

From demolition to re-composition?

The 2018 Italian Lower House MPs and their careers: novelty and continuity

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Abstract

The 2018 Italian general election marked the consolidation of a three-pole party system. However, the contours of parliamentary elites seem to be still in motion. This article aims, at first, to describe the main features of Italian Lower House MPs by recurring to a five-fold classification, where different MPs' career features are taken into consideration. Then, it puts forward an analysis of the connection between this classification and the tool of multi-candidacies. Subsequently, the article presents the features of parliamentarian and governmental elites, before concluding by underlying the presence of both innovations and traditional patterns of career and pointing towards future avenues of research.

Introduction

The rates of electoral change and volatility in the 2018 Italian general election (Chiaromonte and Emanuele 2018; Emanuele 2018) mark it as a patent example of a *critical election*. This immediately leads us to raise questions about related changes in the features of the parliamentary elites and, consequently, in the whole profile of the ruling class. Indeed, the notion of critical election has always been associated with the problem of elite change, from the pioneering study produced more than one century ago by Pareto on political circulation to the modern comparative assessments on the long-term transformation of political elites (for a recent review, see Verzichelli 2018). Articulated theories have been developed about the linkages between party and party system changes on the one hand, and the changing structure of opportunities for the political elites (Norris 1997; Cotta and Best 2007) on the other, with important implications for the effective qualities of representatives (for a review, see Best and Vogel 2014).

The effects of the economic crisis (e.g., see Hernández and Kriesi 2016) and the growth of populist and challenger parties (e.g., see Pappas and Kriesi 2015) have recently triggered a quest for the persistence of the traditional patterns of elite formation and circulation, producing empirical and normative analyses of the prospective evolution of the democratic ruling class (for instance, see Caramani 2017). Many wonder what the future

of representative elites will be without some iron law of oligarchy (Cordero and Coller 2018). However, it is precisely the consolidation of the new actors and their access to the executive institutions that are supposed to stabilise some kinds of new pattern of elite circulation.

These implications look particularly relevant in the analysis of the Italian parliamentary ruling class after the 2018 Italian general election. Several pundits have stressed interesting pieces of evidence: among them, a new step in the path of gender balance among the candidates to parliament (Pedrazzani, Pinto and Segatti 2018), a very relevant rate of parliamentary turnover (Salvati and Vercesi 2018), and new and significant records of rejuvenation of the political personnel (Marino, Martocchia Diodati and Verzichelli forthcoming).

However, can these signs be considered as a prelude to a significant transformation of parliamentary democracy in Italy? Indeed, one may stress the contradiction between the extraordinary parliamentary turnover rate and the persistence of some traditional features of parliamentary recruitment, like the ‘consensus control’ in the hands of a significant number of local politicians and the frequent accumulation of different political mandates. This dilemma certainly cannot be solved in a few pages on the basis of limited data groundwork. However, we can raise a few specific questions concerning the limited or controversial implications of such an important electoral turning point.

Such questions are, in short, related to the most relevant political-experience-related characteristics of the Members of Parliament belonging to the Lower House after the 2018 Italian general election, to the relationship between these different clusters and the features of their candidacy, and to the new structure of opportunities opened to the parliamentary elites in terms of (parliamentary and governmental) career prospects.

Such questions are particularly timely in the Italian scenario. In this short contribution, we argue that, notwithstanding the manifest novelties that have emerged in the selection of the parliamentary elite, the consolidation of a remarkably diverse ruling class seems to be far from taking place. The ‘revolutionary’ changes, stressed by the same party actors and by some observers of the descriptive representation (see Salvati and Vercesi 2018, Marino, Martocchia Diodati and Verzichelli forthcoming), can be scaled down to a sort of ‘adaptive’ pattern of differentiation. In other words, all the parties – including those supporting the *Governo del Cambiamento* (the Government of Change), i.e. the coalition between the *Movimento Cinque Stelle* (M5S) and the *Lega* (League), since June 2018 – have proven themselves unable to radically transform the nature of the patterns of circulation of their political representatives. This does not mean that changes have not occurred at all, but that a sort of resilient power of highly-ranked politicians concerning, say, parliamentary or governmental offices can still be found.

The article is organised as follows: in the next section, we discuss some innovative characteristics in the profiles of the 2018 Italian Lower House MPs and put forward a five-fold typology able to distinguish between different clusters of parliamentarians. We focus on the Lower House both for data-availability reasons and to foster comparisons with other Western Lower Houses and MPs. The second section is instead devoted to a more in-depth analysis of the tool of multi-candidacies and its link with different MP profiles. The third section explores the patterns of elite circulation from the same chamber to the ‘inner circle’ of institutional leaders both in parliament and in the new Conte

government. The concluding section discusses some of the implications deriving from our analysis in light of foreseeable future research.

1. The new Lower House Parliamentary elite

The primary empirical question we aim to answer in this section is the following: what are the most innovative characteristics of the 2018 Italian Lower House MPs? To detect possible differences or similarities between parties in the Italian Lower House after the 2018 general election, we have relied on the classification put forward in Marino, Martocchia Diodati and Verzichelli (forthcoming), based on different clusters of MPs: the *Intruders*, the *Local Party Machine* MPs, the *Local Untouchables*, the *National Untouchables*, and, finally, the *National Mandarins*. We have relied on the data on Italian Lower House MPs collected by the CIRCAP, the University of Siena's Centre for the Study of Political Change, focusing on the six largest political formations in the Italian Lower House in terms of seats held: the *Movimento Cinque Stelle* (M5S), the *Partito Democratico* (PD), the *Lega* (the League), *Forza Italia* (FI), the far left cartel of *Liberi e Uguali* (LeU), and *Fratelli d'Italia* (FdI), a small extreme right party included in the centre-right coalition. Moreover, special attention is paid to the two parties supporting the Government of Change, i.e. the League and the M5S.

As more extensively shown in Marino, Martocchia Diodati and Verzichelli (forthcoming), the five mutually-exclusive categories have been formed starting with three MP features¹: in particular, each category has been defined by taking into consideration each MP's experience at the local government level (e.g., having been a mayor, or a regional MP), each MP's career within political parties (e.g., having been part of a central organ of a political formation, like National Direction or a National Executive Office), and, finally, each MP's parliamentary tenure. Starting with the *Intruders*, these represent a type of parliamentarian which goes against the classic stereotype of the party-career politician: indeed, they are MPs without local-government or party-related positions and who had also never been elected to parliament before 2018². Their profile could, therefore, resemble that of 'technocrats' attracted by the political arena, or also that of a prominent representative of civil society. The second class, the *Local Party Machine* MPs, includes those Lower House parliamentarians who have not had experience in local governments or parliament, but instead have held some positions within a political party (from the local to the regional level), thus capturing the exclusive role of grass-roots party activism in providing a chance for being recruited as a prospective parliamentarian.

Two clusters have been labeled as *Untouchables* to stress the robustness of MPs' backgrounds from the viewpoint of a more traditional pattern of political career. On the one hand, we find the *Local Untouchable* cluster, made up of MPs with local government

¹ Such features are related to the moment parliamentarians entered parliament for the first time. We have classified MPs according to the highest office ever held both at the party and the institutional level.

² Other authors, such as Samuels and Shugart (2010) or Carreras (2012), use the term 'outsider', although there are differences between our definition and theirs. Unlike Samuels and Shugart (2010), we do not consider politicians with subnational party-related experience as *Intruders* (see discussion in Samuels and Shugart 2010: 67; Carreras 2012: 1456); moreover, unlike Carreras (2012: 1456), we do not include contesting elections as independents or with new political formations as one of the possible characteristics of *Intruders*.

experience who might have had party experience up to the regional offices. In this cluster, we find those MPs endowed with specific party- or local-government-related characteristics that make them potential protagonists of the parliamentary life of a party. For instance, parliamentarians with experience as regional MPs could be extremely useful for parties because of their competence concerning specific pieces of legislation.

Conversely, the *National Untouchables* cluster is composed of two different groups of MPs: on the one hand, those who have not had parliamentary experience but have held national office in a political party; on the other hand, those parliamentarians who have served one term in the Italian parliament but who are not professional politicians (i.e. their main profession before entering the parliament was not politics).

Finally, the cluster we have called *National Mandarins* includes parliamentarians who are already professional politicians and well known as such. Two types of MPs are included in this cluster: either parliamentarians who have served one term in parliament but are indeed professional politicians (i.e. they lived off politics for a significant time span before entering parliament), or those MPs who have already been in the Italian parliament for more than one term.

Figure 1. Clusters of 2018 Italian Lower House MPs per party.

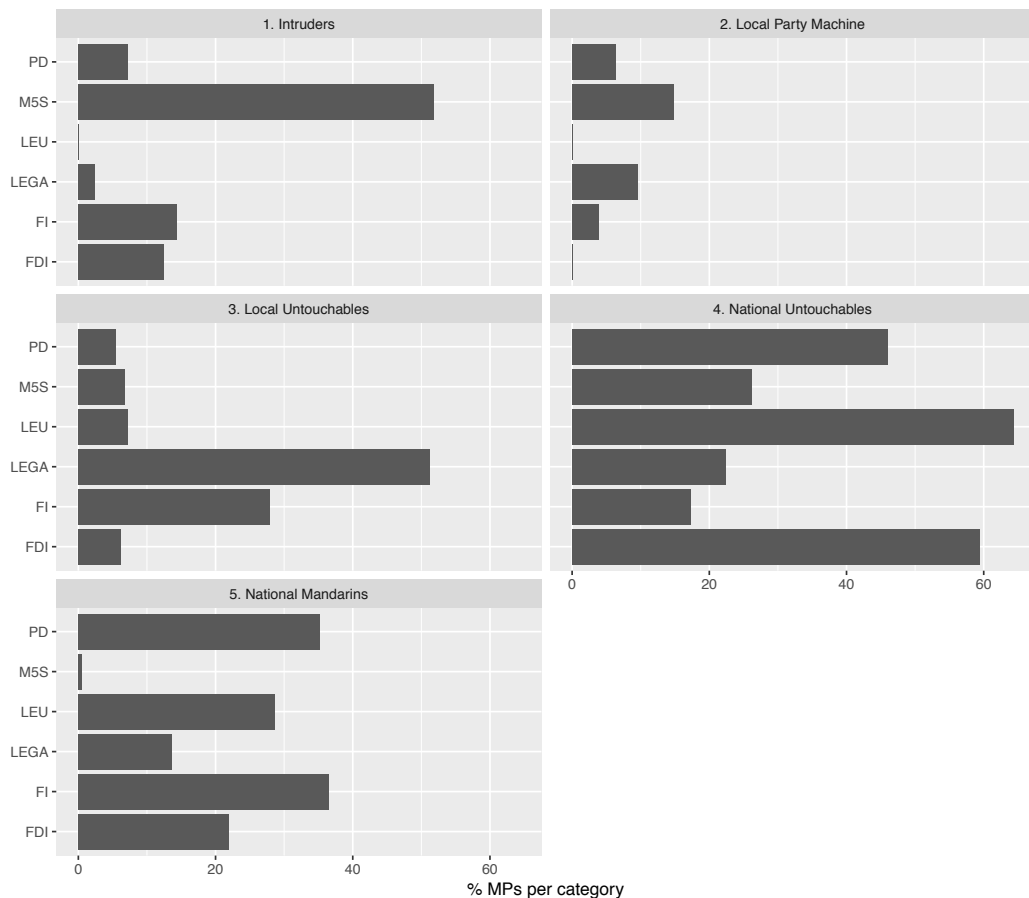


Figure 1 above reports the percentage of Lower House MPs who are members of the abovementioned five clusters and belong to the main political formations which ran in the 2018 Italian general election. Notice that, overall, 23.7% of the MPs are *Intruders*, while 9.1% are *Local Party Machine*, 18.8% are *Local Untouchables*, 30.7% are *National Untouchables*, and, finally, 17.8% are *National Mandarins*.

As Figure 1 above shows, there are interesting differences between the main parties in the Italian Lower House in the aftermath of the 2018 general election. Starting from some general considerations, despite the rhetoric surrounding the 18th Italian legislature concerning the rate of renewal of the parliamentary class, what emerges from Figure 1 is that there is undoubtedly a high degree of *Intruder* MPs, especially for the M5S, but two phenomena have tempered such renewal. On the one hand, other parties show a substantially lower degree of *Intruders* (in particular, LeU, the PD, and the League). On the other hand, despite the partial exception of the M5S, MPs belonging to the *National Untouchables* and *National Mandarins* clusters – that is, the two categories including well-established politicians at the national level – still constitute a noticeable proportion of the Italian Lower House's 18th parliamentary class.

Let us now turn to the analysis of parties. One interesting piece of evidence emerging from Figure 1 is that, on the centre-left flank of the political spectrum, the PD and LeU parliamentary groups are somewhat similar to one another. Despite the presence of some *Intruders* and *Local Party Machine* MPs in the PD group (while such clusters have no parliamentarians coming from the smaller LeU group), a wide proportion of MPs coming from centre-left parties are, to a small extent, *Local Untouchables* and, to a much larger extent, *National Untouchables* and *National Mandarins*. In other words, many centre-left MPs are politicians with specific parliamentary or party-related experience, and this might signal the fact that the formation of the new PD and LeU parliamentary groups has followed a rather traditional pattern of party 'central control' (Wertman 1988) in the selection of representatives. The picture is entirely different if one looks at the centre-right: the parliamentary groups of the three parties that contested the 2018 Italian general election under the centre-right flag do not have a very compatible profile concerning the five clusters under examination.

Finally, the M5S group shows a very peculiar composition: more than 50% of its Lower House MPs are people with no previous experience whatsoever (*Intruders*), paired with a certain percentage of *National Untouchables* and also a lower proportion of *Party Machine* parliamentarians³. In this regard, and from a speculative viewpoint, a 'top-down' perspective of political selection might help us to decipher the situation of M5S parliamentary elite. Indeed, the confirmation of a substantial number of MPs elected in 2013 who had remained loyal to the party provides the core of a bunch of *National Untouchables*, but the impressive increase in the number of seats for the M5S after the 2018 Italian general election gave many people who were substantially unknown to local government structures, to the party (in the sense they did not hold any office), and to parliament, the chance to enter the Lower House (the *Intruders*). Again, this very last point could also be understood, for the time being only at the speculative level, by

³To account for the peculiar party structure of the M5S, in the CIRCaP dataset, when dealing with party-related experience, M5S MPs who were at the top of a party's local meet-up have been categorised as if they had a city-level office in the party.

connecting it with the relevance of central party organs (in this case the party leadership and possibly top party cadres as well) in the selection of candidates. Indeed, *Intruder* MPs would have had little chance of entering parliament on their own (given the constraints imposed by the electoral law), while top party cadres had many incentives to select these people and favour their election. More in detail, despite the fact that M5S repeated, before the 2018 general election, the same candidate selection procedure of 2013, the *parlamentarie*, where ‘certified members’ could preliminarily select the candidates for the general election (Movimento 5 Stelle, 2018b), the final decision on the party’s lists remained in the hands of Luigi di Maio (Movimento 5 Stelle, 2018a), who was able to personally select a group of ‘high profile’ personalities, such as university professors or entrepreneurs. This type of selection could have been made for a number of reasons: to polish the public image of the party and make it appear a more competent and trustworthy actor also from a governmental viewpoint, or even to present viable candidates in some specific arenas of competition (e.g., single-member districts), where some argue it is important for parties to put forward ‘high-valence candidates’ (Galasso and Nannicini 2011). This sort of ‘personalised’ parliamentary party model, involving MPs’ qualities and also leaders’ powers in selecting them, is not surprising when one refers to the M5S (e.g., see Vignati 2015). Finally, and this is another hint that could be confirmed in future empirical analyses, the selection of M5S candidates and would-be MPs who could not revert to party- or local-government-related resources could also be seen as a way of building a more loyal parliamentary group: indeed, *Intruders* would be more likely to be loyal to the party majority or the party whip so as to increase the chances of continuing their parliamentary career (see also the discussion in Marino and Martocchia Diodati 2017).

Other compelling considerations can be drawn if we move closer to the other party forming the parliamentary basis of the *Governo del Cambiamento* (Government of Change), that is, the League. Indeed, the parliamentary group of Matteo Salvini’s party seems to have a more ‘bottom-up’ composition of the parliamentarian class, where local-government or subnational party-related experience might have played an important role. There is an extremely low percentage of *Intruders* and, conversely, a very high proportion of MPs who are *Local* or *National Untouchables* (along with a certain percentage of highly ranked *National Mandarins*). This model might resemble what has happened in the Italian *Seconda Repubblica* (i.e. the period from 1994-today), concerning the connection either with local rank-and-file or specific experience with the party machinery (e.g., see Verzichelli 2010). All in all, the League seems to have a parliamentary party structure with solid local-government-related and party-related roots, where experience gained, say, as a regional MP or as a mayor is extremely important for MPs with specific connections with their constituencies and party structures. This might also resemble a sort of *cursus honorum* of professional politicians which was, especially in the past, almost necessary to have specific parliamentary or governmental careers (Verzichelli 2010; see also Marino and Martocchia Diodati 2017; Martocchia Diodati and Verzichelli 2017). Finally, it is worth noting that the importance of local government experience and presence in party structures is not surprising when connected to the League given, for instance, the persistence of a particular net of local organisational structures within the party (e.g., see McDonnell and Vampa 2016).

All in all, in this section, we have tried to tackle some interesting features of MPs belonging to the most important parties represented in the Italian Lower House after 4th March 2018. Nonetheless, there is one further element which has not yet been analysed and could give us further food for thought when analysing the Italian parliamentary elite: multi-candidacies. In the next section, we try to sketch some connections between such tools and the five clusters of MPs we have presented.

2. Multi-candidacies and MP clusters

Is it possible to find interesting differences in the connection between, on the one hand, multi-candidacies and, on the other, the proportion of *Intruders*, *Local Party Machine* MPs, *Local* and *National Untouchables*, and *National Mandarins* for the parties under consideration in the 18th Italian Lower House legislature? Let us first clarify the issue of multi-candidacies under the *Rosatellum* law, i.e. the electoral law used to select Italian parliamentarians on 4th March 2018 (for more information, see Chiaramonte and D'Alimonte 2018).

Let us distinguish between, on the one hand, those MPs who were candidates in just a single-member district or in a single multi-member constituency and, on the other, those MPs who were candidates in more than one multi-member constituency (or at least in one constituency and one single-member district). Indeed, the *Rosatellum* allowed each prospective MP to be a candidate just in a single-member district, or just in one or more multi-member constituencies (up to five), or in both a single-member district and in one or more (up to five) multi-member constituencies (see again Chiaramonte and D'Alimonte 2018). All in all, multi-candidacies could easily have been put forward, in different fashions.

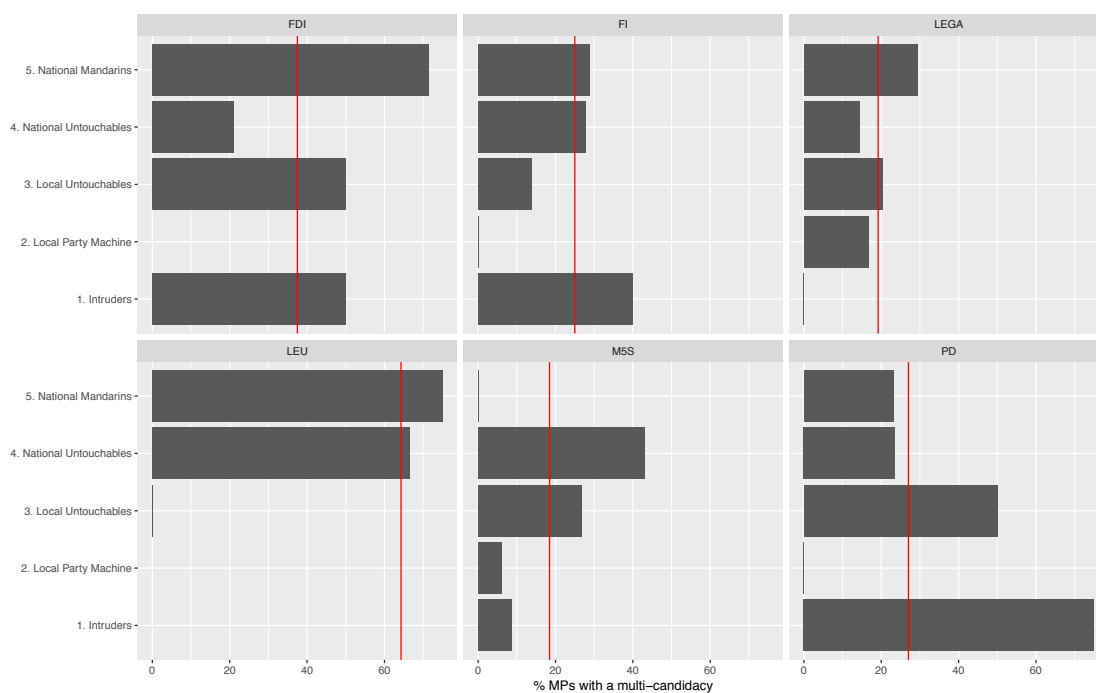
Multi-candidacies can be approached from different viewpoints. For small parties, like LeU or FdI, this tool can be used in order to maximise the exposure of the few appealing national party leaders while securing, at the same time, a seat for (almost) all of them. This applies particularly to LeU, whose party group in the Lower Chamber, as shown above, is almost entirely composed of *National Untouchables* and *National Mandarins*, i.e. by top national politicians who had joined this little cartel either from the PD or the far-left galaxy.

Conversely, for bigger parties, a multi-candidacy is a good way to 'protect' a politician against the risk of losing a specific race in a single-member or a multi-member constituency. In other words, multi-candidacies can represent, on the one hand, the willingness of party leaders and elites to increase the chances of election for a particular candidate but can also be, on the other, a sign of the noticeable bargaining power of a single candidate, who could more easily secure his/her re-election (for more information on multi-candidacies in the 2018 Italian general election, see for instance Pinto, Tronconi, and Valbruzzi 2018). All in all, the analysis of multi-candidacies, connected to parties' specific clusters of MPs, can lead to useful insights concerning the phase preceding 4th March 2018.

Figure 2 shows the percentage of MPs, for each party and each of the five clusters under analysis, who received a multi-candidacy, while the vertical red line represents

the mean percentage of each party's MPs who received a multi-candidacy⁴. For instance, approximately 40% of FI *Intruder* MPs were multi-candidate. On the contrary, approximately 25% of all FI MPs received a multi-candidacy.

Figure 2. Percentage of 2018 Lower House MPs with a multi-candidacy, per category



Let us start with a general consideration concerning all MPs coming from each party. There seems to be a clear distinction between, on the one hand, FdI and LeU and, on the other, FI, the League, M5S, and the PD. In the former cases, either slightly less than 40% (FdI) or more than 60% (LeU) of MPs received a multi-candidacy, while in the latter cases this percentage goes from 18% to 27%. This is possibly in line with the discussion that introduced our Section 2: such a difference between smaller and bigger parties could be related to a different use of the multi-candidacies. All in all, it could be argued that, for FdI and LeU, multi-candidacies have represented a way to secure the (re)-election of some crucial figures. Indeed, given the projected small share of votes that these formations would have received, it could have been necessary to protect some candidates from the uncertainty of the electoral process. This is also possibly shown by the high percentage of *Untouchables* and *National Mandarins* from FdI and LeU who had a multi-candidacy at their disposal.

A different discourse can be made with reference to the other four parties: the PD has only slightly more than 20% of its *National Untouchables* and *National Mandarins* who received a multi-candidacy (while MPs belonging to these two clusters represent an extremely high percentage of the total parliamentary group of the party, see Figure 1 above); conversely, among the less numerous PD *Intruders* and *Local Untouchables*,

⁴ Notice that no *Intruder* MPs belonging to the League, no *Party Machine* MPs belonging to FI and the PD, no *Local Untouchable* MPs belonging to LeU have received a multi-candidacy.

there are many MPs who were multi-candidate. The high percentage of *Intruders* with a multi-candidacy makes the PD similar to FI (despite Silvio Berlusconi's party showing a more homogeneous distribution of multi-candidacies among the five clusters). These elements might signal that a 'top-down' attempt of renewal could have been put in place by each party's leadership, favouring the entrance of newcomers endowed with the parachute of a multi-candidacy. Finally, concerning the M5S and the League, it is interesting to note that, for both parties, the cluster with the highest percentage of MPs with a multi-candidacy is a top-national one: the *National Untouchables* for the M5S and the *National Mandarins* for the League. In this sense, the attempt to 'protect' the national politicians of the parties under consideration might be something worth analysing in future empirical research, possibly in connection with (multi-)candidacies in safer or riskier districts or constituencies.

3. Towards the *Governo del Cambiamento*: career prospects within the new parliamentary elite

We have reached the final level of our analysis, in our attempt to assess the effective impact of the 2018 Italian general election on the structure of the Italian parliamentary ruling class. We now focus on the formation of an 'inner circle' of institutional leaders, both in parliament and the executive. This exploration could allow us to answer two other fundamental questions about the true meaning of the 2018 Italian general election: to what extent does the renewal of the overall parliamentary class correspond to an effective change in the patterns of selection for parliamentary or governmental offices? Finally, is there any difference in the pattern of selection for parliamentary and governmental offices according to the five-fold typology used in this contribution?

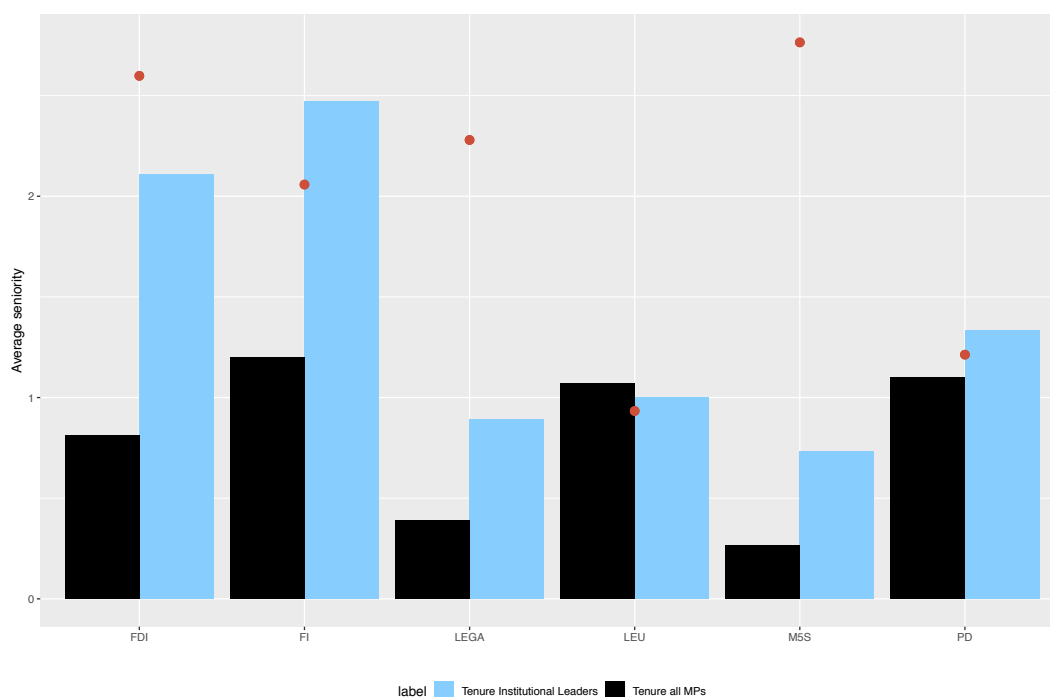
To answer these questions, we started with the same CIRCaP dataset (see Section 1) but, this time, controlling our descriptive data for a narrower population of MPs who have been promoted to certain parliamentary and governmental positions. More precisely, we considered 119 MPs elected to different offices of the Lower House⁵ and 34 deputies included in the different positions – full minister, minister without portfolio, vice-minister, undersecretary – of the new Conte Government.

Figure 3 below reports the differences between the mean seniority (in parliamentary terms) of all the MPs (by party) and that of MPs who have been appointed within the core of parliamentary/executive institutions (called Institutional Leaders). Moreover, the ratio (again, in parliamentary terms) between the mean seniority of the former and that of the latter is also provided (orange points). For instance, the League's Institutional Leaders have a mean seniority which is twice as large as the seniority of all MPs coming from Matteo Salvini's party (see the orange dot for the League positioned above 2). The figure provides a preliminary but incontestable answer to the first question cited above: the rule of seniority is still quite evident in the circulation of the parliamentary elite.

⁵We have considered the following institutional apical positions: Chairman of the Lower Chamber, vice-Chairmen, quaestors and secretaries, the chairman of a legislative committee, vice-chairmen and the secretaries of legislative committees, the chairman and vice-chairmen of the parliamentary party group. Notice that the distribution of offices (and the related ratio between Institutional Leaders and all MPs) of the parties included in the analysis could also be influenced by belonging to a governing party or not.

Indeed, MPs with parliamentary or executive offices are much more experienced in comparison to the whole cohort of MPs.

Figure 3. Average seniority of 2018 Lower House MPs (All MPs vs Institutional Leaders)



Quite an interesting take from Figure 3 is that the higher seniority of those we have called Institutional Leaders applies to all parliamentary groups, with the sole exception of the small group of LeU. In short, there is a tendency to appoint more experienced MPs to important parliamentary or governmental positions. More in detail, noticeable differences can be found between Institutional Leaders and MPs of the M5S (average tenure of Institutional Leaders of 0.73 vs. average tenure of all MPs of the party equal to 0.26), the League (0.89 vs. 0.39), or FdI (2.11 vs. 0.81). This is not surprising and is consistent, after all, with the classic idea of institutionalisation of parliamentary actors (e.g., see Polsby 1968).

However, the comparative analysis concerning the M5S and the League, the two parties now in government, looks somewhat surprising. Indeed, notwithstanding the noticeable percentage of newcomer MPs from the M5S (see above), its Institutional Leaders have a mean seniority which is almost three times higher than that of all the MPs coming from the party. Notice also that the difference in the M5S between the average seniority of Institutional Leaders and that of all MPs is the highest among all the parties considered in this analysis. All in all, incumbency seems to have played an important role within the M5S ranks (given that M5S MPs entered parliament for the first time, at best, after the 2013 Italian general election). This partly applies to the League as well, where the ratio between Institutional Leaders and the whole parliamentary party group is quite high (2.3), albeit not as high as in the case of the M5S.

We conclude with two figures which analyse parliamentary and governmental offices in greater detail and connect them with our five clusters of Lower House MPs. More in detail, Figure 4 below reports the relevance of the parliamentary offices (X-axis), for each party under consideration, held by each MP cluster (Y-axis). We have assigned a value of 0 to MPs without any parliamentary office, 1 to MPs selected for a collective office (like quaestors), 2 to vice presidents of parliamentary groups and committees and the vice president of the Chamber, and 3 to the president of groups, committees, and of the Chamber. The red vertical line indicates, for each party, the mean relevance of parliamentary offices held.

Figure 4. Relevance of the parliamentary offices held by the five MP clusters, per party, 2018 Lower House MPs

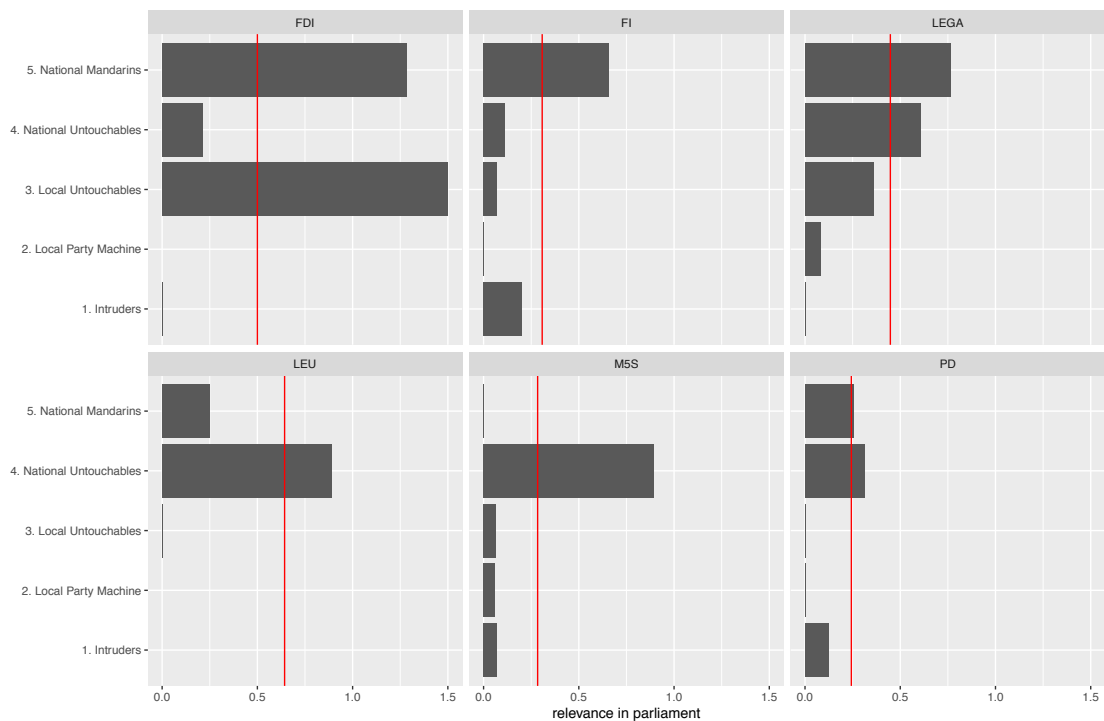


Figure 4 above tells us that if we consider the relevance of parliamentary offices, top national politicians get the lion's share: indeed, especially *National Untouchables* and *National Mandarins* occupy, on average, very relevant offices, regardless of the parties under analysis. The figure above shows that the six parties considered in this article have parliamentary office distributions substantially skewed towards such highly ranked politicians. This might indeed be another element to consider when analysing the rate of change brought about by the 2018 Italian general election: when one deals with parliamentary offices, it seems that clusters of more prominent and experienced politicians obtain, on average, more important positions than lower-level clusters of parliamentarians. All in all, even from this viewpoint, the renewal of MPs has also been tempered by the 'old-style politics' centrality of highly-ranked and more tenured parliamentarians (see Cotta 1982, Verzichelli 2006).

Figure 4 is related to parliamentary offices. Is it possible to find some differences, or similarities, when dealing with governmental offices? Figure 5 below attempts to answer this question by reporting, for the two governing coalition partners, the League and the M5S, the relevance of governmental positions held by each one of the five clusters considered here. More in detail, we have assigned to the undersecretaries of the government a value of 1, while to vice ministers we have given a value of 2, and to ministers a value of 3. The other members of the parliamentary groups that have not been appointed to a governmental office have been given 0. Finally, the vertical red line is the mean of the relevancy of governmental positions held by each party.

Figure 5. Relevance of the governmental offices held by the five MP clusters, for the League and the M5S, 2018 Lower House MPs

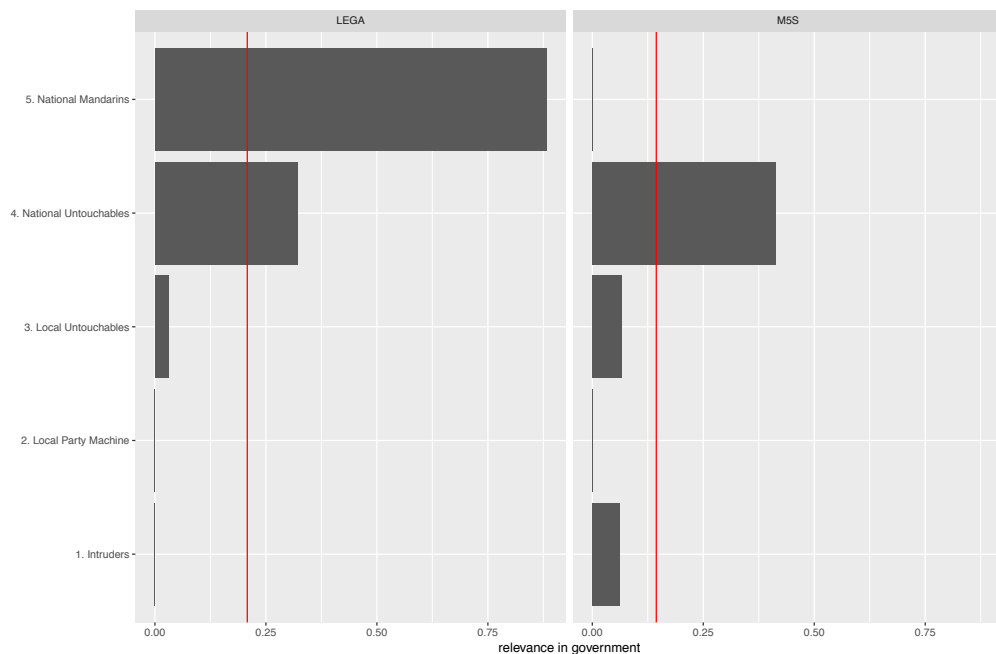


Figure 5 shows that, as expected, the predominance of the highest clusters of nationwide established MPs is quite evident. In other words, also when dealing with governmental offices, more important and ranked parliamentarians obtain more central offices in government. More in detail, the League's *National Mandarins* have been given, on average, the most relevant governmental positions, followed by the *National* and *Local Untouchables*. A somewhat different picture is that of the *Movimento Cinque Stelle*, where it is the *National Untouchables* cluster to have received the most important offices in the Conte government (followed by *Local Untouchables* and *Intruders*). Let us remember that *National Untouchables* are, for the M5S, basically incumbent MPs (see Section 1): this cluster is, on average, the typical target of the 'super-selection' to apical governmental offices, while the League presents a more mixed model.

Summarising the results of this section, it is of course too early to provide an ultimate assessment, but it seems that there might be some signs of a sort of resilience of a more classical framework of political careers (see De Winter 1991). Indeed, party elites,

in charge of the parliamentary and ministerial selection, seem to be able to recompose and conduct the pattern of elite circulation even among the new 'populist' actors emerging in Italy (i.e., the M5S and the new 'nation-wide' League led by Matteo Salvini, see the discussion in Ivaldi, Lanzone and Woods 2017). However, we also note that, as far as the M5S is concerned, the control operated by the party leadership (however we define it, see for instance Tronconi 2018) seems to be oriented towards establishing a rigid pattern of circulation based on parliamentary incumbency (also given the thin organisational structure of the party), while the framework of career opportunities within the League appears much more compound, with a relevant role played by long-term MPs, by professional party functionaries, and also by territorial leaders with relevant local administrative experience.

4. Conclusions

In this article, we have analysed the main features of the Italian Lower House parliamentary elite after 4th March 2018. We have focused on the *Movimento Cinque Stelle* (M5S), the *Partito Democratico* (PD), the *Legga* (the League), *Forza Italia* (FI), *Liberi e Uguali* (LeU), and *Fratellid'Italia* (FdI). More in detail, after having described the main features of Lower House MPs in Section 1 by reverting to a five-fold typology, in Section 2, we investigated the use of the tool of multi-candidacies in each of the main parties according to this typology. Finally, Section 3 has been devoted to the analysis of patterns of selection for parliamentary and governmental offices.

A preliminary element to underline is that the rate of parliamentary turnover brought about by the 2018 Italian general election has inevitably determined a number of interesting elements of innovation in the parliamentary elite. A relevant number of newcomer MPs have entered the Lower House, and this is surely something worth underlining. Moreover, the use of multi-candidacies has been somehow differentiated between smaller (LeU and FdI) and bigger parties, and also among more prominent political formations, where different clusters of parliamentarians have been differently 'protected' by the use of this tool (more experienced and central MPs have, from a very general point of view, received many multi-candidacies, notwithstanding party-related differences, as for the PD). Finally, concerning the selection for parliamentary and governmental offices, the relevance of top politicians remains evident, even if the different features of the League and the M5S – the two parties included in the coalition supporting the Conte government – determine some differences in their patterns of elite circulation. However, 'more traditional' parliamentary seniority and parliamentary or party-related centrality are important characteristics showing that the pattern of elite formation does not seem to have changed in a univocal and dramatic way (see also Pasquino 1999; Verzichelli 2010).

So, what are the tentative conclusions? Let us start with the innovative hints. At first, a clear differentiation can be seen by looking at the number in parliamentary groups of external 'genuine' newcomers. These are strongly represented within the M5S ranks and almost absent among the MPs from the League. Smaller parties are also committed to offering a considerable bulk of the available spoils to more experienced and central politicians and, generally, to candidates coming from party or local government structures. These latter received, on average, also more multi-candidacies before the

general election, and this is extremely interesting when analysing both smaller and larger political formations and also different parties. All in all, some kinds of mixed model have emerged: there is undoubtedly the absence of a clear framework of change but also the (maybe declining yet still relevant) importance of top parliamentarians, in line with more classic accounts of elite circulation and selection.

Furthermore, the selection for parliamentary and ministerial offices clearly shows the ambivalence in the procedure of formation of the Government of Change. On the one hand, the formation of the Conte government is without any doubt a rather innovative episode in the Italian constitutional and political chronicles. On the other hand, the mechanisms of political selection behind such an important event unveil the signs of a more traditional, accommodative process. Both party delegations (the M5S and the League) show a noticeable weight given to more experienced and central parliamentarians: the MPs elected in 2013 among the M5S ranks, and a more compound list of top-experienced politicians among the ministers and junior ministers of the League.

To sum up, the analysis carried out in this article leads us to conclude by pointing at some implications for future analyses. For instance, future research could investigate the path towards the formation of a robust and more stable parliamentary elite, able to project a selected set of national rulers in future parliamentary or governmental offices. Despite the presence of central and more experienced politicians also within the ranks of the M5S and the League, there are other elements to be taken into consideration. Indeed, a more consolidated elite circulation is connected to the stability of the party system, but also to other conditions, both general (i.e. the features of electoral rules) or party-specific ones (i.e. the persistence of primary elections to select candidates for general elections). The fuzziness of the Italian political scenario after the 2018 general election does not allow us to envisage a clear-cut forecast. It might indeed be possible that in the (more or less) near future we will witness a period of very uncertain and permeable models of political representation, possibly with noticeable differences between Italian parties.

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