elective body, party non-elective body, party leader.

6. For SEL and the League, regional boards proposed candidates for parliamentary, European and regional elections. For the UDC, regional and provincial boards made the choice, although the selection had to be ratified by the secretary.
7. 'Regulations for the selection of M5 s candidates for the general elections of 4 March 2018 in the multi-member and single-member constituencies.
8. See article 3 of the Movement's statute: 'the Political Leader, after consulting the Guarantor, assesses the compatibility of the candidacy with the values and policies of the M5 s ... he may express a binding negative judgment on the matter of acceptance'. Articles 2 and 6 of the 'Regulations ... 4 March 2018' make additional requirements of every candidate. The 'Political Leader' designates all candidates for the single-member constituencies (article 1). For selection of the candidates to be fielded in the multi-member constituencies, the M5 s held closed primary elections (*Parlamentarie*) with party members being given the right to cast up to three preference votes via the Movement's Rousseau platform.
9. Article 2 of the 'Rules for the selection of candidates for Parliament, 2018 General Elections' states that 'Candidates may be ... citizens who declare themselves to be voters of the PD, who meet the requirements of the law and the Code of Ethics'. LeU in its 'Criteria for LeU candidatures, 2018' makes it possible for any supporter of the party to nominate themselves as a potential candidate.
10. While there is no specific regulation for 2018, article 19 of the 'Regulations of the Lega Nord for the Independence of Padania' requires candidates to have been party members for at least five years.
11. The press office announced that the 'selection of candidates [was] and [would] be the sole responsibility of Berlusconi'.
12. The secretary, having evaluated proposals received from the regional secretaries, and in consideration of petitions from the regions; of internal pluralism; of the positions of existing members of Parliament, and of the relevant legislation (see article 1 of 'Rules ... 2018' cit), 'entrusts the selection of candidates to the national leadership'. LeU, too, may be located in an intermediate position along the continuum of inclusiveness/exclusiveness.
13. See: 'Criteria ...' cit. Before the elections, LeU organized open assemblies for the selection of candidates.
14. For the single-member constituencies, candidates were selected to represent the coalitions of the centre right (consisting of the League, FI, FdI and Noi con l'Italia) and the centre left (consisting of the PD, Insieme, Più Europa and Civica Popolare). The M5 s and LeU, fielded their own candidates. Each of the main parties (the PD, FI, the Lega and LeU) fielded its own candidates in the multi-member constituencies. In the case of multiple candidacies, the candidate's profile was counted only once. For an overall picture, see the Ministry of the Interior's Dossier (2018: 186).
15. The OpenPolis productivity index is a measure of parliamentarians' activity: the number of legislative proposals they present in a given period of time, and the efficacy of their political activities. See: <https://www.openpolis.it>.
16. The data on rebellion are available at <https://www.openpolis.it>. The indicator measures the number of times the parliamentarian has defied his/her group's voting instructions.
17. The degree of competitiveness of each constituency (considered by the parties in the nomination phase) is estimated by means of a model that takes into account the average of two SWG polls on voting intentions, published in the two weeks prior to 4 March 2018. This makes it possible to identify the safe seats, i.e. those where the polls gave the leading candidate a margin of more than 5 percentage points; those where the margin ranged from 1 to 5 percentage points; the marginals, where the gap was between 0 and 1 percentage point; the 'losers', where the candidate trailed the leader by between 1 and 5 percentage points; the 'hostile constituencies' where the gap was over 5 points.
18. The majority (23 out of 32) did not change groups during the legislature and had levels of parliamentary productivity that were high in 13 cases and average in 12. As far as

rebellion is concerned, on the floor of the assembly and in the commissions, 15 of the 28 rebels displayed a level of autonomy of their parliamentary groups that we do not find in men in the same positions. Other work on the behaviour of women in legislatures also focusses on rebellion. See, for example, Cowley and Childs (2003) and Rivière-De Franco (2014).

19. The variable 'rebel vote' was constructed by dividing the distribution into three levels using a statistically guided criterion.
20. This political career index is a summative one. The number of years the candidate has held elected office has been counted and weighed according to the importance of the office held. Thus the number of years the candidate had held an administrative position, such as a local or provincial councillor, was multiplied by 1, while the corresponding weights for each year in other offices were as follows. Members of local or provincial executives: 1.2; mayors and provincial presidents: 1.5; regional councillors and executive members: 1.7; regional presidents, MEPs, Deputies, Senators in one of the last six legislatures: 2; ministers and undersecretaries in one of the last six legislatures: 2.5. Finally, we created four levels using a statistically guided criterion (based on the distribution of the scores and identification of the unadjusted distribution quartiles) as follows: 'no career value', 0; 'low career value', from 0.1 to 10; 'average career value', from 10.1 to 18.5; 'high career value', from 18.6 upwards.

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