

# Political Professionalization Beyond National Borders: An Analysis of Italian MPs in Overseas Constituencies

Matteo Boldrini 

Department of Political Science, LUISS University, Italy

**Correspondence:** Matteo Boldrini ([mboldrini@luiss.it](mailto:mboldrini@luiss.it))

**Submitted:** 31 July 2023 **Accepted:** 5 December 2023 **Published:** 13 March 2024

**Issue:** This article is part of the issue “The Political Representation and Participation of Migrants” edited by Sergiu Gherghina (University of Glasgow) and Sorina Soare (University of Florence), fully open access at <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.i354>

## Abstract

Among European countries, Italy is one of the relatively few cases to provide a quota of reserved parliamentary seats for non-resident citizens. Despite an increased scientific interest in the topic, the group of MPs elected in Overseas Constituencies remains overlooked in the available literature. The gap relates to factors such as their socio-biographical profile, precedent careers, parliamentary activity, the role played in their recruitment by the party abroad or at a national level, and their style of representation. In this vein, the article investigates the career profiles of Italian MPs elected in Overseas Constituencies from 2006 (the first elections with the introduction of citizen representatives living abroad) to 2022. Based on an original data set and through an analysis of their biographical and political characteristics, the article builds a typology of elected MPs abroad by cross-referencing two dimensions derived from the literature: the linkage with the host country and the presence of previous political and associational experiences. The analysis shows that different types of MPs have different career lengths and a different capacity to collect preference votes.

## Keywords

foreign constituency; Italy; MPs; party politics; political careers; representation

## 1. Introduction

Following the 2006 political elections, the Centre-Left (C-L) government led by Romano Prodi, who won by a margin of just 25,000 votes (D’Alimonte & Chiaramonte, 2007) and held a razor-thin majority in the Senate (158 to 156 seats), secured a vote of confidence thanks to crucial support from Senator Luigi Pallaro, elected in the Overseas Constituency. Similarly, in January 2008, the absence of Senator Pallaro was decisive in causing the downfall of the same government. Over two years later, in December 2010, during a motion of

no-confidence against the Berlusconi IV Government, Deputy Antonio Razzi, elected overseas for the Italy of Values party, decided—along with others—to vote against the motion, leaving his party and thus providing the government with the vote of confidence.

Since its introduction in 2001, the Overseas Constituency and its MPs have been a recurring theme in the imagination of Italians. Gradually, the issue of representing emigrant communities has gained increasing attention from social scientists (Caramani & Grotz, 2015; Caramani & Strijbis, 2012; Ellis, 2007; Lafleur, 2013, 2015). Numerous scholars have focused on this aspect of democratic representation in the Italian context as well. However, studies have predominantly concentrated on the electoral dimension, examining features such as electoral regulations (Gratteri, 2008), their compatibility with the constitutional framework (Grosso, 2002; Sica, 2008; Tarli Barbieri, 2007), and electoral outcomes (Battiston & Luconi, 2020; Battiston & Mascitelli, 2012).

Conversely, one of the less investigated aspects is related to overseas MPs and their careers. Most studies focused on the characteristics of MPs elected by Italians residing abroad within the broader group of national parliamentarians (e.g., De Lucia, 2013; Tronconi & Verzichelli, 2014, 2019). A few dedicated studies (Sampugnaro, 2017), however, provide clear insights into certain aspects related to the specific features, the selection process, and candidacies of MPs, as well as their representation styles without delving deeply into their career paths and without offering classifications that can be effectively applied to distinguish their trajectories. The reasons for this neglect can be attributed to the nature of the research object. Despite the significant growth in the recognition of external voting rights for emigrant citizens since the 1990s (Wellman et al., 2023), countries that provide direct representation through the election of MPs constitute a minority (Collyer & Vathi, 2007). Furthermore, even in those countries that guarantee this type of representation, they form a small minority compared to the overall set of parliamentarians, making it more challenging to conduct specifically dedicated research and, therefore, easier to assimilate them with national MPs.

However, understanding the evolution of the career profiles of these MPs is significant for two main reasons. Firstly, it allows a deeper exploration of how democratic representation is developed. The choice to establish a special constituency for emigrants, thereby segmenting their representation (Hutcheson & Arrighi, 2015), creates a distinct arena of representation (Caramani & Grotz, 2015) governed by its own set of rules, trajectories, and peculiarities. Indeed, political or social backgrounds may result in distinct forms of representation and interpretations of their roles. Consequently, delving into the career profiles of its MPs facilitates a deeper comprehension of how this representation manifests. Secondly, it enables a better grasp of the specificities and disparities among the MPs elected abroad, leading to a deeper comprehension of the factors that account for their political success or failure. This includes understanding how distinct features influence party strategies, electoral competitions, and consensus construction.

In this context, Italy could be considered a typical case study (Gerring, 2008) to explore. Among European countries, Italy was among the first to introduce a quota of MPs reserved for overseas voters. Also, it presented particularly robust emigration patterns, contributing to the presence of a large community of emigrants. Furthermore, Italy has generous legislation regarding the acquisition of Italian citizenship based on ancestry, significantly increasing the number, at least potentially, of those eligible to participate in the election of this specific category of MPs.

From the perspective of this thematic issue, this study aims to further expand the understanding of the representation of emigrant communities by exploring the career paths of its MPs, integrating perspectives offered by other research. The article by Finn and Ramaciotti (2024) explores the factors that led to the delayed adoption of voting rights for emigrants by examining the repeated rejections of legislative proposals on this issue in Chile until its implementation. On the other hand, Gherghina and Basarabă (2024) highlight how interest in politics and participation positively influence voter turnout in the home country. Specifically, this contribution focuses on the perspective of political supply, exploring the careers of Italian MPs considering their institutional trajectory and their integration in the two communities to which they belong.

The aim is to fill a gap in the literature, focusing on the career paths of Italian deputies and senators elected in the Overseas Constituency and providing a classification that can better differentiate the distinct features of this form of MPs and offer a clearer understanding of their careers. Specifically, the research question aims to investigate the profile of elected Italian MPs and how their socio-biographical characteristics shape their careers. The article develops a typology of MPs elected abroad by intersecting two dimensions: the relationship with the host country (operationalized as being born there or having emigrated later) and the relationship with Italian integration associations abroad (operationalized as having held positions in these organisations). The analysis shows, consistent with the literature, that positions in emigrant associations are widely diffused among the MPs. Furthermore, the explorative bivariate analysis suggests that MP types that are more rooted in their community tend to have longer careers and gather a higher percentage of preference votes.

The article is structured as follows. Section 2 outlines the theoretical framework of the research, presenting the proposed classification of MPs. Section 3 focuses on data and methods. Section 4 illustrates the main descriptive statistics of the MPs and applies the classification to MPs, presenting its distribution and cross-referencing the results with their career paths and the percentage of preference votes received. Conclusions will then follow.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

The increasing size of migration flows between countries has drawn the attention of scholars, especially since the 1990s, to the political representation of emigrant communities (Collyer, 2013; Laguerre, 2013). However, until recent years, social sciences had not extensively addressed this topic, with the literature focused mostly on the different dimensions of emigration and diaspora and multi-level party politics (van Haute & Kernalegenn, 2021, p. 2).

In recent years, scholars have demonstrated a growing interest in the political representation of emigrant communities. A significant portion of the literature has primarily concentrated on the analysis of parties operating abroad (van Haute & Kernalegenn, 2021), their activities (Friedman & Kenig, 2021; Paarlberg, 2021), their membership (Burgess & Tyburski, 2020; Collard & Kernalegenn, 2021), and their organizational features (Kernalegenn & van Haute, 2020).

Furthermore, a second body of literature has directed its focus towards the representation of communities abroad. This aspect holds particular relevance, as the establishment of parliamentary representation can serve as a means of maintaining a link or connection (Proksch & Slapin, 2015) while also expressing the

home country's interest towards the community abroad (Gherghina et al., 2023). Broadly speaking, the literature has outlined diverse strategies to establish community representation in foreign locales. These approaches are linked to practical considerations based on the political or economic benefits that communities can bring to their home country (Gamlen, 2014), the necessity of preserving the national community (Gamlen, 2014; Koinova, 2018), and as a symbol of commitment to both democracy and international norms (Gamlen, 2014; Turcu & Urbatsch, 2015). Research on this subject has shown that it is primarily the MPs elected abroad who emphasize this connecting function (Sampugnaro, 2017).

In this framework, the analysis of the career path of MPs elected abroad still suffers from this excessive uniformity with national politics due to the lack of extensive studies and theoretical reflections.

The subject of political careers is one of the traditional topics in social sciences, and a great deal of research has shown which factors favour the establishment of one career over another (Best & Higley, 2018). Traditionally, studies on political careers can be distinguished into those focusing on *actors* and those focusing on “contextual” factors (Jahr & Edinger, 2015; Vercesi, 2018). Among “actor-oriented” analyses, different approaches can be observed. The “biographical” approach highlights how career paths are influenced by the primary socialization paths (Walter, 2014). The “personality” approach underlines how political careers are influenced by the individual personality of politicians (Caprara & Silvester, 2018). The “ambition” approach focuses on ambition as the key variable in defining a political career (Lawless, 2012). The “social background and socialization” approach states that social characteristics and individual background are fundamental in determining how politicians can achieve specific offices (Pilet et al., 2014). Finally, the “selection and deselection” approach uses the principal-agent theory to emphasize how politicians are chosen for office based on their previous institutional experience.

On the contrary, among “context-oriented” approaches, we can distinguish between an “opportunity structure” approach, which states that the definition of a political career is influenced more by the availability of political positions, their social desirability and accessibility than by personal characteristics (Grimaldi & Vercesi, 2018), the “intraorganizational” approach, which suggests that political careers are defined by the informal and formal incentives within organizations (Peters, 2010), and the “supply-demand” approach, which instead stresses how political careers are determined through a progressive matching of candidates' resources, representing certain social groups and the preferences of the selectors (Carnes, 2016).

This article aims to partially overcome this gap in the literature by exploring the career paths of MPs abroad and proposing a typology to help better interpret their stability and change over time.

Based on the literature, which advocates integrating various approaches (Boldrini & Grimaldi, 2023b; Vercesi, 2018), this article employs a blend of the socialization and opportunity structure approaches. Relying extensively on subjective elements, such as variable ambitions and expectations, may pose challenges in empirical data utilization. While this may entail a trade-off in terms of the depth and complexity of the analysis, employing a typology founded on less subjective criteria helps mitigate these issues.

The classification aims to enhance comprehension of the characteristics of the parliamentarians who are elected abroad. It serves both descriptive and interpretative purposes, classifying MPs and emphasizing how specific types of MPs, due to their traits, tend to have lengthier careers and can amass a higher percentage

of preference votes. It is intended to form a theoretical framework rooted in the Italian context. However, it can also find application in future research across diverse contexts with MPs elected directly by emigrant communities. Its value lies precisely in its relatively straightforward analytical nature and ease of replication, which facilitates its broad applicability in various institutional settings.

The typology encompasses two dimensions. The first pertains to the relationship with the community in the host country. It is recognized that emigration experiences vary widely. Emigrants exist in a state of “transnationality,” establishing complex connections with both their country of origin and the host country (Basch et al., 1994, p. 7). However, these connections can manifest in diverse ways, involving various degrees of assimilation (Landolt, 2008). Some individuals may belong to the second or third generation, being born and raised in the host country and thus fully integrated into its society. Others might be immigrants for economic, educational, or employment reasons, still in the process of assimilating. This perspective suggests that migration patterns can influence political engagement (Gauja, 2020; Ortensi & Riniolo, 2020). As the literature emphasizes, varying levels of integration result in differing levels of political participation (Ortensi & Riniolo, 2020). This is a crucial factor, particularly concerning political engagement in both the host and home countries (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003). Recent immigrants, lacking strong ties to the host country or exhibiting a low degree of integration will offer a different perspective on the emigrant community. Conversely, individuals with robust connections to the host country, possibly second or third generations, embody an older, more deeply embedded migration, with stronger ties spanning both countries. They may represent not only the emigrant community but also individuals deeply connected to the country of origin, bound by a dual sense of belonging.

The second dimension revolves around the relationship with associations that promote integration with fellow nationals in the host country. In certain contexts, the literature emphasizes the role of these organizations in mobilization, as well as in mediating and bridging between the host country and the country of origin (Colucci, 2002). These structures serve as vital hubs for emigrants, offering services or simply providing a space for community gatherings. Membership in these entities signifies a robust and structured connection with the host country’s realities, which, in turn, facilitates a link with the country of origin. Furthermore, studies have underscored the political significance of these organizations (Sampugnaro, 2017), for they are able to cultivate relationships within the immigrant community. This is particularly crucial for political parties operating abroad, and some parties may aim to recruit political personnel from these associations, leveraging this network of relationships for electoral purposes (Rashkova, 2020).

Although the two dimensions may appear related, they pertain to distinct aspects of the MP’s career. The first concerns their socialization, background, and connections with the community, whereas the second pertains to their opportunities within emigrant associations. A weak connection with the host country does not automatically imply a robust involvement in emigrant associations. Conversely, it could signify frequent visits to the home country or recent or short-term emigration, which might not have extensive involvement in associations and may not directly result in relevant positions within them.

By combining the two dimensions, four distinct types of MPs elected overseas emerge (Table 1). The first, characterized by weak ties and no connections to migrant associations, is termed Outsider. These individuals often immigrate to the host country (typically in adulthood) but lack a close affiliation with migrant associations, indicating a degree of distance from their compatriot community. The second type (strong ties with the host

**Table 1.** Typology of MPs elected abroad.

|                             |        | Associative experience  |                           |
|-----------------------------|--------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
|                             |        | No                      | Yes                       |
| Linkage to the host country | Strong | Heritage Representative | Diaspora Representative   |
|                             | Weak   | Outsider                | Expatriate Representative |

country and no links to migrant associations) is termed Heritage Representative. These individuals are deeply assimilated and integrated into the host country’s community, having been born and raised there, and have held no positions with their compatriot organizations. The third type (limited ties with the host country but strong associational connections) is termed Expatriate Representative. These individuals were not born in the host country, possibly immigrating in adulthood, yet maintain close ties with their community’s associations. Lastly, the Diaspora Representative constitutes an individual who, despite having strong connections in the host country, also maintains a robust relationship with their community of origin.

As mentioned earlier, the typology serves not only a descriptive purpose but also an interpretative one. It highlights how different attributes of MPs can account for distinct career trajectories. Drawing on insights from the literature on political capital, it can be hypothesized that candidates who hold advantageous positions within their electoral context (and consequently possess more resources) may be more proficient in leveraging these advantages to secure a nomination (or party re-election), gain greater consensus, and ultimately secure more preference votes in elections. This could lead to longer, more stable careers. Therefore, it is conceivable that both Expatriate Representatives and Diaspora Representatives are more likely to have extended and well-established careers and tend to receive a higher percentage of votes compared to their counterparts, Heritage Representatives and Outsiders.

### 3. Data and Method

This analysis serves not only a descriptive purpose in examining a segment of the political class that has not been extensively studied in the literature but also adopts an exploratory (Yin, 2017) and heuristic (George & Bennett, 2005) perspective. This approach seeks to inductively probe into the characteristics of the research subject to formulate hypotheses and classifications that will be subsequently tested through comparative studies.

From this perspective, due to its distinctive characteristics, Italy can be considered a typical case study (Gerring, 2008) for investigating the career paths of MPs elected in the Overseas Constituency.

First, Italy presents strong historical migratory patterns. Italy has a rich history of emigration, notably during two key periods following the unification of Italy in 1861 and the conclusion of World War II (Pozzetta et al.,

1992). More recently, a substantial surge in emigration occurred, including segments of the highly skilled population, in response to the economic crisis that struck the country around 2008–2009 (Tintori & Romei, 2017). The National Registry of Italians Residing Abroad, which keeps track of Italians living abroad, reports that about six million Italians live abroad, making up about 10% of the country's total population. This number exceeds the comparable figures in other major European nations where residents living abroad can cast ballots for their representatives. Moreover, one further unique feature is the special rules for obtaining citizenship, which allow anyone who can prove they are of Italian descent to become a citizen (Zincone, 2006). This is particularly interesting given the expected growth of Italy's diaspora, which results in between 60 and 80 million Italian nationals living abroad (Di Salvo, 2017).

The analysis focused on the careers and socio-biographical characteristics of the overseas MPs, both in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, from the 2006 elections (the first implementation of the law introducing the Overseas Constituency) to the latest political elections in 2022. Thus, the analysis encompasses the entire population of MPs elected abroad, comprising a total of 84 positions (56 in the Chamber of Deputies and 28 in the Senate). These positions were distributed across the overseas district, with 34 in Europe, 25 in Southern America, 15 in Northern and Central America, and 10 in Oceania, Asia, Africa, and Antarctica, and were occupied by 52 different MPs.

The variables considered include age, gender (whether male or female), their linkage with the host country (operationalized as a dichotomous variable related to the place of birth, if in Italy or the host country), the share of preference votes obtained, the institutional career, party affiliation, and the previous involvement in associations of Italians abroad.

The choice of operationalising the country's link with the place of birth is necessarily a crude indicator that certainly fails to capture the complexity of the link between different countries. However, it was selected for its simplicity and immediacy because of the ease with which it can be applied to different contexts and biographical paths.

Career has been operationalized as the number of terms the MPs serve in either the Chamber of Deputies or the Senate (not necessarily in the Overseas Constituency). Two individuals, Guglielmo Picchi and Antonio Razzi, were initially elected in the Overseas Constituency and subsequently on a list within the national borders. None of the MPs have ever held ministerial positions; only two have served as undersecretaries at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The decision to exclusively focus on institutional careers at the national level was influenced by contextual factors and considerations of data reliability. Firstly, Italy prohibits residents abroad from holding municipal offices, thus limiting the availability of institutional roles at the subnational level. Secondly, including positions in the host country would have complicated and potentially compromised data collection. Gathering information about previous career paths at the local level in numerous countries would have been especially challenging due to the absence of dedicated databases. Additionally, it would have introduced data comparability issues, as accessibility to such data can vary between countries. Given these factors, and acknowledging the limitations involved, the decision was made to concentrate exclusively on careers at the national level.

For the sake of simplicity, party affiliation was operationalized in four distinct categories based on the coalition to which the party belongs. These are divided into C-L, encompassing the Democratic Party (Partito

Democratico—PD), Italy of Values (Italia dei Valori—IDV), and More Europe (Più Europa—+E); Centre-Right (C-R), which includes Forza Italia (FI), the League (Lega), Brothers of Italy (Fratelli d'Italia—FDI), and For Italy in the World with Tremaglia (Per l'Italia nel mondo con Tremaglia); the South American Emigrants Parties (SAEP), consisting of the South American Union of Italian Emigrants (Unione Sudamericana Italiani Emigrati—USEI), Associative Movement of Italians Abroad (Movimento Associativo Italiani all'Estero—MAIE), and Italian Associations in South America (Associazioni Italiane in Sud America—AISA); and other parties, encompassing With Mario Monti for Italy (Con Monti per l'Italia) and the Five Star Movement (Movimento Cinque Stelle—M5S).

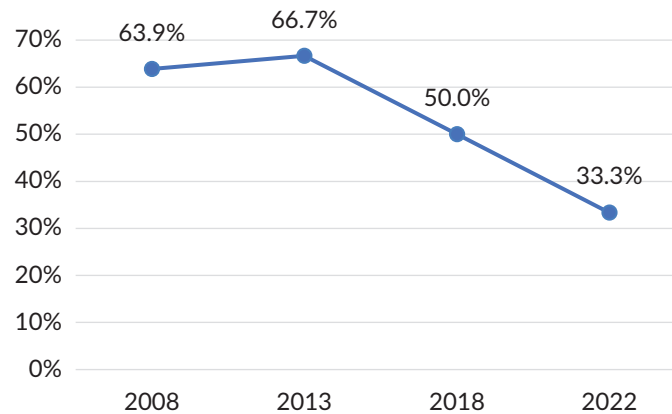
The presence of prior associative experiences was operationalized as a dichotomous variable, taking a value of one if the candidate held positions in associations dedicated to organizing the lives of Italians abroad. This approach was chosen over a more general assessment of associative involvement, and the variable was constructed in a dichotomous manner without accounting for potential multiple associative affiliations. This decision was driven by the imperative of ensuring data reliability and the comparability of results. Including broader forms of participation would have added complexity to data collection and posed challenges when assessing the impact of various forms of activism. Similarly, to enhance comparability and data reliability, we opted not to consider the possibility of multiple positions, treating the variable in a dichotomous fashion. This aligns with insights from the literature emphasizing the significance of associations for integrating Italians abroad (Sampugnaro, 2017). Only organisations that held relevance from this perspective were considered, while involvement in groups solely related to the country of emigration was excluded. Theoretically, previous experience in associations can vary during the term of office as an MP. In fact, there may be the possibility of an MP who, without holding any office at the time of candidacy, later acquires one during any subsequent term. This is a particularly relevant scenario as, for the purposes of the theoretical classification presented here, it would imply the MP transitioning from one type to another. However, during the data collection process, no MPs were found to have taken on positions in emigrant associations during their parliamentary terms, rendering this possibility purely hypothetical.

Due to the limited number of total MPs in the dataset, the research used a variety of statistical techniques, such as univariate and bivariate analyses. Two phases of analysis were carried out: a first concentrated on using descriptive statistics to show the profile of MPs; and a second, more exploratory phase, which involved conducting two bivariate analyses to investigate the relationship between the various MP types and the percentage of preference votes and their career length.

#### 4. The MPs' Profile

Before examining the MPs' profile, it is useful to briefly consider their re-election share. As shown in Figure 1, the percentage of re-elected MPs follows a decreasing trend, reaching its peak in the 2008 and 2013 elections (with almost 2/3 being re-elected) before decreasing significantly. This trend is consistent with the process of deinstitutionalization affecting the Italian political system (Chiaromonte, 2023), but compared to national MPs, the impact is attenuated. The 2013 elections represented an “earthquake” (Chiaromonte & De Sio, 2014), with turnover rates of the parliamentary class among the highest in Italian history (Tronconi & Verzichelli, 2014). However, this effect seems to manifest in the Overseas Constituency only from the 2018 elections. It reaches its peak in the 2022 elections, confirming the specificity of the competition in the Overseas Constituency compared to the national one (Battiston & Luconi, 2020). This distinctiveness becomes even more apparent





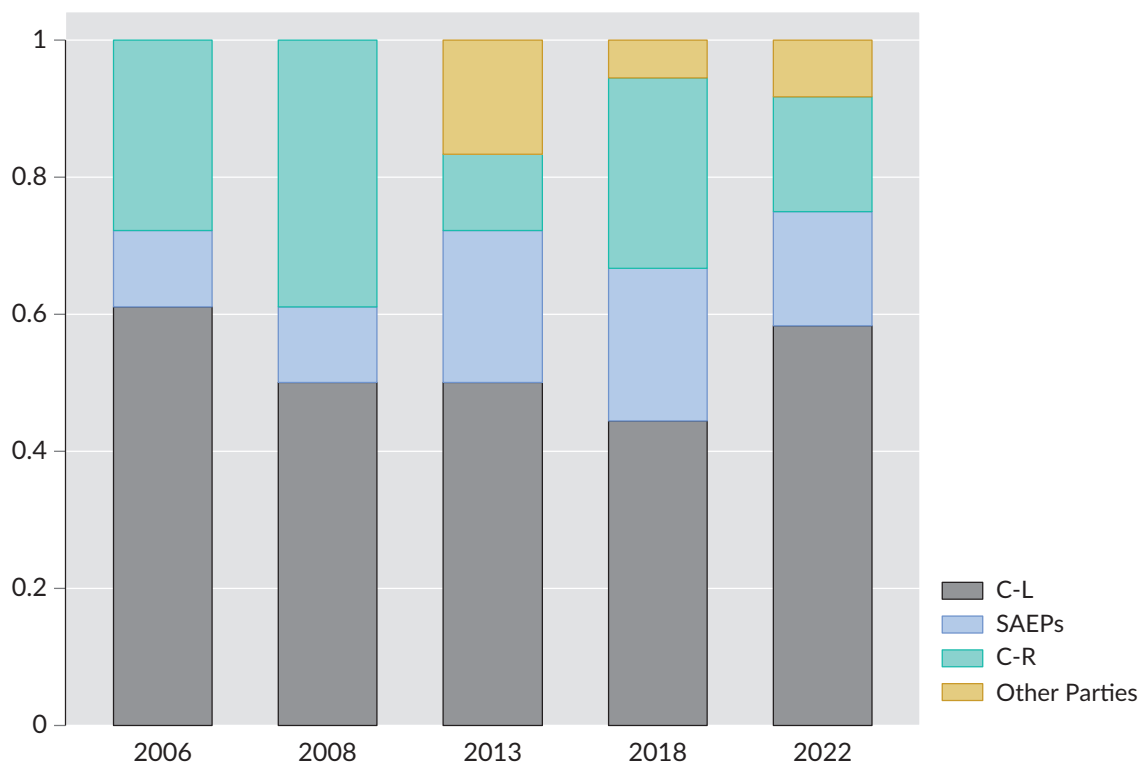
**Figure 1.** Re-election rates of MPs elected in the Overseas Constituency in Italy. Source: Author's own elaboration based on data of the Italian Central Directorate for Electoral Services (2023).

when examining the distribution of MPs' ages. The 2018 elections witnessed a noteworthy decrease in the age of elected representatives, both in the Chamber of Deputies (where the median age dropped from 48.5 to 42.5) and in the Senate (with the median age declining from 61 to 52). Although the median age experienced a slight uptick in the 2022 elections, it remains higher compared to the period before 2018. This indicates a substantial rejuvenation of the parliamentary class, even within the Overseas Constituency.

Regarding other socio-biographical characteristics, MPs elected abroad, while possessing their own specific traits, do not significantly deviate from the profile of the national parliamentary class. In terms of gender, there is a notable prevalence of men, accounting for just over 80% of the total, as opposed to women, who make up less than 20%. Only during the 2013 and 2018 elections, in line with the trend observed for national parliamentarians (Tronconi & Verzichelli, 2014, 2019), did the percentage of women increase, comprising almost 40% of the total. However, aligning once more with the pattern seen among national MPs (Boldrini & Grimaldi, 2023a), this percentage dipped once again in the 2022 elections.

Regarding party affiliation (Figure 2), a substantial prevalence of MPs linked to the C-L can be observed. Around 60% of MPs in the various elections appear to belong to this political area. On the contrary, the C-R is clearly underrepresented, reaching an all-time low in the 2013 elections with just two MPs elected. On the contrary, the presence of MPs from the lists of citizens of Italian origin in South America is relatively constant at approximately 10% of MPs in all electoral rounds, even with 22% in the 2013 elections. Finally, the 2013 elections mark the emergence of the tripolar scenario, with the appearance of MPs from new parties such as the M5S and the list of Mario Monti (which is, however, limited to the 2013 elections). Finally, regarding career duration (Table 2), a significant portion of MPs only served one term (59.6%). Around 19.2% were elected for two terms, 17.3% for three terms, while a small minority, comprising 3.8% of MPs, were re-elected for four terms.

Table 3 presents the distribution of MPs based on their prior involvement in associations and their birthplace. Examining the birthplace data, most MPs (76.9%) were born within Italy's borders, while a minority (23.1%) were born outside. This highlights that, despite Italy's extensive history of emigration and its inclusive citizenship legislation for those with Italian heritage, the selection of MPs elected abroad predominantly involves individuals who have emigrated relatively recently.



**Figure 2.** Distribution of Italian MPs elected overseas by party and year of elections.

Examining associative memberships, however, reveals a drastically different picture, with nearly half of the MPs (46.2%) holding posts in Italy-related organisations abroad. These findings underline the significance of these associations in the recruitment (and election) process of MPs. Notably, the most substantial experiences (26.1%) were reported within the COMITES (Committees of Italians Abroad—Comitati degli Italiani all'estero), followed by trade unions and patronages (21.7%), associations for economic exchange and integration between different countries (21.7%), political parties or movements (17.4%), and other aggregative associations representing Italians from specific regions of the country (17.4%). By integrating these two dimensions, we can categorize MPs according to the previously proposed typology.

The prevalent category is Outsiders (42.3%), individuals lacking strong ties to the host country and holding no association positions. The second category (34.6%) comprises Diaspora Representatives, MPs born in Italy who have held positions within emigrant associations. The Expatriate Representatives, characterized by

**Table 2.** Distribution of the number of terms among MPs elected abroad in Italy (2006–2022).

| N° of tenures | Absolute frequencies | Relative frequencies |
|---------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| 1             | 31                   | 59.6%                |
| 2             | 10                   | 19.2%                |
| 3             | 9                    | 17.3%                |
| 4             | 2                    | 3.8%                 |
| Total         | 52                   | 100%                 |

**Table 3.** Distribution of Italian MPs elected abroad in the proposed typology.

|                               |        | Associative experience                     |   | Total             |
|-------------------------------|--------|--|---|-------------------|
|                               |        | No   | Yes   |                   |
| Linkage with the host country | Strong | Heritage Representative<br>9.6%<br>(N = 5) | Diaspora Representative<br>34.7%<br>(N = 18)  | 42.3%<br>(N = 22) |
|                               | Weak   | Outsider<br>42.3%<br>(N = 22)              | Expatriate Representative<br>13.5%<br>(N = 7) | 57.7%<br>(N = 30) |
|                               | Total  | 53.8%<br>(N = 28)                          | 46.2%<br>(N = 24)                             | 100%<br>(N = 52)  |

a weak link with the host country and prior positions in organizations, constitute the third largest category, accounting for 13.5% of all MPs. Lastly, the Heritage Representatives, MPs with a strong link to the host country but without any ties to associations, form the smallest category, comprising 9.6% of the total. These results align well with our expectations, illustrating a widespread presence of associative experiences. However, they ultimately represent a “limited” resource, not readily accessible to everyone, yet significant in the political landscape.

Analysing the distribution of different MP types among the coalitions (Table 4), a general prevalence of Diaspora Representatives is observed within the C-L (13%) and SAEP (33.3%), as opposed to the C-R (7.1%). Both the C-L and C-R (47.8% and 35.7%, respectively) also exhibit a higher proportion of expatriate candidates, underscoring the pivotal role of expat organizations in the recruitment process of MPs for the main coalitions. Conversely, the selection of Heritage Representatives appears to be more prevalent among SAEPs (22.2%), aligning with the presence of a historically significant community of Italian origin in that region. Lastly, the Outsiders are widely dispersed within the C-R and constitute the entirety of MPs recruited by the other parties, emphasizing the greater challenge faced by these lists in attracting individuals deeply rooted in emigrant communities.

It remains to be seen if these categories correspond conceptually to different characteristics and provide distinct competitive advantages related to available resources. To investigate this, two separate analyses were conducted to compare the average preference percentages obtained by each type of MP. The goal was to determine if distinct types were correlated with varying percentages of preferences and an extended duration

**Table 4.** Distribution of MP type among coalitions.

|               | Outsider | Heritage Representative | Expatriate Representative | Diaspora Representative | Total |
|---------------|----------|-------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|-------|
| C-L           | 30.4%    | 8.7%                    | 47.8%                     | 13%                     | 100%  |
| SAEPs         | 22.2%    | 22.2%                   | 22.2%                     | 33.3%                   | 100%  |
| C-R           | 50%      | 7.1%                    | 35.7%                     | 7.1%                    | 100%  |
| Other parties | 100%     | 0%                      | 0%                        | 0%                      | 100%  |

of institutional mandate. It is important to note that the results of this analysis have exploratory validity, align with the research's aims, and are influenced by the limited sample size and absence of controls.

Table 5 shows the average share of preference votes obtained at the elections by the different MP types. As can be seen from the table, compared to the average (25.4%), the percentage of preference votes is significantly lower for Outsiders (18.85%), only slightly lower for Heritage Representatives (23.1%), and slightly higher for Expatriate Representatives (26.4%). Conversely, it is considerably higher for Diaspora Representatives (36.4%). The analysis thus seems to suggest that MPs with closer ties to the host country and the community of origin migrants are able to achieve higher percentages of personal approval compared to others.

It still needs to be verified whether this greater ease in obtaining approval also translates into a longer political career. To this end, Table 6 illustrates the average career duration in terms of mandates for each type of MP. As can be seen, similarly to what happened with the preference vote, both Outsiders and Heritage Representatives show a lower average career duration (1.3 and 1, respectively) than the overall average (1.6). Again, therefore, the presence of these characteristics in MPs is associated with a longer career in terms of mandates. Unlike the previous case, however, Heritage Representatives have the shortest careers, with none being reconfirmed for a second term. This specificity can be explained partially by the specific nature of the Heritage Representatives, primarily concentrated within the lists of emigrants to South America. Over the years, these lists have experienced significant turbulence, including splits and the emergence of numerous distinct factions. Although, as previously mentioned, the analysis lacks control variables and is of an exploratory nature, it appears to suggest notable distinctions in the career trajectories of various MPs. Those who previously held positions in associations within the host country, and to a lesser extent, those born in the election constituency, seem to have longer careers and a greater capacity to gather consensus.

**Table 5.** Average share of preference votes by MPs type.

| MPs type                  | Average share of preference |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Outsider                  | 18.8% (N = 29)              |
| Heritage Representative   | 23.1% (N = 5)               |
| Expatriate Representative | 26.4% (N = 35)              |
| Diaspora Representative   | 36.4% (N = 15)              |
| Total MPs                 | 25.4% (N = 84)              |

**Table 6.** Average numbers of terms by MPs type.

| MPs type                  | Average number of terms |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| Outsider                  | 1.3 (N = 22)            |
| Heritage Representative   | 1 (N = 5)               |
| Expatriate Representative | 1.9 (N = 18)            |
| Diaspora Representative   | 2 (N = 15)              |
| Total MPs                 | 1.6 (N = 52)            |

## 5. Conclusion

The research explores the profiles of Italian MPs elected abroad, scrutinizing their characteristics and career trajectories from the creation of the Overseas Constituency up to the latest elections in 2022. By employing an exploratory analysis, utilizing quantitative methods, and encompassing all elected candidates, the study seeks to augment the comprehension of the career paths of these MPs.

Descriptively, the analysis shows some differences between the Overseas Constituency and the national political sphere. Trends such as the national MPs' gradual rejuvenation and the significant turnover observed in the 2013 and 2018 elections applied to the overseas MPs in a more gradual and subdued manner over time. Also, MPs elected abroad exhibit distinct characteristics, particularly a notable overrepresentation of professional categories linked to entrepreneurship, surpassing the levels seen in national parliamentarians. The research also underscores the widespread presence of associative experiences among MPs, confirming the centrality of these pathways in the journeys of those elected abroad and the relatively low number of MPs born directly in the country of emigration. Despite the historically robust and well-established Italian communities abroad, the recruitment of MPs in these constituencies appears to lean towards more recent emigrants rather than individuals of Italian descent seeking to maintain a link with their country of origin.

From a theoretical standpoint, the research introduces a typological classification of MPs elected abroad, offering a finer delineation of their distinctions. Given the specific context, not all MPs elected abroad fit the same model. The typology distinguishes between: those individuals who belong to one of the historical Italian communities abroad but are outsiders to their social integration circuits (Heritage Representative); those who, while part of the host country's community, are integrated into associations of Italians abroad (Diaspora Representative); those who are outsiders to the host community but integrated into associations (Expatriate Representative); and finally, those who are outsiders to both the host community and associations (defined as Outsider).

The research evidence that this classification not only holds conceptual merit by differentiating MPs with diverse socio-biographical backgrounds but also holds interpretative value. It suggests that MPs deeply ingrained in emigrant organizations (such as Diaspora Representatives and Expatriate Representatives) tend to have more enduring careers and secure higher percentages of preferential votes. Consequently, career paths appear to be more solid and extended for MPs who are firmly rooted in their community compared to those who are entirely external to it.

Given the exploratory nature of the research, further investigations are necessary to validate its findings. Longitudinal studies will be essential in determining whether the trends observed here will be corroborated in subsequent elections. Furthermore, comparative studies can ascertain the applicability of this classification (and its explanatory capacity) in contexts beyond Italy.

Additionally, the research opens further paths of inquiry. This encompasses exploring whether different representation styles are correlated with distinct types of MPs elected abroad, investigating diverse forms of political and institutional engagement (both prior and subsequent) in both the country of origin and the host country, and scrutinizing whether they are tied to specific communities within such extensive constituencies. Lastly, an additional perspective could be dedicated to applying the same interpretative framework to

national parliamentarians. As noted initially, the scientific literature has paid limited attention to investigating prior associative experiences in the recruitment pathways of the parliamentary class and their significance in structuring careers and as a competitive resource. Unpacking this aspect for national parliamentarians and comparing their similarities and differences with MPs elected abroad could represent a vital line of inquiry in comprehending the career trajectories of Italian parliamentarians and the evolution of representation in contemporary Western democracies.

### Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interest.

### Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

### References

- Basch, L., Glick Schiller, N., & Blanc, C. S. (1994). *Nations unbound: Transnational projects—Postcolonial predicaments and Deterritorialized nation-states*. Routledge
- Battiston, S., & Luconi, S. (2020). The vote of Italians abroad: An anomaly in the new Italian political landscape? *Contemporary Italian Politics*, 12(1), 62–76. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23248823.2019.1709760>
- Battiston, S., & Mascitelli, B. (2012). *Il voto italiano all'estero: Riflessioni, esperienze e risultati di un'indagine in Australia*. Firenze University Press.
- Best, H., & Higley, J. (Eds.). (2018). *The Palgrave handbook of political elites*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Boldrini, M., & Grimaldi, S. (2023a). Career models in the new tripolar order: Political profiles of the Italian MPs after 2022 general elections. *Italian Journal of Electoral Studies*, 86(1), 51–65. <https://doi.org/10.36253/qoe-14368>
- Boldrini, M., & Grimaldi, S. (2023b). Political careers and stability in office of regional ministers in Italy. *Regional & Federal Studies*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13597566.2023.2268524>
- Burgess, K., & Tyburski, M. D. (2020). When parties go abroad: Explaining patterns of extraterritorial voting. *Electoral Studies*, 66, Article 102169.
- Caprara, G. V., & Silvester, J. (2018). The personality attributes of political elites. In H. Best & J. Higley (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of political elites* (pp. 476–487). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Caramani, D., & Grotz, F. (2015). Beyond citizenship and residence? Exploring the extension of voting rights in the age of globalization. *Democratization*, 22(5), 799–819. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2014.981668>
- Caramani, D., & Strijbis, O. (2012). Discrepant electorates: The inclusiveness of electorates and its impact on the representation of citizens. *Parliamentary Affairs*, 66(2), 1–21.
- Carnes, N. (2016). Why are there so few working-class people in political office? Evidence from state legislatures. *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, 4(1), 84–109.
- Central Directorate for Electoral Services. (2023). *L'Archivio*. Ministero dell'Interno. <https://elezionistorico.interno.gov.it>
- Chiaromonte, A. (2023). Italy at the polls: Four lessons to learn from the 2022 general election. *Contemporary Italian Politics*, 15(1), 75–87.
- Chiaromonte, A., & De Sio, L. (2014). *Terremoto elettorale. Le elezioni politiche del 2013*. Il Mulino.
- Collard, S., & Kernalgenn, T. (2021). The membership of parties abroad: A case study of the UK. *Comparative Migration Studies*, 9, Article 34. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-021-00238-0>

- Collyer, M. (Ed.). (2013). *Emigration nations: Policies and ideologies of emigrant engagement*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Collyer, M., & Vathi, Z. (2007). *Patterns of extra-territorial voting* (Working Paper T2). Centre for Migration Research.
- Colucci, M. (2002). Il voto degli italiani all'estero. In P. Bevilacqua, A. De Clementi, & E. Franzina, (Eds.), *Storia dell'emigrazione Italiana* (Vol. 2, pp. 597–609). Donzelli Editore.
- D'Alimonte, R., & Chiaramonte, A. (2007). *Proporzionale ma non solo: Le elezioni politiche del 2006*. Il Mulino.
- De Lucia, F. (2013). Il Parlamento 2013: Nuovo e al femminile. L. De Sio, M. Cataldi, & F. De Lucia (Eds.), *In le elezioni politiche 2013* (pp. 137–140). CISE—Centro Italiano Studi Elettorali.
- Di Salvo, M. (2017). Il rapporto della Fondazione Migrantes Italiani nel Mondo. In R. Bombi (Ed.), *Nuovi spazi comunicativi per l'italiano nel mondo: L'esperienza di Valori identitari e imprenditorialità* (pp. 69–79). Forum Edizioni.
- Ellis, A. (2007). *The history and politics of external voting: In voting from abroad*. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
- Finn, V., & Ramaciotti, J. (2024). Reject, reject, reject...passed! Explaining a latecomer of emigrant enfranchisement. *Politics and Governance*, 12, Article 7331.
- Friedman, A., & Kenig, O. (2021). Parties beyond national borders: Exploring the activities of Israeli political parties abroad. *Comparative Migration Studies*, 9, Article 23. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-021-00230-8>
- Gamlen, A. (2014). Diaspora institutions and diaspora governance. *International Migration Review*, 48(1), 180–217.
- Gauja, A. (2020). Temporarily' abroad: Partisan organisation and mobilisation outside Australia. *Parliamentary Affairs*, 73(4), 874–886. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pa/gsaa042>
- George, A. L., & Bennett, A. (2005). *Case studies and theory development in the social sciences*. MIT Press.
- Gerring, J. (2008). Case selection for case-study analysis: Qualitative and quantitative techniques. In J. M. Box-Steffensmeier, H. E. Brady, & D. Collier (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of political methodology* (pp. 645–684). Oxford Academic.
- Gherghina, S., & Basarabă, A. (2024). Migrants' voter turnout in the home country elections: Non-integration or political anchor? *Politics and Governance*, 12, Article 7396.
- Gherghina, S., Soare, S., & Tap, P. (2023). Speaking out against the discrimination of Romanians abroad: An analysis of parliamentary speeches in the home country. *Nationalities Papers*, 51(2), 403–424. <https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2022.32>
- Gratteri, A. (2008). Le elezioni dell'altro mondo: Gli Italiani all'estero e il voto per corrispondenza. In R. D'Alimonte & C. Fusaro (Eds.), *La legislazione elettorale Italiana: Come migliorarla e perché* (pp. 171–194). Il Mulino.
- Grimaldi, S., & Vercesi, M. (2018). Political careers in multi-level systems: Regional chief executives in Italy, 1970–2015. *Regional & Federal Studies*, 28(2), 125–149.
- Grosso, E. (2002). Il voto all'estero: Tra difficoltà applicative e dubbi di costituzionalità. *Quaderni Costituzionali*, 22(2), 346–347.
- Hutcheson, D. S., & Arrighi, J.-T. (2015). Keeping Pandora's (ballot) box half-shut: A comparative inquiry into the institutional limits of external voting in EU member states. *Democratization*, 22(5), 884–905.
- Jahr, S., & Edinger, M. (2015). *Political careers in Europe. Career patterns in multi-level systems*. Bloomsbury.
- Kernalegenn, T., & van Haute, É. (Eds.). (2020). *Political parties abroad: A new arena for party politics*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003015086>
- Koinova, M. (2018). Endorsers, challengers or builders? Political parties' diaspora outreach in a post-conflict state. *International Political Science Review*, 39(3), 384–399.

- Lafleur, J.-M. (2013). *Transnational Politics And The State. The external voting rights of diasporas*, New York and London: Routledge.
- Lafleur, J.-M. (2015). The Enfranchisement of Citizens Abroad: Variations and Explanations. *Democratization* 22(5), 840–860. doi:10.1080/13510347.2014.979163.
- Laguerre, M. S. (2013). *Parliament and diaspora in Europe*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137280602>
- Landolt, P. (2008). The transnational geographies of immigrant politics: Insights from a comparative study of migrant grassroots organizing. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 49(1), 53–77. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1533-8525.2007.00106.x>
- Lawless, J. (2012). *Becoming a candidate. Political ambition and the decision to run for office*. Cambridge University Press.
- Ortensi, L. E., & Riniolo, V. (2020). Do migrants get involved in politics? Levels, forms and drivers of migrant political participation in Italy. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 21, 133–153. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-019-00703-x>
- Østergaard-Nielsen, E. (2003). *Transnational politics: Turks and Kurds in Germany*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203361627>
- Paarlberg, M. A. (2021). Competing for the diaspora's influence at home: Party structure and transnational campaign activity in El Salvador. In A. D. Alonso & H. Mylonas (Eds.), *The microfoundations of diaspora politics* (pp. 67–88). Routledge.
- Peters, B. G. (2010). *The politics of bureaucracy: An introduction to comparative public administration*. Routledge.
- Pilet, J.-B., Tronconi, F., Onate, P., & Verzichelli, L. (2014). Career patterns in multilevel systems. In K. Deschouwer & S. Depauw (Eds.), *Representing the people. A survey among members of statewide and sub-state parliaments* (pp. 209–226). Oxford University Press
- Pozzetta, G., Ramirez, B., & Harney, R. F. (1992). *The Italian diaspora: Migration across the Globe*. Multicultural History Society of Ontario.
- Proksch, S.-O., & Slapin, J. B. (2015). *The politics of parliamentary debate*. Cambridge University Press.
- Rashkova, E. R. (2020). The party abroad: A new modus operandi for political parties. *Parliamentary Affairs*, 73(4), 839–855.
- Sampugnaro, R. (2017). The Italian foreign constituency and its MPs. *Contemporary Italian Politics*, 9(2), 162–184. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23248823.2017.1333838>
- Sica, G. (2008). La legge sul voto degli italiani all'estero e la rottura del principio della rappresentanza parlamentare nazionale. *Politica del Diritto*, 39(4), 703–718.
- Tarli Barbieri, G. (2007). Il voto degli italiani all'estero: Una riforma sbagliata. In R. D'Alimonte & A. Chiaramonte (Eds.), *Proporzionale ma non solo: Le elezioni politiche del 2006* (pp. 119–149). Il Mulino.
- Tintori, G., & Romei, V. (2017). Emigration from Italy after the crisis: The shortcomings of the brain drain narrative. In J.-M. Lafleur & M. Stanek (Eds.), *South–North migration of EU citizens in times of crisis* (pp. 49–64). Springer.
- Tronconi, F., & Verzichelli, L. (2014). La nuova rivoluzione nel ceto parlamentare: Effetti congiunturali e interpretazioni diacroniche. In A. Chiaramonte & L. De Sio (Eds.), *Terremoto elettorale: Le elezioni politiche del 2013* (pp. 203–231). Il Mulino.
- Tronconi, F., & Verzichelli, L. (2019). Il ceto parlamentare al tempo del populismo. In A. Chiaramonte & L. De Sio (Eds.), *Il voto del cambiamento: Le elezioni politiche del 2019* (pp. 209–240). Il Mulino.
- Turcu, A., & Urbatsch, R. (2015). Diffusion of diaspora enfranchisement norms. *Comparative Political Studies*, 48(4), 407–437.



- van Haute, E., & Kernalegenn, T. (2021). Political parties abroad as actors of transnational politics. *Comparative Migration Studies*, 9, Article 27. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-021-00234-4>
- Vercesi, M. (2018). Approaches and lessons in political career research: Babel or pieces of patchwork? *Revista Española de Ciencia Política*, 48, 183–206. <https://doi.org/10.21308/recp.48.0>
- Walter, J. (2014). Biographical analysis. In A. W. R. Rod & P. 't Hart (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of political leadership* (pp. 314–327). Oxford University Press.
- Wellman, E. I., Allen, N. W., & Nyblade, B. (2023). The extraterritorial voting rights and restrictions dataset (1950–2020). *Comparative Political Studies*, 56(6), 897–929. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00104140221115169>
- Yin, R. K. (2017). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods*. SAGE.
- Zincone, G. (2006). Due pesi e due misure: Pronipoti d. Italia e nuovi immigrati. In G. Zincone (Ed.), *Familismo legale: Come (non) diventare italiani* (pp. 3–51). Laterza.

### About the Author



**Matteo Boldrini** is a postdoctoral researcher at the Department of Political Science at Luiss Guido Carli University in Rome. He holds a PhD in Social and Political Change from the University of Florence in a co-tutorship with the University of Paris 1 Panthéon–Sorbonne and an MA in Political Science from the University of Florence. His main research interests are candidates, political representation, and multilevel political careers.