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Marinella Belluati

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Marinella Belluati

Department of Cultures, Politics and Society, University of Turin, Turin, Italy

ABSTRACT

Everywhere, the gender gap is an expression of the imbalance in the representation of women involved in politics and in gender issues in the media. Several studies show that the representation of gender politics tends to reproduce a very stereotyped public image of women, which emphasizes more their personal features than their political skills. In contrast, female activism in social media produces interesting networking experiences and innovative initiatives with many followers. Starting with a general assessment of the data, this contribution discusses the under-representation and mis-representation in Italy of female politicians and gender policies in Italy, focusing on the profiles of selected women and on specific media strategies adopted to place gender issues on the public agenda.

In Italy, and more or less everywhere else, the data confirm that there are few political opportunities for women.[1] This is a result of many factors, both as part of feminist activism and outside it. Women in politics, though well prepared and increasing in number, have had little success in attaining positions of leadership in parties and institutions, and those who have done so seem to have limited impact on gender issues. The opportunities provided by the new digital communication environments could be a resource in this respect, but the fact that the forms of political power and the mechanisms for its distribution are still heavily male-dominated continues to be a major disadvantage.

According to Fraser (2013), achieving gender equality is a question of struggling simultaneously on three fronts: the redistribution of economic and social resources; the recognition of rights associated with women's status, and political representation of their interests. For this reason, any step forward on the path to equal opportunities must necessarily involve all three fronts. Fraser argues that all of the actions that have sacrificed even a single one of these dimensions, or have addressed them separately, have ended in failure. During the heyday of the feminist movement, the three dimensions were fairly well combined, leading to significant advances in gender balance. Recently, however, the gender gap has returned with a vengeance, as some of the gains that had been made are being called into question, such as the right to abortion or the rights accorded by family law. Much has changed, and the improvements must be acknowledged, but we are still far

from the level of equality that could be hoped for, in Italy as elsewhere (see Carbone and Farina in this issue). Once again, the question clamours for our attention.

There can be little doubt that the economic crisis has made women's difficulty in accessing economic and social resources all the more apparent, and in many cases has forced them to retreat to the private social sphere, but the trend is by no means recent.[2] It began with the ever more aggressive inroads made by forms of neoliberalism that have eroded the traditional pillars of social organization (the middle class, the educational system, the systems of production and reproduction) and threatened the conquests of the feminist movements (Fraser 2013).

The relationship between politics and gender representations is an area of inquiry that has long drawn on the gender studies tradition (Duverger 1955; Campus 2013; Ross 2017) and testifies to how women's underrepresentation in politics and decision-making roles shows few signs of improvement.[3] One domain that intersects and heightens all the others is that of communication as a dimension that reproduces social inequalities (Krijnen and Van Bauwel 2015). This is an issue that has been repeatedly addressed in studies (van Zoonen 2002; Ross and Carter 2011) that have analysed how the media represent gender relationships and women's presence at the helm of media companies and in the information professions (Franks 2013).[4]

Worldwide, women in leadership positions are still less likely to be in the media spotlight than men, and the coverage they receive is often distorted and highly sexist. In politics, for example, women's roles are not always accurately presented, and their public successes are celebrated far less (Ross 2011). As a result, women in the public debate have little visibility, and when they do become visible they often end up as targets of hate and denigration.[5]

From this standpoint, women could make more and better use of the potential that the Internet and Web offer for taking a more incisive role in the processes of inclusion and democratic participation in public life.

Existing studies start from the premise that the Web has made traditional and post-gendered feminism's networking experiences more interconnected than ever before. In her study of online masculinity, Kendall (2002) noted that the new communication environment has given women unprecedented room for freedom. Thus, the network's structure and configuration provided an opportunity for asserting forms of counter-power that challenge hegemonic masculinity. At the same time, Kendall warned that the Web's architecture tends to reinforce existing relationships, and the potential risk for feminist movements was that of walling themselves off in self-referential enclaves.

After the early 1990s, the years of the dot-com bubble, the over-optimistic vision that urged gender-oriented movements to embrace the Web and its potential for freedom (Haraway 1991) began to fade. A number of studies have acknowledged that online spaces are 'normalizing' by reproducing typically male usages and practices (van Zoonen 2010). Nevertheless, we continue to see forms of gender 'occupation' (Baym, 2010). Women on the Web seem to be better at building social networks, and this could give them more opportunities to shape the public sphere (Harcourt 1999; Desai 2009). Though how the Web and platforms are used depends on age and education level, the most recent worldwide[6] and Italian data[7] indicate that women are the greatest users of these resources. Women's participation is particularly high in the Third Sector, where they share important experiences.[8] Women's volunteer groups, for example, rely heavily

on the Web and social media as free spaces for creating networks,[9] as well as for talking about politics (Belluati 2018). These are generally environments where networking and microblogging strengthen and revitalize gender identity, and where public and private issues typically intertwine (Comunello 2015). Despite the fact that the Internet's structure lends itself to activities of this kind, this activism enjoys little visibility in the public debate and even less influence in the public sphere.

Starting from these considerations, the following pages will present a study of women's presence and communication style in Italian politics focusing on the women elected to the XVIII Legislature. We intend to demonstrate that there is a relationship between gender, politics and communication that on the one hand confirms the political gender gap, and on the other sheds light on new models of women's presence in politics.

Politics is still no place for women!

Before turning to the data, it is necessary to set them against the backdrop of a few macro-theories about the relationship between women and politics.

The first of these perspectives is that advanced by liberal and normative feminism, which holds that achieving gender equity is a question of reaching a critical mass of women in public positions. In this vision, more women at the top in society should be able to change the forms of power and correct the current gender imbalance. This is the line of thought used to justify all of the legal measures laid down to rectify situations involving clear gender disparities. The question is controversial: a series of studies have shown that a larger number of women in elected assemblies has not brought about a gender-oriented shift in politics (Childs and Krook 2008; Towns 2003).

Another approach, though still in the normative camp, is that of substantive representation, which holds that if the goals of gender policies are to be met, women must make a joint effort in their support. In the past, the more women have been able to form alliances – across the aisle, if need be – the more successful they have been. Another analysis of women's political careers points out that women not only must demonstrate that they are better in order to reach the top, but once they have done so they are continually called upon to show that they are qualified. And in the process, female solidarity frequently goes by the wayside. This is what Jamieson (1995) has called the double bind effect, where women leaders must show that they are highly competitive so as not to be considered weak; but acting decisively, far from reinforcing a positive view of their abilities, can draw their male colleagues' criticism. Typical leadership traits such as assertiveness, stubbornness and determination that are seen as strengths in a man are regarded as drawbacks in a woman (Campus 2010, 35).

This is an aspect of gender issues that is well illustrated by what is known as the 'Matilda effect' (Rossiter 1993). The disadvantages facing women in their careers are more likely to create a multiplier effect than whatever advantages they may have. Even though they often start on an equal footing with men, women fall behind in terms of earnings and prestige as their careers proceed.[10] A 2013 ISTAT survey[11] provides a clear picture of women's persistent difficulties in succeeding in STEM fields. This is a far cry from the cyber-feminism hoped for by Haraway (1991) who, believing the Internet's structure to be gender-neutral, urged women to occupy its spaces. There can be no doubt that the Web era has changed how women communicate with each other and build their

networks, or that this has had a substantial impact on how they participate in the public and private spheres (Harcourt 1999). Nevertheless, social media are still largely shaped by men – as witnessed by the many forms of sexism that fill the Web (Lumsden and Harmer 2019) – though women generally use them more.[12]

Such is the background for the situation in Italy, where there are still few women in the country's institutions and politics. As Carbone and Fatima (2019) point out, the unequal gender distribution of leadership positions is an unresolved issue. Though the last three decades have seen improvements in the proportions of women in national institutions, and even more so in local institutions, this has largely been the result of introducing quotas. As regards political responsibilities, however, there has been little change. Women continue to hold minor offices and occupy subordinate roles, and when they succeed in rising to leadership, they show little or no inclination to leverage their position to advocate for gender issues.

It will happen in Italy

Before going into the details of our findings, a few words are in order concerning the methodology used in this first part of the study.[13] Using official biographies as a source, we collected data about the previous careers and institutional roles of the women elected to the XVIII legislature from the major parties. We then compared these data with their parties' gender visions as expressed in the political platforms issued for the 2018 national elections and the European Parliament elections in 2019. As the 2018 electoral law called for gender balancing,[14] our first question was whether this law had been successful or, if not, how far it had fallen short of its goal. We then compared the number of women elected with their actual weight in terms of the appointments assigned to them, and with their parties' positions on gender issues.

It has been shown that Italian voters are generally less likely to elect a woman candidate than a man, (see Pansardi & Pinto, and Legnante & Regalia, in this issue). One indicator of the persistent disadvantage women face in politics is thus the female electoral success index developed in a study by the Department of Institutional Reform together with the Italian National Research Council. Since 2000, female candidates' success rate has been measured in elections at all levels of government. Though the situation is improving, chiefly as a result of electoral reforms targeting gender disparities, men's political choices and capacity for engagement still make them more likely to be elected.[15] The problem is compounded by the fact that politics channel very few resources into narrowing the gender gap, as Feo and Piccio point out in this issue. The data also show significant differences across election levels (local or national) and geographic areas (Farina and Carbone 2016). Women candidates stand a better chance of being elected to local office and in the northern regions, but on the whole they still struggle to win votes, even from the female electorate.[16]

An analysis of vote tallies shows that parties did not contribute equally to the XVIII Legislature's overall improvement in gender parity (see Table 1). In percentage terms, the best results were shown by the Movimento 5 Stelle (Five-star Movement, M5s) and the worst by Fratelli d'Italia (Brothers of Italy, FdI) and the Lega (League). The Partito Democratico (Democratic Party, PD)[17] and Forza Italia (FI) adhered to the law's require-ments with similar outcomes. The only outlier here was Emma Bonino's group, Più

Table 1. Female representation in Parliament.

	Seats	No. of women elected	% of total seats won by women	Women in leadership roles
Fratelli d'Italia (FdI)	52	15	29%	13%
Forza Italia – Berlusconi Presidente (FI)	160	57	36%	16%
Lega – Salvini Premier (Lega)	183	56	31%	7%
Movimento 5 Stelle (M5s)	322	139	43%	4%
Partito Democratico (PD)	168	58	35%	10%

Europa (More Europe, +EU), which we will consider only in this section, as it was able to elect only one woman out of four – Bonino herself, to the Senate – and three men to the Chamber. While this party is important as a paradigmatic case of a political group headed by a woman, it is not significant in general terms, and unfortunately is continuing to lose ground.

In terms of selecting women for leadership roles in the legislature,[18] FI showed itself to be the party most open to having women in power, while FdI, though headed by a woman, assigned almost all of its prime positions to men. The M5s, though it was the party that sent the largest number of women to Parliament, side-lined them in minor positions, while the PD, which ideologically should be the most attentive to gender parity, did not show nearly as much attention in handing out appointments.

To determine how concerned the parties are with gender politics, we proceeded to analyse the platform statements put forward by the major Italian parties[19] for the 2018 national elections and the European Parliament elections in 2019 and their internal statements (see Sampugnaro and Montemagno in this issue). Specifically, our goal was to find out how and to what extent gender issues are considered in the platforms, and thus gauge what Carbone and Fatima (2019) call the tension between formal and substantive representation. Though party platforms now have almost no repercussions on actual policy,[20] they continue to be statements of the party's values and as such are useful in assessing how consistent its political choices are. We thus analysed the platforms[21] issued by the major parties, seeking crucial passages that would enable us to pinpoint each party's stance on gender issues.

On the whole, the space devoted to these issues is fairly limited, and it is immediately apparent that there is a polarization between a more conservative camp that takes a rather traditional view of women's place, and another that is more progressive, at least rhetorically. In the middle ground between these two poles, attitudes fit less readily into the classic categories (see Table 2).

FI ran fewer women for office and has a more conservative platform, but assigned many of its organizational posts to women. Though the party revolves very much around its leader, Silvio Berlusconi, whose record as regards women's issues is hardly praiseworthy (Sarlo and Zajczyk 2012, 105), its de facto political leadership in this period was in female hands. In addition to the presidency of the Senate (held by Maria Elisabetta Casellati née Alberti), FI's top ranks are largely peopled by women, who are much in the public eye at a time when the party is losing its appeal to voters[22] and Berlusconi's popularity is fading.

The League offers a very macho political vision, perfectly embodied by its leader Matteo Salvini. Gender issues are essentially absent from its party platforms, which

Table 2. Gender in party platforms.

Election	2018 National Election	2019 EP Election
Fratelli d'Italia	Gender issues considered in connection with protection for mothers.	Gender issues considered in connection with protection for mothers.
Lega – Salvini Premier	Only reference is in the section on 'Social Policies', in connection with the topic of the family and care.	No reference to gender issues.
Forza Italia – Berlusconi Presidente	No reference to gender issues.	No reference to gender issues.
Movimento 5 Stelle	No reference to gender issues.	No reference to gender issues.
Partito Democratico	Gender issues considered in a specific section entitled, 'For a culture of civil rights and equal opportunities'.	Gender issues considered in the section headed, 'Wage parity for men and women'.
Più Europa con Emma Bonino	Gender issues considered in the section headed, 'More Rights'.	Gender issues considered in the section headed, 'The Europe that loves rights'.

centre on traditional family values. The party's few female legislators keep a low profile and are mostly underlings in the organizational hierarchy. The only exception is Giulia Bongiorno, a prominent criminal lawyer who served as Minister for the Public Administration in the League/M5s coalition government, but has had no political career outside the League. Her commitment to gender issues is well known; as minister, she sponsored the Codice Rosso (Red Code) bill which amended provisions for protecting victims of violence against women in the Code of Criminal Procedure. Another noteworthy exception among the League's female cohorts is Lucia Borgonzoni, who became something of a media darling during her bid for the governorship of Emilia Romagna but disappeared from the public scene after her defeat at the polls.

FdI and +EU are the only two parties headed by a woman, Giorgia Meloni and Emma Bonino respectively: two characters, and two political outlooks, that are polar opposites. FdI is a highly contradictory case. Though it is Italy's most conservative and right-leaning party, it has handed the reins to a woman who is very active and popular on social media, while its internal organization is overwhelmingly male and its stance on gender openly champions the idea of the woman as wife and mother. Giorgia Meloni herself is a living embodiment of contradictions as a single mother who moves in male-dominated circles and defends the integrity of the traditional Catholic family.

+EU, on the other hand, is a party formed in the liberal tradition and headed by an icon of the fight for women's civil rights (with the legislation on divorce and abortion of the 1970s and 1980s among her accomplishments) who nevertheless refuses to be labelled as a representative of her gender. Apart from the charismatic figure of Emma Bonino, however, the party's upper echelons and organization are entirely male. Even with female leadership, it would seem that the form taken by the party line does not change.

We next come to the M5s, whose stance is not easy to unpack. In terms of equal opportunities, it has a post-ideological approach (Belluati 2018) which seems to be even-handed in assigning opportunities to men and to women – as can be seen from the number of women in the party who ran, were elected, and received positions in the government – but is far less so in the Movement's internal organization. Though it is the party that elected the largest number of women, its platform ignores gender issues.

Lastly, we have the PD, whose public performance is at odds with its declared openness on equal opportunities. Though its platform devotes more attention to gender issues

than that of any other party, its electoral mechanisms and ways of assigning posts show a certain degree of contradiction.

Social media and gender politics. New opportunities for politics?

Research on the propagation of gender stereotypes in politics and elsewhere has confirmed that the problem is aggravated by how women's participation in politics is represented in the media (Buonanno 2015). Times, however, have changed, with the decline of traditional parties and, above all, the transformations that the Web has brought to political communication.

The question we must ask at the outset is whether the new forms of politics in Italy – those spawned by Web politics (Bentivegna 2012; Mosca 2012) – are an opportunity for gender politics in terms of representation and representativeness. The Web, precisely because it enables old and new forms of communication to hybridize, is an excellent vantage point for observing new trends, both in the thematization of gender issues and in the new opportunities for women's visibility and engagement in politics (Capecchi 2006; Bracciale 2010). The situation, however, is ambivalent: while the Web's open structure can offer new possibilities for subjects and topics to gain attention, it at the same time contributes to reproducing and accentuating inequalities between social groups (van Dijck, Poell, and De Waal 2018). The field of political communication has changed radically, and it is thus important to understand whether significant changes have also affected the world of Italian female politicians.

Accordingly, our second line of inquiry focused on the political space accorded to women on the Web in Italy. Our basic question was whether, and how, women use digital media and, if they do, whether their use differs from men's. To investigate the background and establish an indicator of the link between gender, media and politics, our first step was to compare the Web accounts and channels of the men and women elected to the XVIII Legislature. We checked whether each MP maintains an institutional or private Facebook, Twitter or Instagram profile, a YouTube channel or a private website, using this information to construct a composite index (range 0–5). Though it was not possible to estimate each MP's effective level of Web use from this index, it serves as a baseline indicator for comparing the men and women elected from the five major parties and determining which were most active. The latter, defined as those with at least three social media accounts or Web pages, were then compared to cast light on usage strategies and significant gender differences.

As regards gender, our findings are fairly positive: the women MPs have good Web potential, at times better than that of the men (see Table 3). On the whole, the generational aspect as indicated by average age seems to have no impact, while political affiliation would appear to make a difference in the approach taken to the Web. The data confirm that nearly all MPs have a Facebook profile (around 90% of current members) and a Twitter account (82%), as these social media are now in general use. Instagram, which is becoming increasingly popular worldwide,[23] is used chiefly by the younger MPs. Those with a YouTube channel and a personal website are in the minority, as managing a site is associated with a more traditional view of the Web, and YouTube is not a favoured vehicle for political messaging.

Table 3. MPs, senators and Web use.

	Total Chamber and Senate	With at least three accounts	With Facebook account	With Instagram account	With Twitter account	With YouTube channel	With personal website	Average age
Female members								
Forza Italia – Berlusconi Presidente	57	79%	95%	81%	88%	9%	51%	51
Fratelli d'Italia	15	73%	93%	67%	80%	27%	47%	50
Lega – Salvini Premier	56	66%	95%	80%	70%	0%	13%	48
Movimento 5 Stelle	139	68%	100%	73%	78%	9%	32%	42
Partito Democratico	58	84%	98%	76%	95%	12%	64%	50
Male members								
Forza Italia – Berlusconi Presidente	103	61%	85%	57%	81%	5%	36%	57
Fratelli d'Italia	37	84%	100%	84%	89%	8%	54%	52
Lega – Salvini Premier	127	64%	94%	76%	73%	6%	28%	47
Movimento 5 Stelle	183	72%	97%	76%	78%	12%	38%	44
Partito Democratico	111	80%	93%	66%	91%	15%	59%	52

Our comparison of men's and women's Web channel use by political party paints a varied picture. Contrary to expectations, the M5s does not show the best performance even though its MPs' average age is lower. There are fewer prominent figures among the women, who in general manage fewer accounts than their male colleagues. The worst showing is made by the League, whose visibility on social media is almost entirely monopolized by Matteo Salvini. Here again, the party's women compare unfavourably with the men, and none have a sizable social media presence. The PD outstrips the other parties in social media activity, particularly among its female MPs, many of whom are even more active than the men. A large number of the party's women have a good relationship with the Web, and many are also heavily involved in gender issues. Examples include Monica Cirinnà, sponsor of the law on same-sex couples, Laura Boldrini, a front-line fighter for women's rights and the frequent target of sexist insults, Maria Elena Boschi (now part of IV), a staunch supporter of Matteo Renzi and former Minister for Equal Opportunities, and Lucia Annibali, who became a symbol of the fight against gender violence after being disfigured in an acid attack by an ex-lover. The same can be said of FI, where the group of women who are very active on the Web include Mara Carfagna, former Minister for Equal Opportunities in the Berlusconi government, Mariastella Gelmini, former Minister of Education in the same government, and Licia Ronzulli, now Berlusconi's personal assistant. The most unusual case is that of FdI: though its young leader, Giorgia Meloni, is a fixture both online and off; though the eccentric society figure Danielà Santanchè is a regular on talk shows, and though Carolina Varchi, who co-founded the party together with Meloni, is very active on social media, the rest of the women elected under the party banner are practically never heard from anywhere on the Web.

Table 4. Women's political communication styles.

	Total	Average age	Gender politics	Official positions	FdI	Lega	FI	M5s	PD
The Media mix	10	47	18%	28%	14%	11%	4%	10%	8%
The pro-Social media	33	45	6%	10%	**57%**	**56%**	4%	39%	19%
The traditional media	**75**	49	**47%**	**52%**	29%	33%	**89%**	**49%**	**65%**
The no-media	5	55	29%	10%	0	0	4%	2%	8%
N	123	48	17	29	7	9	27	41	37

It would thus seem that whether women make extensive use of the Web's potential depends either on their personal resources or the political setting of which they are a part.

This, however, is still not especially illuminating. For a better understanding of what we might call the female style of political visibility, it was necessary to focus on a subsample of 123 prominent women in the Chamber and Senate selected from among the total of 343 female legislators on the basis of the following criteria:

(1) Public standing, defined as holding an official position in the party, government or Parliament, or having held one between 2018 and 2019.
(2) Visibility in the public debate, determined by searching the *Corriere della Sera* news database for 2018 and 2019.
(3) Popularity on the Web and social media activity, defined as having at least three profiles and measured as of November 2019 using the KPIs provided by the Fanpage Karma social media analytics tool (e.g. Facebook engagement rate and number of fans).
(4) Commitment to current and past gender issues, as indicated by the legislators' official Chamber and Senate biographies and personal websites.

Women who met at least one of these criteria were included in the subsample. As around two thirds of the total sample did not satisfy even a single condition, we can say that the women in the XXVIII Legislature are a rather lacklustre group. These four dimensions were used to construct a typology of the different political styles adopted by women (Table 4):

The Media mix

This profile includes a small number of women legislators and takes its name from the fact that their strategy for achieving public visibility is based on a mix of online and offline forms of communication.[24] Some are noted political figures who are very present on the public scene because of the offices they hold and their media exposure, though not all are engaged in gender issues. These women use communication in the postmodern sense (Norris 2000), i.e. more to emphasize their own personal role than to push the party line or express support for specific issues. They include opinion leaders such as Giorgia Meloni (FdI), undoubtedly the female politician who is most active in the public debate and on social media. On the PD side, we find Laura Boldrini (PD), former Speaker of the lower house, who is heavily engaged in women's rights issues and often at the centre of sexist attacks on social media; the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, Paola De Micheli (PD); the former Minister of Health, Beatrice Lorenzin (PD), and the energetic

Teresa Bellanova (formerly PD and now with IV). In the M5s, the most popular and active women are Paola Taverna, Laura Castelli and Giulia Grillo, all somewhat gaffe-prone and frequently pilloried for their unguarded statements. The League has only one Mixer: Lucia Borgonzoni, who ran for governor of Emilia Romagna but who has dropped out of sight since her defeat in that election. In FI, the most active according to our parameters is Mara Carfagna, who some see as the party's future leader once Berlusconi bows out.

The pro-Social media

This is a new profile for women in politics. Those with such a profile are less present on the traditional public scene but defter in their use of online communication. These women generally have four or five social media accounts with sizable fan bases and high levels of engagement.[25] They tend to be younger than the average female legislator, and are found in the more populist parties such as the M5s and the League, whose elected representatives are generally younger but, as we have seen, include fewer women. Political engagement on gender issues is not one of their hallmarks. There are no well-known names in this category, demonstrating that public visibility is built up from a combination of different elements, and that basing strategy on social media alone is not sufficient.

The traditionals media

This, by contrast, is the most numerous category, with 75 members. These are the women who are most active in Parliament's institutional life and in the public debate, as can be seen from their newspaper coverage. They are also present on the Web, but more pragmatically, without any particular strategy for its use, and their engagement rates and fan bases are not very large. This is the group that holds, and has held, the most institutional offices, often being appointed across party lines. They show a fair level of commitment to gender issues. Theirs is a more old-school brand of politics, more attentive to pragmatic matters than to political messaging, and their potential for visibility is liked to their public role and circumstances. In general, they do not seem particularly interested in reaching a larger audience through the targeted, strategic use of communication and social media. This group includes Maria Elena Boschi as well as Valeria Valente and Roberta Pinotti (PD), both former ministers in the Renzi and Gentiloni governments; Gulia Bongiorno (League), a successful criminal attorney active in questions of gender violence and former minister in the first Conte government; Maria Elisabetta Casellati (FI), current president of the Senate; Michela Brambilla, Licia Ronzulli and Maria Stella Gelmini (FI), all stalwart Berlusconi allies.

The no-media

This category consists of a small number of women legislators, often older than the others. Though they do not hold prominent offices or appointments across party lines, they are heavily committed to questions involving gender. They make little or no use of social media, are absent from the public debate, and represent an untapped

potential as regards women's issues. The better-known names include Barbara Pollastrini (PD), Stefania Prestigiacomo (FI) and Lucia Annibali (formerly PD and now with IV).

Conclusions

Several transformative models of gender relations have alternated on the Italian political scene, but none has yet been able to make significant progress in loosening the male and masculinized grip on political and institutional power. Though time has brought major advances for women in politics (McBride and Mazur 2010) that have set virtuous cycles in motion (Squires 2007; Krook 2009), the situation is still critical. Politics continues to be a man's world, a world where women appear but fleetingly. The persistent gender gap cannot be blamed simply on the failure of feminist strategies, but is the consequence of power struggles waged piecemeal and often ineffectively (Celis and Lovenduski 2018). Hence the need for a new problematization of women's representation in politics and of achieving equal opportunities as a vital piece of the political mosaic.

The backdrop to all this is an increasingly liquid society (Bauman 2000) and a new, interconnected and disintermediated communication environment that is disrupting the structure of society and power (van Dijck, Poell, and De Waal 2018). We must thus return to the question of gender and how it relates to new forms of expression and gender-oriented participation (van Doorn and van Zoonen 2009; van Zoonen 2008).

The upheaval in political communication – now more social media-driven and disintermediated – has changed the scene, but not yet, as had been hoped for, women in the political and public arena. The Web's resources are not producing the desired opportunities because they are not fully understood, and few are able to use them skilfully. Though we have seen that Italy's female legislators are fairly well versed in the new forms of communication, they are less able to turn them to their own advantage. The few exceptions are those who have little interest in equal opportunities.

The profiles we analysed reveal a highly varied and composite phenomenology as regards equal opportunities. Gender issues are less of a factor in women's political action, and are approached differently than in the past. This in itself would not be a problem, were we further along the path to gender parity.

The women who have gained prominence in Italian politics today are still too willing to tread the route mapped out by a male-dominated leadership. Though the historical moment is ripe for relaunching gender issues, and there is new potential for communicating them, there does not yet seem to have been any meaningful change of pace. To deal with women's issues and those linked to gender, more incisive thinking is needed about how women, as women, can make a mark on the public scene and take a guiding role in society.

Notes

1. See the latest UN report on women in politics https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2019/03/women-in-politics-2019-map (last accessed 12 April 2020).
2. The Global Gender Gap Index, which the World Economic Forum has measured since 2006, confirms that progress towards gender parity continues to be very slow in all four key areas

of education, health and survival, economy and politics, though there are marked differences from region to region. While the situation is somewhat better in the first two, which could be said to be more favourable to women 'by nature', power in the economy and politics is still firmly in male hands (The Global Gender Gap Report 2018 (http://www3. weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2018.pdf; last accessed 3 January 2020).

3. As regards gender parity in political representation, data published by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the worldwide organization of national parliaments, indicate that the average percentage of women representatives in the world's parliaments is increasing, passing from 11.3% in 1995 to 24.9% in 2020. (https://www.ipu.org/our-impact/gender-equality Last accessed 4 January 2020).

4. As part of working towards the 2030 Agenda, the Global Alliance on Media and Gender (GAMAG) – a UNESCO initiative launched in 2013 that brings together over 500 NGOs from around the world – has once again called upon its members to focus on the few opportunities available for women to take part in constructing public visibility, noting that even though twenty-five years have passed since the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action, the communication sector has still not done enough to close the gender gap.

5. A recent study by iKNOW Politics found that women in politics are attacked in the media more frequently than their male colleagues pretty much everywhere. See *#Shepersisted Women, Politics & Power in The New Media World*, Lucina di Meco, Global Fellow at The Wilson Centre/Fall 2019 (last accessed 2 March 2020).

6. See https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/chart/social-media-use-by-gender/ (Last accessed 28 February 2020).

7. Data from the thirteenth Censis report on communication (2016) confirm that women's Internet use has outstripped men's in Italy (13^ Rapporto Censis-Ucsi sulla comunicazione '*I media tra élite e popolo*'), as does the 2016 ISTAT multi-scope survey ('*Come cambia la vita delle donne – 2001–2014*').

8. See *Le Reti del terzo settore* (3rd ed. 2017), Forum Terzo Settore https://www.forumterzoset tore.it/files/2017 /12/ABSTRACT-RETI.pdf (Last accessed 12 April 2020).

9. See https://www.peaceinsight.org/conflicts/afghanistan/peacebuilding-organisations/riwps/ (last accessed 2 March 2020).

10. See 'The gender pay gap situation in the EU' https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/equal-pay/gender-pay-gap-situation-eu_en (last accessed 14 February 2020).

11. ISTAT, 19 December 2013, Cittadini e nuove tecnologie.

12. See Pew Research Centre, Internet & Technology https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/chart/social-media-use-by-gender/.

13. Data were collected by Roberta Satalino.

14. The issue of gender rebalancing in political representation was raised in the most recent electoral reform (the so-called Rosatellum), Law 165 of 2017.

15. Thanks to the quotas, the XVII Legislature logged the most significant increase to date in the number of women representatives (299 seats, or 30.1% of the total, went to women). For this reason, it was used as the basis for our analyses.

16. See https://www.irpps.cnr.it/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Sveglie_ rapportofinalePartePrima.pdf and (last accessed 3 February 2020).

17. The figures for the PD include those for Italia Viva (IV) under Matteo Renzi, which split from the party in September 2019 but was still with it at the time the tickets were formed.

18. These include institutional appointments (presidency of the Senate, deputy speakerships, committee chairs) and internal party positions (such as party secretaries, caucus chairpersons, deputy chairpersons and treasurers) held by the women elected for each individual party.

19. The following parties were chosen: Lega – Salvini Premier, Forza Italia, Fratelli d'Italia, Movimento 5 Stelle, Partito Democratico, Più Europa con Emma Bonino.

20. See the position paper by Marco Valbruzzi, Istituto Cattaneo http://www.cattaneo.org/wp-content/uploads /2018/02/Analisi-Istituto-Cattaneo-Analisi-dei-programmi-elezioni-2018-Valbruzzi.pdf (last accessed 4 January 2020).
21. The platforms were downloaded from the party websites.
22. In 2018, Forza Italia's vote share dropped to 14% from the 21% in the 2013 national elections.
23. See https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/04/10/share-of-u-s-adults-using-social-media-including-facebook-is-mostly-unchanged-since-2018/ (last accessed 12 April 2020).
24. The mixers are mentioned in at least 100 newspaper articles in 2 years, and have 4 or 5 profiles or Web channels and more than 1,500 fans.
25. The social media enthusiasts have garnered little attention in the press, but show excellent performance on the Web, with a Facebook engagement rate above 2% and more than 1,000 fans.

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Notes on contributor

Marinella Belluati is Associate Professor in the Department of Culture, Politics and Society at the University of Turin where she teaches Sociology of Communication and Media Analysis. She is the holder of the Jean Monnet module Communicating Europe (CoEUr) 2019–2021. She is course director ofthe Master's programme in Public and Political Communication. She is the local coordinator of the National research project (PRIN) 'Social representation of violence against women: the case of femicide in Italy'. She is also the Deputy Director of the online journal, *De Europa*, and member of the editorial board of the journal, *Problemi dell'Informazione* (Il Mulino). She has published several essays and articles about gender politics and gender representation, and about European communication.

ORCID

Marinella Belluati 🆔 http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8707-7355

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