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Follow the Candidates, Not the Parties? Personal Vote in a Regional De-institutionalized Party System

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses how personal vote shapes electoral competition and predicts electoral results in a regional de-institutionalized party system. After having analysed the connection between unpredictable political environment and personal vote, we build an original empirical model that explores preferential vote and patterns of re-candidacies and endorsements of the most voted candidates in the Calabrian regional elections. The analysis shows that leading candidates retain a more stable and predictable support over time with respect to parties and that candidates and their system of interactions are able to predict the electoral results better than parties and their alliances.

KEYWORDS Personal vote; de-institutionalized party system; Lords of Preferences; regional elections; Italy

In this article we analyse how personal vote shapes electoral competition in a fluid and unpredictable political environment. Specifically, we focus on the role of major individual candidates in regional elections, and we test their ability to predict electoral results better than parties, thus replacing the traditional role exerted by political formations and their alliances. Such assumption is verified via an empirical analysis of a regional Southern Italian context.

Unlike previous research, focused either on the causes of personal vote or on the consequences of such vote on legislators' characteristics, this article is a first attempt to build an original empirical model to assess if personal vote shapes the electoral competition and whether it predicts electoral results better than parties. We show not only that leading candidates get a more stable and predictable support than parties, but also that candidates and their system of interactions predict electoral results better than parties and their alliances. In other words, we show how, in a context characterized by high levels of electoral volatility and discontinuity in the party labels, personal

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vote acts as the only element of continuity and stability within the political system.

The article is organized as follows: in the first section we theoretically explore the role of personal vote in electorally volatile and politically unstable contexts and we also put forward our working hypotheses; in the second section we synthetically present the characteristics of a regional Southern Italian context (the province of Reggio Calabria) on which we test our hypotheses; the third section deals with data selection and specifically with the empirical identification of major individual candidates and their system of re-candidacies and endorsements; the fourth section is devoted to the empirical analysis and the validation of the hypotheses; a concluding section follows.

Electoral Volatile Contexts, Unstable Parties and the Role of Personal Vote

Starting from Sartori's definition of party system as "the system of interactions resulting from inter-party competition" (1976: 44), Casal Bértoa (2014a: 17) defines a party system as 'institutionalized' when "the patterns of interactions between political parties become routine, predictable and stable over time". This definition emphasizes the predictability of inter-party competition as the key element of party system institutionalization. Conversely, as emphasized by Bardi and Mair (2008), when this system of interactions lacks, there is not a 'system' but only a 'set' of parties. Moreover, a certain degree of continuity in the main components of the system is conceived as a fundamental criterion to identify the presence of a party system (Mainwaring and Torcal, 2006). On the contrary, when the identity of the top party vote-getters shows a great variability between elections, then the party universe is best described as an 'inchoate' party system or even as a 'non-system' (Sanchez, 2009). While many recent contributions on party systems' institutionalization and on their degree of systemness have focused on Latin American and on Central and Eastern European countries – that is, where party systems' institutionalization is associated with the consolidation of democratic regimes – it should not be surprising to study Western European contexts by using these tools of analysis. In fact, Chiamonte and Emanuele (2015) underline that in the last two decades even Western European countries have been experiencing growing levels of electoral instability and party system 'regeneration' (i.e. high rates of parties' entrances and exits from the party system). In other words, the electoral environment in these countries has become increasingly unpredictable. As a consequence, party system 'de-institutionalization', especially in certain countries (such as Italy, France, Greece and Spain), has become a must-to-consider reality. This process of de-institutionalization has accelerated after 2008, namely, after the inception of the hardest economic crisis since 1929: according to recent pieces of research (Casal Bértoa,

2014b; Hernández and Kriesi, 2015) we find the greatest electoral volatility among the countries that suffered the most from the crisis.

This change occurred in the last years should be seen in connection with a long-term process: the decline of party organizations in Western Europe. As underlined by several scholars (Katz and Mair, 1994; Van Biezen et al., 2012) in the last two decades the number of party members has dropped and there has been a general weakening of parties' central organizations. Parties in Europe are therefore less able than before to perform the classical functions they carried out in the past. At the same time, Western European polities have witnessed the rise of personalized politics (Poguntke and Webb, 2005; Karvonen, 2010; Garzia, 2014): candidates' characteristics and personal traits have acquired increasing importance in the party-voter relationship and candidates' evaluation is a noticeable vote choice's determinant.

While many Western European countries are nowadays characterized by extreme instability regarding party labels and voters' preferences, and consequently by high unpredictability of electoral results, an important element of continuity could be represented by personal vote, especially in local contexts where preferential vote is allowed (Fabrizio and Feltrin, 2007; van der Kolk, 2007; Barberà, 2010). Starting from Carey and Shugart (1995), the literature has focused on the incentives to foster personal vote provided by electoral systems' features (Marsh, 2007; Riera and Barberà, 2011; André and Depauw, 2014), by parties' internal features (Samuels, 1999) as well as on the consequences of personal vote on the attributes of legislators (Shugart et al., 2005). Yet, few if any attention has been devoted to explore if and how personal vote affects the dynamics of competition and the electoral results. More specifically, we want to understand whether personal vote is able to structure a system of interactions, acting at the level of individual candidates, and whether this candidate-based system replaces, either partially or totally, the system of interactions among parties, thus structuring a new form of political and electoral competition.

In other words, we would argue that preferential vote has not only the function of selecting representatives for public office within the classical party-based competition, but it has also started to shape a new form of systemness, replacing the declining systemness of the party system, which has increasingly become unpredictable. This new form of systemness is indeed based on the relations of cooperation and competition among the ones we might call *Lords of Preferences*. These latter are politicians able to collect a large amount of votes, control them over time and influence the electoral results. The inter-candidate relations of cooperation and competition take primarily place in the electoral arena. They can involve the same candidate who changes party or coalition election after election, bringing his/her personal 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; endorsements given by politicians who have previously stood as candidates to freshly running candidates. This last point entails the transfer of blocks of personal votes from, say, candidate A to candidate B. The structuring of this system of interactions at candidate level has important consequences for the electoral supply, the internal composition of the electoral alignments and elections' outcome.

The rationale behind this argument, which has to be empirically verified, is that parties are losing their historical functions of selecting candidates for public offices and competing for voters' electoral support in favour of Lords of Preferences. These latter are endowed with a personal block of votes, concentrated in a specific territory. This block can be substantially retained even if the candidate changes party or coalition and regardless to the type of election and electoral system. Owning blocks of votes, Lords of Preferences exercise the lion' share in pre-electoral bargaining with national or local parties, and their strength vis-à-vis party organizations (or what remains of them) is as higher as larger is their share of votes. Nonetheless, Lords' power is not limited to pre-electoral arrangements with parties. Rather, moving from one coalition to another, or endorsing one candidate or another, they strongly influence the electoral results.

To sum up, we hypothesize that: (1) in contexts of party system de-institutionalization, personal vote is an important element of continuity and stability within the political system; (2) personal vote, shaped by Lords of Preferences and by their system of interactions (i.e. re-candidacies and endorsements) is able to affect the structure of competition and the electoral results; (3) this candidate 'system' is able to substantially replace the traditional party-based system.

All these considerations may find empirical application in Southern Italian contexts like those described in the classic works by Banfield (1958) and Putnam (1993), that is, characterized by socio-economic backwardness, the pursue for private interest in public engagement and low civic culture. In these contexts, Lords of Preferences may find fertile ground, thanks to various tools, such as personal networks, micro-distributive policies and clientelistic relationships (see also Piattoni, 2001; Kopecky et al., 2012). Specifically, as also argued by Golden (2003) on post-war Italy, candidates endowed with a large number of preferential votes have historically provided specific benefits to their 'clients' by managing public resources or by passing pork-barrel legislation.

From this discussion it is evident that personal vote has always been an important component of Southern Italian contexts thanks to the presence of preferential vote and the above-mentioned socio-economic and cultural characteristics. Yet, while the use of this tool was previously encapsulated within strong mass parties, given the ongoing processes of parties'

organizational decline and party system instability discussed above,¹ nowadays personal vote may be the sole element of continuity within the political system.

We argue that all these assumptions can be valid in Italian regional elections, where the competition has recently become increasingly unpredictable (Tronconi, 2010, 2015). In this article we test the above-mentioned hypotheses by focusing on the regional elections of 2010 and 2014 in the Southern Italian region of Calabria.

The Calabrian Context: Personal Vote in an Unpredictable Environment

The choice to focus on Calabrian regional elections has been driven by a series of reasons: the presence of a de-institutionalized party system, the existence of an electoral system that allows for the use of personal vote; the wide diffusion of preferential vote; data availability.

To begin with, since the birth of the so-called Italian 'Second Republic', Calabrian regional elections have been characterized by an almost perfect alternation in power between a centre-left and a centre-right coalition. Specifically, in the 2010–2014 electoral period in Calabria this alternation was followed by a noticeable level of instability affecting parties, coalitions and the party system as a whole. The landslide victory of centre-right in 2010 was followed by the return to power of centre-left in 2014.² Moreover, out of the 16 lists contesting the 2010 regional election, only 3 (PD, UDC and *Autonomia e Diritti*) maintained their party label in 2014, while as many as 12 lists ran for the first time in a regional election.³ This means that there has been a significant amount of party replacement (Birch, 2003). At the same time, the level of electoral volatility (Pedersen, 1979) has been as high as 51.3,⁴ while the share of votes obtained by non-national parties⁵ rose from 26.6% in 2010 to 43.3% in 2014, which means that both the supply side (parties) and the demand side (voters) have faced great fluidity in Calabria in the last years. In other words, Calabria's party system can be considered as an unpredictable environment. Therefore, following Chiaramonte and Emanuele (2015), it can also be considered as a 'de-institutionalized' party system.

Second, the electoral system for the regional elections in Calabria is based upon a PR system with a majority bonus granted to the coalition supporting the Presidential candidate who has obtained the highest number of votes. Specifically, the regional election in Calabria is based upon two separate arenas of competition: the first one is the majoritarian arena, where Presidential candidates compete for citizens' vote; the second one is the proportional arena, where party lists compete for seats in the Regional Council. Therefore, the voter has at his/her disposal two votes: one to choose the Presidential candidate (plurality) and the other one for a party list. The voter can also express a

preferential vote for one of the candidates running within the party list he/she has decided to support (open list system).

Third, in this electorally unpredictable context, personal vote is not only allowed by the electoral system, but it seems to be the only element of continuity within the political system from one election to another. As shown in [Figure 1](#), the level of preferential vote in Italian regional elections has increased in the last decades, reaching particularly high values in Southern regions and especially in Calabria.

Finally, to perform a reliable analysis of the territorial patterns of preferential vote and of candidates' endorsements, a very in-depth analysis is needed. Specifically, one needs to collect not only aggregate data concerning the territorial support received by the most voted candidates in the regional elections, but also qualitative records of candidates' endorsements, based on information retrieved in national and local media. To get these latter one needs to have a detailed knowledge of the local political landscape under study. Therefore, we have focused on the local electoral context of the Reggio Calabria province (from now on RC), where we

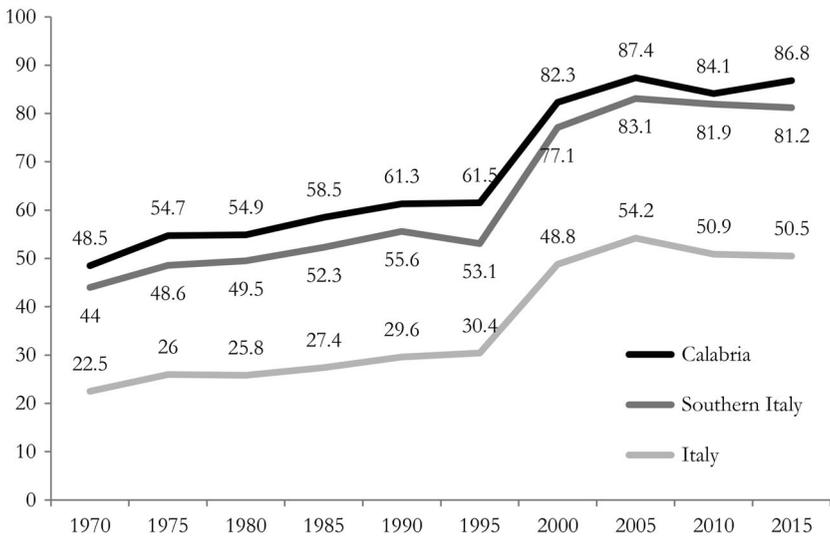


Figure 1. Rate of preferential vote in Italian regional elections, 1970–2015. Note: data for the 1970–1990 period come from Scaramozzino (1990); data for the 1995–2010 come from Chiaramonte (2010); data for the 2013–2014 come from Valbruzzi and Vignati (2014). Data on 2015 are authors' elaboration on official electoral results. Notice that during the 1970–1990 period the rate of preferential voting could be slightly underestimated due to the possibility of casting two or three preferences for the voters in certain provinces. Furthermore, notice that the line representing Southern Italy includes Campania, Basilicata, Puglia and Calabria. Moreover, the 2015 points in the chart include the last election held between 2013 and 2015 in the different regions considered. Finally, 'Italy' includes data concerning 'ordinary statute' regions.

have been able to perform a very careful and focused analysis, combining qualitative and quantitative data, which would have been hard to achieve in other contexts.

Data Selection: The System of Lords of Preferences

How to measure preferential vote? A first possible criterion could simply be considering all preferences obtained by all candidates running for the Regional Council in 2010 and 2014. Yet, this would be misleading, since a candidate who obtains ten preferences and a candidate who obtains 1000 preferences are obviously different: the latter is more able to mobilize a certain amount of support and to influence the electoral outcome. Indeed, our goal has been that of considering only relevant candidates, that is, the top candidates, because of the potential influence they can exert on the political system in RC. Following these considerations, we have 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 cast in RC in either the 2010 or the 2014 regional elections.⁶ From a comparative viewpoint, the criterion we use is a very tight one, since a threshold of 1% of votes is usually applied to party systems when considering whether to include or not a party into a given analysis. The rationale behind this choice is that we want to select only those candidates able to collect such a relevant number of votes so that they could be considered as noticeable actors of the political system. From an empirical point of view, the 1% threshold corresponds to 3008 votes in 2010 and to 2169 votes in 2014. By using this criterion, we have selected 30 candidates in 2010 and 29 in 2014, as shown in [Tables 1](#) and [2](#).

[Tables 1](#) and [2](#) report the names of these top candidates in 2010 and 2014, their party list and the votes they have received (absolute and percentage values). Looking at the table, the total number of preferences obtained by these candidates in 2010 is equal to 180 558 while in 2014 is equal to 145 589. This decrease is not fostered by a reduction in candidates' ability to control electorate' support, but is mostly due to the relevant change in electoral turnout, which has fallen from 62.7% to 44.6%; indeed, by looking at the ratio between preferences and valid votes, in 2010 the 30 selected candidates collected 59.9% of total votes cast in RC (with a mean share of 2%), while in 2014 this percentage increases up to 66.9% (with a mean share of 2.3%). In other words, in both elections between 60% and 70% of the votes in RC were collected by a handful of politicians: for instance, in 2014 just the four most voted candidates (Romeo S., Irto, Battaglia M. and D'Agostino) received 19.7% of the votes in RC.

From this first empirical evidence, it is clear that personal vote has a large role in RC's politics. Still, personal vote has always been an important part of Southern Italian politics. What could be a real novelty for the study of personal

Table 1. List of top candidates in the 2010 regional election (RC): names, party list and votes received (absolute and percentage values).

Top candidates in 2010			
Name	Party list	Votes	Valid share
Alvaro	PSI-Vendola	3237	1.1
Battaglia D.	PD	9710	3.2
Biasi	PDL	5438	1.8
Bilardi	Scopelliti Pres.	8123	2.7
Bova	PD	8770	2.9
Caridi	PDL	11 215	3.7
Cherubino	PDL	6546	2.2
Crinò	Scopelliti Pres.	4663	1.5
Cuzzola	Aut. e Diritti	2994	1
De Gaetano	PRC-PDCI	8765	2.9
Fedele	PDL	7671	2.5
Giordano	IDV	2279	0.8
Imbalzano	Scopelliti Pres.	4780	1.6
Managò	Noi Sud	3367	1.1
Mazza	UDC	3104	1
Minasi	PDL	6756	2.2
Naccari Carlizzi	PD	7384	2.5
Nicolò Al.	PDL	8082	2.7
Nicolò An.	Scopelliti Pres.	3291	1.1
Nucera G.	PSI-Vendola	1138	0.4
Nucera G.	PDL	7717	2.6
Racco	PD	3196	1.1
Rappoccio	Insieme Calabria	3726	1.2
Raso	Scopelliti Pres.	4305	1.4
Sarica	PDL	4305	1.4
Tripodi M.	PRC-PDCI	5465	1.8
Tripodi P. M.	UDC	10 393	3.5
Vilasi G.	PDL	6867	2.3
Zappalà	PDL	11 078	3.7
Zito	PDL	6193	2.1
Mean		6019	2.0
Total		180 558	59.9

vote and party politics is to assess whether – and to what extent – candidates' hold on the electorate and their interactions through time have replaced parties in a new candidate-based system. That is, we want to assess whether candidates' territorial support in RC could represent an element of continuity within the political system which is able to explain and predict electoral results, contrasting with the increasing instability and unpredictability of the party system. In order to test this hypothesis, we take, among the 59 top candidates of 2010 and 2014, those who exerted a role in both elections, either standing as candidates in both elections or standing as candidates in 2010 and endorsing another candidate in 2014.⁷ These politicians are our *Lords of Preferences*, that is, those top candidates who are able to influence the political system and the electoral results. In particular, many different situations can emerge: (1) the same Lord stands for election in 2010 and 2014, within the same party; (2) the same Lord runs for election in 2010 and 2014 with different parties of the same coalition; (3) the

Table 2. List of top candidates in the 2014 regional election (RC): names, party list and votes received (absolute and percentage values).

Top candidates in 2014			
Name	Party list	Votes	Valid share
Amodeo	Centro Dem.	3404	1.6
Arruzzolo	NCD	5920	2.7
Bagnato	Aut. e Diritti	3357	1.5
Battaglia M.	PD	10 450	4.8
Bombardieri	PD	2252	1
Cannizzaro	CDL	6109	2.8
Creazzo	Democr. Progr.	3692	1.7
Crinò	CDL	3492	1.6
D'Agostino	Oliverio Pres.	7942	3.7
Fedele	NCD	4840	2.2
Giannetta	FI	4084	1.9
Giordano	PD	6428	3
Imbalzano	NCD	3666	1.7
Irto	PD	12 014	5.5
Longo	La Sinistra	2325	1.1
Mallamaci	Oliverio Pres.	7158	3.3
Mazza	Nuovo CDU	1792	0.8
Minasi	CDL	4391	2
Nastasi	Democr. Progr.	2920	1.3
Neri	Democr. Progr.	5000	2.3
Nicolò Al.	FI	7046	3.2
Nucera G.	La Sinistra	3315	1.5
Pedà	CDL	5009	2.3
Pirrotta	FI	2289	1.1
Romeo D.	CDL	3178	1.5
Romeo S.	PD	12 288	5.7
Sciarrone	Calabria in Rete	2414	1.1
Tripodi P. M.	Centro Dem.	6120	2.8
Vilasi G.	FI	2694	1.2
Mean		5020	2.3
Total		145 589	66.9

same Lord runs for elections with different coalitions; (4) a Lord in 2010 endorses another Lord in 2014, belonging to the same party; (5) a Lord in 2010 endorses another Lord in 2014, belonging to another party within the same coalition; (6) a Lord in 2010 endorses another Lord in 2014, belonging to a different coalition.

Therefore, we analyse the territorial support of Lords of Preferences between 2010 and 2014 in RC. The empirical analyses are performed in the following sections and are based, for each Lord in each of the 97 municipalities of the RC province (our units of analysis), on the ratio between his/her votes and the total electorate.⁸

Figure 2 reports Lords' re-candidacies and endorsements between 2010 and 2014, distinguishing among the possible situations we have just described.

The 2010–2014 electoral cycle in RC offers a wide variability regarding Lords' re-candidacies and endorsements. As regards re-candidacies, only in two cases (Nicolò Al. and Vilasi G.) the same Lord ran for election in the

Lords in 2010 and 2014	Lords in 2010 who endorsed other Lords in 2014
<i>Same party</i>	<i>Same party</i>
Nicolò AL. (PDL) → (FI)	Battaglia D. (PD) → Irto (PD)
Vilasi G. (PDL) → (FI)	
<i>Different party but same coalition</i>	<i>Different party but same coalition</i>
Minasi (PDL) → (CDL)	Bova (PD) → D'Agostino (Oliverio Pres.)
Giordano (IDV) → (PD)	Crinò P. (Scopelliti Pres.) → Crinò F. (CDL)
Nucera G. (PSI-Vendola) → (La Sinistra)	Caridi (PDL) → Cannizzaro (CDL)
	De Gaetano (PRC-PDCI) → Romeo S. (PD)
<i>Different coalition</i>	<i>Different coalition</i>
Fedele (PDL) → (NCD)	Bilardi (Scopelliti Pres.) → Arruzzolo (NCD)
Imbalzano (Scopelliti Pres.) → (NCD)	
Mazza (UDC) → (Nuovo CDU)	
Tripodi P. M. (UDC) → (Centro Dem.)	

Figure 2. Lords' re-candidacies and endorsements between 2010 and 2014. Note: 'Same party' means same party list (e.g. PD) or a party list directly resulting from the former one (e.g. FI from PDL). Despite NCD is a splinter party from PDL, Fedele has been included in the subset 'Different coalition' and not in the subset 'Same party' since NCD did not support the centre-right coalition in the 2014 regional election.

same party in 2010 and 2014 and in three cases (Minasi, Giordano and Nucera G.) the candidate changed party list but stayed within the same coalition. As many as four Lords changed their coalition between the two elections, moving from centre-right to centre (Fedele and Imbalzano) and from centre-right to centre-left (Mazza, Tripodi P.M.).

Turning to the endorsements reported in Figure 2, based on national and local media's information (see endnote 6), we have found six verified endorsements⁹ between Lords in 2010 and Lords in 2014: once again, only one out of six has involved two Lords who run as candidates in the same party (Battaglia D. – Irto), while in the majority of cases¹⁰ the supported candidate belongs to a different party list with respect to the supporter's one and even in one circumstance the endorsement is given to a candidate running with a different coalition, from centre-right (Bilardi, candidate in the *Scopelliti Presidente*) to centre (Arruzzolo, candidate in NCD).

Overall, we have found 15 links, with 9 re-candidacies and 6 endorsements. All the other Lords included in Tables 1 and 2 have been excluded from the analysis, given that they did neither run in both elections nor endorse another candidate (or at least there is not reliable information about that). Despite these exclusions, the total vote share collected by the selected Lords is still remarkable: it amounts to 34% of the total number of valid votes cast in RC in 2010 and to 40.6% in 2014.

Do these links represent a 'system', meant in terms of stability and predictability of interactions among Lords, alternative to the parties' official one? Is this alternative candidate system able to explain the results of 2014 regional

election in RC province? Moreover, can this alternative candidate system explain such results better than parties and their interactions? The next section will answer these questions.

Lords Versus Parties: Towards an Explanation

We argue that in the RC context the combined effect of the growing unpredictability in the interactions among parties and voters and the pervasiveness of candidate-oriented voting has changed the nature of the competition from a party-based system to a candidate-based system. To test this hypothesis we need to verify whether there is a certain degree of continuity in the territorial support held by Lords of Preferences over time. The presence of such continuity is tested through a series of correlations across the 97 RC municipalities between the hypothesized links among Lords.

We expect that if the competition in RC is highly driven by personal vote, there will be a high level of association in the territorial support among Lords over time. This is because each Lord is able either to retain his/her block of preferential votes in subsequent elections or to transfer his/her endowment to another candidate. Conversely, in a party-driven politics – the ordinary model of competition in Western Europe so far – parties structure the electoral competition, establishing ties with voters and, consequently, they show high levels of territorial continuity of support, while individual candidates only play a minor role, which is highly dependent on parties' performance. More specifically, in a traditional party-driven politics, where the candidate is only a function of the party where he/she runs, one would expect higher correlations over time for candidates who run at t and $t + 1$ with the same party label and gradually lower correlations for candidates who run from time to time with a different party label, with a different coalition, and finally for candidates who endorse another candidate. Regarding endorsements, one would expect to find higher correlations among candidates running for the same party list and gradually lower for candidates running with different parties or even with different coalitions.

The left part of [Figure 3](#) shows the results of bivariate correlations (Pearson's r coefficient) among the 15 hypothesized links of Lords previously illustrated in [Figure 2](#). We note that 11 out of 15 hypothesized correlations show a significant coefficient, most of the times at the best level of confidence ($p < .001$). Overall, the average level of correlation among Lords is .43, with no significant differences among the various subtypes we have previously identified: for instance, there is an impressive level of correlation among some endorsements, and in particular in the case of the Crinò brothers (.91), while on the contrary Vilasi G., despite running in both elections with the same party, shows a non-significant correlation between 2010 and 2014. Moreover, by enlarging the scope, correlating all the 59 top candidates, the overall mean of correlation is almost

Hypothesised correlations (2010-2014)

Lords' candidacies and endorsements	Pearson's r	Party lists	Pearson's r
Nicolò Al. (PDL) → (FI)	.35 ^{***}	Aut. e Diritti → Aut. e Diritti	.18
Vilasi G. (PDL) → (FI)	.14	PD → PD	.41 ^{***}
Mínasi (PDL) → (CDL)	.59 ^{***}	PD → Oliverio Pres.	.10
Giordano (IDV) → (PD)	.42 ^{***}	PDL → FI	.34 ^{***}
Nucera G. (PSI-Vendola) → (La Sinistra)	.17	PDL → NCD	.31 ^{**}
Fedele (PDL) → (NCD)	.69 ^{***}	PDL → FDI-AN	.06
Imbalzano (Scopelliti Pres.) → (NCD)	.10	PSI-Vendola → La Sinistra	-.13
Mazza (UDC) → (Nuovo CDU)	.88 ^{***}	RC-PDCI → Altra Calabria	.22 [†]
Tripodi P. M. (UDC) → (Centro Dem.)	.24 [†]	UDC → UDC	.11
Battaglia D. (PD) → Irto (PD)	.56 ^{***}		
Bova (PD) → D'Agostino (Oliverio)	.44 ^{***}		
Caridi (PDL) → Cannizzaro (CDL)	.54 ^{***}		
Crinò P. (Scopelliti Pres.) → Crinò F. (CDL)	.91 ^{***}		
De Gaetano (PRC-PDCI) → Romeo S. (PD)	.30 ^{**}		
Bilardi (Scopelliti Pres.) → Arruzzolo (NCD)	.11		
Mean of hypothesised correlations (N:16)	.43	Mean of hypothesised correlations (N:9)	.18
Overall mean of correlations among Lords (N: 870)	.04	Overall mean of correlations among parties (N: 180)	.06

Figure 3. Lords and parties' territorial support: bivariate correlations (2010–2014). Note: bivariate correlations (candidates/parties' votes share) across the municipalities of RC ($N = 97$); [†] $p < .05$, ^{**} $p < .01$, ^{***} $p < .001$.

zero (.04), with 870 observations: the correlations among Lords resulting from the analysis shown in Figure 3 are not casual.

This analysis shows two important findings. The first one is that personal vote for Lords of Preferences in RC shows a certain degree of continuity and predictability over time, with candidates who are able to maintain a similar territorial configuration of their support across subsequent elections. The second finding rejects the above-mentioned hypothesis regarding the decreasing level of continuity in the ability of Lords to maintain a similar pattern or support as far as they change party, coalition or even transfer their votes to other candidates. Correlations show instead that the level of continuity among Lords' territorial support is not driven by partisan links and occurs both if the candidate stands again for election and if he/she decides to endorse other candidates.

However, simply showing that personal vote exerts a large role in RC politics and holds a certain degree of continuity over time does not mean that party politics is without importance per se. Personal vote could indeed be important, but within a party system that holds a higher degree of continuity and predictability over time. Nonetheless, the right part of Figure 3 clearly rejects this scenario. This part of the figure reports the results of the correlations among the ratios between votes and total electorate

across the 97 municipalities of RC as regards the party lists for which we can hypothesize an organizational continuity between 2010 and 2014.¹¹ Consistently with the previous analysis of Lords of Preferences, only parties receiving at least 1% of the votes in RC either in 2010 or in 2014 have been taken into account. There are nine couples of party lists which can be considered as having an organizational continuity: three parties which present the same list in both elections (*Autonomia e Diritti*, PD and UDC), a list that is a direct expression of PD (*Oliverio Presidente*), other three directly deriving from PDL (FI, NCD, FDI-AN), and other two couples of leftists lists (*PSI-Vendola* and *La Sinistra*; PRC-PDCI and *L'Altra Calabria*). Only four couples out of nine show a significant degree of correlation in their territorial support between 2010 and 2014 (PD-PD, PDL-FI, PDL-NCD and PRC-PDCI-*L'Altra Calabria*), while the other couples, including a national party like UDC, show completely independent patterns of support through time. Overall, the mean of the hypothesized correlations among party lists is barely .18, really lower than the mean coefficient found as regards Lords. Moreover, the difference between the nine hypothesized correlations among parties and the overall mean of correlations among all the party lists above 1% running in 2010 and 2014 (180 observations) is very low (.12).¹² It follows that the hypothesized correlations among parties are not significantly different from the correlations among the whole sample of parties, and this means the electoral competition in RC seems to be driven by the Lords of Preferences rather than parties, whose patterns of support are not far from being random.¹³

After having shown that Lords' re-candidacies and endorsements grant a certain level of continuity and predictability that replaces the uncertainty of the system at the party level, we need to see whether such links among Lords are able to influence the electoral outcome. In other words, to go on with the comparison between Lords and parties, we have to assess whether the 'system' of Lords is able to predict the 2014 election results in RC better than traditional parties and their alliances.

To perform such analysis we have built a dataset where the units of analysis are the 97 municipalities of the province of RC, the dependent variables are the shares of votes (votes/electorate) of the three main Presidential candidates in 2014 (Oliverio for the centre-left, Ferro for the centre-right and D'Ascola for the centre coalition) and the independent variables are the shares of votes in 2010 of the coalition of parties and of the coalition of Lords supporting the Presidential candidates in 2014. We have added a series of control variables that can potentially affect the relationship between our independent variables and the dependent variable: demographic size (measured as the number of residents in each municipality); the political tradition of the municipality (measured as the mean of the votes received by the Italian Communist Party between the Italian general

elections of 1953 and 1987 in each municipality); the economic context (measured as the unemployment rate in each municipality).¹⁴

We want to assess whether and to what extent Lords of Preferences are able to determine the success or the failure of a Presidential candidate (or of the coalition supporting him/her) and compare this result with the explanatory capacity of parties and their alliances. In a traditional party-based politics, we would expect that the electoral result of a Presidential candidate (or of his/her coalition) at time t is predicted, to a large extent, by the electoral results of parties supporting him/her at time $t - 1$. Conversely, in a candidate-based politics, we would expect that Lords of Preferences are better predictors of electoral results than parties, which are weak and not able to significantly structure the electoral competition.

Before analysing the determinants of the votes for each of the three main Presidential candidates in 2014, it is useful to start from a general combined OLS regression analysis by pooling together the votes for the three main Presidential candidates in 2014. To perform such analysis we have stacked the dataset in a way that each row corresponds to one of the three categories of the dependent variable (the share of votes for a Presidential candidate) and of the independent variables. Therefore, we now have 291 observations (97 municipalities repeated three times).

Table 3 reports the results of a series of OLS regressions where the votes for a Presidential candidate in 2014 in RC are predicted from different aggregations of coalition of parties and Lords in 2010.¹⁵ In Model 1 we use, as independent variable, the share of votes of the coalitions of parties in

Table 3. Votes for a Presidential candidate in 2014 predicted from different aggregations of coalitions, parties and lords in 2010.

Independent variables	Dependent variable: Votes for a Presidential candidate							
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	beta	s.e.	beta	s.e.	beta	s.e.	beta	s.e.
Coalitions in 2010	0.16**	0.56			-0.03	0.05		
Parties in 2010 supporting a Presidential candidate in 2014			0.22***	0.08			-0.03	0.07
Lords in 2010 supporting a Presidential candidate in 2014					0.58***	0.11	0.58***	0.12
Demographic size	0.02	0.00	0.02	0.00	-0.01	0.00	-0.01	0.00
Political tradition	0.01	0.06	0.00	0.06	-0.01	0.05	-0.01	0.05
Unemployment rate	-0.03	0.16	-0.02	0.16	-0.01	0.14	-0.01	0.14
N	291		291		291		291	
R^2	0.03		0.05		0.33		0.33	
Adj. R^2	0.02		0.04		0.31		0.31	
F statistic	2.10		3.85*		27.48***		27.46***	

Note: OLS regression with standardized coefficients (beta) and standard errors (s.e.).

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

2010.¹⁶ Model 2 replicates the analysis of Model 1, but tests the explanatory capacity of parties and their alliances from a different perspective by using the share of votes in 2010 of the parties supporting a Presidential candidate in 2014 instead of the share of the coalition in 2010.¹⁷ More specifically, while Model 1 considers the coalitions as they actually contested the 2010 regional election, Model 2 takes into consideration the coalitions in 2010 as formed by the parties that supported each Presidential candidate in 2014. Models 3 and 4 add to the analysis developed, respectively, in Models 1 and 2, our variable of interest, which measures the impact of the ‘coalitions’ of Lords supporting the three Presidential candidates in 2014.¹⁸ In particular, this variable has been constructed by aggregating the share of votes in 2010 across the municipalities of RC of the Lords of Preferences supporting each Presidential candidate. By doing so, Models 3 and 4 show the impact of Lords of Preferences in the explanation of the electoral result in 2014 and allow us to compare their impact with that of parties and their alliances.

The empirical results of the regression models in [Table 3](#) are absolutely remarkable and confirm our expectations about Lords and their links to predict electoral results. As one can see by looking at the beta coefficients, as well as at the R^2 coefficients, Lords’ explanatory capacity is always substantially higher than that of parties, both considering them in the 2010 coalitions or through the re-aggregation of these coalitions according to the 2014 structure of competition. Specifically, while Models 1 and 2, although showing significant coefficients as regards both coalitions and parties, explain a very low percentage of variance (3% and 5%, respectively), by adding the variable related to the Lords of Preferences (Models 3 and 4), this latter is always statistically significant at the highest level of confidence and strongly increases the percentage of explained variance (up to 33% in both models). Moreover, after introducing the Lords’ variable, both coalitions (Model 3) and parties (Model 4) become non-significant predictors.¹⁹

We now turn to analyse, in [Table 4](#), the determinants of the votes for each of the three main Presidential candidates, going back to the unstacked dataset ($N=97$) and by splitting the analysis of [Table 3](#) into three: one for the centre-left Presidential candidate, Oliverio (Models 1–4 in [Table 4](#)); one for the centre-right candidate, Ferro (Models 5–8); and finally one for the centre candidate D’Ascola (Models 9 and 10).²⁰

The analyses in [Table 4](#) confirm our expectations and show that the explanatory power of the coalitions of Lords of Preferences is always higher than that of parties and their coalitions. This is particularly true for D’Ascola where the model becomes significant only by introducing the coalition of Lords (and the R^2 increases from .07 to .28) and for Oliverio where the increase in the percentage of explained variance when one adds the coalition of Lords

Table 4. Votes for Presidential candidates in 2014 predicted from different aggregations of coalitions of parties and lords in 2010.

Independent variables	Dependent variable: Presidential votes for Oliverio							
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	beta	s.e.	beta	s.e.	beta	s.e.	beta	s.e.
Centre-left coalition in 2010	0.39***	0.16			0.25**	0.13		
Parties in 2010 supporting Oliverio in 2014			0.35***	0.17			0.20*	0.14
Lords in 2010 supporting Oliverio in 2014					0.51***	0.12	0.52***	0.12
Demographic size	0.08	0.00	0.07	0.00	0.04	0.00	0.04	0.00
Political tradition	0.14	0.07	0.15	0.08	0.13	0.06	0.15	0.06
Unemployment rate	-0.17	0.19	-0.18	0.19	-0.19*	0.16	-0.20*	0.16
<i>N</i>	97		97		97		97	
<i>R</i> ²	0.23		0.21		0.48		0.46	
Adj. <i>R</i> ²	0.20		0.17		0.45		0.43	
<i>F</i> statistic	7.00***		6.05***		16.71***		15.32***	
Independent variables	Dependent variable: Presidential votes for Ferro							
	Model 5		Model 6		Model 7		Model 8	
	beta	s.e.	beta	s.e.	beta	s.e.	beta	s.e.
Centre-right coalition in 2010	0.46***	0.06			0.27**	0.07		
Parties in 2010 supporting Ferro in 2014			0.49***	0.08			0.26*	0.10
Lords in 2010 supporting Ferro in 2014					0.38***	0.11	0.34**	0.13
Demographic size	-0.07	0.00	-0.08	0.00	-0.06	0.00	-0.05	0.00
Political tradition	-0.21*	0.05	-0.25**	0.05	-0.22*	0.05	-0.24**	0.05
Unemployment rate	0.03	0.14	0.05	0.14	0.04	0.13	0.05	0.13
<i>N</i>	97		97		97		97	
<i>R</i> ²	0.24		0.27		0.36		0.34	
Adj. <i>R</i> ²	0.21		0.24		0.32		0.30	
<i>F</i> statistic	7.39***		8.65***		10.19***		9.28***	
Independent variables	Model 9				Model 10			
	beta	s.e.	beta	s.e.	beta	s.e.	beta	s.e.
Parties in 2010 supporting D'Ascola in 2014	-0.10	0.06			-0.10	0.05		
Lords in 2010 supporting D'Ascola in 2014					0.48***	0.11		
Demographic size	0.12	0.00			0.06	0.00		
Political tradition	-0.06	0.03			-0.08	0.02		
Unemployment rate	0.22*	0.07			0.32**	0.06		
<i>N</i>	97				97			
<i>R</i> ²	0.07				0.28			
Adj. <i>R</i> ²	0.03				0.24			
<i>F</i> statistic	1.62				7.00***			

Note: OLS regression with standardized coefficients (beta) and standard errors (s.e.).

**p* < .05.

***p* < .01.

****p* < .001.

is noticeable as well (from .23 to .48 and from .21 to .46), while for Ferro the explanatory power of Lords compared to parties and their alliances is less remarkable, although the coefficients related to Lords are significant at an

higher level of confidence than those of coalitions (Model 5) and parties (Model 6).²¹

Conclusions: Towards a Candidate System?

In this article we have analysed patterns of personal vote in a de-institutionalized and electorally unpredictable environment. The main novelty of our research is having built an original empirical model concerning the top candidates in a local context and having tested their ability to shape electoral competition and to predict electoral results better than parties and their alliances. Our assumptions have been tested in a Southern Italian context, namely, the province of Reggio Calabria, focusing on the regional elections of 2010 and 2014. In such environment the widespread use of personal vote seems to be the only element of stability and continuity within the political system, while parties continuously face instability and high levels of inter-election replacement.

To test whether top candidates with their block of votes represent an important element of continuity within the political system and have become more able than parties in shaping electoral competition and predicting the electoral results, we have empirically identified the so-called Lords of Preferences, defined as those top candidates who either contested both elections or contested the 2010 election and endorsed another candidate in the 2014 election.

The first part of the empirical analysis, performed through bivariate correlations, has brought about three important findings. Firstly, Lords of Preferences are able to maintain a similar territorial configuration of their support across consecutive elections. Secondly, such continuity and predictability are found regardless of the temporary partisan label and alignment in which candidates run. Thirdly, the continuity and predictability of personal vote retained by Lords of Preferences is by far higher than those concerning parties' territorial support.

The second part of the analysis has verified whether Lords' system of re-candidacies and endorsements is able to predict the electoral results of 2014 and to do so better than parties and their alliances. We have tested these hypotheses through a series of multi-variate regression models. The results confirm our idea about the ability of Lords and their links over time to predict the electoral results better than parties and their alliances.

Concluding, this analysis, albeit being temporally and spatially limited, has revealed that in Calabria there has been a deep change involving the overall structure of competition: individual candidates, endowed with a personal support and with the ability to retain it over time or to transfer it to other candidates, have basically replaced parties and their alliances as the core element granting predictability to the system. While in traditional party-based politics

parties have the function to recruit candidates for public offices and to compete for the electoral support, in our context it seems there has been a real overturning, bringing stronger candidates to decide what to do with their block of votes: running again or endorsing another candidate? Running in the same party of the last election or changing party or even coalition? It is by such decisions, taken by Lords of Preferences, that the electoral result is determined. The consequences of this system on the quality of democracy and the electoral accountability, in terms of voters' ability to punish or reward those in power, can be noticeably negative (Raniolo, 2009). 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' behaviour 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.

The results of this study – despite they should not be overestimated given they are restricted to a single regional context and temporally limited – constitute a fertile terrain for further research that can apply our model to other contexts showing similar characteristics to the Calabrian case, both in Southern Italy and beyond.

Notes

1. See also Tronconi (2010, 2015) on party system instability in Southern Italian regional elections.
2. Detailed data about the electoral results of Calabrian regional elections of 2010 and 2014 can be found on the Italian Ministry of Interior's website (<http://elezionistorico.interno.it>).
3. The 16 lists contesting the 2010 regional election in Calabria were: for the centre-right coalition (supporting the Presidential candidate Scopelliti), *Popolo della Libertà* (PDL), *Scopelliti Presidente* (Scopelliti Pres.), *Unione di Centro* (UDC), *Insieme per la Calabria* (Insieme Calabria), *Socialisti Uniti-PSI, Libertà e Autonomia Noi Sud* (Noi Sud), *Fiamma Tricolore-Destra Sociale*; for the centre-left coalition (supporting the Presidential candidate Loiero), *Partito Democratico* (PD), *Autonomia e Diritti* (Aut. e Diritti), *Rifondazione Comunista-Sinistra Europea-Comunisti Italiani* (RC-PDCI), *PSI-Sinistra con Vendola* (PSI-Vendola), *Alleanza per la Calabria* (Alleanza Calabria), *Slega la Calabria* (Slega Calabria); for the other leftist coalition (supporting the Presidential candidate Callipo), *Italia dei Valori* (IDV), *Io Resto in Calabria con Callipo*, *Lista Pannella-Bonino*. Conversely, the 15 lists contesting the regional election in Calabria in 2014 were: for the centre-left coalition (supporting the Presidential candidate Oliverio), *Partito Democratico* (PD), *Oliverio Presidente* (Oliverio Pres.), *Democratici Progressisti* (Dem. Progr.), *Calabria in Rete-Campo Democratico* (Calabria in Rete), *La Sinistra con Speranza* (La Sinistra), *Autonomia e Diritti* (Aut. e Diritti), *Centro Democratico* (Centro Dem.), *Nuovo*

CDU; for the centre-right coalition (supporting the Presidential candidate Ferro), *Forza Italia* (FI), *Casa delle Libertà* (CDL), *Fratelli d'Italia-Alleanza Nazionale* (FDI-AN); for the centre coalition (supporting the Presidential candidate D'Ascola), *Nuovo Centro Destra* (NCD), *Unione di Centro* (UDC); finally, *Movimento Cinque Stelle* (M5S) and *L'Altra Calabria* ran separately with their own Presidential candidate.

4. The calculation of the index has followed Bartolini and Mair's (1990) rules.
5. By non-national parties we have considered those party lists whose labels do not correspond to national parties' ones.
6. Other authors, such as De Luca (2005) and Napoli (2005), use a quantitative criterion to select 'champions of preferences': having received a high number of preferential votes. Nonetheless, they do not specify the share of votes necessary for a candidate to be qualified as a 'champion'. Furthermore, note that if we do not apply the 1% criterion and simply include in the analysis all the candidates who either ran in both elections or ran in 2010 and endorsed another candidate in 2014, there are only two minor candidates who should be included in our analysis (Montagnese, who ran for *UDC* both in 2010, obtaining 312 votes, and in 2014, obtaining 67 votes; Mesiano, who ran for *PSI-Vendola* in 2010, obtaining 358 votes, and ran for *L'Altra Calabria* in 2014, obtaining 596 votes). The results presented in the article would do not change if we included these two candidates both in the bivariate correlations analyses and in the multivariate regressions analyses.
7. All the remaining candidates should be excluded from the analysis given that, by running only in a single election, it is impossible to verify the continuity in their electoral support and therefore assess their influence on the political system.
8. We rely on the total electorate and not on the total number of valid votes to avoid misleading results regarding Lords' territorial support, since the level of electoral turnout between 2010 and 2014 is highly different even at municipalities' level and, consequently, the ratio between Lords' votes and valid votes would have been biased by the shrinking of the denominator. On the contrary, the total electorate is a more stable measure that can be used to assess each Lord's ability to mobilize his/her supporters over time.
9. Regarding Battaglia D. (2010) endorsing Irto (2014), see Cilione (2014), *Corriere della Calabria* (2014), Tripepi (2014b), *Quotidiano del Sud* (2014c). Since the articles connect Irto with many politicians, we have decided to rely on a conservative criterion, only considering Battaglia D. as endorser, being the person who always appears in the articles we have considered. Regarding Bova (2010) endorsing D'Agostino (2014), see Galullo (2014) and *Quotidiano del Sud* (2014d). Regarding Crinò P. (2010) endorsing Crinò F. (2014), see Albanese (2014). Regarding Caridi (2010) endorsing Cannizzaro (2014) see Gemelli (2014), *Cronache del Garantista* (2014) and *Quotidiano del Sud* (2014b). Regarding De Gaetano (2010) endorsing Romeo S. (2014), see Tripodi (2014), Tripepi (2014a) and *Quotidiano del Sud* (2014e). Finally, on Bilardi (2010) endorsing Arruzzolo (2014), see *Quotidiano del Sud* (2014a).
10. As the reader can notice, one case involves Pietro Crinò, a Lord in 2010 who decided not to run in the following regional election and instead endorsed his brother Franco in 2014.
11. The choice regarding which party lists to correlate is consistent with the calculation of electoral volatility we have reported in the first section.

12. Note that all the parties for which we hypothesize a correlation have received at least 1% of the votes in either the 2010 or the 2014 election. Therefore, the result would be the same if we do not put the 1% threshold. Similarly, the overall mean of correlations between all parties running in 2010 and all parties running in 2014 would be almost identical ($r = .07$; $N = 240$) if we include also the four lists that did not reach 1% (*Alleanza per la Calabria*, *Io Resto in Calabria con Callipo*, *Lista Pannella-Bonino*, *Fiamma Tricolore-Destra Sociale*).
13. We have run a series of correlation analyses to prove whether the support for parties in the municipalities of RC over time was higher in the past than today. Specifically, we have compared the territorial support for parties in the Calabrian regional elections of 1970 and in the 1975 for the RC province. The results emphasize the strong continuity of the parties' territorial support over time, thus confirming our expectation that this continuity was higher in the past than today. Just to give a brief example, the highest correlation in the 1970–1975 period concerns the Italian Communist Party (*Partito Comunista Italiano*), with a Pearsons' r of 0.88 ($p < .001$), while the lowest is that of the Italian Social Movement (*Movimento Sociale Italiano*), with a Pearsons' r of 0.45 ($p < .001$). This means that the lowest correlation in the 1970–1975 is higher than the highest correlation in the 2010–2014, as reported in [Figure 3](#).
14. Data on demographic size refer to 2014 and unemployment rate refer to 2013. Both have been taken from ISTAT (www.istat.it). Data on the Italian Communist Party are official electoral results (www.elezionistorico.interno.it). Personal vote is expected to be more able to predict electoral results in smaller municipalities (due to possible closer ties between voters and candidates), in municipalities with a weaker Communist tradition (due to the fact that historically the vote to the Italian Communist Party was less affected by personal ties to candidates) and, finally, in municipalities with a higher unemployment (since in such contexts voters may be more tempted by asking for micro re-distributive policies provided by politicians).
15. We have also performed an identical statistical analysis using as the dependent variable the electoral performance of the three coalitions of parties supporting the three main Presidential candidates in 2014 in RC. The results are extremely similar to those reported in [Table 3](#), and this is not surprising, given that the electoral results of the Presidential arena and of the proportional arena have been almost identical. For this reason, we have decided not to report the results of these additional regression models. All the analyses have been performed by using STATA 12.
16. PRC-PDCI has been excluded from the centre-left coalition in 2010, since the party supported another Presidential candidate in 2014; UDC has been excluded in 2010 for the centre-right coalition since the party supported D'Ascola in 2014.
17. The variable 'Parties in 2010 supporting a Presidential candidate in 2014' includes, for Oliverio: PD, PSI-Vendola and *Autonomia e Diritti*; for Ferro: PDL and *Scopelliti Presidente*; for D'Ascola: UDC.
18. The variable 'Lords in 2010 supporting a Presidential candidate in 2014' includes, for Oliverio: Mazza, Tripodi P.M., Giordano, Nucera G., Bova, De Gaetano and Battaglia D.; for Ferro: Minasi, Nicolò Al., Vilasi G., Caridi, and Crinò; for D'Ascola: Fedele, Imbalzano and Bilardi.
19. We have performed a multicollinearity diagnostic test (by using the command 'lmcol' in STATA) that reports no problems for all models; moreover, we have

run a test of equality of coefficients ('test' in STATA) to test whether the coefficients for Lords is statistically distinguishable from the coefficients related to coalitions (Model 3) and parties (Model 4): the null hypothesis of equality is rejected with $p < .001$ in both models. Finally, the results are basically identical if we cluster the standard errors in the regressions by municipality and if we control for candidates' fixed effects.

20. As already mentioned, there was not a centre-leaning electoral coalition in 2010 and therefore the variable concerning the electoral coalition in 2010 is absent in D'Ascola models.
21. The assumption of equality of coefficients is rejected for both Oliverio (Models 3 and 4) and D'Ascola (Model 10), while it is not rejected for Ferro (Models 5 and 6). Furthermore, even these analyses have shown no problems of multicollinearity.

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