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**A new candidate-based system in the
Italian regions?
An analysis of personal vote in
Campania, Emilia-Romagna, and Veneto**

Prof. Vincenzo Emanuele

RELATORE

Prof. Emiliana De Blasio

CORRELATORE

Mattia Gatti - 642142

CANDIDATO

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART I: A THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

Introduction	4
Chapter One. Italian parties and party system. A de-structuring process	11
1.1 The Italian party system towards de-institutionalization	11
1.2 A process of ‘region-centered presidentialization’ at regional level	17
1.3 From party identification to vote’s individualization	22
Chapter Two. Decentralized personalization and personal vote. A focus on the Italian case	28
2.1 Centralized and Decentralized Personalization	28
2.2 Personal vote, preferential voting, and their determinants	35
Chapter Three. Studying personal vote through preferential voting: determinants and differentiated use in three Italian territorial contexts	49
2.3 Social capital and economic backwardness: a possible explanation for preferential voting in the <i>Mezzogiorno</i>	49
2.4 The decline of the Italian Red and White Political Subcultures: new room for personal vote?	60

PART II: AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

Chapter Four. A new ‘systemness’? The role of the ‘Lords of Preferences’ at the Italian regional elections	73
4.1 Lords of Preferences: an analysis of the Calabrian case	73
4.2 The empirical model	78
Chapter Five. The case of Campania	82

5.1 The Campanian political and party system	82
5.2 Personal vote in a de-institutionalized environment	86
5.3 The new systemness put to the test	93
Chapter Six. The case of Emilia-Romagna	100
6.1 The Emilia-Romagna's political and party system	100
6.2 A new systemness in the heart of the Red Subculture?	105
6.3 The resilience of party-based politics	110
Chapter Seven. The case of Veneto	114
7.1 The Veneto's political and party system	114
7.2 Leading candidates as new 'anchors'?	118
7.3 The 'general' electoral competition and the central role of parties	124
Conclusions	128
References	132
Summary	144

INTRODUCTION

Following his victory in the 2002 Sicilian regional election, Totò Cuffaro stated that winning in the South crucially depends on the relationships and personal networking that politicians - both Presidential candidates and individual ones - can weave with local society and governmental institutions. If a southern voter must choose between casting a vote for a candidate that he/she personally knows or one that can best represent him/her, he/she will undoubtedly vote for the former (Diamanti, 2009).

These words are indicative of the peculiar relationship between citizens and politics in the *Mezzogiorno*. The chronic economic backwardness, spurred by the failed industrialization, paved the way to the ‘atomistic disaggregation’ of southern society (Catanzaro, 1986). The lack of a deeply felt class identification made very difficult any attempt to collective and solidaristic action. Moreover, a history marked by foreign domination, shaped a verticalized society, ultimately hindering the formation of dense networks of mutual trust (Putnam *et al.*, 1993). In the electoral arena, these circumstances resulted in voting choices mainly guided by particularistic motives.

Consequently, in the South, post-WWII national parties - that represented the fulcrum of fully-fledged political subcultures in the North and Central regions of the country - appeared from the very beginning more as ‘catch-all parties’ rather than mass-based ones (Bova, 2009). In short, political clientelism has represented *the* organizational form of a society - the southern one - in which the unmet demands for labor have been matched by the need, for political actors, to gain electoral support (Zitara, 1977).

Parties have thus played different roles across Italy. While in the South they have functioned as votes’ collectors, the two Italian territorial subcultures - the Red and the White one - have traditionally been monopolized by a specific political force that succeeded in integrating and representing diverse local interests (Trigilia, 1981). The Italian Communist Party (PCI) in the Red Zone, and the Christian Democrats (DC) in the White Zone, have long been the fulcrum of the

associational and political life of the local community. They were able to incapsulate the center-periphery cleavage, giving representation to the latter *vis-à-vis* the central institutions, as well as fostering the reproduction of a precious collective resource: social capital (Almagisti, 2016).

Social capital can best be described as the combination of four elements: (i) the presence of associational networks that involve the great majority of society; (ii) a disposition towards the respect of existing social and political norms; (iii) high levels of interpersonal trust; (iv) a certain degree of political consciousness (Bordandini and Cartocci, 2014; Ballarino, 2001). This concept was employed by Putnam *et al.* (1993) as a possible explanation of the territorial differences characterizing the Italian peninsula. Taking advantage of the simultaneous and identical setting up of regional councils in 1970, Putnam analyzed the institutional performances of Italian regions over time. He found out that the performances were differentiated and strongly polarized between northern and southern regions, with the latter displaying the poorest results. The difference was explained not in terms of diverse political cultures - as proposed by Almond and Verba (1963) - but through the sociological concept of social capital. It is, indeed, the different endowment of social capital that better explains the North-South divide. The experience of the 'free Communes' in Northern Italy in the XIIth century, characterized by a style of governance guaranteeing equality and the creation of horizontal networks of relationships, fostered the consolidation of a civic spirit that was preparatory for high levels of social capital. In Southern regions, instead, the Normans shaped a markedly verticalized society, thus creating a gulf between citizens and government and hindering the development of dense networks of mutual trust (Ballarino, 2001).

The literature has deemed social capital as an important element for understanding the different pervasiveness of personal vote across Italian regions. Personal vote can be defined as the portion of candidates' electoral support that originates in the candidates' personal qualities, qualifications, activities, and record (Cain *et al.*, 1987). The most straightforward indicator of personal vote is preferential voting. Preferential voting, simply defined as "the possibility of voting for candidates" (Wauters *et al.*, 2011) is regarded as a major element constituting personal vote, as the preference is cast directly for one (or more) candidate(s) within the party list and not for the party list, thus implying an evaluation that completely revolves around the characteristics, qualities, and activities of candidates.

In his study, Passarelli (2017) analyzed the effects of socio-political variables on the use of preferential voting in Italy. He found out that social capital negatively affects preferential voting at each electoral level. This means that, in contexts characterized by high levels of civicness and strong communitarian linkages - as in the two political subcultures -the effects of the personalization of political representation, exemplified by the use of preferential voting, would be weaker, as personal

vote is not considered a worthwhile option by the majority of voters. This argument is backed up by historical data on the rate of preferential voting in Italy. Since the end of WWII, Italian elections at all levels have been characterized by a clear-cut divide between Northern and Southern regions, with the former making a far thriftier use of preferences (Scaramozzino, 1990).

More specifically, parties in the North and Centre have traditionally been the main political referents of citizens, making personal vote an unnecessary tool for voters, and its cultivation by individual candidates (the ones running for a seat in the national Parliament, supranational, regional, and local institutions) of little value (Almagisti, 2016). In the South, instead, the long-standing socio-economic backwardness, together with low levels of civicness (Banfield, 1958), have fostered a tendency towards the personalization of voting choices. In this context, politics, and especially local notables, have long engaged in the bestowal of pork-barrel legislation, jobs (especially in the public administration), and, more generally, political clientelism (Golden, 2003).

On top of this, something has changed in the last few decades, especially in those areas where parties have long shaped the political and electoral competition. More specifically, two processes have taken place in Western Europe, profoundly shaping Italian politics: (i) a process of party system de-institutionalization (Mainwaring and Scully, 1996; Casal Bértoa, 2014), following the decline of mass-based organizations and the latest macro-changes affecting European political and party systems (Kriesi *et al.*, 2006; Marks and Hooghe, 2018); (ii) the personalization of politics.

A party system is defined as ‘de-institutionalized’ if unstable political parties show unstable and unpredictable patterns of interaction (Casal Bértoa, 2014). These patterns of interactions were characterized by a surprising continuity during the First Republic. This stability stemmed from parties’ ability to represent those cleavages and traditions that stretched back to well before the foundation of the Republic (Galli, 1966; Corbetta, Parisi and Schadee, 1988). Following the collapse of the First Republic, however, the Italian party system restructured itself on fragile bases (the so called Second Republic), that finally fell apart at the 2013 general election, leading to a new phase of greater instability. As outlined by Emanuele and Chiaramonte (2020), the period following the 2013 general election represents one of the most unstable phases in post-WWII political European history, on equal terms with the French (since 2012), Icelandic (since 2013) and Irish (since 2011) cases.

Moreover, signs of instability and unpredictability in the patterns of interactions among parties can be spotted in the Italian regional party systems. The last electoral cycle (2013-2020) has featured the weakening of parties’ peripheral branches. Parties’ central offices are facing growing difficulties in keeping under control local dynamics and the ‘ballot structure’: indeed, it can be spotted an increasingly autonomous process of candidate selection at the local level (Passarelli, 2012). Fragmentation, spurred by the growing importance of non-partisan lists, make the regional

environment a turbulent one. Rather than being regarded as ‘second-order elections’, regional elections ultimately seem to have acquired a logic of their own (Vampa, 2021).

Personalization can be described as the process through which “the political weight of the individual actor in the political process increases over time, while the centrality of the political group (e.g. the political party) declines” (Rahat and Sheaffer, 2007: 65). Balmas *et al.* (2014) between two types of political personalization: centralized personalization and decentralized personalization. The former concerns the flow of power from the group (e.g. political party, cabinet) to the leader (e.g. party leader, prime minister, president). The latter means that the flow of power goes downwards, from the group to individual politicians that are not party leaders or prime ministers. Italy, among others, can be regarded as a ‘prototype’ of a strongly personalized political system (Garzia and Viotti, 2012).

The transition to the Second Republic has brought not only changes in the electoral system, but also the growing centrality of television and ‘media figures’ (Manin, 1995). The most notorious one, Silvio Berlusconi - well known for its media empire (owner of 3 out of 6 national television networks) and for being the owner of one of the most famous Italian football teams (A.C. Milan) - imparted a significant push to the process of centralized personalization in Italy. He indeed founded a ‘personal party’ (Calise, 2000), Forza Italia (FI) of which he was (and is) the owner and ultimate leader. Through the party organization and his team of media and marketing experts, Berlusconi has conducted strongly personalized electoral campaigns, trying to link voters’ choice to a comprehensive evaluation of his persona.

Besides a process of ‘presidentialization’, a process of decentralized personalization appears to be taking place. What Legnante (1999) would call a ‘personalization from below’ (Legnante, 1999). As noted by the literature (De Luca, 2001; Napoli, 2005; Emanuele and Marino, 2016), since the turn of the century, especially the South has witnessed the emergence of the so-called Lords of Preferences, that is candidates able to obtain a large share of personal support (preferential votes), regardless of the party they run with and the type of election (De Luca, 2011). They control the recruitment mechanisms and, through their following, they can heavily sway the electoral competition.

In such a context, exacerbated by the decline of party organizations (Katz and Mair, 1994), and by the erosion of traditional cleavages (Frankin, Mackie, and Valen, 1992), our argument is that personal vote may have become a prominent element in the Italian political system, especially in those systems such as the regional ones, where preferential voting is allowed. More specifically, following Emanuele and Marino (2016), we suggest that personal vote has conferred a new ‘systemness’ to ‘turbulent’ regional political systems, supplementing, or even replacing, the one

instilled by the patterns of interactions among parties. This new systemness stems from inter-candidate patterns of cooperation and competition. The latter are mainly those that exert a greater influence on the regional political system, the ones that we may call Lords of Preferences. We thus suggest that the continuity and predictability of leading candidates' territorial support significantly affects the regional electoral competition. Moreover, we argue that in 'turbulent' party systems Lords' endowments of votes have become important determinants of the 'general' electoral results.

To assess so, we will focus on three different regional contexts: Campania, Emilia-Romagna, and Veneto. More specifically, we will evaluate our expectations in three districts (*province*): the Metropolitan City of Naples (NA) in Campania; the Metropolitan City of Bologna (BO) in Emilia-Romagna; the Province of Padova (PDV as not to confuse it with the Democratic Party (PD)). The choice stems from the necessity to evaluate personal vote's pervasiveness in different political scenarios. While the Region of Campania has long been characterized by an unstable and weakly-structured party system (Reda, 2021), the hearts of the two territorial subcultures have long featured the entrenchment of two mass-based parties (the PCI and the DC) which have constituted the main political referents of the local community, rendering personal vote ultimately unnecessary (Diamanti, 2009). Nonetheless, these regions are experiencing turbulent times (Valbruzzi, 2019), as the White and Red subcultures appear to have lost their traditional social and political traits (Caciagli, 2011). The inter-regional comparison will allow us to grasp the current status of the Italian regional party systems, as well as assess the possibility of the establishment of a new relationship between voters and candidates, based on personal vote and its ability to confer new stability and predictability to the system.

In sum, we put forward four expectations:

1. *In Campania, the permanent instability and unpredictability of the regional party system has favored the development of a new systemness based on the patterns of interactions (re-candidacies and endorsements) taking place at individual level.*
2. *This new systemness has complemented, or even replaced, the weakened systemness stemming from Campanian parties' patterns of interactions, influencing both the electoral competition and the 'general' electoral results;*
3. *The weakened socioeconomic and political centrality traditionally awarded to parties in Emilia-Romagna and Veneto has been integrated by new "anchors" in the figure of leading candidates for the regional council;*
4. *Leading candidates have supplemented, or even replaced, the tarnished mobilization ability of national parties, affecting both the electoral competition and the 'general' electoral outcomes.*

Part One has a theoretical character. Chapter One deals with the ongoing process of de-institutionalization characterizing Western Europe, and in particular, Italy. Both the national and regional dimensions are analyzed. Moreover, we focus on the weakening of mass-based organizations and the softening of party identifications. Chapter Two focuses on the process of political personalization, underlying the fact that not only centralized personalization but also a ‘personalization from below’ is taking a widespread character. Furthermore, we deal with the literature on personal vote and its most straightforward indicator: preferential voting. Finally, Chapter Three, explores the socio-economic and political peculiarities fostering (or rather, inhibiting) the diffusion of personal vote in Southern regions and in the two political subcultures.

Part Two, instead, is of an empirical nature. More specifically, Chapter Four introduces the empirical method employed in this elaborate, as well as the literature on the main traits of the so-called Lords of Preferences. Chapter Five, Six, and Seven respectively deal with the cases of Campania, Emilia-Romagna, and Veneto, trying to assess the truthfulness of our expectations on personal vote. In the conclusions, we will summarize our findings, linking together the theoretical part with the results of our empirical analysis.

PART I

A THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

CHAPTER ONE

A CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS: ITALIAN PARTIES AND PARTY SYSTEM. A DE-STRUCTURING PROCESS

The concept of party system (de)-institutionalization was first introduced by Mainwaring and Scully (1996) to account for the permanent state of instability characterizing the patterns of inter-party competition and cooperation in national party systems of Latin America. The concept was subsequently developed (Sanchez, 2009; Casal Bértoa, 2014) but the discussion has usually remained focused on Latin America and Post-Socialist States (Bielasiak, 2002). Little has been the attention, however, for the ongoing process of party system de-institutionalization in Western Europe. Based on the scarce literature on the subject (Mair, 1998; Bardi *et al.*, 2014; Emanuele and Chiaramonte, 2020; Tronconi, 2015; 2020; Bolgherini and Grimaldi, 2017), this chapter will outline the de-structuring process taking place in the Italian national and regional party systems. Moreover, parties *per se* will be analyzed to emphasize the current decline of mass-based organizations (Katz and Mair, 1994) and the cooling down of feelings of attachment expressed by voters (Dalton, 1984).

1.1 The Italian party system towards de-institutionalization

Giovanni Sartori (1976: 44) defined a party system as “the system of interactions resulting from inter-party competition”. This system of interactions, which in Western Europe remained stable and predictable for a big part of post-WWII XXth century, is nowadays experiencing intense turmoil. Both the European debt crisis and the European refugee crisis have been catalysts (Hooghe and Marks, 2018) for the emergence of populist radical left and populist radical right parties that have polarized the national political conflict. As described by Kriesi *et al.* (2006) new conflict lines are indeed shaping the national politics, interacting both with the political supply and the demand side. On the one hand, the traditional division lines that gave form to the European party systems (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967) have long since lost their traditional centrality and explanatory power (Franklin, Mackie, and Valen, 1992). Class, religion and even territory’s capacity to determine and predict electoral results and patterns of interactions among political actors have significantly diminished (Maraffi *et al.*, 2010). On the other hand, processes such as globalization and European integration are re-shaping the national party systems, adding new meaning to the cultural and socio-economic dimensions of conflict.

Among Western European countries, perhaps Italy represents the main example of an ongoing process of party system de-institutionalization (Emanuele and Chiaramonte, 2020). A party system is defined as ‘de-institutionalized’ if unstable political parties show unstable and unpredictable patterns of interaction (Casal Bértoa, 2014). These patterns of interactions were characterized by a surprising continuity during the First Republic (Corbetta, Parisi and Schadee, 1988). Indeed, even if the Italian party system featured a long-lasting ‘polarized pluralism’ (Sartori 1976) - that is, a very fragmented system with two opposing poles occupied by two anti-system parties (the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and the Italian Social Movement (MSI)) and an occupied center (by the Christian Democracy (DC)), that fueled centrifugal tendencies -, it was ultimately characterized by persistent stability, at least until the 1990s. This stability stemmed from parties’ ability to represent those cleavages and traditions that stretched back to before the foundation of the Republic (Galli, 1966; Corbetta, Parisi and Schadee, 1988). More specifically, the party system could rely on the existence of two political subcultures - the Red and White ones (Trigilia, 1986; Caciagli, 1988) - that incapsulated the political conflict and granted long-lasting electoral stability. Following the collapse of the First Republic, however, the Italian party system restructured itself on fragile bases (the so called Second Republic), that finally fell apart at the 2013 general election, leading to a new phase of greater instability.

Emanuele and Chiaramonte (2020) analyzed the ongoing processes characterizing the Italian party system in the last few years, focusing on the three elements that Casal Bértoa (2014) pointed out as being crucial for a system to be institutionalized: stability, predictability, and the time factor. In terms of stability of the party system, the authors arrived at the conclusion that the period following

the 2013 general election represents one of the most unstable phases in post-WWII European political history, on equal terms with the French (since 2012), Icelandic (since 2013) and Irish (since 2011) cases (Figure 1.1).

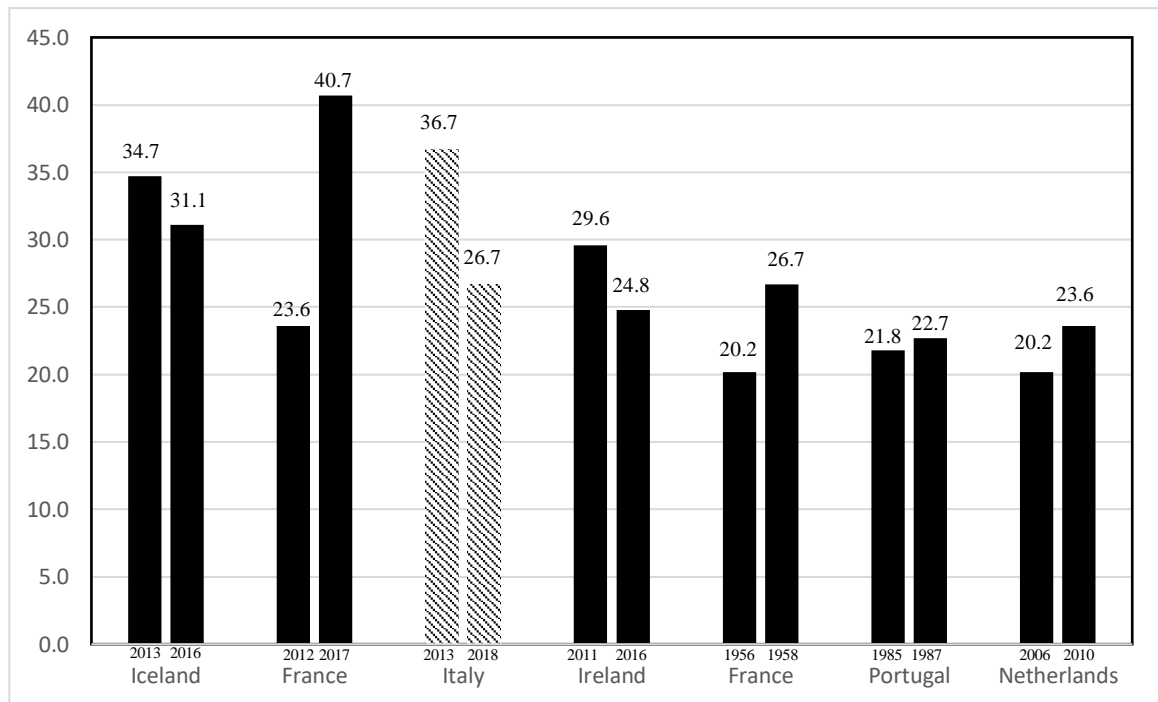


Figure 1.1. Pairs of consecutive elections in Western Europe characterized by the highest electoral volatility since the end of WWII.

Source: Emanuele and Chiaramonte (2020: 9).

The last two Italian general elections have, indeed, witnessed the highest levels of electoral volatility since the collapse of the “First Republic” in 1994 (Figure 1.2): 36.7% in 2013 and 26.7% in 2018, respectively second and third higher scores since the proclamation of the Italian Republic. The fact that one very unstable election was followed by another one of this kind, indicates that the 2013 election cannot be considered as a ‘critical election’ (Key, 1955), have they not been able to structure new persistent patterns of interactions between parties, but rather this points to an ongoing process of de-institutionalization in the electoral arena.

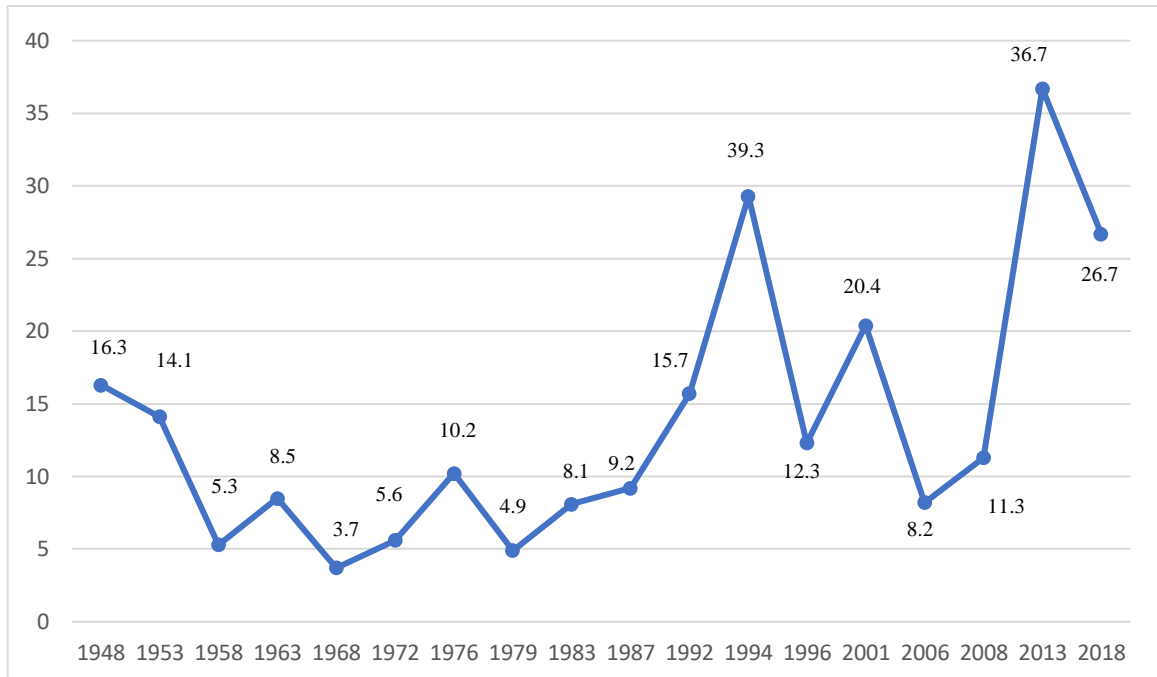


Figure 1.2: Changes in electoral volatility since the end of WWII.

Source: Emanuele and Chiamonte (2020: 8).

Both the parliamentary and to some extent also the governmental arena show patterns of greater instability, while in terms of predictability the formation of the yellow-green government in 2018, comprising the Five Star Movement (M5S) and the League, has meant a very high score (the second highest since WWII) in terms of governmental innovation - that is the share of new parties in government (Figure 1.3).

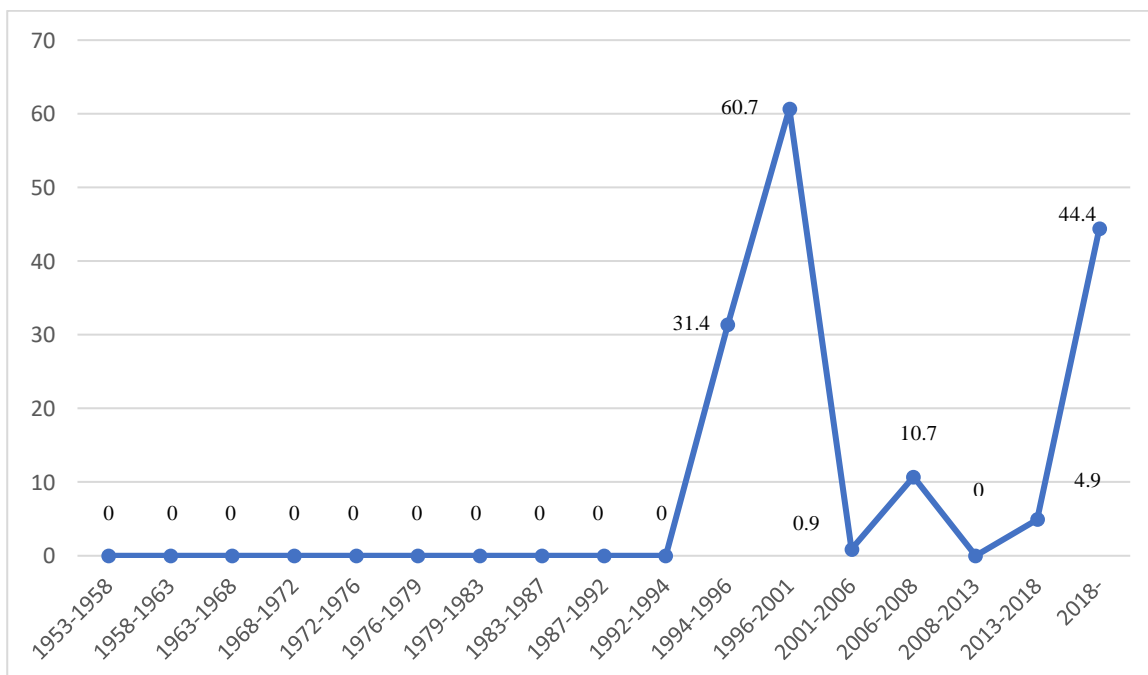


Figure 1.3. Changes in governmental innovation in Italy since the end of WWII.

Source: Emanuele and Chiaramonte (2020: 15).

Going more into detail on the last two electoral cycles, the 2013 Italian general election represented a true ‘electoral earthquake’ (De Sio and Cataldi, 2014). They were marked by the emergence of a strong anti-establishment populist party - the M5S - that obtained the best electoral result for a party competing at its first general election (25%) and did so by showing an impressive level of territorial homogeneity in its electoral support (Emanuele, 2015). The emergence of a quantitatively important third pole (Scelta Civica), and an even more successful fourth pole (M5S) crushed the delicate balances of the so called ‘Second Republic’, characterized by a system of ‘fragmented bipolarism’ (D’Alimonte, 2005) - that is a system dominated by two, highly fractioned and internally litigious coalitions: the center-left coalition and the center-right one. These results led many (De Sio and Cataldi, 2014; Chiaramonte and Emanuele, 2014) to depict a new configuration of the Italian party system: from a bipolar to a ‘tripolar’ (or even a ‘quadripolar’) structure.

Such description was all in all confirmed by the results of the 2018 general election, that produced a more convincing tripolar configuration of party competition but was again characterized by high instability (De Sio and Cataldi, 2019). Explicative in this respect is the variation in electoral strength of each pole and in the intra-coalition balance of power. Indeed, the M5S (first national party in terms of electoral support with 32% of the vote in the Chamber of Deputies) went from third to become the second-best force, the center-left coalition swapped from second to third, and the center-right one from third to first (Chiaramonte and Emanuele, 2019). Within the latter, the League of Salvini overtook Forza Italia (FI), with a four-fold increase compared to 2013 (17% vs 4%), becoming the leading party of the center-right coalition (De Sio and Cataldi, 2019). It was indeed the *Carroccio* - which under the powerful leadership of Matteo Salvini transformed itself from an anti-establishment ethno-regionalist party to a truly national populist right-wing one (Tronconi, 2020) - that scored the most striking electoral result. It imposed itself as the main party in the North, but it also obtained very important results in the so called ‘Red Belt’ (Cataldi and Emanuele, 2019), the geographic area that has been dominated for a long time by left-wing parties and by a peculiar ‘Red Subculture’ (Galli, 1966). Moreover, for the first time Salvini presented his lists in the South, obtaining between 7% and 17%.

It is perhaps the disrupted electoral geography that comes out of these two elections that constitutes their most significant and meaningful consequence. If 2013 saw Italy painted quite evenly in yellow (the color representing the M5S), a result that signaled a step forward towards a process of vote nationalization (Emanuele, 2015), the 2018 general election reported the opposite trend: the Italian geopolitical map appears a lot more diversified (Cataldi and Emanuele, 2019). The M5S

resulted the dominant force in the South, while the center-right coalition secured the North. However, most importantly, the center-left coalition lost control of the Red Zone. Indeed, if its electoral support is now more than ever confined to the regions of the Centre-North, this is so at a significantly lower level. All this has crucial implications for the stability of the Italian party system as the last electoral cycle dramatically transformed the traditional patterns of competition that have for long characterized the different geographical areas of the state. Since its re-foundation after WWII, the Italian political system featured a well-known trait that granted great stability (Galli, 1966; Corbetta, Parisi and Schadee, 1988); that is the existence of two distinctive geopolitical areas: the White Zone, politically affiliated with the Christian Democracy (DC) and whose epicenter was represented by the north-eastern region of Veneto, and the Red Zone (comprising Tuscany, Emilia-Romagna, Umbria and Marche), a traditional stronghold of the left, and in particular of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) (and later, of its successors) (Trigilia, 1986; Caciagli, 1988).

The aftermath of the 2018 general election did not help in reducing the instability characterizing the past few years of the Italian political system, but rather this time was marked by even greater turmoil. After months without a government, unexpectedly, the two main populist parties, the M5S and the League joined forces in what has been by many regarded as the first populist government in Western Europe. Extremely different on various dimensions of conflict, the two parties nevertheless politicize the same side of the ‘integration-demarcation’ cleavage (Kriesi *et al.*, 2006), as opposed to the stances adopted by the mainstream parties (in particular, Forza Italia and Democratic Party (PD)). The one-year government of the challengers’ coalition was marked by a polarization of tones, providing further evidence for the assumption that “as soon as populist parties rise to power, they are always intent to step up polarization to unprecedented degrees” (Pappas, 2019: 341); indeed, as noticed by Tronconi (2020), 2019 featured one of the highest levels of party system’s polarization of the last decade. Both the M5S and the League wanted to gain the coalition’s golden share, and this seemed to be happening for the latter when it became the first party at the 2019 European election. This caused further turmoil within the coalition that resulted in the termination of the populist experience. If that wasn’t enough, another turn of events led to the formation of a government shared by the M5S and the PD, two life-long enemies that however shared similar positions on the political space regarding environmental, economic, and socio-cultural issues.

So overall, it seems like Italy has lost its stability, but it has yet to get it back (Chiaramonte and Emanuele, 2019). As it has already been shown, following the 2018 general election, the Italian party system is still waiting for a re-structuring of its patterns of cooperation and competition. The post-electoral events witnessed the formation of two coalitional governments made up by political forces that considered each other fierce enemies not long-time before, and after that, the formation of

a government of national unity chaired by the former president of the European Central Bank (ECB) Mario Draghi. The new government does not include Fratelli d'Italia (FdI), the heir of the MSI, a post-fascist party active during the First Republic. It is the rise of the party led by Giorgia Meloni that is eye-catching and explanatory of the great fluidity of voters' alignments: after winning 4% of the popular vote at the 2018 general election, according to the opinion polls it is now the second Italian party (20%) (You Trend, 2021) just after the League. The strengthening of the two radical right-wing parties, and the fact that a 'challenger' is occupying the center of the political space are deeply affecting the overall level of polarization of the Italian party system and enhance its insecurity. Higher polarization is usually associated with lower congruence between the median voter and government's policy directions (Tronconi, 2020). Moreover, the radicalization of a political discourse characterized by the reciprocal de-legitimation among the main parties may lead to hard feelings and distrust towards democratic institutions of the ones excluded from government, together with their supporters. Should this ongoing process of de-construction keep going, it may hinder the already shaky relationship between citizens and élite, between citizens and politics, therefore affecting the quality of the democratic process.

1.2 A process of 'region-centered presidentialization' at regional level

Regional elections have for long been described as 'second-order elections', that is elections of lesser importance compared to the ones deciding the political balances at national level. At most, they have been regarded as a 'thermometer' for detecting the consensus of parties at the government and the strength of the ones at the opposition (Reif and Schmitt, 1980). However, in an increasingly de-structuring national party system, it is important to detect how the regional counterparts are responding to this process, and thus, if they are following the same tumultuous path, or if new autonomous tendencies are emerging rendering the regional political competition more 'region-centered' (Bolgherini and Grimaldi, 2017).

The picture that emerges analyzing the last regional cycle - that is the one concerning the regional elections held in 2013-15 and the ones that took place in 2017-20 - is one of overall territorial instability and fragmentation (Tronconi, 2015; 2020), mirroring the path undertaken by the national party system. Moreover, signs of "increasing 'insulation' of the regional dimension of politics" (Vampa, 2021) have appeared, so much that it can be said that "regional elections now clearly follow a logic of their own" (Vampa, 2021:2).

First, it is important to evaluate the long-term trend affecting the electoral participation in regional elections, that is hindering the legitimization of the regional institutions. After reaching an all-time-low in the electoral cycle 2013-15 (58.8%), electoral turnout in 2020 put a halt to the historical downward trend (58.5%) (Figure 1.4); however, this result could not hide the chronic divide felt by citizens in their relationship with regional institutions. If, indeed, at the end of the twentieth century regions were perceived as institutions capable of reducing the gap between the state, politics, and citizens, making the latter more involved in policy decisions, the uncompleted process of federalization and the scandals hitting the regional political class have dampened any enthusiasm (Tronconi, 2015). Another important factor explaining the declining trend of participation is given by the increasingly personalistic nature of voting behavior, stripped by feelings of deep belonging and identification. The voters who cast a vote nowadays - and they are in general terms becoming fewer and fewer - choose increasingly to reward an individual candidate, or leader, rather than being mobilized by a party symbol (Fabrizio and Feltrin, 2007).

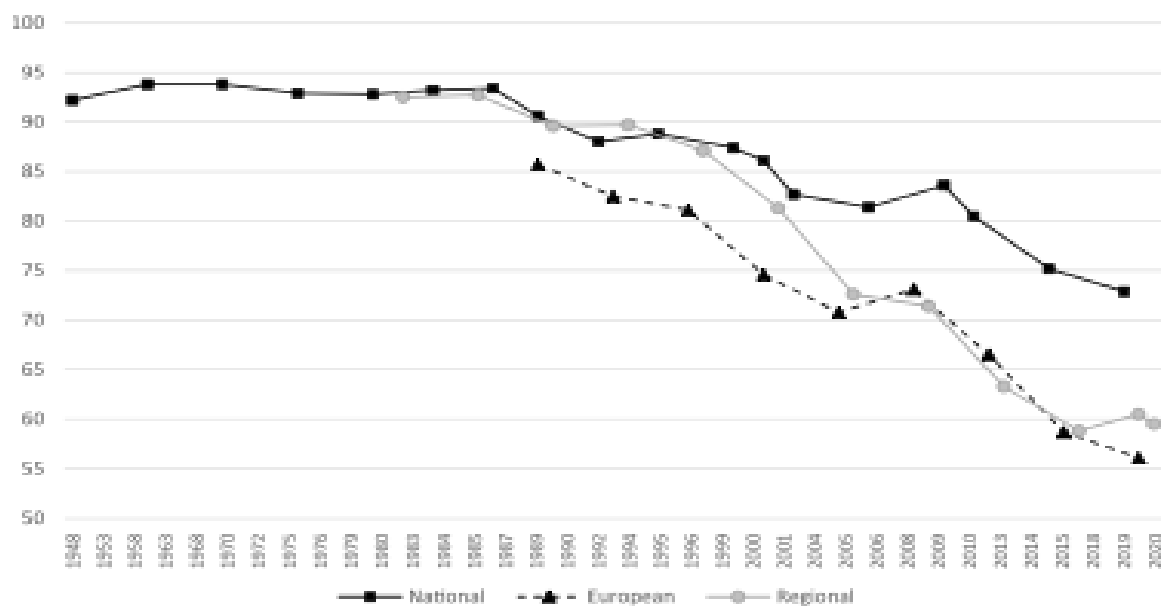


Figure 1.4. Participation in regional, European, and general elections in Italy (1948-2020).

Source: Tronconi (2020: 8).

By analyzing the systemic dimension of the last two rounds of regional elections, they can be regarded as having produced two very different patterns. The 2013-15 electoral cycle has been described by Tronconi (2015: 553) as a turning point for regional party systems, “paralleling the earthquake of the 2013 general election”. Indeed, as happened at the national level, the ‘fragmented bipolarism’ characterizing the Second Republic was replaced by a multipolar competition, given the territorial consolidation of the M5S. The 2020 regional elections, instead, witnessed a small reversal

trend towards a bipolar pattern of competition (Tronconi, 2020), featuring at the center of the political stage the center-right (led by the League of Salvini) and center-left coalitions. This is the consequence of the constant erosion of electoral support by M5S, spurred both by the so called ‘cost of governing’ that seems to have damaged it only, but also because of the movement persistent failure in taking roots and organize itself at sub-national level.

Few important aspects, however, are shared between these two electoral cycles. First, it can be highlighted a trend towards increasing weight of the peripheral branches of parties and local leaders, mostly paralleling the process of decentralization that is going on in Italy the last few decades (Passarelli, 2012). Parties’ central offices are facing growing difficulties in keeping under control local dynamics and the ‘ballot structure’: indeed, it can be spotted an increasingly autonomous process of candidate selection at the local level (Vampa, 2021). This stands in stark contrast with the traditional centrality of national organs during the First Republic, which controlled large quotas of candidates’ selections (Bille, 2001). Let’s, for example, think at the candidacy of the incumbent president of Veneto Luca Zaia (LN) in 2015, which was opposed by the mayor of Verona, Luca Tosi, himself member of the Northern League (this was still its name at the time) who decided to run for the regional presidency and was finally expelled by the party; or, perhaps, the case of the center-left coalition’s candidate in Campania, Vincenzo De Luca, that won a primary election in 2015 strongly opposed by the national leadership (Tronconi, 2015). This phenomenon can even be considered ‘endemic’ at municipality level. One prominent example is the one concerning the current mayor of Palermo Leoluca Orlando: following the defeat of the establishment favorite Rita Borsellino at the center-left primaries for the 2012 local election in Palermo, Orlando - who previously endorsed her - announced his candidacy for mayor supported by a radical left coalition with only 45 days left before the election, upsetting the leadership of the progressive area (Emanuele, 2013a).

Another crucial aspect that characterized both the elections was the increasing trend of fragmentation. By analyzing the 2013-15 regional elections¹, Bolgherini and Grimaldi (2017) recorded high values for both the total number of lists (TL) and the effective number of parties (Eff N²). TL in 2013-15 started increasing again (16.4) after a long-lasting downward trend that began after the peak reached in 2000 (17.5). The Eff N reached is highest value (6.78) since 2000 (6.99). The same pattern can be detected when looking at the 2020 regional elections, where the effective number of ‘parliamentary parties’ increased in almost all regions, except for Veneto and Puglia (Table

¹ These figures refer to all 15 Italian Ordinary Statute Regions.

² The effective number of parties is a concept introduced by Laasko and Taagepera (1979) to count the number of political parties in a country’s party system, by weighting parties by their relative strength. The formula is: $N = \frac{1}{\sum_{i=1}^n p_i^2}$

1.1). However, if the growing number of relevant parties in 2015 can be explained by the disappearance of the People of Freedom (PdL) on the right, and the emergence of a new relevant political actor (the M5S), a different phenomenon seems to have triggered the rampant fragmentation in 2020: the proliferation of local and presidential lists accompanied by a growing importance of regional presidents and individual candidates³ (Vampa, 2021). Non-partisan lists increased from 15 in 2010, 37 in 2014/15, to 59 in 2020⁴, while their overall share of seats in the assemblies grew by 7%. Among them, presidential lists represent a very important feature of this election. All elected presidents, indeed, enjoyed the support of at least one presidential list. Moreover, in some cases, presidential lists outweighed traditional parties in electoral support. One example of this is Luca Zaia's personal list (Zaia Presidente): already present in 2015 when it outweighed the list presented by the League, in 2020 the gap between the two widened from 5% to 28%. It grew so much that Zaia no longer needed the vote of the League to win the election. Another example is the one regarding the president of Liguria Giovanni Toti, who thanks to its personal list (Cambiamo con Toti Presidente) became the largest group in the center-right coalition. The remarkable performance of presidential lists explains the fact that today Salvini's League is stronger in the red regions rather than in Veneto (*Ibidem*).

This development can also be detected when looking at individual candidates for the regional assemblies. If the phenomenon of the so called 'Lords of Preferences' - those candidates able to gather a big share of preferential votes irrespective of the party label they represent and the type of election (De Luca, 2001) - was already documented in Southern Italy, both northern and central regions witnessed the appearance of candidates with significant personal support. Let's think about the case of Elena Ethel Schlein (Emilia-Romagna Coraggiosa Ecologista Progressista), elected in the regional council Emilia-Romagna with 15,975 votes collected in the electoral district of Bologna only (amounting to the 3.12% of the total list votes), or the example of Roberto Marcato (Lega Salvini) that with 11,660 votes (2.87%) turned out to be the most voted candidate for the position of regional councilor in the electoral district of Padova (Veneto).

³ An increase in the significance of presidential lists was also visible in 2015, however this trend became clear-cut in 2020.

⁴ These figures refer to 8 Italian Ordinary Statute Regions: Liguria, Veneto, Tuscany, Marche, Campania, Puglia, Emilia-Romagna, Calabria.

Table 1.1. Representation in eight ordinary statute regions

	A					B			C
	Main parties and groups - % of seats won								
	PD	M5s	FI	League	FdI	Other parties	Local lists	Fragmentation (ENPP)	Disproportionality
Liguria	19.4 (-6.4)	6.5 (-12.9)	3.2 (-16.2)	19.4 (-3.2)	9.7 (+6.5)	0 (-9.7)	41.9 (+41.9)	5.6 (+0.6)	4.9 (-2)
Veneto	13.7 (-3.9)	0 (-9.8)	3.9 (-2)	19.6 (-2)	9.8 (+7.8)	2 (+2)	51 (+7.9)	3.4 (-2.7)	3.7 (-0.3)
Tuscany	56.1 (-4.9)	4.9 (-7.3)	2.4 (-2.5)	22 (+7.4)	9.8 (+7.4)	4.9 (=)	0 (=)	2.6 (+0.2)	16 (+4.8)
Marche	25.8 (-25.8)	6.5 (-9.6)	6.5 (=)	25.8 (+16.1)	25.8 (+22.6)	3.2 (-3.3)	6.5 (=)	4.7 (+1.5)	6.8 (-5.9)
Campania	17.6 (-13.8)	13.7 (=)	5.9 (-9.8)	5.9 (+5.9)	7.8 (+3.9)	29.4 (+15.7)	19.6 (-2)	10.8 (+4.5)	3.9 (-6.4)
Apulia	33.3 (+5.8)	9.8 (-3.9)	7.8 (-2)	7.8 (+7.8)	13.7 (+13.7)	0 (-31.4)	27.5 (+9.9)	5.6 (-1.2)	13.6 (+6.6)
Emilia-Romagna	46 (-14)	4 (-6)	2 (-2)	30 (+12)	6 (+4)	2 (-4)	10 (+10)	3.2 (+0.7)	8.5 (-3.5)
Calabria	16.1 (-12.9)	0 (=)	19.4 (=)	12.9 (+12.9)	12.9 (+12.9)	12.9 (-9.7)	25.8 (-3.2)	7.7 (+2.3)	8.7 (-1.1)
Total	29.1 (-8.6)	5.9 (-6)	5.9 (-4.2)	17.5 (+6.8)	11.3 (+9.2)	7.1 (-4.8)	23.1 (+7.4)		

Notes: difference with previous election in brackets.

Source: Vampa (2021).

To sum up, these elections showed how important regional leaders and individual candidates can be in influencing the electoral outcome, and therefore be key players in intercepting the popular vote. All this means that, rather from being regarded as of ‘second-order’ nature, regional elections seem to have acquired a logic of their own. This led Vampa (*Ibidem*) to describe the regional party system as a ‘territorially fragmented bipolarism’ in which competition between coalitions is region-specific, detached from any national logic. Regional political competition has become more ‘region-centered’ (Bolgherini and Grimaldi, 2017), with region-specific factors increasingly more important

than national leaders and parties. Let's think about the regional election of January 2020 in Emilia-Romagna, where Matteo Salvini tried to nationalize the political competition, making of this vote a regional referendum on the performance of the national government led by PD and M5S. This strategy, however, was ineffective since the personality of the incumbent regional president Bonaccini, plus its record of '*buon governo*' in the region played as crucial assets for the win of the center-left coalition (*Ibidem*). In a context of increasing political turmoil, weakening party organizations and allegiances, and socio-economic crisis due to implications of the Covid-19 pandemic, what can be expected is a further acceleration of territorial fragmentation and of the presidentialization process. A process that may bring about the shift from a party-centered regional system, towards a candidate-centered one.

1.3. From 'party identification' to vote's individualization

These long-term de-structuring processes must be seen in connection with another crucial development: the decline of party organizations in Western Europe (Katz and Mair, 1994; Emanuele and Marino, 2016). Van Biezen *et al.* (2012), for example, showed how since the turn of the century, most European parties have experienced a decline in their membership levels, both relative to the size of the electorate and in absolute terms. Italy, among the others, have lost about 1.5 million members compared to the First Republic (*Ibidem*). This organizational ebb can also be observed at the local level, where, as it has already been mentioned, parties' central offices are experiencing hard times in keeping regional centrifugal tendencies under control.

In general, it has become clear that most Western European parties have all but abandoned any pretention to be mass organizations (*Ibidem*). Given the very important functions accorded to mass-based parties within democratic institutions, this has been deemed by many as a major threat to the quality of democracy. Almagisti (2016) described parties as 'anchors' that connect broad sections of the citizenship to the democratic institutions, working as central agents of socialization to the codes of modern politics. A party which is strongly institutionalized and territorially organized, can 'encapsulate' the conflicts that run through society and grant mass integration in the political system. Most importantly, mass-based parties are essential actors in the production of 'social capital', thanks to their networks of trust and mutual assistance (both economic and professional).

As noticed by De Sio (2007), parties play additional key functions that give shape to the relationship with citizens. Besides functioning as basic agents in the integration process in democratic

institutions, parties simplify and pool political proposals: single positions on diverse issues are assembled into political platforms. This is crucial as citizens-voters hardly possess the sufficient sophistication, information, and time to deepen every single matter. Moreover, parties carry out an educational and information role, especially when, during the prime age of the mass-based parties, they happened to be the only channel through which large numbers of members with low levels of schooling acquired basic knowledge on politics. Finally, parties have a symbolic function, providing mechanisms of identification and triggering identity feelings in the voters. This function is deeply related with the fact that parties were usually founded to represent a pre-existent social, cultural, or community-based identity, establishing themselves as the genuine political expression of that particular social or cultural group.

Mass-based parties played a very important role in Italian politics. The DC and PCI, which respectively were the expression of the catholic and working world (Diamanti, 2009), could count on millions of members and activists, widespread territorial organizations, and a dense network of collateral associations. What is more, is that both parties were at the very center of full-fledged subcultures - territorially restricted areas characterized by dense organizational networks and collateral associations controlled by the local branches of the party (Trigilia, 1986).

This is to say that the loss in importance of party organizations has been particularly felt in Italy, where mass-based parties played a crucial role in the process of transition from Fascist dictatorship to mass democracy, as well as in the following phase of consolidation (De Sio, 2007). In their seminal book "The Civic Culture", Almond and Verba (1963) analyzed the features of Italian political culture. The authors wanted to determine whether a '*civic culture*' - that is a culture characterized by high levels of trust in the functioning of the political system and in the ability to affect it - could be detected in Italy, and what mechanisms would lead to the maintenance of a democratic regime. What the authors found out was that Italian citizens expressed deep political alienation and distrust towards their own social environment. Moreover, they were characterized by very feeble national pride, strong political factionalism, low levels of political sophistication and widespread apathy towards political obligations such as participation to the national social and political life. In sum, the particularistic nature of the Italian political culture did not seem to be able to sustain a durable and efficient democratic regime.

This view, however, was clearly refuted by the fact that the Italian First Republic was characterized by very high levels of electoral participation, by parties' organizations packed with millions of members and activists, and by vibrant social and political mobilizations. In sum, the lack of civic culture was made up for a process of political integration carried out by the associational network of mass-based parties and by the presence of territorial political subcultures (Biorcio, 2007).

Nonetheless, the transition from mass-based to ‘catch-all’ parties (Kirchheimer, 1966) have caused fundamental changes in the relation between politics and citizens in Western countries. “If mass-based parties were characterized by a tight link with their respective social milieu ,..., in the case of contemporary catch-all parties, the nature of this link can be expected to differ substantially” (Garzia, 2014: 2). The erosion of traditional cleavages made it necessary for parties to adjust their electoral strategies to appeal to a larger section of the electorate, outside of their traditional boundaries. Parties’ platforms and ideologies have therefore become much more flexible, displaying a marked electoral orientation. The overturning of traditional political strategies, together with the process of ‘mediatization’ of politics, have boosted the prominent role of party leaders and candidates, who have now become crucial assets to gather electoral support and win elections (*Ibidem*).

Let’s now discuss the transformations having place at the level of the demand side, that is the voters and their political attitudes and behaviors. In the introduction of their book “*Dall’appartenenza alla scelta*” (From belonging to choice) Bellucci and Segatti (2010) stressed the fact that in modern democracies, socio-psychological models (the ones that outline the role of group identities, party attachment, territory) are increasingly unable to explain voters’ choices. Short-term factors (the ones that focus on emotional and cognitive dynamics) such as issue opinions, leaders’ images and economic performance seem nowadays to matter much more. Already Parisi and Pasquino (1977) noticed how Italian voters of the 1970s were becoming much more autonomous in their political and voting behaviors, outlining a process of “individualization” of the voting choice. In their seminal work, they introduced a typology of voting for which the ‘vote of belonging’ distinguishes itself from an ‘opinion vote’ and a ‘vote of exchange’. The vote of belonging constitutes a re-affirmation of an identification with a party that is in an organic relationship with the group the voter belongs to. This vote is usually expressed by the marginal and peripheral strata of society (industrial and agricultural proletariat); in Italy it is cast by the members of ‘organized communities’, in particular the ones belonging to the territorial political subcultures of the White and Red Zones. The concept of ‘vote of belonging’ has been frequently employed to explain electoral stability and continuity in voting behaviors (Galli, 1966). Indeed, by not representing a choice but a mere statement, this vote is considered non-specific, that is not influenced by the short-term factors characterizing a specific election. The ‘opinion vote’, instead can be regarded as a true choice among the alternative platforms put forward by the parties competing in the election. This vote is usually expressed by the central section of the socio-political system, the one that through its electoral participation asserts its genuine acceptance of the mechanisms and rules of the democratic institutions. This section of the electorate seeks political information by exposing itself to the mainstream channels of communication such as radio, tv, internet and social media; this implies that this type of voter can be influenced by the

electoral campaign and, in general, by the political juncture. The ‘opinion vote’ is thus characterized by high mobility and instability. For Parisi and Pasquino the share of electors that expressed an ‘opinion vote’ was gradually increasing in Italy, while the feelings of belonging to a particular subculture were experiencing a sharp decline (see also Corbetta, Parisi and Schadee, 1988).

To understand the transition towards increasingly autonomous voters’ choices, it is important to refer to the concept of “cognitive mobilization”, introduced by Inglehart (1977). For him, the advent of advanced industrial societies goes hand in hand with an inter-generational change that ultimately leads to an increase in citizens’ political participation. This transformation is due to the rising educational levels and the mass diffusion of political knowledge and abilities in modern Western societies. This is accompanied by a shift in the dominant value system: from a constellation of values that emphasize security and deference to others - the so called ‘post-materialist values - that stress quality of life, individual autonomy and self-realization. This long-term trend is deemed to cause a mutation in the relationship between citizens and politics (Segatti 2007). Indeed, citizens who are more interested and competent in politics will ultimately prefer grassroots participation over forms that are characterized by a hierarchical and inclusive link provided by mass-based parties.

What does also change, therefore, is the relationship between parties and voters. Campbell *et al.* (1960) introduced a very well-known model to explain voters’ allegiances and choices. The so called ‘socio-psychological model’ focused its attention on a fundamental attitude - the ‘party identification’. This was described as a ‘sense of attachment’, a ‘psychological identification’, a ‘deep affective orientation’ that eventually becomes a form of social identity. This kind of identification, that was acquired through processes of political socialization occurring at the level of social groups, was thought to be an antecedent force with respect to more floating variables that influence voting choices, hence basically more stable than the vote itself. In the 1980s Dalton (1984) proposed a new theory to explain the changing nature of this ‘sense of attachment’ towards parties. The theory of ‘partisan dealignment’ points out to the steady decline in long-term bonds stabilizing individual feelings of closeness or even full-fledged identification towards a political party. The abovementioned developments in modern Western societies, wearing away feelings of deference towards political groups and élites, would imply greater individual self-reliance in evaluating the political sphere, and the weakening of ritual forms of attachment.

In Italy, this process is deemed to relate to the profound changes that characterized the Italian society since the 1960s. The effects of the economic *boom*, the modernization of social life, the expansion of consumerist behaviors and mass culture undermined traditional values and cultures (Biorcio, 2007). Moreover, the growing social and geographical mobility loosened the community and subcultural ties (De Sio, 2007). As outlined by Parisi and Pasquino (1977), the process of

secularization meant the crisis of the White Subculture in the North-East, undermining the catholic identity and delegitimizing the mediating role of the DC as fundamental linkage with the political system at the central level. In this sense we can understand the argument for which the ‘opinion vote’ is replacing voting choices based on a deep identification with a political group, given the breaking-up of that relational fabric that represented the socio-cultural background of the ‘vote of belonging’.

As shown by Table 1.2 (Biorcio, 2010), levels of party identification in Italy - measured as the level of proximity stated by the interviewer towards one party within the national political space - have suffered a sharp decline starting from the 1970s. The increasing delegitimization experienced by parties in the last stages of the First Republic meant growing dissatisfaction by Italian voters. Feelings such as anger and disbelief replaced the ones expressing trust and belonging. Many citizens who before looked at politics with apathy and boredom now started now to stare at parties with disgust (Biorcio, 2007). This can explain the slowing down in the downward trend concerning the share of who is ‘really close’ or ‘quite close’ to parties (second column) in the 1990s: the collapse of traditional mass-based parties and the emergence of ‘anti-politics’, which embodied the sentiments of fierce protest towards the establishment, have indeed re-awakened - at least partially - the interest of citizens towards party politics.

Table 1.2. Individuals close to an Italian party between 1968 and 2008.

Year	Close: very much or somewhat	Close but only a sympathizer	Not close	N
1968	77.8	5.4	16.8	2500
1972	64.5	7.0	28.5	1841
1975	56.8	12.0	31.2	1657
1990	25.8	23.5	50.7	1499
2001	33.5	21.3	45.2	3209
2006	38.5	16.9	44.6	4016
2008	23.3	27.9	48.8	2990

Source: Biorcio (2010: 14).

Nonetheless, as already mentioned, the Italian party system is nowadays experiencing a process of de-institutionalization. High electoral volatility and fragmentation are symptoms of the decline of stable and durable voters' allegiances towards political parties. Vote shifts, as well as opinion polls, indicate that today is very hard to talk about 'party identification' and deep 'sense of attachment'. Parties do not resemble anymore mass-based organizations with extensive networks of local branches and collateral associations, but rather élites' devices specially designed to maximize electoral support.

Accordingly, the ongoing de-structuring process may serve as the basis for the argument - underlying this elaborate - that some other elements are acting as bonding agents, as 'anchor' keeping citizens in some way connected to the political institutions. This element is the 'personal vote', which is going to be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

DECENTRALIZED PERSONALIZATION AND PERSONAL VOTE. A FOCUS ON THE ITALIAN CASE

Western Europe is nowadays experiencing a pronounced process of ‘leaderization’ (Garzia, 2014). The image of the leader, its personal traits, and its communicative skills are ever more prominent. Italy, in particular, has witnessed a deep transformation in the relationship between voters and individual candidates (Garzia and Viotti, 2012). The demise of the First Republic has meant the rise of new leaders able to attract huge consensus on their persona. However, personalization hasn’t only affected leaders and their prominence. Individual candidates (MPs, candidates for regional and local assemblies), as well, are now considered as important as parties in steering voters’ attitudes and behaviors (De Luca, 2001; Emanuele and Marino, 2016). Decentralized personalization (Balmas *et al.*, 2014) is thus a process that directly impacts on Italian politics. Most importantly, it closely relates with the growing importance of personal vote - that is that part of the candidates’ electoral support that stems from his/her personal traits, qualities, and activities (Cain *et al.*, 1987). Personal vote, as studied through its main indicator - preferential voting - presents some peculiarities when related to the Italian case. Its determinants are here studied through the analysis of classic and more recent literature on the subject.

2.1 Centralized and Decentralized Personalization

In the previous chapter, it was pointed out how the Italian party system, both at national and regional level, is experiencing a process characterized by growing instability and discontinuity in the political supply. Sanchez (2009: 490) described ‘party non-systems’ as those systems populated by “electoral vehicles par excellence with little claim to veritable societal roots or the representation of groups. In such contexts, party labels count less than personalities , . . . , non-systems are the ultimate expression of party universes shaped ‘from above’ - that is, shaped by political élites independently of existing ethnic, cultural or socio-economic cleavages in society. The main political battle lines (the issues emphasized) are arbitrarily chosen and redrawn by political entrepreneurs from election to election”. Far from being mere ‘pre’- or ‘proto-parties’, Italian political groups have certainly lost their traditional entrenchment in society (see Chapter One) by forsaking their claims to mass-based organizations and transforming themselves in groups primarily focused on enlarging their electoral support. Their ideological background has been in a certain sense watered down at the same time as traditional cleavages have lost their role as driving forces of voters’ attitudes and allegiances.

The process of ‘ideological flexibilization’, which is effectively summarized by the concept of ‘catch-all’ party (Kirchheimer, 1966), was linked by many authors (Karvonen, 2010; Garzia, 2014) to the rise of personalized politics. The personalization of politics is defined as the process in which “the political weight of the individual actor in the political process increases over time, while the centrality of the political group (i.e. the political party) declines” (Rahat and Sheafer, 2007: 65).

The literature has often dealt with one type of political personalization, that is ‘centralized personalization’ (Balmas *et al.*, 2014). Centralized personalization refers to an upward flow of power from the group (e.g. political party, cabinet) to a single leader (e.g. party leader, prime minister, president). An example of this type of personalization is ‘presidentialization’, that is a process “by which regimes are becoming more presidential in their actual practice without, in most cases, changing their formal structure, that is, their regime-type” (Poguntke and Webb, 2005: 1). Cognate with centralized personalization are the concepts of ‘vertical personalization’ (or ‘leaderization’) and ‘macro-personalization’ (Mazzoleni *et al.*, 2010). Vertical personalization refers to the strengthening of leaders as compared to the party organization (Calise, 2004), while macro-personalization mainly concerns the relation between voters and candidates. More specifically, the latter refers to the process for which candidates who aspire to fill top positions in political institutions gather, thanks to the strategic use of mass-media, a personal and autonomous support relative to the party or coalition they belong to, so to establish a plebiscitary relationship with the electorate Bolgherini and Musella (2006: 233).

In addition to centralized personalization, we have the process of ‘decentralized personalization’ (Balmas *et al.*, 2014). Largely neglected by the literature, decentralized

personalization implies the downward flow of power from the group to individual politicians who are not party or executive leaders (e.g. candidates, members of parliament, members of regional or local councils, ministers). The literature (Mazzoleni *et al.*, 2010) has also referred to this process as ‘horizontal personalization’ - that is, a dynamic for which personalization takes on a widespread, diffuse character, not centered on few individuals such as party or government leaders - and ‘micro-personalization’ - the diffusion of direct personal relationships between voters and candidates (one-to-one).

This elaborate will mainly deal with the implications of decentralized personalization rather than centralized personalization, as our focus concerns the growing role of personal vote, cultivated by candidates for the regional council, in affecting the electoral competition and electoral outcomes in turbulent regional party-systems. Nonetheless, the two phenomena should not be considered as two mutually exclusive processes; they can exist simultaneously. As leaders gain more personal power (centralized personalization), they may find it harder running the party they lead. This stems from the concurrent increase in centrality and independence of other individual members of the group (decentralized personalization) (Balmas *et al.*, 2014). The common origin of these two phenomena, as well as its pervasiveness, thus suggests us to briefly overview the literature on centralized personalization, with a specific focus on the Italian case.

In his analysis of centralized personalization, Garzia (2014) stressed that the decline of traditional cleavages in established democracies and the following changes in voters’ behavior, fostered a mutation in parties’ strategies. To keep pace with the shifting in voters’ demands, mass-based parties have restructured their electoral offer and platform, making their ideology more flexible and capable of attracting larger and more diverse sections of the electorate. Paralleling - and fostering - this process, the modernization in the forms of political communication implied a growing centrality of television. The mass use of a visual and personality-based medium of communication has significantly contributed to emphasize the role of political leaders as primary political objects, at the expense of parties. This transformation has been described by Manin (1997) as a shift from ‘party democracy’ to ‘audience democracy’, for which people now vote differently from one election to another depending on the specific candidates competing for their vote, independently from the party supporting them. New forms of communication confer salience and vividness only to those candidates possessing specific personal qualities: successful candidates are not anymore party activists and bureaucrats as in party democracy, but ‘media figures’. In sum, challenged by the decline of traditional cleavage politics and by the increasing mediatization of political communication, parties have adjusted to the renewed context. By putting in the background their ideological platforms and

labels, they staked everything on the image of their prominent political leaders that have nowadays become the most valuable means to gather electoral support.

The collapse of ‘partitocracy’ in the 1990s due to the scandals of *Tangentopoli*, together with the definitive decline of traditional voters’ allegiances towards the parties that featured the First Republic, laid the foundations for the personalization of political competition in Italy. Italy can be regarded, indeed, as a ‘prototype’ of a strongly personalized political system (Garzia and Viotti, 2012). This assumption stems from the fact that, during the transition towards the Second Republic in the 1990s, all three conditions put forward by McAllister (2007)⁵ concerning the centralized personalization of politics took place: (i) the electoral reform of 1993 implied a shift from a proportional to a mixed electoral system (75% of the seats assigned through a first-past the post (FPTP) system); (ii) the growing centrality of television as a channel of political communication, due to the emergence of Silvio Berlusconi; (iii) the collapse of the First Republic (*Ibidem*). The introduction of a markedly majoritarian system produced the conditions for the entrance of popular social figures in the political system. The most notorious one, Silvio Berlusconi - well known for its media empire (owner of 3 out of 6 national television networks) and for being the owner of one of the most famous Italian football teams (AC Milan) - imparted a significant push to the process of leaderization in Italy. He indeed founded a ‘personal party’ (Calise, 2000), FI, of which he was (and still is) the ultimate leader. Through the party organization and his team of media and marketing experts, Berlusconi have conducted strongly personalized electoral campaigns, trying to link voters’ choice to a comprehensive evaluation of his persona. The success of Berlusconi in targeting the floating voters during national electoral campaigns was paralleled by the struggles center-left parties - marked by a strong tradition of mass-based politics - encountered in responding to the evolution of the electoral market and adapting to the new communication strategy employed by FI (Diamanti, 2009). Nonetheless, in the late 2000s we witnessed a definitive ‘systemic push’ towards presidentialization. The PD and the PdL (Il Popolo della Libertà) - created respectively in 2007 and 2009 through the combination of different political forces - organize(d) themselves around the image of their leaders, rather than by expressing a specific social identity (*Ibidem*).

What is more, Garzia (2014: 19) hypothesized - and then showed - that, “as a result of the process of party transformation, partisan loyalties have shifted from a mere reflection of previous socio-ideological identities to the result of individual attitudes towards more visible partisan objects

⁵ These conditions were summarised by McAllister (2007) in: (i) a series of institutional reforms that strengthen the role of the head of the government; (ii) the mediatization of politics; (iii) the gradual weakening of traditional feelings of partisanship.

- and, in particular, their leaders". The traditional socio-psychological model (Campbell *et al.*, 1960), which placed party identities as a cause, and not a consequence, of voters' short-term attitudes (Garzia and Viotti, 2012), might have been replaced by the so-called 'attitudinal model' (Bartle and Bellucci, 2009), for which party identification now takes a different location in the famous "funnel of causality", by being considered a proper political variable influencing, but at the same time being influenced, by short-term political attitudes. This is to say that partisan attachments have become increasingly connected to voters' opinions towards party leaders, and that parties' appeal is more than ever affected by leaders' image.

The centrality of Italian political leaders in affecting feelings of party identification was tested by Garzia and Viotti (2012), who focused on five general elections taking place during the Second Republic. The author demonstrated that leaders' evaluations explained much of the feelings of closeness towards political parties in Italy (data not shown). This was true especially for parties characterized by a strong leadership (FI and LN). The most striking results, however, regard those that in the past were considered fully-fledged mass-based parties. For both the Christian-democratic parties (UDC) and the post-communist ones (PCI, PDS, DS), leaders' evaluations represented the main determinant of party identification.

More interestingly, personalization of politics seems to have resulted in an even more relevant change at the behavioral level: leaders' figures are becoming increasingly important in individuals' voting calculus. Indeed, it has been shown how leader evaluations display a clear dominance over partisanship and other attitudinal variables in terms of impact on voting choices (Garzia, 2014). This means that parties' decision to focus their electoral strategies on leaders' figure has had a clear implication in the fact that, nowadays, party leaders have become a crucial criterion of judgement for voters' decisions.

This ultimately implies that leaders' personal traits and reputation have a profound effect on the outcome of parliamentary elections. Through a counterfactual analysis on "how would the election outcome have turned out had the winning parties' leaders been perceived to possess the various personal qualities in the same proportions as their unsuccessful counterparts", Garzia (*Ibidem*) showed that voters' evaluations of party leaders did exert a discernible impact on the outcome of several parliamentary elections held in the past 30 years in Britain, Netherlands, and Germany.

In a worthwhile paper centered on the Italian political system, Sani (2010) divided voting choices in three categories: the 'party vote' is the vote casted by those who indicate party as their main point of reference; the 'area vote' is casted by those who feel close to one of the coalitions running for election or decide based on their self-proclaimed position on the right-left axis; the 'leader

vote' is the vote casted by those who do not feel sentiments of identification towards the parties nor position themselves on the right-left axis, but rather use as focal point the party/coalition leaders. Almost 90% (Itanes, 2006) of the Italian voters declared to look at parties or coalitions present on the ballot to make a voting choice, while only 10% stated to base their vote on the evaluation of leaders (data not shown). What is also interesting is to know the social and cultural identikit of the ones casting a vote based on the images and evaluations of the protagonists of the Italian political system. The data showed that the 'party vote' was more frequent among those more interested in politics, who discuss about it more frequently, who feel to have a higher degree of 'political efficacy'; while whose vote is linked to the evaluation of a party or coalition leader can be considered a 'marginal voter' (*Ibidem*), that is one that shows low levels of participation, interest, and feelings of being politically effective. In sum, the survey data concerning the Italian political system prior to the beginning of the ongoing process of de-institutionalization (see Chapter One) indicated that, at the time, parties still held a central position in the voting calculus of Italian voters. This means that the process of centralized personalization wasn't as widespread as in the other Western European parliamentary democracies studied by Garzia (2014). While both the institutional and media dimensions were heavily affected by this process, based on these results we cannot discern a clear behavioral personalization of voters' choices⁶.

What has been discussed until now, however, is just one of the several facets of political personalization. This process does not exclusively affect leaders. Rather, we can also imagine a sort of 'personalization from below' (Legnante, 1999), for which not only leaders, but also individual candidates at national or even at local level, are getting more important as drivers of voting choices and as determinants of electoral outcomes. It appears, indeed, as individual candidates' personal traits and characteristics "have acquired increasing importance in the party-voter relationship and candidates' evaluation is a noticeable vote choice's determinant" (Emanuele and Marino, 2016: 3).

As in the case of centralized personalization, the decentralized type concerns (and it is also affected by) different dimensions (Rahat and Sheaffer, 2007; Balmas *et al.*, 2014) such as the institutional one (e.g. party, cabinet), the media system, and the behavioral level. As regards the first dimension, Bille (2001) outlined the greater role played by individual party members in the candidate selection processes in the 1990s as compared to the 1960s in Western Europe. This democratization (and decentralization) process - it has been noted (Balmas *et al.*, 2014) - ultimately implies personalization, as the personal popular mandate granted to those selected renders the intra-party competition for those posts more personal.

⁶ Rahat and Sheaffer (2007) constructed a typology of political personalization, differentiating between institutional, media and behavioural (concerning politicians and/or voters) personalization.

Most importantly, Karvonen (2010) noted how in some Western European electoral systems (Austria, Belgium, Netherlands, and Sweden), the weight of individual candidates has indeed grown, as their election increasingly depends on their personal reputations. This deeply relates to the possibility of casting a preferential vote, which in turn increases the incentives to cultivate a personalized support (we will analyze this in more details in Section 2.2). Indeed, the same author (2009: 28) outlined that “in countries where the possibility of choosing between individual candidates has existed for a long time, the relative importance of individual candidates seems to have increased”.

Moreover, the literature has highlighted the growing prominence of individual candidates in the (paid and un-paid) medias. Medias’ role, indeed, cannot be underestimated when talking about decentralized personalization (Mazzoleni *et al.*, 2010). As national television tends to focus mainly on national politics and leaders, the widening of media’s density at regional and local level (local newspapers, local TVs, radio, and websites) have meant that, while parties’ channels of communication have weakened, minor and local politicians have gained visibility. On this subject, Karvonen (2009) also noticed how in Finland the past fifty years have featured a rise in the share of parliamentary campaign advertisements focusing on individual candidates, rather than parties.

Finally, the author (*Ibidem*) also outlined another important change taking place at behavioral level, and now concerning the demand side. By studying countries with semi-open list electoral systems, the author found that - in some of them - voters tend nowadays to vote more on the basis of an evaluation of individual candidates rather than on the basis of an evaluation of parties.

As for the case of Italy, the literature has noted that some of these processes are indeed in motion in the country. Bille (2001) noticed how, compared to other Western European democracies - at least until the demise of the First Republic - the country did not witness a decentralization of candidate selection processes, which firmly remained under the control of national organs, partially hindering a flow of power towards individual politicians. Nonetheless, soon after the end of WWII, Italian parties - principally in the South - provided themselves with an internal structure that made constant use of prominent local party members for mobilization purposes. Belloni, Caciagli and Mattina (1979: 264) referred to these figures as the ‘*capi-tessera*’ (also known as ‘*padroni delle tessere*’). They represented the membership heads of mass clientele parties in the South during the First Republic, “whose main task is to stimulate - artificially - enrolment in the party and, subsequently, to assure that the new members “give” their support to the appropriate group of faction - i.e., the one to which the *capi-tessera* belong”.

If on the hand the rise of the Second Republic implied power flowing towards party and cabinet heads, on the other hand the weakness of party formations prompted a more marked process of decentralized personalization. This has ultimately enhanced - especially in the South - the role of

the so-called ‘Lords of Preferences’, who have functionally replaced the ‘*capi-tessera*’, and that may be described as those candidates able to obtain a large share of personal support, regardless of the party they run with and the type of election (De Luca, 2001, 2011; Napoli, 2005). These individual politicians have become largely dependent for (re-)election on their own personal reputation, as opposed to the reputation of their parties. As noticed by Emanuele and Marino (2016) in the case of Reggio Calabria (Calabria), they are even capable of shaping the electoral competition and the final electoral outcome.

Combining the different dimensions, we can argue that the increased weight of individual candidates (other than party or executive leaders) at the expenses of their party or cabinet, paralleled - and fostered - by their growing exposure on the media, as well as by institutional and behavioral modifications that have enhanced their role, has rendered their personal reputations an invaluable resource in order to be (re-)elected. Indeed, as the party loses its centrality, as well as its identification power on voters, candidates become more dependent on their ability to cultivate a personalized support, as well as on their ability to deliver benefits to their constituencies. Accordingly, the literature concerning the incentives and strategies employed for the cultivation of a personal vote will be the focus of the next section. Moreover, concerning the demand side, we are going to explore the possible determinants of such a voting behavior in Italy through the analysis of personal vote’s main indicator - preferential voting.

2.2 Personal vote, preferential voting, and their determinants

Personalization of politics can be defined as the process in which “the political weight of the individual actor in the political process increases over time, while the centrality of the political group (i.e. the political party) declines” (Rahat and Sheafer, 2007: 65). In terms of voting behavior, this implies that when casting a vote, citizens will increasingly look at candidates, together with their personality traits, their competence, and reputation, or more simply they will make an individual or ‘communitarian’ evaluation on the material or immaterial benefit the election of this candidate will entail. This evaluation does not concern only the most prominent figures in the political system, such as party or coalition leaders competing in an election. The concept of decentralized personalization refers to a process that encompasses individual politicians other than the ones competing for leading posts in political institutions or groups (Balmas *et al.*, 2014). National candidates, as well as regional and local candidates running for a seat in national and local councils, would thus be affected by a

change in the relationship between politics and voters that make them more visible as compared to the party label they are part of. These may include MPs competing for a seat in Parliament in single-member districts through a FPTP system or in Open List Proportional Systems (OLPSs), as well as candidates for the regional or local councils who need a large number of preferential votes to be elected. This would ultimately imply that the portion of a candidate's electoral support that originates in the candidates' personal qualities, qualifications, activities, and record (Cain *et al.*, 1987) - namely the 'personal vote' - becomes more prominent and valuable in a context characterized by an increasing personalization of politics.

Personal vote is by definition "a non-partisan vote rooted in individual candidates rather than in partisan ideologies and policies" (Zittel, 2017: 668). Scholars of personal vote have tried to distinguish it from the process of personalization of politics. If personalization is interested in studying the voter level and the extent to which candidates affect voting choices, the literature on personal vote focuses primarily on the elite level and strategies incumbent legislators employ to build personalized support (*Ibidem*). However, both debates are interrelated. Personal vote-seeking would not make much sense in electoral markets where the electorate is strongly partisan and homogeneous. Instead, heterogeneous electorates comprising many independent and 'floating voters' provide greater incentives to cultivate a personalized support.

The first studies on the subject focused on the United States (Cain *et al.*, 1987) and they conceptualized personal vote as the share of electoral support resulting from *constituency work* performed by incumbents and their staff (Avelino, Izumi, and Russo, 2020). Trying to explain the occurrence of high and growing rates of re-election of MPs, the literature has stressed three distinct behavioral styles legislators may employ to cultivate personal vote. These are position taking, credit claiming and advertising (Zittel, 2017). Position taking implies legislators making 'judgmental statements' on those policy matters that are popular among his/her geographic constituency. This presupposes acting in legislative contexts, such as while taking roll call votes. Credit claiming sees legislators seeking to generate the belief among local constituents that he/she is the ultimate responsible for desired policy outcomes. This could mean seeking favorable assignments in committees where to foster the adoption of particularistic policies directed to personal districts (pork-barrel legislation). Advertising strategies imply legislators making themselves known and visible among constituents in order to create a favorable image. This may be pursued by transforming the incumbent into a brand name to increase name recall and recognition, and particular qualities such as experience and sincerity are usually view in positive way. Frequent direct constituency contacts and communication via posters, newsletters or social media are also deemed crucial.

Another stream of literature focused on the personal qualities that are considered important in cultivating personal votes. In particular, the localness of incumbents has been regarded as a determinant for re-election. Shugart *et al.* (2005) suggested that two characteristics appear to be important personal vote earning attributes (PVEA): being born and/or raised in the constituency and having previously served in public office in that territory. Indeed, the place of birth would work as a signaling mechanism that the candidate understands local issues, as well as having previous experience in local offices show that the candidate knows how things work in the community. Gender and race are also regarded as important characteristics to understand patterns of re-election. These are deemed as risky personal traits with regard to personal vote-seeking, since the electorate would potentially be divided over their desirability (Valdini, 2012).

A third branch of literature related to personal vote-seeking focused not on the behavioral patterns of incumbents, but on the motivations fostering such behavior. Among others, Carey and Shugart (1995) analyzed electoral formulas as potential incentives to cultivate a personal vote and thus campaign on a personal rather than party reputation. Personal vote was defined by them as the extent to which one's personal reputation matters. By distributing a precious commodity - legislative seats - among candidates, electoral formulas affect the extent to which individual politicians can benefit by developing personal reputation distinct from the one of their parties. The model proposed by Carey and Shugart is based on four variables featuring all electoral systems: ballot control, vote pooling, types of votes and district magnitude.

'Ballot control' measures the degree of control party leaders exercise over access to their party's list. This variable refers both to the control individual politicians possess over party endorsement, and the control over candidate ranking on the ballot. Greater the authority the party exercises over ballots, smaller will be the autonomy of individual politicians - and thus minimized will be the incentive to cultivate a personal reputation. Analyzing the importance of parties' characteristics, Samuels (1999: 487) argued that "a candidate's adoption of an individualistic or collective strategy depends on centralized or decentralized nomination control in his party (ballot control), his party's alliance options, and his access to and control over funding and patronage". If nominations are centrally controlled, all candidates owe their political careers to the party, thus they will be more willing to follow the political line dictated by the party leadership. On the other hand, if ballot control is decentralized, individual candidates will feel freer from party control. Moreover, whether a party controls campaign finances may also influence personal vote-seeking. A party that centrally controls funds allocated to individual campaigns will possess the lion's share over candidates, whereas individual politicians controlling their own fundraising might be more independent from party influence.

Another variable put forward by Carey and Shugart is ‘vote pooling’. Pooling measures whether votes cast for an individual candidate also contribute to the overall share of votes obtained by the party. The vote could be counted first as a vote for the whole party for the purpose of determining the number of seats allocated to the list (for example, systems such as closed-list, OLPS and multiple-list PR systems); it could be also pooled but across candidates or factions rather than across entire parties (Single Transferable Vote (STV) formula); or no vote pooling may occur at all, and therefore candidates are elected solely on their ability to cultivate personal reputation (Single Non Transferable Vote (SNTV) formula).

The ‘type of vote’ variable, instead, measures the number and types of vote cast. Voters could simply vote for a party list (in this case party reputation matters the most) as in closed-list systems; they could cast more than one vote for individual candidates either within party lists or across parties (split-ticket voting); lastly, each voter could cast one vote, either for a candidate or a party faction (as in SNTV and OLPR), and in this case every candidate competes against each other, and thus personal reputation matters more than party reputation.

Finally, district magnitude’s effect on personal vote-seeking depends on the level of intra-party competition. Indeed, as districts become larger, personal reputation’s importance declines. But this is true only if the co-partisans do not compete with each others for votes and seats. As the number of candidates within the same party list grows, this increases the need for individual candidates to distinguish themselves.

Thirteen possible configurations were founded (*Ibidem*), and the authors argued that proportional flexible list systems (including OLPRs) and preference voting systems provide greater incentives for personal vote-seeking compared with plurality systems. The main factor results being intra-party competition, which is greater under these electoral formulas since voters are allowed to choose between different candidates (Zittel, 2017).

Samuels (1999: 490,491) defined candidate-centric electoral systems those systems that “tend to push candidates towards self-promotion rather than toward promoting the party’s collective identity”. These systems satisfy the following criteria: (i) each voter is presented with the option of casting one or more votes directly for candidates, and may also have the option to cast a list vote; (ii) each electoral district returns more than one member to the assembly (therefore no single-member districts); (iii) if there are no party list, the candidate receive seats according to their electoral support, while if there are party lists, the seats are awarded to the candidates in each list following the number of votes they individually receive. These criteria narrow the field of electoral formulas to the STV system, the SNTV system, and OLPR systems.

In his analysis on Ireland, Marsh (2007) focused on the STV system, a strong preferential voting system where the voter must indicate his first choice by placing a '1' next to a candidate's name, and then he/she may indicate second, third and later preferences using the numbers 2, 3, and so on. That implies that individual candidates have strong incentives to differentiate themselves from co-partisans and to develop personalized support. More precisely, the paper wanted to assess the share of the Irish electorate for whom is the candidate rather than the party the key driver of their voting decisions. The survey showed that while some voters cast a vote that is highly party-centered (for example, by voting a complete party list in sequence), a substantial minority does not. Moreover, this share increases when Irish respondents are asked about the main reason why they voted a particular candidate rather than any other. Generally, four different reasons were emphasized: personal characteristics of the candidate, the area the candidate comes from, the party of the candidate and the candidate's policies. We can see how three out of four of these answers relate to those elements - personal traits and the role of direct personal contacts, place of birth or past working experience, constituency service - commonly emphasized by the literature on the personal vote. Finally, when asked whether party or candidate was most important for their decision on first preference, only 39% answered by selecting party. In the same manner, only 38% of respondents said they would not follow a candidate that changed party. In sum, this is to say that electoral formulas matter for candidates' behavior and motivations in seeking personal votes, and that those behaviors and motivations, in turn, may influence voters' mentality and incentives.

After having focused our attention on the behavioral strategies and motivations defining individual politicians in their pursuit of a personal vote, and after having highlighted the electoral incentives fostering its cultivation, it is time to shift our analysis to the literature that emphasizes what can be regarded as the principal and most straightforward indicator of the personal vote (De Luca, 2011): preferential voting. Preferential voting, simply defined as "the possibility of voting for candidates" (Wauters, Verlet, and Ackaert, 2011) is regarded as a major element constituting the personal vote, as the preference (s) is cast directly for a candidate within the party list and not for the party list, thus implying an evaluation that completely revolves around the characteristics, qualities, and activities of candidates. As outlined by Passarelli (2017: 168), "preferential voting in itself is based far more on the personal influence of a candidate rather than on the influence that can be expected from support arising from an 'ideological affinity' with a political party".

Katz (1985) noticed that where preferential voting is allowed, the order of election of individual candidates is determined by it. This means that candidates will have to compete both against candidates from rival parties, and against their own co-partisans. The intra-party competition will naturally lead (motivate) them to differentiate from others and attract voters based on their

personal - not party's - reputation. Consequently, this will favor the personalization of politics as both the visibility of the candidates and the significance of candidates' evaluations are fostered (Passarelli, 2017).

Its use - and consequently its effects - differ greatly among countries. In proportional electoral systems (PR), closed-list systems allow voters only to express preferences for political parties, hence candidates are then selected by their order in the electoral list; OLPRs, instead, allow voters to express one or even more preferences directly for candidates of the same parties (in these systems vote pooling at party level may occur or not). It is in those circumstances in which the latter electoral formula is used that a personal vote can be easily detected and assessed (*Ibidem*).

The discussion over preferential voting is especially important for two reasons: to study its impact on the quality of democracy, and to understand who are the people most likely to cast a preferential vote. As outlined by Katz (*Ibidem*), preferential voting puts at the center stage the question of who should choose people's representatives. Should the voters directly pick among the candidates proposed by the parties, or should be the parties themselves to make this decision? Should be the electorate an active participant in the process of selection or not? As pointed out by Wauters, Verlet, and Ackaert (2011), it is the possibility to express a preferential vote that determines whether parties or voters play the role of main decision-makers in choosing representatives. Moreover, diverse is the role awarded to preferential voting by the literature. One argument (*Ibidem*) is that it promotes values underpinning the good functioning of democracy. It strengthens, indeed, the legitimization of the political system by making voters perceive electoral outcomes more acceptable and fairer. In addition, by fostering the personalization of political competition, it may enhance and make more straightforward the link between voters and politicians. Another branch of the literature (Allum, 1973; Barisione, 2007) stressed the connection between preferential voting and phenomena such as clientelism, corruption, and organized crime. That is, preferential voting is considered a political and democratic pathology (Martelli, 2017), an indicator of the personalistic nature of the relationship between citizens and politics.

Italy has long been considered a 'case study' (*Ibidem*) for preferential voting. The election of the Italian Chamber of Deputies has long been regulated by an OLPR system granting - at least until the referendum to repeal the multiple preferential voting system of 1991 - the possibility to select up to three or four individual candidates (Katz and Bardi, 1980). While the long-lasting national proportional system was abolished in the wake of the judicial earthquake causing the collapse of the First Republic, preference voting remained - and remains - an option at voters' disposal both at European, regional, and local level.

As noticed by Passarelli (2017), both the inter-party and the intra-party electoral competition in Italy were particularly affected by the possibility voters had to cast one or more preferential votes. Italian parties - especially in the past - have shown a significant organizational capacity in controlling preferential voting, both as to direct it towards party favorite candidates - as in the case of PCI -, or to use it for settling internal disputes - as in the case of the DC (Katz, 1985). Nonetheless, high levels of preferential voting have also implied the emergence of clientelism, patronage, or at worst collusive and illegal behaviors, rendering its analysis even more compelling.

In a seminal paper, Golden (2003), analyzed the effects of the cultivation of the personal, and thus the implications stemming from the possibility to express one or more preferential votes, during the First Republic. What he argued was that the search for autonomous and personal consensus by individual candidates for the national Parliament was the basis for the poor performances of the Italian public administration after WWII. The latter - he stated - was “a result of the deliberate behavior of parliamentary officials who were concerned to enhance their own re-election prospects. ‘Bad government’ provided reasons for members of parliament to offer voters compensatory constituency services. It also enhanced the partisan loyalty of civil servants, who were typically appointed on a patronage basis, by providing them with extensive opportunities to engage corruption” (Golden: 2003: 189). In short, the same politicians would have engaged in ‘facilitation’ activities to navigate their constituency, or part of them, across a complicated and cumbersome bureaucracy. Moreover, they would have provided concrete individual benefits (especially jobs) to reinforce the loyalty of their following. It is not a surprise that most of the people employed in the public administration came (and still come) from the South, where the socio-economic backwardness and lack of collective identities (see Chapter Three) made patronage appointments an invaluable opportunity for large strata of the population.

Consequently, another clear implication of these mechanisms can be observed when looking at the differences in the use of preferential voting across the various areas of the country. More specifically, Southern Italy has regularly displayed very high levels of preferential voting compared to the northern and central regions, at each electoral level (Table 2.1). To account for the differences in this specific voting behavior, various research (Allum, 1973; Furlong, 1977) have greatly stressed the deep connection of this phenomenon with the high levels of personalism stemming from the existence of traditional culture, clientelism and low levels of political sophistication (Katz, 1985). A negative relationship between political competence and preferential voting was observed in Naples by Allum (1964), as well as in Rome by Furlong (1977). This led many authors to state that preferential voting is a pivotal element in southern Italian society; a society that displays a pervading

traditional culture - exemplified by the strong ties between southern citizens and the Catholic Church -, low levels of political consciousness, and poor economic development (Katz, 1985).

This view is in stark opposition with the one proposed by Cazzola and Gangerni (1979), who interpreted preferential voting as an indicator of political sophistication and maturity. Casting a preferential vote would therefore imply being more acquainted with the terms of the political competition, and hence more interested in politics. Through preferential voting, the citizens would not only express a vote for the party, but he/she would also evaluate the competences and qualities of individual candidates.

Finally, another possible explanation of the use of preferential voting in Italy was proposed by Katz (1985: 235), for whom this phenomenon is a direct response “to explicit efforts at mobilization”. On one hand, preferential voting might be organized and mobilized by a centralized party to control the order of election of its candidates. An example of this is the PCI, which directly instructed voters in each district to cast a preferential vote for a specific candidate. In this sense, preferential voting could be interpreted as an indicator of voters’ commitment towards their party. Consequently, in this case it could be expected that preferential votes would be few and directed mainly towards the option instructed by the party. On the other hand, preferential voting might be mobilized by candidates or groups within the party in order to win the intra-party competition and sort disputes among party factions. According to this interpretation, preferential voting is deemed as an indicator of voters’ ties with specific personalities within the party.

Table 2.1. Rate of preferential voting in Italian regional elections (only ordinary statute regions), 1970-2020.

	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020
PIEDMONT	14.4	16.0	16.6	18.6	17.9	16.8	34.4	41.3	35.0	19.9	19.5
LIGURIA	16.7	20.5	19.0	18.4	19.5	26.3	41.6	46.2	42.0	38.0	21.0
LOMBARDY	10.5	13.4	13.6	15.8	15.2	11.6	23.9	26.6	23.3	13.3	6.9
VENETO	15.4	17.3	18.6	22.2	13.4	16.3	33.4	39.1	35.2	30.7	17.8
EMILIA-ROMAGNA	10.5	10.8	10.5	12.7	12.9	11.1	22.4	28.2	25.7	18.0	14.0
TUSCANY	14.1	14.7	13.5	14.7	13.9	15.4	28.6	-	-	32.0	29.0
UMBRIA	19.3	22.9	22.2	25.8	28.5	30.7	51.2	55.7	53.0	31.0	25.5
MARCHE	23.2	27.4	25.7	27.6	29.9	28.6	44.6	49.5	49.4	45.0	26.2
LAZIO	26.6	31.9	29.5	25.4	34.1	26.6	47.0	54.4	50.9	36.3	18.9

ABRUZZI	43.9	46.6	44.8	47.9	47.8	46.3	73.1	78.9	75.4	54.0	39.6
MOLISE	42.0	48.3	50.3	55.0	58.4	66.4	85.0	90.2	89.7	74.0	49.7
CAMPANIA	40.8	46.2	45.4	51.0	53.5	46.4	70.6	76.8	45.3	43.0	42.0
APULIA	43.2	45.9	46.5	44.2	48.7	41.0	69.8	78.5	75.7	71.0	37.0
BASILICATA	43.5	47.6	51.2	55.3	55.8	63.4	85.8	89.6	85.9	85.9	47.7
CALABRIA	48.5	54.7	54.9	58.5	61.3	61.5	82.3	87.4	84.1	86.8	77.0

Notes: data for the 1970-1990 period come from Scaramozzino (1990); data for the 1995-2014 period come from Valbruzzi and Vignati (2014), except for the data on the 2014 Calabrian regional election (Emanuele and Marino, 2016). Data on 2015 come from Rombi (2015) expect for: data on the 2015 and 2020 regional elections in Veneto come from Osservatorio Elettorale Regione Veneto (2015; 2020); data on the 2014 and 2020 regional elections in Emilia-Romagna come from Regione Emilia-Romagna; data on the 2015 and 2020 regional elections in Toscana come from Bracci (2015; 2020). Data on the 2020 regional elections in Piedmont, Liguria, Lombardy, Marche, Lazio, Abruzzi, Molise, Campania, Apulia, and Basilicata are author' elaboration on official electoral results.

Katz (*Ibidem*) related these three opposing arguments to the three types of votes described by Parisi and Pasquino in their seminal work (1977). The first account on 'preferential voting as indicator of personalism and particularistic behavior' could be associated with the 'vote of exchange', that is that kind of vote - particularly spread in Southern Italy - whose content is a service (the vote cast itself) to which it should follow a reward by the candidate (*Ibidem*). This relationship between the voter and the candidate is direct and personal, as it is the interest pursued. The second argument - preferential voting as an indicator of political consciousness - could be loosely connected with the 'vote of opinion', that is a vote cast based on a universal interest and aimed at influencing collective policy. The third account - preferential voting as an indicator of political mobilization - relates to the 'vote of belonging', as this vote is cast by those citizens that feel a deep sense of attachment with their party and that are mobilized to vote by the network of collateral associations connected to it.

Based on these theoretical arguments, Katz (1985) tested - through multiple regression analyses - which category of variables, related to each of the three arguments, significantly contributed to explain preferential voting in Italy. Control variables for the potential effect of region were also added to the combined model. The results, while showing the contribution of all three accounts to the overall explanation of preferential voting, clearly outlined the significant explanatory capacity of the North-South divide, remaining still the main predictor of this type of vote.

Subsequent literature has focused on different determinants in the attempt to explain the peculiarity characterizing the divide between Italian northern and southern regions. An important variable that has recently been pointed out as a crucial determinant of the different rates of preferential

votes is ‘social capital’ (Passarelli, 2017). Conceptualized as the combination of four elements - the presence of associational networks that involve the great majority of society, a disposition towards the respect of existing social and political norms, high levels of interpersonal trust, and a certain degree of political consciousness (Bordandini and Cartocci, 2014; Ballarino, 2001) - social capital as a possible explanation of the Italian territorial differences was first explored by Putnam *et al.* (1993). Taking advantage of the simultaneous and identical setting up of regional councils in 1970, Putnam analyzed the institutional performances of Italian regions over time. What he found out was that the performances were differentiated and strongly polarized between northern and southern regions, with the latter displaying the poorest results. The difference was explained by the author not in terms of diverse political cultures - as proposed by Almond and Verba (1963) - but through the sociological concept of social capital. It is, indeed, the different endowment of social capital that better explains the North-South divide. The experience of the ‘free Communes’ in Northern Italy in the XIIth century, characterized by a style of governance guaranteeing equality and the creation of horizontal networks of relationships, fostered the consolidation of a civic spirit that was preparatory for high levels of social capital. In southern regions, instead, the Normans shaped a markedly verticalized society creating a gulf between citizens and government and hindering the development of dense networks of mutual trust (Ballarino, 2001).

Social capital was operationalized by Putnam *et al.* (1993) through the combination of four indicators:

- the rate of local associations;
- the rate of newspapers reading;
- the rate of participation for referendums;
- *the rate of preferential voting.*

Between the last two measures, it is the relation between political (and electoral) participation and social capital that has been studied the most (Krishna, 2002; Klesner, 2007; Teney and Hanquinet, 2012). Fiorino, Galli, and Pontarolo (2021), among others, explored the relationship between the regional endowment of social capital and electoral participation in the parliamentary elections in Italy from 1994 to 2008. Firstly, the authors - as already noticed by Putnam *et al.* (1993) - uncovered a clear geographical pattern, in that Italian northern and southern regions differ greatly in terms of their social capital’s endowment (Figure 2.1). Subsequently, through the development of a composite indicator - the *Social Catalyst* index - able to account for the multifaceted nature of social capital (social norms, shared community values, trust among people and towards institutions, social networks, membership in associations, civic engagement) the authors found a significant and positive

nexus between *Social Catalyst* and turnout in the Chamber of Deputies and in the Senate: where the level of social capital is higher, turnout results higher. In particular, the social norms (operationalized through the share of tv taxpayers and Newspapers' diffusion) and associational networks' (civiness) variables showed the strongest effect.

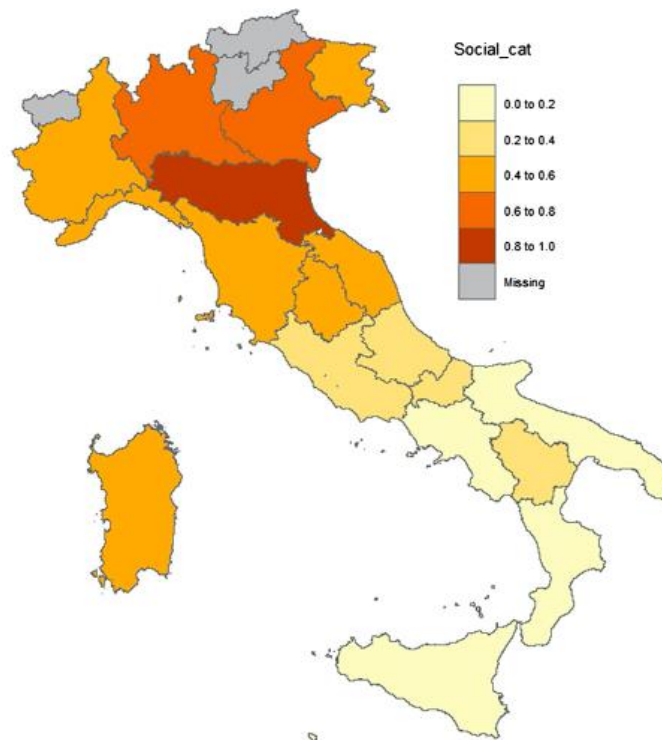


Figure 2.1. Average values of *Social Catalysts* by quartile.

Source: Fiorino, Galli, and Pontarollo (2021: 10).

Nonetheless, for the purpose of our elaborate it is the relation between social capital and preferential voting that is most interesting. In a seminal paper (2017), Passarelli analyzed the effects of socio-political variables and the 'political system' as a whole on the use of preferential voting in Italy - both at national (1948-92), subnational (1970-2015) and European (1979-2014) levels - for the entire post-WWII period. The variables used were:

- *Non-hierarchical and Divided Party*: this variable was employed as to verify the influence of party's organization on voting. The presence of high levels of preferential voting could imply a significant intra-party competition. The Gini Index was used to distinguish parties with higher internal competition among candidates from the ones with a strong 'leader-candidate';
- *District density*: the lower the density (so the less urbanized is the district), the smaller the community, the more personalized political representation - recall here the concept of micro-

personalization. A rural environment should foster preferential voting, as candidates' networking becomes more important;

- *Social capital*: here Passarelli adopted the argument for which the use of a preferential vote can be thought as an expression of 'traditional' culture (Allum, 1973), or tantamount to a 'vote of exchange'. In line with the literature on social capital (Cartocci, 2007), that has conceived preferential voting as an indicator of the level of 'civicness' in a given community, the author hypothesized that the higher the level of social capital, the lower the share of preferential votes;
- *Electoral geography*: the differences in the share of preferential voting could arise as a result of the varying political and electoral rootedness of parties in different parts of the country. Thus, the expression of this voting behavior may vary depending on the geographic area (North, Centre, South).
- *District magnitude*: in line with Carey and Shugart (1995), the author hypothesized that in OLPR systems the bigger the district magnitude, the higher the share of preferential votes, as higher is the level of intra-party competition and the motivation for individual candidates to distinguish themselves;
- *Party size*: the dimension of the party could also be influential. As the electoral strength of the party at district level increases, higher will be the intra-party competition to get elected. Therefore, the hypothesis is that the bigger the party size, the higher the share of preferential voting.

The analysis carried out through three different linear regression models - one for each electoral level under evaluation (European, national, and regional levels) - showed that only four out of the six abovementioned variables displayed strong and statistically significant effects on preferential voting: district magnitude, district density, party size, and social capital. These models (the first two models are not shown) explained a good portion of the variance as the R^2 values reveal - the lowest value is 0.422 concerning the European elections in Italy, the highest is 0.634 and it regards the Italian regional elections. But what about the direction of the effect? A strong positive correlation is visible in the cases of the party size and in the case of the district magnitude, while negative is the effect of district density in the case of the regional elections. What is more interesting is that social capital negatively affects preferential voting at each electoral level. In particular, the negative influence of social capital is most evident in the cases of the PCI and the DC. For the author, these results may stem from the fact that, in contexts characterized by high levels of civicness and strong communitarian linkages, the effects of the personalization of political representation,

exemplified by the usage of preferential voting, would be weaker, as personal vote is not considered necessary nor a worthwhile option by most voters. Moreover - as already shown in Figure 2.1 - social capital's endowments depend greatly on electoral geography. Table 2.2 describes the role of social capital in northern and southern regions. The effect on preferential voting is particularly evident in the North, while it is not significant in the South. The latter result, nonetheless, is mostly due to the absence of significant variability among southern provinces in terms of social capital's endowment - generally lower than in the North.

These results leave room for the argument that the voter's decision to express a preferential vote or not strongly depends on the specific features of the society/community in which these voters are located. The fact that the strongest negative impact of social capital on preferential voting concerned both the DC and the PCI, as well as the significant influence of electoral geography, compels us to endorse the argument for which the specific nature of the Italian social and political system - which has featured the long-lasting presence of two deeply entrenched territorial political subcultures (Galli, 1966; Trigilia, 1986 ; Caciagli, 1988; Almagisti, 2015; 2016) - strongly affects the diffusion of a personalized style of relation between politics - and its actors - and citizens. The analysis of the high levels of 'civicness' proper to the so called '*Terza Italia*' (Third Italy) (Bagnasco, 1977) as opposed to the diffusion of a 'traditional culture' characterized by 'amoral familism' (Banfield, 1958) in the South, may be instrumental in assessing the existence of candidate-based systems in different regions of the country. Thus, the next chapter will deal with the different features underlying the southern Italian political system and the two territorial political subcultures, in order to explore those circumstances that may have fostered - or not - the emergence of a political system centered on the personal vote.

Table 2.2. Preferential voting at the regional elections in Italy (1970-2015).

	Pooled model	North	South
Social capital	-0.748***	-0.688***	-0.276
Density	-0.384***	-0.496***	-0.343
Magnitude_regional	0.321***	0.347**	0.296
R^2	0.634	0.518	0.099
N	92	70	20

Notes: OLS regression, entries are beta coefficient (standardized), and level of significance: *** $p < 0,001$, ** $p < 0,01$, * $p < 0,05$.

Source: Passarelli (2017:179).

CHAPTER THREE

STUDYING PERSONAL VOTE THROUGH PREFERENTIAL VOTING: DETERMINANTS AND DIFFERENTIATED USE IN THREE ITALIAN TERRITORIAL CONTEXTS

A clear-cut divide characterizes the use of preferential voting in northern and southern regions (see Table 2.1). The following pages study the peculiar political, cultural, and socioeconomic features distinguishing three opposing Italian territorial contexts: the *Mezzogiorno*, the White Subculture, and the Red Subculture. We aim at highlighting the determinants of such voting behavior, identifying, at the same time, potential factors enhancing the centrality of personal vote in traditionally and newly volatile regional political and party systems.

3.1 Social capital and economic backwardness: a possible explanation for preferential voting in the Mezzogiorno

We have just discussed the argument proposed by Passarelli (2017) - backed by empirical findings - for whom, in Italy, the endowment of high levels of social capital negatively affects preferential voting. It is interesting to note the peculiarity of the Italian case, as a high share of

voluntary associations, solid mutual trust, and widespread civicism is not always tantamount to low levels of preferential voting. For example, by analyzing the Flanders' case, Wauters, Verlet, and Ackaert (2011) found out that social capital (proxied by the number of associations per 1000 inhabit.) positively and significantly correlated with the percentage of preferential votes. The authors suggested that voluntary organizations may be seen as 'schools of democracy' as they teach civic and social values. Moreover, they are pivotal in the recruitment of candidates. This would ultimately imply that a solid network of associations increases citizens' opportunities to learn and become acquainted with the positive value of preferential voting, as it guarantees a direct and strong link between voters and politicians and promote a greater sense of fairness about elections outcomes.

This view is in deep contradiction with what the literature on the Italian case has long told us. While in the Italian northern and central regions specific historical patterns (Almagisti, 2016) have led to the rise of two territorial political subcultures on top of which both the DC and PCI created an organic connection with the local communities - rendering personal vote less cogent and pressing -, the specific socioeconomic features of the *Mezzogiorno*, as well as its historic and cultural legacy, and the peculiar political behavior of party organizations and their members, have rendered the personalistic and particularistic connections between voters and candidates, between citizens and politics, structural elements underpinning society in the area (Scaramozzino, 1990; De Luca, 2001; Golden, 2003; Costabile, 2009).

Southern Italy has always been a seminal case for socio-cultural and political research. In 1958, Banfield carried out a study in the fictitious town of Montegrano (Chiaromonte) in the southern region of Basilicata. By using surveys, census data, and autobiographic memoirs, the American political scientist came up with the concept of 'amoral familism', that is the propensity to maximize immediate and material gains to the benefit of one's own nuclear family, under the assumption that everyone else behaves in the same way. This was deemed as being the cultural model underpinning the *Mezzogiorno*; a model that implied deep distrust towards others as well as towards political institutions, thus preventing any form of collective action (Bordandini and Cartocci, 2014). These findings were confirmed and enriched by the seminal work of Almond and Verba - *The Civic Culture* (1963) - which analyzed the specific feature of the Italian political culture. The authors found out that the Italian case could be described as dominated by a 'parochial' type of culture - that is one characterized by particularism, localism, low levels of interpersonal trust and apathy and dissatisfaction towards the state and politics (*Ibidem*). On the heels of the aforementioned research, in 1993 Putnam *et al.* published *Making Democracy work*. This study analyzed the issue of the institutional and economic backwardness of the Italian South, concluding that the main reason for the

very different institutional performances between Italian northern and southern regions stemmed from the varying levels of social capital displayed by the territories.

On the basis of the literature on social capital and civicness, Raniolo (2009) assessed the quality of democratic institutions in the southern regions. The author described the South of Italy as the place in which a ‘localized subversion’ and a general deterioration of the democratic quality is taking place; that part of the country in which different laws govern the social and political life alongside the ones imposed by the central state. A state which is ‘anemic’ and where a ‘low-intensity citizenship’ has developed. Table 3.1 shows the five-fold dimensional grid employed by Raniolo to map the features of southern social and political system.

Table 3.1. Salient dimensions concerning the quality of democracy in Southern Italy.

Main dimensions	Secondary dimension (and related subversion)
Rule of law	Widespread crime Systemic corruption ‘Weak legality’ Pervasiveness of the organized crime
Participation	Deficient participation Selective abstention Weak associational participation Party colonization Particularistic distortion of participation (electoral and associational)
Competition	Restricted political competition Presence of dominant parties (DC’s one-party rule) Centrifugal electoral supply
Accountability	<i>Electoral or vertical accountability:</i>

	<p>Willingness of electors to change their voting decision</p> <p>Absence of alternation and ‘invulnerability’ of the political (and governmental) elites</p> <p>Individualistic representation</p> <p><i>Inter-institutional or horizontal accountability:</i></p> <p>Role played by the political opposition</p> <p>Media system</p> <p>The judiciary and other ‘guarantee institutions’</p>
Responsiveness	<p>‘Specific’ legitimacy</p> <p>Political professionalism and ‘ceticization’</p>
Equality and freedom	<p>Crisis of citizenship</p>

Source: Raniolo (2009: 192).

Among others, the rise in delinquency is the main aspect that negatively affects the quality of democracy in the South, paired with phenomena such as corrupt exchanges, ‘weak legality’, black economy, and, especially, the diffusion of organized crime. These issues relate to the presence - or better absence - of low levels of civiness, that is low levels of social capital. These circumstances, in turn, impact on many important political dimensions. One of them is political and electoral participation. This part of Italy has consistently shown low levels of political and electoral participation so that it can be described as ‘distorted’, deficient, nonaffective. Voting seems to be a difficult act for the southern voter. In the period between 1946 and 1987, the South displayed a 7.4% ‘lead’ with respect to the Centre-North in terms of unexpressed voting. The divide in terms of electoral participation remained constant during the Second Republic (Cartocci, 2007).

Nonetheless, Table 3.2 highlights a surprising aspect concerning the electoral behavior of southern voters. It seems like different types of elections provide different incentives to participate and cast a vote. More specifically, regional elections represent for them a reason for political (primarily individualistic) mobilization. Indeed, the differential in terms of participation between North and South remains constant or even shrinks when the competition shifts from the national to the regional stage. As outlined by Raniolo, it looks like that the higher the degree of ‘politicization’ of the electoral competition, the lower the level of electoral participation of southern voters, so that

we could talk of a rule of ‘reverse mobilization’. This may arguably stem from the unique relationship between voters and politics in southern regions. Here, this relationship takes the form of a particularistic and personalized connection between voters and individual candidates. In sum, the ‘closeness’ of the electoral competition, and thus the proximity to candidates and local leaders (as well as to public resources) work as crucial determinants of southern voters’ mobilization.

Table 3.2. Regional turnouts on various elections (1999-2005).

	Turnout on various elections*	Turnout on regional elections**		Turnout on various elections*	Turnout on regional elections**
Emilia-Romagna	65.4	78.2	Friuli Venezia Giulia	53.0	64.5
Tuscany	60.1	73.0	Abruzzi	52.7	69.7
Umbria	59.1	75.5	Aosta Valley	50.7	79.5
Veneto	58.6	74.0	Apulia	49.3	70.3
Marche	58.6	72.9	Basilicata	49.0	69.9
Piedmont	57.0	71.5	Sardinia	48.3	68.7
Lombardy	57.0	74.3	Molise	47.6	65.1
Trentino-Alto Adige	56.2	80.4	Campania	46.1	68.5
Liguria	54.3	70.0	Sicily	44.0	61.3
Lazio	53.7	72.1	Calabria	42.1	64.5

Notes: * it refers to five different elections: the 2001 general election, the 1999 European election, the 1999 and 2000 revocatory referendums, and the 2001 constitutional referendum.

** It refers to the 2000-01 and 2005-06 regional elections.

Source: Raniolo (2009: 202).

Besides the lack of civicness, the abovementioned pervasiveness of particularistic and personalized relationship between voters and individual candidates may stem from the enduring economic backwardness characterizing the South. Catanzaro (1986) stressed three main factors that induced the ‘atomistic disaggregation’ of southern society: (i) the peculiar features of the market in a society strongly dependent and assisted by the central State; (ii) the modification of the criteria socially defining individual identities; (iii) the importance acquired by ambiguous social placements. While in the North - and, more generally, in industrialized societies - individual and collective identities were formed through the interaction with the market and based on one’s occupation, the large portion of people in South in a situation of unemployment, inactivity, or illegal work, made it

very difficult for the formation of collective identities based on the profession activity performed. This has implied the absence of a deeply felt subjective class belongingness. The large share of citizens not ascribed to any specific social class has made it very difficult to reconcile multiple interests, and ultimately to identify a prevailing and stable one. This could therefore explain the lack of collective and solidaristic action in the South, as compared to the North.

On this subject, Bova (*Ibidem*) added that the South did not take part to the liberation struggle, it was freed by the Allies, it was only marginally affected by the process of industrialization having place in the North, and thus it did not witness the formation of a class consciousness derived by the solidaristic and participative potential resulting from the process of modernization. Indeed, in a social and economic context in which working opportunities lack, and where the few that exist take the form of casual and unregulated jobs, the local employers are not automatically the counterpart of their employees, but rather some sort of ‘saviors’ that foster the social integration of a portion of the population, although small.

Similarly, southern political institutions have been regarded as fully-fledged employers of the population. Politics has, indeed, long represented the regulatory force of southern economy (Arrighi and Piselli, 1985). It has not represented a super-structural element as in regions of the North, but rather a structural one. Jobs, subsidies, as well as business and professional success has largely depended on it, as the fundamental weakness of the productive system has implied a continuous dependence of economic activities on political institutions; to the extent that entire cities in the South ‘live of’ politics (see also Golden (2003) on the pervasiveness of patronage appointments in the public administration in the area). It is precisely for these reasons that the role of the ‘patron’, played by the welfare state and by individual politicians (Bova, 2009), has become pivotal in the southern political system.

The socioeconomic backwardness of southern society has thus represented a fertile ground for the diffusion of clientelism, so much that Allum (1997) described it as more important than ideology. As outlined by Trigilia (1992), the lack of shared reference values that could guide and stabilize southern voters’ opinions, did not allow for an assessment of the political class based on a universalistic, or at least communitarian, logic; rather, voting in the South has usually been led by particularistic motives. Citizens - especially those who were most socially marginalized – did not, and could not identify with national parties (Zitara, 1977). The latter were entities superimposed on southern society, as if they ‘dropped down’ from above rather than rising from below. This meant that parties had to undergo a strategical transformation when interacting with the political system. In this respect, Bova (2009) outlined that in the South the main post-WWII national parties appeared from the very beginning more as ‘catch-all parties’ rather than mass-based ones. The role that the DC

and the PCI had in their political subcultures could not be replicated. They lacked that mobilization power granted by their role as fulcrum of people's social and political life. A 'vote of belonging' was thus far from southern reality. This view was also confirmed by Fantozzi and Greco (2009). While in the North mass-based parties become established after the end of WW2, in the South political clientelism subsumed and softened ideological oppositions into exchange mechanisms. In sum, southern clientelism represents *the* organizational form of a society in which the unmet demands for labor have been matched by the need, for political actors, to gain electoral support (Zitara, 1977).

The weakness of the productive system, and of the civil and political society have also led the way to the 'ceticization' of a political class deeply entrenched in the public institutions and capable to renew and reproduce itself. For Costabile (2009), several characteristics distinguish the southern political class from the ones populating the two territorial political subcultures. First, these individuals possess specific competences and skills: relational and technical ones. The relational prowess is of an informal nature, and it includes the ability to establishing strong interpersonal networks of trust with the public, the voters, and the clients. The technical ones are less political, as they concern marketing and communication skills, power-sharing techniques, etc. As outlined by Golden (2003), local notables also possess the ability to navigate their following in the cumbersome Italian public administration, working as 'facilitators' for the attainment of constituency service or particularistic benefits.

Moreover, the abovementioned weakness of mass-based parties has ultimately implied the predominance of individual political actors over political groups in the management of recruiting channels and, more generally, in the electoral arena. The conquest of a 'seat' in local government bodies - i.e., ministerialism – has long represented the ultimate goal of the southern political class. To achieve this, family and clientelist circles have made use of parties as electoral vehicles. Stripped of every social and cultural function, the latter have long lost the lion's share in the production of the main political choices, as these have been monopolized by the 'strong powers' organized on a family, clientelist, or professional basis (Costabile, 2009).

The developments affecting the Italian party system after the demise of the First Republic have further enhanced the centrality of the individual over the group in the South. The emptying of local party branches has ultimately resulted in the formation of restricted party oligarchies led by the most influential local and regional administrators. As compared to the past, where the so called '*padroni delle tessere*' represented the centerpiece of a somewhat stable party-led system, nowadays the so called 'Lords of Preferences' (De Luca, 2001) appear to dominate the institutional and electoral life of southern political systems, as they influence parties' activities and pick candidates by leveraging their large electoral support.

To better understand the importance of individual candidates' relational networks on the territory, as well as the tendency of southern voters to approach politics through the means of personalized connections, it may be useful to analyze the political strategy pursued by Forza Italia to organize electoral support in the regions (Diamanti, 2009). Forza Italia was founded by Berlusconi as a party that, by definition, does not possess a territorial characterization, as it is intended to appeal to all Italian citizens. As described by Diamanti (*Ibidem*), Forza Italia inaugurated - in the 1990s - a new phase characterized by a 'politics without territory'. More specifically, the geography of its electoral support featured a large 'blue zone', an archipelago of territories that stretched⁷ from the North-West to the South – mostly in Sicily and Campania. However, Forza Italia was conceived as a fully-fledged 'national party', a 'personal party' (Calise, 2004) without a widespread territorial organization. This weakness constantly resulted in heavy losses when the electoral competition shifted from the national to the regional and local dimension, where the leader was 'distant' from the competition. Nonetheless, after the 1995 regional elections, Forza Italia began a restructuring process of its territorial organization. In the South the party put on a network that revolved around institutional figures such as mayors, local administrators, and MPs. These politicians have since then guaranteed the anchoring of the party with southern society, by interpreting the relation with professional associations and individual citizens on a personal and direct basis. Forza Italia, in a nutshell, has leveraged on the social and political context characterizing the South, developing a territorial organization based on the personalized action of the local political class. In this regard, it is illustrative the analysis put forward by Totò Cuffaro after his electoral victory at the 2002 Sicilian regional election. Winning an election in the South - he stated, - crucially depends on the personal networking and relations that politicians - both presidential and individual candidates for the regional council – manage to weave both with local society and government. That's because, if a southern voter must choose between casting a vote for a candidate that he/she personally knows or one that can best represent him/her, the citizen will undoubtedly vote for the former (*Ibidem*).

In short, the overall context has led southern political actors, as well as voters, to seek for a particularistic and personalized political relationship which has ultimately resulted in high levels of preferential voting. The centrality of clientelism - spurred by the socioeconomic and cultural deficiencies of the South - has rendered crucial the role of individual politicians as 'vote collectors', and providers of particularistic services. Moreover, the latter have played another important function in the sense that clientelism has represented the medium through which the South socialized with politics. This 'patron-centered' system has constituted *the* way through which citizens have become

⁷ We use the past simple 'stretched' given the consistent loss in electoral support characterising the recent history of the party.

acquainted with political and democratic institutions. A system that in numerous cases has allowed southerners to participate to the national and local political life, as well as to enjoy political and social rights (Bova, 2009). However, if on the one hand clientelism has served as an anchor to the democratic system, in the long run it has planted the ‘seeds of destruction’ (Raniolo, 2009). In fact, clientelism has eroded - and still does - the sense of legality necessary for the good functioning of a political and democratic system. This, in turn, has worn away feelings of trust towards political institutions and their actors, structuring a system characterized by ‘weak legitimisation’.

Against this background, the increase in its rate since the beginning of the Second Republic does not come as a surprise (Table 3.3) (Fantozzi and Greco, 2009). Preferential voting now involves all parties, not only the governing ones. If in the past it mostly acted as a yardstick to ultimately solve intra-party competition, nowadays voters seem to consistently choose individual candidates over parties, based on the formers’ images, records, and their ability to provide personal and particularistic benefits. This development, moreover, deeply connects with the increase in the levels of electoral volatility (*Ibidem*). As individual candidates gather more and more personalized support, their interactions in the electoral arena deeply affect electoral and party competitions (De Luca, 2001).

Table 3.3. Rates of preferential voting in general and regional election in ordinary statute regions.

	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990
Regional elections					
General elections	1972	1976	1979	1983	1987
NORTH-WEST					
Regional elections	18.5	21.5	20.4	23.6	25.6
General elections	25.3	26.5	24.1	23.8	28.4
NORTH-EAST					
Regional elections	20.9	24.0	22.6	27.9	30.1
General elections	30.0	25.3	23.2	23.3	25.7
CENTRE					
Regional elections	32.1	35.6	33.5	37.2	41.1
General elections	39.9	33.4	35.3	24.8	39.9

SOUTH					
Regional elections	51.2	55.6	56.0	58.2	61.2
General elections	60.6	50.4	54.4	54.3	57.4
TOTAL (15 REGIONS)					
Regional elections	30.7	34.5	34.0	37.5	41.9
General elections	38.2	37.4	34.8	35.0	39.2

Notes: list total by geographical area.

Source: Scaramozzino (1990: 304).

To sum up, we may isolate two different interpretations of preferential voting in the South:

1. The most popular one identifies preferential voting with the ‘vote of exchange’, and thus with clientelist practices. As seen before, clientelism can be considered the structuring element of the southern politics. On the one hand, political clientelism can be considered a cause in the sense that its pervasiveness has shaped the way in which southern voters interact with democratic and political institutions. It has eroded the trust and loyalty towards party politics that, on the contrary, has long characterized the two Italian subcultures. On the other hand, clientelism appears as a result of the atomization of southern society, neglected by the process of industrialization, and never able to mold a class consciousness. Voters lack those shared values that would allow them to carry out an assessment of the political class and platforms driven by universal expected benefits (Bova, 2009). Moreover, as noted by Golden (2003), clientelism may also be a result of deliberate attempts of politicians to exert more personal support, by generating new pockets of dependance through the adoption of lengthy and verbose laws and the creation of a cumbersome administration. In sum, it seems as a process of ‘economization of politics’ (Costabile, 2003) has taken place in the *Mezzogiorno*, as the market has shifted its location from society to the heart of political institutions. Preferential voting has thus become the currency through which citizens may obtain ‘primary goods’ (jobs, licenses, subsidies, etc.) in the context of an underdeveloped economy. In this sense, casting a preferential vote in the South would represent one side of a transaction, that *should* then be followed by the provision of a personal benefit on the part of the candidate.

2. Nonetheless, many authors have questioned the connection between preferential voting and ‘vote of exchange’. For Scaramozzino (1990) it would be too simplistic to invoke the argument concerning the ‘clientelization’ of voting behavior. The distorted use of preferential voting may then be attributable to local factors, the history of the area, its customs; to those features specific to what can be described as the ‘Italian southern subculture’. All southern voters - he suggested - share the common propensity to personalize their voting choices. In sum, when they vote for a party list, they also need to identify themselves with a candidate that personifies that list (*Ibidem*). Of the same opinion is De Luca (2001), for whom the nexus between preferential voting and clientelist practices is possible but not necessary. High rates of preferential voting have characterized all parties in the South, not only the governing ones. Indeed, if it is easy to link preferential voting with the vote of exchange in the case of governing parties, this is not the case with opposition ones, as their candidates have little to exchange with the voters. In short, a possible explanation may be found in the traditional conception of politics shared by both citizens and the political class. Since the unification, southern regions have been represented in Parliament by individuals that hardly followed collective logics, thus creating that phenomenon best described as ‘transformism’.

The two aforementioned arguments - the ‘tradition’ argument and the one linking preferential voting to the ‘vote of exchange’ - can be traced back to two different literatures: the one that has focused on the peculiar conditions of underdevelopment and economic backwardness that have long since characterized the *Mezzogiorno* (Salvemini, Nitti, Saraceno), making it a fertile ground for clientelism to spread; and the one - related to the ‘tradition’ argument - which traces back the voters’ propensity to personalize the relationship with politics to the peculiar historical patterns characterizing Southern Italy. In particular, the latter shows an affinity with the argument proposed by Putnam *et al.* (1993), who connect preferential voting to the specific endowments of social capital.

Nonetheless, a third argument could be put forward for the diffusion of preferential voting in the South. An argument that significantly differs from the others. That is, the possibility of the existence, among southern Italian voters, of a type of personal vote - and thus of preferential voting - driven by universal expected benefits (Martelli, 2017). Benefits, in short, that can be enjoyed by the vast majority of citizens (maintenance of roads and infrastructures, public education or tax reduction, etc.). ‘Constituency service’ (personal universalistic vote) thus “represents a particular type of relation between voters and candidates, in which actors orient their strategies towards public or semi-public goods, albeit these goods being located and concentrated in a specific territorial unit (the

electoral present) (Martelli, 2017: 18). Surprisingly, through the means of semi-structured interviews, Martelli (*Ibidem*) confirmed the presence of this type of vote among southern voters; in particular, labor resulted a central element in the various accounts.

In sum, these opposing accounts all point to the peculiarity of Southern Italy's use of preferential voting. A feature that stands in stark contrast with the experience of those two areas of the country - the Red and White Subcultures - that have usually been considered 'immune' to the spread of candidate-oriented voting (Scaramozzino, 1990). To account for these differences, we will now discuss those features characterizing the two Italian territorial subcultures that may have enhanced (or rather, weakened) the role of personal vote.

3.2 The decline of the Italian Red and White Political Subcultures: new room for personal vote?

A political subculture can be defined as a set of traditions and norms that regulate the relationships between people, and between them and the state. Its resilience stems from its ability to influence a set of relationships that go beyond the political arena but also concern the associational life (Farneti, 1971). Trigilia (1981) enriched this definition by outlining the centrality of the local political system as a constitutive element of political subcultures. A political subculture can therefore be regarded as a distinctive local political system characterized by a high degree of consensus towards a specific political force and by the capacity to aggregate and mediate local interests. This finds its expression in a deep institutional network (church, party, interest groups) coordinated by the dominant political force. In sum, the distinguishing features of a territorial subcultures can be summarized in:

- the presence of a widespread localism originating from the center-periphery cleavage characterising the national political system;
- the existence of a diffused and ideologically oriented associational network;
- a persistent feeling of belonging to a specific political area and the associational networks that represents it;
- a local political system consistently monopolized by a specific political force that succeeds in integrating and representing diverse local interests.

In the 1960s, the 'Istituto Cattaneo' of Bologna began a research project focused on those factors contributing to the overall functioning and stability of the Italian political system. Galli (1966) highlighted the existence (or rather, persistence) of two well defined political subcultures - the 'Red Subculture' entrenched in the central regions and the 'White' one stretching across the North-East. These two subcultures originated from those cleavages - in particular the center-periphery cleavage - that characterized the processes of state and nation building. Along these cleavage lines, parties have incapsulated the conflict by providing representation to these communities, organizing local society, and favoring the thickening of trust and associational networks. Moreover, parties have guaranteed the 'democratic anchoring' of these subcultures to the national political system, fostering the legitimization of democratic procedures and the loyalty towards political institutions (Almagisti, 2016). Parisi and Pasquino (1977) exemplified the relationship between voters of these areas and political groups through the concept of the 'vote of belonging'; a vote that pointed at the significant overlapping between the values shared by society and the ones declared by party formations (Almagisti, 2016). The centrality of parties in these communities has ultimately promoted a high degree of continuity and concentration of electoral support in the hands of specific political groups. The White Subculture has, indeed, featured consistent - at least until the 1980s - favorable results for the DC, while in the Red Subcultures the PCI has dominated the electoral competition for a long time (Diamanti, 2009).

Bagnasco (1977) defined these areas as '*Terza Italia*' (Third Italy), as opposed to the industrialized North-West and the underdeveloped *Mezzogiorno*. What characterized the Third Italy was a 'diffused economic development' marked by the presence of a multitude of small and medium labor-intensive enterprises. This economic configuration kept unemployment very low despite - initial - harsh working conditions. The latter were compensated through local development planning that had its foundation in the organic relationship between families, labor unions, associations, and the dominant party. Political institutions provided social services, educational institutions, subsidies, etc., building up trust networks and bettering the quality of life.

Besides these similarities, the two subcultures have shown some peculiarities connected to the role played by the dominant party in the area. In the White Zone loyalty was primarily directed towards the Church and its associations, while the legitimization of the DC stemmed from being the party of the '*religion*' and the mediator of local interests with the central state. In the Red Zone, instead, the party - the PCI - was the fulcrum of the local social and political life, guiding the economic regulation of the area through the active role of the local government (Almagisti, 2016).

Since the 1980s, however, the two subcultures have been experiencing a deep social and economic transformation that have thrown into crisis the organic relationship between parties and

voters. The DC has been delegitimized as the main sponsor of the North-East, as cultural secularization has meant the decline of Church's influence on community life. The PCI has undergone a difficult ideological repositioning after the demise of the USSR, leaving voters confused and disoriented (Diamanti, 2009). Even if the Red Subculture has resisted the collapse of the First Republic, signs of a rapid erosion of the feelings of belonging towards the heirs of the PCI (PDS, DS, and finally PD) have been highlighted by many authors (De Sio and Cataldi, 2015). The 2018 general elections have, indeed, produced a revolutionized electoral geography (Cataldi and Emanuele, 2019): the Red Zone has almost disappeared.

This, along with the ongoing process of political personalization, may imply that (local) political leaders as well as individual politicians (other than leaders and those holding top government positions) may have enhanced their role in the area at the expense of parties. Voters, now freed from the strong identification with a political group, may find a stable reference point in individual actors. Of course, this does not necessarily imply that in these areas we are witnessing a radical shift from a 'vote of belonging' to a 'vote of exchange', thus entailing that clientelist practices have ultimately replaced the party-voter relationship revolving around the sharing of common and universalistic values. Rather, as already noticed by Martelli (2017) for the South, we may witness the rise of a personal vote best described as 'constituency service' - that is a vote driven by universal expected benefits. To assess so, we need to look at the features characterizing the two Italian territorial subcultures, highlighting the differences between them and the transformations that they have undergone in the last few decades.

As we already discussed in Chapter Two, Passarelli (2017) highlighted how social capital constitutes a strong determinant of preferential voting. More specifically, social capital is negatively correlated with the use of preferential voting. In their seminal work *Making Democracy Work*, Putnam *et. al* (1993) described Italy as fundamentally divided in two parts: the North characterized by high institutional performances, and the South lacking behind. The North-South divide was explained through the different endowments of social capital in the areas, dependent on historical events that went beyond the Italian unification, and that are linked to the experience of the Communes in the Middle Ages. The regions included in the two political subcultures (above all Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany, and Veneto) displayed the highest scores both in terms of social capital and institutional performance.

Putnam's interpretation, however, does not consider the role parties have had in anchoring and 'channeling' social capital towards democratic institutions, while at the same time enlarging local trust and associational networks (Almagisti, 2016). Originated as collective identities politically and culturally rival to the central state, the two subcultures soon became 'safes' of social capital during

the First Republic, as mass-based parties succeeded in incapsulating social and cultural conflicts. For a long time, the DC in the North-East and the PCI in the Italian central regions managed to defuse the disrupting potential of the main cleavage lines (the center-periphery, the state-church, and the capital-labor cleavages), rendering the two entities the most important elements guaranteeing stability to the fragile post-WWII Italian political system.

A recent study by Bordandini and Cartocci (2014) has produced an updated map of social capital in Italy at regional level. The analysis centered on the construction of an index including four different indicators:

- electoral participation⁸;
- diffusion of daily press⁹;
- diffusion of voluntary associations¹⁰;
- diffusion of blood donations¹¹;

The first two measures were chosen as to detect two different aspects of political participation: voting as the most visible and explicit form of political participation, while the diffusion of newspaper represents an indicator of ‘invisible’ participation and interest towards the public sphere. The last two indicators, instead, explore the dimensions of solidarity and co-responsibility.

Table 3.4 returns a clear-cut picture of the persistent North-South divide characterizing Italy. Emilia-Romagna - the fulcrum of the Red Subculture - features the highest values in terms of electoral participation (81.7%), followed by Veneto (79.7%) - the center of the White Subculture. The regions of the North are consistently characterized by higher values as compared to southern regions, which all present figures lower than the national mean. Looking at the average distribution of newspaper, the highest values are all concentrated in the northern regions, with Trentino-Alto Adige, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, and Liguria occupying the top positions. The indicator focusing on the diffusion of voluntary associations shows that in the eleven central-northern regions are employed more than nine volunteers every one thousand residents, while this value is halved in the *Mezzogiorno*. More specifically, Emilia-Romagna is the second-best region in terms of volunteers’ concentration (10.2) behind Trentino-Alto Adige (12.9). Finally, regarding the blood donations’ indicator, again central-

⁸ This indicator is based on regional participation at the 2008 and 2013 general elections for the Chamber of Deputies, and the 2009 European elections.

⁹ 2009-2010 average.

¹⁰ It concerns the year 2011.

¹¹ It concerns the year 2008.

northern regions occupy the top spots. Emilia-Romagna (57.8) is followed by Friuli-Venezia Giulia (57.4) and Veneto (51.2).

Table 3.4. Regional distribution of the four indicators of social capital.

REGIONS	Electoral participation (average of general and European elections (2008-2013))	Copies of daily newspapers sold every 1.000 residents (Average 2009-2010)	Volunteers every 1.000 residents (2011)	Blood donations every 1.000 residents (2008)
Piedmont	76.4	62.1	8.4	50.8
Aosta Valley	71.7	86.4	5.5	46.5
Lombardy	79.2	76.6	9.9	47.7
Liguria	72.7	130.4	7.6	44.6
Trentino-Alto Adige	75.1	133.5	12.9	44.7
Veneto	79.7	74.8	8.9	51.2
Friuli Venezia Giulia	74.2	113.3	8.2	57.4
Emilia-Romagna	81.7	92.9	10.2	57.8
Tuscany	78.6	84.1	9.8	44.7
Umbria	80.5	55.7	6.1	46.0
Marche	78.9	62.3	7.6	47.4
Lazio	73.9	73.5	7.1	31.1
Abruzzi	73.0	55.5	5.5	37.1
Molise	73.2	31.8	4.8	44.6
Campania	69.4	27.1	3.2	24.7
Apulia	71.5	34.8	4.0	38.4
Basilicata	70.9	36.5	5.5	35.5
Calabria	63.5	44.0	4.5	30.7
Sicily	62.9	52.0	3.7	34.6
Sardinia	60.5	103.4	7.2	41.9
ITALIAN AVERAGE	73.4	71.5	7.0	42.9
MIN	60.5	27.1	3.2	24.7
MAX	81.7	133.5	12.9	57.8

Coefficient of variation Italy	21.2	106.4	9.7	33.1
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Notes: analysis per region, national average, minimum value, maximum value, and coefficient of variation.

Source: Bordandini and Cartocci (2014: 54).

Another important aspect concerning the levels of civiness within Italian regions is the ‘generalized trust’, that is the level of trust that us, as humans, feel towards people that we do not know; people that are outside our familiar and parental circles but together with we think to share the belief of a common destiny. Again, the share of people expressing generalized trust is consistently higher in the central and northern regions with respect to the South (Table 3.5).

Table 3.5. Percentage frequency distribution and index numbers relative to generalized trust.

REGIONS	GENERALIZED TRUST	
	% TRUSTFUL	N INDEX
Piedmont or Aosta Valley	24.3	112.0
Lombardy	23.8	109.7
Liguria	27.7	127.6
Trentino-Alto-Adige	36.4	167.7
Veneto	22.2	102.3
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	27.3	125.8
Emilia-Romagna	22.3	102.8
Tuscany	22.2	102.3
Umbria	21	96.8
Marche	20	92.2
Lazio	23.9	110.1
Abruzzi	20.2	93.1
Molise	17.3	79.7
Sardinia	22.3	102.8
Campania	15.8	72.8
Apulia	16.6	76.5
Basilicata	15.1	69.6
Calabria	18.3	84.3
Sicily	14.9	68.7
ITALIAN AVERAGE	21.7	100

Min	15.1	69.6
Max	36.4	167.7
Range of variation	21.3	98.2

Notes: analysis per region, national average, minimum value, maximum value, and coefficient of variation.

Source: Bordandini and Cartocci (2014: 59).

In sum, the picture emerging from the data highlights the persistency of high levels of social capital in those regions belonging to the two territorial subcultures. Above all, Emilia-Romagna shows consistent high levels in all five indicators concerning the civiness of local community. Therefore, even if these areas cannot be considered anymore ‘excellences’ as compared to other regions in the Centre-North, they seem to have preserved a great part of their social capital’s endowment.

The aforementioned data lead us to put forward the argument for which in these areas preferential voting is far from an established reality. High levels of social capital, as we mentioned, shall prevent citizens to cast a preferential vote based on individual expected benefits. The data shown in Tables 2.1 and 3.3 stress that preferential voting has been persistently low in the White and Red Zones, as, more generally, in all the northern regions. Indeed, since the beginning of the First Republic, the general elections for the Chamber of Deputies have been characterized by a clear divide between northern and southern regions in the use of preferential voting. The same picture can be drawn from the data concerning the regional elections. Here Emilia-Romagna has consistently been the region with the lowest rate of preferences (Scaramozzino, 1990).

With the collapse of the First Republic, however, we witnessed a generalized increase in the use of preferential voting across all Italian regions. As outlined by Fabrizio and Feltrin (2007), concomitantly with the demise of mass-based parties and the beginning of the Second Republic, preferences seem to have become an essential device for voters to connect with politics, as parties’ presence on the territory and their ability to offer an ideological platform steeped with universalistic values have weakened.

As shown in Table 3.6, the increase in the rate of preferential voting in the period 1995/2005¹² has not only interested Southern Italy, but also Northern and Central Italy showed a significant growth in the propensity to cast a candidate-oriented vote. Let’s take into consideration the two regions that are most often identified as the fulcrum of, respectively, the Red and the White Zones: Emilia-Romagna and Veneto. In the former, the period 1995/2005 was marked by an overall increase of

¹² It refers to the 1995 regional elections, the 2000 regional elections, and the 2005 regional elections.

17.1% in the rate of preferential voting. This value constitutes the lowest increase among all regions - Puglia, for example, witnessed an increase of 37.3% -, however it could still represent a cue of an ongoing transformation in the voter-politics relationship, as the weakening of party organizations may have left space for the development of a direct and personalized relationship with individual politicians. The same could be said for Veneto. In the cradle of the White Subculture the period 1995/2005 was characterized by an increase of 22.8% in the use of preferential voting.

Table 3.6. 1995-2005 regional elections. Differences in the rate of preferential voting in 13 ordinary statute regions.

Regions	2005/1995 Difference	2005/2000 Difference
Piedmont	24.5	6.9
Lombardy	15.0	2.7
Veneto	22.8	5.7
Liguria	19.9	4.6
North	19.3	4.5
Emilia-Romagna	17.1	5.8
Umbria	25.0	4.5
Marche	20.9	4.8
Lazio	28.0	7.5
Centre	23.2	6.6
Abruzzi	31.5	5.6
Campania	30.7	6.3
Apulia	37.3	8.7
Basilicata	26.5	3.5
Calabria	26.2	4.7
South	32.0	6.5
Total 13 regions	25.5	6.0

Source: Fabrizio and Feltrin (2007: 180).

Nonetheless, the trend of overall increase in the rate of preferential voting has come to a halt in the last decade. The 2015 and 2020 regional elections in Emilia-Romagna and Veneto have been marked by a significant decrease in the rate of preferential voting. In Emilia-Romagna, after having reached its peak in 2005 (28.2%), the rate of preferential voting started declining, reaching 14% in

2020. Similarly, Veneto has experienced a sharp decline in the rate of preferential voting, falling towards the levels of 1995 in 2020 (17.8%). It's difficult to put forward an argument for this downward trend. First, we should point out the introduction of the *Legge 15 febbraio 2016 n.20* which introduced the possibility to express a double preference, with the requirement to reserve the second one to a candidate of the opposite sex. This change has made it more difficult to compare the rate of preferential voting between those regions that have promptly introduced the new requirement and the ones that have delayed its introduction. The former's rate of preferential voting may, indeed, be negatively biased (Rombi, 2015). Another possible explanation was put forward by Almagisti, Scarnera, and Stefanelli (2015) when studying the 2015 regional election in Veneto. A generalized protest - visible also by looking at the electoral turnout -, as well as a 'weaker' electoral campaign run by individual candidates - due to the ongoing economic crisis - may have hindered the use of preferential voting. Indeed, as suggested by Valbruzzi and Vignati (2014), the economic crisis may have rendered harder the political exchange of promises and favors between citizens and candidates. Nonetheless, further research would be needed for better understanding this downward trend. In short, we cannot spot a clear-cut trend. After a significant increase in the period 1995-2005, which involved both southern as well as northern regions, the last decade is explicative of the resistance of the two areas to the diffusion of a widespread 'culture' of preferential voting.

This, however, does not necessarily mean that personal vote hasn't established itself as an important element in those party systems experiencing great turmoil and instability. As we will show in the empirical part of our elaborate, nowadays, leading candidates running for a seat in the regional council of those areas that have traditionally expressed a close and organic relationship with a dominant party display a more stable and predictable support with respect to party lists. To grasp the possible determinants of the increased centrality of personal vote, it is now best to analyze the historical (both socioeconomic and political) trajectory characterizing the two Italian subcultures. This will allow us to highlight the peculiarities of the two entities, as well as those features that may have spurred a change in the voter-politics relationship.

Sociological studies have often pointed at the 1880s agrarian crisis as the spark provoking the activation of trust and associational networks in the areas of the North-East and Centre. In the former, crucial was the role of the Church in the mobilization of the masses of peasants, while in the central regions first the socialist movement, and then the Communist party, took the lead in structuring the social and political life of the sharecroppers' community (Almagisti, 2016). These circumstances opened a gap between these communities and the political institutions of the newly born state, that only the later action of the DC and the PCI will eventually patch up.

Only with the end of the Fascist regime, indeed, when new centrality was conferred to party organizations, the process of democratic anchoring of the two territorial subcultures could be concluded. The DC and the PCI's organizational structures soon became elements of identification, representation, and consolidation (Diamanti, 2009). They became *part of the society* as well as their spokesmen within state institutions: at the same time, they were party-society and party-institutions.

If they both expressed the 'politics in the territory', the role of the parties in the two subcultures dramatically differed. In the North-East the relationship between the party and the local community was strongly mediated by the presence of catholic associationism. The DC had a limited presence in society, as evidenced by the level of party-membership as compared to the PCI. The Church controlled and steered party's decisions, besides providing fundamental welfare and cultural services. It represented the main source of local development and thus it had a great influence on political attitudes and behaviors. In sum, the party was a vehicle, a means through which the local community got protection on the inside and with regards to central institutions (*Ibidem*). It was the affiliation to the Church that represented a sufficient premise for casting a vote in favor of the DC (Almagisti, 2016). The relation with politics in the North-East was thus characterized by detachment and instrumentality (Trigilia, 1981).

In the Red Zone, instead, *the party* - the PCI - was the center of the local community's social and political networks. The party was not a 'wingman' in the sense that it represented the fulcrum of cultural and political associationism. The PCI was able to capitalize the considerable social and trust capital stemming from the *Resistenza* (Almagisti, Scarnera, and Stefanelli, 2015). This made it a party with a 'strong institutionalization' as compared to the DC, characterized, instead by a 'weak institutionalization'. Moreover, the party entrenched in the local government - the only body it could control since the central government was constantly occupied by the DC.

As outlined by Messina (2012), the PCI carried out an integrative function through its interventionist politics, which was peculiar to the *municipal socialism* proper to the area. The regulatory function unfolded through fiscal policies that lessened the burden of the less well-off, and through measures such as subsidies and services in favor of the unemployed. This 'integrative model' was opposed to the 'aggregative model' peculiar to the North-East, where political institutions interpreted politics as tantamount to mediation and *exchange*, thus creating the conditions for the diffusion of a 'vote of exchange' (Diamanti, 1988).

The peculiar relationship between the party and the White Subculture explains why in the 1980s the DC experienced a sharp decline in electoral support. The process of secularization rapidly eroded the foundations of the party's legitimation, as the Church lost its grip on society. The DC was forced to 'autonomize' itself, but this inevitably made it an easy target for citizens' protest. The DC

never employed an interventionist strategy in the North-East, never guiding local development, and when it was called upon to do so in light of the all-pervading socioeconomic transformations affecting the area, it ultimately failed them.

The demise of the DC led to the success of the *Northern League* (LN) precisely in those areas where highest had been the consensus for the Christian-Democrats. The League has interpreted very differently the relationship with society and central institutions. It has used the territory as a ‘symbol’ *against* Rome and the unproductive South. Moreover, another crucial factor has differentiated the LN from the DC: the stability of its electoral support. The party, led at the time by Umberto Bossi, won 10% of the votes at the 1996 general election, being nonetheless overcome by Forza Italia in 2001. Emblematic of the political instability of the White Zone was the previously mentioned unexpected increase in the rate of preferential voting, as well as the decrease in electoral turnout characterizing late 1990s’ regional elections (Messina, 2012). Even more problematic is to interpret recent vicissitudes. Surprisingly, the M5S became the first party in Veneto at the 2013 general election for the Chamber of Deputies. In 2018, instead, the League retook the leadership in the region. Shifting the focus to the regional competition, the League seems nowadays in control of the region. Luca Zaia won the last three consecutive elections. However, it must be noticed how the 2015 and 2020 regional elections were characterized by the great results of non-party and presidential lists. In particular, *Zaia Presidente* has stood as the most voted list in the region for two consecutive regional elections.

The 1990s represented a critical period also for the Red Subculture. The demise of the USSR called for big changes within the dominant party of the area. The PCI lost its external legitimization and had to abandon communism. The sudden transformation from the PCI to the PDS (then DS and PD) brought confusion and disorientation in the eyes of citizens and voters that felt to have lost their traditional political identity. This led to an unusual electoral fluctuation for the local government party, as well as a significant decrease in electoral turnout. Nonetheless, at the turn of the century the Red Zone was still painted ‘red’. In Emilia-Romagna, 2000s’ regional elections were characterized by convincing victories for the center-left coalition. The stability of the local government may be explained by the ability of the regional political class to build consensus through projects of general interests (*Ibidem*). The heirs of the PCI have, indeed, continued to be an active player in political regulation and planning. Even when the area was hit by the processes of globalization and economic internationalization. This has generated trust and consensus towards political institution, even when the vote of belonging transformed itself in a vote of opinion.

The last decade, however, has put into question the resilience of the Red Zone. As outlined by Cataldi and Emanuele (2019), the 2018 general elections witnessed a significant reduction in the electoral support for center-left parties, and especially for the PD. Moreover, for the first time,

regional elections in the Red Zone became truly competitive. Above all, the 2020 Emilia-Romagna regional election saw the unfolding of a close battle between the center-left presidential candidate – and incumbent governor - Stefano Bonaccini, and the center-right presidential candidate Lucia Borgonzoni. The reduced gap between the two coalitions and candidates may thus be interpreted as a sign of more volatile voting choices, less restrained by a sense of belongingness or attachment to a specific party, but rather more responsive to the specific electoral juncture.

This leaves us with the question: is there room for personal vote in the two Italian political subcultures? Our analysis of the recent literature on the two subcultures revealed the peculiarities of the two areas. The PCI has been the fulcrum of the associational life in the Red Zone, while the DC has held a mediating role in the relationship between the North-East and the central state. The vote cast for the Christian-Democrats was the expression of an ‘indirect’ belongingness. The Church represented the true builder of social capital and organizer of social life. Once the religious affiliation faded away, the relationship with politics quickly assumed the form of a fully-fledged political exchange. The inability of the LN to become a (politically and electorally) stable referent for the now ‘former’ White Zone - as shown by the high electoral volatility and unpredictability of recent electoral cycles - may have left some room for another important political element - personal vote - to work as an ‘anchor’ in connecting North-Eastern voters to political institutions.

One of the most famous scholars of the red regions - Caciagli (2011) - clearly stated that the Red Subculture as we knew it is dead. Modernity has meant the loosening of the traditional forms of social integration, leaving room to individualism and fragmentation. The ritualism - as for example the custom to go to the polls - that for decades characterized the red regions has faded away, as the prominent role of the family and class as socializing factors. The Red Subculture has been replaced by mere territorial identities. What is left is the traditional voting behavior that leans to the left.

The last few years, however, have shown that little remains of that common electoral behavior that characterized the Red Subculture. The Red Zone is reduced to few and sparse leftist feuds, and both the general and regional elections in the area displayed high levels of electoral volatility and increased competition (Valbruzzi, 2019). The loss of *the party* - the PCI - cracked the foundations sustaining the social and political life of the area. The heirs of the PCI have tried to preserve its legacy, nonetheless it appears more and more difficult to do so. The voting behavior, as in the North-East, is now more volatile and heavily dependent on single issues and performances of the local administrations. The vote of belonging is no more. Under these circumstances, the direct relationship between voters and candidates may constitute an antidote to the confusion and disorientation felt in the last decades. We are now going to assess if this holds true.

PART II

AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

CHAPTER FOUR

A NEW ‘SYSTEMNESS’? THE ROLE OF THE ‘LORDS OF PREFERENCES’ AT THE ITALIAN REGIONAL ELECTIONS

The following pages will examine the role of leading candidates in regional political systems. Lords of Preferences can be defined as those candidates able to obtain a large share of personal support, regardless of the party they run with and the type of election (De Luca, 2011). The analysis of the literature on the Calabrian case highlights their centrality in candidates’ recruitment mechanisms and, ultimately, their influence on the electoral competition. An empirical model is proposed - replicating the one employed by Emanuele and Marino (2016) - to assess personal vote’s ability to structure a new ‘systemness’ in ‘turbulent’ regional party systems, as well as its ability to integrate, or even replace, the weakened party-based politics.

4.1 Lords of Preferences: an analysis of the Calabrian case

A pattern of greater instability and unpredictability can be observed when looking at Italian regional party systems. As outlined by Vampa (2021), nowadays regional elections clearly follow a logic of their own, to the extent that is extremely difficult to talk about ‘second-order elections’. This mutation is linked to the emergence of important individual actors who have stolen the ‘spotlight’ to national parties. More specifically, a process of ‘region-centered presidentialization’ (*Ibidem*) can be

detected. Presidents of regions have, indeed, concentrated more political powers in their hands, increasingly detaching themselves from national parties' directives (see also Passarelli, 2012). This process was ultimately accelerated by the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, that transferred extensive powers in relevant areas such as health care in the hands of regional governments (Diamanti, 2020; Reda, 2021). This, in turn, spurred the proliferation of presidential lists, which, in some cases, even outweighed traditional parties in their electoral support¹³.

More generally, non-partisan lists increased from 15 in 2010, to 37 in 2014/15, and to 59 in 2020 (Vampa, 2021). This upward trend signals the presence of widespread political fragmentation (Grimaldi, 2021), as well as - as noticed by De Luca (2011) - parties' inability to normalize and streamline the political supply at local level. Parties' central offices are, indeed, facing growing difficulties in keeping under control local dynamics, and especially candidate selection. As stressed by Costabile (2009), especially in the South regional and local recruitment channels are nowadays controlled by the so called 'Lords of Preferences'. Lords of Preferences can be best described as those candidates able to obtain a large share of personal support, regardless of the party they run with and the type of election (De Luca, 2011). By functionally replacing the traditional '*padroni delle tessere*' (or '*capi-tessera*')'s gatekeeping role, their power in regional and local political systems has grown exponentially in the last few decades, to the extent that they have become key elements of Southern institutional life.

Who are these Lords of Preferences? And what means do they employ in order to collect such a great electoral support? Lords of Preferences are mostly political professionals who trained in parties where inter-personal struggle overrode common goals (De Luca, 2001). That is, those politicians raised within the local branches of government parties such as the DC and the PSI, where preferential voting represented a means to solve intra-party competition (Katz, 1985). Their know-how in terms of preferential voting's collection, together with their vast network of direct voter-candidate relations, have proven fruitful in times when personal vote takes a prominent role in local party systems.

The crisis of party organizations and the resultant lack of organizational support for individual candidates by the former, indeed, have rendered the autonomous cultivation of personal vote a key activity in sub-national political systems. As outlined by De Luca (2001), the organizational structure supporting candidate's electoral campaign has now moved outside the party, in election committees populated by activists with previous party experience. In this context - the author argued - local referents play a prominent role in maintaining the network of relations between the candidates and

¹³ Let's think for example at Luca Zaia's presidential list, which outweighed the League in the last two regional elections (2015 and 2020) (Grimaldi, 2021).

their voters. Moreover, the latter are fundamental in building an electoral support that goes beyond the candidate's place of residence and reaches every town in the constituency.

As to construct such an extensive network of local referents, leading candidates must possess a crucial asset: being known and influent (*Ibidem*). This implies that Lords of Preferences are usually politicians with a long *cursus honorum* in local political institutions. Incumbent members of regional assemblies or councils, above all others, can leverage their political influence to make them known all over the constituency.

As said before, these individuals have strengthened their prominence mostly in the *Mezzogiorno*. Accordingly, the literature has mainly focused its attentions on Southern regions, highlighting the increasing importance of individual politicians (other than the ones occupying leading executive positions) over the group (e.g. the party or the regional and local government). We refer here to the process of decentralized personalization (Balmas *et al.*, 2014), previously outlined in Chapter Two. The area has, indeed, witnessed a downward flow of power towards individual politicians and candidates that increasingly behave in an autonomous way with respect to their group. Calabria, perhaps, represents the most illustrative case. Through the means of interviews, Napoli (2005) analyzed the mechanisms underpinning candidates' recruitment processes for the 2005 Calabrian regional election. Candidates placed in provincial lists were primarily chosen based on their ability to attract electoral support; that is, their ability to obtain preferential votes. Interestingly, candidates' recruitment wasn't carried out in a democratic way and the choices were handled by few people; sometimes even by the candidates themselves. This exposes the weakness of central party's offices, and parties in general, to control the ballot structure. Few party officials, the Lords of Preferences, played - and still play - the role of gatekeepers in controlling who can enter regional politics and who is excluded. Their ultimate objective is to make up competitive lists comprising candidates able to mobilize voters to cast preferential votes, but at the same time to guarantee the election of specific candidates only (including themselves), excluding other potential competitors.

Napoli (*Ibidem*) noticed how in Calabria two phenomena were taking place: (i) a substantial overlapping between the votes cast for the presidential candidates and the list votes for the coalitions supporting them; (ii) an extremely high rate of preferential voting. These circumstances denote the centrality of individual candidates other than presidential ones in shaping the electoral competition and influencing the electoral outcome. Valuable for the eventual win of the coalition in regional elections proves to be not only the vote cast to the latter because of the presidential candidates' image and traits, or as the recognition of the goodness of its political platform, but also the ability to gather electoral support through individual candidates' ability to collect a fair quantity of preferential votes.

De Luca (2001) outlined how those candidates obtaining a broad political following represent fully-fledged ‘personal parties’ (Calise, 2000). Indeed, alongside those national parties led and organized by a strong charismatic figure (for example, Berlusconi’s FI), we could add the case of those candidates for the regional council that secure a large share of preferences in regional elections. These ‘parties’ are fundamental as they shape electoral competition. The choice of a Lord of Preferences to run under the banner of one coalition or another may truly influence the final electoral outcome. On the one hand, these politicians are able to transfer their votes from one side of the political spectrum to the other. Their electorate, on the other hand, is keen to follow them, as party affiliation is weak and the role of direct and informal relationships with the leading candidate is deemed more important (*Ibidem*).

The effect of personal parties in Southern regions has been studied in many respects. Among others, De Luca (2001; 2011) stressed the relationship between personal parties and electoral participation. Personal vote, he noted, has contained the rampant electoral abstention characterizing the *Mezzogiorno* in the last few decades. Personal vote has made up for the mobilizing deficiency typical of political parties in the South. This relates to what Raniolo (2009) has defined ‘reverse mobilization’: as the degree of politicization of the electoral competition increases - as it is the case for general elections - the turnout in Southern regions tends to shrink. The closeness of the electoral competition, and thus the direct relationship between voters and leading candidates, work as an amplifier of political mobilization.

Nonetheless, major downsides have been highlighted regarding the growing importance of Lords of Preferences in local political contexts. Emanuele and Marino (2016:18) noted how in a ‘Lord of Preferences-centered system’ electoral accountability becomes problematic. “Indeed, parties are no longer used as a heuristic (Shively, 1980) by voters, who rather express their vote primarily for an individual candidate. It follows that traditional accountability based on the classic punish/reward mechanism related to parties’ behavior in office is replaced by a vicious individual-level accountability based on the ability of elected Lords to deliver pork-barrel legislation for their own constituency or, more generally, on Lords’ ability to provide, through political patronage, private benefits to their voters”.

To what extent do Lords of Preferences - and more in general, personal vote - affect regional political (and party) systems, thus shaping electoral competition and/or even the final electoral outcome? Empirically, Emanuele and Marino (*Ibidem*) tried to give an answer to this question, by focusing (as De Luca and Napoli did) on the Calabrian political system. They constructed an original empirical model with the aim to explore preferential voting and patterns of re-candidacies and endorsements of the leading candidates in the 2010 and 2014 Calabrian regional elections. Personal

vote has long been an important component of the Calabrian party system. The rate of preferential voting has constantly been thirty or more points higher than the national average. Furthermore, electoral volatility has shown a significant increase in the last few years, as well as party replacement rates. In sum, “both the supply side (parties) and the demand side (voters) have faced great fluidity in Calabria in the last years” (Emanuele and Marino 2016: 5). The lack of stable, predictable, and routinary patterns of interactions between political forces (Casal Bértoa, 2014) makes the Calabrian party system a de-institutionalized one.

The presence of an unstable and unpredictable party system - Emanuele and Marino argued - may leave room for personal vote to thrive. The latter, indeed, may become an important element of continuity in those contexts where preferential voting is allowed. So much that we may think at personal vote as an element fostering a new form of ‘systemness’, alongside or even replacing the declining systemness of the party system. Personal vote is thus deemed as a potential structuring force, generating a new system of interactions - taking place at candidates’ level - in which relationships of cooperation and competition occur between individual candidates (other than the ones running for top government positions) in the electoral arena. These interactions can involve “the same candidate changing party or coalition election after election, bringing his/her endowment of votes with him/her; an alliance among individual politicians who can switch from a right-wing to a left-wing party and vice versa or even build new electoral lists - the so called ‘personal parties’ -; endorsements given by politicians who have previously stood as candidates to freshly running candidates” (Emanuele and Marino, 2016: 4). Naturally, these patterns influence the electoral competition, as the internal composition of electoral alignments are heavily affected by the decisions of the Lords of Preferences. Moreover, the transfer of blocks of personal votes from one party to another, or from a candidate in a party A to a new candidate in party B may significantly impact the electoral outcome.

The empirical analysis showed that in the 2010 and 2014 Calabrian regional elections, between 60% and 70% of the votes in the province of Reggio Calabria (RC) were collected by a small circle of politicians. Most surprisingly, the empirical evidence demonstrated that leading candidates were able to build a more consistent and predictable relationship with their electorate as compared to political parties. By analyzing Lords of Preferences’ territorial support in RC across the two elections, the authors found out, not only that those candidates showed a significant level of predictability in their electoral following, but also that these levels were significantly higher than the ones concerning political parties. The weakness of party organizations in structuring stable pattern of interactions was evident when considering Lords’ ability to maintain a high level of continuity in their territorial support, even when they moved from one party/coalition to the other. This means that the

predictability of candidates' support was mainly driven by their ability to build a direct relationship with their voters and the capacity to feed these links over time, rather than stemming from the label for which they run for election. In short, Calabrian voters increasingly follow the candidates, not the parties.

Furthermore, Calabrian Lords of Preferences were able to strongly influence the electoral outcomes of the presidential competition. By assessing their ability to explain and predict the success (or failure) of a presidential candidate in the 2014 regional election in RC, Emanuele and Marino (*Ibidem*) found out that leading candidates possessed a significantly higher explanatory capacity than traditional parties. More specifically, through the means of a general combined OLS regression analysis, the authors found out that the beta coefficients concerning the Lords of Preferences' related variable were substantially higher with respect to the ones concerning parties, besides being always statistically significant at the highest level of confidence.

4.2. *The empirical model*

In the previous pages we stressed the ability of leading candidates in structuring a new form of systemness based on the patterns of interactions (re-candidacies and endorsements) taking place at individual level. Most of all, the Calabrian case is a seminal one in the fact that Lords of Preferences have structured a candidate-based system, replacing the traditional party-driven one. Not only they featured a more stable and predictable electoral support than parties, but they also proved to be better predictors of the electoral outcomes.

Is the Calabrian case a one-off? Is there significant room for personal vote in other - and markedly different - areas of the country? Have Lords of Preferences acquired a prominent role in political systems traditionally driven by party politics? The following empirical analysis attempts to answer these questions by comparing the effects of personal vote in three different Italian regions: Campania, Emilia-Romagna, and Veneto. These regional contexts are different in nature. The Region of Campania, located in the Southern Italy, displays many political features proper to the *Mezzogiorno*. Its regional party system has usually been quite unstable and unpredictable over time (Reda, 2021). In such a context, political forces have not been able to establish themselves as the fulcrum of a fully-fledged political subculture. Parties have never bothered to present themselves as mass-based organization, but rather as 'catch-all' ones solely focused on the acquisition of electoral consensus (Bova, 2009). The chronic weakness of intermediate bodies has left room for personal and

particularistic relationships between candidates and voters to thrive. Leading candidates have thus become the primary political referents of large sections of the electorate (De Luca, 2001; Emanuele and Marino, 2016). The rate of preferential voting in the region (Table 2.1 and Table 3.3 is a clear indicator of this tendency. Voters tend to choose first their candidates, then their party. The analysis of the Campanian case will assess the possibility that - as in Calabria - personal vote has structured a new systemness; a candidate-based system paralleling or even replacing the traditional party-based system.

Nonetheless, our empirical analysis will not stop here. We also want to assess the possibility that personal vote has become a structuring element in those political systems where parties have long been the center of fully-fledged political subcultures. That is, those regions where parties have not only represented primary political referents, but rather truly regulators of local development. Therefore, the study will also focus on the Italian regions of Emilia-Romagna and Veneto. The former can (or rather could¹⁴) be considered the center of the Red Subculture - together with Tuscany. Here the PCI, and, more generally, left-wing parties, have traditionally obtained their strongest electoral results (Galli, 1966; Corbetta, Parisi, and Schadee, 1988). However, as we have previously noticed, the Red Subculture is experiencing a deep crisis: both concerning its traditional value system, and in electoral terms (Valbruzzi, 2019). The fall of the Berlin Wall and the demise of the USSR dismantled the identity base characterizing the area. The end of the PCI - replaced by the PDS (then DS and, finally, PD) - transformed the nature of the relationship between the dominant party of the area and citizens. Nowadays, the traditional vote of belonging appears to have been replaced by a vote of opinion dependent on the performances of local political institutions (Diamanti, 2009; Almagisti 2016). The wearing down of long-lasting organic relationships between citizens and parties can be best appreciated when looking at the last two general elections. The PD - and in general, all center-left parties - does not represent anymore the dominant party in the area. In Emilia-Romagna, the strong performances of the M5S and the League are clear indicators of the transformation of the local patterns of interactions between parties (Valbruzzi, 2019). This represents a solid basis for the argument that individual candidates for the regional council have now established themselves as new elements of continuity in a 'turbulent' regional party system, acting as non-traditional 'anchors' between citizens and politics.

Similarly, we propose the argument that, in Veneto, leading candidates and their block of votes represent nowadays important elements of continuity within the regional political system, being able to shape the electoral competition and significantly influence electoral results. The White Zone is no more. It was firstly replaced by the green banner of the League, and then by the blue one of FI.

¹⁴ See Chapter Three for a detailed analysis of the recent developments of the Red Subculture.

However, no party has yet granted the same political and electoral stability instilled by the DC (Diamanti, 2009; Almagisti, 2016, 2020). Parties' weakness has already left room for personalized politics, as today Veneto is experiencing a process of centralized personalization (Almagisti, Scarnera, and Stefanelli, 2015). We want to assess if, paralleling the growing importance of political leaders (as the President of the Region Luca Zaia) and Presidential candidates, a process of decentralized personalization is taking place.

In sum, we put forward four different expectations:

1. *In Campania, the permanent instability and unpredictability of the regional party system has favored the development of a new systemness based on the patterns of interactions (re-candidacies and endorsements) taking place at individual level.*
2. *This new systemness has complemented, or even replaced, the weakened systemness stemming from Campanian parties' patterns of interactions, influencing both the electoral competition and the 'general' electoral results;*
3. *The weakened socioeconomic and political centrality traditionally awarded to parties in Emilia-Romagna and Veneto has been integrated by new "anchors" in the figure of leading candidates for the regional council;*
4. *Leading candidates have supplemented, or even replaced, the tarnished mobilization ability of national parties, affecting both the electoral competition and the 'general' electoral outcomes.*

The following empirical analysis will be conducted on *regional* contexts and *regional* elections. The choice stems from two fundamental reasons: on the one hand, Italian regional elections are one of the three electoral venues - together with local and European elections - in which preferential voting is allowed; on the other hand, the *Tatarella* Law (the so called *Tatarellum*) presents peculiar features that enhance the cultivation of a personal vote.

The *Tatarella* Law, first introduced in 1995 (n.43 February 23rd, 1995), is a proportional electoral system featuring a majority bonus. It features a single electoral round, and it allows for the direct election of the President of the Region (constitutional law n.1 1999). More in detail, 80% of the seats are allocated through a proportional formula and preferential voting - the Law n.20 of February 15, 2016, has introduced the possibility to cast two preferences, with the requirement to set aside the second one to a candidate of the opposite sex -, while the remaining 20% through a multi-member plurality system. The *Tatarellum* is a provisional arrangement. Each ordinary statute region has,

indeed, adopted its own regional electoral law. Nonetheless, the main features of the national law have been retained.

What makes the *Tatarella* law very interesting for our elaborate is the fact that it can be defined as a candidate-centric electoral system. That is, a system that “tend to push candidates towards self-promotion rather than toward promoting the party’s collective identity” (Samuels 1999: 490,491). The *Tatarella* law, indeed, satisfy the criteria put forward by Samuels: (i) each voter is presented with the option of casting one or more votes directly for candidates, and may also have the option to cast a list vote; (ii) each electoral district returns more than one member to the assembly (no single-member districts); (iii) if there are no party lists, the candidate get a seat according to his/her electoral performance, while if there are party lists, the seats are awarded to the candidates in each list following the number of preferential votes they individually receive.

The following chapters will analyze the regional political contexts of Campania, Emilia-Romagna, and Veneto, with a specific focus on the Metropolitan City of Naples (NA), the Metropolitan City of Bologna (BO), and the Province of Padova (PDV as not to confuse it with the Democratic Party (PD)). The analysis will aim to verify our hypotheses. The empirical method will replicate the one used by Emanuele and Marino (2016): (i) we will identify the leading candidates (from now on Lords of Preferences), operationalized as those candidates for the regional council obtaining at least 1% of the total valid votes cast in the three abovementioned districts in either the 2014/15 or the 2020 regional elections; (ii) we will assess the persistence and predictability of Lords’ territorial support, and we will compare it with the one of parties through bivariate correlations; (iii) we will run a series a multi-variate regression analyses in order to test the ability of Lords and their votes to predict the electoral results of Presidential candidates in 2020, as compared with the explanatory power of parties.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE CASE OF CAMPANIA

The following pages will deal with the Campanian political and party system. The last regional electoral cycle (2015-2020) featured a process of presidentialization (Tronconi, 2015; Reda, 2021; Vampa, 2021). The regional political power concentrated even more markedly in the hands of the governor of the region, Vincenzo De Luca, who managed to pursue a strategy of ‘monocratization’ of the electoral competition. His performances played as determinants for the success of the center-left coalition in the last two regional elections. This change was fostered by the ongoing process of party system de-institutionalization, that weakened national parties’ centrality in the political system, as well as their ability to control the electoral supply (Vampa, 2021). These developments may have created room for the establishment of more stable and predictable patterns of interactions. The systemness resulting from the competition and cooperation among parties, may have been paralleled, or even replaced, by a new system revolving around leading candidates for the regional council. We will therefore employ our empirical model to assess if personal vote constitutes a new central element of the Campanian political system.

5.1. The Campanian political and party system

Since the establishment of the direct election of the President of the Region (Constitutional Law n.1 1999), Campanian regional elections have been characterized by a clear pattern: in four of the five electoral consultations taking place within this period, elections have been won by the center-left coalition. Both Antonio Bassolino and Vincenzo De Luca are two charismatic figures that were able to personalize the electoral competition, allowing for the victory of their supporting parties (Reda, 2021). De Luca was able to attract a widespread consensus, becoming a truly ‘popular’ figure. If Tronconi (2015) highlighted the tendency towards personalization and presidentialization for the 2015 regional elections, the last years and months of the previous legislature - characterized by the evolution of the pandemic - witnessed a greater centralization of powers in the hands of incumbent regional Presidents. The latter re-defined their room for maneuver, taking the lead of the territorial garrison of citizens’ security. As stressed by Reda (2021), De Luca reached this goal by converting his government leadership in a ‘popular’ leadership. De Luca was able to set in motion a process of ‘national viralization’ of his local communication after the outbreak of the pandemic.

De Luca’s strategy meant - in 2020 - a further accentuation of the ‘monocratic twist’ concerning the Campanian political system. His recent electoral success was striking: 69,4% of the popular vote, with a 50 percentage points lead over the second-best Presidential candidate Stefano Caldoro (19,2%). The process of regional personalization and ‘monocratization’ of the electoral competition appears as remarkable if we focus on few important figures: (i) De Luca’s electoral support has increased by 28% compared the 2015 regional election, and by 26% compared the 2010 one; (ii) his rate of personalization¹⁵ reached 110,7% (Grimaldi, 2021). This means that the performance of the incumbent governor - who gained one hundred thousand votes more than the center-left coalition - produced a ‘towing effect’ on the overall result of the winning coalition.

The abovementioned process of regional centralized personalization matters to the extent that it highlights the chronic illness of national parties in Campania. The Campanian party system has long been unstable and weakly structured (Reda, 2021). If the birth of the Second Republic meant the establishment of a tendential bipolarism, on the other hand a fully-fledged two-party system has never come into existence. Between 2000 and 2010, the first two political forces barely exceeded 50% of regional votes, while the index of bipolarism reached 90%. The last two electoral cycles, in this sense, produced a very familiar picture. The sum of the votes of the two main parties in 2020 does not even reach 30% (*Ibidem*).

The level of party fragmentation is thus very high - even higher than in the past electoral consultations. Overall, the Effective Number of Parties (Eff N) rose to 12.2 in 2020 (the highest level

¹⁵ Computed as follows: the share of votes of the Presidential candidate/ the share of votes to the lists supporting him/her.

among Italian regions in 2020) (Grimaldi, 2021). This was mainly due to the great performance of non-national parties¹⁶, whose share of votes rose from 37.86% in 2015 to 48.17% in 2020. Moreover, the number of competing lists rose from 20 in 2015 to 26 in 2020. The ‘extra-large’ coalition supporting De Luca contributed significantly to this result. The center-left coalition comprised 15 lists, 6 more than in 2015. In this regard, it is interesting to note that the Presidential list ‘De Luca Presidente’ obtained 13.30% of the total list votes, becoming the second most voted list in the region.

The high number of lists, as outlined by De Luca (2011) is an important indicator of two phenomena: (i) they are indicative of the generalized crisis of political parties and their inability to normalize and organize the political supply at local level; (ii) when a high number lists is condensed in the same coalition - as in the case of De Luca’s coalition - this responds to a strategy aimed at leveraging the electoral behavior of those voters that primarily cast a (preferential) vote for a candidate to the regional assembly.

Connected to the high fragmentation characterizing the Campanian party system is the level of party replacement. Of the 20 lists running in 2015, only 8 (PD, De Luca Presidente, Campania Libera, Centro Democratico, Partito Socialista Italiano, Forza Italia, Fratelli d’Italia, and the Five Star Movement) maintained their party label in 2020, while as many as 8 lists ran for the first time in a regional election. The literature on party system institutionalization relates the high levels of party replacement to the weakening of predictability characterizing the party system (on this point, see Emanuele and Chiaramonte, 2020).

At the same time, also the stability of the Campanian party system is endangered. When considering the period between the 2015 and 2020 regional elections, the level of electoral volatility¹⁷ has been as high as 41.8%¹⁸. All this means that both the supply side (parties) and the demand side (voters) are experiencing great fluidity in Campania. Therefore, based on the literature (Emanuele and Chiaramonte, 2020), the Campanian party system may be considered as a de-institutionalized party system.

This represents a solid starting point for our argument that, in Campania, personal vote nowadays constitutes a prominent element of the regional political system. The weakening systemness stemming from parties’ patterns of interactions may have been complemented, or even replaced, by the new systemness generated by personal vote.

¹⁶ By non-national parties we have considered those party lists obtaining less than 1% of total valid votes cast in the general election preceding the analysis in question.

¹⁷ For electoral volatility we mean the degree of change in voting behaviour between elections. It is measured by the Pedersen Index (Pedersen, 1979). Its formula is: $\frac{\sum_{i=1}^n |p_{it} - p_{i(t+1)}|}{2}$

¹⁸ Author’s elaboration based on the data of the *Ministero dell’Interno*.

First, we must stress that the electoral system for the regional election in Campania fosters the cultivation of a personal vote. As outlined by Borghese and Mezzio (2015), the Law n.6 of January 31st, 2014, provides for a PR system with majority bonus (60% of the seats) granted to the coalition supporting the Presidential candidate who has obtained the highest number of votes. The electoral system allows for split-ticket voting. Indeed, the voter can express two votes: one for a party list and the other for a Presidential candidate that may be supported by a different list/coalition (Plescia, 2016). Moreover, the voter can express up to two preferential votes, on the condition that the second preference must be cast for a candidate of the opposite sex.

As we have already outlined in the previous chapters, the Open List Proportional Systems (OLPS), characterized by the possibility of expressing one or more preferential votes (Samuels, 1999), provides incentives for the cultivation of a personal vote among individual candidates, as well as fostering inter-party competition. The features of the Campanian electoral system add up to the peculiar circumstances characterizing the relation between voters and politics in Campania, as more generally in Southern Italy. Direct and particularistic ties between citizens and individual politicians are widespread in Campania. Similarly, preferential voting has long constituted an element of continuity of the regional political system (see Table 2.1). Figure 5.1, however, returns an unclear picture when focusing on the last decade. If it is easy to denote a clear upward trend in the period 1970-2005 - a phase in which Campania displayed rates of preferential voting as high as other Southern regions -, the period starting from 2010 up to 2015 was characterized by a significant drop in the rate of preferential voting. This could stem from many different factors. Above all, however, there is the introduction of the regional electoral law n.6 of May 28th, 2009. The law innovated the regional electoral system by introducing, for the first time in Italy, the possibility of casting up to two preferences, on the condition to express the second one for a candidate of the opposite sex. As noticed by Rombi (2015), in this case the computation of the rate of preferential voting differs from the one employed for the regions allowing for just one preferential vote. This evidently hinders the comparability between the two categories. Nonetheless, the 2020 value indicate the return of Campania's rate close to the levels of other Southern regions. This was mainly due to the late adoption of the double preferential vote by Puglia and Basilicata.

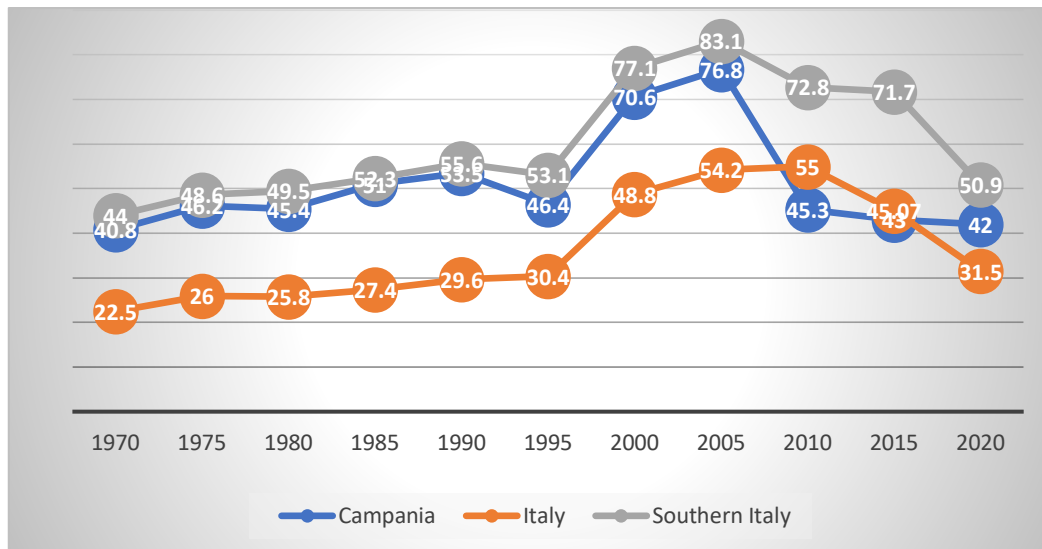


Figure 5.1. Rate of preferential voting in Italian regional elections, 1970-2020. Data for the 1970-1990 period come from Scaramozzino (1990); data for the 1995-2014 period come from Valbruzzi and Vignati (2014); data for the 2014-2015 period come from Emanuele and Marino (2016) and Rombi (2015). The line representing Southern Italy includes Campania, Basilicata, Puglia, and Calabria. Finally, ‘Italy’ includes data concerning all ordinary statute regions.

5.2 Personal vote in a de-institutionalized environment

The mere analysis of the rates of preferential voting is, however, partial. This impels us to perform a rather in-depth analysis. We want to assess if personal vote has turned into an important, or even central element in the Campanian political system, generating a new form of systemness, supplementing, or even replacing, the one produced by parties. This new systemness would stem from the pattern of interactions - re-candidacies and endorsements - occurring at individual level between those who we may call Lords of Preferences - that is, those candidates able to obtain a widespread personal support, regardless of the party they run for and the type of electoral competition. Therefore, it is now important to identify who are the Lords of Preferences in Campania. To do so, we will analyze the 2015 and 2020 regional elections, and we will focus on the local electoral context of Naples metropolitan city (NA).

How to identify Lords of Preferences? Following Emanuele and Marino (2016), we selected candidates running for the Regional Council according to a quantitative criterion: having received at least 1% of the total valid votes for the lists in NA in either the 2015 or the 2020 regional elections. A threshold of 1% allows us to isolate those leading candidates able to collect such a relevant number

of votes to affect the electoral competition and results. In short, we want to identify noticeable individual actors of the Campanian political system.

Table 5.1 and 5.2 report the names of Lords of Preferences in 2015 and 2020, as well as their party/non-party list, the votes they received (absolute and percentage values), and if they were ultimately elected. Moreover, the turnout, the share of total list votes, and the 1% threshold in absolute value are shown. The total number of preferences obtained by leading candidates in 2015 was equal to 361,976, while in 2020 was 276,873. The decrease was not due to the different levels of electoral turnout - turnout is actually higher in 2020 (55.3%) as compared to 2015 (51.5%). Neither by the potential drop in the rate of preferential voting, which remained stable. Preferences may thus have acquired a more widespread and less concentrated character, with many candidates obtaining a quite relevant number of votes (fostered by the newly introduced double preferential voting system), albeit under the 1% threshold.

Indeed, Lords of Preferences in 2015 collected 31.71% of the total list votes, while in 2020 this value was equal to 23.41%. In sum, between 20% and 30% of the votes in NA are concentrated in a handful of candidates. These values are quite small when compared to the results presented by Emanuele and Marino's (2016) on the province of Reggio Calabria (RC). In Campania, the pervasiveness of personal vote and the centrality of leading candidates seems to be weaker than in Calabria. Indeed, in RC Lords of Preferences controlled between 60% and 70% of the votes. This difference may be explained by the higher levels of fragmentation (as noted earlier) characterizing the last electoral cycle, prompting the spreading of preferential votes across more candidates.

Table 5.1. List of Lords of Preferences in the 2015 regional election (NA).

Leading candidates 2015 regional elections (NA)					
Turnout (NA): 51,45%					
Valid list votes: 1142355					
11424: 1%					
Surname	Name	Party list	Votes	Valid share	Elected
Amato	Vincenza	PD	15180	1.33%	Yes
Amente	Mafalda	Forza Italia	12658	1.11%	No
Beneduce	Flora	Forza Italia	14373	1.26%	Yes
Borrelli	Francesco Emilio	Davvero-Verdi	2233	0.20%	Yes
Casillo	Mario	PD	31307	2.74%	Yes

Casillo	Tommaso	Campania Libera	7972	0.70%	Yes
Cesaro	Armando	Forza Italia	27937	2.45%	Yes
Ciarambino	Valeria	M5S	35305	3.09%	Yes
Daniele	Gianluca	PD	16821	1.47%	Yes
Di Scala	Maria Grazia	Forza Italia	17462	1.53%	Yes
Fabbrocini	Gabriella	NCD-Campania Popolare	14,375	1.26%	No
Fiola	Carmela	PD	13605	1.19%	Yes
Guarino	Francesco	Forza Italia	11942	1.05%	No
Marciano	Antonio	PD	13162	1.15%	Yes
Marrazzo	Nicola	PD	12525	1.10%	Yes
Nappi	Severino	NCD-Campania Popolare	17282	1.51%	No
Pizzella	Francesco	Centro Democratico	1501	0.13%	No
Porcelli	Giovanni	Campania Libera	5304	0.46%	No
Raia	Loredana	PD	10924	0.96%	Yes
Russo	Ermanno	Forza Italia	16322	1.43%	Yes
Schiano Di Visconti	Michele	Forza Italia	21550	1.89%	Yes
Sommese	Pasquale	NCD-Campania Popolare	21680	1.90%	Yes
Topo	Raffaele	PD	20556	1.80%	Yes
Mean			15738	1.38%	
Total			361976	31.71%	

Notes: candidates obtaining at least 1% of total list votes both in the 2015 and the 2020 regional elections (NA) highlighted in yellow.

Source: Author's elaboration.

Table 5.2. List of Lords of Preferences in the 2020 regional elections (NA).

Leading candidates 2020 regional elections (NA)					
Turnout (NA): 55,32%					
Valid list votes: 1183308					
11833: 1%					
Surname	Name	Party list	Votes	Valid share	Elected
Amato	Vincenza	PD	15483	1.31%	No
Amente	Cosimo	Fratelli d'Italia	4697	0.40%	No
Beneduce	Flora	Campania Libera	6325	0.53%	No
Borrelli	Francesco Emilio	Europa Verde-Demos	15799	1.34%	Yes
Casillo	Mario	PD	42350	3.58%	Yes

Casillo	Tommaso	Campania Libera	12133	1.03%	No
Ciarambino	Valeria	M5S	17365	1.47%	Yes
Daniele	Gianluca	PD	13958	1.18%	No
Di Scala	Maria Grazia	Forza Italia	10226	0.86%	No
Fiola	Carmela	PD	22760	1.92%	Yes
Guarino	Francesco	Italia Viva	7313	0.62%	No
Manfredi	Massimiliano	PD	19073	1.61%	Yes
Marciano	Antonio	PD	11897	1.01%	No
Marrazzo	Nicola	PD	10772	0.91%	No
Nappi	Severino	Lega Salvini Campania	8501	0.72%	Yes
Porcelli	Giovanni	Campania Libera	12339	1.04%	Yes
Raia	Loredana	PD	27040	2.29%	Yes
Russo	Ermanno	Forza Italia	4361	0.37%	No
Schiano di Visconti	Michele	Fratelli d'Italia	8927	0.75%	Yes
Sommese	Giuseppe	Liberaldemocratici	5554	0.47%	Yes
Mean			13844	1.17%	
Total			276873	23.41%	

Notes: candidates obtaining at least 1% of total list votes both in the 2015 and 2020 regional elections (NA) highlighted in yellow.

Source: Author's elaboration

Based on the data concerning Lords of Preferences in NA, we can now proceed to assess the latter's ability to structure stable and predictable patterns of interactions, generating a new systemness at candidates' level. Moreover, we will compare the continuity of these patterns of re-candidacy and endorsement to the ones concerning parties. To do so, we assessed Lords' territorial support in NA, measuring their continuity as compared with parties. Among the 40 leading candidates of 2015 and 2020, we studied those exerting a prominent role in both elections, either standing as candidates in both, standing as candidates in 2015 and endorsing another candidate in 2020, or being endorsed by another candidate and standing as candidates in 2020. More specifically, six different situations may emerge: (i) the same Lord stands for election in 2015 and 2020, within the same party; (ii) the same Lord stands for election in 2015 and 2020 with different parties of the same coalition; (iii) the same Lord stands for election in 2015 and 2020 with different coalitions; (iv) a Lord (or simply an

individual candidate¹⁹) in 2015 endorses a Lord (or simply an individual candidate) in 2020, belonging to the same party; (v) a Lord (or simply an individual candidate) in 2015 endorses a Lord (or simply an individual candidate) in 2020, belonging to another party within the same coalition; (vi) a Lord (or simply an individual candidate) in 2015 endorses a Lord (or simply an individual candidate) in 2020, belonging to a different coalition.

Table 5.3 reports Lords' re-candidacies and endorsements in NA between 2015 and 2020. The table indicates that the majority of Lords in 2015 run again for the Regional Council of Campania in 2020. Among the 20 links found, 17 are re-candidacies and only 3 are endorsements²⁰. More specifically, in 13 cases the Lord in 2015 run with the same party in 2020. Regarding endorsements, we have no cases in which a Lord - or an individual candidate - in 2015 who endorsed a Lord - or another individual candidate - of the same party. In one case only, a Lord (Sommese P.) in 2015 endorsed an individual candidate in 2020 belonging to a different coalition. Overall, the total vote share collected by the selected Lords is 26.20% in 2015 and 23.41% in 2020.

Table 5.3. Lords' re-candidacies and endorsements between 2015 and 2020 in NA.

Lords in 2015 and in 2020

Same party

Amato V. (PD) → (PD)
 Borrelli F.E. (Davvero-Verdi) → (Europa Verde-Demos Democrazia Solidale)
 Casillo M. (PD) → (PD)
 Casillo T. (Campania Libera) → (Campania Libera)
 Ciarambino V. (M5S) → (M5S)
 Daniele G. (PD) → (PD)
 Di Scala M.G. (FI) → (FI)
 Fiola C. (PD) → (PD)
 Marciano A. (PD) → (PD)
 Marrazzo N. (PD) → (PD)

Lords in 2015 who endorsed other Lords in 2020/Other candidates in 2015 who endorsed Lords in 2020/Lords in 2015 who endorsed other candidates in 2020

Same party

¹⁹ For clarity purposes, for individual candidates we refer to candidates for the Regional Council who obtained less than 1% of the total valid votes.

²⁰ The endorsements were retrieved through the means of local newspapers and the analysis of Facebook posts posted by those concerned. More specifically, in the case of Amente M. endorsing Amente C. (they are cousins) the endorsement was retrieved from Amente M.'s Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/mafalda.amente.5>. In the case of Pizzella F. and Manfredi M. the endorsement was retrieved from Pizzella F.'s Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/francescoarchi.pizzella>. Finally, in the case of Sommese P. and Sommese G. (Sommese P. is the father of Sommese G.), the source is Di Costanzo (2020).

Porcelli G. (Campania Libera) → (Campania Libera)
Raia L. (PD) → (PD)
Russo E. (FI) → (FI)

Different party but same coalition

Nappi S. (NCD-Campania Popolare) → (Lega Salvini
Campania)
Schiano di Visconti M. (FI) → (FdI)

Different coalition

Beneduce F. (FI) → (Campania Libera)
Guarino F. (FI) → (Italia Viva)

Different party but same coalition

Amente M. (FI) → Amente C.* (FdI)
Pizzella F.* (Centro Democratico-Scelta Civica) →
Manfredi M. (PD)

Different coalition

Sommese P. (NCD-Campania Popolare) → Sommese
G.* (Liberaldemocratici-Moderati)

Notes: individual candidates in *.

Source: Author's elaboration.

Then, we verified whether there was a certain degree of continuity and predictability in the territorial support held by these Lords over time - that is, between the 2015 and the 2020 Campanian regional elections. That's why we run a series of correlations between the hypothesized links among Lords²¹ across the 91 NA municipalities. If our expectations hold true, we expect that in a political system in which personal vote has become a central element, there will be high levels of correlation in Lords' territorial support over time. That is, Lords are either able to retain their block of votes, or to transfer their endowments to another candidate. Indeed, we expect that endorsements will not lead to a loss in Lords' continuity of their electoral support, as instead it would be the case in a fully party-driven system, where candidates are solely a function of the party for which they run.

Table 5.4 shows the results of bivariate correlations (Pearson's r coefficient) among the 20 hypothesized links of Lords. We note that out of the 20 hypothesized links, 18 present a significant coefficient, most of times at the highest level of confidence ($p < .001$). We can, however, spot some differences in the levels of correlation among candidates. Re-candidacies, indeed, present the highest levels of correlation, with many candidates scoring a coefficient higher than 0.90 (Porcelli G., for example, shows a level of 0.95). These values are lower when considering endorsements. The highest correlation, in this case, is 0.62 (the one concerning Sommese P. and Sommese G.). The other two endorsements, instead, show very low coefficients (lower than 0.25). As compared to the Calabrian case, where the coefficients of endorsements between candidates featured levels comparable to the ones concerning re-candidacies, in Campania party affiliation may still be considered a crucial element and a selection criterion for voters, so that a move from one party to another (especially if belonging to another coalition) may hinder the continuity of a candidate's electoral support. Another

²¹ The correlations are run among the ratios between votes and total electorate across the 91 NA municipalities.

(parallel) possible explanation may be put forward: both the link concerning Pizzella F. and Manfredi M., and the one regarding Amente M. and Amente C. are characterized by the fact that one of the two candidates in each couple obtained much fewer preferential votes compared to their counterpart. Pizzella F., for example, obtained ‘only’ 1501 preferences in 2015, as compared to the 19073 cast for Manfredi M. This implies that the endorsements are, in this case, not decisive, as both Manfredi M. and Amente M. retrieve much of their consensus from sources other than the one highlighted in the analysis. This could have ultimately biased the Pearson’s r coefficient. Despite this, the overall average level of correlation among Lords is extremely high: 0.63. This coefficient is higher than the one recorded by Emanuele and Marino (2016) for the province of RC (0.43). In sum, Lords’ territorial support across the 91 NA municipalities - and, therefore, their patterns of interactions - show a certain degree of continuity and predictability over time.

Nonetheless, it is essential to compare these results to the one concerning political parties to assess the extent to which personal vote has become a truly important element in the Campanian political system. Indeed, personal vote could have become an element to consider in the Campanian political system, but within a party system that maintains a high degree of predictability and continuity over time. To test this possibility, we made use of 10 bivariate correlations among the ratios between votes and total electorate across the 91 NA municipalities for the party lists that have obtained at least 1 seat in the Regional Council in either one of the two elections under analysis. The results are remarkable. Out of the 10 couple of party lists, 6 show a significant coefficient. The highest r coefficient concerns the M5S (0.63). This high value may be connected to a recent process of ‘territorial structuring’. The last two general elections (De Sio and Cataldi, 2014; De Sio and Cataldi, 2019) as well as - to some extent - the most recent regional elections were characterized by the rise of the M5S. Its electoral support has been sizeable especially in Southern regions. Here, the party was able to develop a dense network of relations with voters. Nonetheless, the overall average level of correlation among parties is only 0.30, extremely lower than the mean coefficient found for Lords.

These results validate the argument that personal vote has truly become an important element in the Campanian political system. Lords’ territorial support features higher predictability and continuity compared to parties, who have lost part of their mobilization capacity and hold on the electorate.

Table 5.4. Lords and parties’ territorial support.

Lords’ candidacies and endorsements	Pearson’s r	Party lists	Pearson’s r
Amato V. (PD) → (PD)	0,79***	Campania Libera → Campania Libera	0,24*

Borrelli F.E. (Davvero-Verdi) → (Europa Verde-Demos Democrazia Solidale)	0,86***	Centro Democratico-Scelta Civica → Centro Democratico	0,19
Casillo M. (PD) → (PD)	0,69***	De Luca Presidente → De Luca Presidente	0,28**
Casillo T. (Campania Libera) → (Campania Libera)	0,78*	Davvero-Verdi → Europa Verde-Demos Democrazia Solidale	0,38***
Ciarambino V. (M5S) → (M5S)	0,79***	FI → FI	0,39***
Daniele G. (PD) → (PD)	0,24*	FdI → FdI	0,20
Di Scala M.G. (FI) → (FI)	0,92***	M5S → M5S	0,63***
Fiola C. (PD) → (PD)	0,35***	PD → PD	0,45***
Marciano A. (PD) → (PD)	0,13	PD → Italia Viva	0,25*
Marrazzo N. (PD) → (PD)	0,74***	UdC → UdC	-0,06
Porcelli G. (Campania Libera) → (Campania Libera)	0,95***		
Raia L. (PD) → (PD)	0,28**		
Russo E. (FI) → (FI)	0,64***		
Nappi S. (NCD-Campania Popolare) → (Lega Salvini Campania)	0,47**		
Schiano di Visconti M. (FI) → (FdI)	0,92***		
Beneduce F. (FI) → (Campania Libera)	0,68		
Guarino F. (FI) → (Italia Viva)	0,79***		
Amente M. (FI) → Amente C. (FdI)	0,24*		
Pizzella F. (Centro Democratica-Scelta Civica) → Manfredi M. (PD)	0,21*		
Sommese P. (NCD-Campania Popolare) → Sommese G. (Liberaldemocratici-Moderati)	0,62***		
Mean of hypothesized correlations (N:20)	0,63	Means of hypothesized correlations (N:10)	0,30

Notes: bivariate correlations (2015-2020) across the 91 NA municipalities; *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

Source: Author's elaboration.

Furthermore, these results indicate that Lords affect the electoral competition, to the extent that we witness the emergence of a more candidate-driven system. Nonetheless we should remain cautious. Indeed, the correlations above only concern the proportional arena. What about the presidential competition?

5.3 *The new systemness put to the test*

To investigate the true extent of Lords' centrality in the regional party system, it may be interesting to assess if personal vote can determine the 'general' electoral outcome. More specifically, we want to assess if Lords of Preferences' patterns of interactions exert a significant influence on the presidential competition, to the extent that they can predict electoral results better than parties.

To this end, we run a series of multivariate regression analyses based on a dataset where the units of analysis are the 91 NA municipalities. The dependent variables in each analysis were the share of votes (votes/electorate) of the three main Presidential candidates in 2020 (De Luca for the center-left coalition, Caldoro for the center-right coalition, and Ciarambino for the M5S), and the independent variables were the share of votes in 2015 of the coalition of parties and of the coalition of Lords supporting the Presidential candidates in 2020. More specifically, the votes for a Presidential candidate in 2020 in NA were predicted from different aggregations of coalitions of parties in 2015. For De Luca and Caldoro, we used the share of votes of the respective coalitions of parties in 2015, plus the share of votes in 2015 of the parties supporting the two candidates in 2020. For Ciarambino, instead, we only tested the explanatory capacity of the share of votes of the party in 2015 - the M5S - supporting the Presidential candidate in 2020. Moreover, we added a series of control variables that could potentially affect the relationship between the independent and dependent variables: demographic size, the political tradition of the municipality, and the economic context²².

Tables 5.5, 5.6, and 5.7 (displayed at the end of the chapter) show the results of the series of the OLS regressions. Each table studies the determinants of the votes for each of the three Presidential candidates. The results are very interesting. Table 5.5 focuses on the determinants of the vote for De Luca. Here, both the beta coefficients and the R^2 coefficients show that parties' explanatory capacity is substantially higher than that of Lords. Model 1 and Model 2, which study the explanatory capacity of different aggregations of parties, display very high and statistically significant beta coefficients - at the best level of confidence. Moreover, they explain a relatively higher portion of the variance (0.17) compared to Lords. Model 3 and Model 4, instead, show that Lords are not able to influence, and thus predict, the electoral performance of De Luca, as their vote shares in 2015 aren't associated to the electoral result of the center-left Presidential candidate in 2020, even excluding control variables. These results are corroborated by Model 5 and Model 6, that show Lords' explanatory power in presence of the independent variables concerning parties. Here, leading candidates' beta coefficients remain not statistically significant, while the opposite is true for different aggregations of parties.

Table 5.6, instead, looks at the determinants of the votes for the center-right Presidential candidate in 2020 - Caldoro. Here, the picture is slightly different. Model 1 and Model 2 show the explanatory power of the center-right coalition in 2015 (Model 1) and parties in 2015 (Model 2) supporting Caldoro in 2020. As in the case of De Luca, beta coefficients are high and statistically

²² Demographic size was measured as the number of residents in each municipality; the political tradition of the municipality was measured as the mean of the votes received by the Italian Communist Party in the 1953-1987 period in each NA municipality; the economic context was measured as the unemployment rate in each municipality.

significant. Moreover, they explain a greater portion of the variance (0.25 and 0.28) compared to the models concerning the center-left Presidential candidate. However, what is most interesting is that Model 3 and Model 4 indicate a significant effect of the coalition of Lords on Caldoro's 2020 electoral performances, with and without control variables. These results are remarkable as they identify a close association - even if weaker and at the lower level of confidence than the one concerning parties - between Lords and presidential results. Nonetheless, Model 5 and Model 6 show that, when we pool together parties' variables with the ones concerning Lords, the latter's coefficients become not statistically significant.

Finally, Table 5.7 concerns the determinants of the 2020 electoral performance of the M5S's Presidential candidate Ciarambino. Model 1 shows a strong association between the results obtained by parties in 2015 - in this case it concerns only the M5S - supporting Ciarambino in 2020. Most interestingly, in Model 2 we can see that the variable related to Lords' share of votes in 2015 (together with control variables) is statistically significant at the highest level of confidence and increases the percentage of explained variance from 51% up to 59%. Moreover, when we analyze parties and Lords together (Model 3), we can see how the beta coefficient related to Lords' electoral performance in 2015 remains significant and at a higher level of confidence compared to parties' variable. These results show that Lords, more than parties, influence the electoral results of the M5S Presidential candidate in 2020. However, we must outline the fact that, in this case, the variable related to Lords' electoral performance in 2015 only comprises the share of votes of Ciarambino herself. Indeed, besides running for the Presidency of the Region Campania, Ciarambino was included in the M5S list in NA, resulting as the only M5S candidate for the Regional Council to obtain more than 1% of total valid votes. These circumstances may have ultimately biased the results of the OLS regressions, as a close association between the votes obtained by Ciarambino as Presidential candidate and the preferential votes obtained in the proportional arena is hypothesized.

In sum, the analysis of the Campanian case revealed the presence, the importance, and the resilience acquired by personal vote in the regional political system. First, we noticed that between 20% and 30% of the total valid votes in NA are concentrated among a handful of candidates. These figures are not impressive when compared to the ones recorded by Emanuele and Marino (2016) for the province of RC. Nonetheless, they denote a good capacity of leading candidates to organize and coagulate electoral supports in their hands. Most importantly, the series of correlations show that the pattern of interactions among Lords (re-candidacies and endorsements) are characterized by greater continuity and predictability compared to parties. This means that, in a de-institutionalized party system, leading candidates have become important heuristics for voters, rendering personal vote a prominent element of the regional political system. Nonetheless, the analysis of Lords' capacity to

predict and explain the ‘general’ electoral results better than parties showed that the latter still hold a greater influence than candidates in determining Presidential candidates’ results. This is especially true for De Luca, where the variable related to Lords’ share of votes in 2015 is never significant, even without control variables. It seems like party labels in Campania, as compared to the Calabrian case analyzed by Emanuele and Marino (2016), still hold a prominent symbolic and identification power, presenting themselves to the electorate as important heuristics for casting a vote for a Presidential candidate. In short, the ‘general’ electoral competition appears still dominated by a party-based logic.

In sum, personal vote has generated a new systemness in the Campanian party system, based on candidates’ patterns of interactions. The latter appear to feature a very high continuity and predictability, thus influencing the electoral competition. Nonetheless, we also observe the persistence of another systemness, a ‘traditional’ one, as party-based politics appears to be the predominant logic in the ‘general’ electoral arena.

Table 5.5. Votes for De Luca in 2020 predicted from different aggregations of coalitions of parties and Lords in 2015.

Independent variables	Dependent variable: Presidential votes for De Luca											
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6	
	beta	s.e.	beta	s.e.	beta	s.e.	beta	s.e.	beta	s.e.	beta	s.e.
Centre-left coalition in 2015	0,38***	0.15							0,36**	0.15		
Parties in 2015 supporting De Luca in 2020			0,37***	0.15							0,36**	0.15
Lords in 2015 supporting De Luca in 2020					0.14	0.21	0.13	0.22	0.06	0.21	0.06	0.21
Demographic size	-0,14	0.00	-0,14	0.0			-0,17	0.00	-0,13	0.00	-0,14	0.00
Political tradition	-0,13	0.12	-0,13	0.12			-0,09	0.13	-0,15	0.12	-0,14	0.12
Unemployment rate	0.06	0.16	0.07	0.16			0.13	0.17	0.07	0.16	0.08	0.16
N	91		91		91		91		91		91	
R-squared	0.17		0.17		0.02		0.06		0.17		0.17	
Adj. R-squared	0.13		0.13		0.01		0.01		0.12		0.12	
F statistic	4.39		4.40		1.90		1.34		3.55		3.55	

Notes: OLS regressions with standardized coefficients (beta) and standard errors (s.e.). *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

Source: Author's elaboration.

Table 5.6. Votes for Caldoro in 2020 predicted from different aggregations of coalitions of parties and Lords in 2015.

Independent variable	Dependent variable: Presidential votes for Caldoro											
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6	
	beta	s.e.	beta	s.e.	beta	s.e.	beta	s.e.	beta	s.e.	beta	s.e.
Centre-right coalition	0,33**	0.06							0,29**	0.06		
Parties in 2015 supporting Caldoro in 2020			0,40***	0.07							0,36**	0.07
Lords in 2015 supporting Caldoro in 2020					0,34**	0.11	0,24*	0.12	0.18	0.12	0.17	0.11
Demographic size	-0.02	0.00	-0.02	0.00			-0.06	0.00	-0.01	0.00	-0.02	0.00
Political tradition	-0,28*	0.07	-0.21	0.07			-0,36**	0.07	-0.22	0.07	-0.16	0.07
Unemployment rate	0.05	0.09	0.01	0.09			0.10	0.09	0.02	0.09	-0.02	0.09
N	91		91		91		91		91		91	
R-squared	0.25		0.28		0.12		0.22		0.28		0.31	
Adj. R-squared	0.22		0.25		0.11		0.18		0.24		0.27	
F statistic	7.18		8.5		11.73				6.55		7.49	

Notes: OLS regressions with standardized coefficients (beta) and standard errors (s.e.). *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

Source: Author's elaboration.

Table 5.7. Votes for Ciarambino in 2020 predicted from different aggregations of coalitions of parties and Lords in 2015

Independent variables	Dependent variable: Presidential votes for Ciarambino					
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	beta	s.e.	beta	s.e.	beta	s.e.
Parties in 2015 supporting Ciarambino in 2020	0,55***	0.06			0,27**	0.06
Lords in 2015 supporting Ciarambino in 2020			0,60***	0.14	0,44***	0.17
Demographic size	0.01	0.03	0.03	0.06	0.03	0.07
Political tradition	0.11	0.03	0.15	0.02	0.11	0.02
Unemployment rate	0,23*	0.04	0,34***	0.34	0,30**	0.03
N	91		91		91	
R-squared	0.51		0.59		0.63	
Adj. R-squared	0.49		0.57		0.61	
F statistic	22.65		31.14		29.25	

Notes: OLS regressions with standardized coefficients (beta) and standard errors (s.e.). *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

Source: Author's elaboration.

CHAPTER SIX

THE CASE OF EMILIA-ROMAGNA

The following pages will deal with the Emilia-Romagna's political and party system. The last decade witnessed the definitive erosion of that peculiar and unconditional support towards left and center-left parties that have long characterized the red region par excellence. Nowadays, Emilia-Romagna appears as a contestable region, as shown by the results of the 2018 general election and the 2019 European election. The political events characterizing the last electoral cycle (2014-2020) have rendered the regional party system a 'turbulent' one. This may have left room for the establishment of a new and non-traditional relationship between citizens and politics. Personal vote may have become a prominent element of the Emilia-Romagna's political system. To assess this expectation, we will carry on an in-depth analysis on the continuity and predictability of leading candidates' patterns of interactions, as well as their ability to influence and predict regional electoral outcomes.

6.1 The Emilia-Romagna's political and party system

For almost a century Emilia-Romagna has been the fulcrum of the Red Subculture (Triglia, 1981; Diamanti, 2009; Almagisti, 2016). Following the demise of the First Republic and the

disappearance of the PCI, the set of norms, values, and traditions characterizing the area evolved on new and less ideological bases. As outlined by Messina (2012), the vote of belonging was replaced by a voter-party relationship that strongly revolved around the institutional performances of the local government. Nevertheless, the Second Republic was ultimately featured the persistence of an electoral behavior aimed at rewarding center-left parties, and in particular the heirs of the PCI. The 14 years long Presidency of the region by Vasco Errani (2000-2014) is illustrative in this sense (Cataldi and Emanuele 2014).

Something, however, has ultimately changed. Even the last remnants of the Red Subculture seem to have disappeared. The resilience of the red region par excellence could not cope with the second electoral earthquake stemming from the Great Recession (2008-2009). Since that moment, the Emilia-Romagna's political and party system have entered a new phase marked by complete unpredictability (Valbruzzi, 2019). More specifically, the 2014 regional election featured the demise of one of the most characterizing elements of the 'Emilian model': the electoral participation plummeted whilst abstention exploded (Salvati and Vercesi, 2015). Many plausible explanations were put forward at the time to make sense of the alarming 38% turnout. First, it must be noted that the 2014 Emilia-Romagna regional election took place in advance with respect to the natural expiration of the legislature. This stemmed from the resignation of Vasco Errani from the Presidency of the Regional Government (*Giunta*) in response to his conviction on appeal for the *Terremerse* case (Cataldi and Emanuele, 2014).

If the 2014 regional election in Emilia-Romagna witnessed the disappearance of one of the constituting elements of the region's civic tradition, the 2018 general election and the 2019 European election formalized the crisis of the dominant party in the area: the PD (Valbruzzi, 2019). Before that moment, Emilia-Romagna was never a contestable region. The supremacy of the PCI, of its heirs, and of the left in general had always been overwhelming to the extent that, in the 1980s, socialist and communist jointly collected 70% of the total votes. The DC, and then FI, long played the role of permanent opposition (Diamanti, 2009). Even the 2014 regional election did not shatter the political balance in the region, as the second-best party - the LN - obtained 25% of votes less than the PD. The 2018 general election, however, featured the definitive decline of Emilia-Romagna as a red region. The 26.38% of votes obtained by the PD represented an all-time low for any main left-wing party in the region. The PD was not anymore the dominant party, as the M5S (27.54%) was able to attract the consensus of who did not identify anymore with the red tradition. Emilia-Romagna wasn't anymore the 'kingdom of belongingness', but rather the place of a fierce electoral competition characterized by a volatile and mobile electorate (Valbruzzi, 2019).

The results of the 2019 regional election confirmed this picture, with the only difference that now the League of Salvini, rather than the M5S, took the lead. The PD, as compared with its predecessors, has lost the ability to subsume the different cleavages dividing the area. The 2019 results, indeed, witnessed the re-politicization of the urban-rural cleavage. The party managed to preserve its electoral support in the major urban centers, while it suffered significant losses in the countryside, where Salvini presented himself as the most credible actor to interpret the interests and needs of the hilly and mountain communities.

In this sense, the 2020 Emilia-Romagna regional election represented a test ground for the now former red region. As noted by Valbruzzi (*Ibidem*), never an Emilia-Romagna regional election was preceded by two consecutive electoral losses for center-left parties. A convincing win for the highly rated League would have meant the end of the Italian electoral geography as we knew it. Moreover, a victory in Emilia-Romagna would have represented for Salvini a stepping-stone for the national government, as the fragile foundations of the former yellow-red executive would have been ultimately eroded. Nonetheless, the attempt to nationalize the electoral competition by the leader of the League was counteracted by Bonaccini's strategy to point to the creditable record of center-left government in the region (Vampa, 2021). *Buongoverno* and regional issues were, indeed, the centerpiece of the incumbent President's campaign. This may ultimately explain a fair part of the electoral result. The PD obtained 46 000 votes more compared to the 2019 European election and regained the control of the Regional Government.

If on the one hand, this election featured a re-mobilization of that social sub-stratum that feared the shift of the region in the hands of the right, on the other hand it must be highlighted the tow effect exerted by the incumbent regional President Bonaccini (*Ibidem*). The latter obtained 51.42% of the total votes, that is 3 percentage points more than the votes obtained by the center-left coalition. In this sense, the strategy to focus on the institutional performance of the government led by center-left candidate proved fruitful. The index of personalization confirms so, as it reached 114.9 in the case of Bonaccini, 11 points more than the one concerning his center-right rival Borgonzoni (Grimaldi, 2021). Another indicator of the process of macro-personalization characterizing the 2020 regional election is the very good performance by the presidential list *Bonaccini Presidente*, which obtained 5.76% of the list votes, and overpowered the presidential list of Borgonzoni *Progetto Emilia-Romagna Rete Civica Borgonzoni Presidente* (1.73%).

Besides a process of centralized personalization, we have now to look at a possible shift in political power towards individual candidates other than politicians holding top government positions. Indeed, we suggest that, paralleling presidentialization, a process of decentralized personalization is taking place in the region. This implies that we must look at the Emilia-Romagna

context and see if the last electoral cycle wasn't only characterized by personalization from above, but also from below. More specifically, we must assess if personal vote worked its way in the regional political system, establishing itself as a prominent political element. As already said, one condition for personal vote to thrive and pervade the relationship between voters and politics is a de-institutionalized party system. So far, we have noticed that the traditional political balance characterizing the red region par excellence has been upset. The last electoral consultations have witnessed the transformation of Emilia-Romagna from a region firmly in the hands of the center-left, to one featuring competitiveness. Both the M5S and the League showed how voters have ultimately lost that feeling of belongingness towards the traditional dominant party, and that their vote is now mobile and extremely volatile. To answer this question, let's first focus on the last regional electoral cycle (2014-2020), looking on specific data concerning the stability and predictability of the Emilia-Romagna's party system.

First, we must outline the increasing party fragmentation characterizing the region. The number of competing lists rose from 11 in 2014 to 17 in 2020. The growing number of lists was accompanied by the rise in the share of votes obtained by non-national parties: from 6.65% in 2014 to 15.57% in 2020. Alongside fragmentation, the last electoral cycle featured an increase in party replacement. Out of the 11 competing lists in 2014, just 6 (PD, League, Fratelli d'Italia, Forza Italia, M5S, and L'altra Emilia-Romagna) maintained their party label, while as many as 8 lists ran for the first time in a regional election. This is a sign of the weakening of the predictability of the patterns of interactions among parties. Moreover, also the stability of the party system seems to be endangered. The level of electoral volatility in 2020 rose to 33.2%. This value is not so dissimilar to the one recorded for the Campanian party system (41.8%). If putting forward the argument that the Emilia-Romagna party system is a de-institutionalized one may be too audacious, it could nonetheless be concluded that we are confronted with a 'turbulent' party system.

In such a context, personal vote may have become an important, or even central element of the regional political system. The weakening of the organic relationship between voters and parties, which have long characterized the now ex-red region par excellence, may have left room for a rather direct and personal relationship between voters and individual candidates. The instability and the unpredictability of the system of interactions among parties may have been complemented, or even replaced, by a new systemness generated by the patterns of re-candidacies and endorsements of the so-called Lords of Preferences. Finally, leading candidates may have nowadays turned into 'anchoring' mechanisms supplementing the deteriorating relationship between Emilia-Romagna's citizens and parties, providing a more personalized, individual-level accountability, which would integrate, or even replace, the untrustworthy party-level accountability.

First and foremost, is important to outline that the Regional Law n.21 of July 23rd, 2014, fosters the cultivation of a personal vote by candidates running for the Regional Council. The law provides for the direct election of the regional President through a plurality system featuring a single round. 80% of the 50 seats in the Regional Council are allocated through a proportional system based on the electoral district corresponding to the provinces, while the remainder 20% represents the majority bonus allocated to the lists supporting the winning Presidential candidate. The system features the possibility for split-ticket voting (that implies, in this case, the possibility to select a Presidential candidate, as well as to express a vote for a list which does not support the selected candidate) as well as the possibility to cast two preferential votes, on the condition that the second preference must be cast for a candidate of the opposite sex.

As we already outlined in Chapter 2, the relationship between voters and politics in the red region has been traditionally mediated by parties, and in particular by the dominant party - the PCI (Almagisti, 2016). These circumstances hindered any incentive to develop a direct a personal form of relationship with candidates. In short, there was no reasons for citizens to make use of a personal vote when their interests and needs found solid representation in party organizations. This implied that Emilia-Romagna has long been - and still is - the region where preferential vote is least used. As highlighted by Figure 6.1, the regional rate of preferential voting has always been significantly lower than the national average.

Nonetheless, Fabrizio and Feltrin (2007) noticed how the birth of the Second Republic fostered a generalized increase in the use of preferential voting. This growth concerned Emilia-Romagna as well, as the 1995/2005 period featured an increase of 17.1%. The last three electoral cycles, however, were characterized by a reversal of this trend. In 2020, the rate dropped to 14%, a level similar to the ones recorded during the First Republic. However, as for the Campanian case, we must stress the fact that the 2014 and 2020 regional elections were held under the new regional electoral system, which provided for the possibility to express a double preferential vote. This new mechanism may have negatively biased the rate of preferential voting.

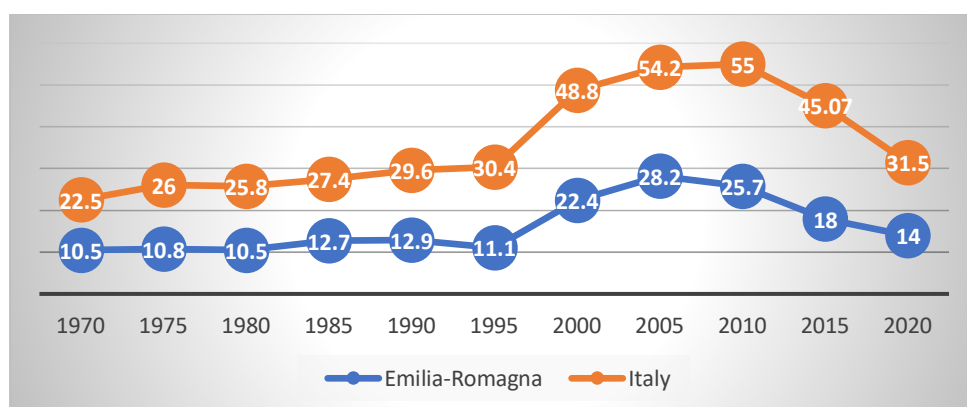


Figure 6.1. Rate of preferential voting in Italian regional elections, 1970-2020. Data for the 1970-1990 period come from Scaramozzino (1990); data for the 1995-2010 come from Valbruzzi and Vignati (2014). Data on 2015 and 2020 come from Regione Emilia-Romagna. Finally, ‘Italy’ includes data concerning ordinary statute regions.

In short, the data return a clear-cut picture: the use of preferential voting in Emilia-Romagna is not as widespread as in other parts of Italy. Emilia-Romagna’s citizens are more inclined to reward parties and competing lists in general, rather than individual candidates running for the Regional Council. This does not necessarily mean, however, that personal vote has not become an important element in the regional political system. Indeed, it could certainly be the case that the thrifty use of preferential voting is now concentrated on few important candidates; and that these candidates display a more continuous and predictable pattern of interactions than parties.

6.2 A new systemness in the heart of the Red Subculture?

To confirm these expectations, we isolated those candidates for the Regional Council (that we may call Lords of Preferences) by using the same empirical method employed for the region of Campania. More specifically, we focused on the Metropolitan city of Bologna (from now on BO).

Tables 6.1 and 6.2 report the names of leading candidates in 2014 and 2020, as well as their party/non-party list, the votes they received (absolute and percentage values), and if they were ultimately elected. The total number of preferences obtained by Lords in 2014 was equal to 58 624, while in 2020 was 89 303. More specifically, Lords in 2014 collected 20.39% of the total list votes, while in 2020 this value was equal to 17.45%. This means that about 20% of the votes in BO are concentrated in the hands of very few candidates. Comparing this value to the one concerning NA, we may notice that even if the share of votes controlled by Lords in NA is higher (between 25% and 30%), in BO personal vote is concentrated in fewer top candidates.

Table 6.1. List of Lords of Preferences in the 2014 regional election (BO).

Leading candidates 2014 regional elections (BO)					
Turnout (BO): 40,18%					
Valid list votes: 287.409					
2874 votes: 1%					

Surname	Name	Party list	Votes	Valid share	Elected
Bignami	Galeazzo	Forza Italia	9,956	3.46%	Yes
Caliandro	Stefano	PD	6,292	2.19%	Yes
Marchetti	Francesca	PD	5,548	1.93%	Yes
Marsano	Manuela	PD	2,158	0.75%	No
Mumolo	Antonio	PD	4,353	1.51%	Yes
Paruolo	Giuseppe	PD	6,614	2.30%	Yes
Poli	Roberto	PD	5,435	1.89%	Yes
Saliera	Simonetta	PD	11,947	4.16%	Yes
Taruffi	Igor	SEL	1,839	0.64%	Yes
Tomei	Fausto	SEL	191	0.07%	No
Vannini	Daniela	PD	4,291	1.49%	No
Mean			5,329	1.85%	
Total			58,624	20.39%	

Notes: candidates obtaining at least 1% of total list votes both in the 2014 and the 2020 regional elections (BO) highlighted in yellow.

Source: Author's elaboration.

Among the 22 Lords of Preferences detected in 2014 and 2020, we focused on those ones who exerted a prominent role in both electoral competitions, either standing as candidates in both elections, by standing as candidates in 2014 and endorsing another candidate in 2020, or being endorsed by another candidate running in 2014 and standing as candidates in 2020. This analysis will allow us to assess if leading candidates generate continuous and predictable patterns of interactions, as well as if this new systemness stands out in comparison to the one generated by parties.

Table 6.2. List of Lords of Preferences in the 2020 regional elections (BO).

Leading candidates 2020 regional elections (BO)					
Turnout (BO): 70,94%					
Valid list votes: 511529					
5115 votes: 1%					

Surname	Name	Party list	Votes	Valid share	Electe d
Caliandro	Stefano	PD	7253	1.42%	Yes
Donini	Raffaele	PD	13786	2.70%	Yes
Evangelisti	Marta	Fratelli d'Italia	5237	1.02%	No
Felicori	Mauro	Bonaccini Presidente	5370	1.04%	Yes
Lisei	Marco	Fratelli d'Italia	9383	1.83%	Yes
Marchetti	Francesca	PD	7759	1.52%	Yes
Mumolo	Antonio	PD	4833	0.94%	Yes
Paruolo	Giuseppe	PD	4278	0.84%	No
Pillati	Marilena	PD	10231	2.00%	Yes
Schlein	Elena Ethel	Emilia-Romagna Coraggiosa Ecologista Progressista	15975	3.12%	Yes
Taruffi	Igor	Emilia-Romagna Coraggiosa Ecologista Progressista	5198	1.02%	No
Mean			8118	1.59%	
Total			89303	17.45%	

Notes: candidates obtaining at least 1% of total list votes both in the 2014 and 2020 regional elections (BO) highlighted in yellow.

Source: Author's elaboration.

Table 6.3 reports Lords' re-candidacies and endorsements between 2015 and 2020 in BO. Among the 9 links found, 5 are re-candidacies and 4 are endorsements²³. More specifically, all re-candidacies concern candidates who run for the same party in both elections²⁴, while there are no cases in which re-candidacies or endorsements concerned a party in a different coalition. Overall, the total vote share collected by the selected candidates is 14.34% in 2014 and 14.43% in 2020.

Table 6.3. Lords' re-candidacies and endorsements between 2014 and 2020 in BO.

²³ Concerning Tomei F. and Schlein E.E., the endorsement was retrieved from Tomei F.'s Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/fausto.tomei.nuovo>. In the case of Vannini D. and Donini R., the endorsement was retrieved from Vannini D's Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/daniela.vannini.5>. For Bignami G. (FI) and Lisei M. the source is Redazione La Pressa (2019). Finally, concerning Marsano M. and Felicori M., the endorsement was retrieved from Marsano M.'s Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/manuela.marsano>.

²⁴ Concerning Taruffi I., we considered the list Emilia-Romagna Coraggiosa Ecologista Progressista as a derivative of Sinistra Ecologia Libertà (SEL).

Lords in 2014 and in 2020

Same party

Caliandro S. (PD) → (PD)
Marchetti F. (PD) → (PD)
Mumolo A. (PD) → (PD)
Paruolo G. (PD) → (PD)
Taruffi I. (SEL) → (Emilia-Romagna CEP)

Different party but same coalition

Different coalition

Lords in 2014 who endorsed other Lords in 2020/Other candidates in 2014 who endorsed Lords in 2020/Lords in 2014 who endorsed other candidates in 2020

Same party

*Tomei F. (SEL) → Schlein E.E. (Emilia Romagna CEP)
Vannini D. (PD) → Donini R. (PD)

Different party but same coalition

Bignami G. (FI) → Lisei M. (FdI)
*Marsano M. (PD) → Felicori M. (Bonaccini Presidente)

Different coalition

Notes: individual candidates in *.

Source: Author's elaboration.

Are these patterns of interactions stable and predictable over time? Has the 'turbulent' regional party system left room for personal vote to thrive and become a new prominent element of the regional political system? To answer these questions, we assessed the degree of continuity and predictability in the territorial support held by Lords over time - that is, between the 2014 and 2020 Emilia-Romagna regional elections. We, thus, run a series of correlations across the 55 BO municipalities between the hypothesized links.

Table 6.4 reports the results of bivariate correlations (Pearson's r coefficient) among the 9 hypothesized links. The results are remarkable. Out of these 9 links, 8 show a significant coefficient. Most interestingly, 7 out of the 8 significant coefficients, present the highest level of confidence ($p < .001$). In two cases (Marchetti F. and Taruffi I.) the r coefficient reaches 0.96. It means that their territorial support is almost identical between the two elections.

Nonetheless, some specifications must be made. As compared to re-candidacies, endorsements show an overall lower level of association. In the cases of Marsano M. and Felicori M., but, especially, Tomei F. and Schlein E.E. the relatively lower coefficients may be due to the fact that one of the two candidates in each couple obtained much fewer preferential votes with respect to their counterparts. Tomei F., for example, obtained 'only' 191 preferences in 2014, as compared to the

15,975 of Schlein E.E. These circumstances may have ultimately biased the computations²⁵. Nonetheless, as compared to the Campanian case, we found statistically significant correlations (even if lower as compared to re-candidacies) at the highest level of confidence for the endorsement concerning G. Bignami (FI) and M. Lisei (FdI) (0.58***), and the one regarding M. Marsano (PD) and M. Felicori (Bonaccini Presidente) (0.58***). These results highlight a good capacity of individual candidates to transfer votes, regardless of the party label. In sum, the overall average level of correlation among Lords is extremely high: 0.61. A level comparable to the one recorded in Campania (0.63). Data on Lords' territorial support corroborate the argument that personal vote has become an element to consider in the Emilia-Romagna political system, and one that displays great continuity and predictability.

Has this new systemness complemented, or even replaced the one conferred by parties? The results presented in the right-hand side of Table 6.4 show that the overall average level of correlation among parties is 'only' 0.33, extremely lower than the one concerning Lords. These results seem to be driven by the competitive, and sometimes unpredictable, environment characterizing the regional party system in recent years. More specifically, we can see how the lower levels of association mostly concern right-wing parties. The League, as well as Fratelli d'Italia show a *r* coefficient of 0.44. This may be caused by the impressive electoral progression that these two parties experienced in the last electoral cycle. The League was able to gain almost 17% of the list votes, while FdI rose from a mere 1.60% to 8.60%. The non-statistically significant coefficient (-0.04) concerning FI corroborate this argument, as it may have been caused by the consistent erosion of its territorial entrenchment in the area. In sum, the data validate the argument that Lords are more predictable and stable political objects as compared to parties, thus greatly influencing the electoral competition in BO.

Table 6.4. Lords and parties' territorial support.

Lords' candidacies and endorsements	Pearson's <i>r</i>	Party lists	Pearson's <i>r</i>
Caliandro S. (PD) → (PD)	0,49***	FI → FI	-0,04
Marchetti F. (PD) → (PD)	0,96***	FdI → FdI	0,44***
Mumolo A. (PD) → (PD)	0,80***	Lega Nord → Lega	0,44***
Paruolo G. (PD) → (PD)	0,82***	PD → PD	0,85***
Taruffi I. (SEL) → (Emilia-Romagna CEP)	0,96***	PD → Bonaccini Presidente	-0,13

²⁵ In short, as already outlined in Chapter Five, the low levels of the *r* coefficient in the case of Tomei F. and Schlein E.E. indicate that the endorsement is not decisive, as the latter candidate could count on other sources of consensus.

Tomei F. (SEL) → Schlein E. E. (Emilia-Romagna CEP)	0,36**	SEL → Emilia-Romagna CEP	0.78***
Vannini D. (PD) → Donini R. (PD)	-0,05		
Bignami G. (FI) → Lisei M. (FdI)	0,58***		
Marsano M. (PD) → Felicori M. (Bonaccini Presidente)	0,58***		
Mean of hypothesized correlations (N:9)	0,61	Mean of hypothesized correlations (N:6)	0,33

Notes: Bivariate correlations (2014-2020) across the 55 BO municipalities. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

Source: Author's elaboration.

6.3 The resilience of party-based politics

It could therefore be argued that the Emilia-Romagna's electoral competition is now centered on individual candidates, thus leaving the traditional party-driven politics out of the picture. Nonetheless, these results concern the proportional arena only. This compels us to proceed assessing Lords' capacity to predict the 'general' - presidential - electoral outcomes.

The series of bivariate correlations led us to the conclusion that Lords greatly influence the proportional competition in BO. In short, personal vote is more central than previously thought in the Emilia-Romagna political system. Consequently, this may also imply that Lords are important and significant predictors of Presidential candidates' electoral performances. To this end, we run a series of multivariate regression analyses based on a dataset where the units of analysis are the 55 municipalities of BO. The dependent variables in each analysis are the share of votes (votes/electorate) of the two main Presidential candidates in 2020 (Bonaccini for the center-left, and Borgonzoni for the center-right coalitions). The independent variables are the share of votes in 2014 of the coalition of parties and the coalition of Lords supporting the Presidential candidates in 2020. Moreover, we have added a series of control variables as in the previous case studied.

Table 6.5 and Table 6.6 show the results of the series of OLS regressions. Each table analyses the determinants of the votes for each of the two Presidential candidates. Table 6.5 deals with the electoral performance of the center-left candidate Bonaccini. Here, Model 1 and Model 3 display the beta coefficients concerning the coalition of parties in 2014 supporting the center-left

Presidential candidate in 2020, which are high and significant even when we add the control variables. Moreover, the analysis of the R^2 coefficients informs us that parties' explanatory capacity is extremely high (reaching 0.74 in Model 3). Very interestingly, the beta coefficient concerning the variable related to Lords' share of votes in 2014 (Model 2) is significant when we exclude control variables, even if it explains a significantly lower portion of the variance compared to the models concerning parties. This is an important result as it shows the existence of an association between Presidential candidate's electoral results and the electoral performance of top candidates. Nonetheless, the remarkable character of these findings is downsized by the results of Model 4 and Model 5. Indeed, by adding the control variables (Model 4) and the variable related to parties (Model 5), the beta coefficients concerning Lords' shares of votes become non-significant.

Table 6.6 analyses the determinants of the votes for the center-right Presidential candidate in 2020 Borgonzoni. The series of OLS regressions return a similar picture to the one drawn from the models concerning Bonaccini. Indeed, as in Table 6.5, Model 1 and Model 3 are significant and show that parties possess a very high explanatory capacity in predicting Borgonzoni's electoral results. At the same time, excluding controls, the beta coefficient related to Lords' share of votes in 2014 is statistically significant (Model 2). Model 4 and Model 5, however, show that, when we introduce control variables and then parties, the one concerning Lords become non-statistically significant.

In sum, the analysis of the Emilia-Romagna's context reveals the importance of personal vote in the Emilia-Romagna political system. Indeed, through an in-depth analysis we have found that, not only the interactions (re-candidacies and endorsements) among Lords are able to generate a new systemness by influencing the proportional competition, but also that this system is more continuous and predictable than the patterns of interactions among parties. Nonetheless, parties still retain the ability to greatly determine the main electoral competition (the one concerning the direct election of the President of the Region), and to do so better than Lords. Even if an association between Lords' electoral performances and Presidential candidates' results is recognizable, leading candidates' explanatory capacity is significantly lower than the one of parties.

These results lead us to confirm only parts of our expectations on Emilia-Romagna. Personal vote has generated a new systemness. Personal vote has become a prominent element for an ever-growing portion of the electorate - even if to a lesser extent than in southern regions. Nonetheless, parties in Emilia-Romagna still possess (especially the center-left parties) a prominent identification and symbolic function for citizens, working as heuristics that ultimately guide voting choices. The new candidate-based system thus appears to have integrated, rather than utterly replaced, the 'traditional' party-based system.

Table 6.5. Votes for Bonaccini in 2020 predicted from different aggregations of coalitions of parties and Lords in 2014.

Independent variables	Dependent variable: Presidential votes for Bonaccini									
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	beta	s.e.	beta	s.e.	beta	s.e.	beta	s.e.	beta	s.e.
Centre-left coalition in 2014	0,80***	0.15			0,47**	0.24			0,52**	0.26
Lords in 2014 supporting Bonaccini			0,38**	0.42			0.05	0.30	-0.08	0.30
Demographic size					0,23**	0.00	0,24**	0.00	0,22**	0.00
Political tradition					0,30*	0.08	0,61***	0.06	0,28*	0.08
Unemployment rate					-0.15	0.15	-0,25 *	0.17	-0.17	0.16
N	54		54		54		54		54	
R-squared	0.65		0.14		0.74		0.68		0.75	
Adj. R-squared	0.64		0.12		0.72		0.65		0.72	
F statistic	94.74		8.54		35.44		25.56		28.46	

Notes: OLS regressions with standardized coefficients (beta) and standard errors (s.e.). *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

Source: Author's elaboration.

Table 6.6. Votes for Borgonzoni in 2020 predicted from different aggregations of coalitions of parties and Lords in 2014.

Independent variables	Dependent variable: Presidential votes for Borgonzoni									
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	beta	s.e.	beta	s.e.	beta	s.e.	beta	s.e.	beta	s.e.
Centre-right coalition in 2014	0,73***	0.21			0,48***	0.23			0,47***	0.26
Lords in 2014 supporting Borgonzoni			0,38**	0.77			0.18	0.64	0.01	0.60
Demographic size					-0,29**	0.00	-0,36***	0.00	-0,29**	0.00
Political tradition					-0,24*	0.05	-0,49***	0.05	-0,24*	0.05
Unemployment rate					0,20*	0.11	0.19	0.13	0.20	0.12
N	54		54		54		54		54	
R-squared	0.54		0.15		0.71		0.60		0.71	
Adj. R-squared	0.53		0.13		0.69		0.57		0.68	
F statistic	61.01		8.99		29.88		18.65		23.43	

Notes: OLS regressions with standardized coefficients (beta) and standard errors (s.e.). *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

Source: Author's elaboration.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE CASE OF VENETO

Veneto has long been the fulcrum of the White Subculture (Diamanti, 2009; Almagisti, 2016). Here, during the First Republic, the Christian Democrats (DC) established themselves as *the* party of the Church, dominating the political and social life of the region, and consequently instilling stability to the system. The 1980s, however, witnessed the definitive erosion of citizens' confidence in the party (*Ibidem*). Venetian voters rewarded a new political actor, the Northern League (LN), as the new spokesman of their socioeconomic interests. Nonetheless, the LN could not replicate the organizational entrenchment of its predecessor, neither could it base its legitimization on the identification with the Church, as the process of secularization heavily affected the area. The regional supremacy of the *Carroccio* has never been so overwhelming as it was in the case of the DC (Almagisti and Zanellato, 2021). Moreover, since the 2010s a process of centralized personalization and presidentialization is under way (Grimaldi, 2021). The role of Luca Zaia, President of the Region since 2010 and member of the League, appears stronger and more prominent than the party itself. We argue that besides presidentialization, a process of decentralized personalization is taking place. More specifically, we put forward the argument that personal vote has become an important element of the regional political system, supplementing, or even replacing, that stability and predictability that parties' patterns of interactions appear to have lost.

7.1 The Veneto's political and party system

Veneto has traditionally been the fulcrum of the White Subculture (Galli, 1966; Diamanti 2009; Almagisti, 2016). Its social and political specificities stem from the process of unification and nationalization imposed by the central state. However, signs of its peculiar nature can be retrieved from the experience of the *Serenissima* (Almagisti, 2016). The agrarian crisis of the end of the 19th century saw the definitive consolidation of the Church as a symbolic and organizational resource. Its associational network and its ideology succeeded in the attempt to incapsulate the anti-statist localism that innervated the local culture. After the end of Fascism, the DC imposed itself as the main sponsor of the region and its citizens towards the central government. Its legitimacy stemmed from the fact that the Christian-Democrats were the party of the Church. In the 1970s, however, the process of economic development together with secularization modified the political demands of Venetian citizens (Diamanti, 2009). This implied a new phase of redefinition of the political balance, as the fifty years long supremacy of the DC, was replaced by the rise of the Northern League. The *Carroccio* interpreted the sentiments and interests of the local community, by using it as a symbolic reference in the struggle against the central state and the South.

Since the 1990s, the regional party system has been characterized by growing instability and unpredictability (Almagisti and Zanellato, 2021). Looking at the general elections, in 1996 the LN became the first party in the region (29.3%). Nonetheless, its expansion came soon to a halt, as in 2001 FI regained the lead. The Northern League was not the DC. Unlike the party of the Church, the *Carroccio* could not structure a dense political organization, and at the same time build a widespread electoral consensus. This becomes even clearer when looking at the regional elections taking place during the Second Republic. Until 2010, FI firmly remained the first party in the region. The LN had to wait the 2010 regional election to become the dominant party in Veneto (35.2%).

The recent success of the League, nonetheless, should be interpreted in connection with the remarkable results of the center-right candidate, and League's member, Luca Zaia. The latter has managed to build a plebiscitary consensus, establishing himself as 'the man of the territory' and 'the prophet at home' (Diamanti, 2020). His success is bound to two factors: (i) its communication ability, based on the wise mix of television appearances, activities on social network, and presence on the territory (the so-called T-R-T²⁶ strategy); (ii) its capacity to interpret the prevailing attitudes of the territorial political culture. More specifically, Zaia has successfully interpreted the anti-statist localism rooted in the North-East (*Ibidem*).

It is not a coincidence that Zaia won three consecutive regional elections since 2010. 60.16% in 2010, 50.09% in 2015, and an astonishing 76.79% in 2020, the largest victory in a regional election

²⁶ 'Tivù-Rete-Territorio (TV-Network-Territory).

since the introduction of the direct election of Presidential candidates. The results of the 2020 regional election are fundamental in understanding the status of the Venetian political and party system. Zaia preceded its main opponent (Lorenzoni) by more than 60 percentage points. Moreover, its presidential list (Zaia Presidente) became the first political force in the region with 44.57% of total list votes. More interestingly, the second-best party, the League, obtained ‘only’ 17% of total votes. This means that the ‘tow effect’ of the incumbent President was fundamental for the success of the center-right coalition, as the electoral performance of Zaia Presidente would have been enough for Zaia to govern *without* the League.

In short, a process of presidentialization is under way. Veneto represents a region where the vote for the ‘Presidential candidate only’ is most diffused. Compared to the Southern regions, indeed, this vote is three/four times more used. The data of the *Osservatorio Elettorale Regione Veneto* (2020) indicate that this type of vote was experiencing a downward trend until 2010. However, the great electoral performances of Luca Zaia brought the share up to 16.3% in 2015 and 16.2% in 2020. As outlined by Almagisti, Scarnera, and Stefanelli (2015), the growing importance of the relationship between voters and Presidential candidates may be interpreted as a further signal of the ongoing erosion of the White Subculture.

These developments clearly impacted on the stability and predictability of the regional party system. Electoral volatility skyrocketed in the last electoral cycle. It rose to 37.93%, a value not so dissimilar from the one of Campania (41.8%). Moreover, the level of party fragmentation grew significantly. The number of competing lists rose from 15 in 2010 up to 19 in 2015 and 17 in 2020. The high number of lists is mostly due to the presence of several autonomist and even separatist local and regional movements. Not only local and regional lists affected the electoral supply, but they also impacted on the electoral competition. Non-national parties obtained 43.39% of the total list votes in 2015 and 54.67% in 2020. Party replacement has been high as well, denoting great fluidity both regarding the demand side (voters) and the supply side (parties). Out of the 19 lists competing in 2015, only 6 (Lista Zaia, League, Fratelli d’Italia, Forza Italia, PD, and M5S) maintained their party label in 2020, while as many as 9 lists run for the first time in a regional election. Referring to it as a de-institutionalized party system would probably be too audacious, however, the Venetian party system has surely become a turbulent one. So that, we may not talk anymore about a political subculture, but rather of a ‘local political culture’ (*Ibidem*). That is, Veneto preserves part of the political and attitudes typical of the political history of the region, although the social capital proper of the White Subculture is becoming increasingly smaller.

The instability and unpredictability characterizing the region, we argue, may have also left room for the development of a process of decentralized personalization; a modification in the

relationship between voters and politics, that may now feature the increasing centrality of individual candidates as the main political referents of the citizenry. The weakened capacity of political organizations in linking the interests of the public to the central state, may have turned individual candidates into ‘anchors’ connecting the electorate to democratic institutions, streamlining the party-based accountability that represented the core structure of the political system in previous decades. Besides a process of presidentialization - most evident in the electoral success of Luca Zaia -, we argue that a personalization from below is taking place. Consequently, personal vote may have become a prominent element of the political system, complementing - or even replacing - the centrality of parties and their interactions. A new systemness, based on the patterns of re-candidacy and endorsement of the Lords of Preferences, may now instill that stability and predictability that the regional party system appears to have lost.

This could also be fostered by the peculiar relationship between citizens and parties in the area. As already outlined in Chapter Two, the relation with politics in the North-East has long been characterized by detachment and instrumentality (Diamanti, 2009; Messina, 2012; Almagisti, 2016), to the extent that the vote for parties has taken the form of a vote of exchange. Accordingly, this might favor the establishment of a more direct and personalistic relationship with political institutions.

Personal vote requires incentives to thrive. The Venetian electoral system, in this sense, allows for the cultivation of a personal vote by individual candidates for the Regional Council. The *Zaiatellum* (Regional Law n.5 of 16th, January 2012) provides for a proportional system with majority bonus. The system allows for split-ticket voting as voters can choose a Presidential candidate and a party that are not linked (Plescia, 2016). Moreover, since 2018 (Regional Law n.19 of May 25th, 2018) voters can cast up to two preferential votes, on the condition that the second preference must be cast for a candidate of the opposite sex.

By looking at the rate of preferential voting for all regional elections since 1970 (Figure 7.1), the first impression is that personal vote has never been a pervading element of the Venetian political system. The gap to the national average has indeed been consistently large (Scaramozzino, 1990). Nonetheless, as noticed by Fabrizio and Feltrin (2007), in the 1995-2005 period Veneto experienced a significant growth in the use of preferential voting. In that decade, the rate grew by 22.8%, rising to 39.1% in 2005. However, since 2010 the rate has experienced a downward trend. This may be due to different factors. One of them may be linked to the introduction of the double preferential vote, as the rate of preferential voting could be negatively biased by it (Rombi, 2015). This would partially explain the drop experienced in 2020 (17.8%), that brought the rate back to the 1970s’ levels. However, Almagisti and Zanellato (2015) highlighted other possible determinants. For example, the good performance of non-party lists linked to the Presidential candidate. In this case, we can put

forward the argument that the rise of Zaia as regional leader, bringing about a personalization of the presidential vote (and consequently the vote for the lists linked to him), hindered the expression of preferential voting. Indeed, as noted by De Luca (2011), the North has consistently shown higher levels of personalization (computed only for the Presidential candidates elected) as compared to the South, where the weaker performances of the elected Presidential candidates have been usually counterbalanced by very strong performances of the coalition supporting them (often boosted by the significant use of preferential voting). Another possible explanation put forward by Almagisti and Zanellato (2015) concerns the rise of political movements that are weakly entrenched in the territory, such as the M5S. More generally, the long-lasting economic crisis and political scandals may have prevented the diffusion of such voting behavior, undermining the incentives to cast a preferential vote.

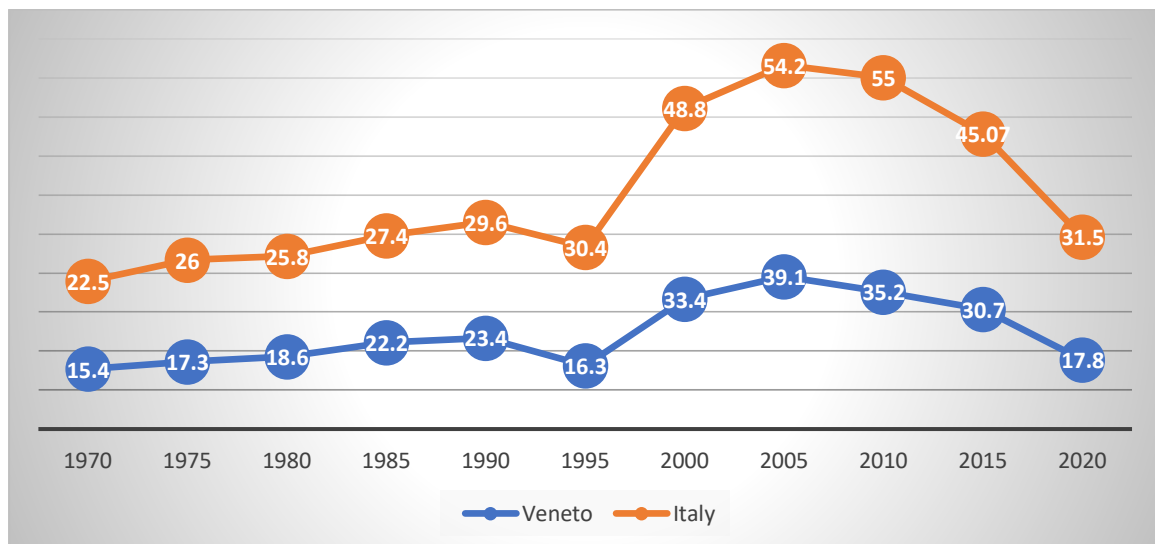


Figure 7.1. Rate of preferential voting in Italian regional elections, 1970-2020. Data for the 1970-1990 period come from Scaramozzino (1990); data for the 1995-2010 come from Valbruzzi and Vignati (2014). Data on 2015 and 2020 come from Osservatorio Elettorale Regione Veneto. Finally, ‘Italy’ includes data concerning ordinary statute regions.

7.2 Leading candidates as new ‘anchors’?

This analysis returns a clear-cut picture: personal vote in Veneto is not as widespread as in other parts of Italy. Nonetheless, to give a definitive answer on the case, we need to carry out a more in-depth analysis, assessing the stability and predictability of the system of interactions between those

that we may call Lords of Preferences. Indeed, if personal vote is not a primary option for most Venetian voters, it may be the case that the share of preferential votes cast for candidates running for the Regional Council is concentrated in the hands of few leading candidates.

Tables 7.1 and 7.2 report the names of leading candidates in 2015 and in 2020 in the province of Padova (from now on PDV). The total number of preferences obtained by Lords in 2015 was equal to 56,785, while in 2020 was 80,781. More specifically, Lords in 2015 collected 15.75% of total list votes, while in 2020 this value was equal to 19.89%. This growth could have been fostered by the increasing candidates' ability in controlling electorate's support. In sum, in both elections between 15% and 20% of the votes in PD were collected by a handful of candidates. These values are similar to the ones recorded in BO. Moreover, as in the now former Red Region par excellence, the votes are concentrated in fewer leading candidates with respect to NA.

Table 7.1. List of Lords of Preferences in the 2015 regional election (PDV).

Leading candidates 2015 regional elections (PDV)					
Turnout (PDV): 60,76%					
Valid list votes: 360240					
3602 votes: 1%					
Surname	Name	Party list	Votes	Valid share	Elected
Barison	Massimiliano	Forza Italia	5552	1.54%	Yes
Berti	Jacopo	M5S	7904	2.19%	Yes
Boron	Fabrizio	Zaia	5458	1.52%	Yes
Centenaro	Giulio	Lega Nord	2637	0.73%	No
Lazarini	Arianna	Lega Nord	3625	1.01%	No
Marcato	Roberto	Lega Nord	7320	2.03%	Yes
Pan	Giuseppe	Lega Nord	5270	1.46%	No
Piva	Giancarlo	PD	4004	1.11%	No
Ruzzante	Piero	PD	5232	1.45%	Yes
Sandonà	Luciano	Zaia	2018	0.56%	Yes
Serato	Luisa	Lega Nord	330	0.09%	No
Sinigaglia	Claudio	PD	5086	1.41%	Yes
Toffanin	Roberta	Forza Italia	1237	0.34%	No
Zanon	Raffaele	Fratelli d'Italia-AN- Altri	1112	0.31%	No

Mean			4056	1.13%	
Total			56785	15.75%	

Notes: candidates obtaining at least 1% of total list votes both in the 2015 and the 2020 regional elections (PDV) highlighted in yellow.

Source: Author's elaboration.

To assess the continuity and predictability of the patterns of interactions (re-candidacies and endorsements) concerning Lords of Preferences, we then focused on those leading candidates who exerted a prominent role in both electoral competitions under analysis, either by standing as candidates in 2015 and endorsing another candidate in 2020, or being endorsed by another candidate running in 2015 and standing as candidates in 2020.

Table 7.2. List of Lords of Preferences in the 2020 regional election (PDV).

Leading candidates 2020 regional elections (PDV)					
Turnout (PDV): 65,4%					
Valid list votes: 406021					
4060 votes: 1%					
Surname	Name	Party list	Votes	Valid share	Elected
Barison	Massimiliano	Lista Veneta Autonomia	4920	1.21%	No
Bisato	Luigi	PD	5044	1.24%	No
Boron	Fabrizio	Zaia Presidente	6574	1.62%	Yes
Camani	Vanessa	PD	6187	1.52%	Yes
Cavinato	Elisa	Zaia Presidente	4361	1.07%	Yes
Centenaro	Giulio	Zaia Presidente	4141	1.02%	Yes
Lazzarin	Filippo	Lega Salvini	4825	1.19%	No
Marcato	Roberto	Lega Salvini	11660	2.87%	Yes
Ostanel	Elena	Il Veneto che Vogliamo	4488	1.11%	Yes
Pan	Giuseppe	Lega Salvini	5039	1.24%	No
Patron	Mirko	Forza Italia-Autonomia per il Veneto	4227	1.04%	No
Sandonà	Luciano	Zaia Presidente	6009	1.48%	Yes
Soranzo	Enoch	Fratelli d'Italia	5858	1.44%	Yes
Tognon	Alessandro	Il Veneto che Vogliamo	762	0.19%	No

Vanni	Andrea	Italia Viva-Civica per il Veneto- PRI-PSI	127	0.03%	No
Venturini	Elisa	Forza Italia-Autonomia per il Veneto	6559	1.62%	Yes
Mean			5049	1.24%	
Total			80781	19.89%	

Notes: candidates obtaining at least 1% of total list votes both in the 2015 and the 2020 regional elections (PDV) highlighted in yellow.

Source: Author's elaboration.

Out of the 30 Lords of Preferences of 2015 and 2020 running for the Regional Council in PDV, we found 11 links (Table 7.3). 6 of them are re-candidacies (4 for the same party and 2 for a different party in the same coalition), while 5 are endorsements (2 for a candidate of the same party, 2 for a candidate in a different party but in the same coalition, and 1 for a candidate in a different coalition)²⁷. Overall, the total vote share collected by the selected candidates is 11.14% in 2015 and 13.21% in 2020.

Table 7.3. Lords' re-candidacies and endorsements between 2015 and 2020 in PDV.

Lords in 2015 and in 2020

Same party

Boron F. (Zaia) → (Zaia Presidente)
 Marcato R. (Lega Nord) → (Lega Salvini)
 Pan G. (Lega Nord) → (Lega Salvini)
 Sandonà (Zaia) → (Zaia Presidente)

Lords or other candidates in 2015 who endorsed other Lords in 2020/Other candidates in 2014 who endorsed Lords in 2020/Lords in 2014 who endorsed other candidates in 2020

Same party

*Toffanin R. (FI) → Patron M. (FI-Autonomia per il Veneto)
 *Zanon R. (FdI-AN-Altri) → Soranzo E. (FdI)

²⁷ Concerning Toffanin R. and Patron M., the endorsement is retrieved from Toffanin R.'s Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/SenatriceRobertaToffanin> . In the case of Zanon R. and Soranzo E., the source is Padova24ore.it (2020). As for Ruzzante P. and Tognon A., the source of the endorsement is Ruzzante P.'s Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/pieroruzzanteLiberiEUGUALI> . In the case of Serato L. and Cavinato E., the endorsement was retrieved from Serato L.'s Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/luisa.serato>. Finally, in the case of Piva G. and Vanni A., the source is Piva G.'s Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100009261201652> .

Different party but same coalition

Barison M. (FI) → (Lista Veneta Autonomia)
Centenaro G. (Lega Nord) → (Zaia Presidente)

Different party but same coalition

Ruzzante P. (PD) → *Tognon A. (Il Veneto che vogliamo)
*Serato L. (Lega Nord) → Cavinato E. (Zaia Presidente)

Different coalition

Different coalition

Piva G. (PD) → *Vanni A. (Italia Viva – Civica per il Veneto – PRI – PSI)

Notes: individual candidates in *.

Source: Author's elaboration.

We suggest that these 11 links may have generated a new form of systemness, instilling stability and predictability in a turbulent party system. Indeed, we argue that these patterns of interactions between leading candidates have supplemented, or even replaced, the unstable and unpredictable relations of cooperation and competition among parties. Finally, this new systemness may now greatly influence the 'general' electoral outcome. To assess so, we now proceed to evaluate the degree of continuity and predictability in the territorial support held by the isolated Lords over time. We thus run a series of correlations between the hypothesized links across the 101 PD municipalities.

Table 7.4 reports the results of bivariate correlations (Pearson's r coefficient) among the 11 hypothesized links. As in the case of the other subculture (Emilia-Romagna, BO), the results concerning PDV are remarkable. Out of the 11 links, 8 present a significant coefficient, mostly at the highest level of confidence ($p < .001$). Some cases, such as the one regarding the re-candidacy of Pan G. (0.94) and the re-candidacy of Barison M. (0.89), show very high coefficients, meaning that Lords have been able to stabilize and protect their endowments of votes over the territory and over time. There are some important differences between re-candidacies and endorsements. Indeed, the former consistently present higher coefficients with respect to the latter. This may be due to the fact that most endorsements take place between couples of candidates, of which one obtained much fewer preferential votes than their counterparts (as in the case of Vanni A. and Tognon A.), implying that the 'top candidate' within the couple retrieves much of its consensus elsewhere. Moreover, this may signal the enduring centrality of party affiliations as crucial heuristics for voting choices. Changing party, or even coalition, may be detrimental in terms of continuity of territorial support over time, as parties still represent prime political objects in the regional party systems. Nonetheless, the overall average level of correlation among Lords is as high as 0.44. This brings us to the conclusion that leading candidates in PDV are able to generate a new systemness characterized by continuity and

predictability in their interactions, even if to a lesser extent with respect to the cases of BO (0.61) and NA (0.63).

The stability and predictability shown by the territorial support of Lords in PDV may, however, be paralleled by an equally stable and predictable party system. Nonetheless, the right part of Table 7.4 tells us that parties' territorial support is far from continuous and predictable. The average level of correlation is only 0.23, far lower than the one shown by Lords. Most interestingly, the League - which since the 1990s developed a widespread territorial organization - shows a non-statistically significant and very low coefficient (0.09). Many could be the possible determinants. One of them could be represented by the recent transformation of the *Carroccio* from an ethno-regionalist to a fully-fledged national party (Albertazzi, Giovannini, and Seddone, 2018). This may have frustrated the desires of many voters who saw the party as the main political referent against the central state. However, further analysis on the topic would be needed. Interestingly, the only party displaying a coefficient at the highest level of confidence is the PD (0.68). This could stem from the party's specific electoral geography. Indeed, the Democratic Party has long obtained a strong consensus in big cities, while scoring relatively poorer results in the small centers (Emanuele, 2013b). This can also be observed by looking at Table 7.6, in which the control variable 'demographic size' displays a strong and highly significant coefficient, greatly affecting the vote for the center-left candidate Lorenzoni. In sum, the patterns of interactions among Lords are more continuous and predictable than the ones concerning parties in the proportional arena. Personal vote is thus present and can replicate itself in the heart of the ex-White Subculture.

Table 7.4. Lords and parties' territorial support in PDV.

Lords' candidacies and endorsements	Pearson's r	Party lists	Pearson's r
Boron F. (Zaia) → (Zaia Presidente)	0,32**	FI → FI-Autonomia per il Veneto	0,05
Marcato R. (Lega Nord) → (Lega Salvini)	0,53	FdI-AN-Altri → FdI	0,05
Pan G. (Lega Nord) → (Lega Salvini)	0,94***	Lega Nord-Lega Salvini	0,09
Sandonà L. (Zaia) → (Zaia Presidente)	0,55***	PD → PD	0,68***
Barison M. (FI) → (Lista Veneta Autonomia)	0,89***	Zaia → Zaia Presidente	0,27**
Centenaro G. (Lega Nord) → (Zaia Presidente)	0,78***		
Toffanin R. (FI) → Patron M. (FI- Autonomia per il Veneto)	0,05		
Zanon R. (FdI-AN-Altri) → Soranzo E. (FdI)	0,21*		
Ruzzante P. (PD) → Tognon A. (Il Veneto che vogliamo)	0,31**		
Serato L. (Lega Nord) → Cavinato E. (Zaia Presidente)	-0,03		

Piva G. (PD) → Vanni A. (Italia Viva-Civica 0,30**
per il Veneto-PRI-PSI)

Mean of hypothesized correlations (N:11)	0,44	Mean of hypothesized correlations (N:5)	0,23
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Notes: bivariate correlations (2015-2020) across the 101 PDV municipalities; *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

Source: Author's elaboration.

7.3 The 'general' electoral competition and the central role of parties

The correlations showed that personal vote greatly influences the electoral competition in PDV. Nonetheless, it may be a stretch to jump to the conclusion that nowadays the Venetian political system is a candidate-centered one. To assess the extent to which party-based politics is a distant reality in PDV, we need to look at Lords' capacity to determine the 'general' electoral results, concerning the election of the President of the Region. That's why we run a series of multivariate regression analyses based on a dataset where the units of analysis are the 101 PDV municipalities, following the empirical model used for Emilia-Romagna and Campania. The dependent variables in each analysis are the share of votes (votes/electorate) of the two main Presidential candidates in 2020 (Zaia for the center-right and Lorenzoni for the center-left). The independent variables, instead, are the share of votes in 2015 of the coalition of parties and the coalition of Lords supporting the Presidential candidates in 2020. More specifically, the votes for a Presidential candidate in 2020 in PDV are predicted from different aggregations of coalition of parties in 2015. We used the share of votes of the respective coalitions of parties in 2015, plus the share of votes in 2015 of the parties supporting the two candidates in 2020. Moreover, we have added a series of control variables as in the previous two cases studied.

Table 7.5 and Table 7.6 return the results of the series of OLS regressions. Table 7.5 deals with the electoral performance of the center-right candidate Zaia. Model 1 and Model 2 clearly show that the beta coefficients concerning different aggregations of parties in 2015 are high and statistically significant at the highest level of confidence. Model 3 concerns the explanatory capacity of Lords. As we can see, the model is not-statistically significant and the R^2 coefficient is much lower than the one concerning parties. Model 4 and Model 5 confirm our impressions. Adding the variable related to Lords' share of votes in 2015 to the models concerning parties' explanatory capacity, the former shows a low and non-significant association with the electoral performance of Zaia in 2020. In this

case, nonetheless, we must point out that the great electoral performance of Zaia may have overshadowed the support stemming from individual candidates.

Table 7.6 analyses the determinants of the votes for the center-left Presidential candidate Lorenzoni in 2020. Model 1 and Model 2 are highly significant and show a greater capacity of parties in explaining the variance related to the electoral performance of Lorenzoni, as compared to the case of Zaia. Nonetheless, with respect to Table 7.5, Model 3 shows that Lords' variable has a statistically significant association with the dependent variable. This shows that personal vote has a certain effect in influencing presidential results. The low level of confidence, together with the low R^2 coefficient, nevertheless, indicate Lords' weaker explanatory capacity with respect to parties. Moreover, as shown by Model 4 and Model 5, Lords' explanatory capacity shrinks when in comparison with parties' variable. As for Zaia, this means that parties still hold a stronger influence than candidates in determining, and thus predicting, the main electoral outcome.

This does not overshadow the importance personal vote has acquired in the Venetian political system, as the stability and predictability of Lords' patterns of interaction clearly show. Personal vote now concerns an ever growing - albeit smaller compared to the southern regions - portion of the electorate. Nonetheless, as shown in the case of Emilia-Romagna, here parties remain central political objects, as the presidential competition appears yet a great way off from abiding to the logics of a candidate-based system. Parties' interactions have lost stability and predictability, yet they remain fundamental heuristics for citizens in their main voting choices. The two systems thus appear to integrate each other, as candidates help strengthening the ties with local political institutions, while parties still retain their identification and symbolic function.

Table 7.5. Votes for Zaia in 2020 predicted from different aggregations of coalitions of parties and Lords in 2015.

Independent variables	Dependent variable: Presidential votes for Zaia									
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	beta	s.e.	beta	s.e.	beta	s.e.	beta	s.e.	beta	s.e.
Centre-right coalition in 2015	0,53***	0.10					0,54***	0.11		
Parties in 2015 supporting Zaia in 2020			0,50***	0.11					0,50***	0.11
Lords in 2015 supporting Zaia in 2020					0.12	0.11	-0.03	0.1	-0.03	0.11
Demographic size	-0,23**	0.00	-0,24**	0.00	-0,35***	0.00	-0,23**	0.00	-0,24**	0.00
Political Tradition	-0,07	0.05	-0.10	0.05	-0,28**	0.06	-0,08	0.05	-0.10	0.05
Unemployment rate	0.07	0.14	0.08	0.14	0.12	0.16	0.06	0.14	0.07	0.14
N	101		101		101		101		101	
R-squared	0.44		0.42		0.25		0.44		0.42	
Adj. R-squared	0.42		0.40		0.22		0.41		0.39	
F statistic	19.06		17.59		8.01		15.13		13.96	

Notes: OLS regressions with standardized coefficients (beta) and standard errors (s.e.). *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

Source: Author's elaboration.

Table 7.6. Votes for Lorenzoni in 2020 predicted from different aggregations of coalitions of parties and Lords in 2015.

Independent variables	Dependent variable: Presidential votes for Lorenzoni									
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	beta	s.e.	beta	s.e.	beta	s.e.	beta	s.e.	beta	s.e.
Centre-left coalition in 2015	0,72***	0.08					0,72***	0.08		
Parties in 2015 supporting Lorenzoni in 2020			0,69***	0.09					0,68***	0.09
Lords in 2015 supporting Lorenzoni in 2020					0,18*	0.48	0.02	0.33	0.06	0.36
Demographic size	0,24***	0.00	0,27***	0.00	0,38***	0.00	0,24***	0.00	0,26***	0.00
Political tradition	-0.05	0.02	-0.11	0.03	0,25**	0.03	-0,05	0.02	-0,11	0.03
Unemployment rate	-0,13*	0.07	-0,18**	0.07	-0,33***	0.09	-0,12*	0.07	-0,18**	0.07
N	101		101		101		101		101	
R-squared	0.75		0.69		0.43		0.75		0.70	
Adj. R-squared	0.73		0.68		0.41		0.73		0.68	
F statistic	70.17		54.06		18.44		55.62		43.46	

Notes: OLS regressions with standardized coefficients (beta) and standard errors (s.e.). *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

Source: Author's elaboration.

CONCLUSIONS

This elaborate put forward the argument that nowadays personal vote constitutes a new and prominent element of continuity within turbulent regional party systems across Italy. More specifically, we argued that personal vote has generated a new systemness based on the patterns of interactions between the so-called Lords of Preferences - that is those candidates able to retain a large share of personal support, regardless of the party they run with and the type of election (De Luca, 2011). This systemness may have supplemented, or even replaced, the weakening systemness produced by inter-party patterns of competition and cooperation, deeply affecting the electoral competition and the final electoral outcomes.

We noted how Western Europe, and in particular Italy, is experiencing a process of party system de-institutionalization (Mainwaring and Scully, 1996; Casal Bértoa, 2014). Emanuele and Chiaramonte (2020) outlined how the period following the 2013 general election represents one of the most unstable phases in post-WWII history European political history. Simultaneously, regional party systems feature greater turmoil. As noted by Vampa (2021), regional elections now follow a logic of their own, as central offices cannot control anymore the recruitment mechanisms of the local and regional political class. Party fragmentation has rose dramatically, together with party replacement and overall electoral volatility.

We also outlined that this process relates to the personalization of politics. Other than centralized personalization, nowadays Italian national and regional systems are experiencing a process of decentralized personalization (Balmas *et al.*, 2014). Individual politicians exert far more influence than before with respect to their group (e.g. political parties, executives). They control recruitment mechanisms (Bille, 2001; De Luca, 2001; Napoli, 2005) and - through their patterns of interactions - can influence the electoral competition and affect electoral outcomes (Emanuele and Marino, 2016)

The growing importance of individual candidates other than those ones occupying or aiming at top executive positions (party leaders, prime ministers, presidents), has ultimately made more valuable and essential the cultivation of personal vote (Karvonen 2010), that is the portion of candidates' electoral support that originates in the candidates' personal qualities, qualifications, activities, and record (Cain *et al.*, 1987).

We saw how Italy represents a case study (Martelli, 2017) for personal vote, as the election of the Italian Chamber of Deputies has been for a long time regulated by an open-list proportional system (OLPR) which granted - at least until the referendum to repeal the multiple preferential voting system of 1991 - the possibility to select up to three or four individual candidates (Katz, 1980). In this context, the search for preferential votes has also implied a dramatic increase in legislative production as well as the creation of a cumbersome administration, both utilized as means to control large strata of the electorate and weave particularistic relationships (Golden, 2003). While the long-lasting national proportional system was abolished in the wake of the judicial earthquake causing the collapse of the First Republic, preferential voting remained - and remains - an option at voters' disposal both at European, regional, and local level.

We then highlighted the possible different determinants of preferential voting. Above all, Passarelli (2017) pointed at social capital. In Italy, social capital appears to negatively affect the use of preferential voting. The data concerning its rates confirm this view, as in the North - home of the two main territorial subcultures and 'safes of social capital' - its use has traditionally been very low, while in the South it has always been a constant (see Table 2.1).

Then, we moved to the analysis of two different areas of the country: the *Mezzogiorno* and the two political subcultures. As for the former, the 'distorted use' of preferential voting seems to stem from the peculiar socio-economic and cultural features of the area. The economic backwardness of the South hindered the formation of class identification, weakening the potential of collective and solidaristic action (Catanzaro, 1986). Moreover, for Scaramozzino (1990) (see also De Luca, 2001), the distorted use of preferential voting is attributable to local factors, the history of the area, its customs; to those features specific to what can be described as the 'Italian Southern subculture'. Therefore, southern voters belonging to all parties have been usually connected by the common propensity to personalize their voting choices. In short, when they vote for a list, they also need to identify themselves with a candidate that personifies that list (*Ibidem*).

As for the latter, the low levels of preferential voting may be linked to the importance that parties played in the local social and political system. The PCI and the DC have long been the fulcrum of associational and political life, fostering the reproduction of the social capital proper to the area (Almagisti, 2016). However, the process of secularization, together with the demise of the USSR,

have implied a deep crisis and the re-shaping of the two subcultures (Caciagli, 2011). The political balance traditionally characterizing the area has given space to high levels of volatility and unpredictability, which now seem to constitute a feature of the area (Valbruzzi, 2019).

To assess our argument, we chose three regions illustrative of the different socio-economic and political realities of the country: Campania for the *Mezzogiorno*, Emilia-Romagna as the red region par excellence, and Veneto as the fulcrum of the now former White Subculture. More specifically, we focused on the last regional electoral cycle (2014-2020). The empirical method employed in this elaborate followed the one used by Emanuele and Marino (2016) for the Calabrian case.

The analysis showed that all party systems under consideration are experiencing ‘turbulent times’ (at different intensities). Most interestingly, the weakening of parties’ patterns of interactions have been successfully integrated by a new systemness conferred by personal vote. As we found out, Lords of Preferences retain a more stable and predictable territorial support with respect to parties in all three regions. The results of our series of correlations thus imply that personal vote has taken roots in these regions, and it is resilient over time.

This is remarkable, especially with regards to Emilia-Romagna and Veneto. Indeed, even in the heart of the two subcultures, where parties have long played such a prominent role, the latter are not able anymore to shape the electoral competition in the way, and to the extent, they have traditionally done it. Here, personal vote has thus become a prominent element for an ever growing - albeit smaller than in southern regions - part of the electorate.

Nonetheless, this does not imply that we may talk about a new candidate-based system replacing the traditional party-driven one. First, as compared with the Calabrian case (Emanuele and Marino, 2016), high levels of correlation in Lords’ territorial support are mainly observed in the cases of re-candidacies with same party, with endorsements presenting relatively lower levels. This may indicate the persistence of an identification power generated by party organizations, so that candidates are mainly seen as parts of the group they run with, rather than separated objects.

Most importantly, the assessment of Lords’ capacity to predict, and thus determine, the ‘general’ electoral results (that is the election of the President of the Region, separated from the proportional arena), returns a quite clear picture. Our OLS regressions, indeed, debunked part of our expectations. In most cases, the explanatory capacity of parties was significantly higher than the one of Lords. Undoubtedly, there were instances in which personal vote appeared to have an association with the general outcome, notwithstanding that Lords’ explanatory capacity shrank compared to the effect of parties. For example, this is the case for Caldoro and Lorenzoni, where the model concerning Lords’ explanatory capacity was significant even adding control variables.

In sum, parties still maintain a strong identification and symbolic power. Their labels constitute heuristics that facilitate voting choices. As far as the presidential competition is concerned, individual candidates remain political objects closely associated with the party they are part of. Thus, the main electoral competition keeps following the logics of party-based politics. If a new systemness has emerged, featuring the centrality of individual candidates in their regional political system, this is paralleled by a resilient party-based system which keeps structuring - at least partially - the relationship with voters, greatly influencing their voting behavior in the presidential arena.

What are the consequences of a political system characterized by the growing importance of personal vote? The increasing centrality of leading candidates in affecting the electoral competition makes them prominent players in the system. The continuity and predictability of their territorial support is illustrative of their capacity to form close ties and trust networks with their electorate. On the bright side, this may play a crucial role for citizens, as these personalities could function as new ‘anchors’ to political and democratic institutions, especially in those regions where parties have lost their traditional capacity of mediating local interests. Individual candidates can now supplement the losing power of party organizations by establishing themselves as important political referents of the community.

As outlined by Emanuele and Marino (2016: 18), however, this system may have negative consequences on the quality of democracy and electoral accountability, as voters’ ability to punish or reward those in powers weakens. As voters would primarily express a vote for an individual candidate, rather than a party, it would follow that “traditional accountability based on the reward/punish mechanism related to parties’ behavior in office is replaced by a vicious individual-level accountability based on the ability of elected Lords to deliver pork-barrel legislation for their own constituency or, more generally, on Lords’ ability to provide, through political patronage, private benefits to their voters”.

Notwithstanding the possible repercussions of such a system, these results may constitute the basis for further research on local - national or foreign - contexts featuring similar or different characteristics as compared to the one dealt by this elaborate.

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SUMMARY

Il presente elaborato si propone di verificare se, in sistemi di partito regionali de-istituzionalizzati o ‘turbolenti’, il voto personale sia divenuto un importante elemento di continuità e prevedibilità del sistema politico. Più nello specifico, l’elaborato valuta la possibilità che il voto personale abbia conferito una nuova ‘systematicità’ ai sistemi politici regionali, basata sui modelli d’interazione tra coloro che potremmo definire i ‘Signori delle Preferenze’ - cioè quei candidati in grado di ottenere notevoli consensi personali, indipendentemente dal partito nel quale si presentano e dal tipo di competizione (De Luca, 2011). Questa systematicità, si ipotizza, abbia integrato, o persino rimpiazzato, la systematicità - ormai indebolita - risultante dalla competizione interpartitica. Di conseguenza, sosteniamo come oggi la continuità e prevedibilità conferita dal consenso territoriale dei Campioni delle Preferenze influenzi fortemente la competizione elettorale, e che, inoltre, sia in grado di determinare i risultati elettorali ‘generalisti’.

Un sistema partitico è definito de-istituzionalizzato quando partiti politici instabili mostrano modelli di interazione instabili e imprevedibili nel tempo (Casal Bértoa, 2014). L’Italia è stata a lungo caratterizzata da una sorprendente continuità in termini di equilibri politici durante la Prima Repubblica. Questa stabilità era conferita dalla capacità dei partiti di incapsulare e rappresentare quelle fratture e tradizioni che si collegavano a tempi antecedenti alla fondazione della Repubblica (Galli, 1966; Corbetta, Parisi, and Schadee, 1988). Il sistema partitico poteva contare sull’esistenza di due ben definite subculture politiche - la Subcultura Rossa e la Subcultura bianca. Queste realtà sono state definite da Trigilia (1981) come veri e propri sistemi politici locali monopolizzati da una specifica forza politica - il PCI nella Subcultura Rossa e la DC in quella Bianca - capace di integrare e rappresentare i diversi interessi locali.

Tuttavia, dagli anni Ottanta in poi, un processo di destrutturazione ha colpito quell’impianto di tradizioni e norme che a lungo ha caratterizzato quella che Bagnasco (1977) ha definito la ‘Terza Italia’. Il processo di secolarizzazione e la modernizzazione economica hanno trasformato i termini della delega conferita alla DC dal Nord-Est italiano. Gli interessi locali hanno quindi cercato e trovato un nuovo referente politico in grado di rappresentarli e di incarnare il pervadente localismo antistatalista. La Lega Nord di Umberto Bossi ha utilizzato il territorio come arma e simbolo contro

lo Stato assistenziale (Diamanti, 2009). Dall'altra parte, seppur caratterizzata da una maggiore tenuta, la Subcultura Rossa ha vissuto sulla sua pelle la caduta del Muro di Berlino e la scomparsa del suo principale riferimento ideologico: l'URSS. Ciò ha inevitabilmente portato a una modifica del rapporto tra cittadini e partiti eredi del PCI, basato non più sul voto d'appartenenza, ma quanto su un voto marcatamente d'opinione (Parisi e Pasquino, 1977).

A questo processo di erosione dei principali elementi di stabilità del sistema, vanno aggiunti gli avvenimenti che hanno caratterizzato la politica nazionale ed europea negli ultimi due decenni. Come sottolineato da Hooghe e Marks (2018), sia la crisi del debito europeo che la crisi dei rifugiati hanno funzionato come 'catalizzatori' per l'emersione di partiti populistici radicali di destra e di sinistra. Questi partiti si sono posizionati sulle nuove linee di frattura che oggi modellano la politica nazionale (Kriesi, 2006). La globalizzazione e l'integrazione europea hanno conferito nuovo significato alle dimensioni di conflitto culturali e socioeconomiche, sostituendo le tradizionali linee di frattura che hanno dato a lungo forma al sistema partitico europeo (Lipset e Rokkan, 1967). Classe e religione, ma anche territorio, hanno in gran parte perso la loro capacità di determinare e predire i risultati elettorali.

Emanuele e Chiamonte (2020) hanno analizzato l'attuale processo di de-istituzionalizzazione in Italia. La loro ricerca ha evidenziato che, in termini di stabilità del sistema partitico, il periodo che segue le elezioni politiche del 2013 rappresenta una delle fasi più instabili del post Seconda Guerra Mondiale, allo stesso livello di Francia (dal 2012), Islanda (dal 2013), e Irlanda (dal 2011). Inoltre, non è solo la competizione nazionale a mostrare una forte instabilità e imprevedibilità, ma anche nei contesti regionali si osservano dati allarmanti per la tenuta del sistema. Come evidenzia Tronconi (2020), l'immagine che emerge analizzando l'ultimo ciclo elettorale - cioè quello concernente le elezioni regionali tenutesi dal 2013 al 2015 e quelle del periodo 2017-2020 - è di sostanziale instabilità e frammentazione. Le elezioni regionali non possono essere più considerate come elezioni di secondo ordine (Reif e Schmitt, 1980), in quanto oggi seguono chiaramente una propria logica (Vampa, 2021). Le sedi periferiche dei partiti acquistano sempre maggior peso nei confronti delle sedi centrali, rispecchiando il processo di decentralizzazione in corso nel paese. È sempre più la classe politica locale a controllare i meccanismi di reclutamento politico, come anche la composizione delle liste partitiche. In alcuni casi, sono proprio i Campioni delle Preferenze a formare dei veri e propri partiti personali (De Luca, 2001), influenzando significativamente la competizione elettorale. Inoltre, la crescente instabilità e frammentazione è generata dall'aumento del peso delle liste locali, civiche, e di quelle più propriamente presidenziali. Il successo della lista 'Zaia Presidente', prima forza politica alle elezioni regionali in Veneto del 2020, è esemplificativo di questo processo.

Parallelamente alla de-istituzionalizzazione del sistema partitico italiano, un'altra importante trasformazione ha interessato da vicino il rapporto tra cittadini e politica, modificandone la sua natura. La personalizzazione della politica può essere definita come quel processo per cui il peso politico degli attori individuali nel processo politico aumenta a discapito della centralità del gruppo politico (Rahat e Sheaffer, 2007). In pratica, le caratteristiche personali di singoli candidati hanno acquisito maggiore importanza nel rapporto tra elettorato e partiti e nel calcolo elettorale dei cittadini (Emanuele e Marino, 2016).

L'Italia, in questo senso, può essere considerata un prototipo di un sistema politico fortemente personalizzato. La crisi della Prima Repubblica, insieme alla modifica maggioritaria del sistema elettorale, ha accresciuto l'importanza delle cosiddette '*media figures*' (Manin, 1997), cioè quegli attori politici che meglio hanno saputo interpretare e sfruttare uno strumento personalizzante come quello della televisione. Tra tutti, Berlusconi è riuscito a portare avanti campagne elettorali fortemente centrate sulla sua figura, anche grazie al suo partito personale (FI) (Calise, 2000), favorendone i suoi successi elettorali.

Balmas *et al.* (2014) hanno evidenziato la presenza di due tipi di personalizzazione politica: (i) la personalizzazione centralizzata, che concerne lo spostamento del potere politico dal gruppo (il partito, l'intera squadra ministeriale) al leader, cioè a coloro che occupano una posizione di spicco all'interno dello stesso gruppo (leader di partito, capi dell'esecutivo, presidenti); (ii) la personalizzazione decentralizzata, che riguarda il trasferimento del potere politico dal gruppo ai singoli candidati, diversi da coloro che ambiscono a posizioni di spicco all'interno del gruppo (candidati per il Parlamento, per i Consigli Regionali, o locali, ministri).

Una 'personalizzazione dal basso' (Legnante, 1999) sembrerebbe quindi influenzare la politica italiana. Come sottolineato da vari autori (De Luca; 2001; Napoli, 2005; Emanuele e Marino, 2016), il Sud Italia ha assistito all'emersione dei Campioni delle Preferenze, che non solo controllano i meccanismi di reclutamento politico, e di conseguenza la composizione delle liste a livello locale e regionale, ma inevitabilmente modellano la competizione elettorale e influiscono sui risultati finali.

Questo processo di personalizzazione decentralizzata implicherebbe la crescita d'importanza di ciò che è definito 'voto personale' (Karvonen, 2010). Il voto personale può essere descritto come quella porzione del consenso elettorale di un candidato che si origina nelle qualità personali, nelle qualifiche, nelle attività, e nella carriera dello stesso (Cain *et. al.*, 1987). La letteratura sul voto personale si è storicamente concentrata sulle strategie messe in campo dai legislatori in carica al fine di coltivare un voto personale. Più nello specifico, i principali filoni hanno messo l'accento sul *constituency work* dei parlamentari, portato avanti tramite strategie quali il *position taking*, il *credit claiming*, e l'*advertising* (Zittel, 2017). Altri autori (Shugart *et. al.*, 2005) hanno evidenziato le qualità

personali degli stessi, quali, soprattutto, il luogo di nascita e l'aver precedentemente presieduto un pubblico ufficio nella circoscrizione. Infine, Carey e Shugart (1995) hanno evidenziato come le diverse formule elettorali possano costituire degli incentivi al fine di coltivare una reputazione personale. Tra queste, quelli che possono essere definiti come sistemi elettorali *candidate-centric* sono i sistemi che prevedono il voto singolo trasferibile (STV), il voto singolo non trasferibile (SNTV), e i sistemi proporzionali a liste aperte (OLPR). Un esempio è quello della legge elettorale regionale n.43 (23 febbraio 1995), soprannominata *Tatarellum*. Essa offre la possibilità di esprimere non solo un voto di lista, ma anche un voto di preferenza (due con l'introduzione della Legge n.20 del 15 febbraio 2016), che determina l'ordine di elezione dei candidati all'interno della lista.

Il voto personale, tuttavia, è stato raramente studiato nell'ottica della sua influenza sulla competizione e sui risultati elettorali (su questo argomenti vedi Emanuele e Marino, 2016). Al fine di verificare ciò, è quindi importante focalizzarsi sul principale indicatore del voto personale: il voto di preferenza. Il voto di preferenza viene descritto come 'la possibilità di votare per i candidati' (Wauters, Verlet, and Ackaert, 2011). La letteratura sull'argomento si è principalmente focalizzata sul rapporto con la qualità della democrazia. Per alcuni autori (*Ibidem*), il voto di preferenza promuove quei valori fondamentali per il buon funzionamento delle istituzioni democratiche, rendendo i risultati elettorali più accettabili e giusti agli occhi degli elettori, e rafforzando il legame tra l'elettorato e la classe politica. Un'altra branca (Allum, 1973; Barisione, 2007), ha evidenziato la connessione tra voto di preferenza e fenomeni poco desiderabili come clientelismo, corruzione e crimine organizzato.

L'Italia, in particolare, è considerata un caso studio per quanto concerne il voto di preferenza, in quanto le elezioni politiche per la Camera dei deputati sono state a lungo (fino al 1991) caratterizzate dalla possibilità di esprimere tre o più preferenze. La svolta maggioritaria del 1993 non ha comunque eliminato la possibilità di esprimere un voto di preferenza per le elezioni amministrative, regionali ed europee. Su questo punto, Golden (2003) ha notato come il voto di preferenza sia stato estremamente importante nella storia repubblicana, in quanto la ricerca di un consenso personale ha incentivato gli attori politici individuali a un'enorme produzione legislativa e alla creazione di una burocrazia macchinosa e inefficiente. Queste, infatti, dovevano servire come pretesto per gli stessi al fine di proporsi alla popolazione come 'facilitatori' della macchina burocratica, e fornitori di benefici particolaristici.

Soprattutto, l'Italia presenta una caratteristica peculiare per quanto concerne l'utilizzo di questo dispositivo: una netta frattura tra Nord e Sud del paese, per cui le regioni meridionali hanno tradizionalmente fatto un utilizzo maggiore del voto di preferenza rispetto a quelle settentrionali.

Analizzando le possibili determinanti del voto di preferenza, Passarelli (2017) ha avanzato l'ipotesi che questo sia l'espressione di una cultura 'tradizionale' (Allum, 1973), o comunque un sinonimo del voto di scambio (Parisi e Pasquino, 1977). La sua analisi ha messo in luce come alti livelli di cultura civica siano associati negativamente con l'uso del voto di preferenza. Cioè, ad alti livelli di capitale sociale corrispondono bassi tassi di preferenza. Il capitale sociale può essere concettualizzato come la combinazione di quattro elementi: (i) la presenza di reti di associazionismo che coinvolgono la grande maggioranza della società; (ii) una tendenza al rispetto delle norme sociali e politiche esistenti; (iii) alti livelli di fiducia interpersonale; (iv) un certo grado di consapevolezza politica (Bordandini e Cartocci, 2014; Ballarino, 2001). Il concetto di capitale sociale fu utilizzato da Putnam *et al.* (1993) per spiegare le differenti performance istituzionali tra le regioni italiane del Nord e Sud d'Italia. Secondo l'autore, sono proprio le diverse dotazioni di capitale sociale a determinare tali divergenze. L'esperienza dei liberi Comuni nel Nord Italia del dodicesimo secolo, caratterizzata da uno stile di governo basato sull'uguaglianza e sulla creazione di reti relazionali orizzontali, aveva promosso il consolidamento di uno spirito civico propedeutico per lo sviluppo di capitale sociale. Nelle regioni meridionali, invece, i Normanni instaurarono una struttura sociale marcatamente verticalizzata, creando un golfo tra cittadini e istituzioni governative e impedendo lo sviluppo di fitte reti di fiducia interpersonale (Ballarino, 2001).

I risultati dell'analisi di Passarelli (2017) sono estremamente interessanti. L'influenza negativa del capitale sociale è più evidente nei casi del PCI e della DC. Questo, secondo l'autore, potrebbe essere dovuto al fatto che, in contesti caratterizzati da un'alta cultura civica e forti relazioni comunitarie, l'uso del voto di preferenza - e quindi la personalizzazione della rappresentanza politica - non costituirebbe un'opzione valida per la maggioranza dei cittadini.

Queste considerazioni spingono a considerare le differenze socioeconomiche e politiche concernenti le diverse aree italiane, al fine di isolare quelle condizioni favorevoli alla diffusione del voto personale. A tal fine risulta importante analizzare il Mezzogiorno, insieme alle due subculture territoriali italiane - la Rossa e la Bianca.

Raniolo (2009) ha descritto il Sud Italia come il luogo in cui è in atto un sovvertimento localizzato e un generalizzato deterioramento della qualità democratica. Le varie dimensioni analizzate dall'autore - *rule of law*, partecipazione, competizione, *accountability*, *responsiveness*, uguaglianza e libertà - rivelano la presenza di uno Stato 'anemico' e di una cittadinanza 'a bassa intensità'. In particolar modo, la dimensione della partecipazione risulta un *unicum* in Italia. I tassi sull'associazionismo volontario, uno dei principali indicatori di capitale sociale, mostrano una generalizzata mancanza di azione collettiva.

Legata all'associazionismo, anche la partecipazione elettorale è costantemente più bassa al Sud che al Nord. C'è un dato, tuttavia, che mostra chiaramente la peculiarità del caso meridionale. Il differenziale in termini di partecipazione tra le due aree del paese si riduce quando la competizione si trasferisce dal palcoscenico nazionale a quello regionale e locale. Raniolo descrive questo fenomeno come 'mobilitazione inversa'. Questa ambiguità proviene dalla peculiare relazione tra politica ed elettori nelle regioni del Sud Italia. La vicinanza della competizione elettorale, e la possibilità di instaurare una relazione diretta e particolaristica tra votanti e candidati giocano un ruolo fondamentale.

È la prossimità alle risorse pubbliche, in particolar modo, a rappresentare una determinante cruciale. Come evidenziato da Arrighi e Piselli (1985), la politica nel Mezzogiorno rappresenta la forza regolatrice dell'economia. Non costituisce un elemento sovrastrutturale come nel Settentrione, ma bensì strutturale. Posti di lavoro (si veda il numero di meridionali occupati nella pubblica amministrazione (Golden, 2003)), sussidi, successo professionale e aziendale dipendono largamente da quella scatola nera che è la politica. Tutto ciò spiega la centralità del clientelismo politico nel Sud Italia, che, come sottolinea Allum (1997), è sempre risultato più importante dell'ideologia. Esso ha infatti svolto il ruolo di cerniera tra i cittadini meridionali e le istituzioni politiche, socializzando i primi alla politica e stabilizzando le seconde.

Diversamente dalla letteratura che si concentra sul capitale sociale, Catanzaro (1986) ha posto l'attenzione su tre fattori principali che hanno indotto alla 'disgregazione atomistica' della società meridionale, favorendo una mobilitazione politica individualistica: (i) le specifiche caratteristiche del mercato in una società fortemente dipendente dallo Stato centrale; (ii) le modifiche dei criteri che definiscono socialmente le identità individuali; (iii) l'importanza assunta dalle identità sociali ambigue. La mancata partecipazione del Sud al processo d'industrializzazione ha reso molto difficile la formazione di quelle identità collettive basate sull'attività professionale svolta. La mancanza di un profondo sentimento di identità sociale ha ostacolato l'azione collettiva e solidaristica, che invece si può osservare nel Nord Italia.

L'impossibilità di giocare un ruolo di mobilitazione all'interno di queste comunità ha reso fin da subito i partiti nazionali 'partiti pigliatutto' (Bova, 2009). La ricerca di benefici individuali da parte dei cittadini ha promosso lo sviluppo di una relazione personalizzata e particolaristica tra di essi e gli attori politici. In questo contesto, i candidati prevalgono se riescono a costruire un supporto personale basato sullo scambio politico-elettorale, e se sono in grado di riprodurre sacche sociali di dipendenza dalla politica.

La presenza di una cultura tradizionale (Scaramozzino, 1990), in definitiva, insieme alle peculiari condizioni socioeconomiche, hanno reso il Sud Italia 'il regno delle preferenze'. Qui gli

attori politici, e in particolar modo quelli individuali, svolgono nello stesso momento il ruolo di collettori di consenso e fornitori di benefici particolaristici. Il processo di personalizzazione della politica, inoltre, ha reso oggi questo legame ancora più evidente. Oggigiorno, la gran parte degli elettori meridionali scelgono prima il candidato che il partito.

Tutto ciò contrasta con l'esperienza delle due subculture politiche italiane: la Subcultura Rossa e la Subcultura Bianca (Galli, 1966). Originare dalla profonda frattura centro-periferia, queste due realtà hanno rappresentato fin da subito le 'casseforti' del capitale sociale italiano (Almagisti, 2016). Qui, due partiti di massa hanno a lungo monopolizzato il sistema politico locale, integrando e rappresentando i diversi interessi locali. Il PCI e la DC sono stati il fulcro delle due subculture, 'aprendo' il capitale sociale verso le istituzioni e di fatto rendendole degli elementi stabilizzanti dell'intero sistema politico e partitico.

Gli avvenimenti susseguitisi negli ultimi decenni, tuttavia, hanno spinto molti autori a decretarne (Caciagli, 2011) la loro fine. Esse sarebbero state rimpiazzate da semplici identità territoriali. La secolarizzazione e la modernizzazione nel Nord-Est, e la fine dell'URSS per quanto concerne la subcultura rossa, hanno contribuito all'erosione di quegli equilibri politici ed elettorali che avevano caratterizzato la Prima Repubblica. Il bianco della DC è stato sostituito dal verde della Lega Nord, poi dall'azzurro di FI (Diamanti, 2009), infine dal ritorno della Lega. Il PCI, e poi i suoi eredi, hanno invece mantenuto una certa stabilità, almeno finché i governi locali hanno prodotto delle performance istituzionali accettabili agli occhi della comunità (Messina, 2012).

La Grande Recessione ha però condotto anche le regioni rosse nel 'regno dell'imprevedibilità' (Valbruzzi, 2019). Le elezioni politiche del 2018, e quelle europee del 2019 hanno decretato la fine del dominio delle forze di sinistra nella regione rossa per eccellenza: l'Emilia-Romagna. Le elezioni regionali del 2020, seppur vinte dalla coalizione di centro-sinistra guidata dal candidato presidente Bonaccini, hanno mostrato come questa regione, da fulcro dell'appartenenza, si sia trasformata in una regione ad alta contendibilità. Anche per quanto concerne il Veneto, il cuore dell'ormai ex-subcultura bianca, instabilità e imprevedibilità sembrano aver rimpiazzato i tradizionali equilibri politici. Il partito sembra sempre più lasciar spazio alle figure dei leader e al loro carisma, come nel caso del Presidente di Regione Luca Zaia.

L'erosione delle tradizionali identificazioni partitiche, e l'imprevedibilità del sistema partitico potrebbero aver lasciato spazio alla crescita di importanza del voto personale. Esso potrebbe aver conferito una nuova sistematicità al sistema politico, aggiungendosi, o persino sostituendosi, a quella conferita dai modelli d'interazione interpartitici. In breve, le interazioni competitive e cooperative tra attori politici individuali potrebbero aver fornito quella continuità e quella prevedibilità che le formazioni partitiche hanno ormai difficoltà a conferire.

Al fine di valutare la veridicità di queste ipotesi, l'elaborato si è focalizzato su tre contesti regionali, emblematici delle diverse realtà politiche italiane. La Campania - come regione del Meridione caratterizzata da un diffuso uso del voto di preferenza - e l'Emilia-Romagna e il Veneto - come fulcro delle due subculture politiche italiane - sono state analizzate tramite un modello empirico ispirato a quello impiegato da Emanuele e Marino (2016) nel loro studio sul voto personale in Calabria, dove gli autori hanno evidenziato l'emersione di un vero e proprio '*candidate-based system*' che ha sostituito la politica party-based.

L'analisi ha previsto l'isolamento di coloro che sono definiti i Campioni delle Preferenze, operazionalizzati come quei candidati che in almeno una delle elezioni regionali in considerazione (l'ultimo ciclo delle elezioni regionali 2014/15-2020) hanno ottenuto l'1% dei voti validi di lista. Al fine di studiare la continuità e la prevedibilità nel tempo delle interazioni tra i candidati, sono state individuate le loro relazioni di cooperazione e competizione. Esse hanno principalmente due forme: le ricandidature e gli endorsement (cioè l'appoggio di un candidato alla elezione successiva). Tramite l'utilizzo di correlazioni bivariate, si è quindi valutata la continuità e la prevedibilità del loro supporto territoriale (misurato nei comuni della Città Metropolitana di Napoli per la Campania, di Bologna nel caso dell'Emilia-Romagna, e della provincia di Padova per il Veneto) e le si sono comparate con quella dei partiti. Infine, si è valutata la capacità dei Campioni delle Preferenze di predire, e quindi determinare, l'esito della competizione 'generale', cioè quella tra i candidati presidenti della regione, attraverso delle analisi di regressione multivariate.

I risultati sono molto interessanti. Prima di tutto, va sottolineata la presenza di un voto personale e la sua capacità di riprodursi nel tempo in tutte e tre le regioni. I risultati delle correlazioni bivariate confermano, infatti, la presenza di una nuova sistematicità generata dalle interazioni tra i Campioni delle Preferenze. Questa sistematicità è caratterizzata da un alto grado di stabilità e prevedibilità. I candidati riescono cioè a mantenere una simile configurazione territoriale del loro consenso personale nel tempo. Per di più, il voto personale sembra essere più continuo e stabile rispetto al voto per i singoli partiti. I coefficienti di correlazione risultano significativamente più alti nel caso dei Campioni delle Preferenze, rispetto al caso dei partiti nelle elezioni sotto analisi. Se questi risultati potevano essere in qualche modo attesi nel caso della Campania, tradizionalmente avvezza all'utilizzo di un voto personale e caratterizzata da un sistema partitico de-istituzionalizzato, più sorprendenti risultano nel caso di Emilia-Romagna e Veneto. Nel cuore delle due subculture politiche, dove i partiti hanno tradizionalmente dominato la scena politica e sociale, il voto personale si è insinuato nelle crepe originate dalle trasformazioni delle ultime decadi, svolgendo un ruolo di ancoraggio per quegli elettori insoddisfatti delle istituzioni politiche e delle loro performance.

Questi risultati, tuttavia, vanno analizzati con grande attenzione. Innanzitutto, rispetto al caso della Calabria (*Ibidem*), un alto grado di stabilità e prevedibilità del supporto territoriale dei Campioni delle Preferenze è osservabile unicamente nel caso di quei candidati che hanno scelto di ricandidarsi nelle successive elezioni, e in particolar modo in coloro che hanno scelto di correre con lo stesso partito. Ciò potrebbe rilevare la persistenza di un certo potere identificativo-simbolico da parte delle organizzazioni partitiche, per cui i candidati ne vengono considerati parte, e non come oggetti separati, e di conseguenza selezionati attraverso l'utilizzo dell'euristica partitica.

Ciò è confermato dai risultati delle regressioni multivariate. Quando l'attenzione passa dall'arena proporzionale - cioè quella riguardante l'elezione al Consiglio Regionale - a quella presidenziale (e quindi alla competizione 'generale') i partiti sembrano ancora guidare il risultato finale. Se non in un caso²⁸, il potere esplicativo dei partiti risulta sempre significativamente maggiore rispetto a quello dei Campioni delle Preferenze. In breve, sono ancora i partiti, e il loro supporto elettorale, a determinare l'esito delle elezioni regionali in tutte e tre i contesti regionali. Il loro potere identificativo-simbolico rimane centrale. Essi continuano, quindi, a costituire delle fondamentali scorciatoie di giudizio per gli elettori. In definitiva, un sistema candidate-based è osservabile nei tre contesti analizzati, tuttavia esso convive e si integra con quella sistematicità generata dai partiti, che ha ancora potere sulla competizione elettorale, e di conseguenza sui risultati elettorali 'generali'.

Nonostante ciò, i risultati di questo elaborato non vanno sottovalutati. L'analisi condotta sui tre contesti regionali ha infatti portato in superficie la presenza di un voto personale in grado di riprodursi nel tempo. In particolar modo, i risultati concernenti l'Emilia-Romagna e il Veneto mostrano come la crisi delle organizzazioni partitiche abbia lasciato spazio per l'emersione di altri elementi strutturanti - come il voto personale - che integrano il ruolo d'ancoraggio alle istituzioni politiche e democratiche.

Tuttavia, è la qualità di questo ancoraggio che è in discussione. Come sottolineato da Raniolo (2009), le conseguenze di un sistema imperniato non più sui partiti, ma sui candidati, sono estremamente negative. Tra tutte, l'*accountability* elettorale tradizionale, basata sul meccanismo di punizione/ricompensa dei partiti al governo, verrebbe così sostituita da una *accountability* di tipo individuale basata sulla capacità dei Campioni eletti di garantire, attraverso forme di clientelismo politico o anche solo tramite legislazione *pork-barrel*, benefici particolaristici ai propri elettori.

In conclusione, i risultati di questa analisi potranno costituire la base per future ricerche su contesti locali - italiani o esteri - che presentano simili, o diverse caratteristiche da quelli studiati in questo elaborato.

²⁸ È il caso di Ciarambino, candidata presidente alla Regione Campania con il Movimento 5 Stelle. Le problematiche concernenti questo risultato vengono approfondite nel capitolo riguardante la regione meridionale.