

As Primaries Affect Electoral Results. France and Italy in Comparative Perspective

Marino De Luca (University of Calabria) and Fulvio Venturino (University of Genoa)

Abstract.

Since some years the democratization of parties' internal life is spreading in several democracies. Among them, Italy and France have recently realized an impressive advancement. Approaching the 2013 parliamentary election in Italy and the 2012 presidential election in France, leftist coalitions have there launched open primary elections to select their chief-executive candidates, Pier Luigi Bersani and François Hollande finally resulting as nominees.

In this paper, we research whether the primaries' levels of turnout and competition are related with the following results of the presidential/parliamentary elections. We gather the needed data referring to a comparable administrative levels: the Italian *province* and the French *départements*. By so doing, we are able to reach the number of cases required to implement an effective comparison.

General Conference

ECPR

Bordeaux, 4-7 September 2013

Panel 9H00-10H40, P034: *Causes and Consequences of Primaries as Instruments for Candidate Selection*

Corresponding authors: deluca.marino@gmail.com, fventurino@unica.it

Contents

Primary elections and their critics.....	1
Leftists go to primaries: the Democratic Party, the Socialist Party, and the selection of the candidate chief-executive.....	3
<i>Italy: towards the 2013 parliamentary election</i>	3
<i>France: towards the 2012 presidential election</i>	4
Hypotheses and measurements.....	6
Results.....	8
<i>A preliminary bivariate analysis</i>	8
<i>Turnout, competition, and parliamentary elections: a (more) general picture</i>	10
<i>Turnout and competition: what matters more?</i>	11
Discussion.....	12
References.....	13

As National Primaries Affect Electoral Results. France and Italy in Comparative Perspective

Marino De Luca (University of Calabria) and Fulvio Venturino (University of Genoa)

Primary elections and their critics

Since a couple of decades a huge amount of comparative literature inform us that parties are affected by a powerful crisis (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000; Dalton *et al.* 1984; Webb *et al.* 2002). Indeed, in democratic, Western-style countries they are shown to be challenged by other kinds of political actors, such as social movements and new forms of web-democracy, in representing the needs and interests of ordinary people. As a consequence of these mounting antagonisms, researchers have detected, from the 1960s, a steady decrease in membership and turnout (Franklin *et al.* 1992; Franklin 2004).

Although declining, these “parties without partisans” are not inert when facing their loss of legitimacy. Rather, they react to the challenges by adopting new forms of organization, and promoting democratization in their internal life. These reforms have sometimes been criticized as a manipulation of the members by the party leaders (Katz 2001). In any case, the role of the ordinary people has generally increased to affect all the functions performed by the parties, including the selection of candidates and party leaders.

Primary elections are one of the most noticeable reforms adopted by the parties to expand the inclusiveness of their decision processes. In a nutshell, a party using primaries accepts that its candidates and/or leaders are chosen by the members (closed primaries) or by all the citizens (open primaries). A party is composed of several related branches, a change – from oligarchy to democracy – regarding the political recruitment predictably will affect the whole organization. The problem of the consequences brought about by the use of primary elections is very complex, and not surprisingly it has been initially researched in reference with the party politics in the United States. There the earliest results have been quite pessimistic: parties adopting primaries are predestined to be defeated in the following general elections, especially when primaries are competitive and/or negative.

Today primaries are hardly a special characteristic of the American politics. At present, this extraordinarily successful tool of democracy is also extensively used in Latin America (Carey and Polga-Hecimovic 2006), Western Europe, Asia, and Africa (Ichino and Nathan 2013). The expansion of the case studies has also made more problematic the assessment of the political consequences produced by the primaries on the parties, the party systems, and the political systems at large. In contrast with American researches, primaries are now said to avoid major conflicts inside the parties, to improve candidates' image, and their fund raising capacities. Thus primaries became an asset for electoral success, rather than the liability previously deplored.

This confused state of art is the outcome of plenty of empirical research sometimes driven by approximate theoretical underpinnings. To obviate this undesirable condition, recently Hazan and Rahat (2010) (HR) have put forward a framework aiming to order

and to standardize the research agenda on candidate selection methods. According to their point of view, these methods differ in their levels of inclusiveness, and generate noticeable consequences on four dependent variables, defined as participation, representation, competition, and responsiveness.

The conclusions reached by HR are quite pessimistic. At the very least, no method of selection can maximize party democracy on the four mentioned dimensions at the same time. At best, one may obviate the most damaging consequences adopting a mixed system, so collecting the best of four worlds. But probably the growth of inclusiveness is meant to generate major pathologies, therefore party democracy is not working.

HR have been criticized as based on quite thin and sometimes anecdotal evidence. Whatever the case may be, it is well known that the internal life of parties continues to be a “secret garden” of politics, where transparency is usually lacking, and data gathering is a difficult task. What is certain, is that all scholars operating in this fresh field of research adopt a theoretical perspective strongly based on their work. For instance, Indriðason and Kristinsson (2013) (IK) have recently issued an empirical examination of the four dimensions proposed by HR. Although inadequately known and rarely quoted, Iceland is one of the European countries where the primary elections have been adopted earlier, and are today still deep-rooted. Thus IK may make use of an impressive dataset covering the four major Icelandic parties in the parliamentary elections for the whole period 1971-2009. Contrasting HR, they reach more positive conclusions about primaries and their consequences. For instance, primaries in Iceland did not restrain female representation, nor they did damage the cohesiveness of the parliamentary parties. Instead they promoted the renovation of the parliamentary political class and boosted up party membership.

In this paper we propose an examination of the political consequences of the primary elections in Italy and France. Our general approach is alike the theory of HR and the methods of IK, but several differences should also be noted. First, while IK explicitly focus on a single country, and HR draw evidence in prevalence from the Israeli primaries, we research leftist coalitions promoting primaries in a couple of countries. Second, both HR and IK make use of evidence gathered during several years, while we focus on a single primary election for each involved country. Third, while both HR and IK research extensively all the four dimensions mentioned above, we focus only on two dimensions, namely participation and competition. Fourth, neither HR or IK deal with primaries related to parliamentary elections, while we have to do with the 2013 parliamentary election in Italy and the 2012 *présidentielle* in France. Fifth, as neither Iceland or Israel use a PR electoral system to elect their parliaments, HR and IK examine single parties selecting through primaries a slate of several candidates; instead in the case of Italy and France several parties associated in a coalition struggle to select a single candidate for the chief-executive, monocratic role. Sixth, HR make use of national data and information, while IK refer to the six districts disposed by the Icelandic electoral law. In both cases, data are made available by national authorities. Instead analyzing Italy and France we refer to an administrative sub-national level – respectively called *provincia* and *département* – which is a territorial division irrelevant either for primary or general elections, but pertinent in analyzing our cases.

In the next sections we detail our approach, sketch the data we analyze, and finally we present our own results and their theoretical implications. But first we start our analyses with two brief narratives about the Italian and French electoral processes under investigation.

Leftists go to primaries: the Democratic Party, the Socialist Party, and the selection of the candidate chief-executive

Italy: towards the 2013 parliamentary election

After the demise of the whole party system in the nineties, the Italian parties reacted by adopting opposite strategies. On the one hand, major rightist parties – Forza Italia, then Popolo della Libertà, and Lega Nord – were created as personal parties promoting the political successes of their self-enthroned leaders. On the other hand, the leftist parties reformed the procedures for selecting candidates and leaders by injecting a greater inclusiveness of the involved selectorates. As a consequence, the leftist Italian parties have become the most advanced promoters of the open primaries in Western Europe.

At the national level, the first national primary election has been launched in 2005 by the centre-left coalition then choosing the candidate Prime Minister. In that case 4.3 million of selectors turned out, and Romano Prodi won both the primaries and the 2006 parliamentary election. Moreover, since its inception in 2007, the Democratic Party (PD) relied on primaries to select its first leader, Walter Veltroni (Pasquino 2009; De Luca and Venturino 2010). In 2009 it came back again to primaries to select the following leader, Pierluigi Bersani (Pasquino and Venturino 2010). And finally, Bersani himself on June 2012 announced a coalition primary election to be held next autumn to choose the candidate chief-executive for the 2013 general elections.

Thus, in November and December 2012 a leftist coalition, named *Italia. Bene Comune*, was created through the agreement of four parties: the Democratic Party (PD), Left Ecology Freedom (SEL), the Democratic Centre (CD), and the Socialist Party (PSI). A council composed by parties' officials screened the candidates, allowing five of them to run. Although its statute clearly asserts that the party leader was the only possible nominee, PD fielded three candidates, namely the incumbent leader Pier Luigi Bersani, the mayor of Florence Matteo Renzi, and the regional councilor Laura Puppato¹. The other candidates were the SEL incumbent president Nichi Vendola and the MP Bruno Tabacci from CD. All citizens could turnout after a pre-registration, a signature to support the coalition manifesto, and a contribution of two Euros.

As shown in Table 1, as no candidate secured a majority among the 3 million of selectors attending the first round, after a week the two most voted, Renzi e Bersani, fielded at the second round, and the latter finally succeeded by gaining 60.9% of the votes.

¹ In precedence the National Assembly of the PD had temporarily amended the statute to allow other candidates to run besides Pier Luigi Bersani.

Table 1. Italy 2012, results of the center-left coalition primary to select the candidate prime minister

Candidates	First round		Second round	
	N	Valid vote %	N	Valid vote %
Pier Luigi Bersani	1,395,096	44.9	1,706,457	60.9
Matteo Renzi	1,104,958	35.5	1,095,925	39.1
Nichi Vendola	485,689	15.6		
Laura Puppato	80,628	2.6		
Bruno Tabacci	43,840	1.4		
<i>Total valid votes</i>	<i>3,110,211</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>2,802,382</i>	<i>100</i>

On December 30th the primaries for the premiership were followed by semi-open primaries promoted only by PD and SEL to select the candidates to the parliament. This prolonged cycle gained great momentum for the leftist coalition, nevertheless the results of the February parliamentary elections have been disappointing. The coalition led by Bersani in fact has been unable to reach a majority in both Houses, therefore in the following months the coalition broke up, Bersani was induced to leave the party leadership, and the PD was disgruntledly induced to enter a great coalition with rightist and center parties, respectively led by Silvio Berlusconi and the former premier Mario Monti.

France: towards the 2012 presidential election

The sequence of Italian style primaries seems to have produced appealing results for other European parties. Inclusive selections are extraneous to the French parties, but the Socialist Party (PS) in 2006 organized a closed presidential primary election – then gained by Ségolène Royal – reserved only to enrolled members (Dolez and Laurent 2007; Le Gall 2007). Since then, several articles by *intellectuels*, practitioners and political theorists appeared in the French press, and the debate urged the Socialist Party to adopt the Italian primary system. Finally, in 2009, a detailed report called *Pour des primaires ouvertes et populaires* was produced by the socialist renewal secretary, Arnaud Montebourg. Then the party officially adopted a primary framework similar to the Italian Democratic Party. And later, approaching the 2012 *présidentielle*, it ran an open primary explicitly inspired by the Italian experiences.

Table 2. France 2011, results of the center-left coalition primary to select the candidate president

Candidates	First round		Second round	
	N	Valid vote %	N	Valid vote %
François Hollande	1,036,767	39.2	1,607,268	56.6
Martine Aubry	805,936	30.4	1,233,899	43.4
Arnaud Montebourg	455,536	17.2		
Ségolène Royal	183,343	6.9		
Manuel Valls	149,077	5.6		
Jean-Michel Baylet	17,030	0.6		
<i>Total valid votes</i>	<i>2,658,667</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>2,841,167</i>	<i>100</i>

The so-called *primaires citoyennes* held in October 2011 (Lefebvre 2011) have been a coalition open primary organized by the Socialist Party and the Radical Party of the

Left using a two-round electoral system. For prospective voters the requisites to participate were a pre-registration in an electoral list, a contribution of one Euro, and the signature of the charter party values. As listed in Table 2, six candidates ran in the first round. As no candidate reached 50% of the votes, the two most voted, Hollande and Aubry, contested a second round, and François Hollande gained a nomination as presidential candidate reaching 56.6% of the total vote. Successively, Hollande defeated the incumbent Nicolas Sarkozy in the runoff of the presidential election, and after few weeks the leftist parties secured a large majority in the *Assemblée Nationale* to support the government led by the prime minister Jean-Marc Ayrault.

In summary, Table 3, shows the main differences between the regulation of the two primaries.

1. in both cases, a run-off is necessary when no candidate had secured more than 50% of the votes in the first round;
2. both primaries are open, as neither party members nor non formally enrolled citizens are allowed to vote;
3. a pre-registration is requested to vote only in the Italian case;
4. people less than 18 years old cannot vote in Italy, while they are allowed in France;
5. in France migrants can vote if they are party members, while in Italy they have more limitations;
6. the lesser fee amounts to two Euros in Italy, but only one in France;
7. the signature is mandatory in both primaries, but it is doubled in the Italian case;
8. candidatures are associated with the party deputies in France, but with the simple voters in Italy.

Table 3. Italy 2012 and France 2011, the rules of the primaries

	Italy 2012	France 2011
1. Election	Two rounds, with a run-off in case no candidate had secured more than 50% of the vote	Two rounds, with a run-off in case no candidate had secured more than 50% of the vote
2. Participation	All Italian citizens	All French citizens
3. Registration	Be enrolled in the <i>Italia. Bene Comune</i> register between 4 th and 25 th November 2012	Be registered in the electoral lists before 31 st December 2010
4. Under 18	Not admitted	Admitted if 18 yo at the time of the 2012 presidential election; alternatively, admitted if member of a party
5. Foreigners	EU citizens resident in Italy and citizens of other countries in possession of a valid residence permit	Admitted if member of a party
6. Contribution	2 Euros	1 Euro
7. Signature	Support for the call of the coalition <i>Italia. Bene Comune</i> and for the Charter of Intent	Support for the values of freedom, equality, fraternity, laity, justice, solidarity and progress
8. Candidature	Before 25 th October 2012, 20,000 signatures of voters of the center-left (no more than 2,000 in each region)	Either, endorsement from 5% of the Socialist MPs (17 endorsements), 5% of members of the National Council (16 endorsements), 5% of regional councilors (100 endorsements) from at least 10 <i>département</i> and 4 regions, or 5% of socialist mayors of cities with more than 10,000 inhabitants (16 endorsements) from at least 4 regions

Hypotheses and measurements

Our general approach aims to shed light on the eventual relationships linking primary to general elections. Of course, a number of provisions are still needed to actually implement such a broad statement. Because we adopt quantitative techniques of research, we sketch these provisions using the language of statistics.

First of all, as independent variables we focus on two characteristics of the primary elections: turnout and competition. In our view, these variables are related to the electoral performances of the promoting parties in an overall intuitive way. Those parties will reach the best results in the general elections when the primaries have first featured a high turnout and a low competition. In both cases the rationale is easy to understand. High levels of turnout at the primaries show that involved parties are fielding appealing candidates. Furthermore, a high number of activists is important to fight a “post-modern” centralized campaign (Norris 2000), and to have a positive image in the public opinion. So that the parties could even start a “spiral of silence” (Noelle-Neumann 1993) pushing them towards an effortless electoral success. In a nutshell, crowded primaries mobilize a great number of citizens who can be trusted to participate in the following general elections.

While high levels of turnout are alleged to boost parties, primaries featuring high levels of competition may damage them. This hypothesis is well entrenched in individual-level theory (Anderson *et al.* 2005). Exceedingly competitive primaries entail the selection of a nominee gaining a small margin of votes on his challengers. In turn, this involves that a great number of selectors have seen their favorite candidate eliminated, leaving them two alternatives when coming close to the general election. Disgruntled but loyal voters will support the nominee from their party as a second best. But those completely disappointed will desert the polling station, and sometimes may vote against their own supposed candidate. Thus, the greater the competition at the primary elections, the greater the number of potential deserters, the lesser the amount of votes gained by the nominee at the general election.

Then turnout and competition are our main independent variables, however both may be measured according to different procedures. Our choices are as follows. For turnout at the primary elections, we calculate the percentage as a ratio between the number of selectors and the number of people enfranchised for the general elections². Usual practice is to refer to the number of votes gained by the nominee at the following general elections. As will be clear below, we disregard this solution in order to avoid problems of reciprocal causality in our analyses.

Also for competition, we make use of several different indexes (Kenig 2008). To assess here the levels of competition in the Italian and French primaries we prefer to use the classical effective number of candidates proposed by Laakso-Taagepera (1979). The reason is that we have to deal with multicandidate primaries, and this index takes in account the electoral performances of all candidates. Thus it seems to be more practical

² The results of the Italian primaries have been released without the information concerning blank and invalid ballots. Thus our calculations here are based on valid votes rather than the number of selectors.

in comparison with other indexes using only the result of the front runner, or the difference between the two best competitors, i.e. the closeness³.

Besides these two main predictors of the performances at the general elections, we make use of a couple of control variables to detect the possible existence of spurious relationships. As the result of a party in a given election is necessarily influenced by the result of that party in the previous election, we consider the percentage of votes gained by the main leftist party in 2007 and 2008 for the French and Italian cases respectively. By so doing, we aim to control for autoregressive effects created by the stability of the vote in a particular territory. Finally, we consider GDP per capita as a proxy to tap the level of economic development.

Some additional information about our research design is still needed. To begin with, neither in Italy nor in France the primaries to select the candidates for the role of chief executive have been held with a two-round system. In both cases, our analyses make use of data pertaining to the first round. Then, as anticipated in the first section, our territorial unity of analysis are *province* for Italy and *départements* for France. We have chosen this level because primary promoters used these levels to spread over the results of their primaries⁴, because it makes it easy to match the results of the primary and the general elections, and finally because it permits us to analyze one-hundred cases both in France and in Italy, so escaping the statistical problem of “small N”.

Finally, we have to describe our dependent variable(s). The starting point here is that we are analyzing two multiparty systems, where the leftist wings are highly fragmented, and also arranged in pre-electoral coalitions largely spurred by the electoral laws⁵. Thus, once decided that we are interested in examining the electoral results of the parties after their respective primaries, we are left undetermined which parties we are talking about. And we have no theoretical guide to pick out in advance the parties most interesting for us. So, we start the next section by a preliminary examination encompassing all the above mentioned parties. In practice, this means that we consider the coalitions operating during the 2013 and 2012 parliamentary elections. Then in the case of Italy we investigate the three main parties composing the coalition *Italia. Bene Comune*, all of which had presented their own candidates at the primary elections: the Democratic Party (PD), Left Ecology and Freedom (SEL), and the Democratic Center (CD)⁶. For France, we will carry out a preliminary analysis of the leftist coalition and of the following parties: the Socialist Party (PS), the Radical Party of the Left (PRG), and the Greens

³ Kenig (2008) has proposed a new index where the effective number of candidates is weighted by the sheer number of competitors. Although promising, this index would be redundant to be used here. This is because we compare several districts in a single primary election where the (sheer) number of candidates is a constant rather a variable.

⁴ The reader should be aware that so far Italy and France did not have adopted any national regulation, and therefore in both countries the primaries are a voluntary and self-regulated activity.

⁵ Since 2006 Italy uses a mixed electoral system having a proportional structure; for parliamentary elections France employs a classical two-round system since 1958, with a single exception dating back to 1986.

⁶ The whole coalition was formed by other minor partners. At the election for the Lower House (*Camera dei Deputati*) the Sud Tiroloer Volkspartei (SVP, the regional party of the Deutsch-speaking minority) gained .43% of the total vote and 5 parliamentary seats. In the case of the Upper House (*Senato della Repubblica*) Il Megafono-Lista Crocetta, the Socialist Party (PS) and i Moderati won together .67% of the votes and no parliamentary seats.

(Europe Écologie-Les Verts, EELV)⁷. In all these cases, the results for the Lower Houses are considered.

Results

A preliminary bivariate analysis

As mentioned above, this work aims to test whether participation and competition in primaries elections have influenced the performance of the left-leaning coalition in the following general elections. For this purpose, the first step is to identify whether some correlations actually exist among our variables.

Let us start with the Italian case. As shown in the first row of Table 4, the primary turnout is strongly related to the votes of the coalition-left and the Democratic Party in the 2013 parliamentary election, and the value of statistical significance is very high. On the contrary, it is not related with the SEL and the Democratic Centre performances.

Table 4. Italy: correlation matrix between primary turnout and vote the center-left parties

	Primary turnout	Vote to center-left coalition	Vote to Democratic Party	Vote to Left Ecology Freedom	Vote to Democratic Centre
Primary turnout	1	.740 (.000)**	.868 (.000)**	.174 (.070)	-.037 (.701)
Vote to center-left coalition		1	.746 (.000)**	.331 (.000)**	-.033 (.732)
Vote to Democratic Party			1	.002 (.982)	-.172 (.073)
Vote to Left Ecology Freedom				1	.454 (.000)**
Vote to Democratic Centre					1

Note: significance level is presented in brackets.

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 5 shows the same correlations for the French case. Here, primary turnout has a positive correlation to the votes obtained by the coalition and the Socialist Party in the 2012 parliamentary election. On the contrary, it is not related to the PRG and Green Party vote. In comparison with Italy, the scores are slightly lower, and the correlation of the coalition is larger than that of the main party.

⁷ PS and PRG presented respectively five and one out of the six candidates which contented the primaries. We do not deal with few leftist independent candidates fielded in several uninominal districts. They are indicated as “miscellaneous left” (DVG, Divers de Gauche), gained 3.40% of the votes in the first round, and a final amount of 22 parliamentary seats.

Table 5. France: correlation matrix between primary turnout and vote the center-left parties

	Primary turnout	Vote to center-left coalition	Vote to Socialist Party	Vote to Radical Party of the Left	Vote to the Greens
Primary turnout	1	.675 (.000)**	.498 (.000)**	.006 (.953)	.072 (.488)
Vote to center-left coalition		1	.734 (.000)**	.062 (.546)	-.073 (.480)
Vote to Socialist Party			1	-.462 (.000)**	-.143 (.164)
Vote to Radical Party of the Left				1	-.209 (.041)*
Vote to the Greens					1

Note: Significance level is presented in brackets

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Matrices presented in Tables 6 and 7 show the correlations among the primary competition and the electoral performances of the leftist parties. As expected, negative correlations prevail. In Italy (see Table 6, first row), they may be detected in three out of four cases, and the only exception (SEL) features a non-significant score.

Table 6. Italy: correlation matrix between primary competition and the vote for center-left parties

	Primary competition	Vote to center-left coalition	Vote to Democratic Party	Vote to Left Ecology Freedom	Vote to Democratic Centre
Primary competition	1	-.412 (.000)**	-.495 (.000)**	.046 (.636)	-.215 (.024)*
Vote to center-left coalition		1	.746 (.000)**	.331 (.000)**	-.033 (.732)
Vote to Democratic Party			1	.002 (.982)	-.172 (.073)
Vote to Left Ecology Freedom				1	.454 (.000)**
Vote to Democratic Centre					1

Note: significance level is presented in brackets.

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

For France (see Table 7, first row) the table is slightly less favorable to our hypotheses. There is a negative relationship between the primary competition and the vote in the parliamentary election, which is valid only in two out of four cases with an intermediate level of significance. Moreover, the two deviating cases (PRG and Greens) also feature a medium level of significance, which was lacking for the Italian deviant case. Both in France and in Italy, the negative consequences brought about by high levels of primary competition are stronger for the largest party rather than the coalition.

Table 7. France: correlation matrix between primary competition and the vote for center-left parties

	Primary competition	Vote to center-left coalition	Vote to Socialist Party	Vote to Radical Party of the Left	Vote to the Greens
Primary competition	1	-.250 (.014)*	-.348 (.001)*	.253 (.013)*	.229 (.025)*
Vote to center-left coalition		1	.734 (.000)**	.062 (.546)	-.073 (.480)
Vote to Socialist Party			1	-.462 (.000)**	-.143 (.164)
Vote to Radical Party of the Left				1	-.209 (.041)*
Vote to the Greens					1

Note: Significance level is presented in brackets

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Let us briefly compare the above information regarding turnout and competition. The scores referred to turnout are larger than those pertaining to competition. Thus, the electoral advantages produced by (high levels of) turnout seem to be larger than inconveniences caused by (high levels of) competition. However, in order to fully understand the above tables, it is necessary to remember that those bivariate correlations are powerless when facing possible spurious relationships. Therefore, in the next sections, we review these preliminary results through a multivariate analysis incorporating other factors supposedly related to electoral performances. By so doing, for a sake of clearness we focus only on the Italian and French center-left coalitions.

Turnout, competition, and parliamentary elections: a (more) general picture

In this section, we discuss the short-term electoral effects of the primaries also considering the long-term parties' strength and the economic level of the involved territory. To this aim, building on previous analyses, our models now present two additional control variables:

- the vote for the Democratic Party and for the Socialist Party in the parliamentary election preceding those under examination;
- the GDP per capita⁸.

Everywhere the electoral performance of a party is subjected to a path dependency, and in several Italian and French provinces the vote features small swings. For this reason, we make use of the vote obtained by the PD and PS in the previous parliamentary elections as a control⁹. Next, it is well known that turnout – at general and primary elections – is higher where economic levels are elevated. Moreover, leftist parties today

⁸ Related data have been collected by API (2010) for Italy and by INSEE (2010) for France.

⁹ By so doing, we control the electoral result of a coalition using the previous result of the main party of that coalition. This is not the best strategy, but the most obvious alternative – to use the previous votes gained by the coalition – is made unviable by the dramatic changes intervened between the two consecutive elections.

may prevail in the wealthier zones. Thus, using GDP as a control variable we aim to check for effective, not spurious, relationships between our main variables.

Table 8. Primary turnout and other predictors of coalition voting: Italy and France

	Italy		France	
	b	s.e.	b	s.e.
Constant	9.338	3.037	23.727	1.933
Primary turnout	.863	.190	2.179	.324
Vote to PD 2008/PS 2007	.253	.088	.363	.067
GDP per capita	.000	.000	.000	.000
R square	.603		.680	
N	110		96	

To start with, we regress the vote for the coalition in Italy and France against primary turnout and the two above mentioned control variables. Results reported in Table 8 show that in both cases control variables explain a substantial amount of the coalition support¹⁰. More importantly, primary turnout continues to be a key predictor even after controls are considered, and the R squares high levels prove the fitness of the model overall.

Table 9. Primary competition and other predictors of coalition voting: Italy and France

	Italy		France	
	b	s.e.	b	s.e.
Constant	17.029	6.114	24.892	5.752
Primary competition	-4.986	1.772	-.124	1.461
Vote to PD 2008/PS 2007	.491	.063	.639	.068
GDP per capita	.000	.000	-.000	.000
R square	.559		.522	
N	110		96	

Similarly, in Table 9 the coalition performances are regressed against competition and control variables. For Italy, the table maintains the same rationales: all variables are significant, and contribute to a substantial fitness of the model. Not so for France. In this case, an autoregressive effect prevails, and the 2012 vote is mostly explicated by the 2007 vote and the other variables – primary competition included – being irrelevant.

Summing up: after the control variables are included, turnout continues to boost the vote of the leftist coalition in both Italy and France. Not so for competition. It damages the coalition in Italy, while in France its effects disappear in face of the stability of the vote. Once Italians were strong identifiers, while French parties were unable to develop strong ties to their supporters. Today things seem to have changed noticeably.

Turnout and competition: what matters more?

So far we have discovered that primary turnout improves parties' fortune, while primary competition plays a damaging role. We have also incidentally noted that the positive effects of the turnout seem to be greater than the negative effects of the competition, but on this point we rely hitherto on cursory and unsatisfactory evidence. Now we make use of a new analysis to address this crucial point with greater accuracy.

¹⁰ As shown by the little score of the standard error in comparison with the score of the regression coefficient.

Table 10 details the results of two regressions in Italy and France. In both cases, the variables are the same as the previous analyses, the major enhancement being the concurrent use of primary turnout and competition as predictors. In order to assess the relative weight of each independent variable, scores reported in the table are standardized regression coefficients.

Table 10. Turnout vs. competition as predictors of coalition voting: Italy and France

	Italy	France
Primary turnout	.417	.549
Primary competition	-.131	.021
Vote to PD 2008/PS 2007	.272	.415
GDP per capita	.206	-.247
R square	.616	.680
N	110	96

Note: the values are standardized regression coefficients (beta).

In both cases, primary turnout has the “right” sign, and is the best predictor of the coalitions’ electoral performances. This appears to be a trustworthy substantiation of the positive role of the open primaries when robustly attended by the citizens. The case for the competition is less clear. In Italy, it presents a negative sign – i.e., it depresses the vote for the coalition, as expected – but is the least relevant among all the considered variables. In France instead it is not relevant at all. In any way, parties should not be too anxious about the presence of several viable candidates. The votes gained in the previous elections in both cases are very important predictors, being the second after primary turnout. At a glance, what is striking is the lesser role played by the path dependency in Italy. But one should be aware of the astonishing results of the critical 2013 parliamentary election, when the newcomer *Movimento 5 Stelle* won 25% of the votes. We did not have clear expectations about the role of the GDP. Now, we note that in both cases it is quite an important predictor, and that it shows a different sign for Italy and France. Thus, we are informed that leftist Italian parties gain more votes in the richer provinces, while in France *la Gauche plurielle* is more supported in the underprivileged *départements*.

Discussion

As the primary elections have been only recently brought into play outside the United States, the cases for research in Europe are not many. There are several research strategies to overcome the ensuing constraints. For large countries, it is possible to divide the national territory in some partitions – based on poll stations, electoral districts, or administrative precincts – in order to create a sufficient number of cases to avoid the “small N” problem. In this paper we have compared two large countries, Italy and France, so the most straightforward approach entailed the use of data collected at the level of *province* and *départements*. After evaluating a sufficient number of cases to apply statistical techniques, we have reached some intriguing results.

First of all, a preliminary analysis demonstrated that the impact of the primaries is relevant only for major parties. Although we lack a satisfying account, niche parties appear to be perceived by voters in such a way that their involvement in the primaries

simply does not influence their success in the general election. In addition, the wide-ranging analyses on major parties and coalitions have confirmed simple intuitions. The citizens' participation in the primaries is a great starting point to be successful in general elections. Also the theoretical insight questioning the commitment of the followers of the losing primary candidates is supported by our data. Finally, as people's involvement matters more than the underdogs' disappointment, the votes for those parties embracing the democratization of the candidates' selection will be enhanced.

Often party officials are afraid because they believe primaries damage their parties. Thus, if they cannot avoid them, they look at least for a low number of candidates and a restricted competition. If our conclusions are right, they should reverse their conservative strategies: more primary candidates, more competition, more turnout, and finally more ballots in the polls. Perhaps they are rather afraid for their own careers. But this is another story.

References

- Anderson, C.J., Blais A., Bowler S., Donovan T., Listhaug O. 2005. *Losers' Consent. Elections and Democratic Legitimacy*. New York: Oxford U.P.
- Carey, J.M., Polga-Hecimovic J. 2006. Primary Elections and Candidate Strength in Latin America. *The Journal of Politics* 68 (3), 530-43.
- Dalton, R.J., Wattenberg M.P. (eds.) 2002. *Parties without Partisans. Political Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies*. Oxford: Oxford U.P.
- Dalton, R.J., Beck, P.A., Flanagan, S.C. (eds.) 1984. *Electoral Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies. Realignment or Dealignment?*. Princeton: Princeton U.P.
- De Luca, R., Venturino, F. (eds.) 2010. *Mobilitazione e partecipazione elettorale. Un'analisi delle "primarie" per l'elezione del primo segretario del Pd*. Rome: Aracne.
- Dolez, B., Laurent, A. 2007. Une primaire à la française: la désignation de Ségolène Royal par le Parti Socialiste. *Revue Française de Science Politique* 57 (2), 133-61.
- Franklin, M.N. 2004. *Voter Turnout and the Dynamics of Electoral Competition in Established Democracies since 1945*. Cambridge: Cambridge U.P.
- Franklin, M.N., Mackie, T., Valen, H. (eds.) 1992. *Electoral Change. Responses to Evolving Social and Attitudinal Structure in Western Countries*. Cambridge: Cambridge U.P.
- Hazan, R.Y., Rahat, G. 2010. *Democracy Within Parties. Candidate Selection Methods and their Political Consequences*. Oxford: Oxford U.P.
- Ichino, N., Nathan, N. 2013. Do Primaries Improve Electoral Performance? Clientelism and Intra-Party Conflict in Ghana. *American Journal of Political Science* (57) 2, 428-41.
- Indriðason, I.H., Kristinsson, G.H. 2013. Primary Consequences: The Effects of Candidate Selection through Party Primaries in Iceland. *Party Politics*, forthcoming.
- Katz, R.S. 2001. The Problem of Candidate Selection and Models of Party Democracy. *Party Politics* 7 (3), 277-96.
- Kenig, O. 2008. Democratization of Party Leadership Selection: Do Wide Selectorates Produce More Competitive Contests?. *Electoral Studies* (28) 2, 240-47.
- Laakso, M., Taagepera, R. 1979. "Effective" Number of Parties. A Measure with Application to Western Europe. *Comparative Political Studies* (12) 1, 3-27.
- Lefebvre, R. 2011. *Les primaires socialistes. La fin du parti militant*. Paris: Raison d'Agir.

- Le Gall, G. 2007. Le primaire au PS: l'irrésistible ascension présidentielle de Ségolène Royal. *Etat de l'Opinion*, Septembre 2005-Décembre 2006, 47-74.
- Norris, P. 2000. *A Virtuous Circle: Political Communications in Postindustrial Societies*. Cambridge: Cambridge U.P.
- Noelle-Neumann, E. 1993. *The Spiral of Silence: Public Opinion – Our Social Skin*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Pasquino, G. (ed.) 2009. *Il Partito Democratico. Elezione del segretario, organizzazione e potere*. Bologna: Bononia U.P.
- Pasquino, G., Venturino, F. (eds.) 2010. *Il Partito Democratico di Bersani. Persone, profilo e prospettive*. Bologna: Bononia U.P.
- Webb, P., Farrell, D.M., Holiday, I. (eds.) 2002. *Political Parties in Advanced Industrial Democracies*. Oxford: Oxford U.P.