

THE LEFT TURN OF THE ITALIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY (PD): PRIMARY ELECTIONS AND POLICY PREFERENCES

GIANCARLO MINALDI*
(Kore University of Enna)

Abstract. On February 26, 2023, for the first time in the history of the Democratic Party, the leading Italian progressive party, a woman, Elly Schlein, was elected leader through open primaries that contradicted the outcome of consultations among the membership. Observing the outcome of an exit poll conducted by the Standing Group Candidate and Leader Selection of the Italian Political Science Society focusing on the policy priorities of the electorate, it clearly emerges that the inclusive rules of intra-party democracy, under certain conditions, can impact the identity of the party, leading in this case to a sharp turn to the left.

More specifically, the positions of the electorates of the two candidates, Elly Schlein and Stefano Bonaccini, diverge significantly on issues that appear to be crucial for the political positioning of the party.

Keywords: Democratic Party, intra-party democracy, political impact, policy issues, left turn.

Introduction

On February 26, 2023, primary elections were held in Italy to select the leader of the Democratic Party (PD), the leading Italian progressive party. As provided for by the statute since the party's founding in 2007, these were open primaries, meaning that not only members but also casual supporters were allowed to participate in the vote.

As well illustrated by Piero Ignazi, primaries, and more generally forms of consultation with members and supporters, are now the most

* Giancarlo Minaldi is Associate Professor with the Faculty of Economics and Law, Kore University of Enna (giancarlo.minaldi@unikore.it).

common form of intra-party democracy, to counter the deficit that has emerged from their disconnection with society – the so-called path of inclusion.¹ However, Ignazi is fully in tune with authors such as William Cross and Jean-Benoit Pilet when they state that “party elites are often able to control the process and limit the actual competitiveness of the races.”²

In the history of the PD primaries up to the moment, since 2007 there has never been a candidate who has won a truly competitive election, just as the vote of open primaries has never contradicted the vote of the members. In 2023, the two candidates in the running, Stefano Bonaccini and Elly Schlein, were selected through a consultation of party members, with Stefano Bonaccini prevailing with 52.9%, followed by Elly Schlein with 34.9%, Gianni Cuperlo with 8%, and Paola De Micheli with 4.3%.³

Nevertheless, the data on the distribution and concentration of the membership vote show deep distortions. The geographical area where most votes were cast, with almost forty per cent, was southern Italy and the islands (Sicily and Sardinia), while in the metropolitan area of Milan, with about 4,200 votes, there was about as much voting as in the small province of Potenza. In short, not only do these figures in no way reflect the actual distribution of PD votes, but they confirm the control of large packages of votes by big voters controlling the central and peripheral party.⁴

In a context of significant tension and difficulty for the Italian left, which suffered a heavy defeat in the 2022 general election, with the Democratic Party increasingly perceived as lacking a strong political and organizational identity, something unpredictable occurred in the open consultations.⁵ Contrary to all the polls, as well as the outcome of the

¹ Piero Ignazi, “The Four Knights of Intra-party Democracy: A Rescue for Party Delegation,” *Party Politics* 26, no. 1 (2020): 9-20.

² William Cross and Jean-Benoit Pilet, “Parties, Leadership Selection and Intra-party Democracy,” in *The Politics of Party Leadership*, eds. William Cross and Jean-Benoit Pilet (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015): 165–173.

³ According to the 2019 statute, access to open primaries is reserved for the two candidates who received the most votes in the consultation among party members.

⁴ Antonio Florida, “La nemesi delle primarie aperte” [The nemesis of open primaries], *il Mulino*, February 23, 2023, accessed December 10, 2023, <https://www.rivistailmulino.it/a/la-nemesi-delle-primarie-aperte?fbclid=IwAR3p8py29Z3Ze8DnopLeOChKWSYro1Vz3Y2rhH6q0dnJHKULoojBcipcoPc>.

⁵ Antonio Florida, *PD. Un partito da rifare? Le ragioni di una crisi* [PD. A Party to Be Rebuilt?] (Roma: Castelvecchi, 2022).

consultation among party members, Elly Schlein won the primaries with 53.75% of the votes, while Stefano Bonaccini stopped at 46.25%. The participants in the consultation numbered 1,098,623, a significant figure, although it was lower compared to the previous consultations in 2019 (1,569,628).

Faced with such a context, it is plausible to say that a great wave of protest against a candidate mostly perceived as an apparatchik, as well as the appreciation for an outsider such as Elly Schlein, reversed a foregone conclusion, laying the groundwork for the party's internal rules of democracy to subvert its identity.

Regarding her profile, Elly Schlein, the first female leader of the Democratic Party (PD), represented a departure from traditional leadership. In 2015, she left the party in open disagreement with the then-leader Matteo Renzi, asserting the need to reclaim a leftist profile. She returned in 2022 in anticipation of the Congress and the primaries, where she presented a motion titled *Parte da Noi! (It Starts with Us!)* strongly oriented to the left, which we will discuss further.⁶ As for Stefano Bonaccini, unlike Elly Schlein, he represented continuity with the traditional elite. He is the President of the Emilia-Romagna Region and has a moderate and pragmatic outlook, consistently aligning himself with the party establishment. His motion *Energia Popolare per il PD e per l'Italia (People's Energy for the PD and Italy)*, as we will discuss further, carries a strong consensus-oriented character.⁷

Having stated the general premises, this paper aims to explore the perceptions of selectors regarding some crucial national public policies. To this end, the contribution makes use of the data of a survey organized by the Standing Group Candidate and Leader Selection of the Italian Society of Political Science, of which the author is a member. The survey

⁶ Elly Schlein, "Parte da Noi! Mozione congressuale a supporto della candidatura di Elly Schlein a Segretaria nazionale del Partito Democratico" [It Starts with Us!], Partito Democratico, accessed December 10, 2023, https://www.partitodemocratico.it/wp-content/uploads/mozione_schlein_def.Pdf.

⁷ Stefano Bonaccini, "Energia Popolare per il PD e per l'Italia. Sintesi della piattaforma politico-congressuale a sostegno di Stefano Bonaccini segretario del Partito Democratico" [People's Energy for the PD and Italy]. Synthesis of the political platform in support of Stefano Bonaccini as secretary of the Democratic Party], Partito Democratico, Accessed December 10, 2023, https://www.partitodemocratico.it/wp-content/uploads/Bonaccini_Mozione_A4-1.Pdf.

consists of an exit poll administered to about 2,000 primary voters on various issues and facets.

Concerning policies, four areas were examined that relate to the traditional divide between left and right, both in its classical form, and in the one between the new left, characterized by libertarian and universalist values, and the new right, characterized by traditional and communitarian values.⁸ In general, the analysis focused on the perceptions of the selectors about migrant reception policies, tax and service policies, environmental policies, and equal opportunity policies for LGBTQ+ couples.

It should be pointed out right away that these issues found ample space in the congress motions of Elly Schlein and Stefano Bonaccini which, although not radically different, have placed different emphases on each of the issues under consideration in this analysis.

To begin with, on migration policies, in line with the provisions of the PD electoral program for the September 25, 2022 general election, both candidates declared themselves in favor of overcoming the Bossi-Fini law, which introduced a series of restrictive measures for immigration, especially regarding residence permits linked to the possession of a job, as well as the planning of regular migration flows that would cancel ex-post amnesties.⁹ Unlike Stefano Bonaccini, Elly Schlein also referred to a widespread reception model, as well as expressing the need to stop any policy of refoulement, and to promote a new *Mare Nostrum* on a European scale, given that thanks to *Mare Nostrum*, more than 100,000 migrants were rescued in the Central Mediterranean and beyond, nearly reaching the border of Libyan territorial waters.¹⁰ Stefano Bonaccini, on the other hand, did not mention the rescue policy, but the need to promote

⁸ Simon Bornschieer, "The New Cultural Divide and the Two-Dimensional Political Space in Western Europe," *Western European Politics* 33, no. 3 (2010): 419-444; Sara B. Hobolt and James Tilley, "Fleeing the Centre: The Rise of Challenger Parties in the Aftermath of the Euro Crisis," *West European Politics* 39, no. 5 (2016): 971-991; James L. Guth and Brent F. Nelsen, "Party Choice in Europe: Social Cleavages and the Rise of Populist Parties," *Party Politics* 27, no. 3 (2021): 1-12.

⁹ Nicolò Pasini and Marta Regalia, *Twenty-eighth Migration Report. The Immigration Issue in Italian Political Elections* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2023): 166-178; Law 189 of 2002, Changes in regulations on the matter of immigration and asylum, Official Collection of Legislative Acts of the Republic of Italy (2002); Schlein, "Parte da Noi," 15; Bonaccini, "Energia Popolare," 34.

¹⁰ Schlein, "Parte da Noi," 15. *Mare Nostrum* was a maritime search and rescue operation launched by the Italian government in the autumn of 2013 in the Central Mediterranean.

“a quality integration inspired by criteria of humanity, legality and security,” with a perspective, therefore, at least partly security oriented.¹¹

Turning to fiscal policies, both candidates proposed lowering taxes on labor and increasing taxes on income, with an explicit reference to inheritances and gifts by Elly Schlein.¹² They also agreed that strengthening welfare was a matter of great importance.¹³

Concerning environmental protection, Elly Schlein’s motion clearly states its priority, making environmental compatibility a premise of any development policy, even at the cost of increasing the tax burden through *ad hoc* taxes such as the plastic tax.¹⁴ Circular economy and sustainable mobility underpin her vision of environmental protection.¹⁵ Also for Stefano Bonaccini, any development policy for the country must have environmental protection as a prerequisite. He does not mention the idea of new taxes, but highlights the opportunities represented by various proposals: from a large-scale reforestation plan to the acceleration towards the development of renewable energies, from the introduction of bonus systems for companies that reduce emissions to incentives for the circular economy, and the strengthening of sustainable mobility infrastructures.¹⁶ On this point, therefore, the two motions differ only in the greater articulation of the specific proposals by Stefano Bonaccini (who dedicates an entire paragraph to the environment), compared to the more radical tones of Elly Schlein, who makes environmental protection an inalienable value and worthy even of introducing of new taxes.

Finally, on civil rights, particularly those of the LGBTQ+ community, the candidates express proposals that differ only in a few nuances. Both express the need to pass a law against discrimination based on sexual orientation as soon as possible, to establish egalitarian marriage and to overcome Law 164 of 1982 to guarantee the right to gender identity of the individual.¹⁷ Stefano Bonaccini makes explicit reference to the need

¹¹ Bonaccini, “Energia Popolare,” 34.

¹² Schlein, “Parte da Noi,” 11.

¹³ Schlein, “Parte da Noi,” 8; Bonaccini, “Energia Popolare,” 24.

¹⁴ Schlein, “Parte da Noi,” 21.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁶ Bonaccini, “Energia Popolare,” 19.

¹⁷ Law 164/1982 provides for the possibility of changing gender identity, but only after surgery. Legge 14 aprile 1982, n. 164, *Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana* 106 (1982).

to “reform the adoption system by overcoming all discrimination,” while Elly Schlein emphasizes schools, highlighting the need for them to “open their doors to affective and sexual education for the new generations.”¹⁸

These, in a nutshell, are the positions of the two leadership candidates on the four issues examined by the research. We will see whether and to what extent these positions are reflected in the respondents’ opinions, and how these are articulated with respect to other variables such as age, gender, level of education, political position along the left-right axis, and the party voted in the last general election.

Different Issues, Similar Polarization

On migration policies, the question was based on two opposing assertions: “some say we receive too many immigrants, others that we could easily take in more,” asking the respondents to express themselves on a scale of 1 to 7, with 4 being the middle position (“it is fine as it is”).

This question was posed in a certainly problematic context, in which the flows towards Italy appeared increasingly uncontrollable in the eyes of public opinion, given that from January 1 to May 12, 2023, 45,380 migrants had landed in Italy compared to 12,633 in the same period of 2022, and also given the increase caused by the crisis of the fragile Tunisian democracy.¹⁹ Thus, on the eve of the 2022 general elections, the share of Italians who considered it necessary to reduce the reception of immigrants was close to seventy per cent.²⁰ The right-wing government led by Giorgia Meloni then

¹⁸ Schlein, “Parte da Noi,” 14; Bonaccini, “Energia Popolare,” 33.

¹⁹ Cruscotto statistico giornaliero [Daily statistical dashboard], Ministry of the Interior, accessed May 15, 2023, https://www.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/202305/cruscotto_statistico_del_12_maggio_2023.PDF; “Sondaggio su elezioni politiche, immigrazione” [Poll on political elections, immigration], April 11-13, 2023, Termometro Politico, Dipartimento per l’Informazione e l’Editoria, Governo Italiani, accessed May 15, 2023, <http://www.sondaggiipoliticoelettorali.it/>; Konstantin Ash, “Protesting for Autocracy: Economic Vulnerability and Anti-democratic Protest Attendance in Tunisia,” *Democratization* 30, no. 2 (2022): 1-2.

²⁰ Marco Improta, Elisabetta Mannoni, Costanza Marcellino, and Federico Trastulli, “Voters, Issues, and Party Loyalty: The 2022 Italian Election under the Magnifying Glass,” *Italian Journal of Electoral Studies* 85, no. 2 (2022): 3-27.

took up this emergency perception, issuing a series of declarations aimed precisely at the urgent need to reduce the influx of immigrants.²¹

In such a context, more than fifty-six per cent of the interviewees state that “we could easily take in many more immigrants” (positions 6 and 7). About thirty per cent believe that the situation is acceptable as it is, while just ten per cent believe that we take in too many (Figure 1).

It is therefore a very polarized figure, with little variation concerning the main sociographic dimensions, and some significant (and predictable) deviations concerning self-ideological positioning and the party voted in the last general election.

Firstly, about the sociographic profile, slightly more mature cohorts are shown to be more inclined to accept more immigrants, particularly the over-50s (almost sixty per cent), women (fifty-eight per cent) and, more markedly, university graduates (63.4%). As for the ideological profile (calculated by asking respondents to self-place along a ten-point Likert scale), and party affiliation (calculated based on which respondents voted for in the 2022 general election), movement along the right-left continuum increases the willingness to accept more migrants, up to a maximum of 66% among those who place themselves further to the left.

Moreover, the highest percentage of those who believe that more immigrants could be easily accepted (75%) is found among selectors who voted for Alleanza Verdi-Sinistra, an alliance to the left of the PD, and +Europa, a small radical-libertarian party. Those who voted PD confirm the general tendency towards greater inclusion (56%), while more skeptical are the voters of the Five Stars Movement (M5S), the other large center-left party (50% believe we could welcome many more immigrants) and especially those of Azione-Italia Viva, an alliance to the right of the PD (with 40% willing to welcome more).

These data are not surprising for two reasons. Firstly, because migration policies, in addition to the right-left dimension, cross the libertarian-universalist *versus* traditional-communitarian dimension, which explains the very high values of +Europa. Secondly, several studies have highlighted how on migration issues, the M5S continues to maintain less open and tolerant

²¹ Riccardo Gibelli, Marta Ponte, and Martina Stevanato, “The News Agenda in the Election Campaign and in the First Months of the Meloni Government,” *Comunicazione politica* 1 (2023): 111-120.

positions than the PD, while on many other issues, such as peace and welfare it is more to the left.²² We have not considered, and will not be able to do so in the following, the positions of the selectors who voted for right-wing parties (Lega, Fratelli d'Italia, and Forza Italia) as they are numerically marginal.

Concluding the analysis of the migration issue, it may be useful to compare the data of our research with those of a recent survey on the relationship between Italians and immigration carried out by IPSOS. According to the poll, 41% of PD voters believe that Italy should set itself the goal of "increasing the number of immigrants," compared to a national average of just 17%.²³ It can be deduced from this that PD selectors are more accepting than PD voters, although the latter are to a significant extent in sharp contrast to the national figure.

The second policy area examined by the research is the purely economic one, classically structured along the left-right axis, *i.e.*, less taxes and less services, or more taxes and more services. This is the classic redistributive dilemma. Specifically, for the left, those who have more must pay more to increase the quality and quantity of welfare and community services.²⁴

Again, the question was based on two opposing assertions: "reduce taxes even at the cost of reducing service," or "increase services even at the cost of increasing taxes," asking the respondent to express themselves on a scale of 1 to 7, with 4 being the middle position ("it is fine as it is"). And in this case as well, the PD selectors took a clear line (Figure 2): almost 64% believed that services should be increased even at the cost of raising taxes (positions 6 and 7), and only 5% felt that the issue of taxes took priority over services.

The question does not specify which taxes and especially for whom they should be increased, but precisely for this reason the result of the

²² Rado Fonda and Salvatore Vassallo, "I temi e il leader" [The issues and the leader] in *Il bipolarismo asimmetrico. L'Italia al voto dopo il decennio populista* [Asymmetrical bipolarism. Italy on the ballot after the populist decade], eds. Salvatore Vassallo and Luca Verzichelli (Bologna: il Mulino, 2023).

²³ "Italiani e immigrazione" [Italians and immigration], March 28-30, 2023, Corriere della Serra, Dipartimento per l'Informazione e l'Editoria, Governo Italiani, accessed May 15, 2023, <http://www.sondaggiipoliticoelettorali.it/>.

²⁴ Theodore Lowi, *At the Pleasure of the Mayor* (Gencoe Ill.: Free Press, 1964); Swen Hutter and Hanspeter Kriesi (eds.), *European Party Politics in Times of Crisis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

survey appears significant. Regardless of which taxes to raise, the perceived need for an improvement in services is such that the vast majority of those surveyed show no hesitation, even at the cost of raising taxes generically. This result also appears to be in line with the contents of the congressional motions mentioned in the introduction: both candidates express the urgent need to defend and strengthen services by raising taxes on income.

As far as the intersection with sociographic and political positioning variables is concerned, other interesting data emerges. Firstly, as far as age is concerned, support for policies to expand taxation and services grows as age increases: it is close to 70% among the over-65s, it stops at 57% among the under-35s. More than all the other categories, pensioners consider welfare a priority, even at the cost of increasing taxes, feeling more than anyone else threatened by further downsizing of services. As far as gender is concerned, it is a variable that does not discriminate, while concerning the level of education, it is university graduates who are most in favor of higher taxes in exchange for more services (almost 70%).

Few surprises on the side of political positioning: the further one moves to the left, the greater the support for expansive policies, up to 71% of the extreme left, while as far as the parties of origin of the electorate are concerned, in addition to those who declared to have voted Alleanza Verdi-Sinistra at the last general elections, even those who declared to have voted M5S settle on very favorable positions for expansive policies (respectively, 79% Alleanza Verdi-Sinistra, and 70% M5S). Those who voted for PD are exactly in the middle position (64% in favor), while those who chose Azione-Italia Viva and +Europa stop at 50%. So, on the economic variable, there are no surprises, as the left-right axis perfectly structures the division, with those parties that are more to the left clearly in favor of expanding welfare by raising taxes and those that are more to the center less clearly in favor of this option.

Turning to environmental policies, selectors were asked to express their agreement that the government should focus on economic growth even at the cost of making decisions to the detriment of the environment on a 4-point Likert scale ("not at all agree," "little agree," "fairly agree," and "very much agree") (Figure 3).

The primary voters endorsed the contents of the two candidates' motions, with over 85% agreeing little or not at all with the proposed statement. Age and gender do not significantly differentiate the distribution, while the level of education, political positioning, and the party voted in the last general election do exert a certain influence. Those most opposed to economic growth to the detriment of the environment are university graduates (over 90%), those in the most left-wing positions (90%), voters of Alleanza Verdi-Sinistra (97%) followed by those of +Europe (94%), M5S (90%), PD (86%), Azione-Italia Viva (80%). In this group, Alleanza Verdi-Sinistra (72% not at all agree) and M5s (60% not at all agree) stand out for "environmentalist intransigence," while Azione Italia-Viva stands out for the least intransigence (36% not at all agree). Once again, therefore, differences manifest themselves between the PD, M5S, Alleanza Verdi-Sinistra, on the one hand, and Azione-Italia Viva on the other.

The last policy area explored is the one most directly related to the cleavage between libertarian-universalist and traditionalist-communitarian values. Selectors were asked to express their opinion along a four-point Likert scale ("not at all agree," "little agree," "fairly agree," and "very much agree") on whether Italy should adopt a law allowing same-sex couples to adopt children.

Again, this is an issue on which the two candidates in the primaries expressed their positions very clearly and clearly in favor of extending the rights of the LGBTQ+ community. Also on this issue are the results of a poll conducted by IPSOS where a relative majority (47%) were in favor of adoption by same-sex couples.²⁵ Unfortunately, no differentiation by party was made in this case, but the results can nevertheless be a useful reference for our survey. As was to be expected, the PD selectors revealed much sharper positions on the issue than the average Italian citizen. Seventy-eight per cent of respondents agreed very much or fairly agreed, while less than ten per cent did not agree at all (Figure 4).

Moving on to the sociographic and political positioning variables, the most in favor of adoption were the youngest selectors (16-35), with 87% very or fairly in agreement, women (85% very or fairly in agreement *versus*

²⁵ The survey, entitled "Italians and homoparentality", was conducted by Ipsos on March 21, 2023, accessed May 26, 2023, <http://www.sondaggipoliticoelettorali.it/>.

75% of men) and the most educated, particularly university graduates (82% very or fairly in agreement), followed by high school graduates who confirm the overall average figure (78% very or fairly in agreement). The most advanced profile on the LGBTQ+ rights issue is therefore young, female, and highly educated. As for political positioning, those most in favor of adoptions for same-sex couples are in the first three positions from the left on the 10-point scale, with an average of 83.6% very or fairly in agreement. Concerning the parties voted in the September 2022 general election, on the other hand, the most libertarian voters are those who voted +Europa (94% very or fairly agree), Alleanza Verdi-Sinistra (92%), M5S (80%), followed by PD (whose 78% coincides with the national average), and lastly, well below the average, Azione-Italia Viva (65%). As with migration policies, the libertarian-universalist dimension emerges as an element that connotes and overlaps with the right-left dimension. This explains the very high adhesion to the proposal by a libertarian but not left-wing party such as +Europa, but also the lower percentage recorded by the voters of the parties of Carlo Calenda and Matteo Renzi (Azione and Italia Viva), undoubtedly connoted by greater traditionalism of values.

Between Schlein's and Bonaccini's Supporters: Signs of a Clear Differentiation

How did the supporters of the two candidates perceive the major domestic policy issues? Are there appreciable differences? If so, are these distinctions consistent with the different nuances that the two motions reveal on the issues under consideration? We will try to answer these questions in this section.

Let us start with migration policies and, specifically, the willingness to accept even more migrants. Our data reveal that there are very significant differences between those who said they voted for Elly Schlein, and those who said they voted for Stefano Bonaccini. Compared to an average of 56%, positions 6 and 7 ("we could easily take in many more immigrants") total 67% among Schlein supporters, and 48% among Bonaccini supporters. A difference of almost twenty points seems to denote very different

sensitivities between the two electorates. Sensitivities that reflect the contents of the motions: Schlein's is much more open to welcome, Bonaccini's is more focused on management, security, and legality. In short, the profile of the two candidates seems to be reflected in the preferences and perceptions of their respective supporters, with Schlein's much more oriented towards libertarian-universalist values.

Even when it comes to fiscal policies and, specifically, the willingness to extend services even at the cost of raising taxes, there is a profound differentiation between the two. Against an average that, let us remember, amounts to 64% in favor of expansive and more onerous measures, among Schlein's supporters this share rises to 71.4%, while among Bonaccini's supporters, it drops to 55.3%.

Again, there is a certain coherence between the motions and the different sensitivities, not so much on the need to defend and promote welfare, but on the need to do so by introducing new taxes – a possibility made explicit by Elly Schlein but not by Stefano Bonaccini. This does not mean that those who went to vote in the primaries did so with an awareness of the contents of the motions then reflected in the poll, but, on the contrary, in some way, the sensitivities of the two seem to be reflected in the programmatic positions and value sensitivities of the candidates.

Moreover, in this case the left-right dimension seems to project itself with great precision on the two electorates, since the share of consensus to expansive policies on the part of Bonaccini's supporters (55.3%) is very similar to that of the selectors who declared having voted +Europa and Azione-Italia Viva (50%), while the share of support for expansive policies by Schlein's supporters (71.4%) is closer to that of selectors who said they voted Alleanza Verdi-Sinistra (79%) and M5S (70%).²⁶

On the other hand, if the differences between the two motions regarding environmental policies are more nuanced, the same is true for the perceptions of the two selectorates regarding the possibility of promoting economic growth at the expense of the environment. Out of

²⁶ On economic issues, the M5s can now call itself a left-wing party, both in terms of the measures it promotes and the content of its statute. Giancarlo Minaldi, "The Transformation of the Five Star Movement: The Normalization of Italy's Most Relevant Movement-Party," *Studia Politica. Romanian Political Science Review* 22, no. 2 (2022): 239-261.

an average of 85% of selectors not at all or little in agreement, those who decided to support Elly Schlein amount to 90.7%, and those who decided to support Stefano Bonaccini amount to 82.3%. A gap of about eight points does not seem particularly significant, even considering the very high percentages. It should be noted, however, that even in this case the share of voters most sensitive to environmental issues (little or not at all in agreement with the proposed statement) who support Stefano Bonaccini is very similar to the share most sensitive to environmental issues who voted *Azione-Italia Viva* (80%).

The last issue examined, that of the possibility of introducing a law in Italy allowing same-sex couples to adopt children, presents another notable differentiation. This is even though the two motions differ little on the merits of LGBTQ+ community rights. In particular, against an overall average of very or fairly favorable at 78%, the very or fairly favorable selectors who preferred Elly Schlein stand at 84.8%, while those very or fairly favorable who preferred Stefano Bonaccini stop at 70.8% (Figure 5), as well as registering a percentage of totally unfavorable (not at all in agreement) of over 14% (compared to 4.8% among Schlein's selectors).

Compared to Elly Schlein's selectorate, Stefano Bonaccini's selectorate is, therefore, less inclined to the extension of rights for LGBTQ+ communities, with 30% against the right to adopt (little or not at all in agreement) that does not seem at all negligible.

As for the overlaps with the parties voted in the last general election, there is once again a not insignificant closeness between the results recorded by the selectors who chose Stefano Bonaccini and those recorded by the voters of *Azione-Italia Viva*: 70% in favor of Bonaccini's selectors, and 65% among those who voted *Azione-Italia Viva*. This figure confirms the more traditional profile of Bonaccini's selectorate, even in the presence of a very libertarian-universalist programmatic platform.

Conclusions

The analysis of the four policy areas researched had rather clear-cut outcomes and was mostly consistent with the contents of the motions presented by the two candidates who remained in the running after the first congress phase.

But let us go in order. In general, it must firstly be said that, with some surprise compared to an image of the PD divided and fragmented between currents and different ideas on the “things to be done,” the selectors expressed themselves very clearly on the issues under investigation, placing themselves, in general, clearly to the left and/or on a libertarian and universalist value dimension.²⁷ To summarize, by a very large majority, the PD selectors agreed little or not at all with the idea that in the name of economic development, one can sacrifice the environment and similarly declared themselves in favor of introducing the right for same-sex couples to adopt children. Large but less consistent majorities were in favor of paying more taxes to obtain more services and accepting more immigrants. These positions tend to be more pronounced among younger people (except on the issue of tax and services), among women, among the better educated and among those who are more left-wing. Large but less consistent majorities were in favor of paying more taxes to obtain more services and accepting more immigrants. These positions tend to be more pronounced among younger people (except on the issue of tax and services), among women, among the better educated and among those who are more left-wing. The differentiation by party voted in the last general election is more articulated, but in general, those who place themselves more to the left (such as Alleanza Verdi-Sinistra) are those who consistently record the highest percentages in the polarization described.

That said, the other data that emerges very clearly is the differentiation between the share of selectors who said they voted for Elly Schlein, and those who said they voted for Stefano Bonaccini. As it was partly to be expected, both for the motion and for the general profile of the undoubtedly more moderate and apparatchik candidate, Bonaccini’s selectors tended to be more cautious concerning the issues in the poll. Put another way, the overall and clear left-wing and libertarian-universalist dimension is largely driven by Elly Schlein’s selectorate. In general, therefore, we can say that Elly Schlein’s candidature has contributed to characterizing the electoral base of the 2023 primaries on the left, defining a clear profile in stark contrast to the moderate leadership of the past, from Matteo Renzi to Enrico Letta.

²⁷ Florida, PD. *Un partito da rifare?*

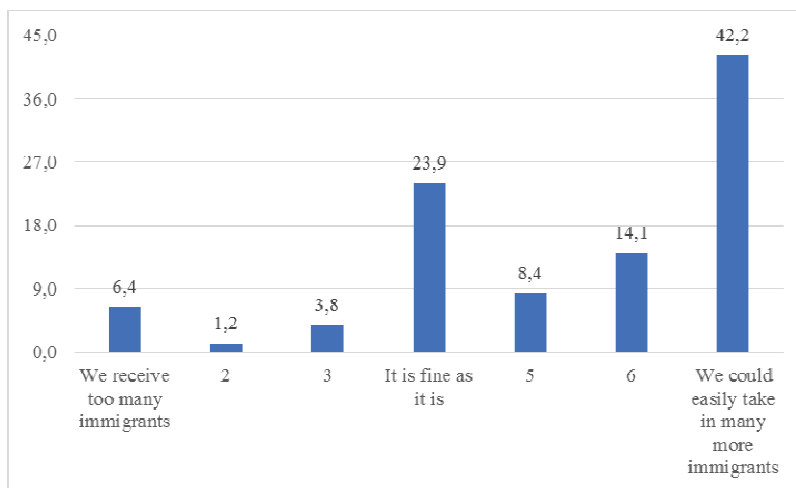


Figure 1. Selectors' preferences on migration policies, 2023

Source: Standing Group Candidate and Leader Selection of the Italian Society of Political Science <https://standinggroups.sisp.it/candidateleaderselection/> (last accessed on May 16, 2023).

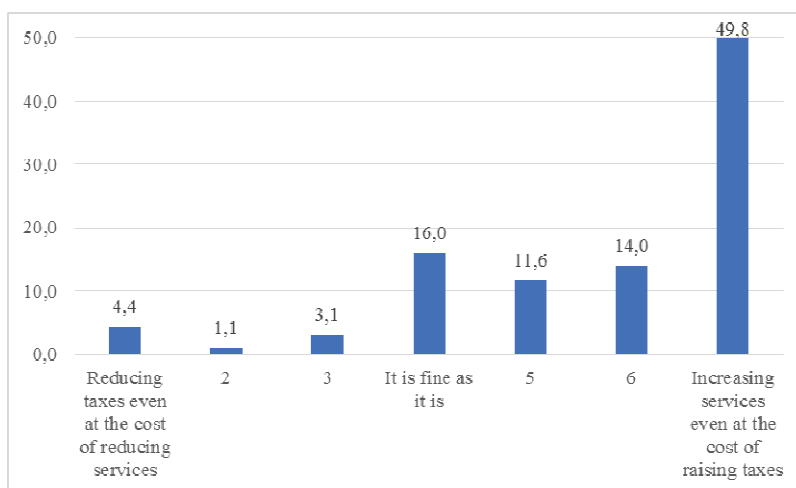


Figure 2. Selectors' preferences on fiscal policies, 2023

Source: Standing Group Candidate and Leader Selection of the Italian Society of Political Science <https://standinggroups.sisp.it/candidateleaderselection/> (last accessed on May 16, 2023).

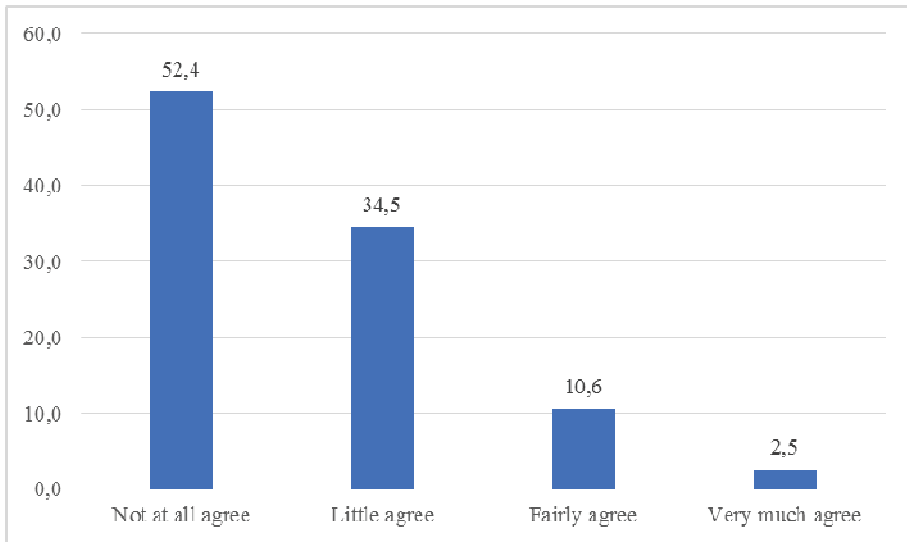


Figure 3. Selectors' Preferences on environmental policies, 2023

Source: Standing Group Candidate and Leader Selection of the Italian Society of Political Science <https://standinggroups.sisp.it/candidateleaderselection/> (last accessed on May 16, 2023).

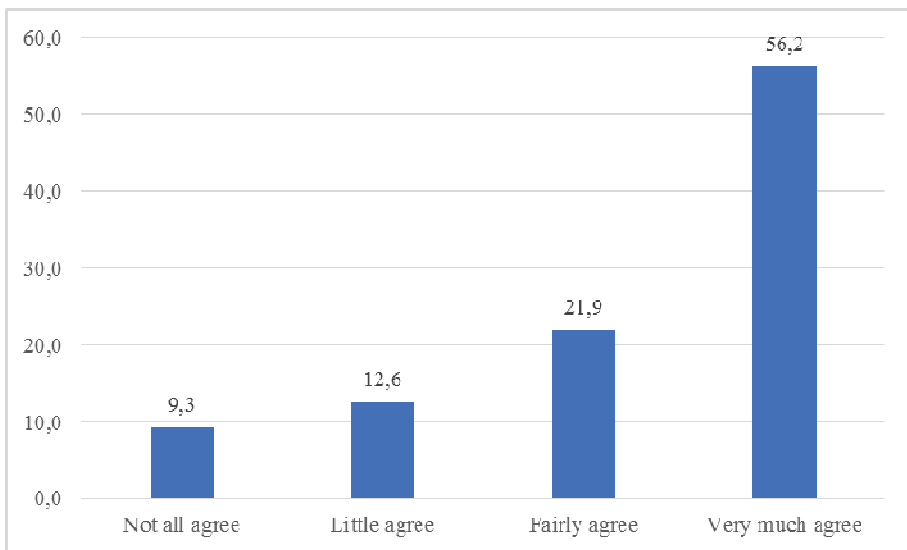


Figure 4. Selectors' Preferences on LGBTQ+ Rights, 2023

Source: Standing Group Candidate and Leader Selection of the Italian Society of Political Science <https://standinggroups.sisp.it/candidateleaderselection/> (last accessed on May 16, 2023).

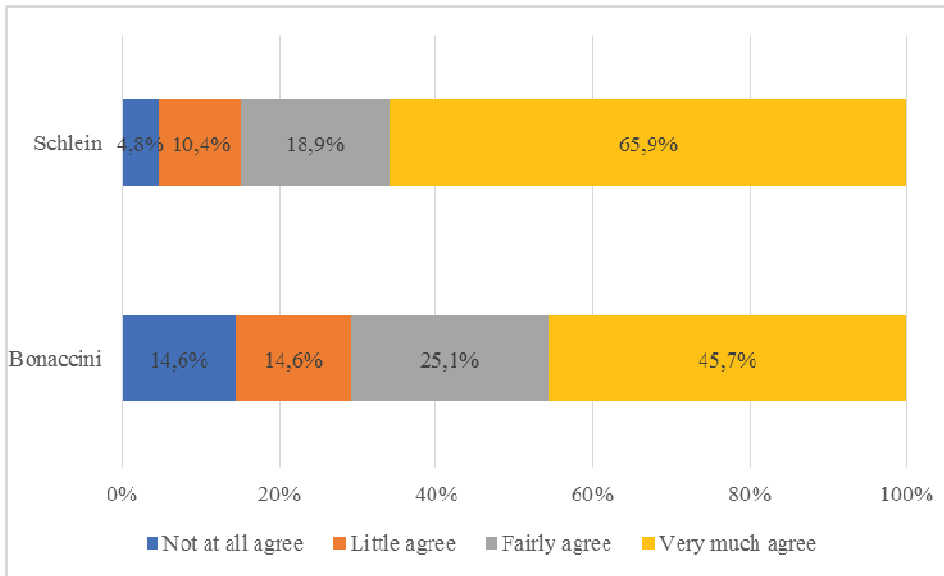


Figure 5. Candidate choice and selectors' preferences on LGBTQ+ rights, 2023
 Source: Standing Group Candidate and Leader Selection of the Italian Society of Political Science
<https://standinggroups.sisp.it/candidateleaderselection/> (last accessed on May 16, 2023).