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**Choosing the Leader
The Italian Democratic Party at Polls, 2007 and 2009**

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Abstract. Scholars often consider primary elections damaging for parties because of the social and political distinctiveness of the selectorate, usually choosing candidates unpalatable for the median voter in general elections. Primaries 'divisiveness' could also demobilize activists and supporters by exhibiting internal divisions among party leaders. These problems have been usually addressed correlating selectorate distinctiveness and primaries divisiveness with candidates performances in the following general elections.

In this paper we deal with the consequences of the leader selections organized by the Italian Democratic Party (DP) in 2007 and 2009 through two open primary elections. To this aim, the paper is organized in four parts. First, we present a short depiction of the rules, candidates, and results of the two elections. Second, we use individual-level data to contrast voters' sociographic characteristics in the two primaries and in the 2008 general elections. Third, we use the same data to compare voters' political characteristics. Fourth, we exploit again survey data referred to primary elections to contrast attitudes of the winners' and losers' supporters.

We discover that participants are not demobilized by the primary result. They are self-located on extreme leftist positions and could select an unelectable candidate. Nevertheless, primaries activate highly sophisticated but independent 'apartisan' voters who may overcome this problem.

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Section 4. Sistema politico italiano

Convenors: Mauro Calise (Naples) and Carlo Guarnieri (Bologna)

Panel 4.2. Where's the party? Restructuring, organization and membership

Chairs: Aldo Di Virgilio (Bologna) and Duncan McDonnell (Birmingham and Torino)

Discussant: James Newell

Choosing the Leader: The Italian Democratic Party at Polls, 2007 and 2009*

Antonella Seddone and Fulvio Venturino (University of Cagliari)

1. The Democratic Party at polls: rules, candidates, and results

In 1994 the Italian political system entered a dramatic crisis unknown in all advanced democracies. Party politics was the area most affected by changes. In that period, traditional and mass-based parties – notably the Christian Democrats and the Communist Party – began a deep rearrangement, including remarkable splits, and sometimes disappeared at all. In comparison with the previous polarized multiparty system (Sartori 1976), the so-called ‘Second Republic’ led to two outstanding innovations. First, the pre-existing partisan structure – articulated on three center, left, and right ‘poles’ – has evolved towards a bipolar format based on a right-left competition. Second, and consequently, the alternation in government became a regular occurrence after decades of Christian Democrat monopoly.

These impressive transformations notwithstanding, another attribute of the Italian politics remained unchanged. After the 1993 electoral reform and the removal of the pure PR, the party system fragmentation unexpectedly increased further at either electoral or parliamentary level. This trend remained unmovable until the 2008 parliamentary election, when for the first time both rightist and leftist coalitions have been led by two great parties agreeing on a ‘majoritarian vocation’ (Bordandini et al. 2008: 319), namely the rightist Popolo della Libertà (PDL) and the leftist Democratic Party (DP). Both parties have been recently formed through the merging of two pre-existing parties. PDL was founded by Silvio Berlusconi unifying Forza Italia and Alleanza Nazionale. DP is the result of the merging of Democratici di Sinistra and Margherita, and it achieves the union of the main Italian political traditions, communism and liberal Catholicism.

But similarities stop here. Once formed, the new parties adopted a completely divergent organization, where the selection and the role of the leader imply the most notable differences. PDL maintained in principle the absolute pre-eminence of a self-promoted leader already experimented in Forza Italia, although open contestations by internal factions arose since mid-2010. Instead DP was officially created in October 2007 through a largely inclusive primary election. In other words, the main party offices – the Secretary and the National Assembly – have been chosen through a direct election where all citizens were enabled to participate.

In a comparative perspective, democratization of parties’ internal life is not a complete novelty. The classical case of the United States apart, in many European democracies party democratization often involves candidate selection for parliamentary elections (Hazan 2002; Norris 2006; Pennings and Hazan 2001; Rahat 2009; Rahat and Hazan 2001). But practices of democratically elected party leaders are also agreed on, f.i. in France, Israel, and Italy. In these cases, the usual solution is to enable only party members to vote for candidates/leaders in closed primaries. The DP case in Italy is unique as this party empowers all citizens to participate in open primaries to choose the leader¹.

* Antonella Seddone has written part 2 and 3, Fulvio Venturino part 1 and 4. The conclusion has been redacted together.

¹ The selectorate’s inclusiveness is so large that are also allowed to vote immigrants and 16-17 years old. Italian electoral laws exclude both categories from the vote in traditional elections.

The first DP primary election – held in October 2007 – was disputed by five contenders, but competitiveness was very low (De Luca and Venturino 2010; Pasquino 2009). The front runner Walter Veltroni gained 75% of the 3,500,000 votes, and his affiliated delegates filled up to 81% of the seats in the National Assembly². This great success notwithstanding, the Veltroni's leadership has been very unstable. The DP statute warrants the secretary a four-years term. But in April 2008 the leftist coalition led by DP was defeated in the early parliamentary election called after the breakdown of the Prodi's government. Successively DP performed badly in several local elections, until Veltroni left the party leadership in February 2009. New elections were then approaching, so after a rough debate the National Assembly designated as a new leader Dario Franceschini, who led the party in the 2009 European election.

This choice postponed the second DP primary election until October 2009, when three candidates contended for the leadership (Pasquino and Venturino 2010). Despite the fact that he was the incumbent secretary, Franceschini – a former Christian Democrat – did not enter the competition as the front runner. Since the first steps of the primary campaign, Pierluigi Bersani – instead a former communist – was credited as the most credible leader. Ignazio Marino – a PD senator with a short political career – was the third competitor, generally qualified as a simple outsider. In comparison with the aforementioned event, the second DP primary was more competitive, as Bersani won 53,6% of the votes and 53% of the seats in the National Assembly. Dario Franceschini, with the 33,9% and the 34% respectively, resulted to be the best loser. Undoubtedly the gap has been quite large. But note that an absolute majority of the votes is requested to elect directly the secretary. If this is not the case, then a run off takes place in the National Assembly between the two most voted candidates. Shortly said, in 2009 the option of a secretary picked by the National Assembly rather than the voters has not been completely out of place as it was in 2007.

In any case, since its foundation the Italian DP has incorporated the recurring direct election of the secretary by all citizens. Hence an intriguing question arises. Formerly an unchallenged conventional wisdom stated that primary elections, revealing competitiveness and negativity among candidates from the same party, damage the winner's fate at the general election. The theoretical explanation for the thesis of the 'primaries penalty' (Carey and Polga-Hecimovic 2006) is grounded on two pillars. First, the primary voters would be radically different from the electorate of the general election, so that they select uncompetitive candidates located very far from the median voter. Second, the internal struggle among members of the same party curbs partisans' enthusiasm, and those supporting losers are especially prone to desert the party in the following general election³.

In this article we address both these tenets in reference with the two direct elections of the secretary so far held by the Italian DP in 2007 and 2009. Of course, both these elections have been primaries *sui generis*, not directly coupled with a following general election⁴. The 2008 early parliamentary election – originally scheduled in 2011 – has been an accident brought about by the weakness of the leftist coalition. And the

² The National Assembly elected in 2007 was also a constituent body. This is because it reached the unusual dimension of 2,858 members. The Assembly elected in 2009 regressed to 1,000 members, as asserted by the party statute.

³ Recently this point of view has been disputed by an alternative outlook, according to which the primary winner is successively advantaged. This would happen because voters actually appreciate party democracy, and internal conflicts may be consensually resolved. In any case, whether candidates selected by primaries are stronger than candidates selected by other methods remains a controversial issue.

⁴ But consider that the DP statute indicate the elected secretary as the only legitimate party candidate to the role of prime minister.

2009 primary has not yet been followed by any election. So, it is not our main interest here to assess the electoral performance of DP once the largely participated selection of the secretary has been adopted. Instead we use survey data to analyze attitudes and preferences of the 2007 and 2009 primary voters, and how they have been eventually oriented by that experience of participation. The next two sections focus on the sociographic and political characteristics of the primary voters, as depicted in two exit polls organized in 2007 and 2009. In order to gauge similarities and differences with the democratic electorate in general we also contrast them with the data collected through a telephone-assisted survey during the 2008 parliamentary election. Section 4 deals with the second above mentioned tenet by examining the attitude of the primary voters towards party enrolment and vote intention. The conclusion discusses some implications of our analysis for the theory and practice of the party democracy.

2. The voters' sociographic characteristics

The main novelty introduced by DP since its foundation consists in inclusive elections to select the leadership. In conditions of high political personalization the party leaders become the most immediate image of the party in public elections, so the results of these open primaries have a very deep impact on the party strategies. First of all, these elections are related with the organizational development of political parties (Katz and Mair 1995; 2002; 2009; Gunther and Montero 2002; Watterberg and Dalton 2000; Farrell and Webb 2000; Mair 1994; Panebianco 1982) and with the personalization of politics (Calise 2007; 2000; Poguntke and Webb 2007). Secondly, primaries elections emphasize the changed relationships between parties and their supporters (Scarrow 1996; 2000).

In the past, the tradition of mass political parties focused on the mobilization of the members, building a symbolic/ideological framework supported by a feeling of organizational belonging. The catch-all party structure reverses this perspective: the party's actions are now directed toward the whole electorate (Kirchheimer 1966). Parties choose to reduce the ideological baggage sending their political messages to a broader public constituency rather than just to its members. Primaries – in particular open primaries – are part of this new dynamic of mobilization which shows the end of the party on the ground in favor of a stronger action by the party in central and public office (Katz and Mair 2002).

PD primaries provide the highest level of inclusiveness of the selector (De Luca and Venturino 2010; Pasquino 2009): participation is allowed to all citizens that wish to express a preference on the nomination, disregarding voters' enrollment. The DP choice in promoting open primaries has a twofold consequence: on party organization, i.e. on the relationship among members, candidates and party; and on the electoral performance of the primary winner.

Primaries have raised a lot of debates about their consequences on parties' organization. There is a widespread prejudice correlated to the assumption that the fusion of inclusiveness and outsourcing in decision making on nomination or leadership's selection process could lead to the weakening of the organizational cohesion. In open primaries participants are not necessarily party members, indeed their participation is not supported by the constraints of organizational membership and adherence to party ideology that characterized the mass parties. Opening the selectorate means to modify the balance between responsibility and responsiveness. The primaries' vote would release candidate from party's control. In other words primaries jeopardize the traditional candidate's loyalty to the party. Basing her legitimacy outside party's organization, a candidate could be lead to act in accordance with a personal accountability, rather than with the party's one (Hopkin 2001; Penning and Hazan 2001). The result would be a weakening of party's organization.

Still on primaries' consequences on party's organization, some scholars underline that deeper implications are linked to the equity of participative incentives enjoyed by party members (Hopkin 2001). Including external voters in the decision-making would marginalize the members' prerogatives. This means that despite their militancy in the organization, members share the same privileges with those who do not participate actively into the party. Somehow, primaries could disarm activists' desire to participate, because they might see this inclusive process as a reduction or dismissal of their role within the party organization. Compared with traditional forms of partisan participation, primaries do not require an high and constant level of activism. Primaries are elections which take place in a time rather dilated, very close to the elections (that is the time citizen's attention is active and available to receive political messages). In other words primaries represent a participatory approach with low marginal costs, but with very large consequences on the party machine and on the electoral performances.

Finally, other concerns are related to the effects of primary results on party's electoral results. The external legitimacy which enjoys the winning candidate of these consultations may not be enough to handle conflicts within the party. Involving citizens outside the organization could mean that candidate selection is affected with a lack of electability in the general election and a possible defeat. Thus primary winners could not be competitive in the general election.

Here we will reflect on the political participation roused by these election contests. If it is true that the primary electorate is different from that one mobilized the general election (Pasquino and Venturino 2009; Kaufmann et al. 2003; Ranney and Epstein 1966) it is essential to figure out how it is and, especially, if those differences necessarily lead to a biased selection of candidates. Nevertheless, as underlined by Kaufmann et al. (2003), differences among selectors and electors are not so deep in case of open primaries, so we can expect that the participation feature stands not so far from the general electorate of the center-left. Our data will help us to find similarities and differences.

Gender represents the first indicator used to assess a participatory event. In this regard data describe a well known situation. Males' is higher than women's participation, with differences ranging from 11 percentage points in 2007 to 8.4 percentage points in the 2009's primaries. If we consider the same data for the center-left electorate in the 2008 parliamentary election we notice the same trend, albeit with a shorter distance (7 percentage points).

Tab. 1 Participation in parliamentary and primary elections by age

Age cohort	Parliamentary election 2008		Primaries 2007		Primaries 2009	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
18-24*	61	9,0	442	14,7	363	11,3
25-34	82	12,1	450	15,0	421	13,1
35-44	97	14,3	508	16,9	435	13,5
45-54	124	18,2	572	19,0	642	20,0
55-64	144	21,2	552	18,4	691	21,5
more than 65	172	25,3	484	16,1	662	20,6
<i>Total</i>	<i>680</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>3008</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>3214</i>	<i>100</i>

* In the DP primary elections the participation of voters 16 and 17 years old is allowed.

Data reported in Table 1 allow to assess the primary's strength to mobilize different political generations. General trends show a prevalence of oldest voters. In 2007 as well as in 2009, our sample seems disproportionately composed by "over 45 year old"

voters. Tendency is even more pronounced in 2009 primaries, when the selectors with an age over 45 years represent more than 60% of the sample.

Data show an higher predisposition to mobilize for older supporters, while young voters appear less involved in such elections. However, focusing our attention on the center-left electorate in 2008 political elections, we notice that youngest selectors are well represented in both primaries (Figure 1)⁵. Primaries represent a strategy to approach the base in order to remedy the lack of legitimacy shown by data on antiparty feelings (Bardi 1996; Poguntke 1996; Poguntke and Scarrow 1996). In other words, through the claim of internal democratization, parties try to strengthen (or to mend) the relationships with their members and electorate. Primaries seem to be a new edition of the traditional paths of mass participatory party rooted in the territory. Even if open primaries aim to involve those groups of more apathetic sympathizers, less related to party organization and less inclined to ensure a constant militancy, this kind of elections has an higher power to mobilize elderly voters. The older selectors are more trained to partisan participation than younger voters, usually more apathetic respect to conventional participation. Anyway, comparing data from parliamentary and primary elections we registered an high capacity of mobilization of younger voters.

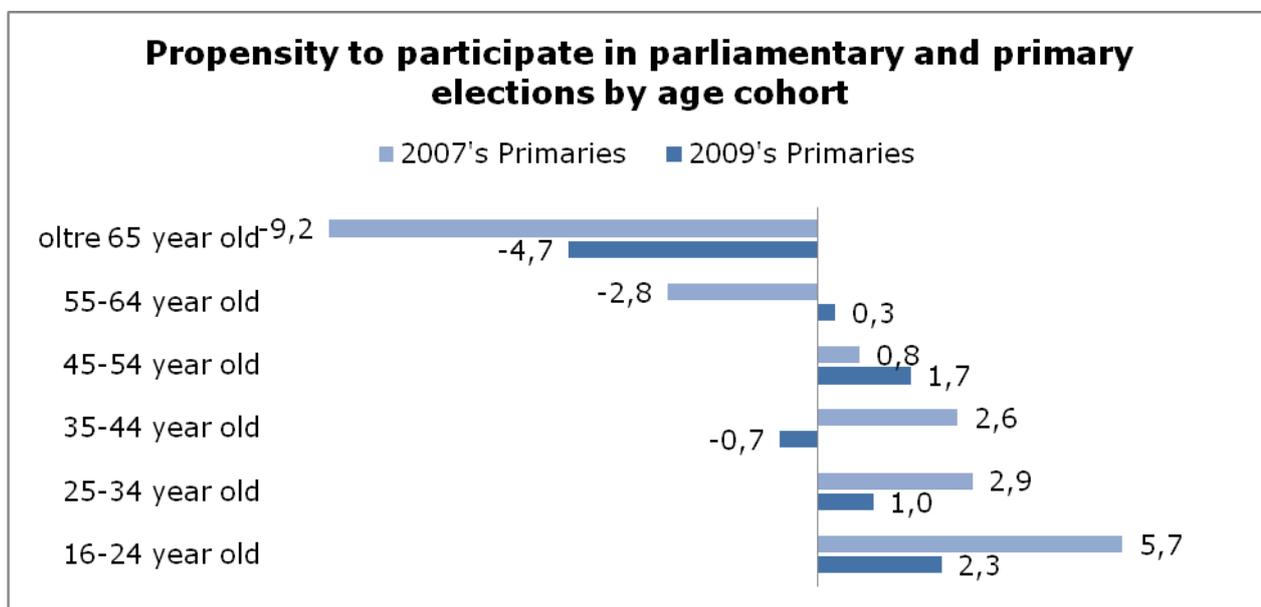


Fig. 1 Propensity to participate in parliamentary and primary elections by age cohort

Another indicator to fully understand the participation to DP primary elections is voters' education. Comparing data reported in Table 2 we notice that in both primaries DP has mainly involved selectors with high qualifications: over 72% of the 2007 selectors possessed at least a high school diploma, and in 2009 the same data concerns over 76%.

⁵ The higher presence of the oldest age color in 2008 sample could be related to the different method used to collect data in the three elections: in 2008 elections phone interviewing has been used, instead in 2007 and 2009 primaries we recurred to exit poll.

Tab. 2 Voters' education in parliamentary and primary elections

Education	Parliamentary election 2008		Primaries 2007		Primaries 2009	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Elementary school	98	14,4	228	7,4	196	6,1
Middle school	290	42,6	597	19,3	559	17,4
High school	201	29,6	1313	42,4	1314	40,8
Degree	91	13,4	961	31,0	1148	35,7
<i>Total</i>	<i>680</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>3099</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>3217</i>	<i>100</i>

This theme assumes greater meaning if we consider the distribution recorded in the 2008 center-left electorate. Fig. 2 allows to appreciate this difference more successfully. Both in 2007 and in 2009 there is an overrepresentation of more educated. Compared to the 2008 center left's electorate, in 2007 primaries we register an overrepresentation of more than 17 percentage points of those selectors possessing a university degree, while the distance amounts to 12.8 percentage points for what concerns high school degrees. This trend is even more evident by observing the distribution of qualifications among primary voters in 2009: in this case the percentage difference, compared to the 2008 electorate, amounts to 22.3 percentage points for university graduates, and 11.3 percentage points relating to the high school graduates.

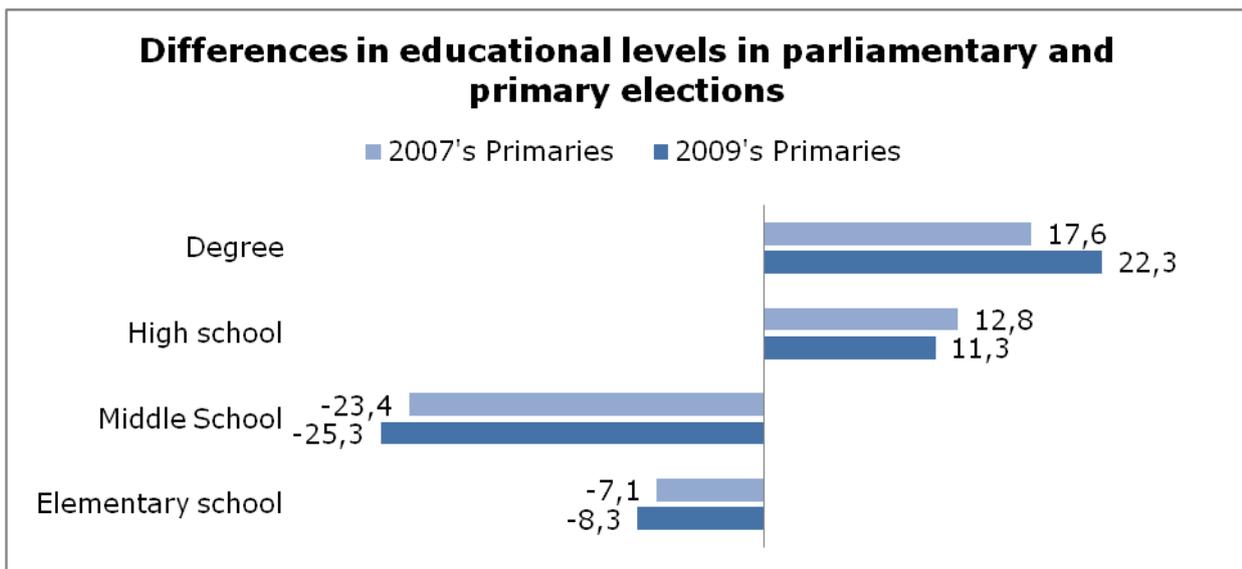


Fig. 2 Differences in educational levels in parliamentary and primary elections

Examining the social features of two primaries' selectorates we have corroborated the results from previous surveys (Pasquino and Venturino 2009; Bordignon and Diamanti 2005). In accord with the social centrality theory as a facilitating factor to political participation (Milbrath 1965), we see a strong prevalence of high degrees. This trend might indicate a greater analytical capacity in interpreting the political dynamics that move the primary. These early evidences allow us to reopen the argument above a supposed primary voters' inability to assess the electability of their candidate in the general election. Anyway solving this question requires to analyze also the political features of primaries' voters. The next paragraph will focus on these issues, outlining the political profile of the selectors.

3. The voters' political characteristics

As we observed about age and education, selectors are quite different from the general electorate. Now another question has to be faced concerning the political profile of primaries' participants. The question is not less important because some debates about primaries and their consequences on the electoral candidate's performances are based on that supposed discrepancy. The literature on political parties, reflecting on the introduction of these inclusive mechanisms of leadership's selection, reveals deep worries about the possibility that these elections produce real effects of democratization within the party (Hazan 2006; Pennings and Hazan 2001; Katz and Mair 1995). Rather, it is quite rooted the idea that primaries allow parties' dominant coalition to enforce their preferences on selectors. The idea of an internal party democratization led by primaries could be accompanied by a perverse effect: ruling coalition are released from the militants control, party leadership find his legitimacy from broad consensus ensured by fringes less diligent in terms of militancy. This is related to the fact that open primaries would mobilize selectors less integrated within the party; those selectors might be less attentive, less present and therefore more easily manipulated according to the specific interests of the dominant coalition. In this perspective, primaries may strengthen the logic of the well-known 'iron law of oligarchy'.

Nevertheless things do not seem so simple. Selectors have not to be considered just as political apathetic citizens, they are quite similar to those that Dalton (2005; 1984) calls 'apartisan citizen'. We talk about voters that are not attached to political parties. Nevertheless, they are involved in politics. They possess political skills required to orient themselves to politics without depending on party labels. As underlined by Dalton (1984: 271): 'Apartisans also may be involved in party-related activities, although they may be less supportive of partisan politics, and their political involvement may extend beyond the partisan sphere'. This means that selectors could not be inclined to support unconditionally party's decisions. In some way our data on education level confirm the idea of a very competent selectorate involved in primaries. So in order to evaluate their attitudes toward party and primary results in term of militancy and electoral fidelity we have to look to their political characteristics. Therefore, it is important to analyze selectors' political attitudes towards DP. Furthermore, observing relationship among voters and party helps to understand consequences led by these elections on party and participants on short- and medium-term.

Interest in politics is one of the indicators that helps to assess the type of political competence whereby selectors face the primary's vote. From this point of view these elections mobilize citizens truly interested in politics (Table 3). Actually, about 77.5% of 2009 selectors declare a quite marked interest toward political issues: the 49,5% says to be quite interesting in politics and the 28% asserts a very high involvement in this subject. Data are even more significant if compared to the interest's level registered on the center-left's voters in 2008 elections. Indeed, if those interviewed having declared 'enough interest in politics issues' are the 47,2%, a rate quite similar to those registered among selectors, the level of high interest stops at 9,3%.

Tab. 3 Interest in politics in parliamentary and primary elections

Level of interest	Parliamentary election 2008		Primaries 2009	
	N	%	N	%
Not at all	82	12,1	107	3,3
Not very much	213	31,3	609	18,8
Enough	321	47,2	1604	49,5
Very much	63	9,3	908	28,0
Don't know	1	0,1	12	0,4
<i>Total</i>	<i>680</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>3246</i>	<i>100</i>

Selectors' political placement and their perception about parties are two useful indicators that help us to understand selector's political attitudes. Not only. These indicators allow to answer those questions about the possibility that primaries' results may be affected by the incursions of voters belonging to political areas opponent the party. Finally, these data allow to clarify if it is real or not the risk that selectorate, in reason of his difference from the general electorate, is used to choose eccentric candidate, without any evaluation of his real electability.

Looking to Figure 3 we find out that selectors and voters seem to converge on center-left's positions. Indeed, 45.7% of the 2009 primary voters is placed in center-left placement, with a distance of only 3 percentage points compared to same data considered on 2008 electorate. Anyway, it is important to underline a very high presence of leftist voters among selectors: 41.4% of the 2009 participants places his political ideas on the left, tracking a distance of 18.6 percentage points from the 2008 electorate. Consequently, there is a marked reduction of those selectors who place themselves in the center. They are the 10,4% of our sample, meaning a difference of 19,1 percentage points compared to 2008 voters.

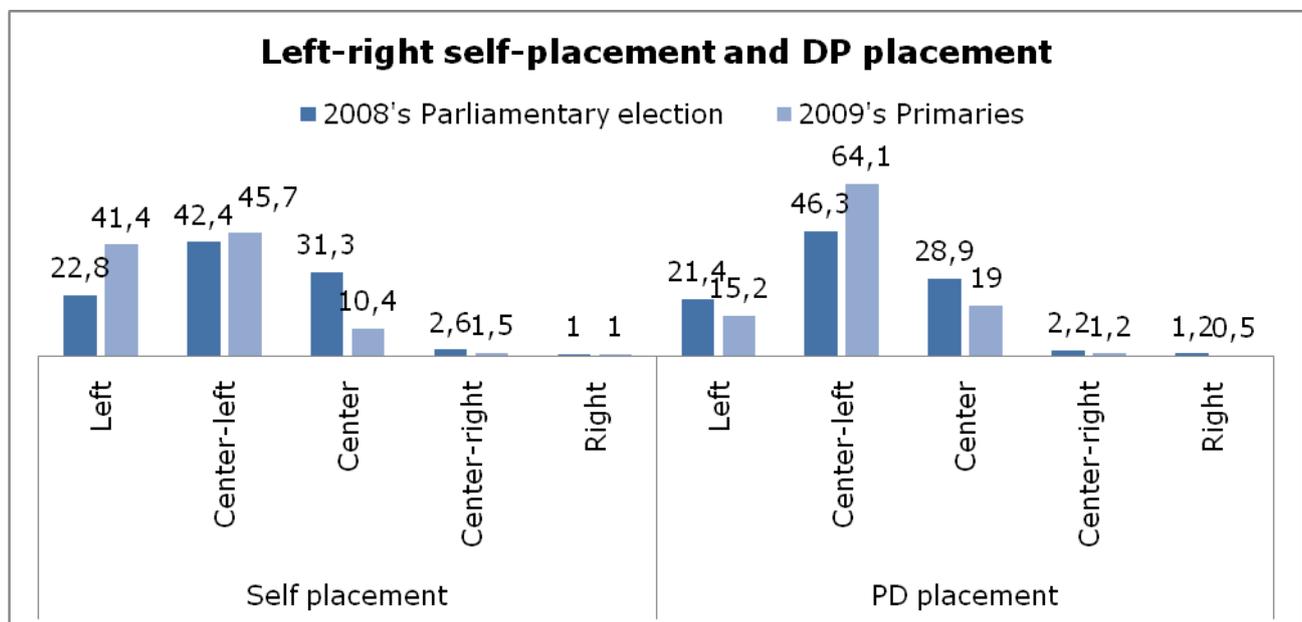


Fig. 3 Left-right self-placement and DP placement

The Democratic Party is a new party where coexist two different political cultures: the Catholic (Christian Democrats) and the Communist. So it becomes very important to consider how selectors interpret the party from the point of view of its political placement, mainly because, as explained above, primary's mobilization concerns much of leftist voters.

Considering the perception that DP voters have about the party, some interesting aspects of the relationship between selectors and DP arise. Even though selectors have a marked tendency to left positions, the party's perception is different: 64% of the selectors considers DP as a center-left party. Data are quite different from the 46,3% registered among the personal selectors' placement: there is a gap between the primary selectorate placement and the representation provided about their party. DP is interpreted as a center-left party, with more marked tendency on the center of the political axis (19%) rather than on the left (15,2%).

Tab. 4 Primary and parliamentary voters' partisanship

Partisanship	Parliamentary election 2008*		Primaries 2007		Primaries 2009	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Independent	602	88,6	2146	70,2	2210	69,0
Democratic Party	70 ^a	10,3	794 ^c	25,9	902	28,2
Other leftist parties	4 ^b	0,6	33 ^d	1,1	26 ^e	0,8
Other rightist parties	1	0,1	3	0,1	4	0,1
Not identifiable partisan	3	0,4	82	2,7	62	1,9
<i>Total</i>	<i>680</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>3058</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>3204</i>	<i>100</i>

a: Democratic Party (68 cases), Democratici di Sinistra (2)

b: Sinistra Arcobaleno (3), Italia dei Valori (1)

c: Democratici di Sinistra (636), Margherita (133), Ulivo (14) and Partito Democratico Meridionale (11)

d: Rifondazione Comunista (15), Greens (8), Comunisti Italiani (2), Rosa nel Pugno (5), Italia dei Valori (3)

e: Rifondazione Comunista (9), Comunisti Italiani (3), Sinistra e Libertà (3), Partito Socialista (2), Greens (2), Partito Radicale (2), Italia dei Valori (2), other minor parties (3)

*The Itanes dataset on the 2008 parliamentary elections lacks a direct question about militancy. So we have used here the classical items concerning party identification. We have considered as party activists those declaring to be "very close" to a party, while those self-describing as "a little close" and "only an occasional supporter" have been deemed as independents.

As already underlined, primaries play a very efficient role as a mobilization tool. Primaries have to be seen as a participative strategy used by parties in order to catch new supporters. In order to assess the real impact of these particular elections now we focus on another side of selectors' political attitude: their membership (Table 4). Concerning membership, statements released by selectors in 2007 and 2009 do not reveal significant differences. In both cases we recognize the same trend: the greater portion of our sample is not enrolled in parties (the 70.2% in 2007 and 69% in 2009); members represent a minority equivalent to 25.9% in 2007 and to 28.2% in 2009. Finally, the participative contribution ensured by other parties' members is marginal, disproving the idea of possible incursions of external 'noise' in these inclusive elections. If we read these data considering the level of membership on the 2008 general electorate, we note that DP open primaries have been able to mobilize militants at a very high level: selectors enrolled in DP (or in DS or Margherita for the 2007 primaries) are over-represented, with difference of 15.6 percentage points in 2007 and 17.9 points percent in 2009.

If data on party membership permit to evaluate the mobilization capacity of this kind of inclusive elections on non-members Tables 5 and 6 help us to understand if the

primaries might encourage participation with a greater investment of resources, namely if they are able to trigger dynamics of participation such as choosing to vote the party or to enroll in.

Tab. 5 Enrolment intentions to DP, 2007 and 2009

	Primaries 2007		Primaries 2009	
	N	%	N	%
I will adhere to DP for sure	1479	48,5	930	30,5
I won't adhere to DP for sure	379	12,4	1071	35,2
It depends on the primaries result	159	5,2	154	5,1
I don't know, I have still to decide	1035	33,9	890	29,2
<i>Total</i>	<i>3052</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>3045</i>	<i>100</i>

Looking to the intentions of enrollment, the two selectorates reveal two very different situations. In 2007 primaries played the role of a ritual of initiation, a sort of participatory baptism directed toward the legitimacy of the new party's entry into the political arena (Valbruzzi 2009). So it is easy to expect in this phase higher level of participative enthusiasm that leads selectors to join the party. In 2007 primaries the 48,5% of the selectors declare the aim to join DP. This is a very large portion of the sample, furthermore those who show a firm decision to not adhere the party are 12.4%, a marginal segment of the sample.

In 2009, the scenario is quite different. The largest portion of the sample is represented by 35.2% of respondents who say with absolute certainty that they have no intention to join the Democratic Party. The distance over the same features recorded in 2007 is approximately 22.8 percentage points. Similarly, in 2009 there is a significant reduction of 18 percentage points among those voters sure to adhere. Even if the level of uncertainty declared in the first DP primaries (33,9%) has been reduced to 29,2% in 2009, it is clear that in the latter primary election selectors were less inclined to a militant effort.

Finally, it is essential to underline that the choice to enroll in the party is not related with the results of the primaries. This means that despite the spreading of personalization of politics, Italian selectors seem to be quite interesting to the party organization rather than to his leadership. Primaries, instead to nourish personalization, seem to be elections played with a party organization logic. In this logic, what matters is not the candidate selected, rather selectors' vote is oriented by another kind of evaluation. In 2007 primaries only the 5,2% subordinated the decision to adhere to the party to the primary's result; data are quite similar in 2009 (5,1%), confirming that in these two primaries personalization played a very marginal role.

Comparing with early participatory enthusiasm, primaries have lost their militancy appeal. This could be related to two different reasons. First, it is plausible that younger selectors, more mobilized in 2009 primaries, are reluctant to engage in conventional and structured forms of participation as formal adherence to the party. Secondly, it is possible that DP atones in 2009 for an unfavorable political situation; repeated electoral defeats could have weakened the militants' enthusiasm.

Tab. 6 Vote intentions for next parliamentary election, 2007 and 2009

	Primaries 2007		Primaries 2009	
	N	%	N	%
I will support DP unconditionally	1814	59,3	2203	68,8
I will support DP only if the candidate leader I've just voted for prevails	150	4,9	152	4,7
I will support DP only if it adopts a noteworthy manifesto	508	16,6	367	11,5
I will support DP only to prevent a rightist government	200	6,5	191	6,0
I don't know, I'm going to choose in the polling station	346	11,3	222	6,9
Surely I won't support DP	42	1,4	68	2,1
<i>Total</i>	<i>3060</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>3203</i>	<i>100</i>

Trying to answer to one of the most prickly subject about primaries, now we tackle the problem of the primaries' effects on selector's vote choice. Confirming some elements about militancy intentions declared by interviewed, it is denied the idea that selectors would be induced to defect in the general election in case of failure of their candidate in primaries. As we see in Table 6 neither in 2007 nor in 2009 selectors have tied their electoral choices to primaries' outcomes. Even if the literature on the topic of primary highlights the possibility of weakening the party against a strengthening of the candidates, our data describe a different reality. The fact strongly emerging is the greater tendency to support the party in the elections (68.8%) declared by 2009 selectors, with a difference about 9.5 percentage points compared to the selectors 2007. The leadership selected by primaries does not affect selector's vote in general elections. In 2007 just the 4,9% of the selectors bind the vote choice to the electoral victory of the candidate selected by primaries; similarly also in 2009's primaries this option is marginal amounting the 4,7% of the sample. Besides voters loyal to the party and results of the primaries, there are selectors focusing their vote behavior and considering party's political and programmatic proposal. However, those selectors are a not such a large part of our sample: in 2007 they are 16.6% of respondents, while in 2009 (with the growth of loyal voters) are reduced to 11.5%. The increasing loyalty registered in 2009 may be connected with the national political situation whereby DP is not in charge of the executive power. This could have supported the sympathizers' trust towards the party with the aim to regain the government.

4. The voters' choices

As stated in the first section, according to a conventional point of view the adoption of primary elections damages the electoral performance of a party. This would happen because the mere experience of the primaries influences negatively the attitudes of the party's supporters emphasising the internal disagreements. As a rule, to gauge such a hypothesis the results of the primaries are matched with the outcomes of the related general elections – either parliamentary or presidential. However this research strategy cannot be straightforwardly recurred to here. We have already remarked that both leader selections organized by the DP in 2007 and 2009 have been primaries *sui generis*, because they were not explicitly connected to a subsequent parliamentary election, and after 2009 primaries no election took actually place. Moreover, such a problem should be conveniently dealt with a different research design, adopting a

comparative perspective and including a larger case number. All things considered, here we turn again to individual-level data to examine how participants react to the anticipated primary results. By so doing, we draw on two items already described in the previous section, namely the vote intentions and the enrolment intentions declared by the selectors when casting their ballots at the primary.

The primary penalty hypothesis provides a clear account of the causal mechanism damaging a party. Several features of the primaries are alleged to generate disgruntled supporters. Legions of scholars have first focused on primary divisiveness (Atkeson 1998; Bernstein 1977; Born 1981; Hacker 1965; Hogan 2003; Kenney 1988; Kenney and Rice 1984; Piereson and Smith 1975; Romero 2003; Ware 1979). When competitiveness – measured as a small vote difference between the winner and the best loser – is elevated, then during the primary campaign a great deal of human and financial assets are wasted which cannot be successively used for the general election. Furthermore, a victory at the primaries with a close margin leaves on the battleground a large amount of partisans who have to decide whether support a second best from their side, or alternatively to abstain or to vote for other parties.

More recently scholars have become aware that a vigorous competition could improve – rather than damage – the electoral outcome of the primary winner. This may happen because a spectacular horse-race spreads the candidate image among the public at large, or because the candidate herself takes advantage of the opportunity to expose her policy positions rewardingly. These points of view have brought back into the research about primaries the role of electoral communication and campaign style. Sometimes a fair primary campaign may attract new voters, fascinated by the uncommon occurrence of a party enacting internal democracy. In this case, the electoral base of the primary winner will result enlarged. And if the primary appeal reaches supporters of the adverse side the electoral bonus will be even larger, and the fate of the candidate almost certainly propitious. Of course, the opposite case of a negative primary campaign mainly carried out by disproportionate criticisms among candidates from the same party may sort alternative outcomes (Djupe and Peterson 2002; Peterson and Djupe 2005). In such a case, when the general election is arriving militants could avoid commitment as campaigners, and sympathizers may desert the party. Evident disagreements may also reinvigorate rival parties. Then the primary winner enters the competition for the general election under the worse circumstances.

We suppose that these consequences are not homogeneously distributed among all party supporters. Rather those voting for the primary winner are expected to be more satisfied than the fans of the defeated candidates. Thus the latter are expected to be less enthusiast for future militancy. In order to tap such different attitudes we distinguish primary voters as 'losers' or 'winners', i.e. the selectors respectively supporting the defeated and the winning primary candidates. If the primary penalty thesis is correct, then losers should be more disillusioned with party politics than winners, and in turn this disenchantment is expected to reverberate on their political attitudes. More explicitly, losers should be less favourable to vote DP in the next parliamentary election and less spurred to join the party through a formal enrolment. In practice, are winners – as just defined – those voting for Walter Veltroni in 2007 and for Pierluigi Bersani in 2009. As a consequence of the mounting level of competitiveness, Veltroni gained 75% of the total votes, while Bersani attained only about 53%. These results are broadly mirrored in our surveys, where winners figure out 76,8% and 49,7% of the two samples.

Tab. 7 Vote intentions for the next parliamentary election, 2007

	Losers		Winners		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
I will support DP unconditionally	309	48,1	1402	64,9	1711	61,1
I will support DP only if the candidate leader I've just voted for prevails	25	3,9	110	5,1	135	4,8
I will support DP only if it adopts a noteworthy manifesto	156	24,3	303	14,0	459	16,4
I will support DP only to prevent a rightist government	47	7,3	133	6,2	180	6,4
I don't know, I'm going to choose in the polling station	91	14,2	190	8,8	281	10,0
Surely I won't support DP	14	2,2	22	1,0	36	1,3
<i>Total</i>	<i>642</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>2160</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>2802</i>	<i>100</i>

Table 7 details the vote intentions declared by losers and winners during the 2007 primaries. As shown in the last column, a notable majority (61,1%) is oriented to support DP in any case, paying no attention to the primary result. At the opposite side, only a tiny minority (1,3%) excludes in principle to vote for DP. Three categories of respondents subordinate their vote for DP to forthcoming events: the win of their own candidate (4,8%), the adoption of a noteworthy manifesto (16,4%), and the prevention of a rightist government (6,4%). Lastly, 10% of the selectors are simply doubtful, and defer their choices until the election day.

Among some categories there is a great difference between losers and winners, as predicted by the conventional wisdom. This is the case of the sure supporters (48,1% vs. 64,9%), of the policy-oriented voters interested in the manifesto (24,3% vs. 14%), of the irresolute selectors deferring their choice to the election day (14,2% vs. 8,8%), and of those surely opposing DP (2,2% vs. 1%). In all these cases, voters' attitudes seem to be affected by the status of loser. Instead status is less relevant for candidate-oriented voters (3,9% vs. 5,1%) and those willing to prevent a rightist government (7,3% vs. 6,2%). However, the most striking fact shown in Table 7 is the large majority of voters oriented to support DP wholeheartedly, as opposed to the small minority subordinating their choices to the primary outcome. The latter category is particularly relevant here because is composed by participants directly reacting to the primaries, while the others seem to be simply influenced by the vagaries of politics. In sum, to be a loser or a winner in the 2007 primaries often brought about different vote intentions among democratic supporters. But those diverse attitudes were barely damaging the party in the next parliamentary election.

Tab. 8 Vote intentions for the next the parliamentary election, 2009

	Losers		Winners		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
I will support DP unconditionally	1039	66,7	1109	72,0	2148	69,3
I will support DP only if the candidate leader I've just voted for prevails	71	4,6	73	4,7	144	4,6
I will support DP only if it adopts a noteworthy manifesto	198	12,7	158	10,2	356	11,5
I will support DP only to prevent a rightist government	96	6,2	86	5,6	182	5,9
I don't know, I'm going to choose in the polling station	114	7,3	88	5,7	202	6,5
Surely I won't support DP	38	2,5	28	1,8	66	2,1
<i>Total</i>	<i>1556</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>1542</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>3098</i>	<i>100</i>

Table 8 reports the same information for the 2009 primary election. In reference with the last right column, the general distribution is quite similar to 2007, with an even more overwhelmingly majority (69,3%) willing to support DP in any case. For all categories, differences between losers and winners are drastically reduced in comparison with 2007. Remarkably, the number of candidate-oriented uncertain voters (4,6%) remains limited as in 2007 primaries, but the disparity between losers and winners in this case fades away completely. Apparently the 2009 primaries did not stimulate among the participants any negative attitudes such to damage the party.

Tab. 9 Enrolment intentions to DP, 2007

	Losers		Winners		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
I will adhere to DP for sure	240	37,2	1169	54,5	1409	50,5
I won't adhere to DP for sure	107	16,6	236	11,0	343	12,3
It depends on the primaries result	42	6,5	101	4,7	143	5,1
I don't know, I have still to decide	256	39,7	640	29,8	896	32,1
<i>Total</i>	<i>645</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>2146</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>2791</i>	<i>100</i>

Table 9 shows the enrolment intentions proclaimed by the 2007 primary voters. For all categories of voters reported in the rows one may notice some differences in the expected direction between losers and winners. Indeed winners are for sure more oriented to enroll (54,5%), while losers are less interested in a full militancy (16,6%). They also prevails in both categories of undecided, either those strategically waiting for the primary results (6,5%) or those simply waiting for riper times (39,7%). But, more importantly, the last right column illustrates that in general half of the sample (50,5%) is conclusively oriented to adhere DP, while only a minority (12,3%) rejects a priori such an involvement. The remaining 2007 voters are undecided. But only a tiny minority (5,1%) is undecided because they are afraid of the primaries result. Once more, to be a loser or a winner brings about different attitudes among primary voters, but disaffection towards the party related to the primary results remains not momentous.

Tab. 10 Enrolment intentions to DP, 2009

	Losers		Winners		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
I will adhere to DP for sure	432	29,0	479	32,9	911	30,9
I won't adhere to DP for sure	512	34,4	510	35,1	1022	34,7
It depends on the primaries result	94	6,3	53	3,6	147	5,0
I don't know, I have still to decide	451	30,3	413	28,4	864	29,3
<i>Total</i>	<i>1489</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>1455</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>2944</i>	<i>100</i>

Table 10 reports the same information about enrolment intentions for 2009 primary election. Differently from vote intentions considered above, the general distribution here changes considerably from 2007 to 2009 because of the dramatic decrease of the prospective joiners (from 50,5% in 2007 to 30,9% in 2009) and the resulting increase of the disinclined voters (from 12,3% to 34,7%), while both other categories remain roughly unchanged. Differences between losers and winners are now negligible, therefore for the participants' attitudes formation to support a winning candidate seems to be very important in 2007, but less relevant in 2009. The only exception are the strategic undecided voters waiting for the primaries results. Here the losers (6,3%) are unequivocally more represented than the winners (3,6%). But again the more striking fact is that the supporters disillusioned because of the primaries keep low on the same level reached in 2009.

To sum up. Critics claim that primaries damage the party fortune. As a causal link they point out the unenthusiastic feelings diffused among the supporters by the primary competition. Here we have dealt with the two main attitudes relating parties and voters, namely the individual propensity to voting and enrolling. We have focused on losers as the fraction of the supporters more subject to desert the party. But losers are barely different from winners in their attitudes towards the party, and only a negligible minority threatens to exit after the primaries. Apparently in this case the link between primary elections and party misfortunes is missing.

5. Conclusion

In this paper we have addressed the issue of the electoral damage brought about by the use of the primaries election. Our results may be summed up in reference with the attitudes of the primaries' participants and the public at large. First, primaries do not affect negatively participants' attitudes. Only a small fraction of losers is definitively alienated, but in general feelings towards DP are positive. In this case, the link between primaries and party electoral misfortunes is missing. Second, comparing some social and political characteristics of the democratic voters at primary and general elections we have discovered some noteworthy differences. Primary voters are younger, more educated, and more interested in politics than their counterparts. Above all, when left-right self-location are considered, they result to be more leftist. Thus the primary winner is forced to assume a position near the median primary voter, who is located far from the median voter at general election. This is the classical mechanism lighted by the conventional wisdom to validate the primary penalty hypothesis (Cadigan and Janeba 2002), and it seems to be at work in the two cases we have considered here.

Besides these core considerations, some complementary and more speculative insights might be spelled out. First, it is true that both DP primary elections have been won by candidates coming from the former Communist Party prevailing on more moderate former Christian Democrat candidates; but few would agree that the new elected party leaders are in some sense 'extremists'. It could be supposed that pri-

mary voters are highly sophisticated – as shown by their high education and interest for politics – and therefore they are able to consider the electability of the candidates they are voting for. Second, though a primary winner has been picked out on an 'extremist' policy platform or candidate image she may reshape her positions in the time spanning from the primaries to the general elections; by so doing, she may come close to the median general voter and nullify the primary penalty. Third, as clearly shown by the impressive turnout either in 2007 or in 2009, the DP primaries are helpful to mobilize sectors of the population usually far from the party, the youth being the most outstanding example; this mobilization could counterbalance the eventual penalty due to an extreme candidate selected through the primaries.

Of course, to draw generalizations about the role of primaries in reference with only two cases may easily drive to over interpretation. Nevertheless, one should acknowledge that the lesson from the Italian Democratic Party primaries is at least controversial: 'extremist' voters actually go to the polls and may select unelectable candidates, but supporters do not mature alienate feelings towards the party, and the amazing participation may boost the party anyway.

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