

Candidates in 2013 Italian general election: evidence from the Italian Candidate Survey

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Changes in electoral politics in contemporary democracies have contributed to shifting the focus of research from parties to individual candidates. The 2013 Italian Candidate Survey (ICS) has collected original survey data with the aim of gaining new insights into the role of political elites, looking in particular at the candidates running for office in the last Italian general election. Based on interviews with individual candidates, the ICS provides a tool for analysing party members; and for comparing them with voters in several ways. In this paper, we spell out the main features of our research that was conducted within the framework of a larger project that examined political representation in Italy between 2013 and 2015. Moreover, we offer three examples of potential applications of ICS data. First, we present a model of political representation favoured by Italian candidates that matches with a well-known typology of political representation. Second, we utilize our ICS data to estimate candidates' policy preferences and to assess the level of congruence with their voters. Finally, by comparing the distribution of candidates' self-placements and their own party mean position on the left-right scale, we show how our data can be used to explore intra-party cohesion.

Keywords: Italian Candidate Survey; Comparative Candidate Survey; elite surveys; political representation; policy congruence; party cohesion

Introduction

Democratic representation in parliamentary systems can be seen as a cycle composed of key stages as follows: the pre-electoral stage, the election stage, the cabinet formation stage, and the inter-electoral stage. Research on democratic representation has often analysed voters and political parties as the most relevant actors in this process. Only in recent times has greater attention been paid to the role that individual candidates and party members play in the democratic process where the latter link voters to electoral outcomes and ultimately to policymaking. Increased interest in the role of individual members of political elites is driven both by a methodological interest in going beyond the empirically disputable 'parties-as-unitary-actors' assumption; and by a desire to understand recent changes in party organizations and in the way parties act as intermediaries between citizens and political institutions. Thus, without underestimating the role of

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parties, investigating political candidates can shed new light on the whole process of democratic representation.

Consequently, the 2013 Italian Candidate Survey (ICS) collected original survey data with the aim of gaining new insights about the role of political elites, and specifically candidates in the last Italian general elections held in February 2013. Our data allow us to address a number of key questions concerning the representative role of candidates such as what is the political and socio-demographic background of candidates running for office? How do intra-party democracy, elite recruitment, and candidate selection work in Italy? How do potential legislators campaign? What are candidates' opinions on politically salient issues and about their role as (potential) representatives? These questions touch on crucial aspects of the chain of democratic accountability linking citizens and elected representatives, and allow us to cast light on important phenomena such as party competition, intra-party politics, and the functioning of legislative assemblies. In this respect, Italy offers a particularly interesting case study, as it is characterized by an unstable institutional framework and persistent fluidity both at the electoral and legislative levels.

In this paper, we offer an overview of the ICS project methodology and present some illustrations of how the ICS data might be applied in studying democratic representation. Our study has been conducted within the framework of a larger research titled 'How Political Representation Changes in Italy. Voting Decisions in the 2013–2015 Electoral Cycle', which involves several Italian universities under the coordination of Paolo Segatti, University of Milan. For the first time in Italy, this research programme examines simultaneously the political attitudes of both voters and politicians throughout the 2013–15 period.¹ In addition, the ICS is part of the Comparative Candidate Survey (CCS), a collaborative international project with the goal of collecting data about candidates running for national parliamentary elections in different countries.

Compared with mass surveys, elite surveys like the ICS have been seldom used in political research in the Italian community, and the number of works including both elite and non-elite respondents is even smaller. Based on interviews with individual candidates, the ICS thus provides a valuable tool for analysing parties and their members and for comparing them with voters. In addition, the ICS data do not suffer from problems associated with gathering data about individual parliamentary party members by observing their behaviour such as their roll-call voting record (see Mair, 2001).² Finally, as part of the cross-national CCS project, the ICS

¹ This project, which focusses on political representation and voting behaviour, includes also a media analysis, a coding of party manifestos, and a contextual data study. More information on the PRIN project can be found at <http://cercauniversita.cineca.it/php5/prin/cerca.php?codice=2010943x4L>. For further details about the study, see ITANES (2013) and Vezzoni (2014). The work presented here is the basis of an edited volume by Di Virgilio and Segatti (2015).

² Another way to avoid such problems is to focus on 'middle-level elites' or party activists. However, there are very few studies of party activists owing to material costs and such activists' representativeness of their party's overall membership (Mair, 2001: 15). About Italy, see Di Virgilio and Giannetti (2011).

facilitates the comparative study of Italian candidates standing for election with candidates from other countries in Europe and elsewhere, allowing to go beyond a comparison between parliamentarians and voters in a single country (Hoffman-Lange, 2008).

This paper is organized as follows. The next two sections spell out the research design adopted and provide some descriptive statistics about the political and socio-demographic background of respondents of the ICS. The penultimate section examines three potential applications of our data. First, we assess how would-be legislators view the relationship between voters and representatives in light of a well-known typology of political representation. Second, we employ data on candidates' policy preferences to ascertain the level of congruence between party candidates and their voters. Finally, we compare the distribution of candidates' self-placements and their own party's mean position on the left-right scale, and we show how our data can be used to explore intra-party cohesion. Concluding remarks follow in the final section.

The 2013 ICS

A major reason for focussing on individual members within political elites is methodological. Many authors have questioned the assumption that parties can be characterized as unitary actors (Giannetti and Benoit, 2009). In this respect, the study of candidates can help in tracing the variety of different ideological beliefs and strategic orientations among party members. More substantively, the study of political candidates is linked to the process of representation where candidates form teams that compete for popular support and eventually define the composition of parliaments and governments. Analysing would-be representatives may help increase understanding of the trend towards personalization of politics that has been observed in many elections, and the impact of personalization on the perceptions and choices of voters (McAllister, 2007; Rahat and Sheafer, 2007; Karvonen, 2010). Moreover, recent changes in how political parties act as intermediaries between citizens and the state have made the study of individual candidates an increasingly attractive and promising line of political research (Katz and Mair, 1995; Thomassen, 2014).

Starting from the exploratory studies on parliamentary roles and norms conducted in the 1950s and 1960s, research on election candidates and elected representatives has usually been carried out using interviews and surveys (see Bailer, 2014 for a recent review). Elite surveys – whether personally administered as in interviews or self-administered as in structured questionnaires – are considered one of the most valuable sources of data for studying candidates and elected representatives. This is because they provide direct measures of the orientations and intentions of individual politicians. However, the elite survey approach is costly in terms of time and money, and strong efforts are often rewarded with rather low response rates (Mair, 2001). In the following sub-sections, we provide an overview of the ICS methodology and some comparisons with other elite surveys fielded in recent years.

Fieldwork

Organizing the fieldwork for a candidate survey requires considerable effort. This is particularly true for the Italian case, as the parliamentary elections for the Chamber of Deputies held in February 2013 saw the participation of about 11,000 candidates, grouped into 47 party lists. As a first step in our research, we reduced the universe of candidates to a sample of about 2900 potential respondents selected on the basis of two main criteria: (a) relevance of the party list and (b) competitiveness of the candidate. According to the first criterion, we excluded all party lists failing to pass the electoral threshold and thus having no representatives in parliament. The only exception is Civil Revolution (RIV), a left-wing list that did not reach the electoral threshold, but was included in our research owing to RIV's salience on the national political stage. This reduced the number of sampled party lists to 11. Regarding our second criterion, we used a candidate's position on the party list as an indicator of her competitiveness. As a rule of thumb, in each district we picked all candidates elected plus an equal number of unsuccessful runner-up candidates from the party lists. We then applied some corrections based on district magnitude by including a higher number of non-elected candidates for small parties. These sampling rules resulted in a sample of about 2600 candidates distributed across 11 party lists. Finally, we added a further 300 candidates belonging to the centre-right People of Freedom (PdL) because of a low response rate from candidates for this party.

Having defined our sample, we collected candidates' personal contact details. This turned out to be a particularly problematic task: in Italy there is no nationwide public register of candidates' addresses. We then gathered personal addresses from several sources including the electoral offices of the Courts of Appeal – where the candidacies to the electoral lists are collected – and the Italian Tax Agency National Register. The ICS survey was fielded in the summer of 2013. We sent all sampled candidates a mail questionnaire based on the one developed by the CCS international team (module 1), together with a cover letter outlining the purposes of our research. After some months we sent a first postal reminder offering the respondent the opportunity to complete an online version of the questionnaire. Later on we sent a second reminder, attaching again a paper questionnaire and all the information needed to complete the online version. Finally, a third reminder was sent to elected candidates and to those belonging to the PdL. We closed the survey at the end of September 2014.

Response rates

Politicians are usually busy people and have little time to fill in long surveys.³ Moreover, distrust for research like this one may contribute to a generally lower

³ The CCS module 1 common core questionnaire includes about 90 questions and it takes about 30 minutes to complete.

Table 1. Response rate by party

Party list	N	n	%
Centro Democratico (CD)	159	36	22.64
Fratelli d'Italia (FdI)	186	31	16.67
Il Popolo della Libertà (PdL)	598	73	12.21
Lega Nord (LN)	143	32	22.38
MoVimento 5 Stelle (M5S)	442	135	30.54
Partito Democratico (PD)	535	145	27.10
Rivoluzione Civile (RIV)	165	45	27.27
Scelta Civica (SC)	230	69	30.00
Sinistra Ecologia Libertà' (SEL)	219	67	30.59
Südtiroler Volkspartei (SVP)	10	3	30.00
Unione di Centro (UDC)	191	36	18.85
Total	2878	672	23.35

Party acronyms are given in parentheses.

response rate compared with mass opinion surveys (Hoffman-Lange, 2008). Despite these limitations, we obtained an acceptable number of respondents, both in absolute and relative terms. In roughly 1 year of fieldwork, we collected 672 completed questionnaires out of 2878 surveys sent, yielding a response rate of about 23%. More precisely, 558 mail surveys and 114 online questionnaires were completed. Table 1 illustrates the response rate by each party list included in the ICS research. The results in this table show that the overall mean response rate is higher for centre-left parties (PD, SEL), the centrist SC list, and the M5S, whereas it is lower for centre-right parties (PdL and FdI). In particular, it should be noted that the PdL remains under-represented in our data, despite over-sampling and sending a greater number of reminders (see above). Almost 21% of the total responses were made by elected candidates. The distribution of parliamentarians' responses among the party lists follows more or less the same trends shown in Table 1.

Even though our sample is acceptable in terms of absolute numbers, our response rates may be a problem if they are biased (Bailer, 2014). This can be assessed by comparing the distribution of respondents in our ICS sample with the distribution of the whole population of candidates in terms of potentially relevant variables such as gender, party group, and constituency. A measure useful for this purpose is the 'Duncan Index of Dissimilarity' (Duncan and Duncan, 1955; Deschouwer *et al.*, 2014: 10–11), which measures the percentage differences between the sample and population distributions. This index ranges from 0 indicating no differences to 100, suggesting maximum dissimilarity. In our case, the overall deviation between the population (i.e. the list of competitive candidates in all sampled party lists) and sample distributions is 3 for gender, 13 for party groups, and 11 for constituencies. In all the cases, the Duncan index is <15, suggesting that our respondents closely represent the population of candidates in terms of key aspects. Altogether, this

Table 2. Overview of the most relevant elite surveys including samples of Italian politicians

Survey name	Focus	Assembly	Fieldwork	Sample size	Returns	Response rate
EPRG	Elected	EP	2000	87	23	26.4
EPRG	Elected	EP	2006	78	29	37.2
EPRG	Elected	EP	2010	72	32	44.4
PartiRep	Elected	National/regional	2010–11	992	128 (45)	12.9 (7.1)
EECS	Candidates	EP	2009–11	473	58	12.3
ICS/CCS	Candidates	National	2013–14	2878	672 (141)	23.3 (21.0)

The figures in parentheses refers to elected representatives in the Chamber of Deputies.

EPRG = European Parliament Research Group; EP = European Parliament; EECS = European Election Candidate Survey; ICS = Italian Candidate Survey; CCS = Comparative Candidate Survey.

evidence supports the notion that analyses based on our data should not suffer from selection bias or distorted results.⁴

The ICS in comparative perspective

Although mass surveys based on quota and probability samples are well established within the Italian research community, elite surveys involving politicians are rare. According to Bailer (2014), we can count four prominent examples of elite surveys including samples of Italian politicians: the European Parliament Research Group (EPRG), PartiRep, the European Election Candidate Survey (EECS), and the CCS, to which ICS belongs. The first two projects focus on elected representatives: the EPRG (Scully *et al.*, 2012) provides data on individual members of the European Parliament, whereas PartiRep surveys national and regional legislators in 15 advanced democracies (Deschouwer and Depauw, 2014).⁵ Rather than focussing only on elected representatives, the EECS, which is included in the PIREDEU project (Giebler and Wüst, 2011), and the CCS have collected data about candidates running for European and national parliamentary elections, respectively. An overview of the most recent elite surveys covering Italian politicians is provided in Table 2, which shows that the response rate we achieved is higher or at least comparable with other projects of similar scope.

In comparison with PartiRep, the only other research targeted to national politicians, the ICS/CCS response rate is 10 points higher; 14 points higher if we consider only the universe of elected represented in the Chamber of Deputies

⁴ We also computed weights by party groups. The analyses reported in the penultimate section give similar results in case of weighted and non-weighted data.

⁵ In the case of Italy, PartiRep includes data on legislators in the Chamber of Deputies and six regional councils.

(the figures in parentheses in the table). Although there are significant differences in the response rates, our survey shares with PartiRep several features, which can be therefore considered as consolidated trends in elite survey research in Italy. In particular, the PD and centre-left parties in general are slightly over-represented among the respondents in both surveys, whereas the PdL and centre-right parties are somewhat under-represented. Similarly, the balance between genders both in the candidate population and among the ICS respondents is slightly skewed in favour of males. However, in terms of party groups our sample more closely resembles the candidate population than the PartiRep sample (Duncan index: 13 vs. 16, see Deschouwer *et al.*, 2014: 10).

As noted above, the ICS is part of a cross-national survey programme, which combines an internationally agreed core questionnaire and a locally adapted set of questions that try to capture the specifics of the national political and electoral system. CCS currently has comparable data from 20 countries, including Italy, for 25 elections.⁶ Table 3 reports the sampling procedure, sample size, and response rate for the countries participating in the CCS project for which such information is available. As we can see, Italy is among the few countries included in the project that adopted a sampling procedure. However, the ICS research team could hardly have done otherwise as the universe of Italian candidates (about 11,000) is more than double than the one recorded in Austria (4800) – the country with the highest number of candidates among the other CCS participants. Regarding response rates, the figure for Italy is significantly lower than that observed in Nordic or non-European countries. However, the ICS response rate is similar to that recorded by CCS in countries in Southern and Eastern Europe.

A profile of the ICS respondents

Focussing on the relationships between candidates, parties, and voters, the ICS/CCS core comparative questionnaire covers several topics such as campaigning, recruitment, career patterns, and opinions about several issues. In particular, the questionnaire has five main sections with questions about (a) candidates' political background and activities, (b) electoral campaign, (c) issues and policies, (d) democracy and representation, and (e) candidates' socio-demographic background. Table 4 shows a selection of descriptive statistics about candidates' backgrounds, which sketches a preliminary profile of the ICS's respondents.

The first part of the table reveals information about candidates' political background, such as the party and the district for which the respondent stood as a candidate, whether or not the respondent stood as a candidate for the first time, if the respondent was elected to the Chamber of Deputies, the position in the party list occupied by the respondent, and finally the respondent's previous political experience as a mayor, member of a local/regional/national government, member of a

⁶ For detailed information about CCS module 1, see <http://www.comparativecandidates.org/node/8>

Table 3. The Comparative Candidate Survey project

Country	Year	Sampling procedure	Sample size	Returns	Response rate
Australia	2007	U	950	472	49.7
Australia	2010	U	543	247	45.5
Austria	2008	U	4080	966	23.7
Canada	2008	U	616	338	54.9
Czech Republic	2006	S	1042	169	16.2
Denmark	2011	U	784	375	47.8
Estonia	2011	U	789	250	31.7
Finland	2007	U	1467	528	36.0
Finland	2011	U	2315	911	39.4
Germany	2005	U	2346	1031	43.9
Greece	2007	U	700	241	34.4
Hungary	2010	U	1346	432	32.1
Iceland	2009	U	756	504	66.7
Ireland	2007	U	466	186	39.9
Italy	2013	S	2878	672	23.3
Netherlands	2006	U	489	170	34.8
Norway	2009	U	1972	1015	51.5
Portugal	2009	S	716	203	28.4
Portugal	2011	U	1150	190	16.5
Romania	2012	U	1802	407	22.6
Sweden	2010	U	4056	1741	42.9
Switzerland	2007	U	3181	1719	54.0
Switzerland	2011	U	3547	1871	52.7
Total	–	–	37,991	14,638	38.5

U stands for ‘universe’, whereas S for ‘sample’ (<http://forscenter.ch/en/data-and-research-information-services/2221-2/obtain-data/special-projects/comparative-candidate-survey-ccs/>).

local/regional assembly, and member of the national/European Parliament.⁷ As Table 4 shows, the PD and the MSS are the two most represented parties (22 and 20%); more than a half of our respondents come from a northern district (55%), whereas the great bulk of the ICS candidates competed in a national election for the first time (81%). About two-thirds of the respondents (68%) occupied a place in their party lists ranging between 1 and 10, and only 21% of the ICS respondents were elected. Finally, regarding previous political practice, more than a half of our respondents declared that they had experience in one or more of the categories described above. This finding does not come as a surprise, as it is well known that Italian representatives usually come through a process of political socialization characterized by initial involvement in local elective bodies (Verzichelli, 1998; Zucchini, 2001).

⁷ For the purpose of this work, we collapsed all these different political experiences into a single dichotomous category: yes/no.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics

	%	N
Party		
CD	5.36	36
FdI	4.61	31
PdL	10.86	73
LN	4.76	32
M5S	20.09	135
PD	21.58	145
RIV	6.70	45
SC	10.27	69
SEL	9.97	67
SVP	0.45	3
UDC	5.36	36
District		
North	55.21	371
Centre	18.15	122
South	18.15	122
Islands	8.48	57
First-time candidate		
No	19.20	129
Yes	80.80	543
List position		
1–5	33.78	227
6–10	33.78	227
11–15	13.54	91
15+	18.90	127
Election		
Not elected	79.02	531
Elected	20.98	141
Previous political experience		
No	41.22	277
Yes	54.76	368
No answer	4.02	27
Gender		
Male	72.47	487
Female	27.53	185
Age		
25–34	17.56	118
35–44	26.19	176
45–54	27.98	188
55–64	21.43	144
65+	6.85	46
Education		
Middle school	2.68	18
Vocational training	1.04	7
High school	27.83	187
University degree	62.50	420
Post-graduate	5.65	38
No answer	0.30	2
Occupation		
Responsible for homework	0.74	5
Students	2.08	14
Unemployed	2.53	17
Managers	15.33	103
Teaching professionals	9.97	67
Clerks	15.48	104
Labourers	2.23	15
Entrepreneurs	6.25	42
Professionals	29.61	199
Trade workers	2.68	18
Craftsmen	1.04	7
Technicians	2.83	19
Party officials, local administrators, trade unionists	2.68	18
Armed forces	0.45	3
No answer	6.10	41
Total	100.00	672

The second part of Table 4 focusses on the socio-demographic background of the respondents. A majority of the respondents are male (73%) and their ages range between 35 and 64 years (76%). Most of them declared they have a university degree (63%). Regarding their occupation, more than a half (55%) of the ICS respondents belong to three broad professional categories such as managers, teaching professionals (teachers and university professors), and other professionals (lawyers, journalists, doctors, etc.). Previous research indicates that this is the typical background for most Italian representatives, especially after the political and institutional earthquake that occurred in Italy in the early 1990s (see Cotta and Verzichelli, 2007).

Potential applications

This section presents three examples of analyses carried out using ICS with the aim of illustrating the potential use of these data for answering important research questions. In the first sub-section, we analyse the opinions expressed by Italian candidates about the nature of the relationship between voters and representatives in light of a well-known typology of political representation. In the second sub-section, we employ data related to candidates' preferences about a set of policy issues to assess the level of congruence between party candidates and their voters across a set of policy domains. Finally, by looking at the distribution of candidates' positions on the left-right scale, we explore intra-party cohesion within the main parties included in our study.

Modes of political representation

Political representation has multiple facets. If we look at its outcomes, representation can be described either through politicians' backgrounds or in terms of their preferences on salient policy issues. Conversely, when the very nature of representativeness is at stake, political representation can be analysed by looking at the most important aspects of the relationship between voters and representatives (Andeweg and Thomassen, 2005). In contemporary democracies, a common way to depict this relationship is describing it as a chain of delegation from voters to governing actors (Strøm, 2000, 2003). Acting as principals, voters can mitigate possible agency problems through a series of control mechanisms that operate *ex ante*: contract design, screening, and selection of potential candidates and parties. As an alternative, voters can count on *ex post* mechanisms in order to keep agents under control: monitoring, reporting requirements, and institutional checks. Therefore, elections can be understood either as a mechanism of selecting 'good types' for office or as a sanctioning device. Within the principal agent framework, elections are hypothesized to translate the popular will into government policy, that is, representation is 'from below'. Alternatively, a more active role can be expected to be played by parties and representatives, who 'enter the political process with

their views and put these views to the citizens for their approval' (Andeweg and Thomassen, 2005: 511). In this case, representation is 'from above'. An example of this mode of representation is the Responsible Party Government Model (Ranney, 1954).

Andeweg and Thomassen (2005) used the approaches described above to build a typology of modes of representation. By combining the bottom-up and top-down link between voters and representatives and the *ex ante* and *ex post* types of control mechanisms, four modes of political representation, which capture the most important aspects of the relationship between citizens and politicians, may be examined. First, representation from below and *ex ante* controls define the ideal-type model of *delegation*. In this model, which is best suited for describing parliamentary democracies, parties translate voters' preferences and act as prior screening devices in order to select prospective parliamentarians as well as cabinet members. Second, representation from below and *ex post* control characterize the *responsiveness* model. Here the focus is on *ex post* sanctions, which force representatives to respond to changes in public policy preferences. Third, representation from above and *ex ante* controls describe the *authorization* model. Within this model, representation aims at giving a popular mandate to a party for implementing its manifesto in the subsequent period. Finally, representation from above and *ex post* controls illustrate the *accountability* model. This mode resembles the liberal vision of representative democracy where the only function of voting is to control officials.

Data from the ICS allow us to assess the attitudes of Italian candidates towards these four models of representation. Following Andeweg and Thomassen (2005), we operationalized the dimensions defining their typology by using responses to the following questions:

- (1) In their relationship with their voters, politicians may emphasize different aspects. Which of these two aspects do you think is most important? (a) translating the political views of citizens into policy as accurately as possible; or (b) seeking support from the voters for the political views of their own party; and
- (2) in our political system, elections have various functions. Which of these two functions do you think is most important? (a) in elections, politicians account to the voters for their actions in the past; or (b) in elections, politicians put their plans for the future to the voters.

The first question differentiates between the direction of the interaction between voters and their representatives (from below or from above); the second one distinguishes between the two types of control mechanism: *ex post* (retrospective voting) or *ex ante* (prospective voting).

Table 5 shows the responses by Italian candidates to these questions.⁸ According to the results presented in the last row of this table, candidates in 2013 Italian

⁸ As the two questions are intended to capture distinct dimensions of political representation, the answers should not be strongly correlated. In our case, the association between the two questions is very

Table 5. Models of political representation in Italy

	From above (%)		From below (%)		Total	N
	<i>Ex ante</i>	<i>Ex post</i>	<i>Ex ante</i>	<i>Ex post</i>		
	Authorization	Accountability	Delegation	Responsiveness		
CD	6.45	6.45	54.84	32.26	100.00	31
FdI	25.93	11.11	33.33	29.63	100.00	27
PdL	13.33	6.67	38.33	41.67	100.00	60
LN	9.52	4.76	47.62	38.10	100.00	21
M5S	1.83	0.92	57.80	39.45	100.00	109
PD	14.44	5.56	46.67	33.33	100.00	90
RIV	5.71	5.71	57.14	31.43	100.00	35
SC	12.73	7.27	54.55	25.45	100.00	55
SEL	14.04	7.02	49.12	29.82	100.00	57
UDC	7.14	10.71	28.57	53.57	100.00	28
Total	10.46	5.62	48.84	35.08	100.00	516

We do not display data about SVP owing to the low number of responses gathered. The association between party groups and models of representation is statistical significant ($\chi^2 = 40.65$, $p < 0.05$).

elections assign much more importance to representation from below than from above (84 vs. 16%). On the other hand, when asked about the type of control mechanisms, the majority of ICS respondents emphasize the importance of *ex ante* rather than *ex post* controls (59 vs. 41%). Italy has been described as a country in which parties exert a strong control over each phase of electoral democracy, from candidate recruitment to electoral campaigns and the organization of parliamentary activity (Cotta and Verzichelli, 2007). Consequently, it seems reasonable to believe that variations in the individual candidate's attitudes towards representation can be accounted for by parties to which these candidates belong. However, Table 5 reveals that candidates from almost all the parties included in the analysis assign more importance to the delegation model of representation (from below and *ex ante* controls). Let us also underline that the M5S candidates give greater importance to representation from below and *ex ante* controls (58%) than respondents from other parties (49% registered in the entire sample). This does not come as a surprise, as the M5S emphasizes the virtues of the 'ordinary people' *vis-à-vis* the perceived self-referential and corrupt nature of political elites (Pedrazzani and Pinto, 2013, 2015). Moreover, M5S candidates cannot rely on any previous political experience as they belong to a brand new party (Pinto and Pedrazzani, 2015).

weak and not statistical significant ($\chi^2 = 1.36$, $p = 0.24$). Although we also collected information about candidates from the SVP, in this section we do not display data about that party owing to the low number of responses gathered.

The only exception to this pattern of responses towards delegation comes from candidates from the two centre-right parties: the PdL and the UDC, who favour a bottom-up form of representation with *ex post* controls as the best model of political representation. This pattern in answering might be explained by the fact that the PdL had been part of governing coalitions for a number of years before the ICS fieldwork. Consequently, it seems reasonable to think that candidates belonging to this political group consider elections as a mean to validate the political decisions taken by the party when in office. It must be added that the PdL and the UDC are the parties in our sample with the lowest share of first-time candidates (67 and 61%, respectively, vs. 82% observed in the entire ICS sample). It appears then that more experienced politicians tend to emphasize what they have done in the past; and consider elections as an opportunity to have their previous political behaviour evaluated by the electorate.

The delegation model of representation, which was supported by a majority of the ICS respondents, relies mainly on *ex ante* screening and selection devices. In parliamentary democracies, *ex ante* controls are guaranteed by an internal selection of agents through centralized, socially cohesive, and policy-oriented political parties. Parties rely strongly on prior screening devices, such as experience, seniority, or ascriptive social criteria in order to recruit candidates who will best represent their principals (Strøm, 2003). Hence, voters are asked to choose between different packages of candidates sharing policy preferences, where citizens have enough information to assessing their potential representatives' skills as agents (Strøm, 2000). Nowadays, this mode of representation is criticized for several reasons. First, ascriptive social characteristics, such as class background, provide less information about principals' voting decision than before (Dalton, 1996). Second, increasing volatility in the policy agenda makes information based on candidates' prior experience a less effective device for providing useful indications about their preferences and skills. Third, parties' tendency to select candidates who have not followed a traditional political career and the growing use of primaries as candidate selection mechanisms may make politicians more responsive towards voters than parties leading to divided loyalties (Strøm, 2000).

What general conclusions can be drawn from our analysis of candidates' attitudes towards representation? Given the problems highlighted above, the effectiveness of representation from below is, from the perspective of our ICS respondents, questionable. On the one hand, the emphasis on responsiveness gives politicians incentives to continuously monitor voters' preferences and to behave in ways that best please their principals even in election campaigns that are not very competitive. This generates a climate of never-ending electoral campaigning, which can potentially harm the day-to-day functioning of the policy-making process. On the other, the reduced role of parties as a proper *ex ante* screening and selection device combined with the decline of class voting may broaden policy differences between agents and their principals, thereby challenging the very functioning of the chain of delegation. This may threaten the citizens-elite policy linkage that is assumed to characterize

democratic political representation, as we will show in the next section dealing with preference congruence.

Party–voter congruence

Democratic representation implies that the actions of policymakers are responsive to the wishes of the electorate. This responsiveness relationship between politicians and voters is realized thanks to a set of institutional arrangements among which the most crucial is free and competitive elections. However, it is often presumed that democratic representation can only work well in the presence of a certain level of affinity or ‘congruence’ between the preferences of political elites and the opinions of voters resulting in a correspondence between citizens’ views and government policies (see, e.g., Dalton, 1985; Thomassen, 1994, 1999; Katz, 1997). Assessing congruence requires estimates of politicians and voters policy preferences and a measure of the correspondence in policy positions of both groups. Fortunately, the ICS data allow us to map the policy congruence between candidates running for office in the 2013 Italian elections and their voters.

Research into political representation shows a persistently high level of policy congruence in democratic countries (Powell, 2004; Thomassen, 2014). Party–voter congruence has been defined and measured in different ways. ‘Relative’ congruence is based on the explained variance of bivariate correlations between the ideological scores of voters and those of their representatives (Miller and Stokes, 1963; Kitschelt *et al.*, 1999). ‘Absolute’ congruence is instead measured as the distance between the average position of parties’ electoral base and the average score of party members along the same scale (Achen, 1978; Rohrschneider and Whitefield, 2012). A second distinction in this literature concerns the domains in which the level of congruence is assessed. Although most studies analyse congruence on the general left-right scale, there can be economic, social, or political reasons why some policy issues yield more congruence than others. Some recent works have therefore measured congruence across different policy domains (Thomassen and Schmitt, 1999; Costello *et al.*, 2012).

In this section, we use the ICS data to evaluate ‘candidate–voter’ policy congruence at the time of the 2013 Italian general elections. We compare the preferences of political candidates with those of voters from the same party using an absolute definition of congruence. As the ICS data set enables to take into account the multidimensionality of the policy space of party competition rather than concentrating on a general left-right scale, we map congruence on a set of specific policy issues. In other words, are there some policy domains where a substantial gap exists between political elites and the Italian electorate? And is this divide greater for some parties? Assessing these differential policy gaps is important for understanding the dynamics of party competition, as the existence of a substantial mismatch on issues such as immigration and the EU can, for instance, help explain the success of populist parties (Costello *et al.*, 2012). In addition, in this study we also assess the

extent to which political candidates are aware of their policy distance from their electoral base: an aspect of political representation that rarely receives attention in studies of policy congruence. Do candidates of Italian parties acknowledge that they are far away from their voters on certain issues? Indeed, newcomer parties are likely to have a less precise idea of their voters' policy preferences because there is no electoral history to act as a guide.

The ICS questionnaire asked each candidate to place herself/himself and the voters of her/his party on a set of 11-point scales (0–10) dealing with four key policy issues. The first policy scale measures support for greater spending in public services (0) *vis-à-vis* tax reduction (10), and it is the dimension most clearly related to economic left-right. The second domain deals with disapproval of (0) or support for (10) further European integration. EU-related issues are gaining increasing relevance in shaping political competition in EU member states (Thomassen and Schmitt, 1999; Hooghe *et al.*, 2004; Kriesi *et al.*, 2008; Schmitt and Thomassen, 2009; Di Virgilio *et al.*, 2015). The third dimension relates to family policy, dealing with support for (0) or opposition to (10) the legal recognition of new types of family such as same sex domestic partnerships. Finally, the fourth policy scale measures attitudes towards immigration with 0 indicating opposition to having more migrants in Italy and 10 showing support for accepting more non-nationals. These two last issues have been linked with the libertarian–authoritarian domain of GAL–TAN (Hooghe *et al.*, 2004), and with the cultural dimension of contestation generated by the process of globalization and defined as a conflict between ‘integration’ and ‘demarcation’ (Kriesi *et al.*, 2008). The self-placement of voters on the four policy dimensions examined in this study are taken from a mass (post-election) survey fielded in February 2013.⁹

Figures 1 to 4 contain estimates for voters and candidates for four policy positions. First, there is a mean estimate of the self-placement of voters indicated by solid black squares. The ‘whiskers’ on these squares represent the 95% confidence intervals around the mean. Second, the dark grey squares show the mean estimates of the party candidates’ self-placement on the four policy scales where again 95% confidence intervals are shown. Third, the light grey squares show mean estimates of where candidates locate their own party’s voters on a policy issue. The final mean estimates illustrate the extent to which candidates misperceive their own voters’ policy preferences. The first general lesson that may be drawn from Figures 1 to 4 is that preference congruence between Italian candidates and voters of the same party varies across issues and political formations. The same pattern is observed with candidates’ perceptions of voters’ policy positions.

If we compare the proximity between candidates and voters across the four policy dimensions, we observe that the overall policy congruence is greater for some issues

⁹ The opinion poll was jointly conducted by IPSOS and ITANES, using computer-assisted personal interviews. The sample of about 1000 interviews is representative of the Italian electorate in terms of sex, age, and place of residence (Vezzoni, 2014). We thus estimate the positions of parties and voters by using the same survey instruments (see, e.g., Costello *et al.*, 2012; Schmitt *et al.*, 2012; Belchior, 2013).

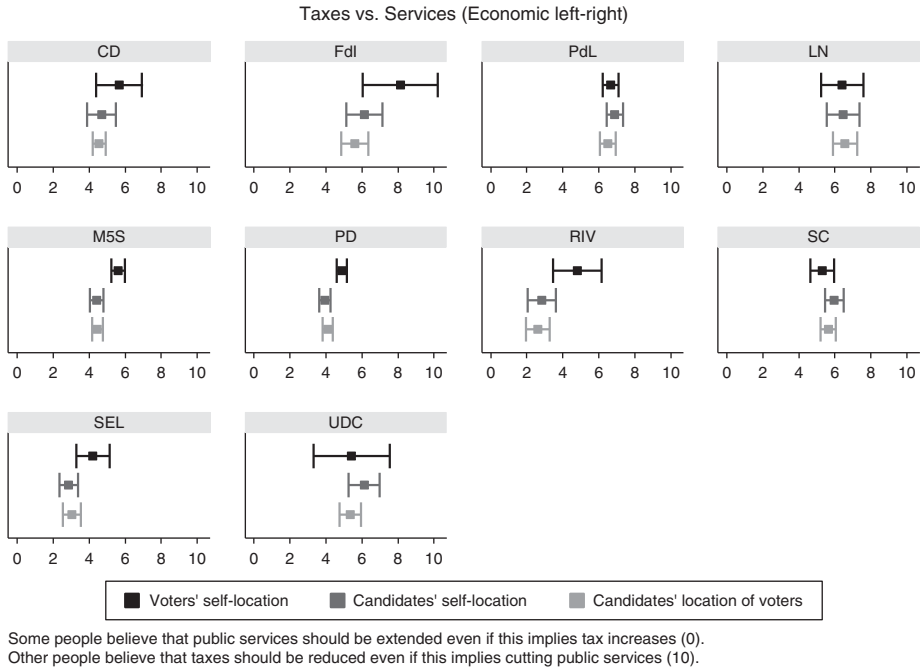


Figure 1 Party–voter congruence: taxes vs. services.

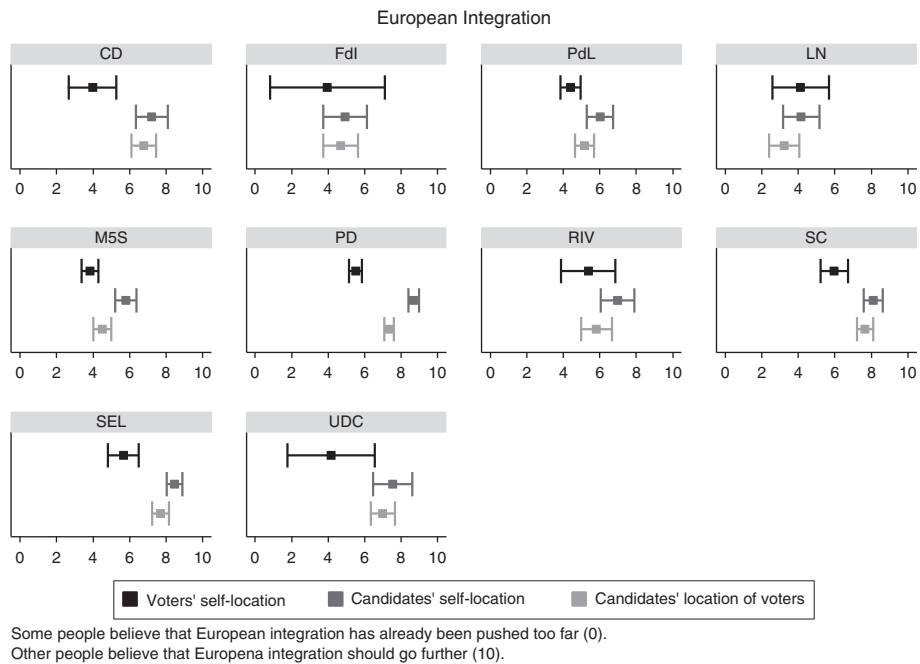


Figure 2 Party–voter congruence: European integration.

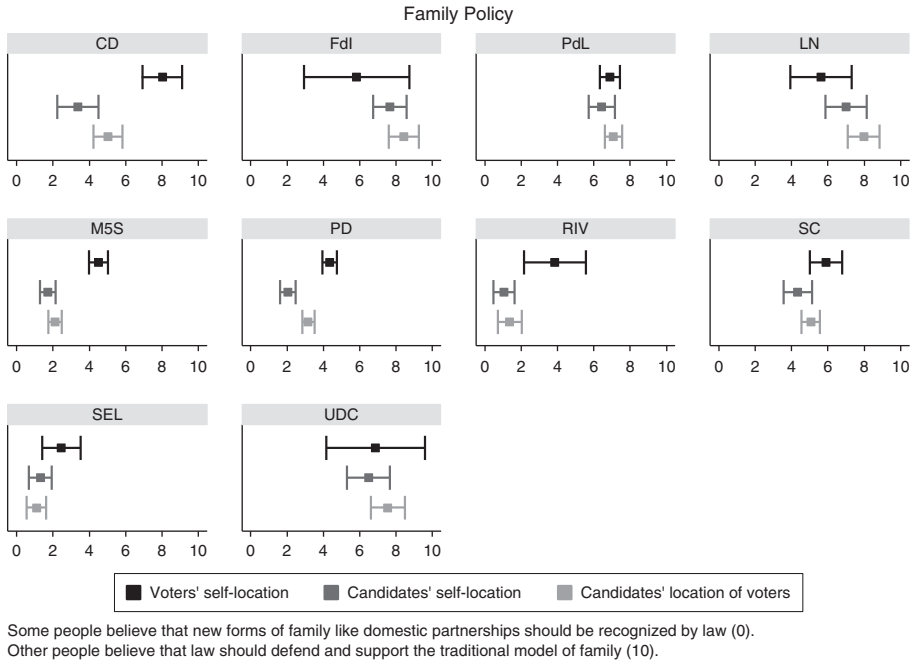


Figure 3 Party-voter congruence: family policy.

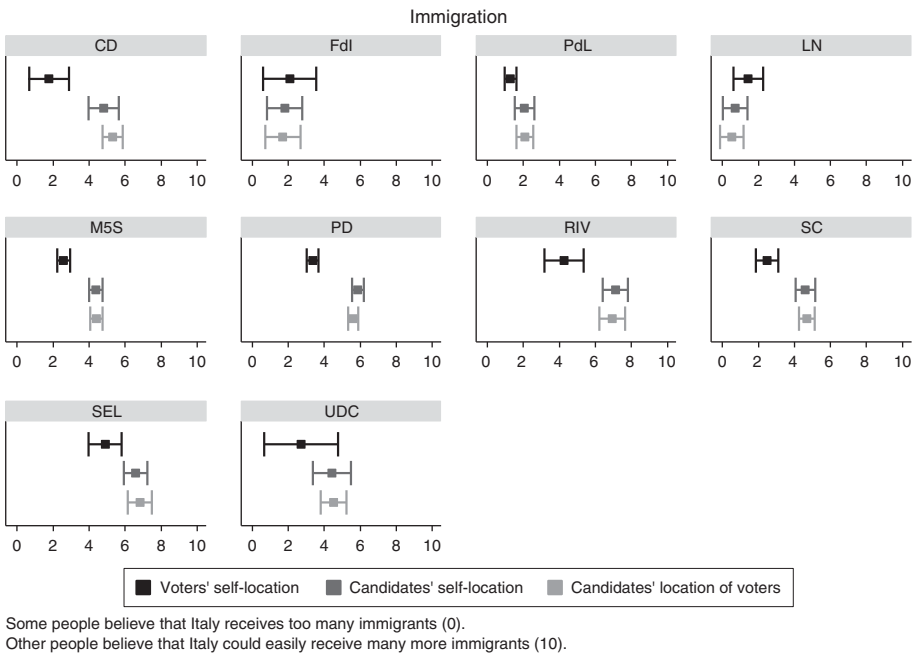


Figure 4 Party-voter congruence: immigration.

and there are domains about which candidates have in general a more accurate idea of the opinions of their electoral base. Considering all parties together, the two policy issues that Italian candidates perceive themselves to be most distant from their party's voters are EU integration and family policy. On European issues, the sum of absolute distances between the mean self-placement of candidates and the average position of voters indicated by candidates from the same party is 8 points. This means that on average candidates from each of the 10 parties studied perceive a policy distance of 0.80 points from their own party's voters on EU matters. Similarly, in area of family policy the sum of absolute distances is equal to 7.9 points indicating a mean absolute distance is 0.79 points. The issue about which candidates perceive themselves to be closest to their electorates is immigration. Here, the sum of absolute distances is just 1.7 points.

Likewise, the dimensions concerning European integration and family policy are the ones where candidates are farthest away from their voters, as the sum of absolute distances between candidates' self-placements and voters' self-placements is 20.9 and 19.3 points, respectively. With regard to European integration, the mean differences between candidates' and voters' positions towards the EU are statistically significant for almost all parties (the only exceptions being the LN and the FdI). This is consistent with previous comparative studies on congruence, which show a stark contrast in views towards the EU between voters and national- and European-level political representatives (e.g. Thomassen and Schmitt, 1999; Best *et al.*, 2012).

According to our ICS data, the issue about which candidates' preferences resemble most the opinions declared by voters is tax cuts and public expenditure, where the sum of absolute distances is about 10 points. This difference represents a mean of 1 point on the 0–10 policy scale for each of the 10 parties studied. Despite what Italian candidates perceive, the ICS data for the 2013 election indicates that immigration is not the issue where there is greatest congruence between candidates and voters. In fact, this is the issue where candidates' misperception of voters' preferences is highest (the sum of absolute distances between voters' self-locations and the scores attributed to them by candidates is 18.3). Unlike the EU integration issue where Italian candidates know their preferences are quite far from those of their voters, it seems that Italian candidates in 2013 really misunderstood the more extreme anti-immigration position of their constituency. Candidates from almost all Italian parties tend to place their voters at least 1.8 points more towards the pro-immigration pole than was actually the case. The only exceptions are LN, FdI, and PdL, that is, centre-right parties that, to different degrees, exploit or foment xenophobic sentiments in the population for electoral purposes. The same candidate–voter gap also appears, although to a smaller degree, in the case of family policy. Here candidates from almost all parties tend to be more liberal than their voters. With family policy, centre-left politicians tend to view their electoral base as being less conservative than they actually are, whereas centre-right candidates seem to have a more accurate idea of the preferences of their voters.

The dimension dealing with taxes and public services is the one where candidate–voter congruence is the greatest. These results matches with Costello *et al.* (2012) findings that mass–elite congruence remains strong for issues associated with economic left–right, which still proves to be the main dimension of contestation in European politics and may be seen as an effective basis for political representation. In contrast, voters’ attitudes and parties’ policy positions in domains such as EU integration and immigration tend not to be constrained by the left–right dimension (Hooghe *et al.*, 2004; Kriesi *et al.*, 2006). This would help to explain the lower levels of policy congruence in these specific domains.

Let us now examine how candidate–voter congruence varies across parties. The 2013 Italian elections saw the participation of important new parties such as Beppe Grillo’s M5S and Mario Monti’s SC. We could reasonably expect a rather low knowledge of the views of voters for candidates in parties running in their first general election. In contrast, for parties with a longer electoral history (such as LN, PD, and PdL) candidates should have more accurate perceptions of the actual policy preferences of their electoral base. Data from the ICS does not support these expectations. Overall, it is PD candidates who have the largest policy preference gap with their electoral base. These candidates believe themselves to be distant from their party’s voters for European and family policy issues, where their perceived distance from voters is >1 point on the 0–10 policy scales used. This difference is statistically significant ($p < 0.01$). Candidates who believe themselves to be the closest to their voters come from the SEL (although not on EU matters), SC, and FdI parties.

Comparison between the self-declared positions of voters and candidates tells a different story. This is because the actual preference gap between candidates and voters is higher for almost all of the left and centre-left parties (the CD, RIV, and the PD), and is lower for the right and centre-right parties (the LN, the PdL, and the FdI). The largest misperception by candidates of the policy preferences of their voters is for CD and RIV. Here the sum of absolute policy difference distances on the four dimensions is 10.4 and 7.8, respectively. In contrast, PdL candidates have the most accurate view of their party’s voters’ policy positions where the sum of absolute distances is 1.9. The level of misperception by candidates from new parties (M5S and SC) is not particularly high, that is, mean absolute policy differences are 6.0 and 5.1, respectively. Our data suggest that PD candidates know their policy preferences are different from those of their voters. This is especially true for the issues of EU integration and family policy where the policy differences are large and statistically significant; however, this is not the case for immigration preferences. In contrast, would-be legislators from CD (particularly in the domains of EU integration and immigration) and RIV (especially for family, immigration and tax-services policies) were not aware of the policy preference gaps between themselves and their respective electorates. In general, left and centre-left parties seem, during the 2013–14 ICS fieldwork period, to have been unaware of the anti-immigrant preferences of their voters.

Party cohesion

Political parties are central actors in democratic regimes (Schattschneider, 1942; Sartori, 1976). Beyond being crucial for democratic representation, parties guarantee the functioning of legislative assemblies as they build a link between the legislative process and policy outputs by grouping legislators under common labels (Aldrich, 1995). These labels give voters information about how candidates are likely to vote across a large number of policy issues and represent the main vehicle through which politicians can enter public office and influence policymaking (Snyder and Ting, 2002). In order to play their role as a mechanism of political accountability in electoral democracies, parties need to be cohesive (Strøm and Müller, 2009).

Cohesion refers to the extent to which members of parliamentary party grouping act in concert because they share common values and preferences (Bowler *et al.*, 1999). Legislative party cohesion needs to be distinguished from related concepts such as ‘party unity’ and ‘party discipline’ (Hazan, 2003). Party unity refers to the degree to which party members, who are observed, act in a united manner (Sieberer, 2006). Higher levels of unity are important because they give parties a stronger bargaining position with competitors in government formation and in policy-bargaining processes. Party unity is often the product of two mechanisms as follows: (1) shared preferences and (2) party discipline. Both mechanisms are the basis of a strategic game played within a party, whereby representatives respond to positive incentives and sanctions created by an internal party decision-making regime (Giannetti and Laver, 2009).

To assess party unity, empirical research has most often relied on the behaviour of legislators in roll-call voting or other parliamentary activities, such as cosponsoring legislation, committee participation, or speech making (Carroll and Poole, 2014). However, measures of behaviour in legislative activities may be contaminated by partisan and institutional constraints, including party discipline, agenda setting, and logrolling. These ‘contaminants’ make it almost impossible to distinguish between preference- or strategic-induced unity (Saiegh, 2009). This results in a high degree of conceptual overlap, which can confound inferences about the level and sources of party unity.

Unlike measures of behaviour, candidate or parliamentary survey responses are not contaminated by legislative or partisan institution effects. This allows scholars to assess exogenous, non-behavioural measures of party cohesion. Moreover, focussing on party cohesion facilitates study of internal groups (or factions) in political parties with programmatic viewpoints that diverge from a majority of fellow party members or the current party leadership. A growing body of literature on intra-party politics highlights the prevalence of both ‘internal dissent’ and party cohesion in Western countries (see Giannetti and Benoit, 2009).

In this section, we use the ICS data to evaluate party cohesion on the left-right dimension during the 2013 Italian general elections. Looking at the important role

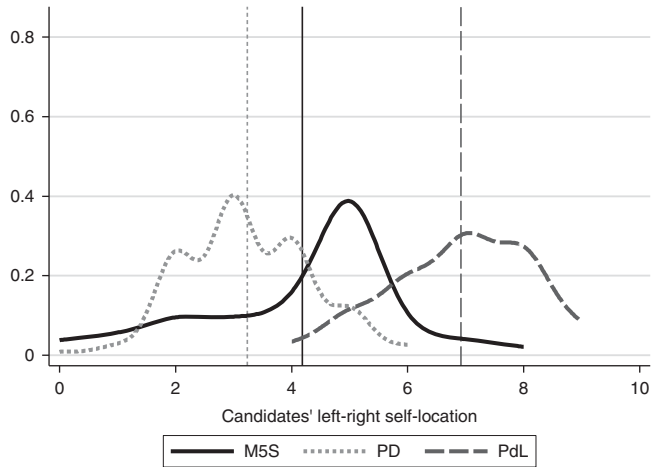


Figure 5 Distribution of candidates' left-right self-placements by party.

played by cohesion in providing information to voters regarding party policy preferences, assessing the coherence of party labels in the specific case of Italy may cast further light on the relationship among voters, candidates, and the parties to which they belong. In particular, we asked each candidate to place themselves on an 11-point scale (0–10) left-right self-placement scale. The results reported in Figure 5 provide kernel density estimates of the (1) mean party positions indicated by vertical lines and (2) the distributions of candidates' left-right self-placements for the three main parties (i.e. PD, M5S, and PdL) studied in the ICS.

Looking first at the kernel density distributions, Figure 5 shows that the leftist PD (light grey short-dashed curve) and rightist PdL (dark grey long-dashed curve) are mainly located towards opposite ends of the ideological spectrum as one would expect. There is not much overlap in the centre of the left-right dimension. In contrast, the M5S candidates' left-right positions cover a much wider range (solid black curve): the distribution peaks at the very centre of the spectrum where the M5S distribution covers substantial parts of both the left and right parts of the dimension. The lines representing mean party positions show an almost symmetrical location for the PD and the PdL, whereas the M5S appears closer to the centre (point 5 on the 0–10 point scale). In light of the distribution of preferences described above, the centrist position of Grillo's M5S cannot be considered as an expression of an ideologically cohesive group of moderate candidates, but as the product of an aggregation of a wide range of contrasting preferences. However, this evidence must be treated with caution, as a relatively high proportion of respondents from M5S (the 27% against the 3% for the PdL and the 1% for the PD) refused to answer this question. This is because M5S party members stress that the terms 'left' and 'right' are obsolete concepts that are not useful for understanding contemporary politics (Pedrazzani and Pinto, 2013, 2015). A final element deserving attention is the

'shape' of the three distributions. Although the PdL and the M5S show a unimodal distribution, the PD distribution has three local peaks: the highest, close to the mean party position, and two lower modes, one close to the extreme left and another close to the centre. This evidence may reflect the existence of different factions within this party.

Conclusion

The prevailing view of political parties, mainly associated with the rise of the mass party model, has changed as a result of social and political changes with trends such as the decline of party membership, the centralization of decision powers in the hands of restricted leaderships, and the development of 'catch-all' policy programmes targeted to broad sectors of the electorate. These changes have prompted comparative research into the nature of intra-party politics both at the electoral and legislative levels. This article has presented some of the main features of a large research survey project examining political candidates in the Italian general election of 2013 where the focus has been on both methodological and substantive issues. First, we discussed our survey's methodology in the context of other elite surveys of comparable scope. Subsequently, we presented some illustrations of how the ICS data might be applied in studying democratic representation. These three applications show substantively important results.

Our analysis of the relationship between Italian voters and their representatives reveals that most of the candidates interviewed in our ICS research assign more importance to the delegation model of representation, a model which presupposes the existence of policy-oriented and cohesive political parties. Second, evidence about candidates' and voters' preferences about a set of policy domains show that party-voter congruence in contemporary Italy is stronger for issues associated with economic left-right, which remains the main dimension of party competition in Europe. Third, an examination of the distribution of Italian candidates' positions on the left-right scale within the two main parties included in our study, the leftist PD and the rightist PdL, revealed that candidates' positions are clustered on the left and the right portions of the political spectrum, and only overlap in the centre to a small degree. This empirical evidence suggests that Italian candidates in the 2013 general election still consider parties to be essential devices in structuring the policy choices offered to voters and the relationship between voters and their elected representatives. This suggests that there are still no well-founded reasons to think that Italian parties will disappear in the near future, notwithstanding important changes in voting patterns with the rapid rise of the 'anti-party' M5S.

Our results demonstrate that scholars' understanding of political parties can greatly benefit from an investigation of what individual party members actually do in politics, or think about relevant policy issues. In this way, the ICS represents a valuable source of data for those interested in the study of politicians, parties, and political representation in Italy and elsewhere. Our candidate survey data is a

precious research tool that can be easily integrated with other resources such as mass surveys, district level socio-economic contextual data or media use data, and candidate surveys undertaken in other countries that have been fielded using the CCS standard questionnaire and methodology.

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