DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS,
MANAGEMENT AND STATISTICS

UNIVERSITY OF MILAN – BICOCCA

DEMS WORKING PAPER SERIES

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No. 338 – May 2016

Dipartimento di Economia, Metodi Quantitativi e Strategie di Impresa
Università degli Studi di Milano - Bicocca
http://dems.unimib.it/

Voters' preferences and electoral systems.

The EuroVotePlus experiment in Italy.*

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May 11, 2016

Motivated by the need of understanding voting behavior under different electoral rules, Laslier et al. (2015) have conducted an online experiment in several European countries during the three weeks before the 2014 elections for the European Parliament, the EuroVotePlus experiment. This paper focuses on the Italian data . We first show that the behavior of Italian respondents is consistent with the empirical findings at the European level. Then, we exploit the change from open list to closed list elections implemented in Italy in 1993 to investigate whether and how preferences over institutions are affected by experience. We find that respondents who voted using the open list system in Italy are more likely to prefer closed list systems, and that the effect is stronger the higher the number of open list elections that the respondents have faced.

Keywords: European Parliament Election, Open list, Closed list, Voting rules.

JEL Classification: D7, C9.

*The authors thanks Michela Cella, Jean-Francois Laslier and Ornella Lepre for useful comments.
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1 Introduction

The political economy literature (see, among many others, Cox 1997) has studied mass voting systems in modern democracies through the rational choice theory approach (since the seminal papers of Arrow, 1951; Downs, 1957). One of the most important issues is indeed the understanding of the voting behavior under different institutional setups. Scholars (for a review see Persson and Tabellini, 2000) mainly focused on the electoral rules (electoral formula and district size), and on the regime types (presidential versus parliamentary systems). In this paper we exploit the data set of the EuroVotePlus (EVP) experiment (Laslier et al., 2015) to understand the voting behavior of the Italian electorate when called to vote for the European Parliament under different electoral formulas, and the determinants of the electorate preferences over institutions. Italian data are particularly useful in addressing this last research question as national elections in Italy were characterized by open lists until 1993, and have been characterized by closed lists from 1993 onwards. Hence, discriminating by the age of the respondent, it is possible to correlate the preferences over electoral systems with the familiarity that voters have with the electoral system itself. Such analysis is of particular interest to address several issues, such as the European attitude of particular social groups (male/female, educated people, left/right oriented people) and the propensity to vote for pan-European parties.

The EVP experiment was conducted online during the three weeks before the 2014 elections for the European Parliament in the 28 European countries. A open-to-all multi-lingual website (www.eurovoteplus.eu) was created by a team of scholars (Laslier et al., 2015), where users were invited to learn more about European elections and rules used to elect MEPs, and then to participate in an online voting experiment. The website included a description of three electoral systems used at the time to elect MEPs in France (*closed list system*), Latvia (*open list system with preferential voting*), and Luxembourg (*open list system with cumulative voting and panachage*). All visitors of the website were offered the possibility of participating in a simulated vote for a pan-European election, where they were presented with ballots composed by seven lists corresponding to the seven political groups registered at the European Parliament at the time. Each list was filled with ten candidates randomly selected from the MEPs registered in the corresponding group. Each ballot provided the official photo of the candidate, name, nationality, group affiliation, and a link to the official page on the European Parliament website. Participants voted three times, once for every electoral system described. The experiment was covered by the press in Italy, where Giovanna Iannantuoni was the national correspondent, making Italy second for number of par-

ticipants. In a restricted set of countries (which does not include Italy) respondents also voted on a simulated national election, where the ballot was composed of local candidates.

The EVP experiment was extensively analyzed in several papers. Laslier et al. (2015) discuss the properties of the experiment by highlighting voters behavior under different electoral rules. The number of seats allocated to each party does not seem to vary substantially between closed and open lists, while the panachage rule seems to favour small parties over main ones. However, as somehow expected, more flexible electoral rules appear to have an impact on which candidates are elected within each party. In this respect, Laslier et al. (2015) suggest that voters tend to prefer candidates of their own countries and that such effect seems larger for smaller countries. More specifically, Bol et al. (2016) show that the likelihood of assigning a positive vote to a co-national candidate is between seven and eight times higher than to other nationality ones (controlling for all other characteristics). Moreover, under both closed and open lists the presence of at least one co-national candidate increases the probability of voting for that list by 48%. Harfst et al. (2015) analyze German data from EVP to investigate whether candidates regional ties influence voting behaviour. The EVP in Germany had an extra feature that allows such analysis: only 50% of the respondents voted on a ballot that showed candidate's Land as additional information. The authors find that preference votes are casted to support regional candidates. Moreover, they find the effect both on treated and untreated voters, suggesting that voters are interested in regional candidates and already know their identity. A second dimension in which elected candidates may differ under different electoral rules is gender. Laslier et al. (2015) highlight that flexible electoral systems appear to favour female candidates and that such effect is particularly strong when the sub-sample of female voters is considered. More in detail, Golder et al. (2015) find empirical evidence that voters favor female candidates under open list and panachage systems, while there seems to be no significant gender effect under a closed list system.

The contribution of this paper is twofold. First, we replicate the main results of the above literature related to the EVP experiment focusing on the population of the Italian respondents. We find that the Italian data are consistent with the empirical findings at the European level in terms of home-candidate bias (Bol et al., 2016) and gender effect (Golder et al., 2015).

More interestingly, we address an original research question related to the Italian case, which is the effect the experience of an electoral rule has on its popularity. More precisely, we exploit the institutional change that occurred in 1993, which reformed the

open list system to a closed list one. We show that respondents that have experienced the pre-1993 system are less likely to prefer open list over closed list electoral rules. We also find that this effect is stronger the higher the number of elections experienced under the pre-1993 rule. The intuition of this latter result is related to the perception the Italian electorate was experiencing in the early 90s towards the political system, as well as to the relation between open list and political inefficiencies and corruption in those years in Italy (see Golden, 2003).

The paper is organized as follows: Section 2 presents some descriptive statistics, discusses home-candidate bias and gender effects for the Italian case, Section 3 focuses on the effect of experience over preferences for electoral rules, and Section 4 concludes.

2 Italians are indeed Europeans: consistency of the empirical findings with previous studies

The EVP experiment focuses on the effects that electoral rules have on voters' behavior. European member states implement several voting rules to elect the European Parliament. EVP focuses on three rules which differ in the extent of voters' possible choices.

France (closed list). In the French system voters express their vote for one party list. Candidates in each party lists are ranked and the ranking is used to determine who on the list is elected.

Latvia (open list with preferential voting). The electoral rule in Latvia allows voters to vote for one party list. However, on the chosen list, the voter can express extra preference (with a +) for some candidates, and cross out other candidates' names. The score of a candidate, which is used to determine who gets elected in the list, is equal to the number of votes for the list itself, plus the number of votes with a + to the candidate, minus the number of votes where the candidate's name is crossed out.

Luxembourg (open list with cumulative voting and panachage). The electoral rule in Luxembourg does not impose that a voter votes for one party list only. The voter has a number of votes equal to the number of positions to fill and she can distribute votes to candidates from different lists, giving up to two votes to the same candidate. The total number of votes received by each list determines the distribution of seats, and candidates in each list are elected on the basis of the number of votes received.

At the end of the experiment respondents answer a questionnaire that elicits participants' opinions and preferences over the three electoral rules and over the possibility of electing MEPs with transnational lists, together with other personal characteristics.

We begin our analysis of the EVP Italian data showing that Italian respondents behave consistently with the empirical findings at the European level. The dataset is composed by 385 respondents, who fully completed the experiment. Women represent the 34% of the sample.

2.1 Home candidate bias

We replicate the analysis of Bol et al. (2016) where authors test three hypotheses related to the co-nationality between voters and candidates and to the interaction between the *co-nationality effect* and the electoral system in use. The EVP experiment proposes pan-European lists, in which each voter faces candidates of several nationalities. The presence of candidates of the same nationality may affect voters behavior, and such effect may depend from the electoral system in use. First, authors expect that the probability of a positive (negative) preference is higher when the candidate is (is not) co-national of the voter. Second, voters are expected to prefer a list including a co-national candidate. Third, the effect of co-nationality on the probability of voting for a given list should be higher under the closed list system. Bol et al. (2016) find that data are consistent with the first two hypotheses, but they do not find any significant difference between results across electoral systems. Thus, the co-nationality effect may partially frustrate the effects of the pan-European lists.

Bol et al. (2016) focus on subjects from France, Germany and Sweden. The analysis suggests that voters have a positive feeling about pan-European lists with 59% of respondents that like this form of election. However, at the moment of casting their votes, voters tend to endorse co-national candidates, thus originating a *home-candidate bias*.

We replicate the same analysis for Italian respondents. First of all, Italian voters seem to support pan-European lists even more than their European fellows. Indeed, 69% of Italian respondents approve the idea of having pan-European lists.[1]

To test the co-nationality effect on voting preferences, we exploit the design of the EVP experiment. In particular, under the open list system voters are given the possibility either to endorse or to cross-out a specific candidate within the list. In detail, any of the ten candidates in the chosen list is given one vote. Voters can choose not to change this (*neutral vote*), to give an additional vote (*positive vote*), or to cancel out the vote (*negative vote*). Table 1 summarizes voters' behavior under the open list

[1] If we consider the full EVP sample including all European countries, the percentage of people approving pan-European lists is almost the 60% of the respondents. We can always reject at 1% level the null hypothesis of equal means between the percentage of people that approve the pan-European lists in Italy and in the rest of Europe.

system. A relatively small percentage of people has exploits the possibility to endorse a particular candidate (21% of voters).[2]

Table 1: Type of votes under the open list system

Vote	**Number of votes**	**Percentage**
Negative vote	723	18.83
Neutral vote	2312	60.21
Positive vote	805	20.96
Tot	3840	100

Notes: EVP dataset.

We investigate the effects of co-nationality on the probability of expressing negative/positive votes for a candidate with a Multinomial logit model. The categorical outcome is the probability to cross-out/endorse a candidate under the open list system. The baseline category in our setting is represented by the neutral vote. The main predictor is the dummy variable *Co-national Candidate* which identifies Italian candidates. We include a set of covariates to control for participants and candidates characteristics. At the participant level we control for age, sex and education of respondents. Therefore, we include indicators for political orientation (*LeftRight*, a categorical variable ranging from zero to ten, with higher values corresponding to right oriented respondents), interest in politics (*Political Interest*, a categorical variable ranging from zero to ten, with higher values corresponding to higher interest) and personal feeling about European institutions (*EuFeeling*, a variable ranging from zero to five with higher values corresponding to a better feeling toward European institutions). Then, we also include the total number of points assigned by each respondent (*Voter's Total Points*). At the candidate level, we control for age and sex of each candidate. We account for the possibility of party-level bias by including party-specific dummy variables.

The results are consistent with the findings of Bol et al. (2016).

[2]We also notice that candidate's position within the party-list seems to have no effect on the decision of the voters, as 48% of the endorsed candidates are located in the first five positions in the list.

Table 2: Predicting preference votes and home-candidate bias under open list

	Negative vote		**Positive vote**	
	Coeff.	RRR	Coeff.	RRR
Co-national Candidate	-0.72^{*}	0.44^{*}	1.73^{***}	5.63^{***}
	(0.28)	(0.14)	(0.15)	(0.85)
Candidate's Sex	-0.24^{*}	0.79^{*}	0.53^{***}	1.70^{***}
	(0.13)	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.18)
Candidate's Age	-0.003	0.99	0.10^{*}	1.01^{**}
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Voter's Total Points	-0.45^{***}	0.64^{***}	0.19^{***}	1.22^{***}
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.34)
Sex	0.27^{*}	1.26^{*}	0.26^{**}	1.28^{**}
	(0.12)	(0.15)	(0.11)	(0.15)
Education	-0.01	1.00	-0.03	0.98
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.015)
Age	-0.007	-1.00	-0.005	-1.00
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.004)	(0.004)
LeftRight	-0.06	0.94	-0.05	0.95
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Political Interest	-0.04	0.96	-0.02	0.98
	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
EuFeeling	0.14^{**}	1.28^{**}	0.10^{*}	1.10^{*}
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Constant	-31.776^{***}	-4.86^{**}	7.07^{**}	$< 0.01^{**}$
CHI^2	544.66^{***}			
N	19124	19124	19124	19124

Notes: White heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors in parentheses. Entries are coefficients and the relative risk ratios (RRR). Dummies indicating the party voted under the open list system are not reported in the Table.
* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Italian respondents, when allowed to express their preferences, reward candidates of the same nationality. Indeed, co-nationality represents the most powerful predictor of the probability to endorse a particular candidate under the open list system. A significant impact is also provided by the candidate's gender with female candidates that are more likely to be rewarded.[3]

Furthermore, we aim to test if lists including a higher number of co-national candidates are more likely to be voted. This effect should be larger under the closed list system, given that under the open list system voters can directly reward a co-national canidate. As in Bol et al. (2016), we measure co-nationality in three ways. First, we use a continuous variable indicating the total number of co-national candidates on the list.[4] Second, we use a categorical variable where each number of co-nationals is included in

[3] If we run the same model restricting the sample to female respondents, the RRR increases to 2.97 and it is significant at 1% level.

[4] The number ranges from zero to six.

the model as a single covariate. This allows us to verify if the co-nationality effect is linear ot not. Indeed, we expect that the effect of one extra co-national is diminishing as the number of co-national candidates increases. Third, we use a dummy equal to one if there is at least one co-national candidate on the list. We run conditional logit models predicting the probability to vote for each list under the closed and open list systems. At respondents' level, we use fixed effects to account for heterogenous individual characteristics. At candidate level, we include the number of female candidates and the average age of the candidates on each list. Results are reported in Table 3 (closed list system) and 4 (open list system).

Table 3: Predicting list voting and home candidate bias (Closed list)

	Continuous		Categorical		Binary	
	Coef.	OR	Coef.	OR	Coef.	OR
Number of co-nationals	0.112^{**}	1.12^{**}				
	(0.052)	(0.058)				
Categories:						
One co-national			0.30^{**}	1.35^{***}		
			(0.14)	(0.19)		
Two co-nationals			0.50^{***}	1.65^{***}		
			(0.16)	(0.26)		
Three co-nationals			-0.01	0.99		
			(0.27)	(0.27)		
Four co-nationals			0.44	1.56		
			(0.38)	(0.60)		
Five co-nationals			0.08	1.08		
			(1.08)	(1.17)		
Six co-nationals			0.38	1.42		
			(0.45)	(0.53)		
At least one co-national					0.33^{***}	1.39^{***}
					(0.12)	(0.16)
Number of women	0.204^{***}	1.23^{***}	0.19^{***}	1.22^{***}	0.19^{***}	1.21^{***}
	(0.034)	(0.042)	(0.034)	(0.041)	(0.032)	(0.039)
Age (mean)	0.987^{***}	2.68^{***}	0.99^{***}	2.68^{***}	0.98^{***}	2.67^{***}
	(0.129)	(0.346)	(0.034)	(0.36)	(0.13)	(0.35)
CHI^2	90.3^{***}		217^{***}		90.1^{***}	
N	2695		2695		2695	

Notes: White heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors in parentheses. Entries are coefficients and odd ratios (OR). The model is a multinomial conditional logit with subject level fixed effects.
* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 4: Predicting list voting and home candidate bias (Open list)

	Continuous		Categorical		Binary	
	Coef.	OR	Coef.	OR	Coef.	OR
Number of co-nationals	0.086**	1.09**				
	(0.039)	(0.043)				
Categories:						
One co-national			0.30**	1.36**		
			(0.13)	(0.17)		
Two co-nationals			0.49***	1.63***		
			(0.15)	(0.25)		
Three co-nationals			−0.31	0.72		
			(0.27)	(0.20)		
Four co-nationals			0.55	1.74		
			(0.37)	(0.64)		
Five co-nationals			−0.26	0.77		
			(1.06)	(0.82)		
Six co-nationals			0.08	0.98		
			(0.34)	(0.53)		
At least one co-national					0.30**	1.35***
					(0.11)	(0.15)
Number of women	0.24***	1.27***	0.23***	1.26***	0.23***	1.26***
	(0.032)	(0.040)	(0.032)	(0.040)	(0.030)	(0.038)
Age (mean)	0.745***	2.11***	0.74***	2.10***	0.73***	2.08***
	(0.089)	(0.189)	(0.092)	(0.19)	(0.09)	(0.19)
CHI^2	115.6***		253.4***		116.2***	
N	2695		2695		2695	

Notes: White heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors in parentheses. Entries are coefficients and odd ratios (OR). The model is a multinomial conditional logit with subject level fixed effects.
* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Results are consistent with expectations. The presence of co-national candidates positively affects the probability of voting for a specific list (Tables 3 and 4, Columns (1)-(2)). Moreover, the co-nationality effect is higher between lists including zero co-nationals and those that include one or two co-national candidates. After the threshold of two, the inclusion of an additional co-national candidate does not affect the probability to vote for the list (Tables 3 and 4, Columns (3)-(4)). When we use the binary outcome (Tables 3 and 4, Columns (5)-(6)), previous results are confirmed: the presence of at least one co-national candidate increases the probability to vote for the list of almost the 40%. Furthermore, the co-nationality effect seems to be slightly larger under the closed list system. This follows theoretical expectations.

Among other covariates, the presence of female candidates is again positively related to the probability of voting for a list. This further evidence gives reasons to better investigate possible gender-related effects across different electoral rules.

2.2 Gender bias

The experimental design gives us the opportunity to isolate some gender-related effects. The presence of women in the party list is supposed to favor female participation in the electorate and to increase the share of votes to women candidates. This mechanism should be stronger in more open electoral systems. However, party leaders may promote the presence of female candidates even in the case of closed list systems if they expect women to favor lists with higher percentage of female candidates.

The work by Golder et al. (2016) investigates the presence of gender effects by analyzing the EVP data at the European level. We again focus on the case of Italy. In line with the previous literature, we expect that electoral systems that provide voters with the opportunity to express their own preferences would favour female candidates. Moreover, female voters should increase women representation, whatever is the electoral system in use. Finally, the left/right orientation of voters may affect the probability to vote for female candidates.

Table 5 summarizes the proportion of voters who change their voting strategy when the electoral rules are modified. As expected, women are always more responsive to the change of electoral design, suggesting that they are more interested in expressing their own opinion about specific issues. On the contrary, male voters seem to vote according to party affiliation, irrespective of issue-specific preferences.

Table 5: Gender and voting strategy

	Male	**Female**	**p(male,female)**
Closed→ *Open*	5%	13%	0.00
Open→ *Panachage*	57%	78%	0.01
Closed→ *Panachage*	58%	79%	0.00

Notes: EVP dataset. $p(x, y)$ is the probability of falsely rejecting equal means across male and female sub-groups under the assumption of equal variances. We always reject the null at the 1% level. *Closed→Open* reports the percentage of voters who change party when the electoral system switches from closed to open lists. *Open→Panachage* and *Closed→Panachage* report the percentage of voters that, under the panachage system, vote for a candidate who does not belong to the party voted under the open and closed list systems, respectively.

Secondly, we test the effect that different electoral rules have on the proportion of female candidates and on the voting behavior of respondents. The ballot provided to participants is the same under the three voting rules. This allows us to evaluate the effect of the electoral system while keeping constant other cultural, historical, economic and contextual factors that normally vary with the electoral rules and may generate biases in the causal estimation. Women represent on average 32% of the proposed candidates, with a 5% standard deviation. The proportion of women in the lists varies

depending on the party and on the party ideological position, with leftist and less extreme parties associated with a larger presence of female candidates.[5]

Table 6: Proportion of female candidates and party ideologies

Party	**Ideology**	**Women**
Freedom and Democracy	6.8	22%
Alliance Liberals and Democrats	6	6%
Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats	5.79	34%
Conservatives and Reformists	5.2	41%
Greens Eu Free Alliance	3.6	47%
United Left-Nordic Greeen Left	2.9	42%
Eu People Party	2	30%

Notes: EVP dataset. Ideology is a continuous measure ranging from 0 to 10 where higher values are associated with right-wing parties.

Note that party lists have been randomly assembled by the roster of existing MEPs; thus, parties with lower female representation would naturally provide fewer potential female candidates for the experiment.

We evaluate the propensity to vote for female candidates by considering at the proportion of votes gathered by women candidates under different electoral rules. Specifically, under the closed list system, we create a measure of women support from the proportion of female candidates in the chosen list, given that voters are not allowed to directly vote for individual candidates. Under both open list and panachage systems, we measure women support by computing the proportion of points assigned to female candidates over the total number of points distributed by each respondent. The main predictor is the gender of the respondents. A measure of the overall proportion of women in the ballot always enters the regression. Other controls include voters-related characteristics as age, education, interest in politics, left/right ideology and the European feeling. We also include a set of covariates indicating the party chosen under the closed list system in order to control for the effect of the party ideology.[6]

[5] To identify the ideological position of each party, we compute the average value of the ideological positions of those respondents who voted for the party under the closed list system.

[6] The Conservatives and Reformists party is the control group in our setting, given that it is located in the median of the ideological distribution of parties (see Table 6).

Table 7: Proportion of votes to female candidates under closed, open and panachage systems

	Closed	**Open**	**Panachage**
Sex	-0.034^{*}	0.048^{***}	0.113^{***}
	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.004)
Freedom and Democracy	-0.301^{***}	-0.28^{***}	-0.33^{***}
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.01)
Alliance Liberals and Democrats	-0.36^{***}	-0.25^{***}	-0.18^{***}
	(0.003)	(0.007)	(0.008)
Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats	-0.073^{***}	0.006	-0.014^{**}
	(0.004)	(0.006)	(0.007)
Greens Eu Free Alliance	0.1^{***}	0.077^{***}	0.024^{***}
	(0.05)	(0.007)	(0.007)
United Left-Nordic Greeen Left	0.33^{***}	-0.003	0.0106^{*}
	(0.03)	(0.004)	(0.006)
Eu People Party	-0.11^{***}	-0.174^{***}	-0.038^{***}
	(0.04)	(0.005)	(0.008)
% WomenBallot	0.95^{***}	1.17^{***}	0.757^{***}
	(0.20)	(0.27)	(0.039)
Education	0.04^{***}	0.006^{***}	0.02^{***}
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Age	0.001^{***}	0.002^{***}	0.004^{***}
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
LeftRight	-0.003^{***}	-0.019^{***}	-0.027^{***}
	(0.00)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Political Interest	0.05^{***}	0.001^{*}	0.005^{***}
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
EuFeeling	0.005^{***}	0.001^{**}	0.034^{***}
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Constant	1.56^{***}	3.35^{***}	7.56^{***}
R2	0.51	0.39	0.27
N	19180	19040	19180

Notes: White heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors in parentheses. Among party's covariates, the *Conservatives and Reformists* party represents the baseline category.
* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Results are consistent with the empirical findings at European level (Golder et al., 2016). Female respondents are more likely to reward candidates of the same gender and the gender effect is higher the more flexible is the electoral system; the voting decision when voters are not allowed to express their preferences toward specific candidates seems largely to depend on party affiliation; left-oriented voters are more inclined to reward women candidates as well as voters that are more educated and those that are more interested in politics.

3 Preferences over institutions: the importance of experience

With his final questionnaire, the EVP experiment investigates respondents' preferences over electoral rules, and it allows us to perform an analysis of the determinants of such preferences. More precisely, every respondent is asked to rate his approval of open list, closed list and panachage rules. The ratings of open vs. closed lists are of particular interest in the Italian case, given the constitutional reform occurred in 1993, which abolished preference voting in national elections.

It is commonly agreed (see among others Barbagallo, 1998; Ginsborg, 2001; Lepre, 1993; Zincone, 1995) that the open list system in Italy at the time generated distortions in the politicians' behaviour, up to the point of creating incentives to significantly decrease the quality of public services. Golden (2003) argues that the public administration performed poorly because politicians were more concerned about their re-election prospect rather than policy implementation. Indeed, evidence suggests that open lists somehow promoted a system of political patronage "where patronage consisted of concrete individual benefits (jobs, especially in the public administration) and help in negotiating the complex legal regulations affecting daily life. The response of many voters to such a system was to offer their votes in exchange for patronage and constituency services" (Golden, 2003).

In order to remedy these distortions and misbehavior arising from preference voting, a first referendum was called in 1991, in which voters were asked to remove the possibility of expressing multiple preferences. This was a first but important step against the distortions induced in Italy by preference voting. As Ginsborg (2001) explains "Being able to choose up to four candidates of the same political party had been a historic vehicle of political clientelism, a means of tying local clients to patrons, and of building factional strenghts in specific areas."[7] The proposed reduction in the number of preferences was opposed by a large number of politicians, in particular by those who relied on the preference voting to be elected. The high turnout, together with the fact that 95.6% of voters approved the change, confirmed that the majority of the population had a profound dislike for the open list system, and it was generally interpreted as a call for a general reform of the electoral rule (Mack Smith, 1997). After a second referendum held in 1993, the electoral rule was modified. The 1993 Mattarella law introduced a system that elected legislators with a mix of plurality rule and closed list proportional rule, completely abolishing the open list system from national elections.

It is thus of particular interest to investigate whether having voted at least once under the open list system systematically changes the perception of what is preferable.

[7] Ginsborg P. (2001), Italy and Its Discontents. Family, Civil Society, State 1980-2001, p.173.

Moreover, we investigate whether this effect becomes greater the higher the experience of voting under open lists. Our hypothesis is that respondents who voted under the open list electoral rule should be more likely to prefer the closed list system, in light of their acquired awareness concerning the inefficiencies generated by preference voting.

The sample includes respondents born from 1939 to 1996. As the 1994 national election was the first election in Italy adopting the closed list system, respondents born after 1975 have no direct experience of voting under the open list proportional rule. In our main regression we analyze whether having experienced at least one election with open list proportional rule affects the respondents' opinion. We create a dummy (*Experience*) which identifies respondents born before 1974, that is, the subgroup of respondents that have experienced at least one election with the open list system.[8] Respondents in the two subgroups differ not only in terms of experience of open list systems, but also in terms of age. Hence, we expect to observe two effects: a general age effect, and a specific experience effect.

We first estimate a simple linear probability model where the dependent variable is a binary variable equal to one if the respondent strictly prefers the open list system to the closed list one, and zero otherwise. Results are reported in Table 8. Column (1) displays results of our baseline regression, where we include the respondent's year of birth in addition to standard controls. The effect of the year of birth is significant and negative, showing that younger respondents have a lower probability of preferring the open list system. We then introduce the dummy *Experience* in the set of regressors (see Table 8, Column (2)). Results support our conjecture about the link between preferences and experience: those who have directly experienced the open list system are less likely to prefer open lists compared to the group of respondents who never voted under that system, controlling for other characteristics. The effect of the respondent's year of birth remains negative and strongly significant, as in the baseline case.

To further investigate the effects of experience, we build a new categorical variable - *Elections* - equal to the total number of elections that were held using preference voting when the respondent was of voting age. The variable ranges from zero (for people born after 1974) to nine (for people born before 1940). We expect a negative effect of the number of open list elections a respondent has experienced on the probability to prefer the open list system. Indeed, Table 8, Column (3), validates our hypothesis. As a robustness check, we also refine the latter analysis by introducing a set of dummy variables $Election j$ for $j = 1, ..., 9$ that identify respondents who experienced j elections under the open list system when they were of voting age. Table 8, Column

[8] We drop respondents born in 1974 as we don't know their month of birth.

(4) shows that aversion to the open list system generally increases with the number of such elections. The few inconsistencies in Column (4) may be explained by the small number of respondents belonging to some of the subgroups (specifically to those defined by *Election*4, *Election*5 and *Election*6).[9]

Despite the robustness of the previous findings, and the negative effect of the respondent's year of birth, we could still suspect that the effect of *Experience* on preferences is originated by some age-related phenomenon and not by the difference in experience due to the 1993 reform. We provide additional evidence in support of our interpretation, by showing that the effect of *Experience*, which is strong and robust in Italy, is not present in the European data. Hence, we replicate the above analysis for the set of all European countries except Italy (see the Appendix, Table 9, Columns (1) and (2)) and for France, which is the country with the largest number of observations (see the Appendix, Table 9, Columns (3) and (4)). For both samples we run the baseline regression, in which only *Year of birth* is included as additional regressor, and the specification in which also *Experience* is included. We find that *Experience* is no longer statistically significant and, moreover, the effect of *Year of birth* is positive and significant, thus supporting further our interpretation.

[9]Our results are robust even when coefficients are estimated by a Logit rather than by a linear probability model. Results are reported in Table 10, in the Appendix. As a further robustness checks, we replicate the same analysis after restricting the sample to subject who strictly prefer either system, i.e. after taking out respondents who are indifferent between the closed and open list systems. Results can be found in Table 11, in the Appendix.

Table 8: Voters preferences over electoral systems and experience

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Experience		-0.103^{***}		
		(0.0106)		
Year of birth	-0.00249^{***}	-0.00581^{***}	-0.0047^{***}	-0.006^{***}
	(0.00023)	(0.000384)	(0.000414)	(0.0005)
Elections			-0.0184^{***}	
			(0.00317)	
Election1				-0.0905^{***}
				(0.0122)
Election2				-0.106^{***}
				(0.014)
Election3				-0.121^{***}
				(0.018)
Election4				-0.083^{***}
				(0.029)
Election5				-0.039
				(0.027)
Election6				0.034^{*}
				(0.021)
Election7				-0.303^{***}
				(0.041)
Election8				-0.393^{***}
				(0.026)
Election9				-0.406^{***}
				(0.0260)
Sex	0.00870	0.00740	0.00789	-0.0073
	(0.00562)	(0.00558)	(0.00569)	(0.0057)
Education	-0.0039^{***}	-0.0045^{***}	-0.00603^{***}	-0.0009
	(0.0011)	(0.0012)	(0.0012)	(0.0013)
EuDemo	0.0131^{***}	0.0135^{***}	0.0126^{***}	0.011^{***}
	(0.00114)	(0.00114)	(0.00114)	(0.0013)
Political Interest	0.0045^{***}	0.0044^{**}	0.00414^{***}	0.0039^{**}
	(0.00156)	(0.00156)	(0.00155)	(0.00156)
EuFeeling	0.012^{***}	0.013^{***}	0.00129^{***}	0.015^{***}
	(0.0032)	(0.00333)	(0.0031)	(0.0032)
Travel	0.349^{***}	0.360^{***}	0.358^{***}	0.347^{***}
	(0.0212)	(0.0205)	(0.0211)	(0.021)
Language	0.0339^{***}	0.0417^{***}	0.0398^{***}	0.044^{***}
	(0.00431)	(0.00427)	(0.00428)	(0.0040)
EuTurnout	0.0194^{***}	0.0195^{***}	0.0184^{***}	0.025^{***}
	(0.00330)	(0.00328)	(0.00329)	(0.0034)
LeftRight	0.0167^{***}	0.0170^{***}	0.0167^{***}	0.0156^{***}
	(0.00124)	(0.00124)	(0.00124)	0.00128)
Constant	4.59^{***}	11.19^{***}	9.08^{***}	11.60^{***}
R^2	0.49	0.51	0.54	0.49
N	17710	17710	17710	17710

Notes: White heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors in parentheses. Elections(1)-(9) indicate the number of open list elections faced by the experiment participants. Election(0) is the baseline category representing the subgroup of people born after 1974, that are the ones with no direct experience of open list elections. The dependent variable is a dummy equal to one if respondents strictly prefer open lists over the closed lists.
* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

4 Conclusions

Electoral rules influence voters' behavior, as suggested by the theoretical and empirical literature. In this paper, we also show that the experience of electoral rules affects voters preferences over electoral systems.

Using the Italian data from the EuroVotePlus experiment conducted in the weeks preceding the 2014 elections for the European Parliament, we find that the influence of electoral rules on the behaviour of the Italian respondents is consistent with the empirical findings at the European level. More precisely, we find that, although Italians are more in favor of pan-European elections than average Europeans, they nonetheless display the co-nationality effect and favor Italian candidates in elections. We also find evidence of a gender effect, showing that women receive more votes under open list rules.

Moreover, the institutional reform that occurred in Italy in 1993, which replaced an open list system with a closed list one, allowed us to investigate the role of experience of a system in determining the respondents preferences over electoral rules. In a political environment where open list systems were (perceived as) leading to corruption, inefficiencies and sub-optimal behaviour of the politicians, we find that respondents with higher experience of elections held under the open list system were significantly less likely to prefer open list over closed list electoral rules.

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5 Appendix

Table 9: Voters preferences over electoral systems and experience (robustness check).

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Experience		−0.012		0.0075
		(0.074)		(0.021)
Year of birth	0.0041***	0.0038***	0.0022***	0.0024***
	(0.00013)	(0.00025)	(0.000216)	(0.0007)
Sex	−0.0128**	−0.0129**	−0.0894***	−0.0896***
	(0.0044)	(0.0044)	(0.0103)	(0.0103)
Education	−0.00161***	−0.0016***	0.0158***	0.0158***
	(0.00037)	(0.00037)	(0.0017)	(0.0017)
EuDemo	0.00067***	0.00069***	0.0027***	0.0026***
	(0.00016)	(0.00016)	(0.0003)	(0.0003)
Political Interest	−0.0039***	−0.0039***	−0.066***	−0.066***
	(0.0011)	(0.0011)	(0.0039)	(0.0039)
EuFeeling	0.0280***	0.0283***	0.0345***	0.0344***
	(0.0015)	(0.0015)	(.00538)	(.0054)
Travel	−0.219***	−0.219***	−0.598***	−0.596***
	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.016)	(0.017)
Language	−0.0368***	−0.0367***	−0.0047	−0.0049
	(0.0026)	(0.0026)	(0.0072)	(0.0072)
EuTurnout	−0.0256***	−0.0256***	−0.035***	−0.035***
	(0.00233)	(0.00233)	(0.004)	(0.004)
LeftRight	0.00016	0.00017	0.0005*	0.0005*
	(0.00147)	(0.00143)	(0.0003)	(0.0003)
Constant	−7.37***	−6.68***	−3.01***	−3.46***
Sample	EU	EU	FR	FR
R^2	0.31	0.55	0.42	0.46
N	52430	52430	9940	9940

Notes: White heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is a dummy equal to one if respondents strictly prefer open lists over closed lists. Columns (1) and (2) are based on data for all European countries except Italy. Columns (3) and (4) are based on French data.
* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 10: Voters preferences over electoral systems and experience (robustness check).

	Logit	**Logit**
Experience		-0.0955^{***}
		(0.0103)
Year of birth	-0.00242^{***}	-0.00523^{***}
	(0.00021)	(0.00034)
Sex	0.00691	0.0045
	(0.00575)	(0.0057)
Education	-0.00364^{***}	-0.0041^{**}
	(0.0011)	(0.0010)
EuDemo	0.0127^{***}	0.0123^{***}
	(0.00112)	(0.0011)
Political Interest	0.00214	0.00243
	(0.00167)	(0.00171)
EuFeeling	0.0113^{***}	0.0119^{***}
	(0.00314)	(0.0031)
Travel	0.214^{***}	0.220^{***}
	(0.0099)	(0.0096)
Language	0.0409^{***}	0.0423^{***}
	(0.00401)	(0.0039)
EuTurnout	0.0153^{***}	0.0144^{***}
	(0.0026)	(0.0025)
LeftRight	0.0154^{***}	0.0153^{***}
	(0.00116)	(0.0012)
R^2	0.51	0.55
N	17710	17710

Notes: White heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors in parentheses. Entries are average marginal effects. The dependent variable is a dummy equal to one if respondents strictly prefer open lists over closed lists.
* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 11: Voters preferences over electoral systems and experience (robustness checks).

	OLS	**OLS**	**Logit**	**Logit**
Experience		-0.104^{***}		-0.0925^{***}
		(0.012)		(0.011)
Year of birth	-0.00255^{***}	-0.00249^{***}	-0.0047^{***}	-0.0052^{***}
	(0.00024)	(0.000415)	(0.000216)	(0.0004)
Sex	0.00764	0.00690	0.00568	0.00383
	(0.00606)	(0.00604)	(0.00609)	(0.0061)
Education	-0.00267^{**}	-0.00259^{**}	-0.00247^{**}	-0.00318^{***}
	(0.0012)	(0.00120)	(0.0011)	(0.0011)
EuDemo	0.0125^{***}	0.0127^{***}	0.0120^{***}	0.012^{***}
	(0.00124)	(0.00123)	(0.00118)	(0.0012)
Political Interest	0.00672^{***}	0.00645^{***}	0.00452^{**}	0.0046^{**}
	(0.00166)	(0.00166)	(0.00181)	(0.00184)
EuFeeling	0.015^{***}	0.015^{***}	0.00141^{***}	0.014^{***}
	(0.0035)	(0.00342)	(0.0033)	(0.0033)
Travel	0.329^{***}	0.337^{***}	0.209^{***}	0.216^{***}
	(0.0214)	(0.021)	(0.011)	(0.010)
Language	0.0380^{***}	0.0403^{***}	0.039^{***}	0.041^{***}
	(0.0042)	(0.0041)	(0.0041)	(0.0040)
EuTurnout	0.0212^{***}	0.0201^{***}	0.0167^{***}	0.016^{***}
	(0.0035)	(0.0034)	(0.0027)	(0.0027)
LeftRight	0.0184^{***}	0.0185^{***}	0.0168^{***}	0.0167^{***}
	(0.00132)	(0.00132)	(0.00122)	(0.0013)
Constant	4.69^{***}	10.92^{***}		
R^2	0.51	0.55	0.52	0.56
N	16450	16450	16450	16450

Notes: White heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors in parentheses. Results obtained by a linear probability model (Columns (1) and (2)) and by a logit model (Columns (3) and (4)) when sample is restricted to people who are not indifferent between closed and open list systems. Entries for the Logistic regressions are average marginal effects.
* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$