italian political science

volume 17 issue 2
2022

Italian Political Science, VOLUME 17 ISSUE 2

Duration and Durability of Italian Ministers: an Old Paradox Revisited

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Abstract

The Italian paradox of 'stable instability' characterized the First Republic, with a very short duration of governments but with a stable ministerial class. During the last twenty years we note a 'partial' growing of governmental duration, but what about the stability of ministers along with the crisis of party government? This question calls for an empirical investigation in search of a more precise understanding. First, this article will focus on the concepts of the duration and durability of Italian ministers, as a premise for further comparative analysis. Second, it will investigate the Italian ministerial elite in order to examine the decreasing role of political parties in stabilizing the political class. Finally, we will focus our attention on the instability of the Italian party system as one of the main explanations of (the lack of) governmental durability. This leads to the conclusion that, leaving aside the rhetoric of stronger Italian executives, Italy has been experiencing a period of greater instability.

1. Introduction

Stable instability: this is the traditional image associated with the Italian Republic during its first fifty years, as a result of a peculiar mix of very short government duration and the firm grip of political parties over political institutions (Cappadocia 1972). In comparative perspective, the First Italian Republic was characterized by the highest rate of cabinet turnover in Western Europe (Müller and Strøm 2000). Conversely, although the average life of a government was less than a year, the Christian Democratic Party remained in power during the whole period, giving rise to rather stable and stagnant (certainly not innovative, as specified in the section on this point) governmental formulas.

Partitocracy led to the lengthy careers of a restricted number of people in the higher echelons of government: more in particular, the composition and recruitment of ministers and junior ministers (*sottosegretari*) showed a remarkable degree of permanence and ministerial partisanship (Calise and Mannheimer 1982; Calise 1984). The super-elite were so stable that 'about one hundred ministers remained in office for more than five years, being part of numerous governments. In particular, two of them for a quarter of a century (Emilio Colombo and Giulio Andreotti) and one for twenty years (Paolo Emilio Taviani)' (Cassese 2022, VII, our translation).

What about the (apparent) paradox of Italian stable instability after the advent of the so-called Second Republic? This question calls for empirical investigation in search of a more precise understanding. Although we have registered a clear departure from the

Volume 17, Issue 2, 121–137.
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short duration of the Italian executives of the past, so leaving aside the 'governi balneari'[1] that symbolized an epoch, executive life has increased but still falls short of expectations. The average duration of governments over the last twenty years is about 690 days, while most of the 50s and 60s governments did not even reach the 100-day threshold – or barely touched it. Eleven governments, however, alternated from 2000 to 2021, with eight different Presidents of the Council, and only three of them lasted more than a thousand days (Table 1). Moreover, as the Christian Democrats' one-party dominance was eroded, and the Italian party system radically changed, relevant consequences may be noted for the stability of the political class, with the occurrence of less 'partified' and durable ministerial career paths (Pritoni 2012; Bergman et al. 2015). This has raised the suspicion that the Italian Republic has been experiencing – since the 1992 election, which may be considered the last one of the First Republic (Bull and Newell 1993) – a period of greater instability.

Table 1. Italian governments and ministers (2000-2021)

Government	Government's duration (days)	Number of ministers
Amato II	412	25
Berlusconi II	1,412	28
Berlusconi III	389	25
Prodi II	720	26
Berlusconi IV	1,287	22
Monti	528	19
Letta	299	22
Renzi	1,024	21
Gentiloni	536	19
Conte I	460	19
Conte II	527	22

Source: own elaboration on the Italian Government' official website.

Government duration might be combined with its durability. The stability of a government of a given political class (in this case ministerial) depends, indeed, on many factors. If duration is an objective and factual measure, taking into consideration the starting date and the end of the executive mandate, durability captures the relationship between the actual data and other intervening variables/factors (Lijphart 1984). To ride the Italian paradox of 'stable instability' that characterized the First Republic, with a very short duration of governments but with a stable political class, what has happened to the duration and durability of the Italian executives in recent decades, if we look at this from the angle of the duration of their ministers in office? And what are the main factors leading to, or limiting current governmental and ministerial stability?

[1] 'Seaside government', an Italian expression which indicates a care-taker executive which lasts for the restricted time of the summer holidays.

This article will be divided into three parts: first it will analyse the concepts of duration and durability by taking into account recent PS literature; second, it will focus on the Italian ministerial class in the last twenty years, to capture indicators of its permanence and underline dominant career paths, along with the decreasing role of political parties in stabilizing the political class. Finally, the instability of the Italian party system will be considered as one of the main explanations of (the lack of) governmental and ministerial durability. The main thesis of the article is that the crisis of party government and the weaker control of party organizations over ministerial selection in the post-1994 years, as well as a greater level of party alternation in government, have brought about the increasing instability of the ministerial class. This has determined the shift from the well-noted system of 'stable instability' (i.e., unstable cabinets and a stable political elite) to a system of 'unstable stability' (longer – though not sufficiently so – cabinets, but frequent ministerial turnover).

2. Duration and durability of government and ministers: starting from the concepts

Government stability comes from both duration and durability. The distinction between the two concepts emerged in the Political Science literature in the early 1970s, to explain how some democratic regimes may acquire a high level of stability with executives that do not last for a long time (Laver 2003). Indeed, while the duration of a government, or that of a minister's office, consists in the observation of the time which elapses between the beginning and the end of the mandate, research on the durability of governments and ministers seeks to identify explanatory factors that impact the term of office. Therefore, duration is the essential starting point for our analysis, whereas durability is an analytical deepening into what factors may allow for government stability or instability. As a matter of fact, "'ministerial stability' is a generic term encompassing both ministerial duration and durability" (Fischer, Dowding, and Dumont 2012, 507).

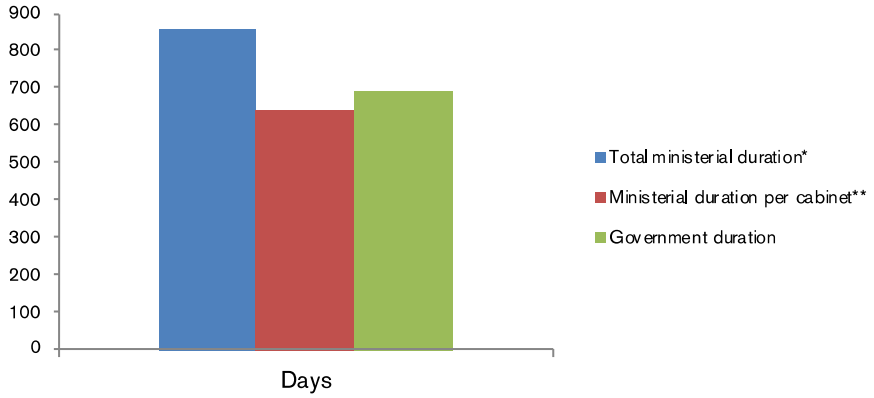
Starting from the concept of duration, although it constitutes an essentially empirical concept, which coincides with the time spent in office by a single minister, its operationalization may not be immediate. Studies on the topic have essentially followed two paths. Some scholars consider the ministerial mandate to be continuous through various governments (Blondel 1985; Shevchenko 2005), others view ministerial tenure as the length of time a minister serves in a given cabinet (Berlinski, Dewan, Dowding 2007; Berlinski, Dewan, Dowding 2012). In the first case, the duration of the ministerial mandate coincides with the time that occurs between the first ministerial appointment in a government and the end of his last ministerial mandate. Thus, for example, minister Dario Franceschini, who held a ministerial position (changing portfolio once) from 2013 to 2021 by crossing four governments, is considered to have been in charge for about eight years. In the second case, however, the minister's duration officially ends with the end of a single mandate. Accordingly, in the event of the minister being appointed again in a different government, this counts as another office. This could be borrowed from research on cabinet stability, where the end of a cabinet is assumed to be a point of discontinuity both for the government as collective body and single ministers. In addition, we could point out that while the first type of measurement takes the minister's point of view, looking at the total days spent in office by each individual, the second type of measurement of ministerial tenure adopts

the point of view of the government, noting the days in office of each individual for individual governments or by types of government.

Apart from the chosen 'counting rule' to measure the length of ministerial office, the mean of the duration in office (in days and/or in years) is generally seen as an accurate index of ministerial longevity.

As Table 1 above shows, if we compare the average duration of the Italian governments from 2000 to 2021 with the duration of ministerial offices in the same period, clear differences between the two measures may be observed. If we use the first measurement of duration, based on the total stay in office by individual ministers,[2] ministerial duration is longer than that of the government, as ministers are more stable than the governments that host them. Moreover, the two values show a (still unsatisfactory) increase in governmental duration compared with the First Republic: indeed, the average of 690 days for executives is double that of past executives, which was 315 days on average (Vassallo 2005; Pritoni 2012, 228). Yet, if one refers to the second type of measurement of ministerial stay in office,[3] the current political scenario moves sharply away from the First Republic, when 'there was a strong stability of the ruling class' (Cassese 2022, VI; Frognier 1991).

Figure 1. Average duration of ministers and governments (2000-2021)



Notes: * total time spent in office by ministers; ** time in office of ministers per cabinet
Source: own elaboration on the basis of official government website and Musella, Fittipaldi and Rullo, *Monocratic Government Dataset: Personalisation of Leaders and Masses*, appendix of Musella (2022).

Indeed, an increase in the average duration of governments compared to the past is offset by a shorter tenure of the ministerial elite compared to the past. It is sufficient to note that the average value of ministerial duration in single cabinets, that is about 640 days, is much lower than that of the First Republic: 'the degree of stability of the rulers was enormously greater than that of the individual governments', so that in the first republican thirty years '152 ministers, one third of the total, enclosed two thirds of the presences in their hands; 1331 government posts as minister and/or junior ministers'

[2] In this case, the unit of analysis is the individual minister. We therefore aggregate all the days that the given minister has spent in government in a ministerial post, over and above the duration of the individual cabinets in which he or she has participated.
[3] In this case, as mentioned above, the point of view is that of the executive and taken into account are the days each minister spends in office for each government or type of government.

(Calise 1997, 360-361, our translations). Thus, by adopting the second measure of duration, the last phase of republican history seems to result in greater ministerial instability.

Using these different types of measurement, we approach the concept of durability. Hence, we can argue that the concept of durability refers to the tentative explanatory models about the relationship between executive or ministerial duration and their causes. Following, therefore, a wide tradition of studies on the subject (Laver and Schofield 1990; Warwick 1994; Lupia and Strøm 1995), in this article we will look at the factors of change related to parties and party systems as the main unit of analysis of government and ministerial durability.

Various personal and political elements can determine the beginning and end of a ministerial mandate. In this way, several classes of explanatory factors have been identified in the Political Science literature as having an impact on ministerial time in office: 1) sociodemographic, 2) political and 3) institutional factors. As regards the first of these, the personal characteristics of the ministers such as gender, age, education, sexual and/or financial scandal and state of health are variables at the basis of many empirical studies on ministerial durability (Fischer, Dowding, and Dumont 2012). As regards the second, party affiliation, career paths, policy disagreement or criticism, (bad) ministerial performance, forms the research design of other studies on the subject (Berlinski, Dewan, Dowding 2007; Müller-Rommel, Kroeber and Vercesi 2020). Finally, among the last group, elements related to the government in which the ministers are in office, such as institutional framework or nature of coalition are key factors for those studies based on the analysis of structural characteristics and on (critical) events (Warwick 1979; Strøm 1985; Browne Frendreis and Gleiber 1984).

Although the Political Science literature has proposed several reasons to explain the degree of government durability (Taylor and Herman 1971; Laver and Shepsle 1996; Andeweg 2000; Smith 2004; Dewan and Dowding 2005; Dowding and Dumont 2009; Fittipaldi and Rullo forthcoming), there are no clear and unambiguous effects, however, between each of such variables and the duration of the ministers and governments in office (Huber and Martinez-Gallardo 2008; Back et al. 2009; Bucur 2017; Berlinski, Dewan and Dowding 2007; Bakema 1991). Nevertheless, the recent radical transformations of parties and party systems constitute key elements for understanding how governments change – and how long they last.

As the literature on the topic confirms, in our day, the loss of salience of the traditional lines of socio-political conflict shakes up the established and mainstream party systems (Panebianco 1988; Diamond and Gunther 2001; van Biezen and Poguntke 2014). The number of parties has been growing in almost all Western countries[4] and the left-right axis which traditionally organized the dynamic of politics is less and less salient, thus opening a window of opportunity for the emergence of new political actors (Ignazi 1996). The result is that, in accordance with the thesis of the decline of political parties ('departitization'), we have fragile – and changing – majorities in cabinets and considerably fragmented and fractionalized assemblies with a remarkable number of

[4] In the last decade, historical cases of two party systems, such as the British and Spanish, do not resist the test of the vote (Musella 2018). See also: Rodon and Hierro (2016) for the Spanish case and Lynch (2007) for UK. For a recent comparative view, see Chiaramonte and Emanuele (2022).

party switchers and independents (Sartori 1976; Bardi 2004; Musella 2018; 2022). It's been a long way from the *Parteienstaat* doctrine (Mortati 1972; Elia 2009) based on the idea that parties could provide legitimation for the democratic state. Indeed, if during the phase of the First Republic, the parties controlled both the processes of government formation and cabinet decision-making, having a considerable hold on society, in the subsequent period they have been undermined by other political actors. More precisely, as the gap between society and parties has widened, with dissatisfaction becoming the main political outcome (Morlino and Tarchi 1996), the pre-eminence of the President of the Republic and of the Prime Minister outlines a political scenario of residual party government (Fabbrini 1996; Calise 2015; Musella 2022).

The reduction in the party affiliation of ministers and the change in ministerial career patterns is one of the main evident results that will be analysed in the following paragraph.

3. The Instability of Political Parties

When Schattschneider (1942) claimed that democracy was impossible without parties, by referring to both the function of representation of such political intermediate bodies and their role in government, he made a statement which is still valid today. Indeed, although much time has passed since similar considerations were made, parties continue to be crucial actors in contemporary political systems (Morlino and Tarchi 2006). However, since the second half of the last century the crisis of political parties is an accomplished fact, so that while some observers still recognize their indisputable position, for other aspects one may suspect that the party is over (Mair 2013).

On the one hand, the main indicators on the presence of political parties in society present decreasing values: party membership seems to belong to the past, with party affiliates generally getting older, and voting not in accordance with the traditional socioeconomic and sociocultural cleavages that stabilized the parties in the second half of the twentieth century. Especially in the last few years, the instability of party systems seems a common feature in several contemporary democracies: from the United Kingdom to Spain, and including Italy, party systems suffered the shock of the so-called Great Recession (Emanuele and Marino 2018; Hutter and Kriesi 2019; Fittipaldi 2021), as the economic and financial crisis gave release to both a consistent loss of consensus to mainstream parties and the spread of radical and populist parties. On the other hand, as regards systems of government, while democratic political systems have appeared as party governments, today political leaders have acquired greater centrality on the political scene (Musella 2018; Musella 2022).

The result of such interrelated trends was very clear in the field of ministerial selection. With reference to the Italian case, indeed, from the birth of the Italian Republic to the second half of the '70s, party control was almost total, only tempered by the territorial linkages of the local (notable) politicians (Calise and Mannheimer 1982; 1986). Nevertheless, over time, the decline of party politics impacted the recruitment and career patterns of the political elites.

Indeed, the spread of the personalization trend over time, along with the emergence of technocratic governments during periods of political or economic crisis, provided more innovative paths for entering the executive. This is a fact that catches the eye when

observing the following table, where it can be noticed that over the last two decades, a good number of ministers have not had a party background, coming from academia or business instead. Although the party grip on ministerial selection remains crucial, and the ranks of government are still largely occupied by professional political personnel, with party affiliation and a traditional *cursus honorum* (Blondel and Thiébault 1991; Cotta and Verzichelli 2007), the increasing number of cases of 'non-partisan ministers' marks the political change from the past (Verzichelli and Cotta 2018). In our country this trend was inaugurated by the rise of 'non-partisan or non-political prime ministers' (Mancini 1997; Pasquino and Valbruzzi 2012; Costa Pinto and Tavares de Almeida 2018; Musella 2018), with Silvio Berlusconi being a clear case on the international scene. During the last twenty years this phenomenon has spread from the apex of government to the entire ministerial elite. Consequently, although Italy has been a paradigmatic case of party government, with a tight and remarkable party and parliamentary control of the process of ministerial recruitment,[5] our data highlights less linear and predictable ministerial careers.

Table 2. Occupation of ministers before their mandate

Field of work	Ministers (N)	Ministers (%)
Institutional	20	8%
Business	23	9%
Political Party	66	27%
Military	3	1%
Media	13	5%
Academia	61	25%
Judicial	32	13%
Medical	9	4%
Other	21	8%
Total	**248**	**100%**

Source: Musella, Fittipaldi and Rullo, *Monocratic Government Dataset: Personalisation of Leaders and Masses*, appendix of Musella (2022).

The progressive relevance of innovative recruiting channels for the ministerial class establishes the development of a 'genetically outsider political elite', i.e., one that is formed outside that party-parliamentary circuit which has traditionally been recognized as the main one in Italy and in other European countries (Dogan 1979; Calise and Mannheimer 1982; Winter 1991; Verzichelli 2016). The relevance of experts, such as academics (25 percent) or businessmen (9 percent), demonstrates the declining role of political parties in their basic and more crucial function, which is the selection of the political class (Neumann 1956; Marsh 1988), as can be seen in Table 3. Moreover, this fact is supported by the percentage of ministers with no previous parliamentary experience:

[5] In the face of low government stability, the notable continuity of the political class was ensured precisely by the penetration of the parties both in society and at all levels of government. See: Verzichelli and Cotta 2000. On Italian party government see also (Pasquino 1987).

38% of the ministerial elite of the last twenty years did not come from the parliamentary benches. Our data confirms, indeed, that 94 out of 248 ministers between 2000 and 2021 became ministers without first having been members of parliament, thus subverting a classic route to the executive.[6] A lower level of parliamentary extraction of ministers, indeed, confirms the lesser partyness of the ministerial elite. As an evident symptom of the erosion of Italian-style party government, this point also helps us to understand the growing ministerial instability in our country. By adopting the second measure of duration, based on the ministerial time in office per government, the duration rate of the ministers with no previous parliamentary experience appears much lower if compared with that of ministers who have had previous experience in the national parliament. Indeed, the former group has served in office for 140 days less than the latter one. This data tells us that a ministerial class coming from a party-parliamentary circuit is more durable and therefore more stable.

From a different point of view, the rise of non-partisan ministers has also resulted from a more general crisis of contemporary democracies. As on the one hand the post-materialist wind (Inglehart 1977) has been driving the birth of new political subjects who are unconventional from the point of view of political organization, repertoire of action, and/or issues, on the other hand 'the withdrawal of the elites' from the realm of civil society towards the realm of government (Mair 2013) has served to offset the loss of weight in society of political parties (Cotta and Verzichelli 1996). Indeed, on the side of government composition, the reduction in party weight brings to light the existence of a growing number of ministers not strictly belonging to a party organization and the diminished control of political parties over the selection of ministers.

Finally, to have a more concise representation of such trends, one may also use the index of party governmentness[7] as a measure to outline the level of partisanship of the ministerial elite. Although a high degree of ministerial class partisanship has been noted in the past, a different scenario is emerging today. Indeed, in the last twenty years, 15 percent of ministers have lacked party affiliation, leaving behind the model of the politician with a typical pure party background. We must also note that ministers who have a party affiliation last, on average, 180 days more in office than those who are independent and, therefore, without party affiliation. Hence, the ministerial duration per cabinet is on average longer for partisan ministers. This leads us to think that we are leaving the 'golden age' of party government, when parties exercised full control over the executive appointments and stability of the political elite reached its highest values (Cotta and Verzichelli 2002).

Table 3. Index of Party Governmentness

Cabinet	Index of Party Governmentness

[6] Musella, Fittipaldi and Rullo, Monocratic Government Dataset: Personalisation of Leaders and Masses, appendix of Musella (2022).

[7] The Index of party governmentness is borrowed from the Katz' concept of party governmentness (1986) and is calculated as the ratio between the number of partisan ministers and the total number of ministers who serve in office per single government (Pasquino and Valbruzzi 2012). For example, in a cabinet with all partisan ministers the value of the index is 1; instead in a cabinet with all non-partisan ministers the value of the index is 0.

Amato II	0.96
Berlusconi II	0.93
Berlusconi III	0.96
Prodi II	0.96
Berlusconi IV	1.00
Monti	0.00
Letta	0.86
Renzi	1.00
Gentiloni	1.00
Conte I	0.68
Conte II	0.86

Source: Musella, Fittipaldi and Rullo, *Monocratic Government Dataset: Personalisation of Leaders and Masses*, appendix of Musella (2022).

In more recent times, moving from the tendency of more independent minsters, a different feature of Italian politics has also emerged: the formation of non-partisan governments, matched with technocratic cabinets in periods of political and economic crisis, and the rise of a grand coalition government. In the technocratic cabinet led by Mario Monti (McDonnell and Valbruzzi 2014) the value of the party governmentness index is 0 while in the Conte I government it is lower than in other cabinets, as more than 30% of ministers do not belong to any party. Looking at the executives in the last two decades, the Letta government and the Conte II government show a relevant rate of non-partisan ministers as well, with a percentage of 14%. At the same time, some differences might be noted in terms of the presence of non-partisan ministers between the 'political' cabinets (centre-right – Berlusconi cabinets, and centre-left – Amato, Prodi, Letta, Gentiloni, and Renzi cabinets) and those that are 'technocratic' (Monti) and 'techno-personalized'(Conte I and II).[8] As a matter of fact, the latter tend to appoint more independents, so emphasizing the differences between party-based cabinets and technical ones.

Table 4. Partisanship rate of ministers per type of government

Type of government	Independents N (%)	Party affiliated N (%)	Total N (%)
Centre-left	6 (5%)	107 (95%)	113 (100%)
Centre-right	3(4%)	72 (96%)	75 (100%)
Technocratic	19 (100%)	0 (0%)	19 (100%)
Techno-personalised	9 (22%)	32 (78%)	41 (100%)
Total	37 (15%)	211 (85%)	248 (100%)

Source: Musella, Fittipaldi and Rullo, *Monocratic Government Dataset: Personalisation of Leaders and Masses*, appendix of Musella (2022).

Especially in technocratic experiences, party politics seems gradually to have been replaced by the politics of depoliticization. This leads to an "enlargement of the 'pool of

[8] We use the label 'techno-personalized government' borrowing it from Valbruzzi (2019). We mainly refer to the relevance of the prime minister, understood (prior to the most recent position within the M5S) as a technical and independent premier until 2021, and to the presence of two highly personalized party leaders. The label also aims to emphasise the relevant influence of non-political experts or authorities over party politicians and partisan institutions in the decision-making process and in the cabinet in general (see the composition of the government and the reference to Valbruzzi 2019 for more details).

ministerables' and [...] confirming the hypothesis of a declining role of the typical career politicians described in the past decades" (Verzichelli and Cotta 2018, 93). Consequently, Italian party government appears as a feature that belongs more to the past than to the present and the future of the country. Our findings shed light on the relevance of the link between the party-parliamentary circuit and the duration and durability of the ministerial elite. The instability of governments in the past was, in fact, balanced by a high rate of duration in office of the ministers who contributed to delineating a stable political class. Today, the Italian paradox no longer holds, and the greater stability of the government is now 'balanced' by a greater instability of the political-ministerial class. In the next paragraph, we will look at the same phenomenon from another analytical perspective.

4. The innovative governments

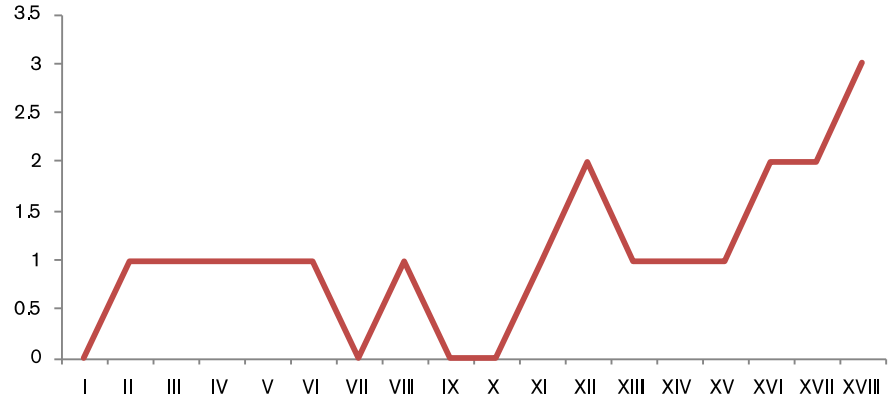
Government refers, strictly speaking, to the executive body in a given political system. It is a crucial institutional actor in all regimes, in some way reinvented by contemporary regimes, which gradually expanded its borders and competences (Musella 2021). Therefore, given the progressive expansion of the role of the executive, it comes as no surprise that: 'the making and breaking of governments is one of the most basic of all political processes. Political competition is typically structured as a choice between governments, and it thus hardly surprising that government formation is of perennial fascination to political scientists' (Laver 1998, 1). In this line of thinking, Italy is an interesting political laboratory. During the so-called First Republic, our country showed a considerable political stalemate in terms of government formation (Curini and Pinto 2013), reproducing government formulas that were not very, or not at all new. If we define as 'innovative governments' those whose formation is new in the combination of its components, that is, when the coalition of government has never been realized before (Valbruzzi 2019), Italy exhibits a change only at the end of the First Republic.

Indeed, as we noted above, despite the short duration of the governments of this first republican phase, instability in Italy was blunted by the permanence in office of the ministerial elite who, in fact, did not undergo much change or turnover. More precisely, despite the instability that characterized the 'golden age' of the Italian-style party government, the 'cooperation at the elite level' (Pasquino 197; Calise 1987),[9] on the one hand, highlights the tendency and the tradition of political compromise within Italian governments and, on the other, it points to a kind of political inertia that has often brought an advantage to the incumbents, whether parties and/or individuals, already in office. As is clear, in the partitocratic era, the prominent role of the Democrazia Cristiana (DC, Christian Democracy) was a strong element of political continuity in Italy (Curini and Pinto 2013). In the light of the so-called *conventio ad excludendum*, another constant was the exclusion from the government of other parties, i.e., those which were 'anti-system',[10] and especially, for a long time, the Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI, Italian Communist Party). Consequently, cabinet formation reached one of the lowest turnover rates of any parliamentary democracy (Strøm 1990). From another angle, the

[9] For an analysis of the Italian party system as a case of polarized pluralism and the patterns of elite cooperation see: Bogaards (2005).
[10] See Sartori (1976 and 1982) for an overview of the Italian party system and the anti-system parties.

static nature of government formation and composition can be understood as the search for stability, overcoming the obstacle of the short duration of the cabinets.

Figure 2. Number of innovative governments per legislature (1948-2022)



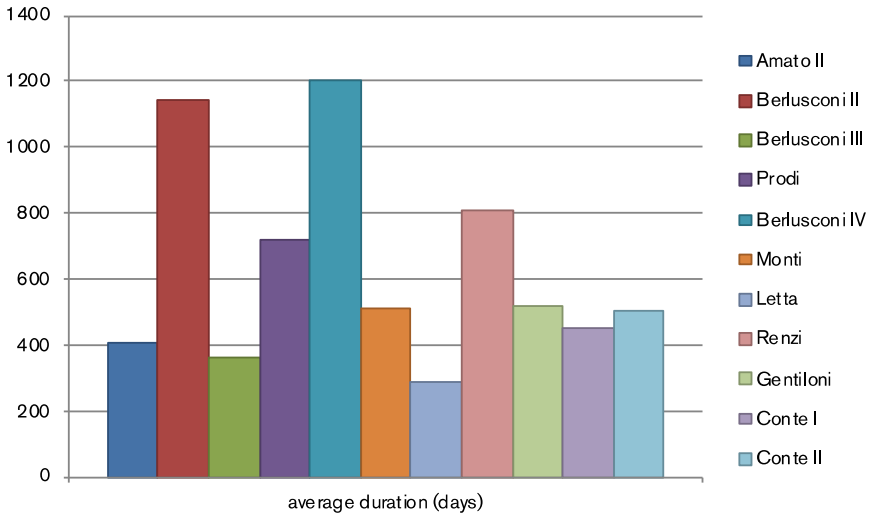
Source: own elaboration of ParlGov dataset, parlgov.org.

Indeed, as our data highlight, the Italian First Republic is characterized by a low degree of innovative governments: only about a quarter of the governments in the first eleven legislatures (1948-1994), in fact, can be defined as such. The relations between political parties were characterized – and determined – by a considerable ideological polarization ('K-factor')[11] and such a division could not allow for a real alternation of government. This paved the way for a 'blocked democracy' (Fabbrini 2009).

In the so-called Second Republic, data show an increasing government innovativeness (Figure 2). In the new socio-political scenario, more competition between coalitions is noted and government formation strictly connected to the electoral results of single political leaders (Musella 2019; 2020; Barbieri and Verzichelli 2003). It is reasonable to think that the higher the rate of government innovativeness, the greater the instability of the ministerial elite, as a consequence of greater party turnover. Indeed, looking again at the substantive aspect of the executive, namely its ministerial components, by reducing the stability of political parties over time, ministerial careers become shorter. Indeed, other channels of access to ministerial ranks have become more relevant and the weight of the party-parliamentary backgrounds is reduced. And this appears very clear when there are periods of greater alternation of government, as occurs in the Second Republic.

[11] K-Factor comes from the Russian word 'Kommunizm', that is communism - used for the first time in an editorial of Corriere della Sera of 30 March 1979 by Alberto Ronchey just to explain the lack of turnover of governmental political forces in the first fifty years of republican Italy. See Calise (2006) for an analysis of the so-called 'K' factor in Italian politics.

Figure 3. Average duration of ministers per single governments (2000-2021)



Source: own elaboration of the Italian Government's official website.

Therefore, if previously the rank of minister was the final step in a complex, linear and long career in political institutions (Calise 1987),[12] since the nineties Italian ministers have stayed less time in office. On average, the ministers who stayed in office longer were those belonging to the Berlusconi II and IV governments (about three years) and those in Renzi's government (about two years). The Prodi government, which ranks fourth, is the last to come close to the two-year threshold for the average duration of the ministerial class. The rest of the cabinets' ministers, in fact, are closer to the year mark. The party-political situation helps us even if we use another angle for our analysis (Warwick 1992). Centre-right governments report higher rates of ministerial duration than centre-left, technocratic and techno-personalized governments.

Table 5. Average duration of ministers per government type

Ministerial duration per government	Ministers in centre-left government	Ministers in centre-right government	Ministers in technocratic government	Ministers in techno-personalized government
Days	547.45	901.26	510.58	480.39
Years	1.50	2.47	1.40	1.32

Source: own elaboration on the basis of Musella, Fittipaldi and Rullo, *Monocratic Government Dataset: Personalisation of Leaders and Masses*, appendix of Musella (2022).

Moreover, since it is the technocratic and techno-personalized cabinets that have the lowest rate of partisanship, our analysis is clearly in line with other recent studies on the topic (see: Costa Pinto and Tavares de Almeida 2018), by underlining that the mean duration of non-partisan ministers, i.e. the ministerial duration per government, is always lower than that of ministers who are affiliated to parties.

[12] An articulate reflection on the 'self-reproduction' of the party bureaucracy and its leadership is found in Cassese (1974).

Finally, our data, on the one hand, emphasize the 'constituent role of the parties in relation to democratic institutions' (Calise 1987, 221, our translation) and, on the other hand, they testify to the deconstruction of the party system and the progressively less crucial role of party actors in terms of incubators – producers and selectors – of the ruling class.

5. Concluding remarks

The Italian political landscape of recent years is closer to the image of an unstable stability than to the topical paradox, Italian *par excellence*, of stable instability. Our article has highlighted some political duration trends of the Italian ministerial elite and executives.

After clarifying the conceptual differences between duration and durability, we note that the latter has been declining over the last twenty years. Indeed, while during the Italian First Republic government duration was balanced by the stability of the Italian executive political class, as the duration of governments seems to be (partially) growing during the Second Republic, the stability of the ministerial class is decreasing. Norberto Bobbio was right when he pointed out that partitocracy was the main feature of the Italian political system. With the change of the partitocratic world, our political system has changed its nature as well. Political parties are no longer the only incubators of the ministerial elites, with experts, academics and businessmen gaining, indeed, political terrain. This has been pretty evident in several variables we have considered in our analysis: the decreasing rate of partyness of the ministerial class, the growing destructuration of the party system, the increasing rate of government innovativeness. Hence, the processes of elite recruitment and government formation have become less party-driven. Furthermore, without any majoritarian reform project of our institutions, it also results in a more unstable Republic.

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Italian Political Science, VOLUME 17 ISSUE 2

SISP SOCIETÀ ITALIANA DI SCIENZA POLITICA

The Impact of Electoral Rules on Political Particularism:
Highlights from the Italian Chamber of Deputies

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Abstract

Candidate-centred electoral systems make it more convenient for politicians to cultivate a personal reputation. To develop personal followings, candidates provide goods and services to narrow segments of society in exchange for votes. While conventional wisdom in the literature of comparative electoral systems tells us there is a connection between candidate-centred electoral systems and political particularism, attempts to disclose a causal relationship are still rare. In this study, I employ regression-discontinuity design to analyse the causal mechanism linking electoral incentives to particularistic policymaking in the Italian political system. The analysis is performed on a newly generated dataset on the bill proposals of Italian individual members, covering the period from the 12th to the 14th legislative term. My findings show that the electoral system, per se, does not cause a higher propensity to serve parochial interests in national assemblies. A time-series cross-sectional analysis, as well as descriptive evidence, points to localness, incumbency advantage, and electoral competition as additional contributing factors.

1. Introduction

A broad strand of the literature on electoral incentives and legislative behaviour has proposed that the electoral system can significantly influence the willingness of elected representatives to engage in particularistic policymaking. Some electoral systems make it highly convenient for candidates to cultivate a personal reputation. The construction of a personal vote in turn incentivizes political particularism: candidates provide goods and services to narrow segments of society in exchange for votes. Conversely, if party reputation matters more for a politician, policy making should respond more effectively to general interests (Carey & Shugart 1995; Lancaster 1986; Shugart 2001). Scholars have studied political particularism at length, concentrating on the possible negative externalities that it can produce, from a non-equitable or Pareto-inefficient distribution of resources (Alesina & Perotti 1995; Battaglini & Coate 2008; Ferejohn 1974; Pennock 1970), to the construction of a political system that is focused on the provision of particularistic benefits instead of offering a selection from among alternative policy choices (Carey & Shugart 1995; Cox 1987, Lancaster 1986).

While the literature offers extensive empirical evidence and a solid theoretical background for a connection between the electoral rule and the tendency of elected representatives to serve parochial interests, 'acid tests' of a causal linkage are still quite

Italian Political Science. ISSN 2420-8434.

Volume 17, Issue 2, 138–168.
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rare. This is mainly due to the difficulty in controlling for potential confounding factors connected to (1) the institutional environment – a strong committee system, or a presidential system of government, and to (2) political parties' internal organization – access to the party ballot. Furthermore, most of the extant work on local representation proposes a definition and operationalization of political particularism that only includes geographical instances thereof, usually equating particularism with pork-barrel spending.

To fill these gaps, I propose a quasi-experimental study of Italian legislators' behaviour. Starting with the 12th legislative term and up to the 14th term, members of the Italian Parliament were elected with a mixed-member system, Legge Mattarella, in which 25% of the seats were allocated through party lists in 26 multiple-member districts, while 75% were filled by plurality rule in 475 single-member districts. On election day, voters received two ballots: one to express their preference for a candidate running in their single-member electoral district (SMDs), and the other to cast a vote for a party list running in their larger proportional district. The two tiers of the Italian mixed-member electoral system produced opposing incentives for candidates seeking re-election: to serve parochial interests if elected in an SMD, and to pursue a national agenda if elected in their party list (Carey & Shugart 1995; Shugart 2001). The peculiar features of this electoral system thus create suitable prerequisites for a quasi-experiment that compares the behaviour of MPs elected in the SMDs to that of MPs elected in the closed-list PR tier.

Results from an RDD quasi-experiment challenge conventional wisdom on the effect of electoral rules on elected representatives' willingness to serve parochial interests. In my analysis, I employ the definition and operationalization of political particularism developed in Decadri (2021), which includes geographical and sectoral instances of particularism. When considering both these kinds of political particularism, I find no evidence to support the hypothesis that a candidate-centred electoral rule causes an MP to serve the interests of narrow segments of society. A time-series cross-sectional analysis, as well as descriptive evidence, points to localness, incumbency advantage, and electoral competition as additional contributing factors.

2. Electoral incentives to cultivate a personal vote and political particularism: where do we stand?

In 1995, Carey and Shugart kick-started a new strand of research in the field of comparative electoral studies by analysing the effect on legislators' behaviour of electoral mechanisms to distribute seats to candidates. In addition to producing a universal model that accounts for the importance of personal reputation in different electoral systems, Carey & Shugart (1995) sketch some potential policy outcomes arising from politicians' greater attention to personal reputation with respect to party reputation. Pork barrel, and more broadly political particularism, is among the most relevant. Along the same lines, many scholars have studied the variation in particularistic outputs produced by different electoral rules. Most of them focus on pork-barrel, which is measured by the distribution of infrastructure expenditures (Ames 1995; Ashworth & Mesquita 2006; Golden & Picci 2008; Lizzeri & Persico 2001; Milesi-Ferretti et al. 2002). Others analyse law making, calling attention to the fact that MPs can conveniently exploit the legislative

process to favour parochial interests (Crisp et al. 2004; Gagliarducci et al. 2011; Gamm & Kousser 2010; Mejía-Acosta et al. 2006).

While in the literature there is much work on the effect of electoral incentives to cultivate a personal vote and political particularism, significant limitations remain, especially regarding the isolation of relevant confounding factors. First, most of the scholarship does not take into proper consideration potential confounding factors connected to the institutional setting. Scholars have demonstrated that presidential systems (Cain et al., 1984; Ashworth & Mesquita, 2006), strong committees in national assemblies, and strong local roots (Lancaster,1986) increase politicians' propensity to serve their constituencies regardless of the operating electoral rule. Still, most of the existing studies are not able to concurrently control for these confounding factors. For example, Crisp et al. (2004) control for the different effect of presidential systems with respect to parliamentary systems by studying only presidential democracies, but they do not control for the effect of the remaining confounding factors – strong committees, localism, local government experience, strong interest groups.[1] Second, confounding factors related to intraparty regulations are not always taken into proper account. Yet, scholars have shown that the level of ballot control affects candidates' propensity to cultivate a personal vote regardless of the electoral rule (Bawn & Thies, 2003; Mejía-Acosta et al., 2006), and that ballot control, district magnitude, party-based voting, and vote pooling exert a joint effect on politicians' propensity to engage in distributive policymaking (Franchino & Mainenti, 2013). Third, while most studies consider only geographical instances of political particularism (e.g. Lizzeri & Persico 2001; Milesi-Ferretti et al. 2002), scholars have pointed out that legislators can be incentivized to serve parochial interests that do not coincide with those of the entire constituency, but instead are targeted to specific clientelistic groups inside the constituency (e.g. Eulau & Karps, 1977; Mayhew, 2004; Golden, 2003; Di Palma, 1977). However, examples of studies that analyse electoral incentives to serve this kind of parochial interest are still quite rare (with exceptions: e.g., Mejía-Acosta et al., 2006; Decadri, 2021).

To fill these gaps, I propose a quasi-experimental study of Italian legislators' behaviour, which employs regression-discontinuity design (RDD) to analyse the causal mechanism linking electoral incentives to particularistic policymaking. The objective is twofold: (1) to study the effect of the electoral system on legislators' propensity to engage in particularistic policymaking, in search of empirical evidence of a causal linkage; (2) to explore elected representatives' willingness to provide benefits that are not only intended for the whole constituency but are also targeted to clientelistic groups linked to specific sectors of the economy.

[1] Another example is Milesi-Ferretti et al. (2002), who select OECD and Latin American countries with different electoral systems and control for GDP and the number of parties in the system but do not isolate institutional factors like the difference between parliamentary and presidential systems.

3. The causal linkage between electoral rules and particularism: a study of Italy

3.1. Why Italy?

Why is a case study, based on the Italian political scenario, a valid option for studying the relationship between electoral incentives and political particularism? First, the choice of a one-country case study enables an individual-level analysis. The electoral connection is a phenomenon that works at the individual level, by linking a candidate in search of a vote to a constituent. An individual level analysis thus appears as the most suitable option to study such a relationship.

Second, a one-country case study makes it possible to control for confounding factors connected to the institutional framework.[2] Disentangling the effect of the electoral system from that of the institutional environment, when performing cross-country studies, could prove to be non-trivial. In this case, one-country studies can be more effective in addressing country-level endogeneity by keeping all the mentioned institutional factors fixed. More precisely, the Italian case offers the opportunity to analyse the behaviour of individuals who operate in the same institutional environment, but have been elected with a different electoral rule. Differences in the legislative behaviour of SMD and PR candidates should not be produced by the interaction of institutional factors with the effect of the electoral system.

Third, a one-country case study makes it possible to disentangle the effect of the electoral system *per se* from that of electoral regulations. While the electoral system concerns the rules that determine how votes are cast and converted into seats, 'electoral regulations' concern the right to vote in free, fair and transparent elections and, most importantly for our purpose, ease of access to the ballot (Gallagher & Mitchell 2005). Researchers have shown that ballot control and the electoral rule, strictly speaking, can have conflicting effects on legislators' willingness to engage in particularistic policymaking (Carey & Shugart, 1995; Franchino & Mainenti 2013; Shugart, 2001). This happens, for example, when we consider candidates who are running under a party-centred electoral rule but are also members of a party which grants access to its label through primaries (Bawn & Thies 2003; Mejía-Acosta et al. 2006). Here again, the choice of a one-country case study offers a good opportunity to simplify things. In the period considered, all relevant political parties in Italy had a highly-centralized nomination system (Ferrara 2004b; Verzichelli 2002). This allows the study of the electoral system's effect on particularistic policymaking, while keeping the level of ballot control fixed.

3.2. Electoral incentives and dual candidates' strategy

As previously explained, the two tiers of the Italian mixed-member electoral system in 1994-2001 produced opposing incentives for candidates seeking re-election: to serve parochial interests in the majoritarian tier, and to pursue a broader agenda in the

[2] Given, of course, that such an institutional framework does not significantly change in the period considered. In the case of Italy, there was no significant change in the form of government, the parliamentary committees' system, or electoral regulations in the period from the legislative 12th term up to the 14th term.

proportional tier. This set of tier-dependent incentives is further complicated by the fact that all MPs considered in this analysis are *dual candidates*. Dual candidates could run in one single-member district, while at the same time being inserted into one or more party-lists presented for the proportional districts. However, if elected in both tiers, they had to accept the majoritarian seat. On the one hand, a personalized campaign strategy would help them gain consensus in their single-member district. However, a personalized campaign strategy would not be particularly helpful for winning in the proportional districts. Given this set of conflicting incentives, I argue that candidates will be unlikely to have a 'pure', either personalized or party-centred, campaign strategy. Candidates will be more likely to have a 'mixed' strategy, whereby they campaign to earn personalized support in the single-member districts, while also advertising the party label in the proportional districts. This strategy should guarantee approval from the party leaders since candidates would still campaign for their party in the proportional districts. At the same time, a mixed campaign strategy would still help maximize a candidate's chance of winning the single-member seat, since they could still cultivate a personal vote in their single-member district.

When campaigning, dual candidates concurrently operate in two different environments characterized by opposing incentives. Candidates will then be elected either in the proportional or in the majoritarian tier. I argue that, at this stage, their behaviour will no longer be influenced by the necessity to cope with the conflicting incentives typical of a dual candidacy. Instead, elected officials' behaviour in parliament will be determined by their tier of election. Why should an MP switch from a 'mixed strategy' to a 'pure tier-dependent strategy', once elected? Because of re-election incentives. During the election campaign, dual candidates make different promises to electors in the proportional and in the single-member districts. In the proportional districts, running candidates commit themselves to pursuing the party agenda. In the single-member districts, candidates commit themselves to favouring the district's parochial interests. If a candidate is elected in the majoritarian tier, voters will recognize the candidate as the representative of the district and will therefore expect them to maintain their electoral promise to favour the district's interests. On the other hand, if an MP is elected in the proportional tier, voters will recognize the MP as a representative of the party, and they will therefore expect them to maintain their electoral promise to pursue the party agenda. To defend their credibility with the electorate and maximize their chances of being re-elected, MPs will need to act in accordance with their – tier-dependent – electoral promises.

Clearly, re-election incentives can produce a 'candidates' specialization' only if, at large, candidates stick with their first-won tier of election. Previous analyses back this assumption, showing that once candidates have been assigned to a given electoral tier, they tend to persist there. Among the MPs re-elected in the next term, the probability of being re-elected in an SMD is about 87% for politicians elected in the majoritarian tier, versus 57% for politicians elected in the proportional (see Gagliarducci et al. 2011, p. 164).[3] Instead, empirical evidence in support of 'contamination effects' reducing candidates' propensity

[3] This difference is significant at the 1% level.

to specialize relates primarily to MPs' uniform voting behaviour across tiers, and not to their propensity to engage in particularistic policymaking (Ferrara 2004b).[4]

Candidates' specialization should be further boosted by the absence of a direct seat linkage between the two tiers of election. Indeed, in the mixed-member system in force in Italy, differently from what happens in Germany or New Zealand, the total number of seats won by a party did not depend on its vote share in the PR tier. Instead, the system was a 'partially compensatory' one, which provided that for each SMD won by a candidate connected to a party list in the PR tier, the votes received by the best loser (plus one) were subtracted from the total list vote. Moreover, parties who decided to coordinate in the majoritarian tier were not required to also coalesce in the PR system. This electoral rule created the perfect conditions for the formation of two broad centre-left and centre-right coalitions in the SMDs tier, while in the PR tier parties forming each coalition run independent lists (Ferrara 2004a). Coordination in the SMDs, where single candidates run under a large coalition banner, and an independently run electoral race in the PR districts, where party lists campaign under their own party label, should further increase the diversification between the two tiers in the eyes of voters.

Still, we might wonder if such evidence holds for dual candidates, who constitute our study group. Indeed, for re-election incentives to produce a tier-dependent behaviour for dual candidates, they should not expect to get a dual candidacy in the very next electoral race. If dual candidates are expected to always get another dual candidacy from their party leadership, they would have fewer incentives to cultivate a personal vote and many more incentives to please their party leaders regardless of their actual tier of election. In fact, dual candidacies were usually granted as a form of compensatory system, to help candidates obtain a seat in parliament even if they lost in their single-member district. Again, the peculiarities of the Italian electoral system work in our favour. The number of dual candidacies was not sufficient to guarantee that every dual candidate losing in an SMD could still get elected in the proportional tier, let alone receive the 'dual-candidacy parachute' in the next electoral race (Gagliarducci et. al, 2011). Persistence in the 'dual candidate status' is, in fact, low: only 27% of all dual candidates received a dual candidacy more than once, a percentage that drops to 17% if we exclude national leaders (Gagliarducci et al., 2011).[5] Empirical evidence and theoretical reasoning thus suggest that MPs, whether they are dual candidates or not, should specialize in serving localities if they are elected in the majoritarian tier, and in representing their party label if they are elected in the proportional tier. Accordingly, I posit:

> **H1:** Deputies elected in the majoritarian tier will engage in particularistic policy-making to a greater extent than deputies elected in the proportional tier.

[4] While a uniform voting behaviour in parliament signals a uniformly high party loyalty, this does not exclude the possibility that PR legislators specialize in safeguarding broader interests, while SMD legislators specialize in serving localities through constituency service or proposed legislation.

[5] They are also much more likely to run in non-competitive districts (see Gagliarducci et al., 2011) and thus are not part of our study group, which only considers candidates running in competitive districts.

4. Data and variables operationalization

4.1. A novel dataset on Italian individual members' bill proposals

To analyse particularistic law making in Italy, I employ a newly collected dataset on Italian individual members' bill proposals (IMBPs). I have automatically retrieved texts of bills in PDF format from the Italian Parliament website, and I have converted the scanned images into machine-encoded text using a set of Optical Character Recognition (OCR) scripts written in Python. The final corpus contains every bill proposed as a first signatory by all Italian MPs in the period from the 12th legislative term to the 14th term. The dataset also includes data on MPs' demographics – date and place of birth, district, and region of election, political party or list of election, parliamentary group, education, profession, age, and gender – which I have taken from their personal page on the Italian Parliament website. In the final dataset used for this analysis, every bill is categorized as either particularistic – geographically- or sector-targeted – or non-particularistic according to the dictionary-based classification proposed by Decadri (2021). Data on dual candidacies are from the historical archives retained by the Italian ministry of interior and from the study by Gagliarducci et al. (2011).[6] The final sample consists of 1700 political candidates, of which 361 are *dual candidates,* elected in the 1994, 1996 and 2001 elections.

4.2. Why individual members' bill proposals?

Why use individual members' bill proposals and not actual legislation passed by parliament? An analysis of bills passed by parliament would not only include the effect of electoral rules on the willingness of parliamentarians to propose particularistic laws, but also the impact of potential confounding factors that influence the chances of a bill becoming law. Political party affiliation, committee leadership, and majority status in parliament can influence an MPs' legislative productivity, i.e. the proportion of bill proposals that actually become law (Anderson et al., 2003; Cox & Terry, 2008). On the contrary, analysing IMBPs allows us to dismiss the whole approval process that comes after the proposal has been presented in parliament. Accordingly, IMBPs should constitute a more direct and transparent measure of candidates' willingness to serve parochial interests.

Moreover, IMBPs fulfil many critical functions (Mattson, 1995). First, they have an instrumental function. MPs can influence the legislative process simply by getting individual bills to the floor, since these proposals become part of the ongoing bargaining process that takes place in national assemblies. Second, IMBPs constitute an effective electoral propaganda instrument, especially when they aim to favour the interests of a small clientele. In addition, MPs can communicate their opinion to their voters, and to the public at large, through legislative proposals, and thus IMBPs also fulfil an expressive function. In sum, IMBPs are relevant to the legislative and electoral process, even when they do not become law, and they constitute a clear and transparent proxy of candidates' propensity to serve parochial interests.

[6] See also https://elezionistorico.interno.gov.it/.

4.3. Geographical and sectoral instances of particularistic policy-making

In my analysis, I follow closely the theoretical framework offered by Decadri (2021), thus considering two kinds of political particularism: geographic particularism and sectoral particularism. Geographic particularism is the act of distributing goods and services to a geographic entity, i.e., an MP's constituency. An example of geographic particularism would be an infrastructural intervention targeting the constituency. Sectoral particularism is the act of distributing goods and services to functional groups determined by specific economic sectors that find representation in a candidate's constituency. An example of sectoral particularism would be the distribution of subsidies to the tourism sector, or the institution of an award for the urban and architectural sector.

Still following Decadri's (2021) approach, I operationalize political particularism as an MP's act of serving parochial interests through ad hoc legislation (IMBPs). Geographical particularism is operationalized as a bill proposal that distributes goods and services to a candidate's constituency. An example of geographically-targeted legislation would be a bill that requires the construction of a bridge in a municipality that is part of a candidate's constituency. Sectoral particularism is operationalized as a bill that distributes goods and services to a whole sector of the economy, a professional category, or a company/firm active in that economic sector present in an MP's constituency. An example of sector-targeted legislation would be one that institutes an award to Sardinia's tourism sector.

To classify a bill as particularistic[7] or non-particularistic, I employ the four new dictionaries of Italian political particularism constructed and validated by Decadri (2021). Geographically- targeted bills are those containing references to the distribution of a benefit intended for the MP's whole constituency, while sector-targeted bills are those containing references to the distribution of benefits for a sector of the economy, professional category, or enterprise/firm present in the MP's constituency. Non-particularistic bills are those which contain no reference to the distribution of a benefit to an MP's constituency or to a sector of the economy. Following the typical approach of Italian politics scholars (Gagliarducci et al. 2011, Marangoni & Tronconi 2011), I use an MP's region of election as a proxy for their constituency. In Italy, the size of constituencies varies over time and throughout the country, but their size is never larger than that of a region. The use of the region of election as a proxy for the constituency thus allows a comparison of legislators' behaviour over time and space. For each MP, their propensity to engage in particularistic policymaking is measured by the total number of particularistic bills they propose. The variable called *geo* measures the number of geographic-based bills proposed by an MP, while *sector* measures the number of sector-targeted bills.

5. Methodology

5.1. Regression discontinuity design: an overview

To estimate the electoral system's effect on legislators' willingness to serve parochial interests, I employ a quasi-experiment based on regression discontinuity design technique (RDD). Social scientists have successfully used RDD to study the socio-economic impact of policy interventions assigned to some geographic units but not to others, or to analyse

[7] Geographically- or sector-targeted.

the effect that winning office in close elections has on legislators' behaviour (e.g. Brollo & Nannicini 2012; Brollo et al. 2013; Lee 2008).[8] In all of these circumstances, a political process assigns individuals to one or the other category of an independent variable, based on whether they are above or below a certain threshold on some co-variate. All these analyses take advantage of the fact that the assignment to one or the other category of an independent is as good as random for individuals right above or right below the threshold. When that is the case, RDD can be used to obtain analytic leverage on the impact of the treatment (independent) variable on the dependent variable (Dunning 2012).

5.2. Statistical framework

As previously illustrated, to elect parliamentarians in the 12th-14th legislative terms, Italy employed a mixed-member system where a portion of the candidates could run in both tiers. Dual candidates could compete for a seat in one single-member district and be inserted in one or more of their party's lists running in the PR districts. However, if elected in both tiers, they had to accept the majoritarian seat. Accordingly, all the dual candidates elected in the proportional tier are those who lost in their single-member district, while all the dual candidates elected in the majoritarian tier are those who won in their single-member district. The peculiar characteristics of the Italian mixed-member system can be used to estimate the causal effect of the treatment 'being elected in the majoritarian tier', as opposed to 'being elected in the proportional tier', for near-winners and near-losers (for a similar approach see Brollo & Nannicini 2012; Gagliarducci et al. 2011).[9]

In general, candidates who gained a very large share of votes should be different from candidates who gained a very narrow share of votes. For example, they could have been able to win by a large margin because they are well known in the district, or differently, because they are national leaders. Consequently, their behaviour in parliament could be mainly determined by their idiosyncratic characteristics and preferences, rather than by the electoral system. Candidates with strong local ties could be more willing to initiate particularistic legislation, irrespective of their tier of election. National leaders should have a higher probability of receiving government appointments, which would leave them with less time to draw up bill proposals; or they could simply be less willing to propose particularistic legislation because they need to show their electorate that they are pursuing the party agenda. Conversely, on average, candidates who barely won will be very similar to candidates who barely lost. Consequently, given the role that random factors play in determining electoral outcomes, their chance of being elected in the majoritarian or in the proportional tier could be considered as good as random.

Near-winners and near-losers are candidates running in close elections. In these electoral races, the difference in the percentage of votes won by the candidate who secures the SMD seat, and the next best candidate should be very narrow. But what percentage exactly constitutes a narrow margin of victory? Previous studies have proposed values ranging from 5% to 15% (Eggers & Hainmueller 2009; Gagliarducci et al. 2011; Titiunik 2009). Of course, the closeness of a particular electoral race will also depend on the electoral context. An electoral race won by a 10% margin could be considered

[8] For further examples, see Dunning (2012), p. 71.

[9] For a general discussion on the use of RDD analysis to study close elections see also Dunning (2012), p. 77-79.

as a close victory in an electoral context where the mean winning margin is higher than that value, but in a different context it could be in line with the average. In the case considered here, the average margin of victory is 13%, with a median value of 10%. I would thus consider close elections all those electoral races where the margin of victory is lower or equal to 10%.

When choosing the scope of the study group, particular attention should be paid to the trade-off between the gain in precision from choosing a wider study group, and the risk of producing biased results when including units that are not valid counterfactuals for each other (Dunning 2012). With a larger study group, the treatment effect estimator will have a lower variance, hence the gain in precision. At the same time, including units that are located too far from the key discontinuity threshold could produce biased results. As a rule of thumb, researchers usually perform analyses that consider different choices of bandwidths (Dunning, 2012; Valentim et al., 2021). For strong quasi-experiments, the results should be consistent across smaller and larger study groups. Moreover, in cases where the number of observations could potentially be too small to detect an effect, showing results for larger study groups should address potential concerns that the results are simply an artefact of the data. In my analysis, I will thus provide results for four different bandwidths – 13%, 10%, 5% and 3% – even though close elections are only those included in the 3%-10% bandwidths.

Treatment assignment for dual candidates can be specified as:

$$T(MV_c) = \begin{cases} 1, if\ MV_c \geq 0 \\ 0, if\ MV_c < 0 \end{cases} \quad (1)$$

where *MVc* is the margin of victory, i.e. the difference between the votes earned by candidate *c*, and the votes earned by the next-best candidate. The margin of victory for candidates elected in the proportional tier will be lower than 0, while the margin of victory for candidates elected in the majoritarian tier will be greater than 0. In accordance with Equation 1, members elected in the majoritarian tier constitute the treatment group, while members elected in the proportional tier constitute the control group. Moreover, we can assume that each candidate's chance of winning does not depend exclusively on their personal characteristics, but instead includes some random component, such that the probability of winning for a candidate c is never equal to 1 or to 0. More precisely, for dual candidates running in close election, the assignment to the proportional or majoritarian tier is as good as random.

Given these assumptions, we can estimate the effect that being elected in the majoritarian tier, with respect to being elected in the proportional one, has on candidates' propensity to propose particularistic legislation. Said effect is defined as the average treatment effect, AT, and it is calculated as the difference between the average number of particularistic bills proposed by dual candidates elected in the majoritarian tier, and the average number of particularistic bills proposed by candidates elected in the proportional tier:

$$AT = \bar{T} - \bar{C}$$

where $\bar{T}$ is the average value of the potential outcomes under the treatment, while $\bar{C}$ is the average value of the potential outcomes for all the candidates in the control group.

6. Analysis

6.1. Electoral incentives in the majoritarian and in the proportional tier

Following best practices in the literature (Dunning 2012; Valentim et al., 2021), I first propose an RDD analysis of the whole population under study. This preliminary evidence serves to demonstrate the presence of a strong, albeit correlational, link between the two phenomena under scrutiny. The correlational link between the dependent and the independent variable then constitutes the starting point on which the subsequent causal-analysis can be built. I thus provide empirical evidence on the different set of incentives relative to the two tiers of election for the whole sample of elected representatives – dual and non-dual candidates – elected in the 1994, 1996 and 2001 elections.

Table 1. RDD Analysis—full sample

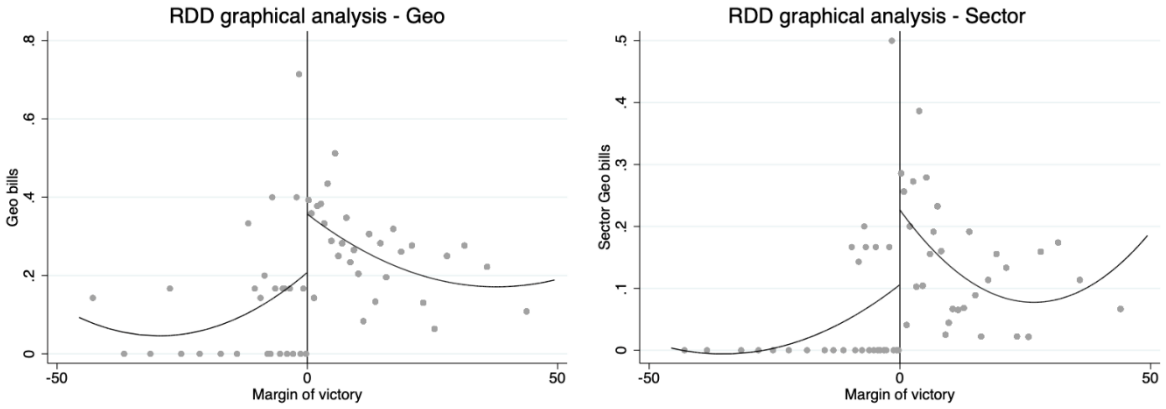
	Jump at the threshold
Geo	0.142**
	(0.0257)
Sector	0.0744**
	(0.0171)
Observations	**1869**
Majoritarian	1392
Proportional	447

Notes: standard errors in parentheses. $^{+}$ p<0.10, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01. The table reports t-tests that compare the average number of geographically-targeted (geo) and sector-targeted bills (sector) proposed by MPs elected in the majoritarian tier with those proposed by MPs elected in the proportional tier.

Table 1 shows the results of t-tests comparing the average number of particularistic bills proposed by MPs elected in the majoritarian tier to the average number of particularistic bills proposed by MPs elected in the proportional tier. T-tests show a statistically significant difference: on average, representatives elected in the majoritarian tier propose more particularistic bills. Figure 1 reports RDD plots for geographically- (panel a) and sector-targeted (panel b) legislation. The RDD plots present two summaries: (i) a global polynomial fit,[10] represented by the black solid line, and (ii) local sample means, represented by the grey dots. The graphs show a positive discontinuity at the threshold, consistent across higher-order polynomials (see Appendix A), which corroborates the evidence provided by the t-tests. Majoritarian MPs appear to be more likely to engage in particularistic policymaking. In addition, previous studies applying an RDD analysis to a similar sample of Italian MPs found analogous results (Gagliarducci et al. 2011).

[10] The polynomial fit is a smooth approximation of the unknown regression function based on a second-order polynomial regression. The local sample means are non-smooth approximations of the unknown local regression functions (see Cattaneo et al. 2018, p. 20).

Figure 1. RDD Analysis—full sample



Notes: the figure shows RDD plots for geographic (panel a) and sector-targeted (panel b) legislation. The dots represent local sample means of the number of particularistic bills proposed by each MP, while the solid line is a second-order polynomial fit. Bins are non-overlapping partitions all containing the same number of observations, i.e. quantile-spaced bins. The total number of bins has been determined using the mimicking variance method.

Can this empirical evidence be considered enough to support the validity of H1? Hardly. This preliminary analysis, like previous contributions,[11] does not consider exclusively MPs who are valid counterfactuals of each other. The observed differences could be produced by MPs' idiosyncratic characteristics that increase their chances of running, and thus being elected, in one of the two tiers. That is why a more compelling analysis should only consider MPs who are valid counterfactuals. To this aim, the next section proposes an RDD analysis which includes only dual-near winners and dual-near losers.

6.2. How plausible is 'as-if random'? Information, incentives, and abilities

In line with best practices in the literature (Dunning 2012; Valentim et al., 2021), I present qualitative and quantitative evidence in support of the as-if-random condition that justifies the choice of an RDD framework. The most common qualitative diagnostics discuss the *information*, *incentives*, and *abilities* of the units under study. First, we should ask ourselves if the units have information about the fact that they will receive a certain treatment, or not. Second, we should inquire if the units have an incentive to self-select into the control or the treatment group, or if other actors have an incentive to allocate units to either of the two groups. Finally, it is important to understand if the units in the study group can self-select into the control or treatment group, or if other relevant actors can allocate units to either of the two groups. The three conditions of information, incentives, and abilities should not be considered as mere elements of a checklist to be completed, whereby satisfaction of each criterion is necessary for the as-if random condition to hold. Qualitative evaluation of the as-if random condition should instead be

[11] Gagliarducci et al. (2011) propose an RRD analysis that should include only MPs who are valid counterfactuals. However, while the authors propose valid thresholds in order to select near-winners and near-losers in their analysis, they include in their study group both dual and non-dual candidates. This hinders the RDD design's ability to effectively control for MPs' idiosyncratic characteristics.

based on a case-by-case analysis, which provides a critical examination of the conditions under which the treatment is administrated (Dunning, 2012).

As explained in Section 4.2, candidates with strong local support could have an incentive to self-select in the majoritarian tier. Similarly, party leaders could have an incentive to allocate candidates with strong local ties in the majoritarian tier. Nevertheless, the fundamental question is whether they have the ability and information to do so. Neither candidates nor party leaders know for certain who will be elected in the majoritarian tier, as they cannot know for certain who will win in their SMD. Furthermore, when a candidate wins both in his single-member district and in one or more PR districts, he must accept the majoritarian seat. This means that neither the candidates nor the party leaders can allocate units to the control or to the treatment group. To conclude, candidates' *incentives* and *abilities*, as well as actors' *information* on the electoral outcome, suggest that it is plausible to retain the assignment of candidates to either tier of election as good as random.

6.3. How plausible is 'as-if random'? Balance and placebo tests

As a complement to qualitative diagnostics, I perform balance and placebo tests to provide further evidence in support of the as-if random condition (Dunning 2012).[12] Balance tests are used to evaluate if there is a systematic difference in relevant 'pre-treatment covariates' across the treatment and control group. Pre-treatment covariates are all those factors whose value has been determined before the treatment takes place. If the as-if random condition holds, assignment to the control and treatment group should be statistically independent of such pre-treatment covariates. Balance tests consist in difference of mean tests that compare the average value of pre-treatment covariates across the treatment and control group, or in z-tests that investigate for the presence of a significantly different proportion of individuals with certain characteristics across the treatment and control group.

The balance tests that I propose include thirteen covariates that convey information on candidates' demographics, political experience, and district of election (see Table 2). Of the thirteen pre-treatment variables considered, only the dummy variable physician has a statistically significant coefficient. Apart from this single imbalance, in general the tests show that candidates' assignment to either the control or the treatment group seems to be independent of pre-treatment covariates.[13]

[12] In general, researchers should also perform conditional density tests to provide empirical evidence against units' ability to sort at the threshold. However, in the case of RDD analyses that consider near-winners and near-losers of elections, conditional density tests will be automatically satisfied (see Dunning, 2012).

[13] See also Dunning 2012, p. 241 on balance tests, and acceptable imbalances. One imbalanced variable out of 20 should be the target, when demonstrating that pre-treatment variables are balanced in the vicinity of the treatment threshold. Unfortunately, there are no other pre-treatment covariates available, that I know of, to perform balance tests. Still, one imbalanced factor over thirteen seems to suggest that there should not be consistent imbalances around the threshold able to undermine the validity of the as-if-random condition.

Table 2. Balance tests

	Jump at the threshold
Local	-0.00646 (0.0341)
Previous local appointment	0.0560 (0.0665)
Clerk	0.0125 (0.0200)
Entrepreneur	0.0359 (0.0317)
Lawyer	0.000631 (0.0426)
Physician	0.0619* (0.0309)
Self-employed	-0.00646 (0.0341)
Teacher	0.0662+ (0.0369)
Female	-0.0653+ (0.0375)
Graduate	0.0999+ (0.0580)
South	-0.0159 (0.0634)
North	0.0104 (0.0654)
Age	1.972 (1.222)
Observations	**226**
Majoritarian	122
Proportional	104

Notes: standard errors in parentheses. + p<0.10, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01. The table reports balance tests for pre-treatment covariates. Local is a dummy variable that indicates if an MP has been elected in the same region where they reside. Previous local appointment is a dummy that indicates if an MP had previous local government experience – mayor, president of a regional government. Clerk, Entrepreneur, Lawyer, Physician, Self-employed and Teacher are dummy variables for a candidate's profession (from Gagliarducci et al., 2011). Female is a dummy for gender. Graduate is a dummy for graduate level education. South (North) is a dummy variable that indicates if a candidate ran in a southern (northern) district. Age measures the age of candidates in years.

Placebo tests check for the presence of apparent causal effects at points different from the key discontinuity threshold (see Dunning 2012). RDD is based on the idea that relevant differences in the observed outcomes, for units in the treatment and control group, should be induced only by the treatment itself. Accordingly, units in the study group should not display large differences in observed outcomes at points other than the discontinuity determining treatment/control assignment. Placebo tests consist of difference of means tests at 'fake thresholds', i.e., at points different from the relevant threshold. The results of placebo tests are reported in Table 3. The tests show there are no statistically significant discontinuities in the propensity to propose particularistic legislation for units close to the two 'fake thresholds' considered – median to the left, and median to the right of the discontinuity threshold.

Table 3. Placebo tests

	50th left **Jump at the threshold**	**50th right** **Jump at the threshold**
Geo	-0.0837 (0.101)	-0.0164 (0.103)
Sector	-0.0326 (0.0586)	-0.0656 (0.0752)
Observations	**104**	**122**
Treatment	50	54
Control	61	61

Notes: standard errors in parentheses. $^{+}$ p<0.10, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01. The table reports placebo tests that compare the average number of particularistic bills proposed by dual MPs to the left and to the right of two 'fake thresholds'. Such thresholds are represented by the empirical median of observations to the left and to the right of the regression-discontinuity cut-off – 50th percentile to the left and 50th percentile to the right of 0.

The empirical evidence provided by balance and placebo tests thus gives further support to the qualitative analysis of relevant actors' incentives, abilities, and information. To conclude, a substantive analysis of the Italian electoral context, as well as the evidence provided by balance and placebo tests, suggests that the peculiar characteristics of the Italian mixed-member system allow a quasi-experimental study of the causal mechanism linking electoral incentives to legislators' willingness to engage in particularistic policymaking.

6.4. Results

Building on the statistical framework proposed in Section 4.1 and on the qualitative and quantitative evidence provided in Sections 5.2 and 5.3, I perform an RDD analysis to evaluate the causal effect of the treatment 'being elected in the majoritarian tier', as opposed to 'being elected in the proportional tier', for dual candidates running in the 1994, 1996 and 2001 elections. To estimate the average causal effect (AVE), I perform a difference of means test for geographically- and sector-targeted legislation (see Table 4). As explained in Section 4.2, I present results for four different bandwidths. The t-tests fail to detect any significant difference between the mean number of particularistic bills proposed in the treatment groups and the mean number of particularistic bills proposed in the control group.

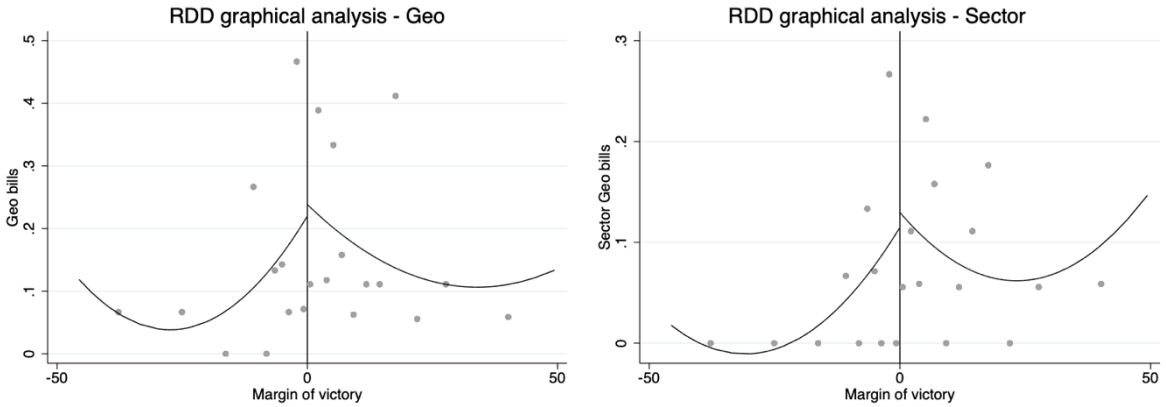
Table 4. RDD Analysis—study group

	Jump at the threshold			
	13% bandwidth	**10% bandwidth**	**5% bandwidth**	**3% bandwidth**
Geo	0.0251 (0.0729)	0.0497 (0.0787)	-0.0107 (0.112)	-0.000922 (0.176)
Sector	0.0214 (0.0490)	0.0188 (0.0555)	-0.0224 (0.0637)	-0.0433 (0.0986)
Observations	**226**	**196**	**111**	**66**
Majoritarian	122	104	57	35
Proportional	104	92	54	31

Notes: standard errors in parentheses. $^{+}$ p<0.10, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01. The table reports the results of t-tests that compare the average number of particularistic bills proposed by dual MPs elected in the majoritarian tier (treatment group), with the average number of particularistic bills proposed by dual MPs elected in the proportional tier (control group). Results are reported for all the relevant bandwidths – 13%, 10%, 5%, 2%.

Moreover, I report RDD plots that fit a second-order polynomial to local sample means, to investigate the presence of a discontinuity at the threshold (see Figure 2). The graphs corroborate the results of the t-tests. The discontinuity shown, much smaller than the one observed in Figure 1, is almost imperceptible. This graphical evidence is robust to the choice of higher-order polynomials (see Appendix B).

Figure 2. RDD Analysis—study group



Notes: the figure shows RDD plots for geographic (panel a) and sector-targeted (panel b) legislation. The dots represent local sample means of the number of particularistic bills proposed by each MP, while the solid line is a second-order polynomial fit. Bins are non-overlapping partitions all containing the same number of observations, i.e., quantile-spaced bins. The total number of bins has been determined using the mimicking variance method.

These results are very different from those obtained in Section 5.1, and from those proposed by previous studies that did not restrict their analysis to dual MPs (Gagliarducci et al. 2011). When we consider MPs who are valid counterfactuals of each other, but have been elected under different electoral rules, we are not able to find any relevant difference in their propensity to propose particularistic legislation. Robustness checks employing local-linear regressions (Appendix C), and separate analyses for each of the three legislatures (Appendix D), further corroborate the evidence provided in Table 4 and Figure 2. This suggests that the relationship between the electoral system and candidates' propensity to serve parochial interests could be correlational rather than causal. Given the rationale of the analysis so far performed, it is not feasible to further investigate the role of confounding factors connected to MPs' personal characteristics. RDD quasi-experiments are used exactly to control for the action of observable and unobservable confounders. In the next section, I therefore propose robustness checks to 1) enhance the credibility of the RDD findings, 2) offer further hints as to the action of MPs' idiosyncratic characteristics.

6.5. Alternative explanations

How can we reconcile the evidence found in this study with conventional wisdom on the effect of electoral rules on elected representatives' willingness to serve parochial interests? The culprits behind this contradictory evidence could be MPs' personal characteristics connected to their political experience or to the strength of their local connections. Incumbents and locals usually have greater familiarity with the

constituency's interests and are more willing to serve them (Marangoni & Tronconi 2011). At the same time, MPs who are party leaders or had appointments in party at national level usually want to safeguard their national profile, and thus are less willing to propose particularistic legislation (Gagliarducci et al. 2011, Marangoni & Tronconi 2011). Table 5 shows that locals and incumbents are more likely to be elected in the majoritarian tier, while national politicians and party leaders are more likely to be elected through party lists (although differences are not always statistically significant). These idiosyncratic characteristics could be relevant factors responsible for the different propensity to favour parochial interests that we observe across the two tiers of election but that disappear once we compare counterfactual MPs.

Table 5. Alternative explanations – descriptive evidence

	Proportion in PR tier – Proportion in SMDs tier
National	0.0375 (1.72)
Incumbent	-0.0391 (-1.52)
Local	-0.0446*** (-3.44)
Leader	0.00306 (0.43)
Observations	**1869**
Proportional	477
Majoritarian	1392

Notes: standard errors in parentheses. $^{+}$ p<0.10, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01. The table reports two-sample test of proportions investigating the presence of a different proportion of party leaders, candidates running inside their region of residence, national politicians and incumbents.

To get a better sense of the different factors involved, I propose a time-series cross-sectional analysis that follows the whole sample of MPs throughout the 12th, 13th and 14th legislative terms. Clearly, not all the MPs were able to get elected in every subsequent electoral race, which means we are dealing with an unbalanced panel where attrition rate is influenced by MPs' observable and unobservable abilities that influence their probability of being re-elected. Evidence derived from such an analysis must therefore be taken with caution and should in no way be interpreted as causal. Still, following MPs throughout their career can provide useful hints as to what could be the observable factors influencing a candidate's propensity to serve particularistic interests. Table 6 shows the results of a panel fixed-effect model that inspects the effect of the electoral rule, electoral competition, incumbency, leadership, localness and electoral geography. In line with the RDD results, a model with individual fixed-effects fails to find a statistically significant impact of the electoral rule. As expected, incumbents propose particularistic legislation to a greater extent, although the difference with non-incumbents is statistically significant only for geographically-targeted legislation. Localness, leadership, and electoral geography, instead, do not seem to have a significant effect. Interestingly, electoral competition seems to diminish candidates' propensity to serve parochial interests.

This could be explained by the desire of the most at-risk candidates to raise their national profile and to please their party's leadership, in order to obtain a more secure candidature in the next elections.

Table 6. Alternative explanations

	Geo	**Sector**
Majoritarian	0.0273	0.0100
	(0.139)	(0.0908)
Close elections	-0.298*	-0.165+
	(0.133)	(0.0866)
Incumbent	0.215*	0.0625
	(0.0874)	(0.0569)
Leader	0.163	0.0718
	(0.468)	(0.305)
Local	-0.0873	0.197
	(0.284)	(0.185)
National	-0.190	-0.0508
	(0.172)	(0.112)
North-East districts	0.0741	0.0925
	(0.258)	(0.168)
South districts	-0.0418	0.0106
	(0.499)	(0.325)
Island districts	0.164	-0.0587
	(0.414)	(0.270)
Constant	0.318	0.197
	(0.236)	(0.154)
Observations	**1651**	**1651**

Notes: standard errors in parentheses. + p<0.10, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01. The table reports the results of a time-series cross-sectional analysis with individuals' fixed-effects. The analysis includes the whole sample of political candidates elected in the 12th, 13th and 14th. *Close elections* is a dummy for highly-competitive districts, i.e., those where the margin of victory was lower than or equal to 10%.

7. Conclusions

A vast literature on legislative behaviour shows that candidate-centred electoral systems should increase elected representatives' propensity to serve parochial interests. While previous studies offer extensive empirical evidence and a solid theoretical background for a connection between the electoral rule and the elected representatives' tendency to engage in particularistic policymaking, attempts to disclose a causal relationship are still rare. This is mainly due to the difficulty in simultaneously controlling for determinants connected to the institutional environment, electoral regulations at large, and candidates' self-selection. This study has proposed a quasi-experiment as a convenient solution to controlling for confounding factors and increasing our understanding of the causal mechanism linking the electoral system to political particularism.

Notwithstanding the relevance of electoral rules in influencing elected officials' behaviour, my findings show that the electoral system, *per se*, does not seem to cause a

higher propensity to serve parochial interests in national assemblies. When comparing the propensity to engage in the particularistic policymaking of deputies who are valid counterfactuals for each other, but have been elected under different electoral rules, t-tests, RDD plots and local-linear regressions fail to find significant differences. Still, deputies elected in the majoritarian tier do propose more geographic and sector-targeted legislation than MPs elected in the proportional tier (see Table 1 and Figure 1). These results call for further explanation.

Such counterintuitive evidence could be produced by MPs' observed or unobserved – time-fixed – personal characteristics that influence their likelihood of being elected in the majoritarian tier, as well as their willingness to engage in particularistic law-making. For instance, legislators with strong personal ties to some constituents, or that are part of specific professional categories, could be more incentivized to favour such individuals, or professional categories, at the expense of citizens at large. Similarly, cultural factors connected to *familism* and social capital could be relevant in determining politicians' propensity to engage in particularistic policy-making (Putnam et al., 1993). Indeed, a panel analysis with individual fixed-effects – which removes the effect of such idiosyncratic characteristics – fails to find a significant impact of the electoral rule. This evidence is consistent with the quasi-experiment findings: once we try and remove the impact of politicians' idiosyncratic characteristics, the electoral system of election does not seem to produce relevant incentives to engage in particularistic law-making. This makes us even more suspicious that the effect of the electoral system on clientelistic and particularistic behaviours is merely correlational, given the confounding effect of observable and unobservable factors. As for the unobservable factors, clearly not much can be said. My analysis though, offers interesting hints as to the role of some observable factors: incumbency advantage and electoral competition. Results show that incumbents, who are most likely to be elected in the SMDs districts, are more willing to serve parochial interests. This suggests that candidates' ties with their own district develop and reinforce themselves overtime, increasing the candidates' ability and willingness to please their constituency regardless of the electoral rule. Furthermore, politicians running in highly competitive districts, who are more likely to lose in highly competitive SMDs and thus (if they are) be elected in the party lists, are less willing to propose particularistic legislation. Such behaviour could be incentivized by the candidates' desire to please their party leadership by boosting their national profile, to get a safer candidacy in the next electoral race.

Another relevant factor to be considered is ballot control. Since in my analysis I compare MPs who are all subject to similar electoral regulations, I cannot show empirical evidence of an effect of ballot control. Still, previous studies have shown that 'electoral institutions'[14] have a relevant impact on distributive policymaking only when they boost each other in inhibiting the incentives to cultivate a personal vote (see Franchino & Mainenti 2013, p. 511). This suggests that the effect of electoral rules could become relevant only if accompanied by a reinforcing effect of congruent electoral regulations. The empirical evidence of a non-significant difference in legislative behaviour between MPs elected in different tiers could thus be produced by the dampening effect of a strong ballot control on the propensity of majoritarian MPs to serve parochial interests.

[14] Understood as the combination of electoral rules and electoral regulation.

In conclusion, more compelling evidence should be provided to deliver a final verdict on the effect of electoral systems on political particularism. Since my analysis aimed to control for MPs' idiosyncratic characteristics and electoral regulations at large, it cannot provide insights into the effect of such factors on MPs' propensity to engage in particularistic policymaking. Still, preliminary statistical evidence and theoretical reasoning suggest that if we want to understand how to impact elected representatives' propensity to safeguard broader interests rather than specializing in serving localities, we might need to look at something different from the electoral rule. Policymakers aiming to respond more effectively to general interests should give serious consideration to candidates' political experience, the level of electoral competition, and the interaction between electoral rules and electoral regulations.

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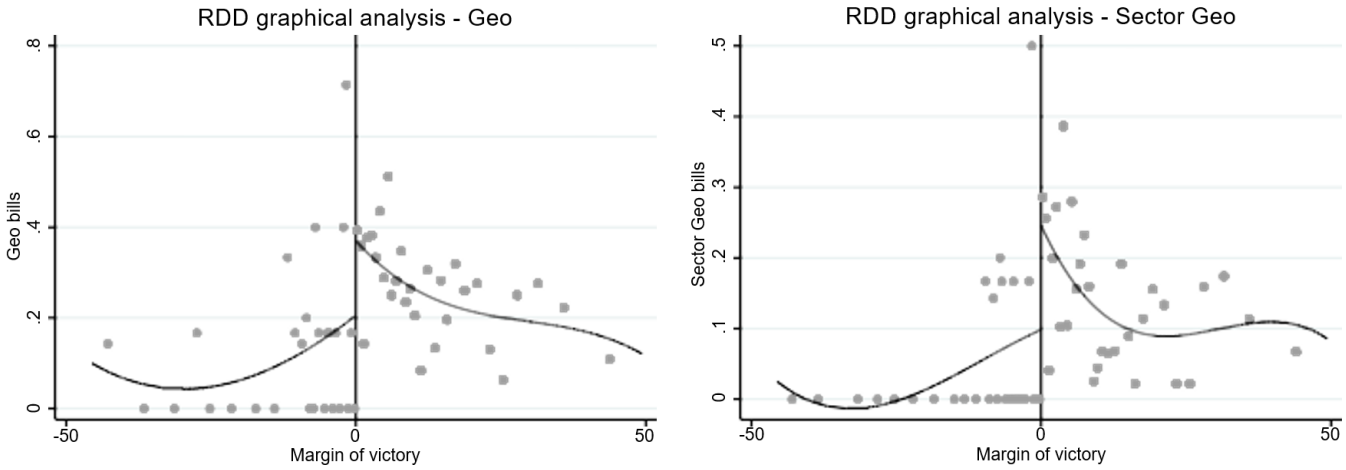
Appendixes

A. RDD Analysis - Complete sample - Robustness checks

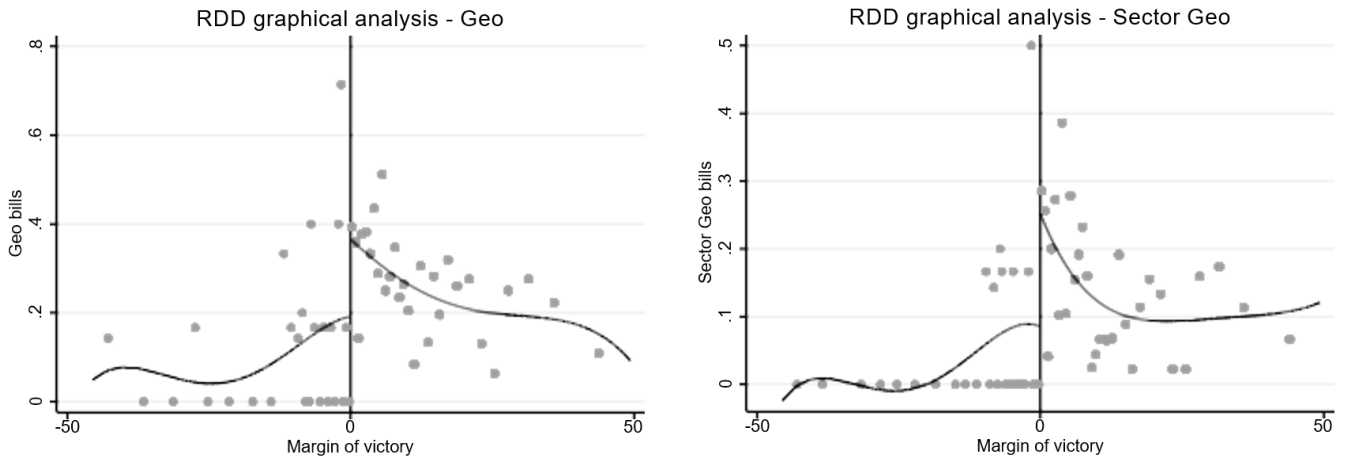
Figure A-1 reports RDD plots for geographically- and sector-targeted legislation. The plots show that the positive discontinuity detected in Section 7.1 is robust across third, fourth, and fifth order polynomials.

Figure A-1. RDD Analysis - full sample

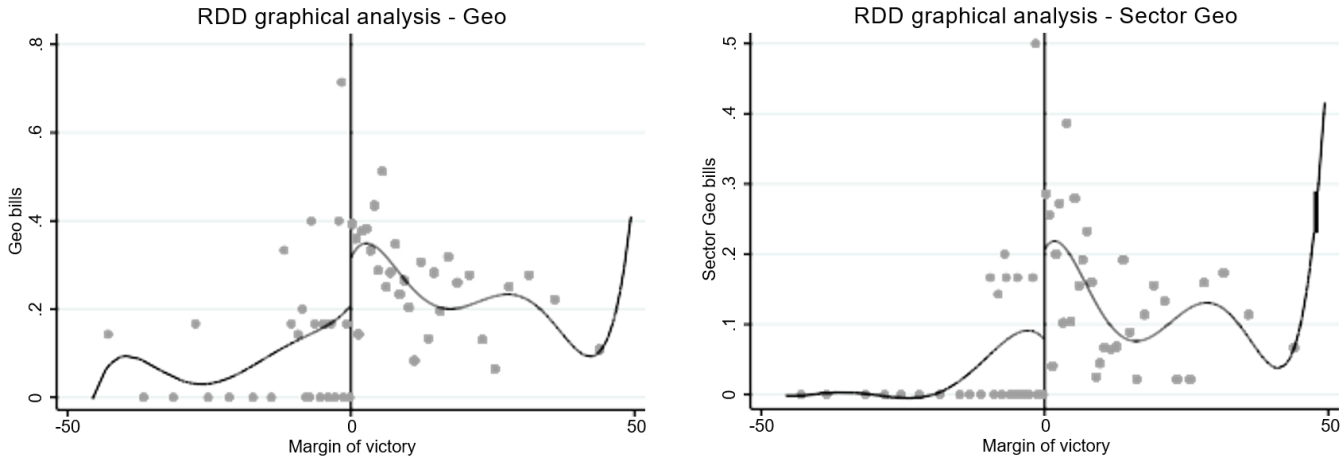
Third-order polynomials (panels **a** and **b**)



Fourth-order polynomials (panels **c** and **d**)



Fifth-order polynomials (panels **e** and **f**)

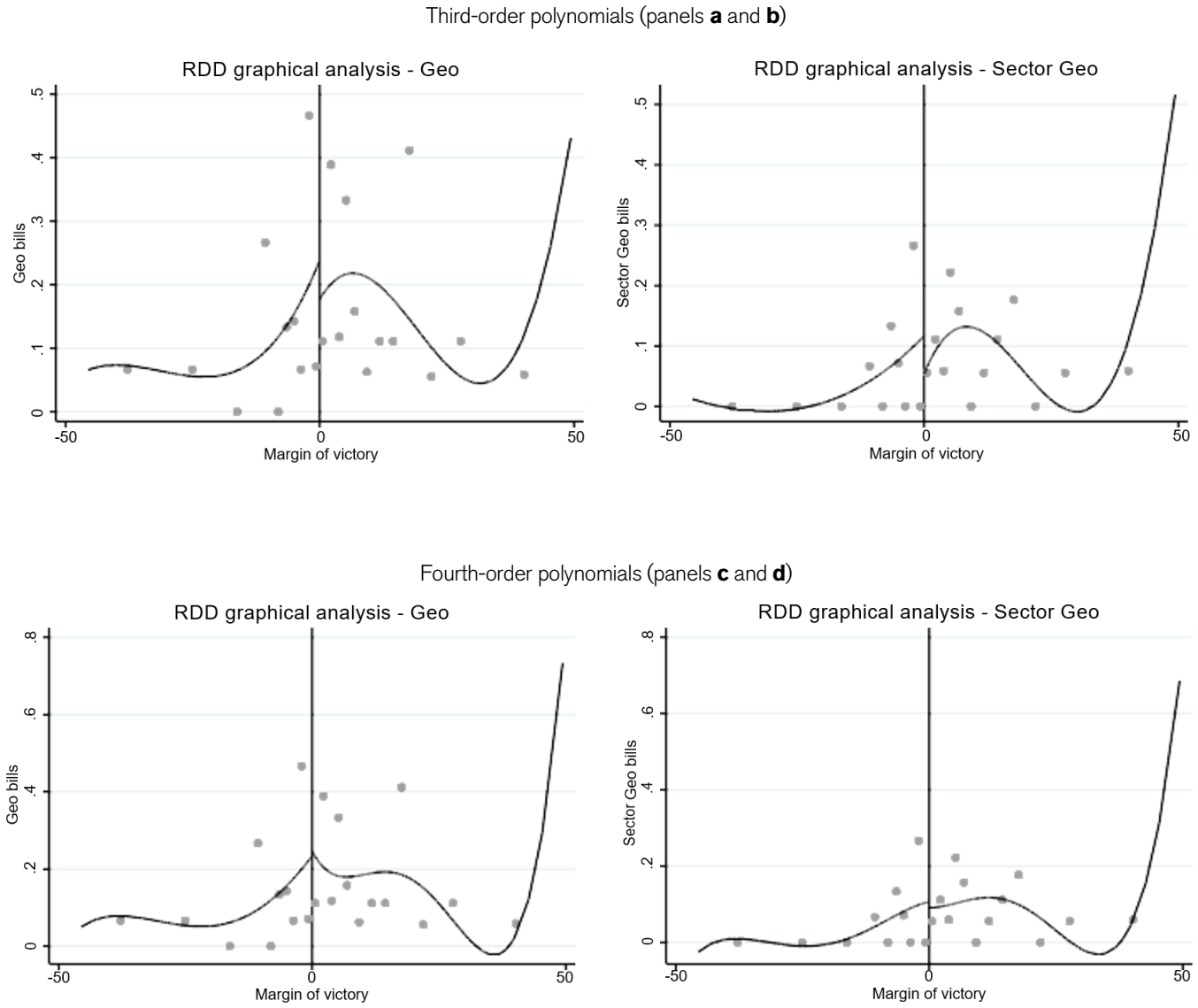


The figure shows RDD plots for particularistic legislation. The dots represent local sample means of the number of particularistic bills proposed by each MP, while the solid line is a third order (panel a and b), a fourth-order polynomial (panel c and d), or a fifth order (panel e and f) polynomial fit. Bins are non-overlapping partitions all containing the same number of observations. The total number of bins has been determined using the mimicking variance method.

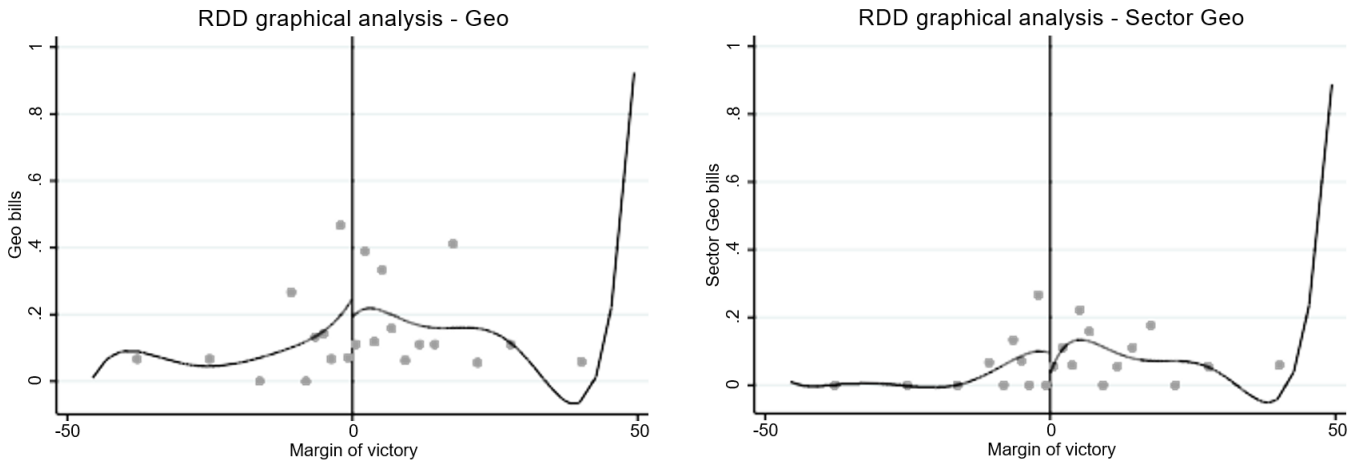
B. Electoral incentives - Study group - Robustness checks

Figure B-1 reports RDD plots for geographically- (panel a, c, and e) and sector-targeted (panel b, d, and f) legislation. The plots show that the absence of a relevant discontinuity detected in Section 7.4 is robust across third (panel a and b), fourth (panel c and d), and fifth order polynomials (panel e and f).

Figure B-1. RDD Analysis - study group



Fifth-order polynomials (panels **e** and **f**)



The figure shows RDD plots for particularistic legislation. The dots represent local sample means of the number of particularistic bills proposed by each MP, while the solid line is a third order (panel a and b), a fourth-order polynomial (panel c and d), or a fifth order (panel e and f) polynomial fit. Bins are non-overlapping partitions, all containing the same number of observations. The total number of bins has been determined using the mimicking variance method.

C. Local linear regression

This appendix reports local linear regressions (LLR) that estimate the causal effect of the treatment 'being elected in the majoritarian tier' as opposed to 'being elected in the proportional tier'. Local-linear regressions are widely used in studies that perform RDD analysis (see Dunning 2012, p. 128). However, opinions on the validity of LLR estimators are mixed. Some argue that, since these regressions draw power from observations further from the threshold, they end up estimating a model that is a less credible description of the data generating process (Green *et al.* 2009). Others consider LLR estimators to be a better option when performing RDD analysis (Hahn *et al.* 2001, Imbens & Lemieux 2008). Building on Dunning (2012), I have opted for what I consider to be a more transparent approach, and I have proposed difference of means tests in my analysis (see Section 7.4). For the sake of completeness, in this appendix I propose an LLR analysis. The results are in line with the quasi-experiment in Section 7.4. The local-linear regressions fail to detect any significant effect of the treatment 'being elected in the majoritarian tier' on parliamentarians' propensity to propose particularistic legislation – geographically- and sector-targeted.

Table C-1. Local linear regressions

	Geo Bills				Sector Bills			
	13% bandwidth	10% bandwidth	5% bandwidth	3% bandwidth	13% bandwidth	10% bandwidth	5% bandwidth	3% bandwidth
Elected in majoritarian tier	0.0439	-0.00976	-0.0331	-0.123	-0.00398	-0.00179	-0.0400	-0.0347
	(0.155)	(0.167)	(0.206)	(0.170)	(0.0860)	(0.0945)	(0.114)	(0.103)
Observations	**226**	**196**	**111**	**66**	**226**	**196**	**111**	**66**
Majoritarian	122	104	57	35	122	104	57	35
Proportional	104	92	54	31	104	92	54	31

Notes: standard errors in parentheses. + p<0.10, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01. The table reports the results of a local-linear regression estimating the effect of the treatment 'being elected in the majoritarian tier', on candidates' propensity to propose geographically-targeted legislation. Results are reported for all the relevant bandwidths: 13%, 10%, 5%, and 2%.

D. Analysis of the 12th, 13th, and 14th legislature

This appendix reports difference of means tests that compare the average number of particularistic bills proposed by dual MPs elected in the majoritarian tier to the average number of particularistic bills proposed by dual MPs elected in the proportional tier. The analysis is analogous to that of Section 7.4, but it is performed separately for each legislature. Table D-1 reports t-tests for the 12th legislature, Table D-2 for the 13th, and Table D-3 for the 14th legislature. In each legislative term, t-tests fail to detect any significant difference in the number of particularistic bill proposals, between parliamentarians elected in the majoritarian tier and parliamentarians elected in the proportional tier.

Table D-1. RDD Analysis - 12th legislature

	Jump at the threshold			
	13% bandwidth	**10% bandwidth**	**5% bandwidth**	**3% bandwidth**
Geo Bills	0.0923 (0.151)	0.127 (0.163)	-0.0195 (0.114)	0.100 (0.131)
Sector Bills	0.0610 (0.147)	0.0899 (0.160)	-0.0909 (0.0801)	0 (0)
Observations	**53**	**48**	**25**	**16**
Majoritarian	32	27	14	10
Proportional	21	21	11	6

Notes: standard errors in parentheses. + p<0.10, ∗ p<0.05, ∗∗ p<0.01. The table reports the results of t-tests that compare the average number of particularistic bills proposed by dual MPs elected in the majoritarian tier – treatment group – to the average number of particularistic bills proposed by dual MPs elected in the proportional tier – control group. Results are reported for all the relevant bandwidths: 13%, 10%, 5% and 3%. The analysis includes only MPs elected in the 12th legislature.

Table D-2. RDD Analysis - 13th legislature

	Jump at the threshold			
	13% bandwidth	**10% bandwidth**	**5% bandwidth**	**3% bandwidth**
Geo Bills	0.109 (0.0944)	0.112 (0.098)	0.0201 (0.108)	0.0476 (0.143)
Sector Bills	0.0439 (0.0648)	0.0311 (0.0724)	-0.0334 (0.0699)	-0.111 (0.0867)
Observations	**95**	**81**	**49**	**32**
Majoritarian	47	39	23	14
Proportional	48	42	26	18

Notes: standard errors in parentheses. + p<0.10, ∗ p<0.05, ∗∗ p<0.01. The table reports the results of t-tests that compare the average number of particularistic bills proposed by dual MPs elected in the majoritarian tier – treatment group – to the average number of particularistic bills proposed by dual MPs elected in the proportional tier – control group. Results are reported for all the relevant bandwidths: 13%, 10%, 5% and 3%. The analysis includes only MPs elected in the 13th legislature.

Table D-3. RDD Analysis - 14th legislature

	Jump at the threshold			
	13% bandwidth	**10% bandwidth**	**5% bandwidth**	**3% bandwidth**
Geo Bills	0.0285 (0.226)	0.0725 (0.251)	0.282 (0.486)	0.200 (0.921)
Sector Bills	0.0270 (0.120)	0.0124 (0.141)	0.179 (0.269)	0.100 (0.522)
Observations	**52**	**44**	**22**	**11**
Majoritarian	23	21	9	6
Proportional	29	23	13	5

Notes: standard errors in parentheses. + p<0.10, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01. The table reports the results of t-tests that compare the average number of particularistic bills proposed by dual MPs elected in the majoritarian tier – treatment group – to the average number of particularistic bills proposed by dual MPs elected in the proportional tier – control group. Results are reported for all the relevant bandwidths: 13%, 10%, 5% and 3%. The analysis includes only MPs elected in the 14th legislature.

E. Robustness checks

This appendix reports robustness checks for the higher presence of ministers in the majoritarian tier. Ministers, who are engaged with government business, usually have less time to draw up bill proposals. Can this act as a confounding factor in the RDD analysis presented in Section 7.4? More precisely, if ministers turn out to be overly represented in the majoritarian tier, and if they are less likely to propose legislation with respect to all the other MPs, they could average down the number of particularistic bills proposed in the treatment group. If that were the case, the results of a non-significant difference between the number of particularistic bills proposed by MPs in the majoritarian tier, and the number of particularistic bills proposed by MPs in the proportional tier, could be driven by the predominance of ministers in the majoritarian tier. Table E-1 reports z-tests that investigate for the presence of a higher proportion of ministers in the majoritarian tier with respect to the proportional tier. The results show that there is a statistically significant higher proportion of ministers in the majoritarian tier. According to these results, the predominance of ministers in the majoritarian tier could act as a confounding factor. What matters, however, is if ministers are less willing to propose particularistic legislation with respect to parliamentarians that did not receive a government appointment. Table E-2 provides the results of t-tests that compare the mean number of particularistic bills proposed by ministers to the mean number of particularistic bills proposed by parliamentarians who did not receive a government appointment. The tests fail to find any statistically significant difference. Notwithstanding the fact that ministers are usually said to propose less legislation with respect to parliamentarians without a government appointment, they do not appear less willing to propose particularistic legislation, at least in the study group employed in this analysis. It thus seems unlikely that the higher presence of ministers in the majoritarian tier could act as a confounding factor and bias the results of the quasi-experiment.

Table E-1. Tests for proportions - Ministers

	Difference in proportions Proportional - Majoritarian
Minister	0.0805**
	(0.0276)
Observations	**226**
Majoritarian	104
Proportional	122

Notes: standard errors in parentheses. + p<0.10, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01. The table reports the results of z-tests that investigate the presence of a higher proportion of ministers in the majoritarian tier.

Table E-2. Difference in means tests - Ministers

	Difference in proportions Proportional - Majoritarian
Geo	0.187 (0.162)
Sector	0.0935 (0.109)
Observations	**226**
Majoritarian	104
Proportional	122

Notes: standard errors in parentheses. + p<0.10, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01. The table reports the results of t-tests that compare the average number of particularistic bills proposed by dual MPs who have received a government appointment to the average number of particularistic bills proposed by MPs who did not receive a government appointment.

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Disconnected? Public Opinion, Economic Elites, and Political Parties during the Migration Crisis

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Abstract

This article analyses whether European political parties were responsive to the policy preferences of citizens and economic elites over immigration during the migration crisis. To do so, it derives hypotheses from the scholarly literature on party responsiveness and tests them on survey data collected in 2016 and 2017 from among voters, political parties, and economic elites in 10 different EU member states. Contrary to the widespread belief about the crisis of contemporary representative democracies, the article shows that political parties' positions on immigration changed consistently with changes in public opinion. On the contrary, the article finds no significant relation between the positions of economic elites and those of political parties. These empirical results are particularly relevant for the study of democratic representation, as they challenge the widespread assumption about the crisis of contemporary representative democracies.

1. Introduction

This article addresses the state of democratic representation in Europe with specific regard to political parties' representation of public opinion positions during the migration crisis.[1] Democratic representation is defined as the ability of political elites to aggregate and represent, within democratic institutions, interests that are diffused in societies (Dahl, 1973). This function is mainly carried out by political parties, which traditionally aggregate societal interests and formally express them through elected representatives in national parliaments. Nonetheless, globalization and its implications for domestic decision-making have catalysed the tension between responsible and responsive political parties (Mair, 2009; 2013). Not only are states now embedded in complex networks of interdependence at the international level, but the strengthening of ties with other states and international actors prompts political parties to behave responsibly. Against this backdrop, to respect countries' external commitments, political parties

[1] The article conceptualizes the migration crisis in a broad manner. On one hand, it considers both refugees and migrants arriving in Europe in the period considered. On the other, it conceives this crisis period as the ensemble of the years during which there was a significant increase in the influx of migrants and refugees to Europe (i.e., 2014-2017).

* Both authors contributed equally to this paper.

Volume 17, Issue 2, 169–185.

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have often gone against the preferences of their domestic electorates (Bardi et al., 2014, p. 237). By increasingly interpreting their roles as responsible elites, it has been argued, political parties (particularly mainstream ones) have favoured the alienation of voters. The latter, in turn, have grown increasingly frustrated by parties' lack of responsiveness to their policy preferences (Brady et al., 2019).

Existing scholarship claims that such a phenomenon is particularly relevant in the European Union (EU). It is a widespread opinion that during the multiple crises that occurred within and around Europe in the 2010s, the EU underwent a generalized crisis of political representation (Kaldor and Selchow, 2013). While at the domestic level this crisis led to a 'strain of representation' (Rohrschneider and Whitefield, 2012), at the EU level it raised concerns about the democratic accountability of the EU responses to the challenges it had to face (Fabbrini, 2014). Indeed, the widespread criticism that current political parties are disconnected from their voters (Rasmussen, 2019) undermined the argument according to which, since national governments represent citizens' preferences, member states, by controlling the EU decision-making system, inherently make its decisions accountable (Moravcsik, 2002). Certainly, political parties' responsiveness is a well-known issue in the scholarly literature (for a review see Beyer and Hanni, 2018). Nonetheless, this issue has only rarely been examined in the context of the recent crises the EU has faced. To address this research gap, the article examines one of the recent EU crises, namely the migration crisis. In particular, it aims to answer the following questions: were political parties responsive? And, if so, to whom?

To answer these questions, the article examines the association between the positions of political parties and those of citizens on the issue of immigration from 2016 to 2017 in 10 different EU member states, namely: Czech Republic, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Poland, and Spain. On the one hand, the timeframe considered allows us to delve into the national divisions on immigration, and the ensuing formation of conflicting positions between member states over the managing of the migration crisis at EU level. Significantly, focusing on this time frame allows us to measure political parties' political representation of voters on immigration during the implementation of the 2015 EU temporary relocation scheme (Council of the EU, 2015a; 2015b), and hence in a period when immigration returned to the centre of political debate across Europe. On the other hand, examining these member states in a comparative research design allows us to achieve stronger confirmation of our analytical claims.

Our analysis is based on a combination of survey data collected by the EuEngage project (Cotta et al. 2021) among voters and economic elites, with data from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) (Jolly et al. 2022) dataset on political parties' policy positions. At the same time, our article considers not only the relation between public opinion and political parties, but also the one between political parties and economic elites. With few exceptions (e.g., Conti et al. 2021), the extant scholarly literature has largely neglected such a relationship. Given the relevance of this aspect, scholars' lack of attention is surprising. As a matter of fact, economic elites may express positions on policy issues that differ from those of public opinion.

Overall, our results bring into question the widespread assumption that contemporary representative democracies are in crisis. In fact, the empirical analysis demonstrates that political parties aligned their preferences over immigration with those of their

citizens, rather than with those of their national economic elites. While doing so, political parties adopted increasingly restrictive policy positions towards migrations flows. Notably, the analysis shows that their preferences in this regard were associated with the public's perception of immigration as a threat.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows. First, we place the migration crisis within the context of the scholarly debate on the crisis of democratic representation and discuss its relevance for our analysis. Second, we outline our analytical framework. Third, we provide an overview of our research design, our data sources, and research strategy. Fourth, we present and discuss the empirical results of the analysis carried out. Fifth, and finally, we draw conclusions from our study.

2. Policy Representation and the Migration Crisis

Has the representative capacity of parties decreased? And, if so, why? These are key questions in the scholarly debate on democratic representation and, more generally, on the state of representative democracy (Andeweg, 2019; Mair, 1995; 2011; Schmitter, 2001). Political parties can secure democratic representation in different ways. Nonetheless, the existing scholarship on representation and on the quality of representative democracy claims that the tension between responsible and responsive forms of representation has thrown contemporary representative democracies into crisis (Mair, 2009; Lefkofridi and Nezi, 2020). Indeed, the distinction between responsive and responsible elites necessarily implies two different understandings of representation.

Responsiveness consists of the ability of political parties to collect and represent citizens' policy preferences consistently. It refers to the connection between public opinion preferences for policy change (or changes in opinions) and changes in policies (or changes in parties' policy positions) (Beyer and Hanni, 2018). As such, responsiveness is a relevant goal for democratic governments (Erikson, 2013). Responsibility, in turn, refers to the willingness of representatives to abide with accepted norms, procedural rules, and conventions, such as the ones set by international treaties and institutions (Lefkofridi and Nezi, 2020, p. 335). By acting as responsive elites, representatives generally follow the short-term orientations and preferences of their constituencies, be they common citizens or economic elites. In these cases, the representation of societal interests within democratic decision-making institutions is substantially based on the reflections of such preferences and their variations. By acting as responsible elites, in turn, representatives carry out their activities based on a relationship of trust with voters, epitomized by their electoral mandate. Even though voters subsequently evaluate their performances, in these situations political parties act as interpreters of society's general interest without being directly constrained by the voters' preferences (Mair, 2009).

The migration crisis can be considered as the epitome of what has been called the responsive versus responsibility dilemma (Lefkofridi and Nezi, 2020). Although to different extents, most EU member states experienced unexpected waves of migration because of the difficult political transition occurring in the Middle Eastern and Northern African region following the 2010-2011 Arab uprisings. While EU responses to the migration crisis were characterised by inefficiencies and stalemates, the pre-eminence of intergovernmental practices in such responses fuelled mistrust between member states, as well as between some national governments and the EU institutions (Amadio Viceré,

2019). As the migratory pressure on the European continent augmented, the constraints imposed by international law as well as by EU policy frameworks reduced the decision-making space for domestic political parties (Moravcsik and Schimmelfennig, 2019). Meanwhile, political parties had to deal with a public opinion that was less and less keen to accept such rules. In fact, as the migratory flows towards Europe augmented, public opinion throughout the continent increasingly supported restrictive policies against immigration (Debomy and Tripier, 2017). Crucially, such policy preferences were often in contradiction with the constraints imposed by international law as well as by agreements within the EU institutional framework.

Against this backdrop, immigration became highly politicized across Europe, turning into a key issue of political competition in many countries (Grande et al., 2019). It became a winning issue especially for radical-right parties, as well as for those parties which were previously on the edge of political competition. By spearheading voters opposing immigration, the latter managed to reshape the political landscape of many European countries. Eventually, the success of radical-right parties in this regard also pushed mainstream parties, which generally adopt less critical positions on immigration, to gradually adopt tougher positions towards migration flows (Abou-Chadi and Krause, 2018; Urso, 2018; Van Spanje, 2010).

All this notwithstanding, the relationship between the policy preferences of political parties and the orientation of public opinion on immigration has received scant attention so far. While existing studies on these matters focus on inter-party relations, they overlook the demand side of politics. In other words, they neglect the role of public opinion and other societal actors in the formation of political parties' policy preferences regarding immigration. Certainly, there are studies that examine the link between public opinion and political parties on immigration (Angelucci et al., 2020), but they adopt a cross-sectional and static design (i.e., they focus on congruence). By doing so, such studies neglect the evolution of the relationship between the demand side of politics (i.e., demands coming from the bottom) and the supply side (i.e., responses from the top). Hence, they do not consider the dynamic dimension of political parties' responsiveness.

Of course, we are aware that in practice the connection between voters and parties may not always unfold in the same direction. For instance, studies on public opinion have demonstrated that parties may not only respond to voters' positions but also shape their views (Steenbergen et al., 2007), including on immigration (Vrânceanu and Lachat, 2021). While acknowledging the complexities of the relationship between parties and voters, in this article we specifically focus on the association between citizens' and economic elites' positions with those of political parties.

3. The Analytical Framework

3.1. Responsive to whom?

Ever since the publication of Dahl's seminal work on polyarchy (1971), the capacity of politicians and political parties to respond consistently to the demands of public opinion is considered a key feature of representative democracies (Thomassen, 1994; Katz, 1997; Powell, 2000). It should therefore come as no surprise that the scientific scholarship focuses extensively on the study of representation and, more specifically, on the link

between political parties and voters in terms of their policy preferences and issue priorities. In this context, scholars have generally either focused on congruence or on responsiveness. While both congruence and responsiveness can be considered forms of representation (Lax and Phillips, 2012), they hint at two distinct phenomena. Congruence is a static measurement, insofar as it relates to the correspondence of mass public preferences with those of political elites at a given point in time. It has been traditionally employed to determine the left-right ideological proximity between voters and political elites (Miller and Stokes, 1963). Comparisons between the ideological positions of mass publics and political elites at one point in time, have recurrently shown fairly robust levels of congruence. Such comparisons indicate that voters and parties would substantially align themselves along the left-right scale (Miller et al., 1999). When it comes to congruence on specific issues, however, results tend to be much more uncertain. Angelucci et al. (2020) show, for instance, that there has been a consistent gap between voters' and parties' positions on the process of European integration, with elites being systematically more Europhile than citizens in different policy areas. Similarly, by examining the relationship between elites and voters on immigration policy, Brady et al. (2020) provides clear evidence of wide gaps between voters and parties.

Responsiveness, instead, is a dynamic concept. Rather than focusing on the static correspondences between political parties' positions and those of voters, it looks at the 'correlation between prior public opinion and policy outputs'. At the same time, it examines whether 'changes in public opinion lead changes in policy in the same direction' (or changes in policy positions of representatives) (Beyer and Hanni, 2018, p.18). Based on this definition, we conceive responsiveness as being not only in terms of policy outputs, but also in terms of the capacity of parties to shift their policy positions consistently with changes occurring in public opinion.

Examining the dynamic responsiveness of political parties, therefore, necessarily requires a focus on their adaptation to the stimuli coming from voters, as well as from other political and societal actors, such as economic elites and interest groups. Looking at the relationship between voters and parties, assuming the rationality of parties, one would expect the latter to adapt their positions to shifts in the policy positions of their voters (Stimson et al., 1995). Indeed, acting in line with voters' preferences can increase political parties' chances of re-election. The underlying mechanism would be a punishment-reward one: political parties would respond to public opinion to avoid the potential negative consequences stemming from their lack of responsiveness at the elections. In this respect, empirical evidence has reported high levels of responsiveness both in the US and in Europe (Page and Shapiro, 1983; Stimson, 1991; Stimson et al., 1995; Brettschneider, 1996; Hakhverdian, 2012).

However, in addition to citizens, other political actors may influence political parties' policy positions (Klüver and Pickup, 2019). A growing body of scientific research has shown that there is a significant variation in the degree of responsiveness of political parties towards different subgroups or organised interests (Druckman and Jacobs, 2011; Gilens and Page, 2014; Jacobs and Page, 2005). For example, examining policy positions over the EU, Sanders and Toka (2012) found that political parties are more responsive to economic interest groups than to public opinion at large. Along similar lines, Klüver and

Pickup (2019) showed that the role of interest groups is decisive in structuring elites' responsiveness to public opinion on a number of issue areas.

After all, this is not surprising. While it is reasonable to expect political parties to be rationally responsive to public opinion for fear of electoral consequences, it is also reasonable to expect political parties to respond to economic elites and interest groups. Significantly, political parties may respond to such groups even if they have positions which differ from those of the party's electorate. In fact, in exchange for political influence, interest groups might provide economic resources to support party campaigns, electoral support, and information when elections are being held (Giger and Klüver, 2016; Hall and Deardorff, 2006; Klüver and Pickup, 2019). Bearing all this in mind, it is reasonable to assume that, depending on the incentives in place, political parties may rationally respond either to their voters or to economic elites.

In this article, we posit that the characteristics of the issue at stake determine to whom political parties choose to be responsive. In particular, we argue that party responsiveness to voters is conditioned by the extent to which an issue is contentious and/or salient in the public debate. According to Costello et al. (2020), when an issue is highly salient, parties have the incentive to fill potential issue gaps between themselves and their electorates. As a matter of fact, salient issues are highly visible in public debates and easily recognizable by voters, who are likely to make their electoral choices based on parties' offers on these issues (or lack thereof). In other words, when issues are key for political competitions, the punishment-reward mechanism is likely to be activated. On the contrary, when issues are out of the public opinion's radar, parties are less likely to be evaluated on them. Consequently, they retain a wider room for manoeuvre. On these occasions, parties have greater possibilities to adopt policy positions which differ from their own electorate's preferences and accommodate interests expressed by economic elites.

It is relevant to point out that this argument resonates with the liberal intergovernmentalist understanding of the formation of member states' preferences in the EU context (Moravcsik, 1997). According to this theory, political elite goals are expected to vary according to changing pressure from national economic elites. Powerful interest groups may even capture government institutions and use them for pursuing their specific objectives, hence determining a bias of the political representation in their favour (Moravcsik, 1997). Nonetheless, when policy issues have significant implications for EU citizens' lives, they generate more diffused patterns of societal interests (Hix, 2018). On these occasions, national governments are likely to be tightly constrained by mass publics.

As far as immigration is concerned, it is relevant to stress that this issue has become increasingly salient over the last decade. Immigration has in fact turned into a source of political contestation both in the EU and within member states (Van der Brug et al., 2015), to the point that it is currently considered the most prominent electoral issue of recent times (Green-Pedersen and Otjes, 2019). Considering all of this, we expect political parties to be more responsive to common citizens' positions on immigration than to those of economic elites.

3.2. Responsive to what?

At this stage, our analytical framework provides some useful assumptions about the formation of political parties' preferences. It predicts which societal interests – be they the

electorate's interests or those of economic elites – are more likely to be represented under certain circumstances. However, our framework does not explain the stimuli to which political parties are likely to respond. In other words, it does not tell us what changes are necessary, in public opinion positions and those of the economic elites, for the positions of parties to vary on a given issue.

In this article, we posit that public opinion's perceptions about immigration might have an impact on the variations of policy preferences about immigration among political parties. We base this argument on two different strands of literature. First, there are studies suggesting that public opinion policy preferences about immigration are, among other factors, dependent on the perception of threat related to migration flows (Basile and Olmastroni, 2020; McLaren, 2003; McLaren and Johnson, 2007). In essence, the more threatening migration flows are perceived to be, the more favourable are likely to be the public opinion positions towards more restrictive policies on immigration. Second, a well-established literature on the effects of public opinion orientations on political elites' foreign policy preferences shows that such preferences become more supportive of tougher and restrictive policies towards an external enemy or danger, if public opinion perceives such an enemy or danger to be particularly threatening (Cohen, 1979; Holsti, 1996; Hurwitz and Peffley, 1990; Peffley and Hurwitz, 1992).

Combining the analytical argument about the public opinion's perception of immigration as a threat and the argument about political parties' responsiveness to public opinion's threat perceptions, we can reconstruct the mechanism that urges political parties to be responsive to public opinion in this issue area. By conceptualizing immigration as an external threat, it is plausible to argue that the connection between political parties and public opinion on immigration can be found in the relationship between voters' threat perception and the policy responses of the politicians. In other words, if political parties were responsive to public opinion positions on immigration, any shift in their policy preferences would derive from changes in public opinion's threat perception of immigration.

All in all, considering the arguments outlined so far, we expect that: 1) political parties will be responsive to the preferences of public opinion on immigration rather than to those of economic elites; and 2) political parties will adopt increasingly restrictive policy positions on immigration in response to increases in the public opinion's perception of immigration as a threat.

4. Data and methods

4.1. The research design

The literature on policy congruence has often assessed the quality of representation by comparing the positions of political parties with those of public opinion on the same issue. This assessment is typically conducted through a correlation analysis or through a comparison of the average positions of politicians and public opinion on given issues.[2] The rationale behind these empirical methods is simple: the greater the correlation, the greater the level of congruence. However, it is important to note that these empirical

[2] For a discussion of different strategies to measure congruence see Wlezien (2016).

analyses are generally carried out at a single point in time. As a corollary, they do not fully succeed in evaluating the elites' actual level of *response* to changes in the positions of public opinion (Simonovits et al., 2019).

The changes occurring over time in the positions of political parties in relation to changes in the positions of the public masses (i.e., *responsiveness*) are relatively less explored. This may be because there are technical constraints deriving from the operational complexities of studying representation. The main problem in analyses of the relationship between masses and parties is that they are observations belonging to groups that are distinct and separate. To overcome this problem, these groups can be compared at a macro level, measuring the positions of both public opinion and parties at the country level. An alternative solution is to create a bridge for comparability by measuring the positions of political elites, public opinion, and economic elites at a meso level, namely that of political parties. Such a bridge would allow a comparison carried out in terms of party electorates and party positions. At first sight, adopting such an approach would leave two questions open, namely: who should the parties respond to? Would they respond to their constituencies or to voters at large? Crucially, however, positive answers to such questions are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, recent studies clearly show how political parties act to maximize support outside their own electoral bases without jeopardizing their traditional electoral bases (De Sio and Weber, 2014).

Bearing all this in mind, in this article we decided to focus on the meso level of political parties. Therefore, we will first map the evolution over time of the perception of immigration as a threat by different parties' electorates, both for public opinion and economic elites. Then, we will match these variations with the changes in the policy positions of the respective political parties. This approach has a clear advantage over a macro-level approach. Of course, the latter remains relevant from a descriptive point of view. Nonetheless, a party-level approach allows us to expand the number of observations in our analysis, and hence to have a more robust assessment of party responsiveness. In essence, rather than focusing on the overall differences at country level, we devote our attention to the multiplicity of parties that compete in the existing party system in each of the countries considered.

4.2. The data

Our analyses are based on two data sources: the EuEngage mass and economic elite panel (2016 and 2017) (Cotta et al. 2021), and the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES), 2014 and 2017 (Jolly et al. 2022). The EuEngage dataset includes 11,638 respondents (mass sample) and 1,271 businesspeople (economic elite sample) in 10 European countries, who were interviewed for the first time in 2016 and subsequently re-interviewed in 2017.[3] After removing the speeders,[4] the mass panel consists of 10,928 observations, while the

[3] It is relevant to note that, in addition to the Mass and Businesspeople surveys, the EuEngage dataset includes an Elite survey which was conducted among politicians in the same 10 EU member states in 2016 and 2017. Elite surveys and expert surveys are often used to estimate party positions (Ecker et al. 2022). Still, we chose to use the CHES expert survey rather than the Elite survey to maximize the number of observations. In fact, since elite surveys suffer from low response rates, they are often marred by a limited capacity to capture the positions of a large number of parties.

[4] In particular, we removed those people answering in less than 50% of median time in each country in (at least) one of the two waves.

economic elite sample consists of 1,203 observations. This dataset is an optimal source for testing our hypotheses for a series of reasons.

First, the time frame of the survey is particularly interesting, given that the two waves were collected during the implementation of the 2015 EU temporary emergency relocation scheme, which set mandatory relocating obligations for EU member states. Crucially, during this period the migration crisis returned at the centre of the political debate, both in the EU and domestic level. Second, the dataset's panel structure allows us to map real changes occurring within the public and businesspeople samples about immigration. Finally, the dataset provides the opportunity to test our hypotheses in 10 European countries. Not only do these countries represent different geographical areas, but they also differ considerably in terms of history, tradition, political culture, economy, and society. In particular, earlier studies have demonstrated that, in these countries, the public opinion and political elites' preferences regarding immigration were determined by: their different contextual factors (i.e., level of exposure to the crisis), their different predispositions towards migrants and the EU, and by their identity and ideological orientations (Basile and Olmastroni, 2020). Furthermore, while in some of these countries there were elections between the first and the second wave (i.e., Czech Republic, France, Germany, Netherlands, Spain), in the others there were no elections in the period considered. This variance will not only make our findings more robust, but it will also allow us to decrease the possibility of detecting changes of perceptions in the electorates generated by the specific electoral dynamics of individual countries.

The CHES dataset, in turn, estimates the parties' positions on a wide range of issues, including policy preferences over immigration in more than 30 countries. These countries include the 10 countries covered by the EuEngage dataset. The 2014-2017 datasets, especially, allow us to specifically analyse changes in policy preferences that happened in this period. In our understanding, responsiveness derives from the consistency between change in the position of voters and change in the position of parties on immigration. Put simply, if political parties changed their positions on immigration consistently with changes on immigration among their electorates, then they would be responsive to their constituencies. Therefore, our dependent variable consists of the change of party positions on immigration, measured by the CHES data. Specifically, it is the difference between the position of the parties on immigration in 2017 and the position of the same parties in 2014. To measure the position of parties in the two waves, we considered a variable ranging from 0 (i.e., party fully opposed to a restrictive policy on immigration) to 10 (i.e., party fully in favour of a restrictive policy on immigration). We standardized both variables so that they could range from 0 to 1 in both waves. Then, we calculated the difference between the two waves. This yielded a variable ranging from -1 (i.e., parties have changed towards a more open position towards immigration) to +1 (i.e., parties have adopted a tougher position in immigration).

Our key independent variable is the change in the perceptions of immigration as a threat by public opinion and economic elites. Here, we rely on the EuEngage datasets of 2016 and of 2017 and, especially, on an item asking the respondents to express how threatened they felt by immigration. The variable ranges from 1 (i.e., do not feel threatened) to 4 (i.e., feel threatened). In each wave, we averaged respondents' positions as sorted by the party they intended to vote for in general elections. We did so for public opinion and

businesspeople separately to measure the threat perceived by each of these two groups (again, by political party). In the two waves, the variables were standardized to range from 0 (i.e., do not feel threatened) to 1 (i.e., feel threatened). Then, we calculated the change in threat perception for each electorate as the difference between the perception of threat in 2017 and in 2016. Once again, this yielded a variable ranging from -1 (i.e., the electorate has become less threatened) to +1 (i.e., the electorate has become more threatened). After having calculated parties' and electorates' scores, we matched them in a unique dataset, consisting of an overall number of 57 party/electorate observations in 10 countries (i.e., the parties for which we have data in the mass survey, the businesspeople survey, and the CHES dataset).

In addition to changes in threat perceptions among public opinion and economic elites, we also included as a series of other control variables: the electoral strength of the party, measured as the difference in votes share of the party in the two last general elections available in the dataset, the left-right ideological position of the party,[5] and its position in government/opposition. We constructed this last variable to account for the variation in government positions of parties between 2014 and 2017. In particular, we constructed a categorical variable which differentiates between: a) parties that were in government in 2014 and remained in government in 2017; b) parties that were in government in 2014, but then moved to opposition in 2017; c) parties that were in opposition in 2014 and then moved to government in 2017; and d) parties that were in opposition in 2014 and remained in opposition in 2017. Lastly, we included a dummy variable to distinguish between countries where elections were held between 2016 and 2017 (i.e., the years when the two EuEngage waves were collected) and countries where there were no elections in the same period.

5. Results

According to our expectations, when it comes to highly politicized and contentious issues, political parties should be more likely to adopt policy positions in line with public opinion preferences. Given the highly politicized nature of immigration during the migration crisis, we expect political parties' policy preferences to correspond to those of public opinion. To test these expectations, we set up a series of regression analyses to understand whether or not political parties were responsive to their voters on the immigration issue between 2016 and 2017.

As discussed above, our dependent variable is the change in the policy preferences of political parties on immigration, while our key independent variables are the variations in perception of immigration as a threat by common citizens and businesspeople. Concerning the details of our empirical analysis, we estimated five linear regression models, including a random intercept to account for country variations. In each model, we let the intercept vary across country. By doing so, we were able to account not only for the variance of the dependent variable that is explained at the individual level (i.e., electorate/party combinations), but also at the country level. Through this modelling

[5] The left-right ideological position of political parties is calculated as the average score between left-right positions as measured in 2014 and 2017 in the CHES dataset (LRGEN item). In both cases, the left-right ideological position was measured on a 0-10 scale, where 0=Left and 10=Right.

strategy, we could estimate the effects of threat perception among citizens and businesspeople, net of contextual factors linked to cross-countries differences.

The results of our analyses are reported in Table 1. In the first place, we assessed to what extent our dependent variable is explained either at country or individual level. To this end, we ran an empty model, without predictors (Model 1). The random parameters at the bottom of the table show that the variance of the dependent variable is mostly explained at the individual level, that is to say at the level of the electorate-party combination. At the same time, the random parameters show that the variance at the country level is relatively small. This is reassuring. In fact, this result indicates that there is not much variation in the dependent variable due to contextual factors. Therefore, variations in party responsiveness may be found in the relation between parties and voters. The latter include, of course, both common citizens and businesspeople.

Table 1. Random intercept linear regressions. Dependent variable: party positions' change on immigration.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Δ Immigration threat (Citizens)		0.260*		0.233*	0.366**
		(0.107)		(0.111)	(0.134)
Δ Immigration threat (Businesspeople)			0.0951	0.0601	0.0511
			(0.0641)	(0.0647)	(0.0658)
Electoral strength of the party					0.0011
					(0.00228)
Position in government:					
Party always in opposition					*Baseline*
Party moved to government					0.0452
					(0.0421)
Party moved to opposition					-0.0709
					(0.0560)
Party remained in government					0.0233
					(0.0360)
Left/Right position of party					-0.0105
					(0.00663)
Election in 2016-2017					0.0211
					(0.0376)
Intercept	0.0222	0.0754*	0.0226	0.0702*	0.137*
	(0.0256)	(0.0317)	(0.0244)	(0.0317)	(0.0595)
Random Parameters					
Country level variance	0.068	0.058	0.063	0.055	0.0393
	(0.024)	(0.022)	(0.023)	(0.022)	(0.027)
Individual level variance	0.102	0.099	0.101	0.099	0.095
	(0.011)	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.011)
N	57	57	57	57	57
AIC	-79.79	-83.29	-79.93	-82.13	-77.59
BIC	-73.66	-75.11	-71.76	-71.92	-55.12

Notes: standard errors are reported in parentheses.

As for the more substantial findings of our models, we assessed the association between the threat perception of common citizens (Model 2) and businesspeople (Model 3) and variations in party positions across 2016 and 2017. These bivariate regression analyses confirmed our expectations. We found a significant and positive effect of threat

perception variations among common citizens on party position variations. Indeed, our results show that with any unitary increase in the threat perception of citizens, there was an increase in party preferences for tougher policy measures ($b=0.260$; $p<0.05$). We found the same positive effect for the relation between changes in the threat perceptions of businesspeople and changes in party positions. In this case as well, political parties seemed to react to the mood of economic elites consistently. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the coefficient of threat perception does not reach the conventional threshold of statistical significance.

In Model 4, we included the two variables together (i.e., threat perceptions of both citizens and businesspeople). By doing so, we further confirmed the significant positive effect of threat perception of public opinion on political parties and the insignificant effect of threat perception of businesspeople on political parties. These results provide some support for our expectations: when it comes to highly politicized issues, such as immigration, political parties *adapt* their policy preferences to perceptions that are mostly diffused within the public opinion, rather than to those of economic elites. Finally, in Model 5, in addition to our two key independent variables, we plug into our regression analyses a set of control variables, namely: the electoral strength of the party, the position in government-opposition of the party, its ideological position (i.e., left-right ideological dimension), as well as a dummy variable distinguishing countries where elections were held between 2016 and 2017, and countries where there were no elections in the same period. The robustness and the strength of the effect of threat perception of common citizens on party position changes are not wiped out by the inclusion of these control variables. This result confirms once again the solidity of the relation between citizens' threat perceptions and political parties' reactions. Overall, this suggests that parties were actually responsive to public opinion's perceptions on immigration during the migration crisis.

Finally, while we did not advance specific hypotheses on the relations between the other predictors we included as control variables and party position variations between 2016 and 2017, it is relevant to note that none of these variables reached conventional thresholds of statistical significance. The different status of the political parties considered, namely whether they were in the government or in opposition, did not produce any effect on the changes of their positions. This result is somewhat surprising. Indeed, it would have been reasonable to expect that, compared to parties in opposition, governing parties would have had more constraints on changes in their positions, given their institutional roles. At the same time, right-wing parties were not more likely to move towards tougher positions on immigration than left-wing parties. This result is in line, however, with the assumption that left-wing parties too have often adopted more restrictive positions towards immigration as a reaction to the surge of radical right parties (Bale et al. 2010). Lastly, neither the electoral strength of parties nor the presence of an election produced an effect on the variation of parties' positions on immigration.

6. Discussion and Conclusions

By examining the association between the positions of political parties, economic elites, and public opinion on immigration across Europe during a crucial period of the migration crisis, we were able to confirm the expectations stemming from the analytical framework

we elaborated. The article demonstrates that political parties aligned their policy preferences on immigration, which is a highly salient issue, in accordance with citizens' preferences rather than with economic elites' preferences. In particular, our results suggest that parties reacted significantly to the stimuli provided by public opinion on the issue of immigration, shifting their policy positions consistently with changes occurring among citizens.

Certainly, our results do not allow us to reach clear-cut and definitive conclusions about 'who followed whom' in the period considered. In this sense, our study should be considered as exploratory research on party-public opinion dynamics. As the scholarly literature shows, the connection between citizens and political parties may take different causal directions (e.g., Steenbergen et al., 2007): if it is true that parties' positions can be influenced by public opinion, it is also true that parties, by cueing citizens, are in fact able to influence their opinions (e.g., Carsey and Layman, 2006; Lenz, 2012; Leeper and Slothuus, 2014; Slothuus and Bisgaard, 2021). Nonetheless, these results have important implications for those who study democratic representation. Previous studies demonstrated that public opinion and political parties do not differ much in terms of their policy positions on several issues, including immigration (Angelucci et al., 2020). In our article, we demonstrated that these positions were not only similar, but also that they changed consistently over time. Of course, the limited geographical and temporal span covered by this study does not allow us to simply generalise our findings. Nonetheless, this result is interesting in itself: if parties shift their positions consistently with citizens' positions, is democratic representation in trouble, as many argue? Indeed, one may reasonably conclude that our results disconfirm the widespread belief that contemporary representative democracies are experiencing a crisis; or rather that they indicate that the causes of such a crisis should be searched for elsewhere.

Further research, for example, should investigate the patterns of political representation on issues which are different from immigration. Indeed, one could also argue that the lack of connection between political parties' positions and the economic elites' positions on this issue is due to the different relevance that this issue has for different societal groups. In this sense, immigration might not be salient enough for economic elites to push them to mobilize their resources to influence the policy preferences of political parties. Recent research in the US, analysing responsiveness on a broad set of issues, has produced different results compared to ours, showing that 'the majority does not rule', whereas powerful economic and business elites do have a strong influence on policy making (Gilens and Page, 2014, p. 576). These seemingly contradictory results suggest that the political representation of different societal groups might in fact be conditional on a number of factors, including the nature and the salience of the issue at stake. From a more general point of view, to understand thoroughly the dynamics of political representation and identify 'who rules', future research will have to explore these factors further.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the LUISS Italian Centre for Electoral Studies (CISE), especially Professor Lorenzo De Sio, for organizing the seminar that inspired this article.

The authors would also like to thank the journal editors and the anonymous reviewers for their very useful comments.

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Diaspora governance in times of COVID-19: the case of the Turkish Diyanet in Italy

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Abstract

Since the COVID-19 emergency broke out, Turkish state institutions have become crucial in governing diaspora communities facing lockdown measures and forced separation from their homeland. Being the first European country strongly affected by COVID-19, where massive lockdown measures were put in place, Italy is a relevant case to analyze. Retracing the scope and scale of the online activities organized during the COVID-19 pandemic, this paper investigates how the Turkish state supported the Turkey-originated population living in Italy. The analysis draws on interviews with Diyanet religious officers sent from Ankara to serve the Diyanet's branches (DITIB) in different Italian cities and with the religious attaché employed in the Turkish Consulate in Milan who supervises them. The interviews have been corroborated by a vast collection of visual materials including brochures, videos and posters published on the YouTube channel and the official Facebook pages of the DITIB cultural centers in Italy. Our data show that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, online seminars enabled Turkey's connection with the diaspora to be strengthened, using the emergency situation as a starting point for enhancing family programs and fostering Muslim-Turkish belonging in all aspects of life.

1. Introduction

The Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*, hereinafter Diyanet) is one of the longest-running Turkish state agencies operating abroad. The institution, founded in 1924, established a Department for International Relations in 1985, one year after the "Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs" (DITIB) opened its branch in Germany. Over the past decades, imams and preachers have been attached to the Diyanet mosques in Sweden, France, Denmark, Austria and the Netherlands to provide religious services and carry out socio-cultural activities for the adults and young generations of Turkey-originated Muslim communities. While the Diyanet rapidly turned into a transnational actor and a key diaspora institution (Sunier and Landman 2014; Çitak 2013; Allievi and Nielsen 2003), it has also contributed to the Turkish state's double strategy of both "maintenance" (Amiraux 2002) – strengthening the link with "its" diaspora – and control of religious and political opposition activities abroad (Yükleyen 2011).

During two decades of Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) rule, the Turkish government's diaspora policy and Diyanet's international mission have been closely intertwined. This transformation mirrored a larger reincorporation of

Italian Political Science. ISSN 2420-8434.

Volume 17, Issue 2, 186–204.
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Sunni Islam into the official state ideology, as well as the renewed presence of religion as a public affair by means of a complete reorganization of the Diyanet, whose budget and responsibilities have expanded (Yener-Roderburg 2020; Öztürk 2016; Maritato 2018a; Lord 2018). The number of Diyanet cadres (imams, preachers and religious officers) sent abroad has increased and their competences have been redefined, including a uniformization of the tasks and competences. In 2019, according to the Diyanet's official statistics, 1931 of its religious officers were serving abroad for either a long period (up to 5 years) or a short one (up to 2 years). These religious services are under the supervision of Turkish Embassies and Consulates, where the religious attachés (*din ataşesi*) are charged with coordinating the activities carried out in the country's mosques. Since the early 2000s, concomitant with the increase in women employed in the Diyanet workforce, women preachers have also been included among the contingent to serve Turkish Muslim communities abroad with the intention of reaching families and young generations. Scholars have recently investigated the forms and meanings of the activities conducted in Diyanet mosques located in Germany (Carol and Hofheinz 2022; Öcal and Gökarıksel 2022), Sweden (Maritato 2018b), Austria (Maritato 2021, Çitak 2013), France (Çitak 2010; Bruce 2012; Akgönül 2018) and Denmark (Öztürk and Sözeri 2018) and emphasized the continuities and changes in Turkey's art of governing its diaspora.

Against this backdrop, Italy has hitherto been understudied, for two main reasons. The first lies in the peripheral position of the country in Turkish labor migration trajectories. The second is the relatively small numbers of Turkey-originated communities settled in the country (officially 21,000)[1] if compared to other migrant communities. However, the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs opened a branch in Italy (*DITIB Italya*) in 2013 and, like the other DITIB Union in European countries, the Italian one has recently expanded its activities. At present, cultural centers have been established in five Northern Italian cities: Milan, Como, Modena, Imperia, and Venice. The DITIB coordinates and supervises these local branches, whose objectives include the promotion of the socio-cultural activities of Turkish communities in Italy, the management of the places where the communities meet and the organization of activities such as Italian and Turkish language courses, social events on the occasion of religious feasts and national celebrations, and activities for young generations, women and families such as the Offices for Family Counseling. This engagement has also occurred within the framework of a redefinition of consulate services showing proximity and availability vis-à-vis migrants' associations. Such an "empathetic" approach (Öktem 2014) has characterized the AKP's populistic narrative of the state serving the people and establishing an "equal" relationship between officers and citizens.

With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in February 2020, the attempt of the Turkish state institutions to be close to the people became crucial in governing diaspora communities facing lockdown measures and forced separation from the homeland. As Italy was among the first countries where massive lockdown measures were put in place, the DITIB coordinated all the local branches to provide online activities to support the Turkey-originated population living in Italy. It is thus an interesting case study from which to investigate how state-sponsored diaspora institutions contribute to governing the diaspora.

[1] ISTAT, as of 31 December 2021.

The paper draws on qualitative research on how COVID-19 has affected the activities of state-related diaspora organizations. It stems from the following questions: How have the lockdowns measures in Italy affected the Diyanet association's activities towards the Turkish diaspora? And what does this say about the ongoing transformation of Turkey's diaspora governance?

It contends that while most activities provided by the DITIB branches were online, the state institution assumed a new proximity with the diasporic communities, providing both religious and moral support in an unprecedented situation. The paper is organized as follows: The first section illustrates the theoretical framework focusing on the role of religious institutions in diaspora governance. The second provides a focus on the AKP's understanding of diaspora policy and how it has evolved to reach citizens living abroad. Subsequently, attention will be paid to the Italian context and the research methodology. The analysis is then divided into three subsections which examine how, during COVID-19 pandemic, the DITIB associations in Italy (i) referred to Islamic principles to provide moral support to the communities while re-organizing activities aimed at reaching people at home, (ii) conducted online seminars which grew in scope and scale to include as many people as possible during severe lockdown measures and (iii) maintain and reinforce the communities' link and sense of belonging to Turkey. The examination of such an attempt to establish a new proximity with the diaspora communities casts light on a broader transformation of Turkey's diaspora governance.

2. The contribution of Transnational Religious Actors and Institutions in Diaspora Governance: Theoretical premises

Since the 1990s, a vast literature has emphasized the increasing visibility of diasporas in global politics. Scholars' attention has been mainly devoted to investigating the contribution of states in building and governing their "domestic abroad" (Varadarajan 2010). This has mainly occurred via ad hoc institutions, policies, and bureaucratic apparatuses through which nation-states maintain political, economic, and identity ties with their respective communities abroad (Gamlen 2014). The role of the state in shaping, manipulating, and building identities is a continuous process that transcends the borders of the state and creates new political actors, such as the diasporic and kin communities. Diasporas as subjects of an expanded, territorially diffused nation have also been analyzed to stress how these new constituencies affect international relations and are strategically employed to propagate states' images and reputations (Korkut 2016). A stream of literature has examined the policies and instruments through which diasporas are governed and how they shape boundaries of belonging (Ragazzi 2009; Délano and Gamlen 2014; Alonso and Mylonas 2019; Lafleur and Yener-Roderburg 2022). In this vein, the study of governmentality and its transnationalization contributes to diaspora studies, casting light on the ways states resort to a symbolic control of transnational space and a discursive control of imaginative space given the impossibility of directing physical discipline (Collyer and King 2014:194-9). Besides institutions and policies, states resort to "creative forms" and "symbolic instruments" to manage their citizens abroad, preserve their national loyalty, and, if possible, extract resources from them (Fitzgerald 2008:34-5).

Against this backdrop, transnational religious actors and institutions have been examined to reflect on socio-political structures within which individuals "belong" to

communities or are excluded therefrom. The role of imams and priests sent to diaspora communities has expanded and diversified the literature on diaspora governance beyond the research on more "classical" diasporic actors such as workers' associations, political, economic, and financial elites (Fitzgerald 2008; Adamson 2012; Bruce 2019; Maritato 2021). Religion has been investigated for its contribution to foreign policy and international relations as well as the religious actors' local response to international issues such as the refugee crisis and migration (Haynes 2001; Warner and Walker 2011; Jacoby et al. 2019). A perspective which considers the activities conducted by religious officers within diaspora communities is not only able to inform about the multifaceted aspect of diaspora governance, it also drives attention to the meanings, symbols, rituals, and morals constituting pastoral power, a governmentality technique that Foucault describes as the art of governing men (Foucault 2009:165). Some scholars have analyzed religious actors' practices in diaspora communities, referring to pastoral power to emphasize care and control as it pertains to the state's interest in building loyal and enduring relations with emigrants while spreading the government's discourse abroad (i.e., Catholic priests sent to serve Mexican immigrants in the USA, (Fitzgerald 2008) or imams and preachers sent from the Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs in Austria (Maritato 2021). Proximity and universality qualify pastoral power as a form of ruling which needs to establish close relations with people to be exerted. Scholarship has recently analyzed how digital diaspora allows issues of spatiality and belonging to be reframed, arguing that, through their digitally networked activities, migrants reinforce their geographical identity rather than becoming more deterritorialized (van den Bosch and Nell 2006; Ponzanesi 2020). Relying on the literature on long-distance nationalism, scholars emphasize how nationalist conservative parties influence their diasporic citizens by enhancing forms of connectivity with the homeland (Anderson 1991).

The paper is situated at the intersection of these literatures and examines how the religious officers' online activities conducted during COVID contributed to offering care and guidance while reinforcing online transnationalism (Trandafoiu 2013; Ponzanesi 2020). The analysis of how state-led diaspora institutions functioned at micro-levels during the pandemic might thus enrich the literature on diaspora studies and transnational religious actors operating in a (digital) diasporic context.

3. Turkey's art of governing diaspora under the AKP

Since the early 2000s, the ruling Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) has been engaged in renewed activism towards Turkey-originated diasporas. The literature which has analyzed the AKP diaspora policies emphasizes two peculiarities that mark a discontinuity in relation to Turkey's long-lasting interest in "its" communities abroad. The first aspect focuses on governmentality and considers the instruments through which the Turkish state aims to reach and govern the diaspora. The activities of agencies, government-organized non-governmental organizations (GONGOs) as well as ad hoc institutions and bureaucratic apparatuses have recently expanded in scope and scale.

New and well-established diaspora institutions operationalized their international mission at cultural, economic, social, and political levels. As scholars have underlined, these institutions are situated at the blurred boundary between diaspora and foreign

policy (Mencutek and Baser 2018; Maritato et al. 2021; Yabanci 2021). This is the case of the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (*Yurtdışı Türkler ve Akraba Topluluklar Başkanlığı*, YTB) founded in 2010 with the aim of building social, cultural and economic relations with kin and co-ethnic communities, (former) citizens abroad and foreign students and to propagate an ethnic-religious conception of nationhood. The YTB is the only agency committed to the implementation of diaspora policies, education programs, networking and funding schemes for diaspora organizations.

Since the 1990s, the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (*Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon İdaresi Başkanlığı*, TİKA) is also actively engaged abroad and today runs projects in Balkan countries, the Middle East and Africa. Moreover, in 2007 the Yunus Emre Cultural Institutes were established to promote Turkish language and culture and, since 2016, the *Maarif* Foundation provides educational services abroad while fostering Turkey's cultural diplomacy. The proliferation of state institutions and para-public agencies also reflected a change in Turkey's art of ruling the diaspora. Scholars underline a discontinuity characterizing the AKP diaspora policies vis-à-vis the previous ones as it pertains to the relationship with the migrants' associations and the empathetic approach combining care and control employed while serving the communities abroad (Öktem 2014:7; Maritato 2020).

The second aspect that qualifies the AKP interest in building and governing diaspora is related to the prominence of Islam and Islamic identity in AKP's thematic conceptualization of diaspora. The literature has underlined how in the past two decades a "new diaspora policy" has been shaped in religious-nationalist terms and how institutions and policies have been aimed at strengthening emigrants' ties with the homeland and widening Turkey's conceptions of citizenship, belonging and identity (Aksel 2014; Mencutek and Baser 2019).

The intent to reinforce the link with the diaspora has also included new measures like the 2009 Blue-Card system, which granted more rights to emigrants and their foreign-born children, and the external voting rights since the 2014 Presidential Elections. In this attempt to shape the diaspora's boundaries of belonging, the Diyanet's associations abroad have emerged as crucial institutions in propagating and fostering a religious-nationalist identity within the diaspora. Although the Diyanet has a long-established presence in Europe dating back to the 1980s, in the past two decades, the number of imams and preachers serving abroad has expanded (Öztürk and Sözeri 2018; Bruce 2020).

Related to this, the budget of the institution has increased to the point where religious services have been transformed into permanent pastoral care aimed at guiding Turkish Muslim communities living abroad (Maritato 2021). The strategies of the Turkish state in creating and representing Turkey's image abroad through state religious apparatuses have been analyzed in different European contexts, in some cases from a comparative perspective (Çitak 2018; Öztürk and Sözeri 2018) while in others with a special focus on the role of women preachers (Maritato 2018). Projects and series of seminars such as "family schools" have been organized by religious officers employed in Diyanet branches in European countries with regard to women's role within the family, children's education, marriage, and divorce. Such attention to future generations in the diasporic context also resonates with the AKP's discourse on the strengthening of the

traditional Turkish family and the attempt to forge a pious generation (Lüküslü 2016; Maritato 2015; Kocamaner 2019). Family and Religious Consultation Bureaus are currently operative in many Diyanet branches abroad and the counseling services related to the family, parenthood, and childcare contribute to redefine the role of religious officers as professional civil servants at the service of the community. The activities organized by the Diyanet abroad also go beyond routine religious services, training and guidance sessions in mosques and include Turkish language courses and social events like trips and picnics for children and teenagers, iftar dinners and culinary kermesses. By virtue of protocols signed with the ministries and state agencies of host countries, Diyanet officers abroad regularly visit elderly people at home, in hospitals and in prisons, and provide counseling services and moral support. In this vein, religion and nationalism intertwine in the construction of a pro-active sense of belonging and of a mobilized and politicized immigrant self.

However, in the aftermath of the post 2016 attempted coup, diaspora policies and institutions have been shaped by authoritarian extraterritorial practices (Glasius 2018) aimed at dichotomizing the conduct of a population abroad by dividing it into the "good" pro-AKP and the "bad" emigrants. Moreover, the fact that religious officers work under the supervision of religious attachés employed at embassies and consulates raises a debate on the spaces for the maneuvering of political opposition. Recently, cases of imams accused of controlling and reporting the activities of the Gülen movement outside Turkey[2] contributed to the recalibration of the relationship between European countries and the Diyanet as the main actor of Turkish Islam which combines both mechanisms of caring and control.

4. Research context and methodology

Within the framework of Turkey's current reinvigoration of its diaspora policy, the article analyzes the activities organized for Turkish immigrants attending mosques run by Diyanet in Italy (DITIB Italya) with particular focus on the lockdown period due to the COVID-19 pandemic (February 2020 - April 2022). Italy is an important case for two main reasons: First, it was the first European country to be severely affected by COVID-19 and secondly, it has become a destination country for flows from Turkey only due to changes in European/Italian migration policies. As it concerns the COVID-19 crisis in Italy, a recent and expanding literature examines the impact of COVID-19 on different Italian sectors (Auriemma and Iannaccone, 2020; Minello, 2021; Scavarda, 2020). In this vein, some scholars have focused on the relationship between the COVID-19 crisis and religious resources to assess how religiosity has been experienced during the pandemic (Molteni et al., 2021). In line with what was previously examined, we contend that COVID-related policies implemented by Italian authorities had an important impact on diaspora communities living in Italy as it pertains to their perceived health and psychosocial security. In this respect, the exceptionality of COVID-19 provides a significant perspective from which to observe not only how the Turkish state operates in accompanying its citizens abroad, but also how Turkish communities living in Italy turned to

[2] Please see: https://www.dw.com/en/turkish-imam-spy-affair-in-germany-extends-across-europe/a-37590672.

Turkish state authorities and institutions, especially during lockdown measures which forced the closure of community centers and places of worship in Italy.

The Turkey-originated diaspora in Italy has been understudied mostly because migration from Turkey to Italy has a short history and an irregular character compared to other European countries that have regulated flows through bilateral agreements since the 1960s (Purkis and Güngör, 2015; Purkis, 2019; Ince-Beqo, 2019). The first flows started right at the end of the 1980s, in a period in which Italy became a destination country and started to officially address migratory phenomena. On Turkey's side, the end of the 1980s reflected not only the negative consequences of neoliberal policies and the economic crisis, but also the growing socio-political tensions in the entire region (Purkis, 2019). Other research (Ince-Beqo and Ambrosini, 2022; Schuster, 2005; Sirkeci, 2006) also showed that Italy was rarely seen as a country of settlement for migrants and asylum seekers from Turkey; rather, it was considered a transitional place where they could settle temporarily, with the intention of later moving to Northern European countries.

Currently, the resident population from Turkey in Italy is about 21,000, with no clear count of immigrants without Turkish passports. More than half of this population reside in Italy's three most industrialized regions: Piedmont, Emilia-Romagna, and Lombardy. Moreover, it is worth also mentioning that by combining the typical characteristics of unskilled labor migration and asylum seeker flows with those of students and highly skilled labor, Italy and particularly large cities such as Milan and Turin have recently become an important destination for students and highly-skilled migrants from Turkey.[3]

Within the framework of the DITIB association in Italy, between 2017 and 2022 we conducted six interviews with two Attachés employed at the Turkish Consulate in Milan (one in 2017 and one in 2022) and with two women preachers employed in Venice and Imperia local branches and two with Milan and Como associations. Between 2020 and 2022, this was combined with the analysis of brochures, videos and posters published on the YouTube channel and the Facebook official pages[4] of the five DITIB cultural centers in Italy: Milan, Imperia, Como, Modena, and Venice with the aim of retracing the scope and scale of the online activities organized during the COVID-19 pandemic. As online activities increased, we also considered videos posted on the Facebook pages in the period between 2020-2022. To grasp continuities and changes with the COVID-19 period, the article also benefits from previous fieldwork on DITIB in Italy conducted in 2017. This included interviews with the former DITIB Attaché in Milan, one women preacher working in Milan and in the Como Camerlata religious center, and the head of the Diyanet's women section in Como. The article is also based on Diyanet publications and yearly reports of the activities conducted abroad. This is the case of the book "The Islam's View on Epidemic Disease" (*İslamın Salgın Hastalıklara Bakışı*) published in 2020 by the Diyanet press as well as all the online brochures and documents about diaspora projects and publications of the local branches in Italy.

[3] Samuk-Carignani, Rosina & Ince-Beqo, forthcoming.

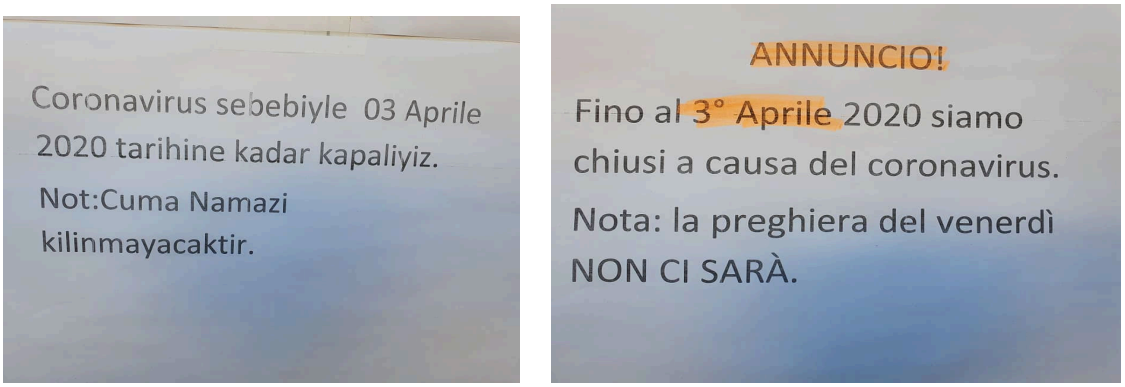
[4] The Facebook pages of the DITIB Italya (https://www.facebook.com/ditibitalya) and all the local branches: DITIB Como, DITIB Imperia (https://www.facebook.com/DiTiB-Italia-Imperia-Camisi-102263606505293), (https://www.facebook.com/DiTiB-Italia-Imperia-Camisi-102263606505293), DITIB Venice (https://www.facebook.com/DITIB-Venezia-190362449325289 4), DITIB Milano (https://www.facebook.com/diyanetcamiimilano), DITIB Modena (https://www.facebook.com/ulu.camii.modena).

5. Data analysis: Turkey's strategies to reach citizens during COVID-19 pandemic

5.1. "We don't want to die here". Islamic principles under lockdown measures

With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Italian health system was massively under stress due to the high number of infected cases and the lack of therapies. As the death numbers were exponentially increasing all over the country, severe lockdown measures were implemented. From the beginning of March 2020, Italy was defined as a "red zone" and the movement of the population was restricted except for necessity, work and health issues. In an attempt to contain the spread of the pandemic, non-essential shops and businesses were closed and public and educational services were provided online. These repeated containment measures transformed the relationship between domestic and public space, contributing to a complete redefinition of the space of "home". For families this meant combining working from home with child and elderly care and the supervision of children's schooling programs. In this vein, religious places were also forced to close (Figure 1) and online activities increased to cope with the various requests for moral support. The unprecedented situation of a pandemic and the forced atomization of lives had a huge impact on family ties which were forced to be put on standby and carried on from afar.

Figure 1. Announcement in Turkish and Italian about the closure of the cultural center in Milan



Translation: *Until April 3, 2020, we are closed due to Coronavirus. Note: Friday prayer will not be held.*

The lockdown measures in Italy and the travel restrictions worldwide also had a strong impact on Turkish diaspora communities which experienced a forced cut-off from families and relatives living abroad. The DITIB branches in Italy were engaged in untangling the Italian government's regulations for Turkish communities and convincing the diaspora to "stay at home". As the religious Attaché affirms, as soon as the mobility restrictions and travel ban were reinforced, a sense of distance from relatives in Turkey spread the fear of isolation and a huge panic within the communities. In this context, despite strict instructions not to move, many Turkish immigrants tried to return to Turkey by their own means because there was so much information circulating, often untrue, about how they would be treated if they were to die in Italy after contracting the virus. In particular, the spread of fake news about the cremation of bodies who had died

from COVID-19 led to a number of requests to return to Turkey despite the travel restrictions:

> "Our people were so afraid of the cremation of their bodies, that they were calling us at all times or ask if it was possible for Turkey to organize for the return of the immigrants even with helicopters" (DITIB Venice branch).

> "They absolutely did not want to die here because they did not know how their bodies would be treated" (Religious Attaché).

In the management of this panic situation, Diyanet's branches encouraged diaspora communities to follow Italian authorities' dispositions while spreading a religious discourse on the pandemic. This occurred through the constant reference to the Sunnah and a specific saying (Hadith)[5] attributed to the prophet Mohammed on how to behave in case of a possible pandemic. It suggests that Muslims should not leave the place where they are located and should isolate themselves in case of infectious diseases to safeguard both individual and community health.[6] Diyanet's branches abroad emphasized the presence of the Turkish state alongside its citizens by reinforcing the meaning of this Hadith.

> "We constantly repeated what our Hadith suggested (...). We supported our citizens in every way, reminded them that our state was with them and would never let their bodies be cremated" (Religious Attaché).

With the aim of providing a religious explanation for the pandemic, the Diyanet published a document entitled "Islam's view on Epidemic Diseases" (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı 2020). Alyanak has recently analyzed how this publication emphasizes that the pandemic was not caused by a virus alone, but by humans due to their own moral failures (Alyanak 2021:168). As the imams and preachers operate on the Italian territory under the coordination of the Religious Attaché in the Turkish Consulate in Milan, the DITIB was receiving requests for moral and spiritual support as well as the assurance that the (Turkish) state was not abandoning them. This occurred via a number of activities that were implemented to reach, and provide support to, as many people as possible while controlling that the quarantine restrictions were implemented among Turkey-originating communities. DITIB officers used the diplomatic car of the Turkish Consulate to reach people during lockdown measures. As reported by the Attaché, such support had a strong symbolic value:

> "Overall, they (citizens) understood that they are never alone and that we (as a state) were with them (...) In addition to food aid, we (financially) supported our citizens who were unable to work or who lost jobs, during the lockdown".

People reached by the DITIB officers needed moral and psychological support, but also foodstuffs and basic necessities. As the Attaché affirms: "we delivered more than 500 food aids not only in the city of Milan, but also up to 450 km away. In fact, we did not leave our citizens alone". This support epitomizes a change in the direction of the way

[5] Hadiths are believed to be the words of the Prophet, memorized by his followers, and written in the first or second century of the Islamic calendar, see Burton (2022) for more information.
[6] The Hadith mentioned in Turkish is the following: "*Hz. Peygamber, bir yerde veba çıktığını duyanların oraya gitmemelerini, bulundukları beldede ortaya çıktığı takdirde oradan ayrılmamalarını söylemiştir*" (Buhârî, "Ṭıb", 30; Müslim, "Selâm", 92-100; Buhârî, "Hıyel", 13).

services are provided by the DITIB, as the head of religious activities conducted in Italy, the Attaché underlines: "During the COVID pandemic we delivered our help to the people" as it was the institution that reached the communities, not the contrary. While reaching people at home during the COVID pandemic, the DITIB officers could also build on the previously established practices of visiting people in hospitals and at home as part of a way to reinforce the link with the diaspora (Maritato 2019). These practices, which combine individual care and proximity, are in line with what has been described as Turkish officers' "more empathetic" approach towards diaspora communities (Öktem 2014). However, they were greatly amplified during the COVID pandemic. The lockdown experience paved the way for the blossoming of online activities which broadened the scope and scale of Diyanet's local branches. While the broadening of activities allowed those who did not regularly attend the mosques to be reached, the Diyanet as a religious and diplomatic representative was a reinvigorated presence of the Turkish state in the lives of the citizens living abroad. It was indeed an opportunity to emphasise that "the state is with you in this very difficult moment".

5.2. The introduction of online activities: transforming strategies and changing diasporas

The lockdown measures were a watershed moment for the organization of online religious activities in all the Italian branches. After the closure of the prayer rooms and cultural centers, and religious seminars for young people, women and families turned online, and this entailed a change in the scope and scale of the events, as well as the audience and the invited speakers who could also join virtually from outside Italy. Moreover, the online meetings allowed the participation of those people who were not usually attending because of working hours and distance from home. The Religious Attaché affirms that before religious seminars and social activities were conducted online, reaching both adults and children in big cities like Milan was not always an easy task.

> "Men working in kebab shops are outside home from 7am to 10 pm and could neither come to nor drive children to the DITIB center. It was also hard to make groups of students. [...] However, once the activities were conducted online, the number of students increased a lot. While about 10 people were attending the meetings in presence, we now reached 200 people online".

The changes concerned not only the audience but also the very nature of the meetings as is reported by religious officers:

> "Our activities were not exclusively religious before COVID, (our mosques) were a meeting place for Turks. We would meet around what unites us: religion, culture, Turkish culture... Sometimes we would just meet to eat together. In particular, women who attend the mosque are housewives, they are always at home, and in this place, they could unwind little bit (...) On the other hand, however, not everyone could easily come to the mosque: for those who did not have a car or driver's license it was difficult. They obviously had opportunities to follow more activities than before. During lockdown we were thus able to talk to other people and it was very meaningful for them". (Venice branch)

While those programs such as language classes, religious courses and Qur'an reading directed towards women, families and young people were conducted on-line, not only the numbers but also the geographic provenance of the audience enlarged. This entailed

an important change in the city-based (often neighborhood-based) dimension, characterizing diaspora associations like the DITIB in which members usually know each other. The online meetings organized by the DITIB officers working in Italian branches were also welcoming people from abroad as in the case of the seminar titled "Daily life expected from a Muslim" in which the religious advisor in Washington intervened, who operates within the framework of Diyanet America (Figure 2). The online seminars were either attended or organized by people from Germany, US, New Zealand, and Turkey, allowing for an expansion of the communities beyond the city borders.

Figure 2. Poster of a webinar on Family, 'Daily life expected from a Muslim'

The extension of immigrant communities' physical boundaries[7] created a transnational virtual space in which representatives of Diyanet and of other diasporic communities could participate. Before the COVID pandemic, the limited economic resources and the relatively small-size communities did not allow the Italian branch of the DITIB to invite to Italy religious officers and speakers from abroad. However, the online seminars forged an international and transnational digital diasporic space which in Italy affected the Turkey-originated diaspora's perception of living in a peripheral diasporic context (Ince-Beqo, 2021). On the Facebook pages of the local DITIB branches all the information concerning the online seminars is posted regularly and the recorded videos of the meetings are available. Online seminars that hosted high-level religious officials employed at Diyanet's headquarters in Ankara were highly effective tools in making citizens feel the presence of the Turkish state. This is the case of the seminar titled "Marriage and Family Life" organized by the DITIB Milan branch whose invited speaker was the head preacher of the Diyanet in Ankara (Figure 3). In a similar fashion, the seminar titled "Family: Love, Compassion and Mercy" hosted the president of the Diyanet and his wife (Figure 4) while the DITIB Venice and Imperia branches organized an online

[7] See Ince-Beqo (2021) for how this digital diasporic space has transformed the migration experience of Turkish Muslim women in Italy.

Conference titled "Being Mothers and Fathers, Raising Children" hosting Diyanet's Head of the Department of Family and Religious Guidance (Figure 5).

Figure 3. Poster of a webinar on Family, 'To be ready for eternal life'

Figure 4-5. Posters of webinars on Family Relations ('Family: Love, Compassion and Mercy') and Parenthood ('Being Mother and Father, Raising Children'), with the participation of the DITIB president and his wife

The online seminars allowed the Diyanet to conduct activities despite the closure of mosques and religious centers worldwide and thus to strengthen Turkey's link to the diaspora also during COVID. From the vast number of online sessions organized between 2020 and 2022, it is clear that the emergency situation was used as a starting point to enhance programs on family and foster Muslim-Turkish belonging in different spheres of daily life. Not only were family life and routines indeed subverted by lockdown measures,

but also the forced cohabitation caused tensions and new challenges. As part of a project implemented by The Presidency of Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB) a Turkish psychologist living in Austria offered phone counseling to immigrants in different Italian cities.

> "In some cases, different generations live in the same house. Living with mothers-in-law for some was already burdensome: with the lockdown it was even more difficult. Sessions with the psychologist were of great help, particularly for the women" (DITIB Venice branch).

The online religious sessions not only affected the audience and the distribution of the content provided, but they also expanded the psychological support to women who otherwise were not used to consulting psychologists. However, the combination of spiritual guidance and psychological support also contributed to enhancing that blurred relationship between religious counseling and psychological support which characterizes Diyanet's mission to diffuse morality within society (Yazıcı 2012; Mutluer 2018; Kocamaner 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic has thus accelerated practices which were already in place.

5.3. Religion as a resource to strengthen ethnic-national belonging

All our interlocutors affirm that during COVID there was an increase in the request for religious and moral support among Turkey-originated Muslim communities in Italy. In the interviews, they report that even people who are not very religious approached the DITIB personnel to ask for advice and to find a sense of community within the diaspora. For Turkey-originated communities in Italy, the sense of isolation during the COVID pandemic led to a quest for both a community to belong to and moral support. It is important to consider that all over Europe local DITIB branches receive religious officers from Turkey but are also independent in terms of the funding of new mosques and cultural centers which rely on members' donations. The sense of community belonging is thus built also via the financial contribution to the local branch activities. However, as many of our interlocutors confirmed, the peculiar context of Italy as a country of transition rather than a final destination negatively affected donation. This is particularly true for the building of new places of worship, which, as was confirmed by the Attaché, do not receive financial aid from the Turkish state and exclusively rely on member donations. As the pandemic provoked an economic crisis, mostly hitting some sectors such as constructions and food service and distribution in which Turkish immigrants work most, the accomplishment of the mosque construction in Italy has been delayed by the decline of donations and the COVID lockdown measures.

However, religious personnel managed to refer to Islamic principles and Turkishness as a national and ethnic culture to reinforce a sense of community also during the pandemic. Scholars have underlined how the activities organized by Diyanet associations abroad are imbued with religious and nationalistic references (Maritato 2021; Öcal and Gökarıksel 2022). By virtue of the institution's mission to protect national solidarity and integrity (Article 136 of Turkish Constitution), religious officers abroad commemorate national holidays and religious celebrations which span from the First World War battle of Gallipoli and Turkey's 1919-1922 independence war to the Birth of the Prophet Mohammed and the Ramadan month. During a farewell program for DITIB Como

religious officials whose six-year abroad mission had come to end, this aspect was confirmed. The two-hour program, attended by about 500 people, was also streamed online on Facebook. It began with the national anthem with the projection of Ataturk's photo on the big screen and was followed by one student's Qur'an reading (Figure 6). In an attempt to summarize the years she served the community in Como, the head of the DITIB women's section clarifies how her duty was at the intersection of Islam and state.

> "(...) We have tried to fulfill this duty conferred on us by our state by working day and night, to convey love for the *ezan* [call to prayer], the flag, the state and the nation, and to keep our national and spiritual values alive. We tried to be close to our brothers and sisters living in Como and Switzerland on good and bad days".

Figure 6. Farewell program to religious officers in DITIB Como

The event, attended by the Attaché, was also an occasion to present all the activities organized by the Como association in the past six years, stressing the COVID-related challenges, and to emphasize how they were in continuity with Turkey's long-lasting engagement vis-à-vis diaspora communities in Europe. In this view, the Turkish state's aim to not forget its citizens abroad and to preserve their belonging to the "Islamic civilization" (*Islam medeniyeti*) was operationalized through the building of mosques and cultural centers and the sending of religious officers from Turkey to Europe. In DITIB officers' speeches this notion of Islamic civilization is intertwined with national culture as an essential component of religion. This aspect is crucial in a migratory context considering that the DITIB is representing the Turkish Sunni interpretation of Islam, as the Attaché affirms:

> "Different (ethnic) communities interpret Islam differently; we have our own interpretation. In a religious organization the cultural aspect is crucial, it is much more crucial than we imagine"

The focus on Turkish Islam qualifies DITIB activities as made by and for the Turkey originated diaspora. It also allows us to cast light on how the diaspora is governed in times of emergency and how the relationship between home states and emigrant communities are continuously shaped. Recently, some scholars have contended that the COVID-19

pandemic marked a return of the states and their notions of sovereignty, protection and control (Gerbaudo 2021). In the case of Turkey, rather than a return of the state, the pandemic accelerated ongoing dynamics at the base of a transformed diaspora governance.

6. Conclusions

One of the first European countries strongly affected by COVID-19, Italy immediately ordered the closure of all places of worship. This closure, along with many other anti-COVID measures strictly enforced from March to June 2020, created great economic and psychological hardship for a segment of Turkish immigrants for whom religious places offer not only religious functions but also social solidarity. In this context, Diyanet's officers who were sent from Turkey to serve the communities in Italy had to adopt new strategies to continue to reach out to citizens. However, under the lockdown measures they seized the opportunity of online resources to expand their audience and present themselves as essential actors to cope with this unprecedented situation. This narrative is thus built on the representation of religious services and moral support provided during the COVID-19 pandemic as important as those offered by secular institutions to strengthen the link between Turkey and its communities abroad.

In this article, we analyzed the way the lockdowns measures in Italy affected the Diyanet association's activities towards the Turkish diaspora. We also looked at how this change can give insight into the ongoing transformation of Turkey's diaspora governance. Our findings showed that COVID-19 enhanced forms of digital diaspora governance. The online activities strengthened the link with Turkey and reduced the sense of isolation and marginalization of the Turkey-originated diaspora in Italy, boosting their sense of belonging to a larger online community in which distance from the homeland is shortened. We also argue that the pandemic has expanded the boundaries, though virtual, of Diyanet's presence in the daily lives of immigrants. In fact, the initial food aid and economic support for those who lost jobs due to the total lockdown was later followed by virtual meetings and, in some cases, online psychological sessions.

What we found is that the online seminars proposed by Diyanet were much more than relational or moral support. Sharing a space, though virtual, with Diyanet representatives from Turkey for the participants was very meaningful because they "felt the concrete presence of Turkey next to them." This was the case of a number of seminars organized by the Italian local DITIB associations which hosted high level religious officers employed in the Diyanet Ankara Head Office. At a time of crisis and panic, this involvement reinforced the approach taken particularly by AKP's diaspora management based on care and proximity. Nevertheless, the relationship between the state representatives and citizens has been simultaneously horizontal and vertical. While on the one hand the care and proximity approach was pursued, on the other hand the authoritative and protective presence of the state through religious functions in daily life was continuously introduced. Accordingly, Diyanet's religious officers allowed the "empathetic angle" to reinforce the link with the diaspora communities and to shape an ethno-religious identity in which Islam and Turkishness are defined in essentialist terms. In this attempt, the Diyanet's services during the COVID-19 pandemic reflected a contentious situation marked by divisions within the Turkish diaspora communities between pro-AKP associations, political opponents, secularists and members of religious

communities like the Gülen movement, whose activities abroad are persecuted as terrorism by the Turkish government. While different political and religious associations carried out their own activities during the pandemic, the state nature of the Diyanet also involved political purposes both to present itself as an official interlocutor acting in compliance with Italian regulations, and to support citizens abroad with transnational bureaucratic apparatus.

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