

Ministerial Comebacks: Explaining Reselection and Promotion of Cabinet Members in Italy

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Abstract

Three cabinets (Conte I, Conte II, and Draghi) entered office during the 18th legislative term in Italy. In spite of the significant ideological differences between them, no full alternation of parties in government occurred. The largest party in parliament – the Five Star Movement – participated in all three cabinets, while the League and the Democratic Party took part in two of them (the League in the Conte I and Draghi, the Democratic Party in the Conte II and Draghi); other minor parties entered the Conte II and Draghi as well. Did party continuity lead to ministerial stability? This article puts the 18th legislative term in perspective, through a longitudinal comparison of all Italian partisan cabinets from 1994 to 2022 (15 cabinets). In particular, it aims to account for continuity and changes within the Italian ministerial elite across different cabinets, also controlling for the gendered aspect of cabinet reselections and promotions. It answers the following questions. What makes ministerial reselection likely? Do political and personal background count in being reappointed and promoted? Based on original data, the analysis shows that remarkable previous political experience, age, and time matter. In contrast, the type of portfolio held in cabinet and gender do not have a significant impact. In this context, the 18th legislative term appears in line with the general pattern, but it distances itself from other terms defined by party continuity across multiple cabinets. The article contributes to the debates about personnel turnover, representation, and policy-makers' stability in democratic cabinets.

1. Introduction

Political executives in parliamentary democracies are collective institutions made up of a prime minister (PM) and a number of senior ministers. Some of these ministers stay in office longer than others. Moreover, some cabinet members serve in multiple cabinets, while some serve just in one. This article deals with ministerial reselection across cabinets in Italy.

One of the key concerns of the comparative literature on ministerial careers in parliamentary systems has been the explanation of ministerial selection and deselection, with scholars focusing on both structural constraints and actors' strategies (e.g., Amorim Neto and Strøm 2006; Dowding and Dumont 2009, 2015). In this context, it has been observed that a person's social and political background, as well as gender, affects the likelihood of their becoming a minister (e.g., Blondel and Thiébaud 1991; Krook and



O'Brien 2012; Hallerberg and Wehner 2018). At the same time, strong prime ministers tend to dismiss cabinet members to reduce agency loss (Indriðason and Kam 2008), to tackle ministerial scandals (Berlinski et al. 2012), or to boost government popularity (Miwa 2018). The common denominator of this literature is that it concentrates on ministerial selection and deselection as discrete events or as parts of broader cabinet reshuffles *within one cabinet* (Helms and Vercesi 2022). What the relevant studies miss is to account for what fosters the *reselection* of a given minister in a new cabinet, even after a period out of office. As Blondel (1980: 196) observed already in 1980, many executive members stay 'close to the corridors of power after their downfall from high office, hoping to return to the [...] position later'. Reselection is more infrequent than 'one-shot selections' and, therefore, it needs to be studied as a phenomenon in itself, driven by specific political logics.

Admittedly, studies of elite circulation in democracy refer to this topic indirectly (Verzichelli 2018). Yet, there is a scholarship paucity about the individual-based determinants of ministerial returns (see Fleming 2021). This is surprising in light, on the one hand, of the important role that personal background and previous experience play in the definition of political career paths (Müller-Rommel et al. 2020) and, on the other hand, of the impact of ministerial profiles on political representation and government performance. For example, female ministers increase women's empowerment and cabinet stability (Barnes and Taylor-Robinson 2018; Franceschet et al. 2017; Krauss and Kroeber 2021), while social policy may depend on the partisanship and the gender of a minister (Atchison and Down 2009; Alexiadou 2015, 2020).

This article is an attempt to fill the literature gap, by comparing the personnel makeup of the three Italian cabinets of the 18th legislative term (2018-2022) to the previous ministerial teams (from 1994). The aim is to detect the factors that foster (or undermine) the continuity of the ministerial elite as well as ministerial promotions through government changes, when parties come back to power; the investigation pays attention to the possible gendered facet of these phenomena.

The driving research questions are the following. What explains the multiple appointments of ministers from the same party to different cabinets? Which individual characteristics make a minister more likely to return and to be promoted? The 18th legislative term is put into perspective because of its particular configuration. Compared to previous terms, this was characterized by the partial alternation in government of the three largest parties in parliament across three cabinets: the first cabinet leaning to the ideological right, the second to the left, and the third supported by all major parties in parliament. The three cabinets – Conte I, Conte II, and Draghi – were supported by different types of multiparty coalitions. While the Five Star Movement (*Movimento 5 Stelle*, M5S) was in office in all three cabinets, the League (*Lega*) was in office in the first and third and the Democratic Party (*Partito Democratico*, PD) in the latest two. In relation to other terms, the 18th legislative term allows an investigation into whether general explaining factors are time-dependent or if they also hold within one single legislative term, with large parties coming and going from the cabinet.

The Italian case is particularly suitable to answer the research questions. Indeed, Italy is a parliamentary democracy with frequent cabinet turnover. Since the breakdown of the first republican party system in the early 1990s, the country has been

characterized by the frequent alternation of parties in government and party system changes (Zucchini and Pedrazzani 2021); this phase has led to large ministerial turnover and diversity in the ministers' background (Verzichelli 2009; Musella et al. 2022).¹ The focus on the 1994-2022 period (made up of seven legislative terms) allows investigating ministerial reappointments between both consecutive and non-consecutive cabinets.

In the next section, we present the theoretical framework and infer four hypotheses, based on the extant literature. Subsequently, we describe our case study and the most relevant aspects of our interest. The fourth section introduces the dataset and tests the expectations. The final section provides a discussion and suggests research outlooks. Overall, the work contributes to knowledge of the selection patterns of top politicians in contemporary democracies and has implications for the debates about personnel turnover, representation, and policy-makers' stability in democratic cabinets.

2. Party Delegation, Ministerial Background and Reselection

In this article, we assume that ministers are ambitious politicians (Schlesinger 1966) interested in surviving in office and trying to avoid steps back down their career ladder. As stressed by Blondel (1991: 153), a ministerial position in parliamentary democracies is usually the 'apex of a political career and indeed a career *tout court* [...]. To cease being a minister is thus a form of decline'. Save, for example, for rare cases of promotion to a top executive regional office or to outstanding positions within supranational organizations, most ministers should be interested in being reappointed after leaving the cabinet. Moreover, they would probably prefer to be reappointed to prestigious ministerial portfolios, if not as prime ministers.²

Ministers' chances of getting the job are subordinate to the preferences of those who pick them. Although the prime minister is formally in charge of their selection, the true selectors (i.e., the principals) of the ministers (i.e., the agents) in coalition governments are their respective parties, embodied by party leaders (Andeweg 2000).³ These leaders are the ultimate selectors of their own party representatives in the cabinet (Bäck and Carroll 2020), whereas the prime minister has greater autonomy in selecting non-partisan ministers (Costa Pinto et al. 2018).⁴ In this context, (the prospect of) reselection is one of the most potentially incisive instruments that party leaders have to induce a minister to behave according to the party agenda, even after being appointed (Andeweg 2000: 389).

¹ Higher ministerial stability characterized the first decades of the republic (see Calise and Mannheimer 1982).

² We do not consider voluntary retirements. However, they are mostly dependent on the age of the outgoing minister and we control for this in the empirical analysis.

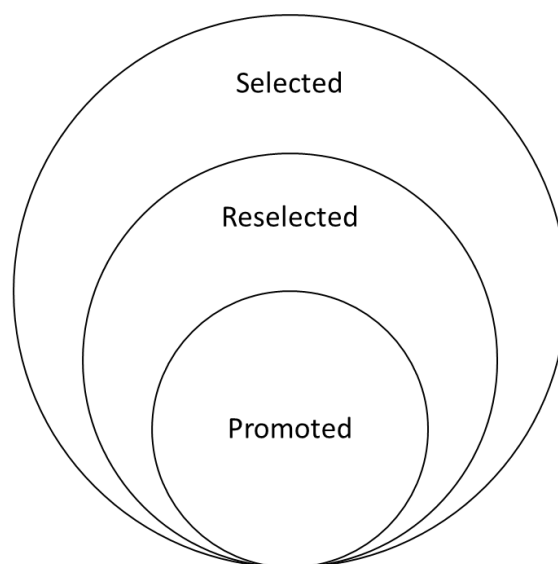
³ Party leaders will have to accommodate the requests of internal party factions in making their choices.

⁴ One should notice that, as long as party organizations are strong, political parties have – through their leaders – full control of ministerial selection. In contrast, the number of non-partisan technocrats increases when parties lose their grasp on society and electoral volatility is high (e.g., Emanuele et al. 2022; Helms 2022). The logic of technocratic appointments, however, does not coincide with the logic of partisan appointments. Factors such as commitment to policy change and international credibility, rather than party reliability, are of major importance (e.g., Alexiadou and Gunaydin 2019; Alexiadou et al. 2021). Moreover, the reappointments of non-partisan technocratic ministers are empirically exceptional events (Improta 2022). For our article's purposes, we thus develop our hypotheses referring only to partisan ministers.

Overall, party leaders want to avoid agency loss (Lupia 2003) and, for this reason, they try very carefully to select loyal agents who will act according to their preferences once in office. These leaders screen in advance the pool of ministerial candidates, by using their individual characteristics as proxies of party reliability. The most straightforward indicator of party reliability is a minister's previous service in the party and within political institutions, because it provides information about their behavior and compliance with the party agenda. This especially holds when the political position at issue has been held for a relatively long period of time (e.g., Samuels and Shugart 2010; Kaltenegger 2022; Kaltenegger and Ennser-Jedenastik 2022; Müller-Rommel et al. 2022).

Reselection is a particular form of selection (Verge and Astudillo 2019) and, just as the set of reselected ministers is a smaller subset of those selected at least once, the set of promoted cabinet members is a subset of those reselected (Figure 1). Therefore, reselection and promotion need to be investigated as distinguished phenomena, although they are strictly related to selection (and one another).

Figure 1. Set relation between the groups of selected, reselected, and promoted cabinet ministers



Source: own elaboration.

The same factors that favor the selection of a minister may have an impact on her or his reselection and promotion, but this conclusion cannot be taken for granted. More specifically, it is plausible that to be reselected is more demanding than being selected and that to be promoted is more difficult than being simply reselected. Due to the quantitatively poor literature on ministerial reselections, we use the existing empirical literature to develop our expectations inductively.

Building upon our theoretical considerations, we argue that political experience matters when it comes to being reselected.⁵ In this regard, Astudillo (2015) shows that a

⁵ As some scholars have shown, political experience also determines political performance in the cabinet (Grotz et al. 2021), which, in turn, may affect reselection. Other factors might theoretically count, such as territorial origin and kinship. However, we exclude them, since they either have little effect within the

politician's anchoring in their own party is usually an important condition to be at least considered for reselection in top executive positions. More specifically, Claveria and Verge's (2015) comparison of post-ministerial careers in 23 democracies finds that political seniority is a significant drive behind ministerial reselection. At the same time, Louwerse and Van Vonno (2022) observe that party leaders value parliamentary activism when it comes to assessing the performance of their own representatives. And an MP, to be active in parliament, needs to stay in office for a sufficient amount of time. These findings are in line with the results of Martocchia Diodati and Verzichelli (2017), who observe that extensive parliamentary experience and the occupation of a top party office boost one's probability of becoming minister in Italy.⁶ Moreover, Verge and Astudillo (2019) remind us that holding the party leadership is a key resource to be included in subsequent cabinets.

Therefore, our first hypothesis is that:

H1a: previous long parliamentary careers increase the likelihood of being reselected by one's own party in a new cabinet;

H1b: the previous occupation of a leadership position within the party increases the likelihood of being reselected by one's own party in a new cabinet.

Martocchia Diodati and Verzichelli (2017) also suggest that the core members of the executive are more frequently selected for higher offices in subsequent cabinets. On a similar note, studies on ministerial durability detect a positive relation between the occupation of a prestigious ministerial portfolio and survival in office (Hubert and Martinez-Gallardo 2008; Hansen et al. 2013; Bright et al. 2015). These observations fit with the general argument that those in office enjoy an 'incumbency advantage' related to future selections (Golden and Picci 2015).

Based on these findings, our second hypothesis is that:

H2: those who have held a prestigious ministerial portfolio in a previous government are more likely to be reselected by their own party in a new cabinet.

That said, there are plenty of studies showing that cabinets are gendered institutions, in that women meet less favorable career conditions than men. Although the number of women in government has sensibly grown in the most recent years in several countries and many cabinets apply a 'parity norm' (Beckwith and Franceschet 2022), women are still underrepresented and stay in office for shorter periods than their male counterparts (Fischer et al. 2012; Claveria 2014; Bright et al. 2015). Interestingly enough, cabinets are often subject to what Scherpereel et al. (2018) have called the 'see-saw effect'. This means that substantial increases in the presence of women in one cabinet are normally followed by 'backsliding' trends in the following one. Some studies suggest that this effect is likely to hold also among cabinets that are not consecutive. For example, Verge and Astudillo (2019: 733) find that party seniority matters only for men when it comes to returning to public office. Moreover, O'Brien (2015) observes that women are more likely than men to leave top political office once their party has suffered poor electoral performance.

Italian political system for the period under investigation or have become of minor importance over time (e.g., Smith 2018: 40; Tronconi and Verzichelli 2021).

⁶ In Italy, ministers may be also parliamentarians, but they do not have to be.

Coherently, we expect that:

H3: women are less likely than men to be reselected by their own party in a new cabinet.

Finally, it has been observed that, once entering government for the first time, it takes longer for women to reach higher prestigious positions than men (Kroeber and Hüffelmann 2021; Curtin et al. 2022). The existence of such gendered patterns of careers within cabinets leads to our fourth hypothesis:

H4: women are less likely than men to be promoted to more prestigious posts when reselected by their own party to serve in a new cabinet.

Before testing these hypotheses, we elaborate on the party attributes and ministerial composition of Italian cabinets from 1994 to 2022.

3. Cabinets and Coalitions in Italy, 1994-2022

Italy has had a long track record of cabinets since the end of the Second World War. According to official counting rules, the Meloni executive (the cabinet which is in office at the time of writing) is the 68th government of the Italian Republic. Although based on various coalitional formulas, all cabinets formed during the so-called ‘First Republic’ were centered upon Christian Democracy (*Democrazia Cristiana*, DC), which was a pivotal party in the party system (Verzichelli and Cotta 2000). After the breakdown of the traditional party system in the early 1990s and the shift to a ‘Second Republic’, Italy has been characterized by instability in the party system and the frequent alternation of parties in government (Zucchini and Pedrazzani 2021).

For about two decades since 1994, center-right and center-left coalitions competed at elections and alternated in power. In particular, the center-right cabinet headed by Silvio Berlusconi in 1994 was the first Italian government to not include the DC. This government was made up of Berlusconi’s Go Italy (*Forza Italia*, FI), the post-fascist National Alliance (*Alleanza Nazionale*, AN), the regional/separatist Northern League (*Lega Nord*, LN) and an ex-DC conservative segment. After Lamberto Dini’s technocratic cabinet (1995-1996) and new elections, the 13th legislative term (1996-2001) featured four center-left coalition cabinets. These cabinets included the main party of the left – the Democratic Party of the Left (*Partito Democratico della Sinistra*, PDS), then relabeled Left Democrats (*Democratici di Sinistra*, DS) – and the center-left heir of the DC – the Italian Popular Party (*Partito Popolare Italiano*, PPI), which later on became The Daisy (*La Margherita*) – together with several minor parties (Communists, Greens, etc.). Center-right parties came back to power in the 14th legislative term (2001-2006), with two consecutive executives led again by Berlusconi, while a center-left cabinet was formed in the 15th term (2006-2008). During the life of this cabinet, which relied upon a very large and extremely heterogeneous coalition, the DS and The Daisy merged into the PD. A new center-right coalition government with Berlusconi as PM took office after the 2008 elections, including the People of Freedom (*Popolo della Libertà*, PDL) – a party resulting from the merger between FI and AN – as well as the LN and the Movement for the Autonomies (*Movimento per le Autonomie*, MPA), the latter being a moderate party with an electoral base in Southern Italy. In November 2011, the Berlusconi IV cabinet was replaced by a technocratic government headed by Mario Monti.

The inconclusive results of the elections held in February 2013 seemed to mark the ‘end of bipolarism’ and brought about the formation of a ‘grand coalition’ (Letta cabinet), which was initially supported by the PD, PDL, Monti’s Civic Choice (*Scelta Civica*, SC) and the Christian democrats of the Union of the Center (*Unione di Centro*, UDC) (Chiaramonte and Emanuele 2014; Di Virgilio et al. 2015; Pasquino and Valbruzzi 2015). In November 2013 the PDL withdrew its support from the cabinet and relabeled itself FI, while a PDL segment remained loyal to the executive after naming itself New Center-Right (*Nuovo Centrodestra*, NCD). During the same legislative term, two other cabinets – very similar to each other – were formed in 2014 and 2016, featuring Matteo Renzi and Paolo Gentiloni as PMs (respectively) and including the PD as well as the NCD and other minor centrist parties.

The elections of March 2018 were once again the beginning of a turbulent phase (Chiaramonte et al. 2018). No party or pre-electoral coalition obtained an absolute majority of parliamentary seats, the anti-establishment M5S turned out to be the most voted party in Italy (winning as much as one-third of the popular vote), and the League surpassed for the first time its traditional coalition partner FI. After a long bargaining process, a new cabinet was sworn in in June 2018, with the M5S and the League as coalition partners and Giuseppe Conte as PM (Giannetti et al. 2018, 2022; Valbruzzi 2018). The so-called ‘yellow-green’ cabinet lasted for 15 months only, as a government crisis triggered by the League prompted the M5S to join the PD and the left-wing Free and Equal (*Liberi e Uguale*, LEU) into a new coalition government – Conte II cabinet – in September 2019 (Conti et al. 2020). Following tensions within the coalition, the Conte II cabinet was replaced in February 2021 by a sort of ‘national unity’ executive which was headed by Mario Draghi and involved all the main Italian parties except for Giorgia Meloni’s Brothers of Italy (*Fratelli d’Italia*, FDI). Draghi’s resignation in July 2022 led to early elections two months later.

Most cabinets during the 1994–2022 period relied upon legislative coalitions that were rather fragmented and quarrelsome. It can be said, however, that center-right executives were less fragmented in terms of the number of coalition members and enjoyed more stable parliamentary support if compared to center-left ones (Conti and Marangoni 2015). As we will show below, this does not imply that center-left cabinets were less stable in terms of ministerial personnel.

A particularly relevant trait of Italian executives during the Second Republic regards their size and ministerial structure: after reaching their maximum size in the 1987–1992 legislative term, Italian cabinets have gradually become smaller in terms of both the number of ministries and the overall number of ministerial departments. This has been especially true since 2001, when a single Ministry of Economy and Finance was created, and a number of other ministries were merged (Zucchini and Pedrazzani 2021).

As to patterns of portfolio allocation, since the end of the Second World War the distribution of ministerial posts has largely followed a proportionality norm (Gamson’s law) among coalition parties. In this regard, it should be noted that, during the Second Republic, the degree of proportionality was particularly high for those cabinets sworn in immediately after the elections and lower for those formed later during the legislative term (Cotta and Marangoni 2015).

A further peculiarity of the cabinets of the Second Republic concerns non-partisan ministers, who were rather exceptional during the previous period. After the appointment of a technocrat-led cabinet (McDonnell and Valbruzzi 2014) in 1993 (Ciampi), the number of non-partisan ministers increased throughout the Second Republic. Not only did two fully technocratic executives (Dini and Monti) take office, but also the partisan cabinets have often featured a number of non-partisan figures appointed to some key ministries – above all to the Ministry of Finance. Moreover, a non-partisan policy expert has been appointed to ministries such as Justice, Labor, and Health several times. Other important portfolios – for instance, the Interior, Defense, and Foreign Affairs – have instead been assigned usually to high-ranking and long-tenured party members (Verzichelli and Cotta 2018). Finally, non-partisan appointees are rarely found in ministerial posts without a portfolio, as the latter are often created to increase the spoils to be distributed to the government parties.

4. Empirical analysis

4.1. Data and Operationalization of Variables

To test the hypotheses put forward in Section 2, we built a dataset including all the partisan cabinets that were formed in Italy during the 1994-2022 period. Our data allow us to analyze patterns of ministerial reselection in the 18th legislative term (2018-2022) and to compare them to what can be observed during the previous six terms (1994-1996, 1996-2001, 2001-2006, 2006-2008, 2008-2013, 2013-2018). On the whole, we include all the 15 partisan cabinets that took office throughout the Italian ‘Second Republic’.⁷

The aim of this article is to understand what types of ministers – in terms of political experience, previous ministerial appointments and personal traits such as gender – are more likely to be reselected by their own party when the party comes back to power. To do this, a comparison is needed between the ministerial team of a given governmental party and the ministerial team of the same party in the next cabinet it participates in. Supposing that party X participates in government A and, some years later, enters government B (where A and B are either two consecutive or two non-consecutive cabinets), reselection occurs when a minister from party X appears in government A as well as in government B.⁸ For instance, Roberto Castelli, a member of the Northern League who was Minister of Justice in the Berlusconi II cabinet (2001-2005), was appointed to exactly the same portfolio in the next government his party participated in (Berlusconi III, 2005-2006). Similarly, Pier Luigi Bersani – Minister of Transport and Navigation in the Amato II cabinet (2000-2001) was reselected to serve as Minister of Economic Development when his party (Left Democrats – *Democratici di Sinistra*, DS) came back to power

⁷We follow the official counting of Italian governments, according to which there is a new cabinet whenever a new ministerial team is sworn in before the head of state. We do not consider the two fully non-partisan cabinets headed by Dini (1995) and Monti (2011).

⁸Our analysis is based on comparing pairs of cabinets. Hence, if party X participates in governments A, B and C and a minister from party X holds a portfolio in all three governments, we count an instance of reselection in the A-B pair and another instance of reselection in the B-C pair. For reasons of empirical tractability, in this article we do not consider multiple (re)appointments of the same minister. To control for the possibility that the same individual appears more than once in the dataset, in our regression analysis we cluster standard errors on the minister’s name (see below).

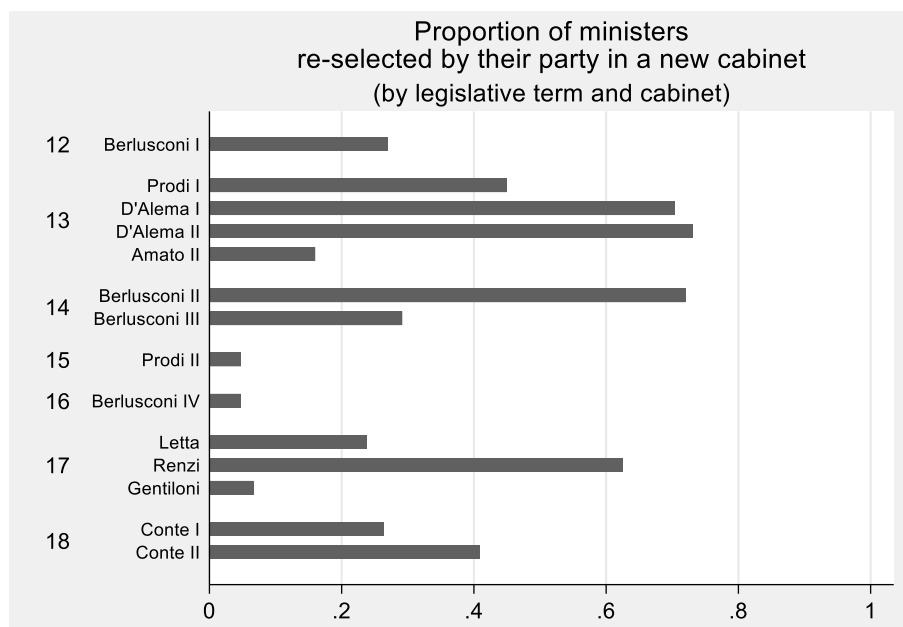
in May 2006 (Prodi II cabinet) after staying in the opposition for the entire 2001-2006 legislative term. Danilo Toninelli, who was Minister of Infrastructure and Transport in the Conte I cabinet (2018-2019), was instead not reselected as minister when his own party – the M5S – broke with the League and formed a new government (Conte II, 2019-2021) together with the PD and LEU.

Our dataset then includes the ministerial teams of those governing parties that came back to power during the 1994-2022 period.⁹ As we investigate ministerial reappointment at the individual level, the unit of analysis in the data is the individual minister. The total number of observations is 308.

The main dependent variable in our analysis indicates whether a minister is reselected in the next government their party takes part in. In particular, the dummy variable *Reselected* equals 1 if a minister of cabinet A is reappointed in the next cabinet (B) where the minister’s party appears (whether governments A and B are consecutive or not).¹⁰ Conversely, this variable is 0 if a minister is not reselected by the party when this enters a new cabinet.

On average, throughout the 1994-2022 period, more than one-third of Italian ministers (37% – that is, 115 out of 308) were reselected by their own party and appointed to a cabinet post the next time the party entered government. The standard deviation around the overall mean of 0.37 is 0.48, indicating a huge variation. To explore such variation, in Figures 2 and 3 we show how the dependent variable is distributed across legislative terms and cabinets, and across parties, respectively.

Figure 2. Patterns of ministerial reselection in Italy, 1994-2022, by legislative term and cabinet



Source: own elaboration.

⁹ Some Italian parties came back to office with a different name or after a party merger. For instance, FI and AN came back to government in 2008 after merging into the PDL.

¹⁰ Prime ministers are included. Moreover, we consider all types of ministerial appointments – that is, both with portfolio and without portfolios.

Figure 2 displays the average proportion of ministers reselected by their party in a new cabinet for the different cabinets covered in this study. The graph reveals that the ministerial personnel of some governments was largely reselected by the parties in the new governments they formed afterwards. This is the case of the two executives headed by Massimo D'Alema (formed in 1998 and 1999), the Berlusconi II cabinet (2001) and the Renzi cabinet (2014). Each of these cabinets was followed by a very similar cabinet during the same legislative term, with the new cabinet resembling the previous one not only in terms of party composition, but also in terms of ministerial personnel. Indeed, the governing parties of these four cabinets reselected as ministers more than 60% (on average) of their ministerial team. In contrast, ministerial reselection was very limited (much less than 10%) in the case of the parties that were members of three cabinets: Prodi II (2006), Berlusconi IV (2008) and Gentiloni (2016). For example, if we consider the Gentiloni cabinet we note that the PM and 12 ministers belonged to the PD. Of these 13 PD members, only Dario Franceschini obtained a cabinet position when the PD came back to power in 2019 (Conte II cabinet).¹¹

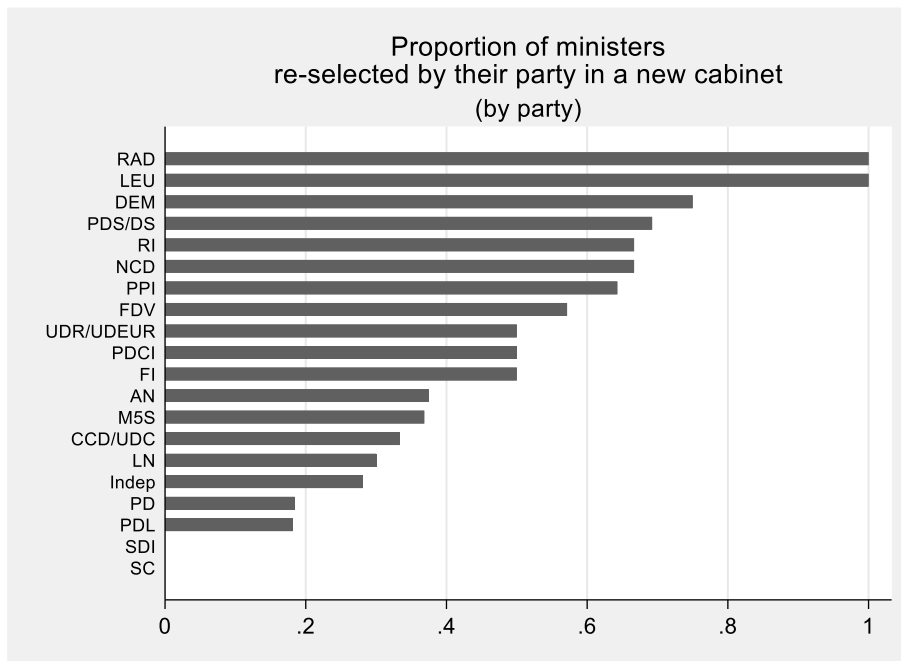
In terms of ministerial reselection, the cabinets of the 18th legislature are in between the two 'extremes' and closer to the overall mean. With regard to the Conte I executive, just one-fourth of the ministers were reappointed by their own party in the governments that followed. In particular, the M5S reselected three of its nine-person team when entering the Conte II cabinet: Giuseppe Conte (who remained PM), Luigi Di Maio (who went from being Deputy PM, Minister of Economic Development and Minister of Labor and Social Policies to being Minister of Foreign Affairs) and Alfonso Bonafede (who remained Minister of Justice). The League reselected only one of its ministers when coming back to power in the Draghi government: Erika Stefani, who was Minister of Regional Affairs and Autonomies under Conte I and Minister of Disabilities under Draghi. Moreover, the Minister of Environment Sergio Costa – a non-partisan figure at the time of the formation of the Conte I cabinet – was reappointed to the same position in the Conte II cabinet. As for the Conte II cabinet, we note that 41% of its ministerial personnel received a cabinet post in the Draghi executive. More precisely, three of the nine ministers who belonged to the PD at the time of the formation of the Conte II cabinet were reselected in the Draghi cabinet: Dario Franceschini, Lorenzo Guerini and Elena Bonetti.¹² Similarly, the M5S reappointed four of its ten ministers: Luigi Di Maio, Stefano Patuanelli, Fabiana Dadone and Federico D'Incà. In addition, the only minister from LEU (Roberto Speranza) was reappointed to the Health portfolio in the Draghi government. Finally, the independent Luciana Lamorgese was Minister of Interior in both the Conte II and the Draghi cabinet. These figures seem to indicate that, in a legislature characterized by different types of government coalitions and partial alternation in government of the three largest parties, ministerial reselection took place only to a limited extent. The M5S, the League and the PD reappointed only a few of their outgoing ministers in the next governments they participated in, presumably as a way to signal discontinuity with the prior government and to present a ministerial team that was more

¹¹ Franceschini was given the same ministership (Culture and Tourism) in the two cabinets. Quite interestingly, Franceschini was reselected three times by the PD, as he served as Minister of Culture in the Renzi, Gentiloni, Conte II and Draghi cabinets.

¹² Elena Bonetti actually left the PD a couple of weeks after the formation of the Conte II cabinet, when a PD faction broke with the party to become Italy Alive (Italia Viva, IV).

compatible with the ‘new’ coalition partners. This pattern is especially visible in the case of the M5S, which took part in all three cabinets of the 18th legislature and reappointed less than half of its ministers when turning from the Conte I to the Conte II executive and from the Conte II to the Draghi executive.

Figure 3. Patterns of ministerial reselection in Italy, 1994-2022, by party



Source: own elaboration.

Figure 3 reports the average proportion of ministers reselected by their party in a new cabinet, for the different Italian parties that were government members in the 1994-2022 period. Although there does not seem to be a clear pattern in terms of party size, we can note that two small parties are the most prone to reselecting their ministers: the radicals (RAD), which were members of the Prodi II cabinet and reselected Emma Bonino in the Letta cabinet, and LEU, which appointed Roberto Speranza in the Conte II cabinet and again in the Draghi cabinet. In contrast, two large parties such as PD and PDL reselected their ministers only to a limited extent. Quite interestingly, the main predecessor of the PD in the 1990s – the PDS, which then became DS – used to reselect its ministers much more often than the PD. Similarly, the two parties which merged into the PDL – FI and AN – reselected their ministers more than the PDL. Let us also note that two minor parties such as the Italian Social Democrats (*Socialisti Democratici Italiani*, SDI) and SC did not reselect their ministerial personnel across the cabinets they participated in (D’Alema I, Amato II and Prodi II for the former, and Letta and Renzi for the latter). As to the other parties, we observe that the M5S and the (Northern) League display a reselection record that is not far from the overall mean: 37% and 30%, respectively.

After such a descriptive account of the dependent variable, we now turn to the operationalization of the other variables included in our analysis. With regard to the independent variables, H1a and H1b posit that ministers are more likely to be reselected by their own party in a new cabinet if they have sat in parliament for a long time and if

they have been party leader in the past, respectively. To test H1a we counted the number of legislative terms that a minister spent in parliament (sitting in the Chamber of Deputies or in the Senate) before being appointed as a minister for the first time. The resulting variable is called *Parliamentary experience*. As for H1b, we created a dummy variable named *Party leader*, whose value is 1 when a minister was leader of the party in the past, and 0 otherwise.¹³

According to H2, those who have previously held a prestigious ministerial portfolio are more likely to be reappointed by their own party in a new cabinet. To test this hypothesis, we classified ministerial portfolios according to their importance and identified five top positions: Prime Ministership, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Economy, and Ministry of Labor.¹⁴ The resulting variable – the dummy *Prestigious portfolio* – equals 1 if a minister holds one of the top five cabinet positions in government A.

The last two hypotheses we formulated deal with women's chances of being reselected and promoted to more prestigious cabinet positions. To empirically evaluate H3, according to which female ministers are less likely than their male colleagues to be reselected by the own party in a new cabinet, we created a dummy called *Woman* (1 for female ministers, and 0 for male ministers). Testing H4 requires the creation of a second dependent variable. According to this hypothesis, female ministers are less likely than males to be promoted to more prestigious posts when they are reselected by their own party to serve in a new cabinet. To operationalize promotion, we created a dummy variable coded as 1 when a minister holds a non-top portfolio (see above) in cabinet A and is reselected to hold a top portfolio in the next cabinet (B) where the minister's party appears. This variable, which we call *Promoted*, is equal to 0 in all other situations.

In the analysis, we controlled for a set of factors – at the individual, party, and cabinet level – that can influence patterns of ministerial reselection. At the individual level, we introduced *Age*, which corresponds to the minister's age at the time when their party enters a new cabinet. At the party level, we took into account the fact that, all else being equal, the reselection of any minister can be particularly hard if the party controls a small number of cabinet portfolios when entering a new cabinet. We hence included *Party share*, measuring the share of cabinet posts controlled by the minister's party in the new government. Finally, at the cabinet level we accounted for the fact that a minister's reappointment becomes less and less likely to occur the longer the time between government A and government B. In particular, we incorporated the variable *Time between*, which counts the number of years between the starting year of the cabinet where the minister appears and the starting year of the next cabinet where the minister's party appears. Descriptive statistics for all the variables are provided in Table 1.

¹³ We attribute 1 even if the party was different from the current one.

¹⁴ When more than one portfolio deals with the economy (e.g., Ministry of Treasury and Ministry of Finance), we consider all these portfolios among the top portfolios. The classification of prestige portfolio is based on Bergman et al. (2021).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

Variables	Mean	SD	Min	Max	N
Dependent variables:					
Reselected	0.37	0.48	0	1	308
Promoted	0.02	0.14	0	1	308
Independent variables:					
Parliamentary experience	1.73	1.82	0	10	308
Party leader	0.12	0.33	0	1	308
Prestigious portfolio	0.24	0.43	0	1	308
Woman	0.20	0.40	0	1	308
Control variables:					
Age	56.58	10.49	33	83	308
Party share	0.29	0.19	0	0.68	308
Time between	3.32	2.33	1	10	308

Source: own elaboration.

4.2. Analysis and Results

Turning from a descriptive analysis to an explanatory one, we now present the multivariate logistic regression models that we used to test the hypotheses discussed in Section 2. In particular, we ran two logistic regression models. One with *Reselected* as dependent variable, which allows us to test H1a, H1b, H2 and H3 (Model 1). And one with *Promoted* as dependent variable, allowing us to test H4 (Model 2). While Model 1 uses all the observations in our dataset, Model 2 uses a subsample of the data (that is, only those ministers who are reselected in the next cabinet where their party participates). In both models, standard errors are clustered on the minister's name. Coefficients are reported in Table 2. Note that coefficients are expressed as odds ratios, where the odd is defined as the probability that an event – in our case, reselection or promotion of a minister – will occur, divided by the probability that the event will not occur. The odds ratio compares two odds, computed at different covariate values. In the table, the odds ratios indicate how the probability of reselection (or promotion) changes for a one-unit change in the independent variable of interest.

Starting from Model 1, it can be noted that our first two hypotheses are supported by the data on Italian cabinets in the 1994-2022 period. In particular, a minister's probability of being reselected by their own party to serve as minister in a new cabinet increases if the minister has a long parliamentary career (H1a) and if they have been leader of the party in the past (H1b). More precisely, an odds ratio of 1.162 on *Parliamentary experience* indicates that each additional legislative term spent in parliament before a first ministerial appointment increases a minister's chance of being reselected by their own party in a new cabinet by 16%. At the same time, having served as party leader in the past

more than doubles a minister's chance of being reselected in a new government the next time the party comes back to power.¹⁵

Table 2. Determinants of ministers' reselection and promotion in Italy, 1994-2022.

	Model 1 (reselection)	Model 2 (promotion)
Parliamentary experience	1.150 * (0.086)	2.295 ** (0.936)
Party leader	2.249 ** (0.905)	2.203 (1.879)
Prestigious portfolio	1.332 (0.472)	
Woman	0.891 (0.305)	0.318 (0.417)
Age	0.960 *** (0.012)	0.936 (0.088)
Party share	0.898 (0.693)	2.409 (8.800)
Time between	0.749 *** (0.050)	1.673 (0.584)
Constant	9.835 *** (6.809)	0.031 (0.090)
Number of observations	308	115
Log pseudolikelihood	-181.72	-16.31

Notes: Logistic regression models with standard errors clustered on ministers' name. Table entries are odds ratios, with standard errors in parentheses. Statistical significance: * p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.
Source: own elaboration.

Our analysis does not lend support to H2 and H3, as the coefficients on *Prestigious portfolio* and *Woman* in Model 1 do not reach standard levels of statistical significance. This implies that the probability of being reappointed as minister in a new cabinet does not depend on the prestige of the portfolio held or on the minister's gender.

With regard to H4, the logistic regression of Model 2 focuses on those ministers that have been reselected by their own party to serve in a new cabinet and tests whether women are less likely than men to be promoted to more prestigious posts. The coefficient on *Woman* is not statistically significant, indicating that women are not less likely than men to be promoted to more prestigious posts when reselected in a new cabinet.

As for the control variables we included, *Age* and *Time between* are found to be statistically significant. More specifically, ministers become less and less likely to be reselected when they get older: a minister's chance of being reappointed by their party in a new cabinet decreases by roughly 4% for every year that passes. Moreover,

¹⁵ In analyses we do not report here, we checked if chances of reappointment are higher for those cabinet members who are also leader of their own party at the moment of their possible reselection as ministers. Results show that this is not the case, implying that what increases the likelihood of reselection is more a politician's career within the party than current status as party leader. We must note that incumbent ministers who are also party leaders at the time of their possible reappointment are very few.

unsurprisingly, reselection chances decrease as time passes between the moment when a minister is in office and the moment when they can be reappointed by their own party in a future cabinet: all else being equal, each additional year reduces reselection chances by 25%. In contrast, the share of cabinet posts controlled by the minister's party in the new government (*Party share*) does not seem to affect ministers' reselection chances.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

In this article, we investigated the extent to which Italian political parties tend to reselect the same ministers across different political executives. Moreover, we tried to detect what makes some ministers more likely than others to be selected by their respective party heads in more than one cabinet. From a theoretical viewpoint, we adopted a principal-agent perspective, arguing that some personal characteristics are particularly important in determining the outcome. First, we hypothesized that remarkable political experiences within the parliament and the party as well as previous cabinet experience in a prestigious ministerial portfolio increase one's chances to be reselected. Second, we expected women – due to the gendered character of political careers and executive institutions – to be less likely than men to be reappointed and promoted to more prestigious cabinet positions. We tested these conjectures on all Italian partisan cabinets from 1994 to 2022.

The results do not support our arguments for the linkages between gender, portfolio prestige, and reselection or promotion. At the same time, we found that – similarly to what happens with first selections – political experience is a key criterion that party principals take into consideration when it comes to choosing the ministerial team. An experienced minister is, in fact, someone who has already had the opportunity to demonstrate reliability and loyalty towards the party; moreover, the minister will be likely to have acquired enough skills to perform in office. Interestingly enough, the seat share of the party within a coalition does not have a significant impact on reselection, while age and time between two cabinets have a negative effect.

The lack of significant effect of the portfolio prestige on our main dependent variable may actually be an indicator that party principals value party reliability *per se*, irrespective of the type of previous cabinet post. In other words, they use a minister's prior experience within the parliament and in the party to assess their adherence to the party agenda and to have a proxy of future behavior. In a nutshell, a minister can be a reliable party agent either in a prestigious or in a less prestigious portfolio. The rejection of the two gender-related hypotheses, in turn, would suggest that the major existing obstacles to gender parity within cabinets emerge before breaking the 'glass ceiling'; in this phase, party gate-keeping may be particularly effective in limiting access to positions from where one can prove to be 'fit for the job'.

With regard to the reselection patterns, the 18th legislative term is a particular case, in that it includes three cabinets characterized by partial party alternation yet with significant ideological heterogeneity. Compared to other terms where the same parties came back to power immediately after the fall of the previous executive, the 18th term shows lower levels of ministerial continuity. A possible explanatory factor is the relative high variation in the coalition partners' policy positions from one cabinet to another. In this regard, Bäck and Carroll (2020: 330-331) have pointed out that the choice of a

minister may be dependent not only on intra-party factors, but also on how coalition partners evaluate a portfolio, and whether or not they like the political profiles in the ally's pool of candidates. Therefore, the same party – say, the M5S – in different cabinets may have had to change its ministers depending on the ideological orientation of the partners, in order to find a general agreement on portfolio allocation.

Future research could extend the focus of the analysis and provide cross-country comparisons. Besides providing more generalizable findings, this would allow assessment of the possible conditional effect of country-specific institutional variables. Moreover, scholars could introduce further individual-based variables, whose impact seems plausible. For example, other types of political experiences at sub-national and supranational level could be taken into account. Future studies would also greatly benefit from introducing sturdy operationalizations of ministerial performance in office and from consequent analyses of how this performance affects a minister's career outlooks.

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