

Inside Technocracy: Features and Trajectories of Technocratic Ministers in Italy (1948–2021)

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Abstract

In recent times, technocratic transformations occurring in the governmental arena of European political systems have prompted growing scholarly interest. This study aims to contribute to this flourishing research agenda by examining the features of Italian technocratic ministers, the underpinnings of their government involvement, and the trajectories they have followed after ruling responsibility from 1948 to 2021. The main findings of the study show that: (a) there is a clear gendered pattern in technocratic appointments; (b) university professors are the most common professional category involved in technocratic appointments; (c) parties are gradually ceding core executive positions to technocratic ministers; (d) technocratic appointments are mainly driven by expertise-related considerations; (e) cases of technocratic ministerial reappointments are negligible; and (f) technocratic ministers take a formal political affiliation, or join top private or public companies after government participation.

1. Introduction

On 13 February 2021, Mario Draghi was sworn in as Italy's new prime minister. Almost ten years after the formation of the technocratic cabinet guided by Mario Monti, the President of the Republic once again entrusted a non-partisan expert to lead the government. In this vein, Italy confirms its place as the promised land of technocracy, not only of populism (Piccolino and Puleo 2021). From a comparative perspective, Italy is witnessing some of the highest shares of technocratic personnel in government (Cotta 2018), both in the so-called 'core executive' positions (Strøm 2000; Amorim Neto and Strøm 2006) and in prime ministerial posts, with five technocratic heads from 1992 to 2021.

Among the recent developments in Italian politics, the gradual reduction of the partyness of governments (Katz 1987) must be carefully considered to properly gauge the transformations occurring in the Italian governmental arena. On the one hand, the decline in partisan presence among Italian executives signals the growing complexity parties are facing in effectively handling the responsibility–responsiveness dilemma thoroughly examined by Peter Mair (2009; 2013). In their ruling activities, government parties are indeed confronted with several constraints posed by external actors, requiring such parties to be *responsible* towards supranational institutions, particularly for issues of budget and fiscal consolidation (Cavaliere 2020; Capati and Improta 2021). At the same time, ruling parties still need to pursue their electoral goals and policy objectives to



survive in office and to be re-elected. To do so, they must satisfy citizens' demands and be *responsive* to them. On the other hand, the increased share of technocratic figures in the government undermines party centrality in the country's political life. Contemporary parties, indeed, are confronted with important challenges, from downward trends in their membership (Van Biezen et al. 2012) and relentless distrust towards them (Bergman et al. 2020). Such challenges can pave the way for non-partisan experts to enter the government and replace parties when it comes to ruling responsibility.

Recently, the formation of technocratic governments in Italy has attracted growing scholarly interest. Mario Monti's cabinet involvement rekindled the discussion on the role of technocracy after the difficulties experienced by party-based governments. According to Verzichelli and Cotta (2018: 78), the formation of the Monti cabinet in 2011 stands as the most extreme case of party abdication, demonstrating the 'bad health' of Italian party government. Such a conclusion is based on the high potential of policy autonomy granted to Monti and his ministers, called to tackle the economic crisis through several important legislative initiatives to achieve financial stability and avoid default. Therefore, almost four years ago, scholars were concerned about 'this palpable sign of weakness of the political system [that] says a lot about the difficult state of Italian parties, twenty years after the crisis of the 1990s' (Verzichelli and Cotta 2018: 78). After a brief interlude of partisan cabinets, Italy quickly returned to the hands of technocratic figures, demonstrating that the weakness of parties is becoming a structural problem of the Italian political system.

This study contributes to the flourishing literature on technocracy by exploring technocratic ministers' professional background and characteristics, expertise, and reappointment patterns, as well as trajectories in terms of career path after government responsibility. It does so by examining the entire life span of Italy's Republican experience, differentiating between three periods, according to the changes and developments of the Italian party system, particularly regarding the governmental arena. Such a differentiation helps to better identify patterns of technocratic ministerships.

The first phase, from 1948 to 1993, is that of 'polarised multipartism' (Sartori 1976). The second phase is known as 'fragmented bipolarism' (D'Alimonte 2005), covering the 1994–2010 period. Finally, the last phase begins in 2011 and terminates in 2021. This period is characterised by 'volatile tripolarism' (Chiamonte and Emanuele 2013) marked by the entrance of new figures in the governmental arena (Monti) and in the parliamentary one (Grillo's M5S) in the first stages of this period, and culminating in the appointment of Mario Draghi (D'Alimonte and Mammarella 2022).

This research strategy aims to address three interrelated research questions. First, the article aims to understand who the technocratic ministers are, and what their background and characteristics are in terms of profession and gender. Second, it investigates whether their appointment is based on the expertise acquired in their professional activities or whether there are cases of misplacement in portfolio allocation. In addition, the article focuses on their reappointments, to understand whether their government participation occurs just for a single occasion or whether they remain actively involved. Third, it aims to understand their paths after political experience. Do they take up political affiliation? Do they return to their professional lives? Do they join public or private institutions from a 'revolving doors' perspective?

The remainder of this study is structured as follows. The second section presents the theoretical framework of the analysis. The third section outlines the research design. The fourth section analyses issues related to technocratic ministers, focusing on five main dimensions. First, it explores background and portfolio allocation. Second, it examines technocratic ministers' expertise and patterns of reappointment. Third, it investigates their career paths and trajectories after cabinet appointment. Finally, the last section discusses the implications for future research and concludes the paper.

2. Theoretical framework

For a long time, cabinets in democratic systems have generally been perceived as partisan cabinets – that is, cabinets composed of partisan personnel who have taken seats in national parliaments (Brunclík 2015). However, in recent times, the enhanced presence of technocratic representation in government (Wrátil and Pastorella 2018; Vittori et al. 2020) has prompted growing scholarly interest. Notably, political scientists have started to examine technocracy's impact in reshaping traditional patterns of democratic governance, underlining its challenges to the party government model (Costa Pinto et al. 2018) and its role as an alternative to both populism and party government (Caramani 2017).

Before entering the political discourse, technocratic ideals of societal management characterised the organisational transformations deriving from industrialisation and Taylorism in the 1920s and 1930s in the United States and Europe (Caramani 2017). Technocracy then became a new form of governance in representative democracies, spreading first in Latin America (Centeno 1994).

According to Caramani (2017), technocratic representation becomes prominent as a consequence of a number of factors. On the one hand, parties are increasingly accused of 'electoralism' – of abandoning their governing roles in favour of the goal of boosting their vote share (vote-seeking perspective), achieving governmental posts (office-seeking perspective), and distributing the spoils of victory (policy-seeking perspective). Such goals 'involve patronage, monitoring electorates through increasingly sophisticated polling instruments as well as policies aimed at short-term results to secure re-election' (Caramani 2017: 58). On the other hand, parties suffer from critiques related to their governance style. From a technocratic viewpoint, policy-making has become more complex, and parties are not equipped to effectively guide such processes. In addition, their decreased ability to rule with expertise places the government in dangerous situations vis-à-vis supranational institutions, which pose several policy constraints limiting the parties' room for manoeuvre. Along these lines, it is argued that complex policy-making should be entrusted to technocrats, endangering the very legitimacy of party ruling (Caramani 2017).

A number of studies have dealt with the critical consequences of technocratic appointments, focusing on the impact of technocracy on democratic governance (McDonnell and Valbruzzi 2014), citizens' preferences regarding technocratic decision-making (Bertsou and Caramani 2020; Chiru and Enyedi 2022), and the role of technocratic personnel in the Italian context (Valbruzzi 2018; Verzichelli and Cotta 2018). Additional examinations have paid attention to the reasons behind technocratic involvement in government, highlighting financial and economic explanations (Alexiadou and

Gunaydin 2019), institutional determinants (Amorim Neto and Strøm 2006), and electoral-related motives (Emanuele et al. 2022).

So far, studies have investigated both the demand and supply sides of the electoral market. As regards the former, citizens' preferences and attitudes towards technocracy have been analysed, showing that citizens may demand expert involvement in political decision-making processes to ensure effective governance, yet they can also be distrustful of experts and reject their unaccountable governance (Bertsou 2022). Chiru and Enyedi (2022) further noticed that individual-level characteristics, such as low political efficacy and authoritarian values, trigger strong support for the replacement of politicians with experts. Furthermore, technocracy appeals to citizens of countries where the quality of democracy is poor. On the supply side, research has emphasised parties' difficulties in managing treacherous crises, diluting governing responsibility towards technocratic figures, especially during electoral turbulence (Emanuele et al. 2022) and economic turmoil (Wrátil and Pastorella 2018). In particular, the need for the appointment of non-partisan members in government lies in the fact that parties must preserve their electoral appeal vis-à-vis voters but struggle to do so when required to implement unpopular reforms in times of electoral or economic instability.

A third line of research stresses the role of institutions in explaining technocratic appointments. In systems in which presidential powers are greater, the involvement of non-partisan personnel should be easier, as the delegation process would overcome the control of parliamentary parties (Cotta 2018). Specifically, the role of the head of state can influence the government formation process and elite selection (Schleiter and Morgan-Jones 2009). As noted by Verzichelli and Cotta (2018: 79), 'this aspect is particularly relevant in a country [such as Italy], where political crises have recurrently determined the conditions for an active role of the President of the Republic in the choice of some key ministerial candidates'.¹

The formation of technocratic cabinets and the presence of non-partisan ministers in government in Italy have been examined in several studies (Cotta and Verzichelli 2002; Marangoni 2012; Giannetti 2013; Castaldo and Verzichelli 2020; Garzia and Karremans 2021). Scholars have particularly focused on Mario Monti's government involvement in managing the financial crisis (Marangoni 2012; Giannetti 2013), comparing such ruling experience with that of Mario Draghi (Garzia and Karremans 2021). Other efforts have been made in relation to the use of non-partisan ministers in Italy, demonstrating the parties' need of technocratic appointments when policy-making becomes more complex, leading to a progressive deviation from the party government model (Verzichelli and Cotta 2018). In the 1950s and 1960s, parties had full control over policy-making, particularly during Fanfani's management of the Italian political system's pivotal party of that time, i.e., the Christian Democracy (DC). During that period, DC membership played a key role in influencing portfolio allocation. In addition, DC's leaders were also deeply involved in the management of several public authorities, such as ENI, IRI, and *Cassa per il Mezzogiorno* (Vassallo 2016). Timewise, the enlargement of the 'pool of ministrables' (Verzichelli and Cotta 2018) started in the late 1980s, marking the tipping point for Italian party government. However, existing

¹ The veto on Paolo Savona as Minister of Economy and Finance in the first Conte cabinet is the most recent instance of the President of the Republic's key role in ministerial selection.

scientific endeavours have indicated that the trend of a technocratic presence in Italy followed predictable paths in terms of government experience, cabinet portfolios, and specific junctures in Italian history. Specifically, technocrats have mostly been appointed in full-technocratic (or caretaker) governments (McDonnell and Valbruzzi 2014). Also, they have been selected for guiding specific portfolios, e.g., Finance, Justice, Treasury. Finally, a technocratic presence was particularly frequent in periods of turmoil, during which greater expertise was demanded (Verzichelli and Cotta 2018).

To guide exploration the article differentiates between three crucial junctures concerning the transformations of the Italian party system and governmental dynamics. This allows patterns of technocratic ministerships to be gauged. As anticipated, the first period is that of the so-called ‘polarised multipartism’ (Sartori 1976) of 1948 to 1993 (from De Gasperi to Ciampi). This period is widely recognised as the golden age of party government (*partitocrazia*), lasting until the political earthquake brought about by the *Mani Pulite* scandal, which prompted the formation of the first technocratic cabinet (Ciampi). The second period considered is ‘fragmented bipolarism’ (D’Alimonte 2005), which started with the formation of the first Berlusconi cabinet in 1994 and ended with his last government experience. This phase was characterised by the formation of the technocratic cabinet led by Dini (1995) and by a (timid) government alternation model between centre-left and centre-right coalitions. The third and last period is that of ‘volatile tripolarism’ (Chiaramonte and Emanuele 2013), which ran from the establishment of the technocratic government headed by Monti (2011) to the (less)² technocratic government led by Draghi (2021), currently in office (D’Alimonte and Mammarella 2022). In this time span, the Italian political system experienced two electoral earthquakes (Chiaramonte and De Sio 2014; Schadee et al. 2019) that profoundly reshaped its features.³

Importantly, all periods considered are characterised by a different degree of party centrality. Along these lines, we should expect dissimilar patterns of technocratic recruitment over time in both general cabinet offices and key positions. Specifically, we expect the first period to record a limited technocratic presence with substantial party control over core executive posts. Moreover, the second period should be characterised by an enhanced technocratic presence and a decrease in the party control of top governmental positions. Finally, considering the increased turbulence in the governmental arena of recent times (Chiaramonte and De Sio 2014), we expect the last period to record technocratic pervasiveness in cabinet and party ‘abdication’ of core executive positions, as the literature on technocracy highlights that technocratic appointments are more frequent in times of economic (Wratil and Pastorella 2018) and electoral turmoil (Emanuele et al. 2022).

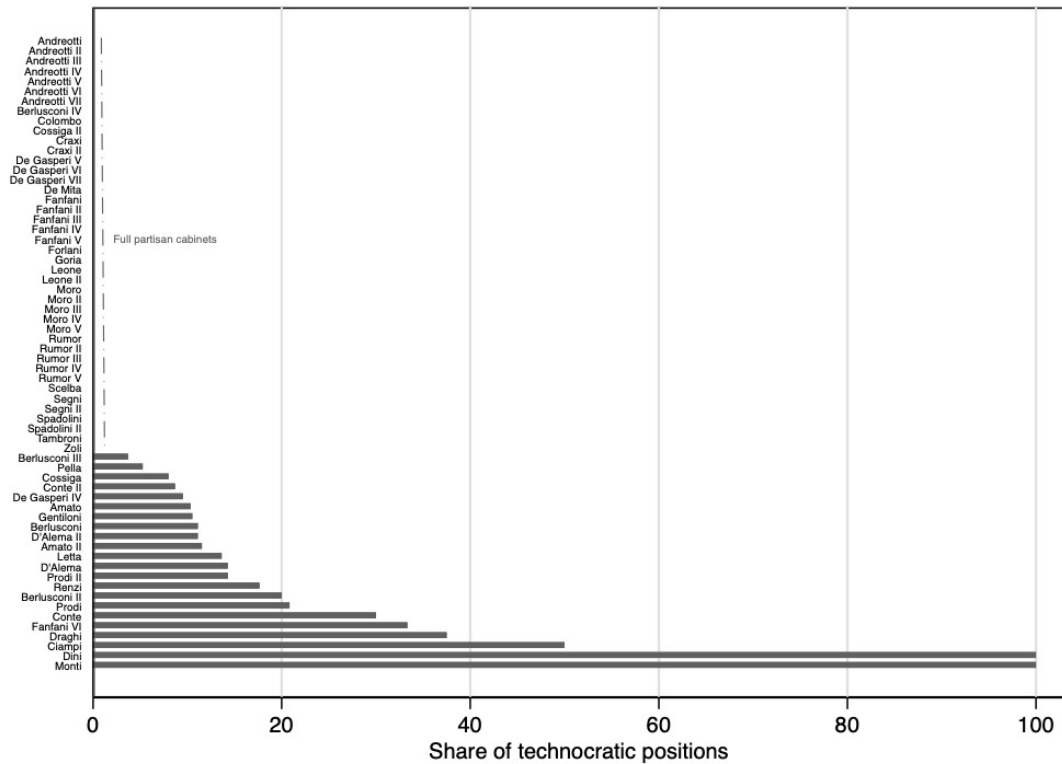
² In terms of share of government positions held by technocratic ministers.

³ In particular, the bipolar dynamics of the second phase were undermined by Monti’s appointment and ultimately interrupted by the emergence of the Five Star Movement (M5S). In this way, the party system structure became volatile and tripolar (Chiaramonte and Emanuele 2013).

3. Design

This study expands the scientific investigation of technocratic ministers in Italy by focusing on the professional background, gender, expertise, reappointment, and career path of each appointed technocratic minister in Italian governments from 1948 to 2021.

Figure 1. Share of technocratic positions in Italy



Source: own elaboration of original data.

As shown in Figure 1, technocrats achieved full control of cabinet positions on two occasions (Dini 1995 and Monti 2011). Moreover, the technocratic presence has grown in the last decade. All cabinets that have recently held government responsibility, i.e. Monti, Letta, Renzi, Gentiloni, Conte and Conte II, have indeed appointed technocratic ministers. This pattern is reinvigorated by the share of technocrats that can be recorded in the current Draghi cabinet (37.5%). Therefore, looking at recent trends, the established tradition of party government in Italy seems to have been interrupted.

Since the definitions of *technocratic minister* and *technocratic governments* have been discussed in relevant studies (McDonnell and Valbruzzi 2014), it is important to clarify their meaning. Specifically, *technocratic ministers* are defined as ministers with no partisan affiliation at the time of appointment, holding relevant policy expertise. Therefore, the objects of analysis of this study are non-partisan ministers. However, while all technocratic ministers are non-partisan ministers, the opposite is not true, as there is the possibility that non-partisan ministers do not necessarily hold specific expertise.⁴ The

⁴ Such phenomena were investigated by Marsh et al. (2010), who explored features of so-called ‘celebrity politicians’.

article explores patterns of expertise by looking at possible misplacements in cabinet portfolios, such as non-partisan personnel with no expertise in their portfolios of appointment, who could have used their expertise in different cabinet positions.

This study aims to examine five different dimensions characterising Italian technocratic ministers. To do so, five variables are considered. First, similar to Alexiadou and Gunaydin (2019), the study looks at the professional background of technocratic ministers to both trace their network and environment and grasp their expertise in specific policy areas. Second, to investigate whether there were gendered patterns in technocratic ministerial appointments, a binary variable indicating the gender of the ministers is included. Third, to examine ministers' expertise and potential issues of misplacement in portfolio allocation, the article studies professional background to understand whether technocratic ministers are appointed to cabinet positions related to their expertise, or occupy posts that are not related to their previous professional activity.⁵ Fourth, the interest lies in the exploration of the patterns of reappointment or reconfirmation of technocratic ministers. Are they appointed just once? Or do they experience multiple appointments after their initial involvement? Finally, the fifth dimension considers technocratic ministers' career paths and trajectories. What are the consequences of ruling responsibility for such figures? Do they remain in politics after government participation, or do they return to their professional lives? And, most importantly, are 'revolving door' phenomena (Shepherd and You 2020) occurring in the alternation between governmental and professional activities? To investigate such issues, information is collected on the first professional experience of technocratic ministers immediately after their first cabinet appointment.

The study relies on the following sources: to trace technocratic participation in government, an original dataset is used, comprising 64 Italian governments from 1948 to 2021. Specifically, data on government composition are derived from Casal Bértoa (2021)⁶ and Sonntag (2015). Then, to dig deeper into the characteristics of technocratic ministers, the study relies on the official websites of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, Senate, and Italian government. Finally, the study benefits from history-oriented efforts retrievable in Bartolotta (1971), Ginsborg (1989), and Mack Smith (1997).

4. Analysis

4.1. Background and Portfolio Allocation

Table 1 shows the professional background, gender, and portfolios of technocratic ministers in the first period considered (1948–1993). Technocratic ministers are present in just seven cabinets out of 47: six are led by partisan prime ministers, and one is led by a technocratic prime minister (Ciampi). Almost 46% of technocratic ministers in this period were appointed as Ciampi's executive, while the remaining part mostly joined DC-led cabinets. As mentioned earlier, during the first period portfolio allocation was largely managed by the parties. On this basis, technocratic ministers were in charge of differing

⁵ Information on the coding scheme adopted for analysing congruence between profession and ministries is available in the Appendix.

⁶ Casal Bértoa's dataset (2021) constitutes the main source, while Sonntag (2015) was used to double-check government composition.

portfolios in terms of relevance; that is, core executive positions were still in the hands of partisan personnel, with the exception of a few cases, such as the Finance Ministry entrusted to Franco Reviglio in the first Cossiga executive and to Franco Gallo in the Ciampi government. Other key positions, such as the Ministries of Interior and Justice, remained firmly in the parties' control for the whole period, except in the case of Giovanni Conso's recruitment as Minister of Justice in the Ciampi government. This signals the ironclad party centrality of that specific period of Italian history.

Table 1. Profession, Gender, and Portfolio of Technocratic Ministers (1948-1993)

Minister	Portfolio	Gender	Profession	Cabinet	Year
Giovanni Porzio	Deputy Prime Minister	M	Lawyer	De Gasperi	1948
Cesare Merzagora	Foreign Trade	M	Banker	De Gasperi	1948
Costantino Bresciani Turrone	Foreign Trade	M	Professor	Pella	1953
Franco Reviglio	Finance	M	Professor	Cossiga	1979
Massimo Severo Giannini	Civil Service	M	Professor	Cossiga	1979
Massimo Severo Giannini	Civil Service	M	Professor	Cossiga II	1980
Ermanno Gorrieri	Labour and Social Welfare	M	Trade Unionist	Fanfani VI	1987
Giovanni Travagliani	Transport	M	Engineer	Fanfani VI	1987
Mario Sarcinelli	Foreign Trade	M	Banker	Fanfani VI	1987
Mario Di Lazzaro	Tourism and Entertainment	M	Professor	Fanfani VI	1987
Livio Paladin	Regional Affairs and Civil Service	M	Professor	Fanfani VI	1987
Gaetano Gifuni	Parliamentary Relations	M	Civil Servant	Fanfani VI	1987
Alberto Ronchey	Culture	M	Journalist	Amato	1992
Adriano Bompiani	Social Affairs	M	Medical Doctor	Amato	1992
Luigi Spaventa	Budget and Economic Planning	M	Professor	Ciampi	1993
Franco Gallo	Finance	M	Professor	Ciampi	1993
Giovanni Conso	Justice	M	Professor	Ciampi	1993
Umberto Colombo	University and Research	M	Professor	Ciampi	1993
Maria Pia Garavaglia	Health	F	Professor	Ciampi	1993
Alberto Ronchey	Culture and Environmental Heritage	M	Journalist	Ciampi	1993
Paolo Savona	Industry, Trade and Crafts	M	Professor	Ciampi	1993
Paolo Baratta	Foreign Trade	M	Manager	Ciampi	1993
Valdo Spini	Environment	M	Professor	Ciampi	1993
Sabino Cassese	Civil Service	M	Professor	Ciampi	1993
Paolo Barile	Parliamentary Relations	M	Professor	Ciampi	1993

Source: own elaboration of Casal Bértoa (2021), Sonntag (2015), Bartolotta (1971), Ginsborg (1989), Mack Smith (1997).

Regarding professional background, 14 out of 24 technocratic ministers were university professors. Notably, in the Ciampi government composition, almost 82% of technocratic recruitment involved university professors. The remaining positions in the first period were occupied by bankers, lawyers, and journalists. Unsurprisingly, male figures dominated technocratic appointments. Thus, there was a clear gendered pattern in technocratic ministerial participation; from 1948 to 1993, only Maria Pia Garavaglia was involved in government and nominated Minister of Health. Such trends are very much in line with that of other European countries, such as France (Bruyère and Gaxie 2018).

Moving to the second phase, Table 2 confirms the trend observed in the previous period in terms of female underrepresentation in government. However, it should be noted that in the Dini technocratic cabinet, a core executive position was entrusted to Susanna Agnelli, the first female Minister of Foreign Affairs in Italian Republican history. With the shift from the first to the second period, the technocratic presence

increased. Once again, almost half of the technocratic ministers in the 1994–2010 phase were involved in a technocratic cabinet (Dini), although the recourse to technocracy was pervasive in a considerable number of partisan cabinets, notably in the first D'Alema cabinet and in the second Berlusconi and Prodi government experiences. The increased presence of technocratic figures signals a growing party weakness in managing ruling positions. This is particularly evident in the appointment of non-partisan experts to key government posts. For instance, the Ministry of Treasury, Budget, and Economic Planning – a relevant portfolio when it comes to policy-making – was in the hands of technocrats in the first Prodi executive (1996) and in all D'Alema cabinets (1998, 1999a, 1999b). However, this trend had already begun with Lamberto Dini's appointment as Minister of Treasury in the first Berlusconi experience (1994) and Rainer Masera's nomination as Minister of Budget and Economic Planning in the technocratic Dini government (1995). Economic and financial tasks were also entrusted to a technocrat in the last governments of this period. Two economists were appointed Ministers of Economy and Finance, specifically in the third Berlusconi cabinet (Domenico Siniscalco in 2005) and one year after in the second Prodi government (Tommaso Padoa Schioppa in 2006). Differently from the first period, other core executive positions were delegated to technocrats for the first time. Filippo Mancuso and Giovanni Maria Flick became Ministers of Justice, whereas Antonio Brancaccio and Giuliano Amato were nominated Ministers of the Interior. The gradual reduction in the presence of partisan ministerial personnel in key government positions, in particular in economy-related ministries, should be interpreted as a party strategy, with the goal of preserving their appeal vis-à-vis voters in times of increased economic and electoral turbulence.

Table 2. Profession, Gender, and Portfolio of Technocratic Ministers (1994-2010)

Minister	Portfolio	Gender	Profession	Cabinet	Year
Lamberto Dini	Treasury	M	Economist	Berlusconi	1994
Sergio Berlinguer	Italians Overseas	M	Diplomat	Berlusconi	1994
Susanna Agnelli	Foreign Affairs	F	Entrepreneur	Dini	1995
Rainer Masera	Budget and Economic Planning	M	Professor	Dini	1995
Augusto Fantozzi	Finance	M	Professor	Dini	1995
Filippo Mancuso	Justice	M	Prosecutor	Dini	1995
Domenico Corcione	Defence	M	Military	Dini	1995
Tiziano Treu	Labour and Social Welfare	M	Professor	Dini	1995
Giancarlo Lombardi	Public Education	M	Engineer	Dini	1995
Giorgio Salvini	University and Research	M	Physicist	Dini	1995
Elio Guzzanti	Health	M	Medical doctor	Dini	1995
Walter Luchetti	Agriculture, Food and Forestry Resources	M	Agronomist	Dini	1995
Antonio Paolucci	Culture and Environmental Heritage	M	Art historian	Dini	1995
Giovanni Caravale	Transport and Navigation	M	Professor	Dini	1995
Alberto Clò	Industry, Trade and Crafts	M	Economist	Dini	1995
Paolo Baratta	Environment and Public Works	M	Manager	Dini	1995
Agostino Gambino	Posts and Telecommunications	M	Lawyer	Dini	1995
Franco Frattini	Civil Service and Regional Affairs	M	Prosecutor	Dini	1995
Giovanni Motzo	Institutional Reforms	M	Professor	Dini	1995
Antonio Brancaccio	Interior	M	Prosecutor	Dini	1995
Carlo Azeglio Ciampi	Treasury, Budget and Economic Planning	M	Banker	Prodi	1996
Giovanni Maria Flick	Justice	M	Professor	Prodi	1996
Antonio Di Pietro	Public Works	M	Prosecutor	Prodi	1996
Carlo Azeglio Ciampi	Treasury, Budget and Economic Planning	M	Banker	D'Alema	1998

Paolo De Castro	Agriculture	M	Professor	D'Alema	1998
Giuliano Amato	Institutional Reforms	M	Professor	D'Alema	1998
Giuliano Amato	Treasury, Budget and Economic Planning	M	Professor	D'Alema II	1999
Paolo De Castro	Agriculture	M	Professor	D'Alema II	1999
Giuliano Amato	Treasury, Budget and Economic Planning	M	Professor	D'Alema III	1999
Laura Balbo	Equal Opportunities	F	Professor	D'Alema III	1999
Tullio De Mauro	Public Education	M	Professor	Amato II	2000
Umberto Veronesi	Health	M	Medical doctor	Amato II	2000
Renato Ruggiero	Foreign Affairs	M	Diplomat	Berlusconi II	2001
Girolamo Sirchia	Health	M	Medical doctor	Berlusconi II	2001
Piero Lunardi	Infrastructures and Transport	M	Engineer	Berlusconi II	2001
Domenico Siniscalco	Economy and Finance	M	Economist	Berlusconi III	2005
Giuliano Amato	Interior	M	Professor	Prodi II	2006
Tommaso Padoa Schioppa	Economy and Finance	M	Economist	Prodi II	2006
Paolo De Castro	Agriculture, Food and Forestry	M	Professor	Prodi II	2006
Alessandro Bianchi	Transport	M	Professor	Prodi II	2006
Ferruccio Fazio	Health	M	Medical doctor	Berlusconi V	2010

Source: own elaboration of Casal Bértoa (2021), Sonntag (2015), Mack Smith (1997), Italian Chamber of Deputies official website, Senate official website, Italian government official website.

Looking at professional backgrounds, the share of university professors remained high in the second period, yet new professional figures emerged. In particular, medical doctors (Elio Guzzanti, Umberto Veronesi, Girolamo Sirchia, and Ferruccio Fazio) started to lead the Ministry of Health, while an increased number of prosecutors (Filippo Mancuso, Franco Frattini, Antonio Brancaccio, and notably Antonio Di Pietro) entered the political scene. This is of particular relevance, as the judicial scandal of *Mani Pulite* played a critical role in (informally) reshaping the structure of the Italian political system (Guarnieri 2002), and the events that occurred in the country's judiciary arena prompted prosecutors to enter politics and pursue a political career.

The volatile and tripolar period (2011–2021), recently labelled '*Italia della svolta*' by D'Alimonte and Mammarella (2022), started with the formation of a full-technocratic government headed by Mario Monti and comprised eight university professors, two public managers, and other professional categories. However, the technocratic presence was spread across all cabinets of this period, with no full-partisan cabinet sworn in for over ten years. Indeed, technocratic ministers were present in all seven cabinets formed from 2011 to 2021. Importantly, economy- and finance-related portfolios were mostly delegated to technocratic figures in all cabinets, not only in the full-technocratic Monti executive, but also in partisan governments: Fabrizio Saccomanni in the Letta cabinet (2013), Pier Carlo Padoan in the Renzi cabinet (2014), who was then confirmed as Minister of Economy and Finance two years later in the Gentiloni executive (2016), Giovanni Tria in the first Conte cabinet (2018) and, finally, Daniele Franco in the current Draghi government (2021). The only exception to this trend was the PD's Roberto Gualtieri in the first Conte cabinet.

Table 3. Profession, Gender, and Portfolio of Technocratic Ministers (2011–2021)

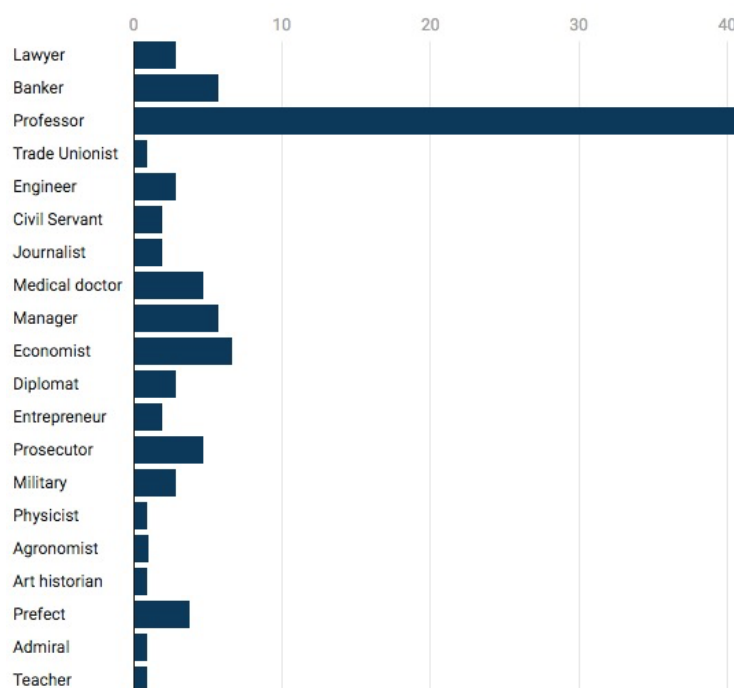
Minister	Portfolio	Gender	Profession	Cabinet	Year
Giulio Terzi di Sant'Agata	Foreign Affairs	M	Diplomat	Monti	2011
Annamaria Cancellieri	Interior	F	Prefect	Monti	2011
Paola Severino	Justice	F	Lawyer	Monti	2011
Giampaolo Di Paola	Defence	M	Admiral	Monti	2011

Elsa Fornero	Labour and Social Policy	F	Professor	Monti	2011
Francesco Profumo	Education, University and Research	M	Professor	Monti	2011
Renato Balduzzi	Health	M	Professor	Monti	2011
Mario Catania	Agriculture, Food and Forestry	M	Civil Servant	Monti	2011
Lorenzo Ornaghi	Culture	M	Professor	Monti	2011
Corrado Clini	Environment	M	Public Manager	Monti	2011
Corrado Passera	Economic Development	M	Banker	Monti	2011
Enzo Moavero Milanesi	European Affairs	M	Professor	Monti	2011
Piero Gnudi	Regional Affairs, Tourism and Sport	M	Public Manager	Monti	2011
Fabrizio Barca	Territorial Cohesion	M	Professor	Monti	2011
Dino Piero Giarda	Parliamentary Relations	M	Economist	Monti	2011
Andrea Riccardi	International Cooperation and Integration	M	Professor	Monti	2011
Filippo Patroni Griffi	Public Administration and Simplification	M	Prosecutor	Monti	2011
Fabrizio Saccomanni	Economy and Finance	M	Banker	Letta	2013
Annamaria Cancellieri	Justice	F	Prefect	Letta	2013
Enrico Giovannini	Labour and Social Policy	M	Professor	Letta	2013
Pier Carlo Padoan	Economy and Finance	M	Professor	Renzi	2014
Giuliano Poletti	Labour and Social Policy	M	Agri-expert	Renzi	2014
Federica Guidi	Economic Development	F	Manager	Renzi	2014
Pier Carlo Padoan	Economy and Finance	M	Professor	Gentiloni	2016
Giuliano Poletti	Labour and Social Policy	M	Agri-expert	Gentiloni	2016
Enzo Moavero Milanesi	Foreign Affairs	M	Professor	Conte	2018
Giovanni Tria	Economy and Finance	M	Professor	Conte	2018
Marco Bussetti	Education, University and Research	M	Teacher	Conte	2018
Sergio Costa	Environment	M	Military	Conte	2018
Paolo Savona	European Affairs	M	Professor	Conte	2018
Luciana Lamorgese	Interior	F	Prefect	Conte II	2019
Sergio Costa	Environment	M	Military	Conte II	2019
Luciana Lamorgese	Interior	F	Prefect	Draghi	2021
Daniele Franco	Economy and Finance	M	Economist	Draghi	2021
Marta Cartabia	Justice	F	Professor	Draghi	2021
Patrizio Bianchi	Public Education	M	Economist	Draghi	2021
Enrico Giovannini	Infrastructure and Transport	M	Professor	Draghi	2021
Roberto Cingolani	Environment	M	Professor	Draghi	2021
Vittorio Colao	Technological Innovation	M	Manager	Draghi	2021
Maria Cristina Messa	University and Research	F	Professor	Draghi	2021

Source: own elaboration of Casal Bértoa (2021), Sonntag (2015), Italian Chamber of Deputies official website, Senate official website, Italian government official website.

Unlike in the first period, core executive positions shifted from the parties' hands to technocratic centrality. In all cabinets, core executive posts were ceded to non-partisans. From 2011, the Ministry of Justice was in the hands of technocrats on three occasions: Paola Severino (Monti 2011), Annamaria Cancellieri (Letta 2013), and Marta Cartabia (Draghi 2021). Likewise, the Ministry of the Interior was headed by a technocrat in 2011 (Annamaria Cancellieri), 2019, and 2021 (Luciana Lamorgese). Regarding professional background, the presence of university professors is still pervasive. Almost 41% of Monti's ministers were professors, and Monti himself served as university professor during his career.

Figure 2. Professional background of Technocratic Ministers (1948-2021)



Source: own elaboration of Bartolotta (1971), Ginsborg (1989), Mack Smith (1997), Italian Chamber of Deputies official website, Senate official website, Italian government official website.

Moreover, relative to the first and second periods, the last period displayed a less unbalanced situation in terms of the genders of technocratic ministers. From 2011 to 2021, seven female technocratic ministers out of a total of 33 ministers were appointed, compared to three out of 58 from 1948 to 2010. While the disparity is still evident, more female technocratic ministers have been appointed in ten years than in sixty years. Yet, the overall picture – i.e., considering all technocratic appointments from 1948 to 2021 – is clear: 88.7% of the technocratic ministers appointed have been male. Finally, considering the whole time span, Figure 2 shows that 40% of technocratic ministers had a university professorship background, followed by economists, bankers, managers, prosecutors, medical doctors, and prefects. This result confirms what Cotta and Verzichelli (2002: 148) noted back in the day, namely that university professors are ‘principal amongst the technocratic elite’.

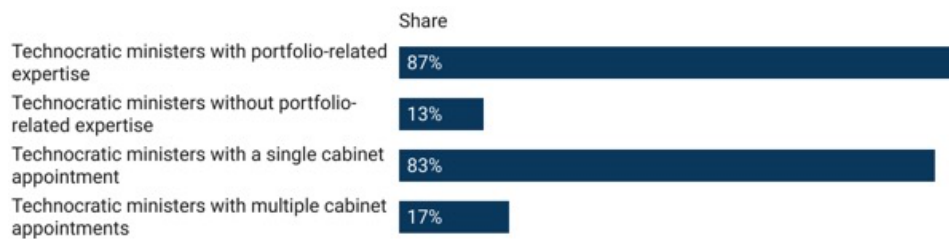
Interpreting the results in a comparative perspective, it can be noted that in the transition from the first to the two last periods Italy has gradually deviated from the French model, i.e., party control and a negligible technocratic presence (Bruyère and Gaxie 2018), becoming more similar to Portugal and Spain, whose systems are characterised by a more accentuated presence of technocrats, especially in recent decades (Costa Pinto and Tavares de Almeida 2018; Rodriguez Teruel and Jerez Mir 2018).

4.2. Expertise and reappointments

After having explored the background and portfolio allocation of technocratic ministers, we now shift our attention to additional investigations related to technocratic

appointments. Specifically, the study investigates whether such appointments were based on the expertise acquired in the technocrats' professional activities or whether there could be cases of misplacement in portfolio allocation. For instance, are diplomats appointed as Ministers of Foreign Affairs? Or are they 'misplaced' in ministries that require different expertise? This is crucial, because non-partisan ministers are not necessarily technocrats; some are just 'celebrity politicians' (Marsh et al. 2010). Most of the literature, however, defines technocrats as politically independent ministers who also hold particular expertise over specific policy areas (e.g., McDonnell and Valbruzzi 2014). To capture both dimensions – independence and expertise – this study explores cabinet appointments by detecting cases of misplacement in portfolio allocation. In addition, interest is also in understanding whether the government participation of technocrats occurs just on a single occasion, as noted by Verzichelli and Cotta (2018), or whether technocratic ministers are frequently solicited through multiple cabinet appointments.

Figure 3. Expertise and Reappointments of Technocratic Ministers (1948-2021)



Source: own elaboration of Casal Bértoa (2021) and Sonntag (2015).

Figure 3 helps us to understand the patterns of technocratic ministerial expertise and reappointments. From 1948 to 2021, 87% of technocratic ministers were appointed in ministries related to their expertise, which matured during previous professional activities. The remaining 13%, however, were appointed in portfolios that were not related to their specific expertise. Among such cases, there are two misplacements during the first period: Mario Di Lazzaro and Valdo Spini. The former was a university professor of mathematics, who had the role of Minister of Tourism and Entertainment in the sixth Fanfani government (1987). The latter was a university professor of the history of international relations, who was in charge of the Minister of Environment in the Ciampi technocratic executive (1993). In the second period, cases of misplacement escalated. The entrepreneur Susanna Agnelli became Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Dini cabinet (1995), prosecutor Franco Frattini was appointed Minister of Civil Service and Regional Affairs (Dini 1995), and the Ministry of Transport and Navigation was entrusted to fiscal policies expert Giovanni Caravale in the same cabinet.

Finally, in the third period, five cases of misplacement took place. Public Managers Corrado Clini and Piero Gnudi were appointed, respectively, Minister of Environment and Minister of Regional Affairs, Tourism, and Sport in the Monti cabinet (2011). In the same cabinet, responsibility for the Ministry of Parliamentary Relations was delegated to Economist Dino Piero Giarda. Three years later, a notable case was Renzi's cabinet portfolio allocation. Agri-expert Giuliano Poletti was appointed Minister of Labour and Social Policy. Poletti was then reappointed to the same government portfolio in the

subsequent executive, Gentiloni 2016. All in all, while the vast majority of portfolio allocation decisions were based on expertise (87%), this is not the only concern of parties and party leaders when it comes to technocratic appointments. Indeed, they might be also interested in involving independent figures due to their personal loyalty, as commonly happens in Spain (Rodriguez Teruel and Jerez Mir 2018).

In Figure 3, the share of technocratic ministers appointed just once and those appointed multiple times can also be observed. As noted by Verzichelli and Cotta (2018), the overwhelming majority of technocratic ministers held governing responsibility on a single occasion (83%), while the remaining 17% were appointed in two or more government formations. Looking at the different time spans under investigation, reappointments involved three ministers in the first period: Massimo Severo Giannini as Minister of Civil Service (Cossiga and Cossiga II cabinets), Alberto Ronchey as Minister of Culture (Amato and Ciampi cabinets), and Paolo Savona, who was first appointed Minister of Industry, Trade, and Crafts in the Ciampi cabinet and then nominated as Minister of European Affairs in the first Conte executive almost 25 years later. During the second period, Giuliano Amato was stably involved in several governmental positions: as Minister of Institutional Reforms in the first D'Alema government, then as Minister of Treasury, Budget, and Economic Planning in the second D'Alema experience, and finally as Minister of the Interior in the second Prodi government, after heading *Palazzo Chigi* as Prime Minister in 2000. Finally, in the third period, seven reappointments occurred, in line with the record of the previous period, yet increased compared to the first period.

Against this backdrop, data indicate that Italian parties do not tend to reappoint technocrats after their first experience in government. In a comparative perspective, Italy is not an outlier, as this trend is observable in other European countries as well, such as Spain (Rodriguez Teruel and Jerez Mir 2018).

4.3. Is There Life After Government? Career Paths and Trajectories of Technocratic Ministers

As we have seen so far, technocratic ministers are mostly appointed only once, displaying a low reappointment rate. This section investigates the consequences of governing responsibility for technocratic ministers. Specifically, what do technocrats do after their cabinet involvement? Do they take up political affiliations, or do they return to their professional lives? The career path of technocratic ministers after government may follow three distinct trajectories, which have important implications for understanding technocrat behaviour.

First, technocratic ministers deciding to join a party after holding cabinet offices might signal that parties simply hide themselves behind non-partisan figures but still receive the lion's share when it comes to ruling. Along these lines, technocratic appointments should be understood as a party-driven process of recruitment of personnel who are outside the parties' governing elite yet willing to pursue a more formalised political career. In this way, the decline in the partyness of governments (Katz 1987) should be interpreted as a mere sign of a numerical decrease in partisan membership in cabinet, but not as a sign of party decline.

Second, technocratic ministers could also opt to maximise their government experience in light of professional benefits. In particular, experts may join relevant industries to exploit the knowledge acquired when holding ruling-responsibility positions in portfolios related to issues of importance for specific industries. Political science defines such situations as ‘revolving doors’ (Shepherd and You 2020). In this vein, technocrats utilise politics as a jumping-off point for reaching top managerial positions in private companies.

Finally, technocratic ministers may follow a third avenue: returning to their pre-government professional activities. This option signals the technocrats’ ability (and willingness) to intermittently serve the country’s political institutions without particular aspirations to a political or managerial career.

Table 4. Career Paths of Technocratic Ministers after Government Participation (1948-2021)

1948–1993		1994–2010		2011–2021	
Minister	Career after appointment	Minister	Career after appointment	Minister	Career after appointment
Giovanni Porzio	Political affiliation (Liberal)	Lamberto Dini	Political affiliation (RI)	Giulio Terzi di Sant’Agata	Political affiliation (FDI)
Cesare Merzagora	Political affiliation (PLI)	Sergio Berlinguer	Political affiliation (RI)	Annamaria Cancellieri	Prefect
Costantino Bresciani Turrone	CEO, Bank of Rome	Susanna Agnelli	Entrepreneur	Paola Severino	Rector, LUISS
Franco Reviglio	Board Member, Edipower	Rainer Maserà	Chairman, Lehman Brothers	Giampaolo Di Paola	Member, Trilateral Commission
Massimo Severo Giannini	Political affiliation (SiR)	Augusto Fantozzi	Political affiliation (RI)	Elsa Fornero	Professor
Ermanno Gorrieri	Political affiliation (DC)	Filippo Mancuso	Political affiliation (FI)	Francesco Profumo	President, ESCP Business School
Giovanni Travaglini	Political affiliation (DC)	Domenico Corcione	Retirement	Renato Balduzzi	Political affiliation (SC)
Mario Sarcinelli	Public Manager	Tiziano Treu	Political affiliation (RI)	Mario Catania	Political affiliation (SC)
Mario Di Lazzaro	Chief, CONSOB	Giancarlo Lombardi	Political affiliation (PPI)	Lorenzo Ornaghi	Professor
Livio Paladin	Professor	Giorgio Salvini	Professor	Corrado Clini	Director, SD and Climate DG
Gaetano Gifuni	Civil Servant	Elio Guzzanti	Medical Doctor	Corrado Passera	CEO, Illimity
Alberto Ronchey	Journalist	Walter Luchetti	Agronomist	Enzo Moavero Milanese	Political affiliation (SC)
Adriano Bompiani	Political affiliation (DC)	Antonio Paolucci	Director, Vatican Museums	Piero Gnudi	Board Member, Confindustria
Luigi Spaventa	Chief, CONSOB	Giovanni Caravale	Professor	Fabrizio Barca	Political affiliation (PD)
Franco Gallo	Constitutional Judge	Alberto Clò	Professor	Dino Piero Giarda	President, BPM (Surveillance)
Giovanni Conso	Professor	Agostino Gambino	President, AIDA	Andrea Riccardi	Political affiliation (SC)
Umberto Colombo	Professor	Franco Frattini	Political affiliation (FI)	Filippo Patroni Griffi	SG, Privacy Guarantor
Maria Pia Garavaglia	Political affiliation (PPI)	Giovanni Motzo	Professor	Fabrizio Saccomanni	President, UniCredit BoD
Paolo Savona	Professor	Antonio Brancaccio	Died shortly after resignation	Federica Guidi	Member, Trilateral Commission
Paolo Baratta	Public Manager	Carlo Azeglio Ciampi	President of the Republic	Enrico Giovannini	Professor
Valdo Spini	Political affiliation (PSI)	Giovanni Maria Flick	Italian Representative, ECHR	Pier Carlo Padoan	Board Member, UniCredit
Sabino Cassese	Professor	Antonio Di Pietro	Political affiliation (IDV)	Giuliano Poletti	Political affiliation (PD)
Paolo Barile	Professor	Giuliano Amato	Political affiliation (PD)	Maria Cristina Messa	Currently in office
		Ferruccio Fazio	Senior Advisor, McKinsey & Co.	Patrizio Bianchi	Currently in office
		Paolo De Castro	Political affiliation (PD)	Vittorio Colao	Currently in office
		Laura Balbo	Professor	Roberto Cingolani	Currently in office
		Tullio De Mauro	Professor	Giovanni Tria	Professor
		Umberto Veronesi	Political affiliation (PD)	Marco Bussetti	Head teacher
		Renato Ruggiero	Political affiliation (PSI)	Sergio Costa	Consultant on environmental issues, Carabinieri
		Girolamo Sirchia	Medical Doctor	Daniele Franco	Currently in office
		Pietro Lunardi	Political affiliation (FI)	Luciana Lamorgese	Currently in office
		Domenico Siniscalco	Manager, Morgan Stanley	Marta Cartabia	Currently in office
		Tommaso Padoa Schioppa	Advisor, IMF		
		Alessandro Bianchi	Political affiliation (PD)		

Source: own elaboration of Bartolotta (1971), Ginsborg (1989), Mack Smith (1997), Italian Chamber of Deputies official website, Senate official website, Italian government official website.

Table 4 shows technocratic ministers’ careers after cabinet appointments. Starting from the first period, the three avenues described are essentially all represented. Eight

technocratic ministers decided to join parties: three of them joined the DC (Adriano Bompiani, Ermanno Gorrieri, Giovanni Travaglini), while two became members of Liberal formations (Giovanni Porzio, Cesare Merzagora). In the final years of the first period, Maria Pia Garavaglia joined the Italian Popular Party (PPI), one of the DC's successor parties, while Valdo Spini was actively involved in the Socialist Party's (PSI) transformations. Moreover, four technocratic ministers achieved managerial positions after government involvement. In particular, Mario Di Lazzaro and Luigi Spaventa became chiefs of CONSOB, an independent administrative authority for market surveillance. The former Minister of Foreign Trade in the Pella government, Costantino Bresciani Turrone, was nominated chief executive officer of the Bank of Rome, while Franco Reviglio became a board member of Edipower, one of the largest producers of electric power in Italy. A not insignificant number of technocratic ministers, however, returned to their past professional lives. Notably, after having managed the Ministry of Culture on two occasions, journalist Alberto Ronchey returned to the publishing industry. However, he was appointed President of the Rizzoli-Corriere della Sera editorial group immediately after the end of his mandate in office.

Moving to the second period, almost 41% of technocratic ministers took up political affiliation after their first cabinet appointment. Lamberto Dini formed his own party, Italian Renewal (RI), gaining support from Sergio Berlinguer, Augusto Fantozzi, and Tiziano Treu. Similarly, former prosecutor Antonio Di Pietro established his Italy of Values (IDV), leaving his professional activities to pursue a political career. Technocratic ministers joined both centre-left and centre-right parties. The Democratic Party (PD) was joined by Giuliano Amato, Paolo De Castro, Umberto Veronesi, and Alessandro Bianchi, whereas Berlusconi's Forward Italy (FI) obtained the participation of Filippo Mancuso, Franco Frattini, and Pietro Lunardi. Interestingly, the technocratic ministers of the 1994–2010 governments reached high ranking positions in relevant institutions. Rainer Masera became chairman of the Italian branch of Lehman Brothers, while Giovanni Maria Flick was nominated Italian representative in the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). Moreover, after serving as Minister of Health in the 2011 Berlusconi cabinet, medical doctor Ferruccio Fazio was hired as Senior Advisor at McKinsey & Company. Economist Domenico Siniscalco left Berlusconi's third government in 2005, serving as managing director and vice president at Morgan Stanley the year after. Finally, Tommaso Padoa Schioppa, Minister of Economy and Finance in the second Prodi cabinet, was appointed advisor for the International Monetary Fund.

In the third period, the share of technocrats joining parties following a cabinet appointment decreased. Most of them were involved in Mario Monti's Civic Choice (SC), a pattern echoing Dini's RI. Regarding professional activities, technocratic ministers of the third period mostly joined the banking system. In particular, Fabrizio Saccomanni became president of UniCredit's board of directors in 2018, while Pier Carlo Padoan joined UniCredit's board of members two years later. Moreover, the banking system has attracted additional technocratic figures. Dino Piero Giarda was nominated President of the Popular Bank of Milan (BPM) with surveillance tasks, and Corrado Passera became Chief Executive Officer of Illimity Bank. Nevertheless, other technocratic ministers returned to their original careers. Elsa Fornero and Lorenzo Ornaghi returned to

university after having participated in the Monti government, whereas Annamaria Cancellieri returned to her prefectural career.

Overall, Table 4 displays a fragmented picture when it comes to technocratic ministers' career paths and trajectories after cabinet appointment. While some non-partisan figures opt to start a political career by joining a political formation, others exploit their governmental experience to reach top positions in major public and private companies. Finally, the remaining technocratic ministers returned to their original positions. Temporal variation in such trends suggests that parties still exert some sort of appeal over technocrats, yet such appeal is mainly driven by political entrepreneurial efforts made by technocratic prime ministers such as Lamberto Dini and Mario Monti. As political careers might be deemed risky and transient by technocrats, achieving high-ranking positions in industry is a clear option for maximising the knowledge gained when in government without being exposed to voters' fluctuations.

5. Conclusions

This study explored the patterns of technocratic ministerial recruitment in Italy from 1948 to 2021, focusing on five dimensions: background, portfolio allocation, expertise, reappointment, and career paths. Albeit remaining at a descriptive level, the findings show insightful elements. First, there is a clear gendered pattern among technocratic ministers. The overwhelming majority of appointments have regarded male personnel, relegating female technocratic ministers to evident underrepresentation. Second, the examination of technocrats' professional backgrounds reveals that university professors are the most common professional category involved in non-partisan appointments, followed by other high-skilled occupational groups, such as economists, bankers, managers, prosecutors, medical doctors, and prefects. Moreover, regarding portfolio allocation patterns, a gradual decline in party management over core executive positions can be observed. As expected, during the first period, core executive positions were mainly controlled by partisan personnel in a pure 'party government' perspective. After the collapse of the old Italian party system, technocratic ministers started to occupy core executive positions. The increased presence of technocratic figures in such positions mainly regarded economy- and finance-related office posts, yet other key portfolios, e.g., Interior and Justice, also witnessed technocratic involvement.

Concerning expertise trajectories, insights derived from our investigation clearly show that the large majority of portfolio allocation considerations were mainly driven by technocrats' expertise in the specific ministerial policy area. However, not all technocratic appointments have followed this pattern, as cases of misplacement are marginal but not absent. As noted by Costa Pinto et al. (2018), experts are generally appointed to ministerial portfolios that correspond to their specialised skills and professional training. Nonetheless, they are sometimes chosen regardless of the specific policy areas of government and, to some extent, precisely because they do not have a 'party stigma'. Furthermore, as for reappointments, technocratic ministers display a low confirmation rate, as already emphasised by Verzichelli and Cotta (2018). Data revealed that most technocrats were appointed just once. Reappointments, however, increased in frequency from the first to the last two periods considered. This finding suggests that

parties do not build strong ties with technocrats, creating high technocratic ministerial turnover.

Finally, this study overviewed the career patterns of technocratic ministers after holding government positions. In this regard, the investigation showed that technocrats might pursue three different goals. On the one hand, they can decide to become an active part of a political formation, running for elections that are subject to popular scrutiny. On the other hand, they can opt to join private or public companies to professionally maximise their governmental experience. Finally, they can return to their original professional activity, interpreting ruling responsibility as a transient step in their life. Results show that all options have been considered viable by technocrats.

Adopting a comparative perspective, Italian technocracy shares differences and similarities with other countries. In France and Sweden, for instance, parties have managed to preserve their centrality in government. Specifically, despite increasing levels of distrust towards them, French political parties maintain their control over cabinet posts (Bruyère and Gaxie 2018). Similarly, evidence from Sweden suggests ‘a continued strong role for politically experienced ministers’ (Bäck and Persson 2018). On the other hand, technocratic transformations occurring in the Italian governmental arena are visible in Spain and Portugal as well. Costa Pinto and Tavares de Almeida (2018) noted that technocracy is a persistent feature of Portuguese democracy, and has its roots in the late democratisation of the country. In Spain, technocratic recruitment is often the outcome of prime ministers’ strategic considerations. In particular, when the prime minister envisages risks for the government and needs personal loyalty and technical abilities, she/he prefers to source ministers from outside the parliamentary party (Rodríguez Teitel and Jerez Mir 2018).

Technocracy is a growing area of interest for political scientists. This phenomenon is indeed provoking profound transformations in European political systems, undermining the persistence of the party government model. Italy is among the countries in Europe most affected by this evolution (Valbruzzi 2018). To grasp the causes and consequences of technocracy, scholars are increasingly directing their efforts to multiple related aspects. In particular, scholars have investigated technocracy both quantitatively (Wrátil and Pastorella 2018; Alexiadou and Gunaydin 2019) and qualitatively (Costa Pinto et al. 2018). Understanding the background and appointment patterns of technocratic ministers in Italy may lay the groundwork for a comparative research agenda going beyond a single case study. In this regard, comparable cases in Europe might allow the detection of common and divergent trajectories in technocratic ministers’ characteristics and government involvement. For instance, comparative analyses may investigate whether the Italian gendered pattern in technocratic recruitment is exceptional from a comparative perspective. In addition, researchers may examine whether Italian technocrats’ career paths are visible in different political systems, thus contributing to enriching the investigation on this less explored matter. Such scholarly efforts are much needed, as they would provide a wider-ranging investigation of the phenomena studied in this article.

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