

# The Return of the Rampant Lion: Regional Elections in the Aosta Valley

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## 1. The Regional Political System of the Aosta Valley

The regional elections of 28 September 2025 marked, in short, the *return of the rampant lion* – the symbol not only of the regional government, but also of the principal autonomist party of the Aosta Valley, the Union Valdôtaine (UV). This comeback was confirmed by a remarkable electoral performance: the UV consolidated its position as the largest political force, gaining almost triple the support of the second - and third-ranked parties. The outcome rewarded the party's recent and complex *réunification* process, formally initiated in 2023 and completed in June 2024. This development reflects a significant effort by the UV to reintegrate the various strands of the autonomist tradition after years of splintering and internal fragmentation. In this way, the UV reaffirmed its central role within the regional political system, a dominance that – except for brief interruptions – has characterised Aosta Valley politics since the post-war era.

Reflecting the institutional peculiarities of the Aosta Valley – a special-statute region endowed with broad legislative, administrative, and fiscal autonomy – regional politics have historically been marked by the presence of locally rooted parties whose competition with national forces has assumed distinctive traits compared to other Italian regions. From a historical standpoint, the Union Valdôtaine represents the cornerstone of the regional

political system. Founded in the aftermath of World War II on autonomist, francophone, pro-European and progressive principles, the UV positioned itself as the main guardian and interpreter of the regional autonomist identity. However, from the 2000s, the Aosta Valley political scene experienced a progressive process of fragmentation, resulting both from the entry of national parties (such as Lega, Movimento Cinque Stelle and more recently Fratelli d'Italia) into the Regional Council and from the proliferation of civic and regionalist lists, sometimes emerging from civil society initiatives and sometimes as a result of processes of party cartelisation (Katz and Mair, 1995).

Today, the Aosta Valley's political system is structured around three main dimensions of party competition.

The first, and historically most salient, is the identity-autonomist dimension, centred on the defence and promotion of regional special autonomy. This is not limited to a simple programmatic orientation but constitutes a genuine political-cultural cleavage that has historically structured the electoral arena, reinforcing processes of territorialisation and identity-building.

The second dimension concerns national party competition, linked to the action of Italy's main political forces. Historically, these parties have tended to cooperate or form coalitions with the UV, rather than constructing alternative statewide projects.

Finally, the third dimension is civic and territorial, comprising local movements and lists that, while often sharing the rhetoric of autonomy, position themselves in opposition to traditional forces (both UV and national parties allied with UV), frequently adopting an anti-establishment stance.

Over time, the intertwining of these three dimensions has not generated a stable alternation between clearly defined coalitions. On the contrary, it has given rise to governments of variable composition, resulting from heterogeneous alliances and, at times, internal party dynamics.

As a result, political stability has become one of the main institutional challenges in recent years. The regional legislatures have often experienced majority shifts and government crises, reflecting both party fragmentation and the need for complex intra-elite negotiations. For a certain period, this led some observers to believe that the long-standing predominance of the UV – and more generally, of the autonomist camp – could be definitively called into question. However, the 2025 election seems to indicate the opposite: as noted, the *return of the rampant lion* signifies the renewed centrality of the Union Valdôtaine and, if the *Réunification* consolidates, its broad capacity to control regional government dynamics.

Two further aspects characterise the Aosta Valley political system: the peculiar nature of anti-establishment competition and the specific type of clientelistic relations.

In a political system historically dominated by the Union Valdôtaine and by a deeply rooted autonomist culture, anti-establishment contestation has tended to assume weak, episodic, and hybrid forms rather than crystallising into a structured protest party. Unlike other Italian regions, no enduring anti-establishment force has emerged, and even the Five Star Movement, which achieved considerable national success, failed to secure a stable foothold in the Aosta Valley<sup>1</sup>.

This pattern reflects the markedly localised and personalised nature of regional competition. Anti-establishment attitudes rarely translate into a rejection of the political order as such; rather, they manifest as endogenous contestations aimed at redefining the boundaries of autonomist legitimacy. Splits, micro-lists, and civic initiatives express intra-elite dissent, while anti-establishment rhetoric often takes the form of “alternative autonomism”, criticising clientelism, opacity, or elite closure without questioning the legitimacy of the autonomist model itself. This discourse does not hinge on a people-versus-elites dichotomy, but on the opposition between “authentic Valdostans” and political actors accused of betraying the original mission of autonomy. The result is a partial moralisation of political discourse, centred on claims for an authentic and non-particularistic form of autonomist governance.

Consequently, anti-establishment competition unfolds within a broadly consensual perimeter, one that shares the foundational values of the system. In this respect, it constitutes a form of symbolic competition (Brubaker, 2004): a struggle over the legitimate representation of Aosta Valley’s identity, autonomist heritage and the safeguarding of the mountain environment. This yields a depolarised system in which conflicts revolve not around strong ideological or programmatic alternatives, but around the meanings attributed to autonomy, territorial identity, and environmental stewardship.

The second aspect concerns the characterisation of the regional political system as *clientelistic*. While the Aosta Valley does not exhibit a fully-fledged “clientelistic regime” in the traditional Southern Italian sense – as in the classic studies of Southern Italy (e.g. Piattoni, 2001; Chubb, 1982) – it nonetheless presents structural conditions favourable to selective political exchange practices. These include its small demographic scale, the regional control

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<sup>1</sup> The weakness of the Five Star Movement is not unique to the political landscape of the Aosta Valley, but rather reflects a broader trend observed in several other regions across Italy. Nevertheless, in most of these areas, the M5S has retained some degree of local representation, albeit significantly weaker than its presence at the national level. In the Aosta Valley, by contrast, after initially forming a group within the Regional Council in 2013 and electing a Member of Parliament in 2018, the M5S effectively vanished from the political scene. In the 2025 regional elections, the party did not even present a list, and some of its former members have since joined other political formations.

over public expenditure, and a highly politicised local bureaucracy. Taken together, these factors produce a functional interdependence between the political elite, the administrative apparatus, and civil society – a configuration typical of sub-state systems dominated by territorially rooted parties (Hepburn, 2010; Detterbeck, 2012).

Historically, the Union Valdôtain (UV) has acted as a dominant ethnonationalist party, capable of exercising stable control over the main administrative and distributive resources of the autonomous region. Its position as a *regional-state party* (Hepburn, 2020; Giordano and Roller, 2003) has fostered the development of dense and personalised relational networks, whose territorial embeddedness has enabled the UV to operate as a gatekeeper for access to public opportunities and collective resources. In this sense, the literature on the Aosta Valley autonomist party highlights a political system founded on proximity, personal loyalty, and selective reciprocity, rather than on open ideological competition (Hepburn, 2010).

At the electoral level, the use of preference voting (see below) further reinforces the personalisation of electoral support, encouraging *personal vote-seeking* behaviour (Carey and Shugart, 1995). In a demographically limited and socially interconnected environment, this dynamic increases the traceability of ties between voters and candidates, thereby creating favourable conditions for particularistic exchanges or clientelistic brokerage relationships (Piattoni, 2001; Kitschelt and Wilkinson, 2007).

In summary, the Aosta Valley political system can be described as an autonomist regime dominated by a territorial party that uses the control of public resources, proximity networks, and the personalisation of voting as mechanisms of legitimacy and power stabilisation (Detterbeck, 2012; Hepburn, 2010). This suggests that the regional context provides both incentives and opportunities for clientelistic behaviour, even if such practices do not always manifest themselves in an explicit or pervasive way. Rather, they should be seen as a functional component of the Aosta Valley's autonomist model of governance, reflecting a relational logic of political exchange (Piattoni, 2001). Citizens turn to their “trusted” councillor to obtain responses or access to regional resources, and this interaction reinforces personal loyalty as well as the legitimacy and persistence of the autonomist system.

## 2. The Regional Electoral System

The Aosta Valley's electoral system, governed by Regional Law No. 3 of 12 January 1993, adopts a single-round proportional system with a dual threshold mechanism. The law, amended several times over the years (Regional

Law No. 16/2017; Regional Law No. 9/2019), was most recently reformed by Regional Law No. 27/2025, subsequently submitted to a confirmatory referendum in August 2025. The consultation was requested following a series of political and procedural initiatives: an initial petition launched by left-wing forces (notably AVS–Greens) was invalidated due to formal irregularities, yet the referendum was ultimately called upon the request of seven regional councillors belonging to Lega and the Mixed Group.

The referendum effectively served as a prelude to the regional electoral campaign, focusing on the reinstatement of the three-preference system, after the previous election had allowed only one preference per voter. Held on 10 August 2025, the referendum recorded limited turnout (around 16% of eligible voters), even this type of confirmatory consultations does not require a quorum for validity. The result confirmed the new electoral law, with 52.1% of votes in favour.

The referendum campaign was notable for producing cross-cutting and atypical alignments. Among the supporters of the new law were the Union Valdôtaine and the Partito Democratico (PD) – then coalition partners in government – alongside a leftist political coalition (Valle d'Aosta Aperta). Their main argument was that reintroducing three preferences, combined with a partial gender alternation mechanism (see below), would enhance participation and facilitate the election of young candidates, women, and *new faces* in Aosta Valley politics.

Conversely, AVS–Greens, together with Fratelli d'Italia, emerged as the main proponents of the referendum, having jointly collected the necessary signatures to trigger the referendum. According to AVS–Greens, reverting to three preferences would favour incumbent councillors and strengthen personal patronage networks, fuelling a system of “electoral alliances” (*cordate elettorali* - vote-exchange cliques) rather than genuine political renewal.

Overall, the referendum campaign produced a picture of informal “de facto alliances” that cut across traditional political divides and allowed other parties to adopt neutral or “free vote” positions, presenting the issue as a technical matter. Nonetheless, the debate echoed, to some extent, the 1993 national referendum that – as observed by Pasquino (2002) and other scholars – contributed, among other factors, to the transformation of Italian political system. As is well known, the outcome of a referendum depends not only on the content of the question, but also on the broader political context in which it takes place, which determines its effective salience.

The 28 September 2025 regional elections were held to renew the 35-member Regional Council (*Consiglio Valle*), within a single regional constituency. A pure proportional system was used for seat allocation, based on the largest remainders and whole quotients method.

Unlike most other Italian regions, the Aosta Valley does not provide for the direct election of the President of the Region, who is instead chosen by the Regional Council from among its members. This institutional feature makes the Council the central organ of regional governance, usually leading to post-electoral – frequently heterogeneous – coalitions required to ensure executive stability.

More specifically, the 2025 electoral reform confirmed the general structure of the previous system but introduced several key innovations. First, it reinstated the possibility for voters to express up to three preferences, replacing the single-preference rule established by the prior legislation. Second, it introduced a conditional gender alternation rule: when a voter expresses all three preferences, at least one must be for a candidate of a different gender; otherwise, the last preference is invalidated (Art. 34). Furthermore, the reform increased the minimum quota of gender representation in candidate lists from 30% to 35% (Art. 3-bis). This means that, in order to strengthen women's presence in elected bodies, no more than 65% of the list can consist of one gender (usually male).

The law also retained the dual threshold mechanism (Art. 50). The first threshold corresponds to the *natural quotient*, obtained by dividing the total number of valid votes by 35 (the number of seats to be filled). Lists that do not reach this value are excluded from any subsequent seat allocation. The second threshold is set at twice the natural quotient, thus excluding lists that fail to reach that level. In the 2025 elections, these corresponded approximately to 2.8% and 5.7% of valid votes respectively, placing the Aosta Valley's thresholds among the highest in European proportional systems.

Finally, the law confirmed the possibility of assigning a majority bonus to any list or coalition obtaining at least 42% of valid votes, as well as the abolition of the run-off (*ballottaggio*) – initially introduced in 2007 (Regional Law No. 22/2007) and repealed in 2017.

In summary, the Aosta Valley's electoral system can be defined as a corrected proportional model, equipped with rationalisation mechanisms (thresholds and majority bonus) designed to limit political fragmentation. However, such instruments have proven insufficient to guarantee stable governing majorities within a highly volatile and fragmented political environment.

### **3. Political Supply and the Electoral Campaign**

Nine lists were admitted to the 28 September 2025 regional elections. The right-wing bloc was represented by an alliance that largely replicated national patterns, bringing together Fratelli d'Italia (FdI), Lega Vallée d'Aoste

(Lega VdA) and Forza Italia, the latter allied with La Renaissance – Insieme Ensemble (FI-LRV), a local liberal-centrist formation.

The autonomist camp was centred on the Union Valdôtaine (UV), flanked by the “Autonomists of the Centre” (AdC). The latter was a new political coalition, primarily composed of forces that had previously run separately during the outgoing legislature. Among them were Stella Alpina – a long-time governing ally of the UV – one candidate affiliated with Azione (a national party not formally represented in the regional elections), and two additional formations: Pour l’Autonomie, founded by the late historic UV leader Augusto Rollandin (who passed away in 2024), and Rassemblement Valdôtain, a small movement led by councillor Stefano Aggravi, formerly elected with Lega. Finally, the left-wing bloc consisted of several formations which, unlike those in the right, presented themselves separately at the polls. These included the Partito Democratico / Federalisti Progressisti (PD/FP), Alleanza Verdi e Sinistra (AVS), and Valle d’Aosta Aperta – a small anti-establishment left formation. In addition, a civic list named Valle d’Aosta Futura joined the contest. This movement-oriented group declared itself independent and alternative to both traditional regional and national parties.

The 2025 electoral competition represented a delicate equilibrium between continuity and renewal in the regional political agenda. The Union Valdôtaine conducted a highly symbolic campaign focused on the recent *Réunification*, the main pre-electoral political event. Its core message was the reaffirmation of the UV’s role as guarantor of institutional stability and authentic interpreter of Aosta Valley’s identity.

The centre-right coalition – composed of Lega, FdI, and FI-LRV – built its program around administrative and socio-economic priorities, emphasising security, efficient use of public resources, and infrastructure modernisation, particularly concerning Alpine mobility and road connections. The aim was to challenge the autonomist camp by proposing a model of “efficient autonomy” and pragmatic territorial governance.

On the progressive front, the Partito Democratico focused on social policy issues, advocating for a stronger regional welfare system, enhanced territorial healthcare, education, and youth opportunities. The Alleanza Verdi e Sinistra introduced new themes into the regional debate, such as ecological transition, environmental protection of Alpine areas, and energy sustainability, thus aligning its agenda with the broader European environmental policy framework.

Alongside these actors, two civic lists – notably Valle d’Aosta Aperta and Valle d’Aosta Futura – promoted political discourses centred on civic participation, administrative transparency, and the fight against clientelism. These forces sought to embody a *third way* between historic autonomism and na-

tional parties, emphasising moral and political renewal as well as citizens' reappropriation of decision-making power.

In terms of issue salience, the 2025 campaign revolved around four main thematic clusters:

1. governability and institutional stability, viewed as prerequisites for administrative continuity after years of unstable majorities;
2. energy and environmental transition, with particular focus on the hydroelectric sector and the management of the *Compagnia Valdostana delle Acque* (CVA);
3. social and territorial policies, including health, education, mobility, and housing;
4. renewal of political representation, through transparency, participation, and gender parity.

The combination of these issues revealed an electoral arena that was deeply localised yet embedded in broader European and national trends – notably, the crisis of party representation, the personalisation of politics, and the increasing salience of environmental and gender-related issues. In this respect, the 2025 Aosta Valley elections represented a paradigmatic case of low ideological polarisation but high symbolic density, where competition hinged more on credibility and governing capacity than on programmatic divisions.

#### **4. Electoral Results of 28 September 2025**

Voter turnout reached about 63%, a decline of over seven percentage points compared to the 2020 elections (70.5%). This is the lowest voter turnout ever recorded in regional elections in Aosta Valley. Since the early 2000s, electoral participation had consistently remained above 70%, with the sole exception of 2018, when it declined to approximately 65%. This confirms a broader national trend of growing abstention, particularly pronounced in contexts characterised by party fragmentation and low perceived competitiveness between political blocs. Table 1 reports the vote shares and seat distribution among the lists which obtain seats<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Two lists (Valle d'Aosta Unita and Valle d'Aosta Futura) were excluded from the proportional allocation of seats, having failed to surpass the thresholds established by the electoral law.

Tab. 1 – Vote shares and number of seats by list, Regional Elections 2025

List	% Votes	Seats
Union Valdôtaine (UV)	32	13
Autonomisti di Centro (AdC)	14.1	6
Fratelli d'Italia (FdI)	11	4
Forza Italia – LRV – Insieme	10.1	4
Lega Vallée d'Aoste	8.4	3
Partito Democratico / Federalisti Progressisti (PD/ FP)	8	3
Alleanza Verdi e Sinistra – Rete Civica (AVS)	6.3	2
	100	35

Source: Author's elaboration on official data from the Autonomous Region of Aosta Valley (Consiglio Valle, 2025).

Compared to 2020, the 2025 results reveal a complete reversal in the balance of power. *Lega*, which had emerged as the leading party in 2020 with 23.9% of the vote, fell sharply to 8.4%. Conversely, the Union Valdôtaine more than doubled its support, rising from 15.8% to 32%.

Despite *Lega*'s collapse, the centre-right coalition – comprising Fratelli d'Italia, Forza Italia, and Lega Vallée d'Aoste – collectively obtained almost 30%, marking the first-ever entry of Fratelli d'Italia into the Regional Council and the return of Forza Italia, which had failed to pass the threshold in 2020.

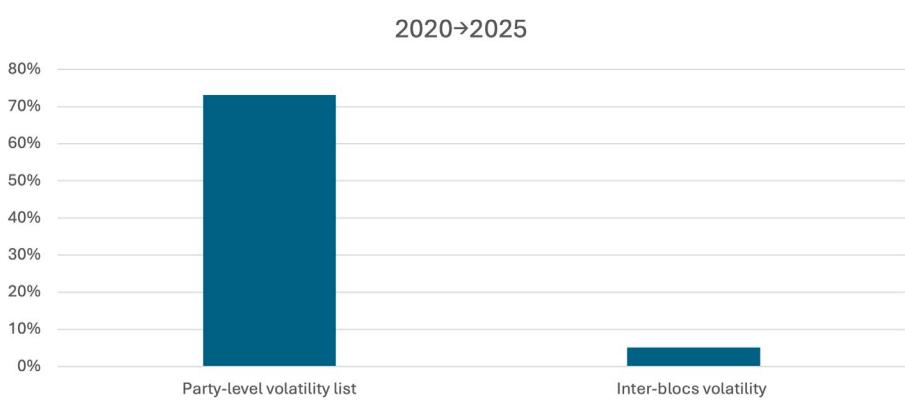
On the progressive side, the Partito Democratico (PD) maintained a stable level of support (8%), securing three seats – a result broadly consistent with its 2020 performance, when it ran as part of the Progetto Civico Progressista (PCP), a centre-left and autonomist coalition that won seven seats overall, three of which were allocated to PD representatives. Alleanza Verdi e Sinistra (AVS) entered the Council for the first time with two seats, while Valle d'Aosta Viva, together with Valle d'Aosta Futura, failed to surpass the electoral threshold.

A notable outcome also came from the Autonomisti di Centro (AdC), which, with 14.1%, became the third largest force. The AdC brought together parties and personalities of diverse backgrounds – including Stella Alpina, Pour l'Autonomie, Rassemblement Valdôtain, and one Azione - affiliated candidate – consolidating a moderate autonomist bloc.

Figure 1 illustrates the value of the Pedersen index which measures electoral volatility between the two last rounds (2020 and 2025). It shows the sharp contrast between high organisational volatility (due to mergers and

splits) and the structural stability of the three main political blocs – autonomist, centre-right, and progressive-civic.

*Figure 1 – Electoral volatility in the 2020–2025 regional elections (Pedersen Index)*



Source: Author's elaboration on official data

The Pedersen index (organizational volatility) calculated per list reached a very high level (approximately 73 percentage points), indicating an apparent “political earthquake” largely driven by the *autonomist réunification* (UV +16 p.p.), the decline of Lega (−15.5 p.p.), and the reconfiguration of the political supply (disappearance of PCP, AV-SA-IV, VdA Unie; emergence of AdC, FdI, FI-LRV, VdA Aperta). However, when calculated by political bloc, the index drops to around 4 percentage points, revealing a substantial continuity of the system: the relative weight of the three major blocs remains almost unchanged, with internal but not cross-bloc shifts.

The party system in the Aosta Valley therefore appears structurally stable, but subject to organisational realignments and flexible coalition strategies, consistent with the features of a depolarised consensual system.

Analysis of electoral results and Regional Council composition, informed by additional indices (see table 2), reveals a gradual yet significant structural consolidation of the regional party system between 2020 and 2025.

The overall architecture of the party system remains pluralist and proportional; however, the indices point to a discernible trend toward greater concentration and reduced fragmentation. The Herfindahl–Hirschman Index (HHI), which measures the concentration of votes among parties, rose from 0.137 to 0.162. This shift suggests a moderate increase in the concentration of electoral support around a limited number of political actors.

Tab. 2 - Comparative analysis of party system indicators. Percentage values

Indicator	2020	2025	Δ	Interpretation
Herfindahl-Hirschman Index (HHI -votes)	0.137	0.162	+0.025	↑ Concentration of votes
Effective Number of Parties (ENP -votes)	7.30	6.19	-1.11	↓ Fragmentation (voters)
Effective Number of Parties (ENP -seats)	6.39	4.73	-1.66	↓ Fragmentation (representation)
Gallagher Index (GI)	2.28	4.42	+2.14	↑ Slight disproportionality
Competition Index (CI)	0.92	0.82	-0.10	↓ Competitiveness (slightly decline)

Source: Author's elaboration on Consiglio Valle data (2020–2025).

Conversely, the Effective Number of Parties (ENP), which offers an intuitive measure of party-system pluralism, declined from 7.3 to 6.2 on the vote side. This contraction of the party spectrum reflects the political effects of the *Réunification* of the autonomist camp, which absorbed several splinter groups and reinstated the Union Valdôtaine (UV) as the pivotal actor within the regional system.

The Gallagher Index, which assesses disproportionality between votes and seats, remains below the commonly used threshold value of 5, confirming that the regional electoral system continues to guarantee a high degree of proportionality. Its increase in the 2025 regional elections mainly mirrors the uneven distribution of support within coalition-linked lists rather than a substantive modification of the proportional mechanism itself.

Finally, the Competition Index, which captures the closeness between the two largest parties, slightly declined, signalling the effects of the re-emergence of a dominant-party configuration centred on the UV. Nonetheless, competition between the two principal parties remains relatively high.

Overall, the 2025 election thus represents a phase of selective reconsolidation of the regional party system - lower fragmentation, higher concentration, and reduced competitiveness - consistent with the dynamics typically observed in small, highly institutionalized regional systems where autonomy-based cleavages and proportional representation foster stability and continuity rather than alternation.

The analysis of the XVII Legislature makes it possible to assess the levels of political, generational, and gender renewal, as summarised in Table 3.

Tab. 3 – Indicators of political, generational, and gender renewal. Percentage and absolute values.

Indicator	Formula	2020	2025	Variation	Trend
Turnover Index (TI) <sup>1</sup>	New members / 35	0.57	0.37	-0.20	↓lower renewal
Elite Retention Index (ERI) <sup>2</sup>	Re-elected / 35	0.43	0.46	+0.03	↑ continuity
Descriptive Representation Index (DRI) <sup>3</sup>	Women / 35	0.114	0.229	+0.115	↑greater parity
Gender Parity Ratio (GPR) <sup>4</sup>	Women / men	0.13	0.30	+0.17	↑greater parity
Youth Representation Index (YRI) <sup>5</sup>	Under 35 / 35	0.057	0.029	-0.028	↓ less youth
Age Shift Index (ASI) <sup>6</sup>	Δ average age	–	+5	+5 years	↑ ageing

Source: Author's elaboration on Consiglio Valle data (2020–2025).

The Turnover Index (or Political Renewal Rate) measures the proportion of first-time councillors relative to the total number of seats. In the 2025 regional election, the share of newly elected councillors declined substantially, from 57% to 37%, alongside a corresponding increase in re-elected or returning members. This shift points to a progressive consolidation of the regional political elite. A similar pattern emerges with respect to generational dynamics. The Youth Representation Index shows that only one councillor under the age of 35 was elected in 2025, while the Age Shift Index indicates that the average age of councillors rose from 49 to 54 years. Taken together, these trends highlight the limited extent of generational renewal within the regional assembly.

Regarding gender representation, both the Descriptive Representation Index (DRI) - which captures the proportion of women elected - and the Gender Parity Ratio (GPR) - which compares the number of women to men - registered a slight increase. Notably, the number of women elected doubled (from 4 to 8), reaching 22.9%. Although still below the 30% threshold recommended by the Council of Europe (Gender Equality in Politics, 2023), this development may offer an initial, albeit tentative, indication of the partial effectiveness of the new gender alternation provisions.

Overall, the data confirm the persistence of a political system with weak generational renewal, typical of small-scale highly institutionalised contexts (Best and Cotta, 2000). The increase in women's representation, on the other

hand, stands out as the only clear discontinuity, signalling a slow but steady alignment with European gender-balance standards.

## 5. Conclusions

The 2025 regional elections mark a phase of partial recomposition of the Aosta Valley's political system. After more than a decade of fragmentation, the *Réunification* of the Union Valdôtaine produced a significant electoral result, reaffirming the resilience of the autonomist model and its adaptive capacity in the face of national political pressures.

Within the new Regional Council, political turnover has decreased, the average age of councillors has increased, while female representation has improved, though it remains well below the gender balance threshold. The overall configuration reflects a political system entering a phase of stabilisation, in which elite continuity coexists with a slow rebalancing of gender representation, but without generational renewal.

The analysis of the campaign and results confirms that the political system of the Aosta Valley is not structured along ideological lines, but around shared thematic and identity-based dimensions, which each political actor reworks in their own way. In other words, while the horizontal polarisation between right and left tends to fade, a new symbolic polarisation emerges around the meanings of autonomy, representation, and “good governance”. In this sense, the Aosta Valley constitutes a paradigmatic case of territorialised consensual politics, where conflict does not disappear but shifts from the programmatic to the semantic and symbolic level.

The Aosta Valley can thus be interpreted as an example of depolarised competition, in which major political actors share a common understanding of regional autonomy, differing mainly in the narrative and symbolic management of that legacy. This model corresponds to von Beyme's (2000) characterisation of depolarised and consensual systems, where political competition remains alive but develops within a consensual frame of reference marked by programmatic convergence and low value conflict. In the Aosta Valley, this consensual field rests upon three shared pillars: the value of *special autonomy*; adherence to a *pro-European orientation*; and the centrality of *territorial identity* as the foundation of political legitimacy.

This depolarisation, however, does not imply the absence of competition. It manifests in the form of symbolic competition, i. e. a struggle for the legitimate definition of shared meanings on who authentically represents autonomism, who embodies good governance, who speaks “on behalf of the territory”. As Brubaker (2004) suggested, in identity-dense political systems

conflict tends to shift towards the terrain of meaning and representation, rather than that of concrete policy differences.

In this framework, 2025 stands as an emblematic moment: all major actors – Union Valdôtaine, Lega Vallée d'Aoste, Forza Italia, Autonomisti di Centro, Partito Democratico, civic lists, and ecological movements – appropriated the language of autonomy and regional identity, differentiating themselves not so much by their goals as by their interpretation of its meaning. The Union Valdôtaine presented autonomy as the symbol of historical continuity and governmental stability; the centre-right reframed it as efficient autonomy and responsible governance; the progressive and civic forces reinterpreted it as participatory and sustainable autonomy.

Consequently, the political system of the Aosta Valley operates within a consensual arena of high symbolic density, where political legitimacy derives less from ideological differentiation than from the capacity to mobilize shared meanings. The result is a form of competition that is low in contrast but high in intensity: a contest centred not on programmatic distance, but on symbolic capital and the cultivation of personal votes. Within this system, two main challenges persist: the strong personalization of voting behaviour and its consequences for the closure of regional policy-making, and the relative instability of governments, stemming from shifting coalitions and a pronounced tendency toward political *trasformismo*.

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