

Doomed to fail. The adoption of gendered party finance in Italy at an inhospitable time

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Abstract

Italy stands out as one of the few countries in Europe to have introduced policies linking public funding for political parties to measures to enhance women's political representation. However, such policies have proved to be flawed, failing to meet the objectives that they aimed to address. Starting from these observations, this paper opens the 'black box' of the policy cycle and analyses the stage of policy formulation that led to gendered party finance, to understand why such ill-defined measures were introduced in the first place. In order to do so we retrace, first, the 'support structure' for the adoption of gender representation policies, and identify the relevant elite arena in which the policy was initiated. Then, by analysing parliamentary votes and speeches, we analyse the alliances and the conflict that originated around the policy. We find that, if structural conditions prevented the adoption of a more intrusive policy, its poor design seems to have been the result of the weakness of the support structure for the introduction of feminist policies and of the lack of cross-party alliances among women MPs that might otherwise have promoted the legitimacy of affirmative action.

Keywords

Gendered electoral financing; gender representation policies; political elites; policy formulation; support structure; women's policy agency

Introduction

Following the last Italian general election in 2018, 35 percent of elected representatives were women, the highest percentage ever reached in the history of the Republic. We owe this result, which for the first time placed Italy above the EU average, primarily to

the gender quota mechanisms introduced in 2017 by the new national electoral law. Today, the use of quotas as ‘temporary special measures’ that serve to rebalance gender representation in the country’s elected assemblies has become a common feature of all Italian electoral laws at all levels of government¹. The path leading to this outcome, however, has been long and not without impediments. Indeed, perhaps unsurprisingly given the resilience of traditional and stereotypical gender roles in Italian society (Saraceno, 2003), Italy had resisted the ‘quota fever’ (Dahlerup, 2005) that had invested a number of countries around the world until quite recently.

First introduced in the early 1990s for both local and national elections, gender quotas were in 1995 declared unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court. Following this decision, if the goal of equality in political representation were to be achieved, other methods beyond quotas had to be found, adopted and implemented.

It is in this context that a debate in the Italian parliament emerged on whether to promote gender balance in political office by using party financing as a lever. Gendered electoral financing or gender-targeted public funding (Ohman, 2018; Muriaas, Wang and Murray, 2020) implies the introduction of systems where the funding mechanisms of political parties are tied to provisions on gender. They can include both economic incentives and sanctions, and may address all main stages of the political recruitment process (Krook and Norris, 2014). They can be used to promote women’s participation in party activities and promote the presence of female candidates in the parties’ electoral lists, as well as promoting the actual number of women elected to parliament for each party group (Ohman, 2018). This set of instruments recognizes the importance of political parties as a site for transformation in the process of gendering politics, given the central role they play as gatekeepers of the political sphere. At the same time, they stress the responsibility of parties as active agents of change.

It should be noted that the idea of gendered party financing was quite innovative at the time. Comparatively speaking, in the 1990s no other country in Europe had introduced such a measure, with only France at that time being in the process of adopting one. Since

¹ For a comprehensive review of the adoption of gender quotas in Italy, see Donà (2018). For a discussion of the effects of gender quotas at local and European levels, see Carbone and Farina, and Legnante and Regalia, respectively (this special issue).

it was introduced in 1999, gendered party financing became the only political representation policy to be enforced in Italy after the 1995 Constitutional Court decision². The law prescribed that all political parties eligible for electoral reimbursement should spend at least 5 percent of the total amount they received for ‘initiatives to promote women’s active participation in politics’. In order to track the expenditures incurred for such initiatives, parties were obliged to introduce a specific budget item into their annual financial reports. Penalties and sanctions in cases of noncompliance were not, however, established. A previous study showed that the objectives of the policy measure were not achieved due to the many loopholes in this legislation. Not least, the very meaning of ‘initiatives to promote women’s active participation in politics’ was not clearly defined, thus leaving ample room for interpretation by the parties themselves, the majority of which formally complied with the rules but informally circumvented them. Indeed, Italian parties have done less than the minimum possible to comply with these measures (Feo and Piccio, 2019).

The main question we raise in this article is *why* such ill-defined measures were introduced in the first place. We will guide our analysis by focusing on the interplay of different actors usually recognized as relevant in explaining the adoption of gender representation policies. After presenting them in a theoretical section, we reconstruct the historical and political setting that led to the introduction of the 1999 gendered electoral funding rule. Next, we examine the parliamentary debates and voting behaviour of MPs. We conclude by arguing that if structural conditions prevented the adoption of a more intrusive policy, its poor design seems to have been due to the weak support structure for the introduction of feminist policies and to the lack of cross-party alliances among women MPs that could promote the legitimacy of affirmative action.

4.2. What drives feminist policy emergence? A brief overview

This article focuses on the formulation phase of a specific policy measure, which obliges political parties to earmark a percentage of the public funding they receive from the

² Law 157/1999, ‘Nuove norme in materia di rimborso delle spese per consultazioni elettorali e referendarie e abrogazione delle disposizioni concernenti la contribuzione volontaria ai movimenti e partiti politici’.

state to increasing women's participation in politics³. As argued in the introduction, this policy measure fell short of its expected outcome, showing instead features of a merely symbolic reform. In contrast to 'material reforms' (Anderson, 1990), symbolic reforms or policies are characterized by the dissemination of symbols at the discursive level, yet have no tangible effects in terms of actual policy outputs (Edelman, 1964; also Mazur, 1995). Of course, the choice for a symbolic use of policy does not apply only to policies for women's political participation. It may pertain to any policy field and it can result from different policy processes (Cobb and Elder, 1983; Kingdon, 1995). However, feminist scholars point to specific policy formulation problems that are particularly at stake when issues of women's representation are involved. Feminist new institutionalism has often underlined that 'policies are "gendered" and "gendering" constructions, embedded in underlying norms and institutions that tend to perpetuate unequal power hierarchies between women and men' (Lombardo and Meier, 2015: 612). Representation policies inherently seek to challenge the status quo of gender relations. Thus, governments may not seek to embrace policies that challenge long-established patterns of behaviour on the side of the powerful. Instead, they may systematically pursue measures that are symbolic and that are not followed by concrete results (Cobb and Elder, 1983; Mazur, 1995).

Studies focusing on women's representation policies have attempted to unravel the actors involved and the interactions that explain their adoption. In particular, three main groups of actors have been identified: civil society actors, typically women's movements but also women's groups within parties; state actors, including national members of parliament, courts and national party leaders; and international actors such as international organizations and transnational networks (Dahlerup, 2006; Krook, 2009). When questioning what triggered the incremental normative shift around gender quotas and parity in France, Lépinard introduced the notion of support structure, i.e. the 'institutional apparatus that supported the development of the parity claim' (2015: 6). In her description of the support structure in France, Lépinard pointed to the importance of active women's movements, pro-feminist party activists inside

3 On the distinction between the pre- and post-formulation phases of feminist policy development, see Mazur (2015).

institutions, Women's Policy Agencies (WPAs), a public debate on women's political rights as well as a favourable international arena. We will review each of these factors briefly, before examining how they are situated in the Italian case.

The presence of active feminist movements proved to be a first important element for the introduction of women's political representation policies, among other policies. Of course, the adoption of such policies – in particular legislative quotas – did not figure at the top of the agenda for the feminist mobilizations of the 1970s. Over time, however, feminist movements increasingly started to address the institutional arena in a pattern of growing confrontation and exchange with the representative institutions and demanding greater (and better) representation of women (Kittilson, 2006).

As feminist activists embraced a less mistrustful attitude towards the state, party activists inside the institutions – mostly women – progressively advanced the claims of the feminist movements. Overall, the feminization of women representatives, in both left-wing and right-wing parties, has been a lengthy, complex and not always straightforward process (Lovenduski, 2005; Campbell and Childs, 2015; Piccio, 2019). For a long time, female party cadres and activists would consider women-related issues as less important compared to party political activity. Interviews with and the personal histories of women representatives in parties describe how women preferred to have tasks that were not specifically women-related to avoid being considered as 'second order actors' (Beckwith, 1985). The presence of women party activists pressing for feminist or pro-women policies inside institutions should therefore not be taken for granted, especially in a context in which a male-dominated culture permeates parties and parliamentary institutions (Lovenduski, 2005).

Scholars working on state feminism (e.g. Outshoorn and Kantola, 2007; McBride and Mazur, 2010) have also acknowledged the importance of 'national mechanisms for gender equality' (more often referred to as Women's Policy Agencies, WPAs) in pursuing the adoption of gender representation policies. WPAs are comprised of official bodies for the advancement of women's rights, such as Ministries or Departments for women's affairs, but also independent advisory bodies, such as gender equality observatories or dedicated parliamentary committees. The mere presence of WPAs does not guarantee the adoption of feminist policies. Indeed, research has shown that the ability of a given

WPA to be proactive in bringing forward feminist policies depends on the agency's individual characteristics and on the extent to which it offers procedural and substantive representation to the actors and demands of feminist movements. Thus, more resources, binding rather than advisory powers, proximity to the government and ties to the feminist movement are more likely to produce feminist policy outcomes (Mazur, 2002; McBride and Mazur 2010).

Equally relevant, according to Lépinard (2015), is the presence of a broad and lively public debate on women's political rights and the perpetuation of gender inequalities as well as debates in the media amongst intellectuals, activists and politicians. Last, there is the influence of a variety of non-national factors, from the presence of international soft law instruments such as recommendations issued by international governmental and non-governmental organizations, to transnational emulation and the spillover effect of norms (Krook, 2009).

Another approach to exploring the determinants of the adoption of pro-women and pro-feminist policies focuses more specifically on the actual composition of parliamentary arenas and on the role of specific actors. Studies have observed how the mere number of women MPs can explain feminist policy change (cf. Wängnerud, 2000). Yet, other scholars have underlined the importance of a number of additional factors. First, they observe how partisan ideology actually matters, political parties on the left being more eager to bring forward women's claims as compared to conservative or rightist parties (Beckwith, 2000; Kittilson, 2006). Others have pointed more broadly to the role played by the so-called 'critical actors' (Childs and Krook, 2009). Critical actors are 'male and female, who may attempt to represent women substantively, as a group' (*Ibidem*: 144) and who manage to find support across the different party families. In most cases where women are able to come together across party lines, there is a greater likelihood that feminist policies will be advanced.

In the following section, we reconstruct the Italian 'support structure', focusing on the role that these respective actors played in the adoption of the 1999 gendered party funding measure. Next, we turn to the analysis at the élite level, examining the actual voting behaviour of the MPs and presenting the main motives underlying their decisions.

4.3. Italy's 'support structure' in the 1990s

The 1990s were a moment of deep political turmoil in Italy. Starting in 1992, a series of judicial investigations uncovered a systemic structure of corruption involving political elites and governing parties in particular. Clean Hands, as the investigation was called, was the last straw that transformed widespread discontent about inefficient and unstable governing into a full-fledged institutional crisis. Within a couple of years, all the major parties had dissolved with new ones emerging in their stead, and there was huge pressure for the adoption of new institutional rules to mend the representational crisis in Italian politics. This pressure resulted in a new electoral law in 1993 based on a majoritarian formula, the purpose of which was to increase governability and alternation in government, contributing to a profound restructuring of the party system. The adoption of new institutional rules opened a window of opportunity for advocates of women's representation. It was mainly female party members and MPs, members of the Italian Women's League (Unione Donne Italiane, UDI), the oldest and largest women's association in Italy, and the National Commission on Parity and Equal Opportunities (CNPPO), the first women's policy agency in Italy established in 1984, that most strongly campaigned to reach this objective. They gained some results between 1993 and 1995, when quota systems were added to new electoral laws for local, national and regional elections⁴. In particular, the introduction of a quota mechanism in the national electoral law was devised by its main promoters – Livia Turco and Tina Anselmi, leading figures of the Democratic Party of the Left and the Christian Democratic Party, respectively – as a necessary measure to counterbalance the negative effects the new majoritarian formula would otherwise have had on women's descriptive representation in Parliament (Guadagnini, 2005; Guadagnini and Donà, 2007).

These achievements were, however, short-lived, as legislative quotas were deemed unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court in 1995⁵. On that occasion, the Court framed the quotas as preferential measures that contradicted 'the principle of formal equality, and the principles that regulate political representation in a pluralistic

⁴ We are referring, respectively, to: Law 81/1993; Laws 276 and 277/1993 for the election of Chamber of Deputies and Senate of the Republic; and Law 43/1995

⁵ Pronouncement 6-12 September 1995, no. 422, available at: www.cortecostituzionale.it (accessed 5 January 2020).

democracy' as these are found in articles 3 and 51 of the Constitution. The pronouncement of the Constitutional Court had various effects: it indefinitely put off any other proposal aiming at introducing quotas into the electoral rules (clearly the more straightforward way to tackle the problem of the under-representation of women) and shaped the institutional debates that followed.

Yet, women's political representation remained high on the agenda for a wide-ranging network of women. As we shall see, however, it remained mainly an élite-level network. After the change of government in 1996, the newly elected centre-left coalition strengthened the structure of Italian state feminism with the creation of new WPAs, a Ministry for Equal Opportunities and the associated eponymous Department, which paralleled the activities of the already existing CNPPO (Donà, 2018). The CNPPO itself experienced in those years 'effervescent times', according to its former President Silvia Costa. Even though the Commission was granted only an advisory role, it had many of the characteristics that scholars deem relevant in terms of WPA capacities. It was well-resourced, maintained relevant links to women's movement networks and over time it gained proximity to the decision-making arenas and figures and was highly involved in the international network advocating women's rights. This participation had a spill-over effect, as it allowed the CNPPO representative to 'bring back home' discussions and issues that had been matured through these international experiences (see also Taricone, 2006).

The ability of the Italian WPAs actually to contribute to, or shape, policy processes was, however, very limited. Also limited was the overall impact of the newly instituted Ministry of Equal Opportunities (without portfolio). Evaluating the presence of a 'support structure' for feminist policy formulation as discussed in the previous section, Italy in the period under examination seems to have lacked one. In contrast with other cases, such as the French (Lépinard 2015), no real debate was generated beyond insider circles. The transnational debate on mainstreaming women had hardly reached civil society. Representation in Italian public opinion was still considered as a 'women problem' and not as something that would strengthen democracy (Guadagnini, 2000). The women's movement was not a central actor either. The public visibility phase of the strong feminist mobilization that characterized Italy in the 1970s had ended and a phase

of latency was now beginning. Many feminists found their place among the rank-and-file of political parties on the left (the Communist party in particular) and pressed for gendered sensitivities from within these institutions. Others remained mistrustful of party politics and political institutions more generally (DIOTIMA, 1987; Martucci, 2008), firmly opposing quotas and other sorts of affirmative action⁶. The debate around women's representation therefore remained confined mainly to the elite.

In the next section we open the 'black box' of the policy process and focus on the elite debate that led to the introduction of gendered party funding. We base our analysis on parliamentary data, combining a qualitative content analysis of the relevant parliamentary debates available in verbatim transcriptions with an analysis of the relevant roll-call votes.

4.4. Promoting women's participation in party activities: The parliamentary debate

Measures for the promotion of women's active participation in politics were not introduced by means of a specific parity law, but as part of the new party finance law (law 157/1999), which reintroduced direct public funding for political parties – in the form of electoral reimbursements – after the failed attempt at shifting to a predominantly private funding regime in 1997 (Pizzimenti, 2017). The debate on the law was heated: as recently as 1993 a popular referendum had ruled out public funding for political parties, following the long wave of corruption scandals that affected Italian politics at the beginning of the 1990s. Many MPs saw the proposal to reintroduce electoral reimbursement as a way of circumventing the clear outcome of the referendum. Indeed, after only few weeks of discussion, the bill was approved, and public funding restored. Given the primary scope of the law (i.e. the establishment of new party funding rules), the first drafts of the proposal did not envisage any gender-related measures. It was only at a later stage of the policy formulation process that four

⁶ We define affirmative action as 'a generic term for programmes which take some kind of initiative [...] to increase, maintain or rearrange the number or status of certain group members usually defined by race or gender, within a larger group' (Johnsons, 1990: 77, quoted in Bacchi, 1996).

different amendments targeting this goal were proposed⁷. These amendments were considerably more radical than the one that was finally adopted – and would possibly also have been much more effective in terms of feminist policy advancement. Three out of the four amendments linked electoral reimbursements to the parties' capacity to meet a gender quota in their parliamentary groups. Parties failing to meet this quota (established at 28.8 per cent based on the European average of female MPs in 1999), would be denied a percentage of the electoral reimbursement fund as a sanction⁸. Beyond sanctions, rewards and incentives were also envisaged: two of the proposals envisioned that the amount unused for electoral reimbursements (i.e. saved by sanctioning parties that failed to meet parliamentary gender quotas) would be reallocated to 'virtuous' parties (i.e. those that managed to fulfil the quota requirements) to support the activities of their women's wings. According to the parliamentary debate, these amendments were the results of 'months of discussions with the CNPPO' and took their cue from 'a joint declaration of the Council of the European Regions, issued in November 1998' (Atti Parlamentari 1999: 41). The amendments found 'all female MPs in agreement, from the left and the right' (*Ibidem*). The parliamentary progress of the four amendments was thwarted after the first reading. In particular, a request was made to postpone their discussion to a later stage, in order to prioritize other articles and respective amendments in their place. This proposal was met with disagreement, in particular from the centre-right female MPs, who accused the centre-left government of seeking to avoid a discussion on relevant matters such as women's representation in order to proceed to rapid approval of the party finance reform (Atti Parlamentari 1999). Against this argument, the president of the Chamber of Deputies (a man) justified the delaying the discussion as an opportunity to consider the proposals more carefully, given the importance of the issue. Secondly,

⁷ The four amendments were: Amendment 1.01, proposed by Maria Teresa Armosino (Forza Italia); Amendment 1.03, proposed by Anna Maria de Luca (Forza Italia); and Amendments 1.08 and 1.09, proposed by Argia Valeria Albanese (Popolari e Democratici). Parliamentary proceedings available at the Chamber of Deputies website. See also Maestri 2018.

⁸ The electoral reimbursement would be reduced proportionally by the gap between the percentage of women representatives reached by the party and 28.8 percent. In other words, the further from European standards, the greater the sanction.

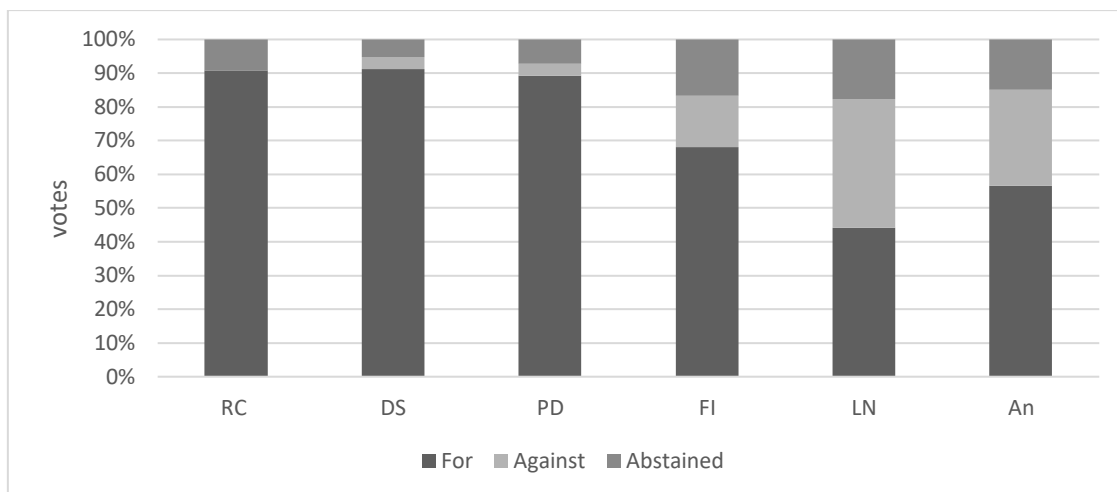
he exhorted the various proponents to submit a composite amendment to be discussed in the plenary session.

The newly proposed amendment (amendment 2.05, which was the one finally approved) was supported and signed by 23 female MPs from across the political spectrum, with the exception of the Lega Nord (Northern League, LN)⁹. The amendment prescribed that parties should spend at least 5 per cent of the public funds they received on promoting women's initiatives and report this spending item in their annual financial reports. This was clearly a watered-down compromise compared to the earlier proposals. First, references to quotas disappeared. Second, the measure did not affect party income, but only referred to party spending. Third, the new amendment was extremely vague with regard to the definition of the kinds of 'initiatives to promote women's active participation in politics' that the parties were to implement. Finally, and perhaps most strikingly, no sanctions were provided for in the event of non-compliance. In this milder formulation, the amendment was approved by a large majority. Of 375 MPs, 274 voted in favour, 52 voted against and 49 MPs abstained¹⁰. Noticeably, although the composite amendment presented to the Assembly was supported by a group of MPs belonging to many different parties, divisions among and within parties emerged at the moment of the final vote.

Figure 1 Voting on the gendered party financing amendment, by parliamentary group

⁹ The party's official name was and still is 'Lega per l'Indipendenza della Padania' (League for Padanian Independence).

¹⁰ Roll-call vote information is available at the Chamber of Deputies Archives Website. Available at: <http://bdp.camera.it/init/ve13/index> (accessed on 15 May 2020).

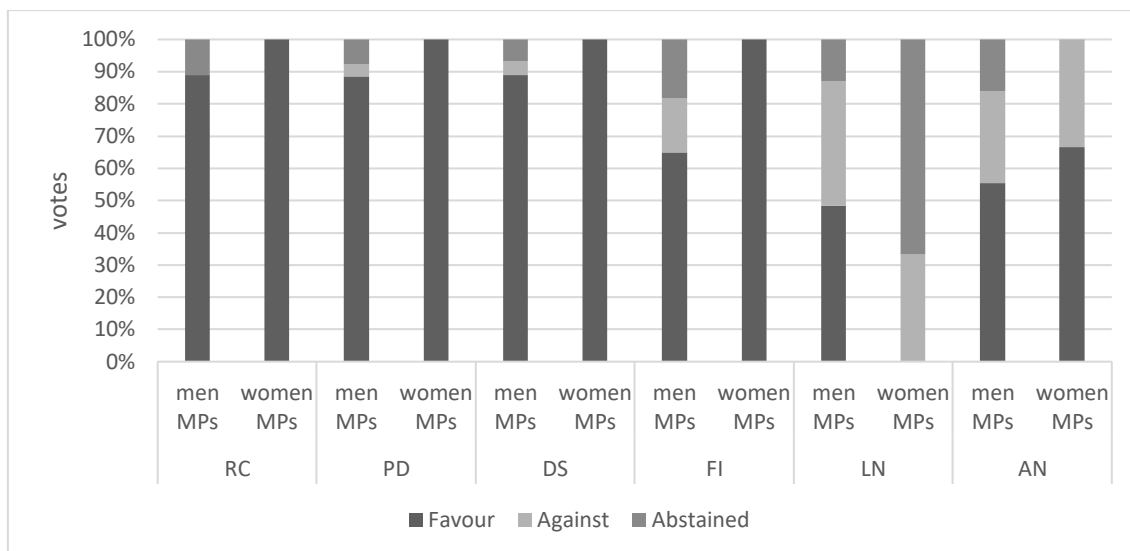


Source: Chamber of Deputies database. Author's elaboration.

As shown in Figure 1, among the parties on the left and centre-left, Rifondazione Comunista (Communist Refoundation, RC), the Democratici di Sinistra (Left Democrats, DS) and the Popolari e Democratici (PD), the lion's share of the votes were cast in favour of the amendment, with over 85 per cent of these parties' MPs voting in favour. As for the parties on the right and centre-right – Alleanza Nazionale (National Alliance, AN), the LN and Forza Italia (Go Italy!, FI) – their support was decidedly lower (about 45 per cent on average). FI, 65 per cent of whose MPs supported the amendment, appears as an exception. This is not striking since, as mentioned above, the most radical proposals for gendered party financing advanced in the first stage of policy formulation were actually championed by female FI representatives, who were also among the supporters of the new amendment. When comparing the voting trends by gender, we note that 90 per cent of female MPs supported the amendment, as against 70 per cent of male MPs. In other words, women, regardless of their party, tended to vote in favour of the amendment, whereas men were much more divided over, and in opposition to, the issue.

Yet, it would be wrong to claim that female MPs formed a united front in favour of the amendment. Distinguishing by gender and by party reveals interesting variations in the level of support (see Figure 2).

Figure 2 Voting on the gendered party financing amendment, by gender and parliamentary group



Source: Chamber of Deputies database. Author's elaboration.

While all the female MPs of the left and centre-left parties and FI supported the proposal, disagreements among female MPs emerged within the AN and LN parliamentary groups (Figure 2). In the case of the LN, none of the three female MPs supported the law. This reflects the fact that no LN parliamentarians figured among the signatories. These factions become clear when analysing the parliamentary debate that preceded the vote (Atto Parlamentare 1999, pp. 84-ff). Overall, a shared understanding was developed among the centre-left and FI MPs in considering affirmative action as an instrument for rebalancing women's political representation. Some MPs stressed the fact that they would have preferred a more 'articulate and strict' measure that would have forced behavioural changes on the parties in the same vein as the previous amendments, and that 'more had to be done'. Yet, the amendment was generally welcomed as a measure and supported by a large cross-party coalition of female parliamentarians as something that could stimulate 'a minimum of cultural effort by political parties, and their concrete sensitization with regards to the civic, cultural and political growth of women'¹¹.

In AN, divisions appeared over the appropriate means to achieve equal access to political office. Generally, the party was (and still is) ideologically against the idea of legislative quotas. A favourable position towards the amendment was expressed by the

¹¹ These positions were advanced by Stefania Prestigiacomo (FI), Ida d'Ippolito (FI), Maura Cossutta (RC) and Claudia Mancina (DS) and Luciana Sbarbati (Italian Republican Party).

party's spokesperson, who praised it for the encouragement it would give political parties to promote women's participation and for no longer referring to 'hideous and unconstitutional quotas'. On the other hand, another AN representative voiced her disagreement with the proposed amendment by stressing the belief that women, like men, should be responsible for their own empowerment and should not expect any privilege, let alone to be treated as a 'protected species'¹².

Many critical voices lined up during the debate, too. One female MP from the LN explained her position by insisting on the uselessness of this measure for improving women's political participation¹³. This concern was also expressed in numerous other speeches. For example, the amendment was described as a 'charade', due to the lack of sanction mechanisms. Or it was provocatively dismissed by defining the earmarking of money for women's activities as 'monetary compensation [to women] for having accepted discrimination'¹⁴. It is noticeable that these very negative and dismissive interventions were all expressed by male MPs.

Yet another issue that emerged as extremely central in the discussion, particularly for male MPs, was party organizational autonomy. Italian parties lacked – and still lack – regulations that govern their activities, as political parties are considered private associations. Thus, any form of state intrusion into party 'affairs' was viewed with suspicion. During the debate, this element often steered the conversation away from the actual subject matter, and many MPs – especially from FI – condemned the amendment for imposing spending constraints on parties¹⁵.

The emergence of these alternative themes, which in a way prevented a genuine debate about gendered party financing, seems to suggest that the focus of attention and concern was about something else throughout the process. Despite the genuine efforts

¹² The two divergent positions were expressed by Alessandra Mussolini and Angela Napoli.

¹³ 'This law is a farce because it will end up being a simple spending item amongst the many others in the parties' financial reports' (Giovanna Bianchi Clerici, LN). Interestingly, all fifteen votes in favour from the LN were from male MPs.

¹⁴ The two speeches were made by Gianfranco Anedda (AN) and Marco Taradash (FI).

¹⁵ Deputies Marco Taradash and Vittorio Sgarbi, both from FI. It should be noted, however, that the actual constraints for parties were minimal. As argued before, the measure that was finally adopted was vague to the point that parties could (and still can despite the further modifications to the law made in 2012 and 2014) list the most diverse activities as 'initiatives for promoting women's participation' (see Feo and Piccio, 2019 for further details).

of female MPs, supported by the CNPPO, the obstacles to a focused and content-based discussion were insurmountable. Additionally, female MPs appeared divided on how to reach the goal of gender equality, most importantly over the very legitimacy of affirmative action.

4.5 Conclusions

As Krook has argued, ‘tracking the origins of public policies is crucial for understanding how and why they come to be adopted, and in many instances, the particular forms they ultimately take’ (2009: 22). In light of the analysis of the first gendered party financing measure introduced in Italy we can indeed conclude that it was doomed to fail.

To be sure, the introduction of more effective women’s representation policies was hindered by structural constraints. Indeed, the 1995 Constitutional Court pronouncement prevented any quota mechanism from being introduced, even if framed in terms of economic instruments, in the shape of incentives or sanctions. Thus, linking the allocation of public funding to a given percentage of women candidates or female MPs was not a viable option. This forced legislators to adopt less rigid and less intrusive measures in terms of the degree of policy intervention, such as the one finally adopted. If the Court ruling explains why a more forceful, free-standing policy was not introduced in the first place, what remains to be explained is why, given the constraints imposed by the Court, did Parliament adopt such ill-defined legislation on this matter. Why introduce a policy measure at all if no sanctions are attached to it and if its wording allows for circumvention of the rules?

Reconstructing societal and institutional developments in Italy in the years that preceded the adoption of this law, we pointed to the fact that the support structure necessary for bringing forward well-targeted comprehensive policy measures aimed at rebalancing women’s representation in elected offices was simply too weak. The debate on the importance of introducing norms that could contribute to the effective equality of women in politics remained elite-driven, without meaningful echoes in the public debate and in the media. Second, the analysis of the parliamentary debates as well as the interview conducted with a former head of the CNPPO point to a lack of the political will to make women’s participation in politics a real priority. It was certainly not a priority for male MPs – a striking majority in the Chamber of Deputies at the time (88.7

%). This is shown by the fact that only women signed the amendments proposing a measure to increase women's political participation; by the lower percentages of male MPs favouring the adoption of the amendment, and by the fact that women's participation entered through the backdoor within a politically crucial law that obscured women's issues completely. It was also not a shared priority for female MPs, whose positions on affirmative action policies diverged considerably along party lines.

A new window of opportunity for policies promoting women's representation was soon provided by the Constitutional reform passed in 2001. After this reform, which subverted the 1995 Court pronouncement, gender quotas progressively found their place in the electoral laws. Yet, at none of the electoral levels (Carbone and Farina, 2016; Legnante and Regalia, 2018 and in this special issue), did the outcomes meet expectations. As far as political parties go, mirroring society, they remain gendered institutions in which the grammar of homosocial capital gets the upper hand.

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Appendix chapter 4 (da fare per bene)

The appendix of this chapter should comprise:

1. Information about the policy
2. information about the interviews
3. information about the debates