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Sustainable mobility and alternative fuel vehicles.
How can public policy sell you a new car?

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Abstract

To solve issues related to sustainable mobility, and in particular to the sale of alternative fuel vehicles (AFVs), public policy has to produce a change in the behaviour of citizens. Scholarly research has mainly investigated the causal power of policy instruments individually, while few studies address how interactions of different types of policy instrument can causally affect individual behaviour. Building on the policy design literature, a specific combination of positive and negative inducements can put in motion a mechanism that can change individual behaviour desirably, by narrowing the possible choices of the policy takers to a single and clear behavioural pattern. In order to test whether the interaction effect takes place, we will analyse the policy mixes adopted by five Italian regions to reduce environmental pollution in the period 2000-2005. Qualitative comparative analysis will be used to identify which combinations of policy instrument were more effective in inducing environmental-friendly consumer behaviours.

1. Introduction

In some of the most iconic science fiction movies from the 1980s, the future giant cities of Earth were depicted as densely populated and perpetually battered by acid rains. During the 1980s, acid rain was a frequent and worrisome event, partly resulting from nitrogen oxide (NO_x) emissions, mostly stemming from consumer behaviours – particularly traditional cars' emissions (Hendrey 1985, Newbery et al. 1990). Eighties science fiction concocted many elements to lend credibility to this future dystopia: among them, governments' failure, overpopulation, and individual egoism, resulting in path dependency and reliance on heavily pollutant transport and industrial production. Notwithstanding the fatalism that surrounded this issue in popular culture, in reality, public policy was extremely effective in curbing NO_x emissions: in OECD countries, NO_x fell by 50 percent during the 1990-2020 period (OECD 2020). This was achieved thanks to a mix of taxation and new regulations which changed consumer and producers' behaviours, by both imposing new standards (compulsory catalytic converters on new cars) and incentivizing the conversion of old vehicles (Gunningham and Sinclair 1999: 59).

Acid rains are a distant memory; today's science fiction dystopias depict our future as either a barren or a frozen world resulting from climate change. 'Fleet inertia' could once again be relevant in bringing into existence this future scenario: for instance, passenger cars and vans alone contribute to 14.5% of total EU GHGs emissions (European

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Commission 2022). Can we replicate the success obtained with NO_x reduction? The public policy solution to this problem is more complex since it requires more radical behavioural adaptation. One crucial measure that could contribute to GHG reduction would be to gradually substitute internal combustion engine vehicles (henceforth traditional vehicles) with alternative fuel vehicles (henceforth alternative vehicles). Alternative vehicles generally have higher purchase costs than traditional vehicles (Morfeldt et al. 2021). These costs are generally offset during the life cycle of a vehicle, with many alternative vehicles having lower total costs of ownership than the traditional vehicles (Rusich and Danielis 2015). In the short run, however, purchase costs may push people towards preferring traditional vehicles. Hence, public policy is once again paramount in speeding up the substitution of traditional vehicles with less-pollutant alternative vehicles.

The EU started to take action in this policy field after the Treaty of Amsterdam. The AutoOil Programme II, backed by Directive 98/79/EC, put forward a strategy to meet the Kyoto Protocol obligations by incentivising the use of alternative fuels for private transport. In each member state, these measures were implemented by different tiers of government in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity. In Italy, Legislative Decree 351/99 established a national framework for creating measures aimed at air quality preservation. Decree 500/99 allocated financial resources to create, both at the national and the regional level, sustainable mobility measures, including incentives for fuel-efficient vehicles (Nespor and De Cesaris 2009). Italian regions experimented with different policy mixes to improve air quality and also push the sales of alternative vehicles.

In this research, we will look at the policy instruments adopted by five Italian regions in the context of Decree 351/99. The regions were selected from among the northern Italian regions with more than two million residents. In this way, we are able to compare regions with a similar socio-economic composition and administrative capacity. The resulting sample is composed of Lombardia, Piemonte, Toscana, Veneto, and Emilia-Romagna. Provided that different policy instruments can achieve the same goal and considering that the combination of instruments can be more effective than the adoption of individual policy instruments, the comparison between the five regions will help us understand what principles should be taken into account when designing a policy aimed at solving the problem of fleet inertia. Our operational hypothesis is that a combination of repressive instruments (regulations) and stimulative instruments (financial incentives) can create a policy which is more effective in changing individual (consumer) behaviours.

The current literature on alternative vehicles offers some preliminary answers to our research question: we will look at them in Section 2. However, there are research gaps: Section 3 introduces a research puzzle that is hard to explain with the current findings of the literature on alternative vehicles policy. We then look at the literature on policy design and how research on the complementarity of policy mixes can provide useful guidance in designing an effective system of incentives as regards alternative vehicles. Section 4 will discuss the research design. Section 5 will compare the policies of the five Italian regions when first designing their alternative vehicle incentives during the 2000-2004 period. In the conclusions, we will be taking stock of the research findings in light of the existing literature.

2. Literature review

The development of alternative fuel vehicles is considered to be key in creating a sustainable energy policy and fighting climate change (Romm 2006). However, the alternative vehicles economic sector is one with relevant market barriers and failures. These principally consist of: i) financial barriers, including increased costs for consumers; ii) technical barriers, such as the low density of refuelling and charging facilities; iii) regulatory barriers, including regulatory gaps; iv) the public acceptability of alternative vehicles, related to subjective and intersubjective conditions that influence the decision to buy an alternative vehicle (Browne *et al*. 2012).

Since these market barriers *de facto* hinder the capacity of alternative vehicles to gain a foothold in the market, it is advisable to tackle these barriers through specific policy initiatives aimed at making alternative vehicles competitive with traditional vehicles (Leiby and Rubin 2004). In this regard, any such policy should take into account consumers' attitudes towards AFVs. The first influencing factor is the purchasing price of alternative vehicles. In this regard, many researchers have focused on subsidies and taxation as a means to reducing the price gap between alternative and traditional vehicles. When there are market failures, subsidies can play an important role by ensuring sustainable sales thresholds to alternative vehicles producers, thus 'tipping' the market back into 'a successful trajectory' (Shepherd *et al.* 2012). The second influencing factor is the price of petrol: the cheaper petrol is, the harder it is to sell alternative vehicles, even if alternative fuels have generally lower prices. According to some literature, this factor is even more relevant than government incentives on alternative fuels purchase: the incentives would have a weaker effect than the relative price of fuels on the sale of alternative vehicles (Diamond 2009, Beresteanu and Li 2011). According to Yeh (2007), both competitive alternative fuel prices and alternative vehicle subsidies play a role in enabling the 'wide adoption of natural gas vehicles'. Natural gas retail fuel price should be below '40-50% gasoline and diesel price' to be competitive. With regard to subsidies, they should keep 'the payback period at 3-4 years'. The two measures need not be adopted in conjunction, but in absence of one of the two, the alternative vehicles market cannot develop (Yeh 2007). A second way in which fiscal policy can improve the competitiveness of alternative vehicles is by taxing traditional vehicles. In this regard, Browne *et al.* (2012) suggest taxing negative externalities 'such as GHG emissions' (see also Gass *et al.* 2014). In the French case, alternative vehicle incentives and traditional vehicle disincentives are deployed at the same time, through a 'bonus-malus' system: 'high CO_2 emitting cars pay a malus, while desirable non-emitting cars receive a bonus' (Kerster *et al.* 2018). In terms of instrument settings, Shepherd *et al*. found 'a modest 6.8% increase in [conventional vehicles] operating costs' in terms of both increased fuel duties or external increases in oil prices (2012).

The traditional-alternative vehicles price differential is not the only factor playing a role in tipping consumers' choice in favour of alternative vehicles. According to Petschnig *et al*. (2014) there are three other factors that can significantly influence buying attitudes: i) compatibility, i.e., the capacity to retain previous driving habits; ii) relative advantage, i.e., the unique advantages offered by alternative vehicles compared to those offered by traditional vehicles; iii) cultural norms and preferences, especially those related to ecology.

In this section, we will address the first two dimensions. Concerning compatibility, one key dimension is the refuelling infrastructure: the absence of an adequate number of refuelling stations can dissuade consumers from buying alternative vehicles, in consideration of the necessity to change previous driving habits (Sierzchula *et al*. 2014, Yeh 2007, Egnér and Tosvik 2018). In this regard, the presence of adequate refuelling infrastructure is considered a necessary condition for the development of the market: in its absence, consumers will not buy alternative vehicles regardless of other considerations (such as generous incentives). In this regard, the necessary ratio of alternative-fuel refuelling infrastructure to the total number of refuelling stations is between 10 and 20% (Greene 1998, Nicholas *et al.* 2004). A second way of conceptualising alternative fuels infrastructure is in terms of 'sufficient' levels of coverage: the ratio which facilitates (instead of simply enabling) the commercialisation of alternative vehicles. In this respect, Melaina and Bremson (2008) found that the sufficient level of refuelling infrastructures in urban centres with a density of 2000 people per 2.6 square kilometers is 0.5 stations per 2.6 square kilometers. Concerning the second dimension, the relative advantage of alternative vehicles *vis-á-vis* traditional vehicles, the literature has focused, in recent years, on non-financial incentives as a way to make alternative vehicles more appealing – in terms of status, rather than from an economic standpoint (Holtsmark and Skonhoft 2013). Examples of non-financial incentives are special lane access, preferential parking, exemptions from driving bans (Hardman 2019).

3. Research gaps and puzzle

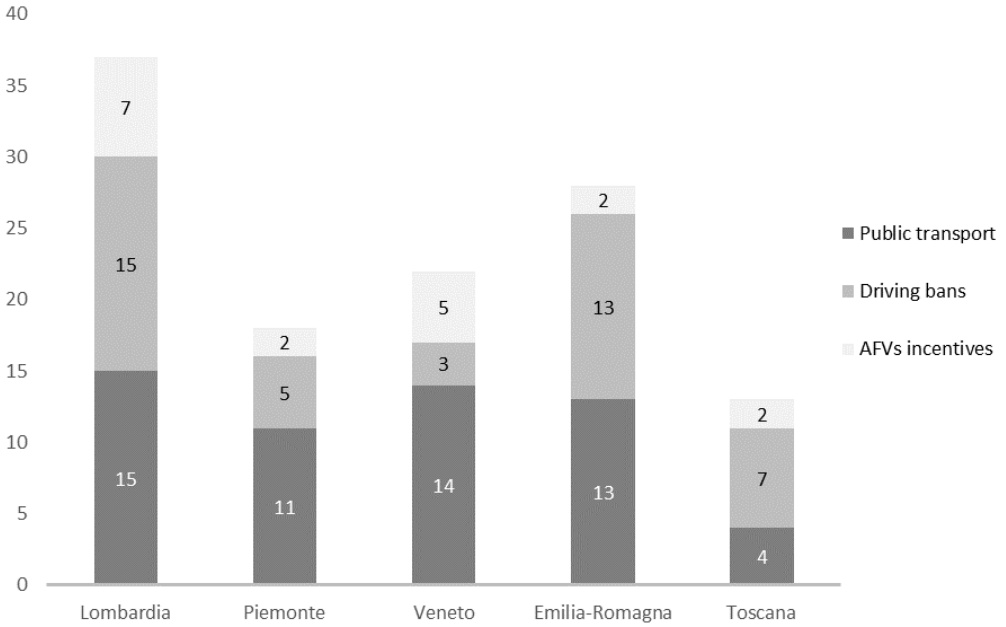
When examining the existing literature on alternative vehicles policies, policy instruments are rarely considered in combination. Even when policy mixes are explicitly addressed, the potential interaction effects between different types of policy instruments are seldom explored. Furthermore, when such interactions are studied, the consistency between observed outcomes and different policy mixes is not thoroughly measured. To shed light on this research gap, we will analyse the sales of alternative fuel vehicles in five Italian regions during the period 2005-2009. While the cases and operationalisation will be described in Section 4, we will utilize some of the data to illustrate the research puzzle in the context of the literature reviewed in the previous section.

Figure 1 illustrates the number of mobility-related measures adopted by each of the five Italian regions during the 2000-2004 period, aggregated by type of intervention. The majority of measures pertain to driving bans, while financial incentives to purchase alternative vehicles constitute a significant share of the policy measures adopted by the regions. Lastly, the category of 'transport policy measures' includes all initiatives aimed at altering the hierarchy between transportation modes, encouraging the use of public transport, walking, and bicycles instead of private cars (Banister 2008).

Each of these types of measure aimed to reduce the use of traditional vehicles for transportation. Various causal pathways could be envisioned to achieve this outcome, such as decreasing private transport through incentivizing public transport usage or increasing the adoption rate of alternative vehicles by either offering direct incentives or disincentives for traditional vehicles. Each solution complements the intended policy goal, and low rates of alternative vehicle adoption do not necessarily imply a failure in

the policy. Nevertheless, an increase in AFV sales can be deemed a sufficient solution for the policy problem at hand and thus a relevant outcome.

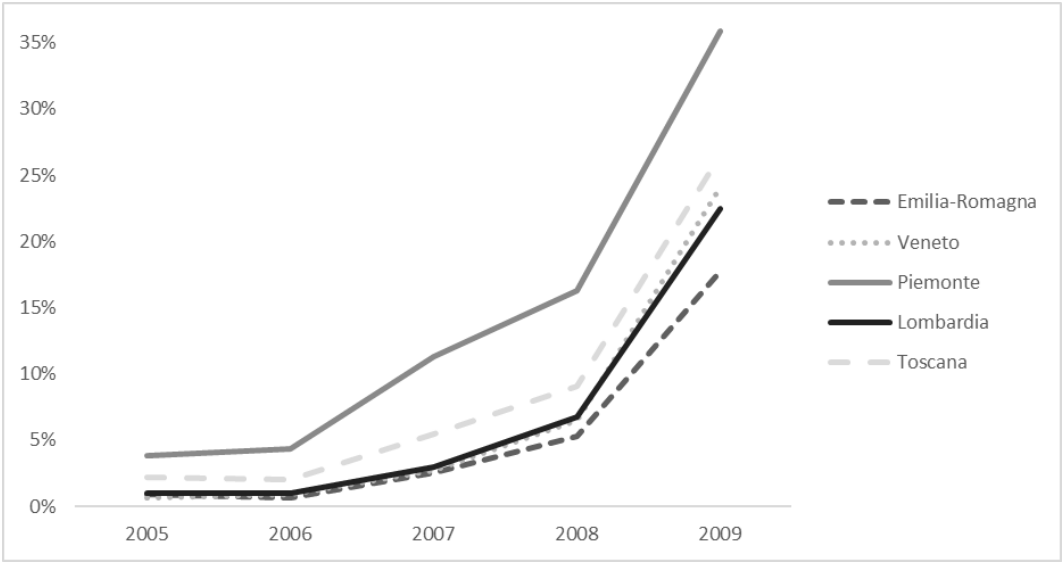
Figure 1. Number of mobility-related measures adopted during 2000-2004 (source: regional official gazettes, own elaboration)



Source: regional official gazettes, own elaboration.

Figure 2 depicts the percentage of alternative vehicles in total car sales during 2005-2009 (source: ACI 2010, own elaboration). Throughout the considered period, the sales of new AFVs followed a similar trend in all five regions.

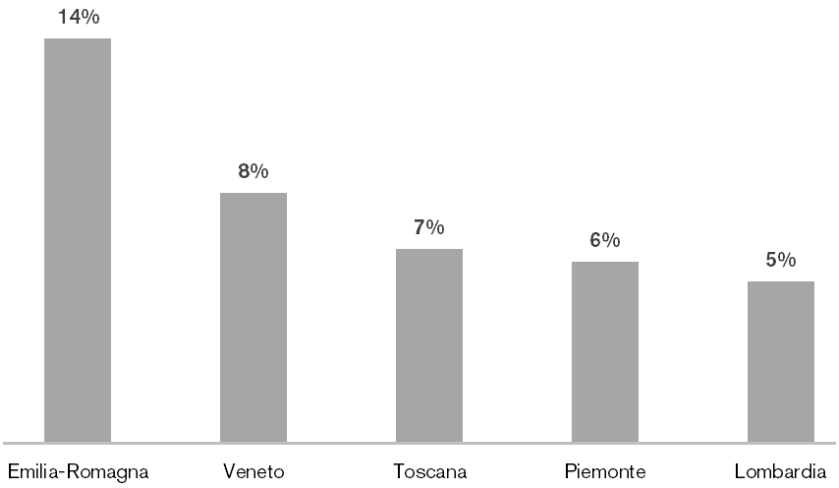
Figure 2. Percentage of alternative vehicles in total car sales during 2005-2009



Source: ACI 2010, own elaboration.

At the end of the 2005-2009 period, Emilia-Romagna emerged as the best performing region in terms of alternative vehicle sales over the total number (Figure 3).

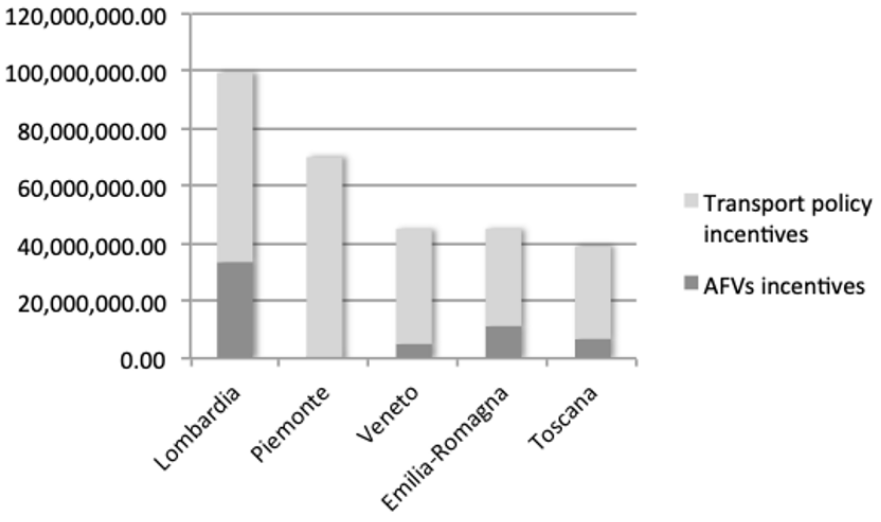
Figure 3. Percentage of alternative vehicles in total car sales during 2005-2009



Source: ACI 2010, own elaboration.

The literature we reviewed would suggest first focusing on the incentives adopted by each region: the higher the financial incentives, the higher the sales of alternative vehicles. However, research data present a different picture (Figure 4). Among the regions considered, Lombardia provided the most generous incentives (both in relative and absolute terms) during the 2000-2004 period; however, it performed poorly in terms of alternative vehicle sales during the 2005-2009 period. In contrast, Piemonte outperformed Lombardia, even though it did not offer financial incentives to purchase AFVs during the 2000-2004 period.

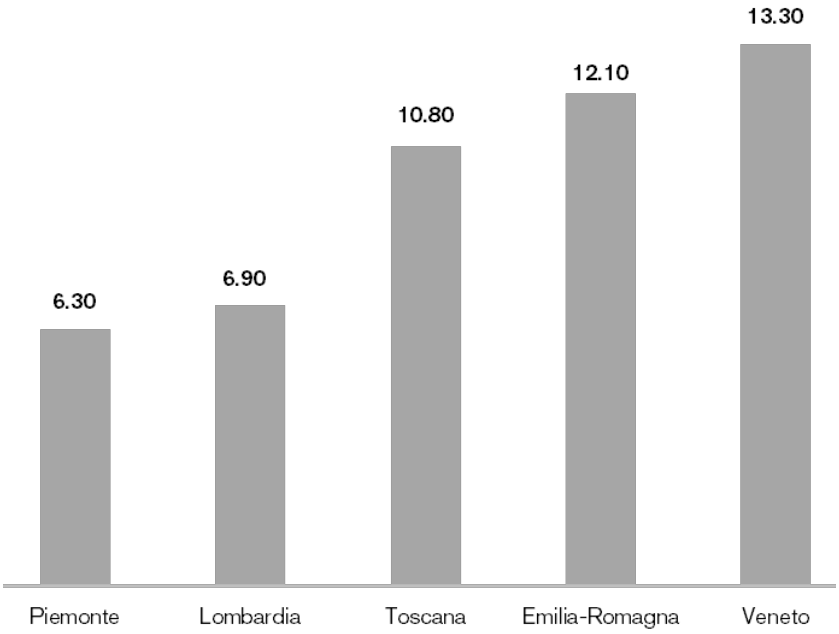
Figure 4. Funds for alternative vehicle incentives over total incentives for transport policy during 2000-2004, millions of euros



Source: regional official gazettes, own elaboration.

A second intuitive explanation considers the existing refuelling infrastructure (Yeh, 2007). Numerous empirical studies have demonstrated that to develop a mature AFVs market, the number of alternative-fuel refuelling stations (AFRSs) must constitute at least 10-20% of gas/diesel refuelling stations (Nicholas et al., 2004). Figure 5 displays the AFRSs ratio for the five regions. The 10% threshold appears to apply to the two worst-performing regions, Lombardia and Piemonte. Moreover, three of the best-performing regions, Emilia-Romagna, Toscana, and Veneto, also boast an AFRSs ratio above the 10% threshold. However, the refuelling infrastructure alone does not seem capable of explaining the varying performances of these three regions. Specifically, Veneto has a more favourable AFRSs ratio than Emilia-Romagna, yet its sales of alternative vehicles are significantly lower.

Figure 5. Percentage of alternative vehicles over total car sales during 2005-2009



Source: ACI 2010, own elaboration.

4. Analytical framework: causal mechanisms and policy mixes

In the previous section, we demonstrated that a theory solely based on the effects of individual policy instruments could not adequately explain the variations in outcomes between the five Italian regions. A more robust explanation may lie in the different combinations of policy instruments (and their relative settings) adopted by these regions. The interaction between policy instruments can create complex effects; in other words, the aggregate effects of the policy mix may surpass the sum of its individual parts. To better elucidate the observed outcomes, we must first attempt to conceptualise how this interaction operates, which can be achieved by unveiling the causal mechanisms at play.

According to Gerring (2010), causal mechanisms can address the question of 'how X causes Y' by specifying the causal chain that leads from X to Y. Another distinguishing feature of the mechanistic understanding is the 'interest in the theoretical process whereby X produces Y,' involving a 'transmission of what can be termed causal forces

from X to Y' (Beach and Pedersen 2011: 25). Bechtel and Richardson (1993) and Glennan (1996) consider mechanisms as 'systems of interacting parts'. Considering how these parts interact means viewing mechanisms not merely as isolated components but rather as the 'wheel-work' or agency by which an effect is produced (Hernes 1998: 78). The nature of these interactions is the subject of debate: on one hand, Machamer et al. (2000) characterize mechanisms as 'entities and activities organized in a way that they are productive of regular changes from start or set-up to finish or termination conditions'. On the other hand, a substantivalist position does not consider activities ontologically distinct from entities. In this regard, changes in the properties of the mechanism, in terms of the presence or absence of entities, can explain the mechanism's productivity. The latter perspective is particularly suitable for our analysis, enabling us to conceptualise each policy instrument as distinct entities while also understanding the effectiveness of various mixes of instruments. Consequently, mechanisms will be conceptualised as 'systems of interacting parts,' where the interacting parts are distinct entities. The resulting causal model needs to be expressed in the following form (Beach and Pedersen, 2011):

$$\boldsymbol{X}\ [(\boldsymbol{e1}\ \rightarrow)\ *\ (\boldsymbol{e2}\ \rightarrow)\ *\ (\boldsymbol{e3}\ \rightarrow)\ ]\ \boldsymbol{Y}$$

In other words, X causes the outcome Y through the mechanism composed of entity$_1$ in conjunction with entity$_2$ and entity$_3$.

4.1. Policy instruments and mixes

Our pragmatic choice to not take activities into account is justified as it would be impractical to observe how policy instruments are productive of causal effects at the individual level in the case at hand. The activities of each entity can only be inferred and tested for congruence. However, as we have discussed, the existing literature on alternative vehicle policies mostly focuses on the effects of single policy instruments without considering their combination effects. To overcome this limitation, we can examine policy instruments at a different level of abstraction, focusing on the features that make them work in a certain way regardless of the policy field.

For instance, an incentive can take various forms and be employed across different policy sectors; however, its fundamental properties that make it an 'incentive' will remain unchanged. Conceptualizing policy instruments can be approached in several ways, starting from different assumptions about their 'ontology' (Hood, 2008). Studies on policy instruments generally analyse them as 'institutions', i.e., forms of organization available to the government (Hood, 1983; Salamon, 2002), or through an 'institution-free approach', focusing on the behavioural effects of these instruments (Schneider and Ingram, 1990; Bertelmans-Videc, Rist, and Vedung, 1998). In recent years, the literature on policy design has revisited the concept of policy mix and the combinatory effects of policy instruments (Grabosky, 1994; Gunningham and Sinclair, 1999; Howlett, 2014). Meta-theories on policy instruments and mixes, using both institutionalist and more 'freewheeling' approaches, have started to investigate various policy fields (e.g., Schaffrin et al., 2014; Capano et al., 2020).

Due to our research question, we are primarily interested in the behavioural effects of policy instruments and how policy design can enhance (or hinder) their effectiveness. As Schneider and Ingram (1990: 514) note, 'public policy almost always attempts to get

people to do things that they might not otherwise do; or it enables people to do things that they might not have done otherwise.' This can be achieved in various ways, with coercion being the most direct method. As such, most studies classify policy instruments along a continuum from the lowest to the highest degree of coercivity. However, the effectiveness of a policy does not necessarily relate to the coerciveness of its instruments. Policy instruments are generally combined with others, creating policy mixes where different instruments enhance each other's effects, resulting in either complementarity (Gunningham and Sinclair 1999) or 'incoherent pluralism,' where new policy instruments are added 'on top of or alongside existing ones', creating a pattern of layering (Capano and Lippi 2013).

4.2. The give-and-take approach

According to Van der Doelen (1998: 131), coercive policy instruments are considered the most effective, but they often lack political legitimacy. Consequently, they are rarely employed in isolation and are instead combined with other instruments to enhance policy acceptability. Van der Doelen's typology distinguishes three types of policy instrument: the least coercive are based on 'education', followed by 'engineering' (economic incentives), and then 'enforcement' (regulations), which are the most coercive. Additionally, Bressers (1988) notes that the degree of coercion can also depend on the settings of the policy instrument; for instance, economic incentives like levies may exert more constraint than regulations. To address this complexity, Van der Doelen introduces a second dimension to the typology, distinguishing between stimulative and repressive forms of policy instruments based on 'the extent to which the use of the instrument by the individual is optional'. Consequently, a stimulative policy instrument enables individuals to take certain actions, while a repressive policy instrument restricts their choices. For example, in the case of economic incentives, a subsidy encourages individuals to take a specific course of action, whereas a levy discourages them. However, in both cases, the fundamental properties of the economic incentive remain unchanged, and individuals still retain their freedom of choice, despite the altered attractiveness of various alternatives due to the repressive nature of the instrument. Table 1 provides an illustration of the complete typology.

Table 1. Stimulative and repressive forms of policy instruments

	Stimulative	**Repressive**
Education	Information	Propaganda
Engineering	Subsidy	Levy
Enforcement	Contract	Order/prohibition

Source: Van der Doelen 1998.

The give-and-take strategy involves combining stimulative and repressive instruments to create policy mixes with complementary effects. While repressive instruments are generally more effective in restricting certain policy options, stimulative instruments can influence policy-takers to move in a desired direction. When both types of

instruments are combined, they can address different aspects of a common policy issue, leading to increased policy effectiveness (Gunningham and Sinclair, 1999).

An example can illustrate this point more clearly. In 1985, the Netherlands implemented a policy to promote eco-friendly cars. They introduced subsidies to encourage the sale of cars equipped with catalytic converters. At the same time, the tax rates on conventional cars were increased as a repressive measure to discourage the purchase of non-ecologic vehicles. The policy employed the repressive instrument of taxation to disincentivize buying non-ecologic cars, while the stimulative subsidies made the purchase of eco-friendly cars more appealing. The combination of these two instruments made the policy more precise and effective in directing consumers towards eco-friendly options. As a result, the adoption of eco-friendly cars increased.

Based on this example, our main hypothesis is that by deploying both incentives (encouraging the purchase of alternative vehicles) and regulations (disincentivizing the use of traditional vehicles) together, the policy will be more effective in promoting sales of alternative vehicles. The combination of these instruments can target various aspects of the policy issue, thereby encouraging consumers to opt for alternative vehicles over traditional ones and leading to a higher uptake of alternative vehicles on the market.

4.3. Model of causation

The causal mechanism to be tested, based on the give-and-take approach, is as follows:

$$\boldsymbol{X}\ [(\boldsymbol{e1\ incentives}\ \rightarrow) * (\boldsymbol{e2\ regulations}\ \rightarrow) * (\boldsymbol{e3\ alternative\ fuels\ infrastructure}\ \rightarrow)\ ]\ \boldsymbol{Y}$$

Table 2 presents the causal model ('truth table') that results from the three causal conditions ('entities') present in the causal mechanism and described in the previous two sections: stimulative measures, repressive measures, and capacity measures. When considering two states (0 = absent, 1 = present), there are 8 possible combinations. Each row of the model identifies a different combination of the three causal conditions. Based on the literature on policy instruments, we can develop plausible expectations regarding the effect that each combination will have on the outcome, which is the sale of alternative vehicles.

Capacity measures should be considered a necessary condition: with an ASFRs percentage lower than 10% of the existing refuelling infrastructure, an alternative vehicles market will not develop (Yeh 2007). Hence, when combinations 2, 4, 6, 8 occur, we should observe low or non-existent sales of alternative vehicles. Repressive measures should be effective even when stimulative measures are absent, but without combining them, the effects on the outcome could be weaker. A disincentive towards buying traditional vehicles without incentives towards buying alternative vehicles could also lead individuals to adopt different modes of transport (e.g., public transport) since the behavioural pattern created by the policy mix does not strongly discriminate between one mode of transportation or the other. Conversely, stimulative measures without repressive measures can also lead to a lower adoption of alternative vehicles, as there will be fewer reasons to buy an alternative vehicle instead of a traditional vehicle

Table 2. Truth table for the causal analysis

Incentives	Regulations	Infrastructure	
1	1	1	Give-and-take approach with infrastructural capacity
1	1	0	Give-and-take approach without infrastructural capacity
1	0	1	Enabling approach with infrastructural capacity
1	0	0	Enabling approach without infrastructural capacity
0	1	1	Coercive approach with infrastructural capacity
0	1	0	Coercive approach without infrastructural capacity
0	0	1	Laissez-faire approach with infrastructural capacity
0	0	0	Laissez-faire approach without infrastructural capacity

Source: own elaboration.

5. Operationalisation

5.1. Scope condition

Regarding the scope condition, the causal model introduced in Section 3 will be investigated in relation to a subset of northern Italian regions having a resident population of over 2 million. This approach allows us to establish a plausible ceteris paribus concerning the economic wealth of individuals and the region's size. By selecting regions that are comparable on these two dimensions, we can avoid distortions due to differing levels of both purchasing power and administrative capacity. This criterion led us to choose a group of five regions: Lombardia, Piemonte, Veneto, Emilia-Romagna, and Toscana. The timeframe in which the implementation of the policy is studied is 2000-2004, and the outcome will be observed in the five subsequent years, from 2005 to 2009. The assumption is that a five-year period is sufficient to observe how the regional policy mix impacted the sale of alternative vehicles in the selected regions. While different policy instruments may impact people's behaviour in different ways, thus having different timeframes, the timeframe of the analysis should allow the reader to appreciate the overall effects of the policy mixes of the five regions.

During the period of implementation, the five regions exploited the flexibility allowed by national law (see the introduction) to implement policy mixes with different policy instruments and settings. As shown in Section 2, regions introduced economic incentives on top of the alternative vehicles incentives already granted by the national policymaker. During the 2000-2004 period, in terms of direct repressive measures, only a compulsory certification for traditional fuel vehicles (the 'bollino blu') was introduced. This certification, however, showed minimal variation between the regions. Moreover, given the small fee related to the certification (7 to 12 euros), it would be difficult to anticipate meaningful effects on the sales of alternative vehicles. New regulations, nonetheless, were introduced in 2000-2004, along with the economic incentives: driving restrictions were mandated in cities with a population of more than 50,000 as an emergency measure to counter spikes in air pollution. These measures were complementary to alternative vehicles economic incentives: while they targeted traditional

vehicles, banning their circulation on given days, these restrictions did not apply to alternative vehicles.

This type of measure, implemented either by design or by chance in conjunction with incentives to buy alternative vehicles, meets the condition of validity laid down by Gunningham and Sinclair (1999): it targets a different aspect of a common policy issue. According to the theory, the simultaneous presence of driving restrictions that target traditional vehicles and incentives to buy alternative vehicles should create complementarity, enhancing the overall precision and effectiveness of the policy. On the one hand, the driving restrictions of traditional vehicles act as repressive measures, making traditional vehicles less attractive to potential buyers and current users. This alone is not sufficient to push alternative vehicle sales, as traditional vehicle users could resort to different modes of transportation, such as public transport (which was incentivized in the same years as well). However, in conjunction with positive incentives towards purchasing alternative fuel vehicles, the probability of preferring this option increases, ceteris paribus.

5.2. Operationalization of variables: raw measures

To test the causal model developed in Section 3, we compiled a comprehensive dataset of all sustainable mobility measures implemented by the five regions during the period 2000-2004. Due to the absence of thematic collections in the regional official gazettes during that period, we performed manual data collection, focusing on Regional Council laws and Regional Government decrees. Ensuring the dataset's exhaustiveness involved a two-phase approach. In the first phase, we conducted a thorough search of the Journals using a set of 18 predefined keywords[1]. This allowed us to identify a first bulk of laws containing sustainable mobility measures. The second phase consisted in analysing the laws and decrees collected, searching for normative references to other laws and decrees missed during research by keywords. Grey literature produced by the five regions during the 2000-2004 timeframe was used to cross-check the list of legislative acts to be included in the dataset. The legislative acts were then analysed to catalogue the measures contained therein. Each measure was catalogued following the Van der Doelen typology. The resulting dataset included all the permissive and restrictive measures adopted by the regions related to alternative vehicles policy. A third condition, as we have discussed, concerns the alternative fuel infrastructure, which consists in the ratio between alternative fuel and traditional fuel refuelling stations present in each region. We used data included in the annual report of Unione Petrolifera (2003) to reconstruct the alternative fuel infrastructure ratio for each region. Finally, the outcome consisted in the percentage of alternative vehicles over the total of new vehicles sold throughout the 2005-2009 period. To reconstruct the outcome, we relied on the 'Autoritratto' dataset produced annually by the Automobile Club Italia (ACI) which contains the number of new vehicles registered each year per each Italian region.

[1] The keywords are: 'aria', 'inquinamento', 'qualità', 'atmosferico', 'particolato', 'PM10', 'trasport*', 'traffico', 'riscaldamento', 'caldaie', 'impiant*', 'permess*', 'limit*', 'monitoraggio', 'polveri', 'mobilità', 'sostenibile', 'risanamento'.

In the context of our study, we have identified four causal conditions to investigate the impact of policy instruments on the adoption of alternative vehicles:

1) Incentives: this causal condition encompasses the positive economic incentives introduced by the regions to encourage citizens and private companies to purchase new alternative vehicles during the period 2000-2004. To gauge the relative strength of these incentives compared to other alternative transport measures (e.g., incentives to strengthen public transport), we measured the ratio of alternative vehicle incentives to the overall budget allocated for sustainable transport.
2) Regulation: this causal condition is a measure of the stringency of driving restrictions implemented by each region to mitigate air pollution caused by non-alternative vehicles during the period 2000-2004. To proxy the coerciveness of these regulations on individual behaviour, we measured the total number of hours of driving restrictions enforced during the 2000-2004 period.
3) Alternative fuel infrastructural capacity: this causal condition quantifies the ratio between the number of alternative fuel refuelling stations and traditional fuel refuelling stations in each region. It serves as an indicator of the region's capacity to support alternative vehicles through infrastructure.
4) percentage of alternative vehicles over total of new vehicles registered. This condition assesses the relative strength of alternative vehicle sales during the period 2005-2009. We calculated this measure by determining the ratio between the percentage of new alternative fuel vehicles) registered and the total number of new vehicles registered during the 2005-2009 period.

Table 3 shows the raw measures for the causal conditions and the outcome.

Table 3. Raw measures of the policy instruments adopted by the regions (2000-2004) and the outcome (2005-2009)

Region	Incentives	Regulation (hours)	Alternative fuels infrastructure	% of alternative vehicles
Lombardia	51.65%	1495	6.99%	5%
Piemonte	0.13%	3285	6.37%	6%
Veneto	11.83%	1224	13.38%	8%
Emilia-Romagna	32.45%	4649	12.12%	14%
Toscana	20.61%	1090	10.82%	7%

Source: own elaboration.

6. Qualitative comparative analysis

In this research, we formulated the research question of identifying the principles that should be considered when designing a policy to address the issue of fleet inertia. Our hypothesis, developed in Section 3, posits that the give-and-take causal mechanism, through the complementarity between stimulative and repressive measures, can be more effective and precise in promoting alternative vehicle sales compared to single

instruments. Based on this research question and hypothesis, we created a causal model exhaustive of the logical possibilities implied by Van der Doelen typology (Section 3). The method we use to test our causal model is Crisp Sets Qualitative Comparative Analysis (CSQca) (Ragin 1987, 2000). Compared with other semi-experimental methods, CSQca's causal assumptions make it particularly suitable to answer our research question. QCA, in fact, does not seek to isolate the net effects of each variable (as in multivariate analysis) -- such as the net effects of economic incentives on alternative vehicles sales. What QCA does instead is to gauge 'multiple conjuctural causality', i.e., it identifies the causal pathways that can produce the outcome (Ragin 2005). In doing this, QCA accepts the possibility that there can be many effective pathways, so that it can highlight different means to achieve the same result. Moreover, variables (causal conditions in the QCA lexicon) are considered in 'combination' when analysing their causal relation to the outcome.

6.1. Calibration of the conditions

Having identified the scope condition and the causal model which will underlie the analysis, it is necessary to calibrate the raw measures we outlined in Section 6. Compared to FsQCA, CsQCA uses crisp conditions, coded as 0 or 1. The value '1' means that a case (e.g., Emilia-Romagna) fully belongs to a set (e.g., regulation). Hence, if Emilia-Romagna scores '1' on the regulation set, it means that in Emilia-Romagna there was strong regulation during the period under investigation. The value '0' means the absence of a condition for a given case. If Lombardia scores '0' on the alternative fuels infrastructure set, it means that in Lombardia the refuelling infrastructure for alternative vehicles is absent. Given the fact that the empirical support for the analysis is dated, quantitative measures are less interesting than the general validity of the causal model: this should make the loss of quantitative information due to the use of crisp sets acceptable. In turn, the analysis results will be easier to interpret than with FsQCA.

To identify the calibration crossover thresholds (at 0.5 for each causal condition), we resorted to the TOSMANA threshold-setter function. This allowed us to identify the natural gaps in the distribution of each causal condition. The only exception was for the alternative fuel infrastructure condition: we know from the literature that the minimum threshold to have alternative fuel infrastructural capacity is that the ratio of alternative fuel refuelling stations to the traditional fuel refuelling infrastructure is at least 10%. The crossover threshold, the one distinguishing the presence from the absence of a condition, resulted in the following for each condition:

1. *Incentives*: crossover at 25.88%.
2. *Regulations:* crossover at 2874.5 hours.
3. *Infrastructure*: crossover at 10%.
4. *Outcome*: crossover at 9.5%.

Table 3 shows the crisp value for each causal condition and the outcome.

Table 3. Crisp set calibration of the causal conditions

	Incentives	Regulations	Infrastructure	Outcome
Lombardia	1	0	0	0
Piemonte	0	1	0	0
Veneto	0	0	1	0
Emilia-Romagna	1	1	1	1
Toscana	0	0	1	0

Source: own elaboration.

6.2. Analysis of the necessary and sufficient conditions

QCA can tell us the necessary and sufficient conditions for both the positive and the negative outcome. Concerning the necessary conditions, the literature outlined in Section 2 showed that, in the absence of an adequate alternative fuel infrastructure, there can be no market for alternative vehicles. The csQCA table contained in the Appendix confirms this finding. The analysis of the necessary conditions for the outcome shows that three conditions (infrastructure, incentives and regulations) are necessary for the occurrence of the outcome, with a consistency of 1. This result however is hardly surprising, given the fact that there is only one instance of positive outcome (Emilia-Romagna). We found more interesting the analysis of the conditions necessary for the absence of the outcome (which is signified by the tilde '¬'). In this case we have no condition that is necessary for the outcome to be absent. The threshold to consider a condition 'necessary' is, conventionally, 0.95. Hence, the analysis confirms that, in the absence of alternative fuel infrastructural capacity, alternative vehicle sales will be low.

The analysis of sufficient conditions (see Appendix) should show which condition, or combination of conditions, is able to produce the outcome, hence answering the question 'what works?'. The empirical data confirm that the hypothesized combination:

*Incentives * Regulations * Infrastructure*

can be considered jointly sufficient in explaining the positive outcome of Emilia-Romagna. On the other hand, the analysis of the sufficient conditions for the absence of the outcome shows that there are three possible explanations accounting for low alternative vehicle sales:

1) *¬incentives*¬infrastructure*, in the case of Piemonte the policy mix lacked incentives and the AFSR capacity was non-adequate. The strong reliance on regulation, by itself, was not able to produce a positive outcome in terms of alternative vehicle sales.
2) *¬regulations*¬incentives*, both Toscana and Veneto share the absence of strong regulation combined with the absence of stimulative measures. This combination, by itself, is able to explain the absence of a positive outcome for these two regions. It is worth noting that both regions displayed a sufficient infrastructural capacity. Still, without different forms of public intervention, the sale of alternative vehicles was still laggard. This could show that a well-developed alternative fuels infrastructure, i.e., well above the 'necessary' threshold of 10%, is not

sufficient to push alternative vehicle sales, contrary to the expectations developed by Melaina and Bremson (2008).

3) ¬*regulative**¬*capacity*: in the case of Lombardia, the alternative fuel infrastructure was absent. On top of this, disincentives to resort to traditional vehicles were weak; these two conditions explain why, even with very generous alternative vehicles incentives, the overall alternative vehicle sales were low.

7. Conclusions

In this paper, we investigated how public policy can effectively foster the sale of alternative fuel vehicles. The current literature explains the increase in alternative vehicle adoption by focusing on economic and cultural factors. It is acknowledged that the presence of economic incentives and adequate refuelling infrastructures can boost alternative vehicle sales and change consumer behaviour. However, the current approach tends to focus on the net effect of single instruments, overlooking the potential of combinations of different instruments.

This research aims to advance the current knowledge on the role that policy instruments play in promoting alternative vehicle adoption in two ways. Firstly, we explored the literature on policy design to discuss principles that can assist in designing alternative vehicle incentives more effectively. We discovered that the pitfalls associated with the use of single policy instruments can be overcome by creating mixes of different types of instruments that exploit complementarity to better influence consumers' behaviour. One type of such mixes appears particularly promising for fostering policy effectiveness: the give-and-take approach. This approach is based on the combination of regulations and incentives to achieve more precise behavioural changes by targeting the same policy issue from different angles.

To test the effectiveness of the give-and-take approach, we focused on the sustainable mobility policies of five Italian regions during the 2000-2004 period. During this time, these regions created new policy mixes to foster sustainable mobility in their major cities, including both regulations and incentives to buy alternative fuel vehicles. To analyse the effectiveness of the give-and-take approach, we employed QCA (Qualitative Comparative Analysis).

In comparison with the current literature, we found that while incentives and infrastructural capacity are necessary to foster alternative fuel vehicle sales, they are less effective when not combined. Incentives for alternative vehicle purchases work better at changing consumer behaviour when coupled with restrictive measures (regulations) that target traditional fuel vehicles. In this scenario, the desirability of alternative fuel vehicles increases. However, regulations targeting traditional fuel vehicles alone could be insufficient to foster alternative vehicle sales, as consumers may prefer alternative modes of transport (such as public transport) due to the perceived high cost of alternative vehicles. It is the combination of the two instruments – stringent regulations and adequate incentives – that creates a clear pattern towards the desired behaviour, i.e., purchasing an alternative vehicle. The combination of complementary instruments, by increasing the precision of the single instruments, is crucial in enhancing the effectiveness of the policy.

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Appendix
QCA Tables

```
Analysis of Necessary Conditions

Outcome variable: outcome

Conditions tested:
                     Consistency          Coverage
capacity             1.000000             0.500000
~capacity            0.000000             0.000000
stimulative          1.000000             0.333333
~stimulative         0.000000             0.000000
regulation           1.000000             0.500000
~regulation          0.000000             0.000000


Outcome variable: ~outcome

Conditions tested:
                     Consistency          Coverage
capacity             0.333333             0.500000
~capacity            0.666667             1.000000
stimulative          0.666667             0.666667
~stimulative         0.333333             1.000000
regulation           0.333333             0.500000
~regulation          0.666667             1.000000



--- INTERMEDIATE SOLUTION ---
frequency cutoff: 1.000000
consistency cutoff: 1.000000
Assumptions:
regulation (present)
capacity (present)

                                       raw       unique
                                      coverage    coverage
consistency
                                     ----------
----------  ----------
regulative*stimulative*capacity     1.000000    1.000000
1.000000
solution coverage: 1.000000
```

```
Cases with greater than 0.5 membership in term
regulation*stimulative*capacity: EMILIA-ROMAGNA (1,1)

**********************
*TRUTH TABLE ANALYSIS*
**********************

File:  //psf/SHARING_IS_CARING/crisp_set.csv
Model: ~output = f(regulation, stimulative, capacity)

 Rows:       6



 Algorithm: Quine-McCluskey
      True: 1
  0 Matrix: 0L
Don't Care: -

--- INTERMEDIATE SOLUTION ---
frequency cutoff: 1.000000
consistency cutoff: 1.000000
Assumptions:
~regulation (absent)

                              raw       unique
                            coverage    coverage
consistency
                           ----------  ----------
----------
~stimulative*~capacity      0.333333    0.333333
1.000000
~regulative*stimulative     0.666667    0.666667
1.000000
solution coverage: 1.000000
solution consistency: 1.000000



Cases with greater than 0.5 membership in term
~stimulative*~capacity: PIEMONTE (1,1)
Cases with greater than 0.5 membership in term
```

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The Road to *Palazzo della Consulta*: Profiles and Careers of Italian Constitutional Judges

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Abstract

Constitutional Court judges are powerful yet understudied elites. Unlike other political elites that have been studied for over a century, their profiles and careers are a neglected field of analysis in European political science. This is surprising given the centrality of the question "who governs?" to an understanding of a political system. However, few studies have attempted to document systemic differences in the profiles and careers of apex court judges, so that this field of analysis is both under-researched and under-appreciated. Drawing on an original dataset, this article contributes to filling this gap by looking systematically at the profiles and careers of Constitutional Court judges in Italy from 1956 to 2021. The article first examines the characteristics of the selection of Constitutional Court judges according to Italian constitutional jurisdiction. Second, it explores the socio-demographic background of Italian constitutional judges. Third, it investigates their political and/or technical experience prior to their period in office. The last section concludes the analysis and opens the way to further research, emphasizing the need for comparative analysis in this issue.

1. Introduction: an under-researched field of analysis

Constitutional Court judges are powerful yet understudied elites. Unlike other political elites that have been studied for over a century, their profiles and careers are a neglected field of analysis in European political science. This is surprising given the centrality of the question "who governs?" to an understanding of a sociopolitical system (Dahl 1961; Schmidhauser 1982; Müller-Rommel et al. 2022). However, few studies have attempted to document systemic differences in the profiles and careers of apex court judges, so that this field of analysis is both under-researched and under-appreciated (Russell 2012; Russell and Malleson 2006; Tiede, forthcoming). The relevance and the salience of such a study have to do with at least three reasons.

First, given the scarce extant literature, there is a lack of integration – and extension – of this stream of research to studies of elites in other branches of government. As Tate (1975: 109) observes, "if judges are admitted to be political elites, then their backgrounds should be intrinsically as interesting as those of other political decision-makers: executives, legislators, or bureaucrats. Further, like information on the background traits of these other political elites, judicial background and career characteristics may provide information about the values and the distribution of political influence of a society and 'gauge' for the measurement of social and political change".

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Second, over the last few decades, most political regimes share an increasing political significance of judicial institutions in the political arena (Tate and Vallinder 1995; Guarnieri and Pederzoli 2020; Hirschl, forthcoming). This is particularly true of Constitutional and Supreme Courts, which have become a privileged seat of policy-making, intervening "in legislative processes, establishing limits on law-making behavior, reconfiguring policy-making environments, even drafting the precise term of legislation" (Stone Sweet 2000: 1). Therefore, courts have increasingly developed the capacity to influence political activity, to the point of becoming the main defenders of democracy over the last few years (Musella and Rullo 2023a). However, while the apex courts have taken on increasingly visible and recognizable political connotations worldwide, we know little about the judges sitting at the helm of contemporary judicialized politics and who quite literally rule (on) different political regimes (Parau 2018).

Third, the study of the profiles and careers of constitutional judges can lead to a broader assessment and understanding of the changing dynamics of their pre-career experience, and what judicial skills and expertise will be present in apex courts (Bobek 2015). At the same time, to understand the development of constitutional justice and the exercise of a mechanism of checks and balances of the political branches of a given liberal democracy, the values and the socio-demographic background against which constitutional jurisprudence will be assessed and interpreted have to be taken into account (Guarnieri and Piana 2011: 141; Pederzoli 2020). These elements have also been interpreted as the main components of the "judicial diversity" of the apex courts (Gee and Rackley 2018), which "enhances a court's legitimacy, builds public confidence in the court, remedies past inequalities, and improves the quality of decision-making of the court by bringing a diversity of perspectives to its opinions" (Chandrachud 2020: 219; Escobar-Lemmon et al. 2021).

Drawing on an original dataset (see Appendix), this article systematically examines the profiles and careers of the judges of the Italian Constitutional Court, one of the most powerful courts in contemporary Europe (Pócza, forthcoming). Consistent with the judicialization of politics in many other political regimes, Italy's Constitutional Court has emerged as a *de facto* lawmaker (Musella and Rullo, 2021; 2023b), which has led to a growing recognition of its political power. Such a systematic analysis echoes the tradition of comparative studies on constitutional judicial elites (Tate 1975), which found fertile ground in the US and in Latin American countries (Atkins 1989; Epstein et al. 2003; Alleman and Mazzone 2009; Barton 2012; Da Ros 2012; Ineguez 2020; Aguiar Aguilar 2023), in the International Court (Mackenzie et al. 2010; Føllesdal 2023), and to a less extent in Europe (Jäckle 2016; Chalmers 2015; Madsen 2014). In Italy, beyond the studies of Breton and Fraschini (2003) and Fiorino et al. (2012) which came from the political economy field, it was the study of Pederzoli (2008) that started political science-oriented research on constitutional judicial elites, thus stimulating further analysis on the members selected for this influential and visible Italian political institution.

More in detail, three research questions will be addressed to provide insights on how empirical analysis of the constitutional judges' profiles and careers can be applied:

1) How "diverse" is the Italian Constitutional Court?
2) Do judges' pre-careers involve a high degree of involvement in political or technical positions?

3) Are there differences between the judges' careers concerning the selecting body (Parliament, President of the Republic, and High Courts)?

The article is structured as follows. First, it examines the characteristics of the selection of the Italian Constitutional Court judges according to the constitutional jurisdiction. It investigates the methods of appointment and tenure, presenting the *de jure* limits to the judicial recruitment pool and the procedure to be followed to "staff the Court". Second, it explores the judicial diversity of the Italian Constitutional Court, investigating the socio-demographic background of the Italian constitutional judges (gender, age at investiture, and geographical origin). Third, the pre-career of judges is analyzed by looking at both the formal qualification provided by the Constitution (judges, professors, lawyers), and at the previous political and/or technical experience of the judges sitting on the bench from 1956 to 2021. The last section concludes and presents an agenda for further research, emphasizing the need for comparative analysis and highlighting how this study provides an effective vantage point for observing the processes of political change in contemporary political regimes.

2. "Staffing the Court": The Italian constitutional jurisdiction

After fascism, the Constituent Assembly introduced the Constitutional Court in the post-war Constitution of 1948. The new institutional framework introduced the Court as an institutional referee to secure intergovernmental relations and protect a coherent and evolving interpretation of the Constitution. The Court was conceived according to the Kelsenian model of judicial review, i.e., a special tribunal outside the regular judiciary (Stone Sweet 2000). Articles 134 and 90 of the Constitution govern the powers of the Court. The former defines the jurisdiction of the Court in deciding the constitutionality of laws and legal acts with the force of law, which means having the force of law and resolving conflicts between various parts of government. The latter refers to its role in monitoring the political arena by trying accusations against ministers – until 1989 – and the President of the Republic. In addition, the Court rules on the admissibility of abrogative popular referendums according to law 87/1953. The Court shares with other Kelsenian courts "the secrecy of decisions" because dissenting opinions are prohibited, and the rulings always appear to be a unanimous decision of the whole Court. Its decisions are not subject to appeal. Constitutional judges have to elect (by absolute majority) from among themselves the President of the Constitutional Court for a three-year term of office. The President (the fifth institutional figure in the Italian order of precedence) manages the agenda and chairs the Annual Conference on the Constitutional Court's work.

The selection of the Court is ruled by article 135 of the Constitution, which originally provided for a Court of 15 judges with a single twelve-year mandate. The original term of office was in force until 1967 when Constitutional Law 2/1967 reduced it to a nine-year mandate. This period is in line with other European countries, such as France, Spain, and Portugal, and is still longer than that of any other mandate/institutional positions provided for in the Italian Constitution. For instance, the President of the Republic is elected for seven years (Art. 85), while ordinary members of Parliament are elected for five years (Art. 60). Moreover, this tenure suggests the attempt of the Italian founding

fathers to keep the Court at a "distance from the run-of-the-mill majoritarian electoral politics" (Kumm 2019: 285). Regarding the judicial recruitment pool (i.e., who can become a constitutional judge), Italian constitutional judges are chosen from among law professors, judges (including retired ones), and lawyers with at least 20 years of practice. Therefore, there is a rather detailed profile, thus providing for educational, professional, and experiential requirements which would make constitutional judges very similar to one another on many social features and very dissimilar to the mass population. There are no other selection criteria limiting the pool of candidates, such as lower age limits (such as in Austria), and which instead apply to Senators (40 years), Deputies (25 years), and President of the Republic (50 years). Thus, the Constitution emphasizes the centrality of the legal expertise and education of potential constitutional judges. This element is in line with the evolution of other Civil Law countries where "since the Napoleonic reforms, the subordination of the judge to the law is not only a value embedded in the political and legal culture of these systems, but also becomes an organizational principle of the judicial apparatus" (Pederzoli 2008: 22). At the same time, the Constitution and other laws define a list of incompatibilities: constitutional judges may not simultaneously be Members of Parliament or of a regional council, may not participate in other duties and activities (both public and private), and may not be members of political parties or involved in political activities. At the end of their term of office, they receive the title of "judge emeritus" and preserve some privileges such as a secretary, an office, and – for one year – one official state car (Pasquino 2016: 107). However, there is no provision for incompatibilities after the end of the judicial term.

Second, another point of great concern relates to the "how" of becoming a Constitutional judge, i.e. the procedure to be followed to appoint a new judge. Although "staffing the Court" was a subject of intense and complex political debate between the main political parties,[1] the Italian founding fathers recognized that the classical powers of a democratic state had to be equally represented in the composition of the Court. In line with the "division of power doctrine" that has shaped Continental Europe (Nicolini and Bagni 2021), the power to select constitutional judges is shared between different institutions, which equally appoint a portion of the constitutional bench, thus realizing a "mixed model".[2]

[1] As Volcansek (2010: 294) points out "the Christian Democrat party in Italy may initially have desired a strong Constitutional Court as an insurance policy to protect the constitutional bargain when facing uncertain electoral prospects, but when in power it attempted to stall implementation of the court and later to dilute its influence. The PCI and PSI may have opposed judicial review on ideological grounds, but later became its champion, probably seeing the court as an insurance policy to check DC dominance". In addition, further delays are caused by the parties' difficulties in reaching an agreement on the election of the five judges elected by the Parliament in a joint session, which required a debate of more than two years (October 3, 1953 - November 8, 1955).

[2] Across countries, Constitutional and Supreme court judges vary in the mechanisms by which they are chosen. The mixed model is the most used worldwide. According to Tiede (2022: 25), "about 52 per cent of high courts worldwide use a form of this selection method, which allows different selector to fill some of the seats of the Court". The "success" of this institutional design has been underlined also by the Venice Commission, a leading authority on constitutional law, which suggests that because constitutional courts have been entrusted with the power of ruling on fundamental separation of powers issues "it may well be appropriate to ensure in their composition a balanced consideration of each of these authorities or organs". As alternatives to this model, we find the "collaborative model" where cooperation between the executive and the legislative branches; and the "parliamentary model" where Parliaments hold the power of the judges' appointment.

Specifically, five members are appointed by the President of the Republic, five members by three Higher courts (three by the Court of Cassation, one by the Council of State, and one by the Court of Auditors),[3] and five members are elected by the two houses of Parliament. Constitutional Law 2/1967 modified the quorum for the election of five parliamentarians judges who until then were to be elected with a 3/5 majority by both chambers of the Parliament assembled together. Since 1967 the five members have been elected by the two houses of Parliament by a two-thirds majority in a joint session or a three-fifths majority after the third ballot. If a judge ceases to hold office before the end of his term of office, because of death, resignation, or removal from office, his replacement is appointed for nine years by the same body that originally appointed him/her. Thus, "the Court's jurisprudence may change over time, but always subject to fundamental underlying continuities" (Nardini 2006: 20).

Table 1. Body selecting constitutional judges in Italy (1956-2021)

	N	**%**
High Courts	40	34.2%
Parliament	37	31.6%
President of the Republic	40	34.2%
Total	**117**	**100%**

Source: own elaboration from the dataset.

From 1956 to 2021, 117 individuals sat in the *Palazzo della Consulta* (with a value of 1.72 appointments per year),[4] showing a composition that *formally* suggests a substantial balance between the political component with technical-legal expertise, thanks to an effective balance between the three branches (Figure 1).[5] Nevertheless, there is a discrepancy between the number of different judicial appointments. This can be understood in the light of the various delays in the election of parliamentary constitutional judges. In fact, while parliamentary appointments have long been part of a larger system of patronage that supported the Italian particracy during the First Republic (1948-1993) (Pederzoli 2018), the issue became an arena of potential conflict – and delay – between the governing parties and the opposition during the so-called Italian Second Republic (1993-today). It is worth noting that the average number of days for the election of parliamentary judges from 1993 to 2021 was 340, while in the previous 28 years the average was 121 days. There is also an increase in the number of scrutinies, which went from an average of 2 to more than 11 in the most recent phase. Therefore, in an era of personalized politics (Musella 2022), difficulties in reaching agreements have led to conspicuous delays, often forcing the Court to work with a reduced Council. For example, in

[3] As in other Civil law countries, ordinary judges are career judges. They enter the Judiciary after law school, and after taking a public exam. They are provided with life tenure and are promoted largely based on seniority, and their career is governed by a special body, that is the High Council of the Judiciary (*Consiglio Superiore della Magistratura*). See Di Federico (2006).

[4] This is a term used to refer to the Constitutional Court, taken from the name of the Court's official residence at the "Palazzo della Consulta" in Piazza del Quirinale in Rome.

[5] The 40 members elected by three senior courts are distributed thus: 7 (6 %) Council of State, 9 (7.7%) Court of Auditors, and 24 (20.5%) Court of Cassation.

1997 the election of Annibale Marini took 603 days, in 2008 the election of Giuseppe Frigo took 536 days, in 2015 Augusto Barbera and Giuliano Prosperetti took 536 and 317 days respectively. Finally, the election of Giuseppe Antonini in 2018 reached the peak over the last twenty years, taking 620 days.

In terms of duration, the majority of judges complete their mandate. On average, they have been in office for 8.6 years. Shorter tenures are mainly due to health problems or death, as in the case of Giuseppe Capograssi, who died on the same day as the Court's first ruling on 23 April 1956, or Giuseppe Lampis, who died a month later (30 May). In other cases, they resigned because of their appointment to other positions (as in the case of Sergio Mattarella, who became President of the Republic after 39 months as a judge) or because of public conflicts between the judges and other political institutions or within the Council itself (Bonini 1996).

3. Judicial diversity at the Italian Constitutional Court

In Italy, no seats are reserved for gender or geographic representativeness, and the formal rules do not impose an age limit. A look at the judicial diversity of the Italian Constitutional Court can highlight if there is an equitable geographic representation, a fair representation for female and male judges, and the age of appointment of the constitutional judges. On the one hand, a Court that fairly reflects the different geographic, gender, and age components of society may signal that it is "open to all" (Chandrachud 2020). On the other hand, these elements can provide valuable information on the "informal constitution" and on whether judicial diversity was considered for judicial appointments to the Constitutional Court between 1956 and 2021.

3.1. Gender diversity

A look at gender shows that being a constitutional judge is a male job: data show that only seven women (6%) broke "the judicial glass ceiling" (Escobar Lemmon et al. 2021). The Italian case is unusual among its European counterparts and suggests that women have only recently entered the Constitutional Court, which was an all-male bench until the mid-nineties.[6] The first woman to be appointed to the Court in 1996 – that is 40 years after the Court began operating – Fernanda Contri, represented a historical landmark, breaking the traditional exclusion of women from the Court. Moreover, beyond its symbolic value, the selection of the first female judge was a "necessary first step in the process of a broad approach to diversity on the bench" (Arrington et al. 2021: 865). We observe an increase in the proportion of women on the bench over the last few years. This has been stimulated by the fact that gender parity is becoming an increasingly hot topic in Italy. Indeed, following Fernanda Contri's appointment to the Court, six other women have been appointed in subsequent years (Maria Rita Saulle in 2005, Marta Cartabia in 2011, Daria De Pretis and Silvana Sciarra in 2014, Emanuela Navarretta and Maria Rosaria San Giorgio in 2020). It should be noted that five of the seven female judges were appointed by different Presidents of the Republic, while it was only in 2014 and 2020 that

[6] For instance, the first woman was appointed to the Federal Constitutional Court in Germany in 1951, to the *Tribunal Constitutional* in Spain in 1980, to the *Conseil Constitutionnel* in France in 1992, to the *Hoge Raad* in Netherlands in 1967.

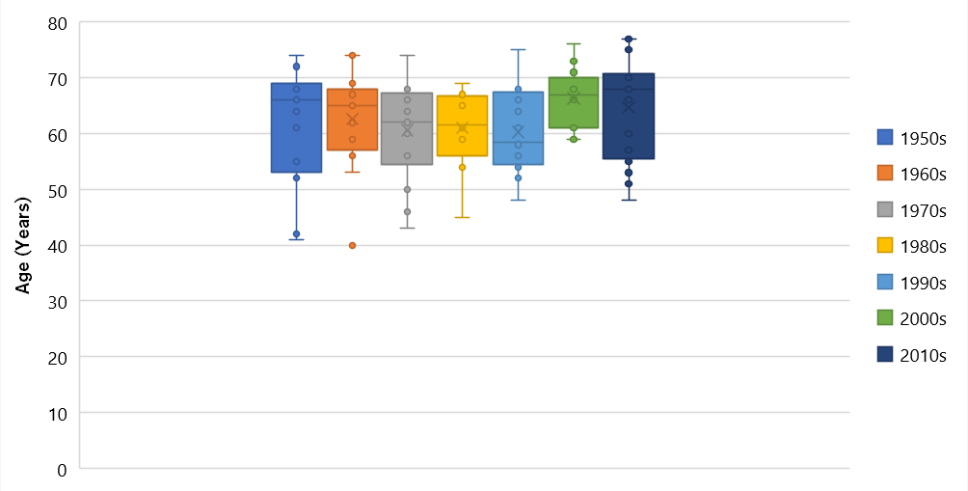
the Parliament and the Court of Cassation respectively elected a female constitutional judge for the first time. Thus, in 2020, the *Consulta* had a record number of four women judges, which had never been the case in more than 60 years of its history. In the same year, the appointment of the first female justice, Marta Cartabia, as President of the Court was also a significant event.

This trend confirms previous comparative studies which underlined that women's overall proportions in the High Courts of developed democracies have increased considerably. At the same time, it is in line with the increasing numbers of women in the Italian magistracy where, as of 2022, more than 50% of magistrates are female, but also in the executive and legislative branches (Pansardi and Pinto 2020). From the 13th legislature (1996-2001) to the 18th (2018-2022) the number of women in the Chamber of Deputies rose from 11.13% to 35.71% and in the Senate from 8% to 34.69%. Moreover, Giorgia Meloni became the first female President of the Council of Ministers in Italy in 2022.

3.2. Age of appointment

Another relevant element relates to the age at which constitutional judges take up their positions. Although there is no maximum or minimum age limit for appointing judges to the Italian Constitutional Court, judges are selected from a limited pool of highly educated and experienced legal professionals. It is therefore not surprising that the average age at investiture is 63 years, with more than half of the judges in the 60-69 age group. There are differences between the three selection bodies: judges appointed by the three High Courts show an average age of 66 years, while those from the other two branches are around 60 years old, with more than 40% of presidential and parliamentary appointees tending to come to office in their 40s and 50s.

Figure 1. Age at time of investiture (1956-2021)



Source: own elaboration from the dataset.

If this is the general picture, significant variations in the level of seniority emerge with the passing of time. Looking at these data in a diachronic way, it can be observed that the Court as a whole is getting 'older' over time (Figure 1). While there has long been a clear tendency towards appointing people to the Court at an earlier age, the general

increase in the average age of the judges has become more visible over the last twenty years. For all judges appointed between 1980 and 1999, the average age at which they first became a constitutional judge was 60.5; for judges appointed between 2000 to 2021 the average increased to 65.5 years.

It is noteworthy that this trend particularly interests Parliament, which has usually appointed the youngest member of the bench for over 40 years. Indeed, while the 25 judges appointed up to 1999 had an average age of 57.4 years, the most recent choices have favored more experienced profiles leading to an average age of 66.8 years. The appointments of Augusto Antonio Barbera and Franco Modugno (on the Court since 2015), being the oldest members ever appointed to the bench at 77 years, make this point rather nicely.

This data is not in line with other branches of government, particularly given that Italy has recently reached one of the lowest average ages of MPs in Western Europe (in 2018: 45 years) (Verzichelli et al. 2022), and that the age of cabinet ministers has also decreased in recent years (Musella et al. 2022). At the same time, it suggests a more static view of constitutional jurisprudence, as older judges are not successfully "hybridized" with new, younger colleagues, which can potentially bring fresh social perspectives to the Court.

3.3. Geographic diversity

An analysis of the geographical origin/territorial dimension is another background factor used by political scientists working on judicial diversity in the apex courts (Skiple et al. 2022). This point is of particular interest for Italian constitutional justice, which is called upon to guarantee the balance of power between the central State and Regions, resolve conflicts arising between different levels of government, and preserve the cohesion of the Italian State (Amato and Bassanini 1972). The theme of territorial diversity on the bench (re)appeared powerfully in the 1990s, occupying the center of the Lega Nord's reform programs, according to which devolution and a regionalized constitutional court represent an inseparable pair of reforms in an approach to federalism. The Northern League's (LN) criticism focused on the appointment mechanisms, thus presenting a project for the "regionalization of the Constitutional court" during the third Berlusconi government in 2001, later formalized in the Bossi-Speroni draft of July 2001. More recently we may recall the potential interventions planned by the Renzi-Boschi constitutional bill on the territorial representation of the Court. These plans have never been realized.

Table 2. Geographic diversity of Italian constitutional judges

	N	**%**
North	23	19.7%
Center	29	24.8%
South	65	55.6%
Total	**117**	**100%**

Source: own elaboration from the dataset.

The data reveal that there is no equitable geographical distribution of the plurality of the Italian regions in the birthplace origins of judges. Despite being one of the most populated and wealthiest parts of Italy, northern regions are largely underrepresented in terms of the percentage of Constitutional Court judges. Table 2 shows that most of the Italian constitutional judges come from southern Italy (55.6%). This is particularly true for the constitutional judges elected by the High Courts (77%) and by Parliament (52%). The overrepresentation of this part of the country has been visible since the first judgment in 1956 when 67% of the judges were born in southern regions. Quite symbolically, these data are similar to the percentage relating to the Italian Presidents of the Republic: six out of twelve were born in southern regions. A closer look at the geographical origin reveals that 32 judges were born in Campania, followed by Lazio and Sicily, with 16 and 14 judges respectively. Only two regions, Veneto and the Aosta Valley have not produced any constitutional judges during the 60 years under analysis.

Although these results do not underline a stable link with the territory of origin (Pederzoli 2008), the birthplace of judges can provide valuable information on their educational path as it often correlates with the university they have attended.

4. The pre-career experiences of Italian Constitutional judges

4.1. Professional background

The constitutional requirement of belonging to the magistracy, having a high-level academic qualification, or long professional experience in the legal sector, provides a limited judicial recruitment pool. Table 3 highlights that there is considerable variability in the professional background of constitutional judges and deep differences in their distribution, with half of the judges having been law professors, followed by judges, and, to a lesser extent, lawyers.

While the presence of lawyers appointed to the Court is becoming increasingly rare, reaching its lowest point (5%) in the decade 2010-2021, the academization of the Court has become commonplace, especially since the 1990s, when professors took on an increasing "weight on the map of power" in Italy (Simone 1998: 642). Almost 60% of the law professors have been appointed by the Presidents of the Republic, with the last three Presidents (Ciampi, Napolitano, Mattarella) appointing exclusively people from the academic world. The strong presence of mature jurists with long and prestigious academic careers, mainly in constitutional law (14.5%) and penal law (6%), has been particularly evident in recent years, reaching 67% of the judges currently in office. Moreover, although there is no formal obstacle to the appointment of professors or lawyers for the High Court's quota, "their votes have always flowed only to members of their respective bodies", so that "the Court has always been able to count on a stable component of at least five ordinary and administrative judges, elected by their peers, according to the proportions provided for by the Constitution" (Pederzoli 2020: 5).

Table 3. Professional background of Italian constitutional judges

	N	**%**
Professor	58	49.6%
Lawyer	13	11.1%
Judge	46	39.3%
Total	**117**	**100%**

Source: own elaboration from the dataset.

Therefore, the absence of permeability of the recruitment process highlights that constitutional judges elected by the three High Courts are drawn from professional groups exclusively inside the judiciary itself, often as the result of a compromise between the different judicial associations and their political strength and the division of power within them (Guarnieri 2003). However, it is not only judicial experience that counts for appointment to the Supreme Court. It is also the length of service on the respective High Courts (Court of Cassation, Council of State, Court of Auditors) compared to the other judges on that court. In short, judges from the three Higher Courts are not considered for appointment to the Constitutional Court, until a certain level of seniority has been reached in their respective Court.

These data, however, do not reflect the real, more complex socio-professional backgrounds of many of the constitutional judges and the wide range of their professional experience. If all the potential constitutional judges' candidates pass certain common thresholds, it becomes difficult to judge their professional background only. As Bobek (2015: 18-19) points out "it makes little difference if one of the university professors competing for judicial office has published 15 books and the other only 12, if all of them are quality publications. Thus, once a certain 'minimal threshold' has been passed by all of the candidates, other considerations will inevitably come into play". For these reasons, it is worth looking empirically at their pre-appointment experience, stressing in the next subsection their political and technical pre-career experiences.

4.2. Political and technical pre-career

Throughout the history of the Italian Constitutional Court, almost 25% of the judges have held one or more political posts prior to their period in office. All these judges have been appointed by Parliament and the Presidents of the Republic. Almost 20 % of all judges were members of parliament, around 3% served as party heads, and more than 18% held posts as a member of the government. For instance, we may recall the case of Giuliano Amato, vice-president of the Council of Ministers from 1987 to 1989, then twice President of the Council of Ministers (1992-1993; 2000-2001), and consistently involved in various government positions; or we may recall the experiences of judges Contri, Flick, Gallo and Cassese who were ministers during the Ciampi and Prodi governments. Moreover, it is worth noting the case of Sergio Mattarella, MP since 1983, minister in three different governments, vice-president of the Council of Ministers in the first D'Alema government (1998-1999), and currently President of the Republic.

Nevertheless, the percentage of individuals appointed to the *Palazzo della Consulta* with previous political experience has fluctuated over time. The First Republic Court was

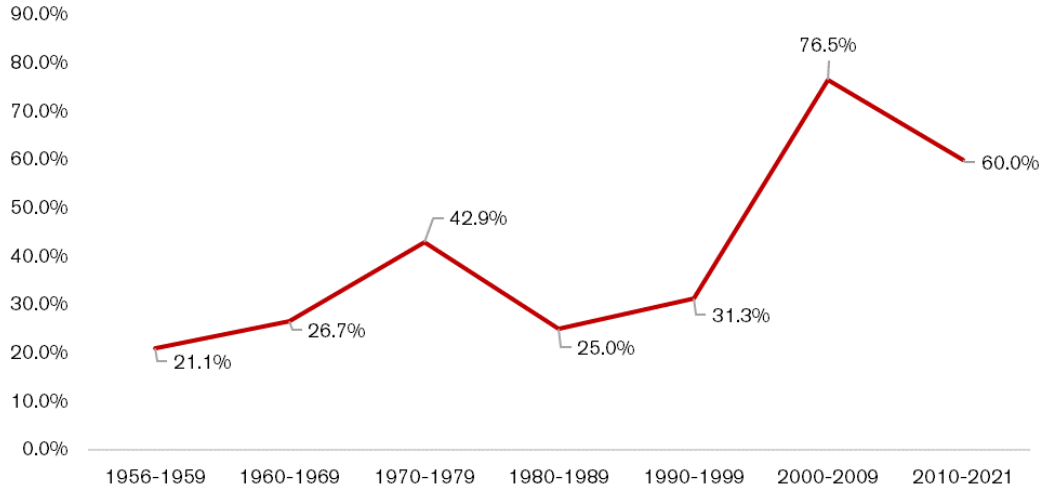
made up of experienced professionals in politics who had often held several mandates during their careers. The selection of constitutional judges was part of the *lottizzazione*, so parties attributed judicial posts – such as other public offices – to each coalition party and intraparty faction according to their parliamentary and intraparty strength. The general convention provided for two candidates chosen by the Christian Democratic Party (DC), one by the Communist Party (PCI), one by the Socialist Party (PSI), and one by the smaller parties. There have been formulas for the Presidents of the Republic as well. For instance, President Gronchi declared his personal "magic formula for appointment: one pre-fascist Liberal, one [politically] independent Catholic, one Christian Democratic representative, one technician with monarchist sympathies, and one republican jurist" (Bonini 1996: 95).

In such a scenario, the highest percentages were reached during the first years of the Italian Republic, when more than half of the first generation of constitutional judges participated in the events surrounding the construction of the Republic. They all represented eminent elder statesmen, reflecting the need to ensure the functioning of the newly born institution and to provide it with greater legitimacy in the years of the institutionalization of constitutional adjudication in the post-war period. In the following years, there was a gradual but clear decline in the percentage of appointees to the Court with previous political experience, reaching the lowest percentage in the last decade (15%).

This decline has been compensated for by the growth in the number of members with different professional backgrounds. Besides political experience, constitutional judges hold increasing technical experience as senior civil servants in the national bureaucracies (i.e., in national banks, ministries, and other governmental agencies). The most notable change reflects the period following the Tangentopoli scandal and the establishment of the so-called Second Italian Republic (1993-today) (Figure 2). The political instability opened by the judicial and media earthquake reshaped the context and the structures of power in which the Court – and its judges – was called to act. As the *cursus honorum* of constitutional judges, whereas the Court of the First Republic (1948-1993) can be noted for its small number of former senior civil servants, with most of these individuals recruited from the top of the Italian judicial hierarchy (Escarras 1990: 172-173), this composition is reversed for the most recent political phase. The rise of former heads of the Cabinet of Ministers, heads of studies and legislation, members of independent authorities, and technical advisors to ministries or other governmental bodies became commonplace.

Between 1993 and 2021, the percentage increased to 60%, peaking at 76.5 % of the appointments made between 2000-2010. It is noteworthy that this trend also involved the judges elected by Parliament, thus suggesting greater insulation of the Court from party-based politics, and the crisis of pervasiveness of the role of the parties in the processes of judicial appointment. Only two of the fifteen judges in office in 2020 have had previous political experience, while half of them held relevant positions in the Italian bureaucracy, such as head of the legislative office, or special advisors to parties and government on specific policy areas, such as Luca Antonini (fiscal federalism) and Francesco Viganò (statute-barred criminality).

Figure 2. Percentage of constitutional judges with technical experience as senior civil servant in the national bureaucracies by decades



Source: own elaboration from the dataset.

These trends underline how, over time, the Italian constitutional judicial elite has established regular channels of access and recruitment into its ranks. While for a long time, previous political experience and a clear political profile characterized the pre-career of judges, technical experience seems to better enable them to accumulate resources and therefore to be identified as a potential candidate and get more chances to reach a judicial position. These channels often also serve to socialize constitutional judge-aspirants in a particular way (Cassese 2015). Although a relationship between pre-career and the understanding of political issues can only be assumed, the trend towards the preponderance of former senior civil servants could imply that constitutional judges are increasingly prepared to deal with the many and specialized issues brought before the Court. At the same time, it reflects a general challenge in the profile of constitutional judges, so that their professional career develops skills in an increasingly technical rather than a policy-oriented application – and interpretation – of statutes.

In such a scenario, the careers of the Constitutional Court judges suggest a general overlapping of the Italian elite and the increasing practice among them of crossing over (Secker 1995). More in detail, a political pre-career became a less relevant criterion for judicial selections during the Italian Second Republic. On the one hand, the search for an institutional legitimacy alternative to party legitimacy has increasingly relied on the authoritativeness and image of independence of more and more technical figures. This point explains the particular attention paid to this point in recent decades: in the face of a political class in a crisis of confidence and reputation, involved in a chronic democratic deficit and in the credibility and legitimacy of its actions, technical figures have increasingly been seen as more reliable and trustworthy actors to be appointed to the bench.

Lastly, it should be observed that having a technical or political pre-career does not affect the possibility to achieve the role of President within the Court, as the election usually falls to one of the most senior members.[7] The President of the Court is the most

[7] Of the 117 constitutional judges in office from 1956 to 2021, 38% achieved the role of President.

prominent political figure inside the decision-making process, and has come to be seen as the public face of the Court (c.f. Scheppele 2005). Indeed, he/she chairs the Annual Conference on the Constitutional Court's work and has the institutional power of moral suasion, advising parliaments and governments on specific policy areas or enacted laws. This prerogative has long been used during the Annual Conferences, which are the only public occasions when the President discusses the most important and critical decisions and issues of the year. More recently, along with the personalization of the presidency, which has been redefining its role in the public arena, there has been a widening of the channels of moral suasion. In addition to the increase in the number of interviews, a large number of posts, tweets and videos focus first and foremost on the President, fueling the scope and the echo of the Constitutional Court's voice in the political arena (Musella and Rullo 2023b).

The President of the Court manages the agenda, sits on all cases decided by the Court and, in the event of a tie, the President's vote is decisive because his or her vote carries more weight than that of the other Council members. In the same vein, the President chooses the Vice-President and the Judge-Rapporteur. The latter is in charge of writing the final opinion and could "orient" the discussion on the law under review. This is a critical responsibility, despite the fact that this final decision is always the responsibility of the entire Court and that concurring and dissenting opinions are not allowed.

While these characteristics suggest a strong presidential power and its influence on the overall functioning of the Court, other factors have to be highlighted such as the term they serve in office. While the three-year term of office would be formally renewable, throughout the history of the Italian Constitutional Court Presidents have rarely completed a full term. Even more rarely, they have been re-elected, as in the case of Gaspare Ambrosini, Leopoldo Elia, Francesco Saja. Therefore, the rise of the "fast-Presidencies" means it is not easy to identify the eras of the Italian Constitutional Court in terms of its Presidents, as is possible, for example, with the US Supreme Court, using the Warren Court, the Burger Court and the Rehnquist Court, or with the Hungarian Court with the Sólyom era (1990-1998).

Of the 44 presidents of the Court between 1956 and 2021, almost half were in office for a year or less, sometimes leaving only a few days before the end of their term in office. Specifically, the number of months (on average) decreases over time, with a clear difference between the first 30 years (1956-1986) of the Court and the following decades, reaching the lowest point (11.1 months) in the period 2010-2021. The prevailing practice has allowed the election of a President for fewer than 100 days, as in the case of judges Vincenzo Caianiello (44 days) and Mario Rosario Morelli (86 days). Marta Cartabia remained in office for 9 months.

According to some authors, this practice has to do with the status privileges (i.e. the title Emeritus President) granted to the presidents after their retirement, which can thus be distributed among a large number of judges (Cassese 2015: 228). According to another interpretation, this practice originates from the desire to preserve the cohesion of the ICC, thus avoiding an "individualism" that would jeopardize the principle of collegiality, and to grant an adequate turnover which exalts seniority within the Council (Barsotti et al. 2015; Cassese 2015). However, the need to reform the actual practice by making the three-year term mandatory for the potential President has also been stressed

(Cardone 2016). This would increase the possibility of putting the Court's work on a more stable footing.

Finally, looking at the body selecting the President it can be observed that over 70% of Presidents have been appointed by Parliament and the President of the Republic. These data reflect the taboo surrounding judges elected for the presidency by the High Courts, which characterized the Court until the end of the eighties. The first case is the election, in 1987, of the former President of the Court of Cassation, Francesco Saja. The Saja term opened the way of the presidency to other 11 former members of the High Courts, peaking at four during the decade 1990-1999 (Granata, Ruperto, Chieppa, Bile). The evolution of the composition of the Constitutional Court is then in line with the evolution of the political system *at large*, reflecting the changing geography of Italian powers and the progressive expansion of judicial power in Italy during those years.

5. Conclusion and perspectives

The study of the traits and life experiences of constitutional judges has usually attracted little interest in political science-oriented research. The importance of this study, therefore, lies as much in the empirical implications of the mechanism under study as it does in its normative implications. Focusing on the Italian case, this article highlighted that the analysis of the profiles and careers of constitutional judges makes way for identifying the main characteristics of those who make up Constitutional and Supreme courts in contemporary judicialized politics. Moreover, as Putnam pointed out (1976: 166), "changes in the composition of political elites provide a crucial diagnostic of the basic tides of history".

This article explores the profiles and careers of the constitutional judicial elite, leading to a broadened assessment and understanding of the challenges and the characteristics of powerful political actors operating in Italian politics. It observed a lack of judicial diversity at the Italian Constitutional Court, and the changing dynamics of pre-career experience, revealing the expertise and trajectories that have led individuals to *Palazzo della Consulta* throughout its history. Then, by taking together the main elements of the profiles and pre-careers of Italian constitutional judges, it provided systematic information on the constitutional judges in office from 1956 to 2021.

This stream of research can have a global range, with the study of the Italian case which can be of great interest for further analyses. Thus, it can stimulate European scholars trained in political science, opening an agenda for further research to analyze patterns and trends in greater depth.

First, it stimulates further reflections on the profiles and careers of constitutional judges from a comparative perspective. It offers a clear and systematic way of analyzing the career of constitutional judges, which can be extended to other political regimes, and may be an agenda for future cross-institutional and cross-national analysis. For instance, future studies could build regression models to determine whether the sociodemographic background or the pre-career of judges has an impact on how they decide cases. In this sense, building on Pederzoli (2008) and Musella and Rullo (2023b), a possible step forward would be to explore possible diachronic patterns of declarations of unconstitutionality and to test well-founded hypotheses on the relationship between the Italian Court's decisions and the characteristics of the judges, and to understand the

challenges of the role of the Constitutional Court with the evolution of the broader political system.

Second, exploring the post-career of constitutional judges can be fundamental to understanding whether the Constitutional Court is a dead end in terms of career or whether it can also be used as a stepping stone towards other prestigious positions.[8] This theme opens up to a challenging stream of empirical research, looking at the career ambitions of judges, and how they can affect the integrity, independence, and transparency of judges' decisions while in office, also in light of the trend towards a greater number of judges with a post-career in politics or high-level state bureaucracy (Pederzoli 2020). Studying pre- and post-bench careers can highlight the reasons for the links between serving as a Constitutional Court judge and holding subsequent institutional positions.

Third, another promising avenue should better analyze the judicial appointment system, and its impact on judicial behavior as well as the consequences on the relationship between Constitutional and Supreme Courts and other political actors (Hanretty 2020). Further research will help to outline the effects of the institutional structures and the judicial behavior of judges. What are the implications of the Italian mixed selection method on their decision-making during constitutional review cases? Are judges' decisions more prone to striking down laws because of the body selecting them? Then, it would be interesting to explore how judges with different selectors have distinct voices when adjudicating constitutional questions as recently observed for the Chilean and Colombian Constitutional courts (Tiede 2022).

Fourth, further comparative analyses should better focus on the 'selectorate' of the constitutional judges, focusing on the politics of judicial selection. While the institutional design aims to insulate judges from political pressures, yet ensuring some form of accountability, the selection of constitutional judges marks one of the fields where parliaments, executives, and courts most visibly interact. With regard to the Italian case, to what extent was the Constitutional Court connected to the evolution of the Italian political system between the First and Second Republics? The selection of constitutional judges has for a long time been part of the *lottizzazione*, so that parties attributed judicial posts – such as other public offices – to each coalition party and intraparty faction according to their parliamentary and intraparty strength. What are the consequences of the end of the Italian particracy since the 1990s? And the impact of the presidentialization of politics? Does it affect changes in the political appointments to the Court due to the weakness of the party's consensual approach?

At this stage, the analysis of the composition and the challenges of the career of constitutional judges reveals fascinating dynamics which help to outline the ongoing transformations of the Italian political system. At the same time, further comparative analyses will increase our knowledge about the transformations of this powerful elite in the country and other political regimes.

[8] We can recall, for instance, the case of Sergio Mattarella. Moreover, in the 2022 Presidential election, the names of Marta Cartabia, Sabino Cassese, and Giuliano Amato were prominent, with Cartabia being named as the "official" candidate of the Azione party by his leader.

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Appendix

The study of the profiles and careers of Constitutional Court judges is largely unexplored. This article discusses the long-term transformations of constitutional judicial elites in Italy, including information on the profiles and careers of the Italian constitutional judges since the early days of the Italian Republic. Drawing on a new dataset that collects detailed information on all the Italian constitutional judges (n=117) in office from 1956 to 2021, this article is one of the first attempts at identifying the profiles and careers of the Italian constitutional judicial elite. Around 20 indicators characterize each judge, related to socio-demographic properties (gender, age, region of birth, occupation), political and technical trajectories (types of mandates, career features, political and technical experience, type and longevity in the different positions held, and so on), which bodies appointed them (Parliament, President of the Republic, High Courts). These data derive from different sources: the Constitutional Court's official dataset (https://dati.cortecostituzionale.it) which contains publicly accessible information about constitutional judges (list of all constitutional judges with dates of swearing in, termination, and a short biographical note); the Chamber of Deputies or Senate when judges have held political positions; literature focusing on the Italian case such as Pederzoli (2020); Breton and Fraschini (2003); Fiorino et al. (2015); Panizza (2002). The information provided was cross-checked against other sources (institutional websites, Wikipedia, and the press).

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Personalized politics in turbulent times: patterns of decentralized personalization in the 2022 Italian general elections

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Abstract

One of the most significant phenomena in contemporary politics is personalization. Several studies have shown that voters are more influenced by the characteristics of leaders and/or candidates than in the past. This analysis examines the paths of personalization taken by candidates in the single-member districts during the 2022 Italian General Election, contributing to the existing knowledge on decentralized personalization in the behavioural arena. Using an original dataset on candidates from the four main coalitions participating in the 2022 General Election (centre-right, centre-left, M5S, and Azione-Italia Viva), the study aims to assess how political professionalization, localness, and affiliation with radical/extremist parties influence the share of personal votes. Consistent with the literature, the research confirms that local candidates tend to receive a higher share of personal votes, while candidates from radical or extremist parties tend to receive less. The study also finds that political professionalization is associated with a decreased share of personal votes, adding complexity to the decentralization of personalization and the transformation of Italian parliamentary representation.

1. Introduction

One of the most discussed subjects in contemporary political science is political personalization. Since the 1990s, numerous researchers have examined this phenomenon in Western democracies (e.g., Poguntke & Webb, 2005; Rahat & Sheafer, 2007; McAllister, 2007; Karvonen, 2010; Webb & Poguntke, 2013; Balmas et al., 2014; Costa Lobo & Curtice, 2015; Rahat & Kenig, 2018; Coffé & Schoultz, 2021; Garzia et al., 2022; Marino et al., 2022). From an analytical perspective, personalization can be understood as the process by which individuals gain increasing centrality in the political arena, often at the expense of parties and other collective organizations (Karvonen, 2010). The literature also distinguishes between two distinct processes of personalization, depending on whether they refer to party leaders, presidents, or prime ministers ('centralized' personalization), or individual parliamentarians and politicians ('decentralized' personalization) (Balmas et al., 2014). In terms of its impact on voting behaviour (behavioural personalization), most of the literature has focused on the centralized aspect of personalization, rather than the decentralized dimension. Specifically, there is extensive evidence on how personalization affects the balance of power in contemporary political systems and the interaction between party leaders and their organizations, but there has been relatively less inquiry into how this phenomenon

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interacts with candidates and politicians at both national and subnational levels (Pedersen & Rahat, 2021).

However, in recent times, literature has shown increasing interest in studying decentralized personalization, frequently through case studies (Renwick & Pilet, 2016; Friedman & Friedberg, 2021; Bøggild et al., 2021; Wauters et al., 2021; Dodeigne & Pilet, 2021). This article contributes to this specific strand of literature by examining the patterns of decentralized personalization among candidates in single member districts (SMDs) during the 2022 Italian General Election. The research focuses on the impact of personal characteristics that have not been extensively studied in the existing literature, such as political professionalization, localness, and ideological affiliation with extremist/radical parties. This inclusion of non-political elements, alongside political factors like candidacy with radical or extremist parties, constitutes a novel aspect compared to recent research in the social sciences, which helps improve our understanding of the dynamics of personalization. Indeed, voter preferences are formed in a context where personal and political characteristics are intertwined. Furthermore, increasing ideological polarization and the emergence of radical/extremist parties may play a significant role in shaping voting orientations, potentially diminishing the significance of non-political characteristics. Specifically, this study aims to examine how various characteristics related to political professionalization, localness, and party affiliation in the SMDs influence the acquisition of personal votes. The article has a twofold aim. First, it aims to contribute to research on decentralized personalization by providing new empirical data on how these processes play out in Western European countries and by testing traditional and new variables. Secondly, it aims to illustrate how these processes unfold their effects within the Italian case, a context characterized by persistent instability, volatility and de-institutionalization (Chiaramonte, 2023). The research was carried out using a multivariate analysis applied to the candidates (N=584) in the SMDs of the four main coalitions (centre-right, centre-left, M5S and Azione-Italia Viva) including – in addition to the independent variables – some control variables.

The results partially confirm expectations, highlighting that localness is one of the most significant factors in influencing the percentage of personal votes, whereas belonging to extremist/radical parties has a negative influence. Also, the analysis reveals that increasing levels of political personalization have a negative impact on the acquisition of personal votes.

The article is structured as follows. The first section outlines the theoretical framework, introduces the research question, and presents the hypotheses that guided the analysis. The second section discusses the case selection and research method and explains variables operationalization. The third section provides descriptive statistics and discusses the results of the data analysis. The final section concludes the article.

2. Theoretical framework, research question and hypotheses

From a theoretical perspective, scholars have identified three different dimensions of political personalization: media, institutional and behavioural. Media personalization refers to the dominance of individual-focused coverage by mass media rather than collective organizations. Institutional personalization occurs when institutions are reformed to give individuals greater centrality compared to political groups. Behavioural

personalization relates to the increasing individualization of politicians' behaviour and the tendency of voters to base their choices on the personal characteristics of leaders and candidates (Rahat & Sheafer, 2007; Rahat & Kenig, 2018).

Furthermore, a second line of conceptualization refers to subjects who benefit from personalization. The literature points out that it can refer to party leaders, institutional leaders (presidents or prime ministers), and the wider category of politicians active both at the national and the local level (Zittel & Gschwend, 2008; Van Holsteyn, 2011; Kriesi, 2012). In this vein, scholars have distinguished between, on the one hand, 'centralized personalization' which affects national party leaders and institutional ones and, on the other, 'decentralized' personalization which affects single candidates and parliamentarians (Balmas et al. 2014). More specifically, centralized personalization is defined as the process by which power flows upwards from the group (e.g., political party) to a single leader (e.g., prime minister, president) (ibid.: 37). On the contrary, decentralized personalization is defined as a process by which the power flows from the group to individual politicians who are not party or executive leaders (e.g., candidates, members of parliament) (ibid.).

Although behavioural personalization is undoubtedly the most investigated personalization process (Wauters et al., 2018), researchers have mainly focused on centralized personalization (Pruysers et al., 2018; Pedersen & Rahat, 2021). It is only recently that a bourgeoning literature has started to investigate decentralized behavioural personalization (McAllister, 2015; Pruysers et al. 2018; Rahat & Kenig, 2018) and documented the diffusion of decentralized personalization practices among Western countries (Costa Lobo & Curtice, 2015; Renwick & Pilet, 2016; Wauters et al., 2018; Pedersen, 2019; De Winter et al., 2021). Understanding decentralized personalization is crucial as it sheds light on the factors influencing citizens' voting choices and provides insights into the changing nature of political parties and representative democracy.

At the same time, a growing body of research has examined how, in the context of personalization, a politician's personal traits can support forms of personal voting. Alongside traditional features such as gender (Dolan, 2004; Valdini, 2013), profession (Mechtel, 2011), or ethnicity (Fisher *et al.*, 2014), additional characteristics have been progressively explored, such as incumbency (Desposato & Petrocik, 2003; Carson *et al.*, 2007) or localness (Shugart et al., 2005; Tavits, 2010; Put and Maddens, 2015; Jankowski, 2016; Collignon and Sajuria, 2018).

As previously mentioned, this study aligns with the existing literature on decentralized personalization and the attributes associated with personal vote earnings. It seeks to explore the patterns of decentralized personalization among candidates in SMDs during the 2022 Italian General Election and particularly to investigate specific aspects such as political professionalization, localness, and affiliation with extremist/radical parties, which have received limited attention in previous research. The decision to focus on these aspects stems from the desire to explore dimensions that have not traditionally been explored in the social sciences or are still the subject of ongoing debate.

Professionalization is a widely discussed concept in contemporary social sciences. It is important to clarify its characteristics as it represents a fundamental preliminary step, because understanding the concept involves understanding 'what is important about an entity' (Goertz, 2006, 27). In modern democracies, there has been significant

attention given to the trend towards professionalization within the political class (Best & Cotta, 2000; Borchert & Zeiss, 2003; Best, 2007).

Conceptually, political professionalization refers to the process by which the role of politicians becomes an autonomous profession, transitioning from what Max Weber referred to as 'living for politics' to 'living off politics' (Weber, 1919). This shift transforms political activity from an amateur activity to a professional career (Verzichelli, 2010). The process of political professionalization, as highlighted by Best and Vogel (2018, p. 354), creates an 'insider-outsider differential' between individuals who belong to the political class (politicians) and those who are excluded (ordinary people). Moreover, due to the considerable variation in professionalization paths and political career trajectories (Putnam, 1976; Dogan, 1989; Blondel & Thiebault, 1991; Dowding & Dumont, 2009; 2014), this process leads to a growing divide between professional politicians, who have established political careers propelling them to prominent positions within their respective parties and/or national institutions, and those with less structured political careers (Verzichelli, 2010).

It is conceivable that in the context of growing personalization, where politics is increasingly perceived as a contest between individuals (Pedersen & Rahat, 2021), higher levels of political professionalization may influence the ability to acquire personal votes. Political professionalization entails the acquisition of specialized skills in political affairs, visibility, resources (including non-economic ones), and the development of political capital (Bourdieu, 1991; Gaxie, 2018), which can be reinvested in the political field and electoral competition (Bourdieu, 1991; Offerlé, 2012). As a result, voters may choose to vote based on a candidate's visibility and political career, rather than party affiliation or legislative record, aligning with a process of personalization from below (Gauja, 2018). Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that candidates with longer political careers will receive a higher share of personal votes compared to candidates with shorter political careers. Building on the provided context, we can formulate the first hypothesis:

> *H1*: Candidates with high political professionalization tend to acquire a higher share of personal votes.

However, it is also possible to envision a reverse process. Part of the scholarly literature has demonstrated how the strong personalization of politics can contribute to democratic malaise. The increasing professionalization of politics implies a significant internal homogenization in terms of social background, leading to a greater disconnect from the general population (Allen, 2013; Allen & Cairney, 2017; Fawcett & Corbett, 2018). In this sense, 'professionalization has contributed to this trend by creating a self-referential and insulated elite' (Fawcett & Corbett, 2018, p. 1). Professional politicians may lose touch with ordinary citizens because they no longer resemble them, instead focusing more on their own career advancement rather than the common good or the interests of ordinary people (Wright, 2013; Allen et al., 2020).

This argument assumes particular relevance in the Italian context, which has been marked by the success of the Five Star Movement (M5S), a political party that has made the fight against the political class and political professionalization one of its distinctive themes. Empirically, this scepticism towards professional politicians can result in a lower propensity to attract personal votes. Moreover, previous research on the 2018 elections found a negative association between political experience and the acquisition of

personal votes (Pedrazzani & Pinto, 2018), with political newcomers or outsiders receiving a relatively higher share (Fruncillo & Giannatiempo, 2018).

Based on these considerations, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

> *H1-bis*: Candidates with high political professionalization tend to acquire a lower share of personal votes.

Additionally, scholars have highlighted the role played by localness in obtaining personal votes (Tavits, 2010; Fisher et al., 2014; Jankowski, 2016; Collignon & Sajuria, 2018).

Academic studies suggest that candidates with a stronger local profile tend to be more successful in elections (Lewis Beck & Rice, 1983; Arzheimer & Evans, 2012; Gorecki & Marsh, 2012; Roy & Alcantara, 2015; Jankowski, 2016) and attract more personal votes compared to candidates without or with limited local attributes (Tavits, 2010; Put et al., 2019). In this perspective, characteristics that highlight the candidate's strong local roots, such as being born in the candidate's constituency and/or having held or currently holding political office, can favour the exercise of descriptive representation, thus increasing the number of personal votes. This phenomenon is referred to as 'behavioural localism' (Campbell et al., 2019). Essentially, the presence of these territorial roots serves as a cognitive shortcut for voters (Popkin, 1994), directing them to infer greater knowledge and attentiveness to the issues of their community. As a result, voters are inclined to support candidates with local attributes because they believe they are better at advocating for their interests in national institutions.

However, despite the vast array of research on the topic, limitations persist in a scholarly understanding of the dynamics of localness, primarily due to the lack of reliable data on defeated candidates (Tavits, 2010).

Regarding the Italian context, recent research has highlighted the widespread prevalence of previous local political experience among both the parliamentary class (Tronconi & Verzichelli, 2019) and the pool of candidates (Boldrini, 2020), as well as its relative importance as a personal vote earning attribute (Boldrini, 2023), albeit with variations across different political coalitions.

Based on these findings, it is possible to introduce the second hypothesis:

> *H2*: Candidates with high localness tend to acquire a higher share of personal votes.

Finally, the last hypothesis is linked to the nature of the party to which candidates belong. As briefly mentioned, personal and political characteristics interact in shaping voters' voting orientations. Western countries are experiencing a growing wave of political polarization, characterized by an increasing ideological distance between parties and the emergence of new radical and extremist parties (Hansen, 2016; Somer & McCoy, 2018). As some literature has pointed out (Kal Munis, 2021), enhanced electoral polarization may lead to a greater influence of partisan loyalty in shaping voting orientations, thereby diminishing the relevance of non-partisan characteristics. Also, particularly concerning radical/right-wing extremist political parties, national leadership plays a central role and acts as a key factor in driving support for these parties (Michel et al., 2020), thereby limiting the potential for personal voting based on individual candidates' characteristics. This does not imply that candidates from radical/extremist parties receive fewer votes overall, but rather that they receive fewer personal votes. Strong

polarization can lead to a mobilization focused more on party proposals than on the personal characteristics of the candidate, thereby favouring party voting over the development of a distinct personal vote. It must be emphasized that this does not necessarily imply that voters are aware of the candidate's party affiliation, but rather that the candidacy of a radical/extremist party fosters polarization, which in turn leads to mobilization along party lines rather than based on personal characteristics. As a result, the party's influence may overshadow the individual candidate. To some extent, this lower competitiveness of radical and extremist candidates has also been empirically observed in the Italian context. Previous research on Italian elections (Bartolini & D'Alimonte, 1995; D'Alimonte & Bartolini, 1997) has shown that candidates belonging to radical/extremist parties have lower competitive capacity. Essentially, belonging to a radical/extremist party can have a 'repulsive' effect on voters compared to belonging to a moderate party. It can be hypothesized that this effect also extends to the ability to mobilize personal votes, with voters being less inclined to vote for a candidate (regardless of their personal characteristics) simply because they belong to radical/extremist lists. Based on this, it is possible to formulate the third and final research hypothesis:

> *H3*: Candidates from radical/extremist parties tend to acquire a lower share of personal votes.

3. Case selection, data, and methods

As mentioned earlier, this article examines the paths of decentralized personalization by analysing candidates in SMDs during the 2022 Italian General Election. Therefore, the study can be considered as case study research, adopting an interpretative-explorative perspective (Yin, 2018). The decision to conduct a case study-based analysis was driven by the nature of the research topic. The variation in electoral laws across countries makes it challenging to conduct direct comparisons, particularly in relation to majoritarian systems where operationalizing personal votes becomes difficult. Moreover, data on defeated candidates (those who were not elected) are often scarce in different countries, making their collection and reliability more challenging. For these reasons, the case study approach was deemed the most appropriate for this type of analysis. From this perspective, the 2022 Italian General Election provides an interesting case to investigate. A first interesting feature relates to the characteristics of the mixed majoritarian and proportional electoral law, the Rosato law, approved in 2017. Under this law, one-third of MPs are elected in SMDs, while the remaining two-thirds are elected in multi-member districts (MMDs) with closed lists. However, the two tiers are connected, with candidates in the SMDs linked to a list (or a coalition of lists) in the MMDs through a fused vote (Chiaramonte & D'Alimonte, 2018).

In terms of voting structure, voters have three different choices. Firstly, they can vote for a single list supporting a candidate in the proportional part. In this case, the vote is counted for the party and automatically transferred to the linked candidate in the SMD. Secondly, voters can cast a vote for the candidate in the SMD. The vote is then counted for the candidate and automatically transferred to the supporting list or coalition *pro quota* based on the votes obtained in the MMD. Lastly, voters can vote for both a candidate in the SMD and a list in the MMD, and in this case, the vote is counted for both.

These voting possibilities point in two directions: one guided by the preference for the list and the other by the preference for the candidate (Pedrazzani & Pinto, 2018). The capacity to distinguish between voting for the candidate and voting for the list provides a valuable opportunity for this investigation. Although there is no real personal vote due to the fused vote mechanism, the 'only candidate' vote can demonstrate the candidate's ability to attract votes independently of the supporting lists, especially in the presence of a coalition (Fruncillo & Giannatiempo 2018). Thus, votes cast solely for the candidate can be considered a form of personalized voting, allowing for the exploration of their distribution between different candidates and the factors that contribute to their collection (Pedrazzani & Pinto, 2018, p. 406).

Moreover, the 2022 Italian General Election is an interesting case due to specific features of the political system. Italy has often been cited as one of the clearest examples of political personalization among European countries (Karvonen, 2010; Calise, 2010; Garzia, 2011; 2017; Bordignon, 2013; Musella, 2014; 2020; Marino et al., 2022). However, while some research has emphasized the relevance of personalization processes even within political parties (Musella, 2014; 2018; Calise, 2015; Marino et al. 2022), most studies have focused on the centralized dimension of personalization rather than the decentralized one. Also, the 2022 Italian General Election is an interesting case in terms of its outcome. As widely known, the elections were characterized by the dominance of the centre-right coalition and the significant rise of Fratelli d'Italia, which experienced a remarkable increase in vote share from 4.4% in the 2018 general elections to 24.4% (Garzia, 2022), marking one of the largest electoral growths among Western European countries (Emanuele et al., 2022). Additionally, the elections were marked by historically low voter turnout (Improta et al., 2022) and high levels of electoral volatility, ranking among the highest in Western countries (Emanuele et al., 2022), indicating the persistent instability and de-institutionalization affecting the Italian political system (Chiaramonte, 2023). Examining the 2022 election allows us to explore the pathways of decentralized personalization in a context of high instability, providing valuable insights from a cross-national comparison with other European contexts.

The analysis focuses on examining candidates from four different parties and coalitions in SMDs: the centre-left coalition, the centre-right coalition, the Five Star Movement (M5S), and the Azione - Italia Viva list (AZ-IV).[1] The choice to limit the analysis to major coalitions was made to ensure comparability of results and data reliability. The inclusion of smaller parties, which lack parliamentary representation and have limited or no chances of electing MPs, would have compromised the robustness of the analysis.[2] Moreover, in order to enhance comparability of results, and considering the specificity of the European Upper Chambers, it was decided to exclude candidates in the

[1] Although only two are actual coalitions (the centre-right and centre-left), while the others are parties (the M5S and AZ-IV), for the sake of simplicity, the term 'coalitions' will be used to refer to all of them.

[2] As is known, the election was won by the centre-right coalition, which obtained a 43.8% share of the votes in the Chamber of Deputies. The centre-left coalition received 26.1%, the M5S 15.4%, and Azione - Italia Viva 7.8%. In terms of SMDs, the centre-right won 121 districts, the centre-left 12, the M5S 10, and Azione - Italia Viva none. Two districts were won by the Sudtiroler Volkspartei, and one by the Sud chiama Nord list.

Senate and focus solely on candidates in the Chamber of Deputies. Therefore, the sample consists of 584 candidates.[3]

To test the initial hypotheses, a linear regression with Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) was conducted, with the candidate's share of personal votes as dependent variable. Consistent with previous literature (Pedrazzani & Pinto, 2018), the share of personal votes was operationalized as the total number of 'only candidate' votes (i.e., votes received exclusively by the candidate in each district, excluding party list votes) divided by the overall votes received by the party or coalition in each district. This variable ranges from 0 (no 'only candidate' votes in addition to party votes) to 1 (all votes received by the candidate are 'only candidate' votes). Data on 'only candidate' and party votes were extracted from the transparency portal of the Ministry of the Interior website.

The independent variables included in the analysis are level of political professionalization, level of localness, and affiliation with a radical/extremist party. Political professionalization was operationalized by focusing on the number of political positions held at the national and European levels. The choice to link political professionalization to high specialization political positions, although a necessary simplification, (Vercesi, 2022), follows the traditional approach employed in investigating political professionalism (Bakema & Secker, 1988; Borchert & Zeiss, 2003; Verzichelli, 2010; Best & Higley, 2018). To provide a more nuanced representation of professionalization, an index of political professionalization, derived from the literature (Muller-Rommel & Vercesi, 2017), was applied with slight adaptations for this research. The index focuses on three dimensions commonly used by scholars (Blondel, 1980) to examine political careers: serving as a parliamentarian, serving as a minister, and serving as a national party leader. The index ranges from zero (for candidates with no previous political experience) to three (for candidates with a high level of professionalization, having held the positions of MP, minister, and party leader). The index used in this study does not encompass the full complexity of political professionalization, particularly in omitting sub-national experience that may be significant in the career paths of many parliamentarians. However, its simplicity and accessibility make it highly practical for this investigation, enabling its application in various contexts and facilitating comparability of results. Data on previous national careers were obtained from multiple sources, including the websites of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, the candidates' CVs on the transparency pages of the Ministry of the Interior, and the official websites of individual candidates, when accessible.

Referring to localness, the literature has traditionally operationalized it in a dichotomous manner, considering whether candidates possess characteristics that denote local roots (e.g., being born in the district, holding or having held local government positions). However, this operationalization has been criticized for its simplicity and limited consideration of the multidimensional nature of localness (Marangoni & Tronconi, 2009; Boldrini, 2020). To address this limitation and provide a more comprehensive operationalization, an index of localness derived from the literature (Marangoni & Tronconi, 2009) was utilized. The index ranges from 0 to 3 and is constructed by assigning a point for each of the following: being born in a city included in the SMD, holding

[3] Due to the unique characteristics of the local political system, candidates from the Aosta Valley were also excluded.

positions in a local institution (municipality, province, or region) partially or fully included in the SMD, and holding such positions at the time of the election[4]. For instance, a candidate who has never held local government positions and was not born within the district would have a score of zero, while a candidate born in the SMD, who has held local government positions and was in office at the time of the election, would receive an index of three. Data on previous political positions held at the local level were obtained from the National Registry of Local and Regional Administrators, available on the Ministry of the Interior website.

Lastly, radical/extremist party affiliation was operationalized as a dichotomous variable, with a value of 1 assigned if the candidate belongs to a radical/extremist party. To determine whether a party is considered radical/extremist, the research relied on the 'PopuList' project (Rooduijn et al., 2019) and its updates, which categorize the following parties as far-right and far-left: Brothers of Italy, the League, and the united list Greens-Italian Left Alliance. Other parties not included in this list are considered non-radical/extremist.[5]

To increase the robustness of the analysis, several control variables were included: gender (value 1 if the candidate is female), education (categorized as junior high school or below, high school diploma, or degree or higher), SMD geographic location (divided into North, Red Belt, and South), and original profession, categorized into three groups: politicians, entrepreneurs/managers; professionals (such as lawyers, journalists, and doctors); and clerks and other professions (encompassing all other professions not previously mentioned). Data on profession and education were extracted from the official CVs available on the transparency pages of the Ministry of the Interior.

4. Data analysis and results

Before delving into the results of the multivariate analysis, it is useful to provide a brief overview of the descriptive statistics.

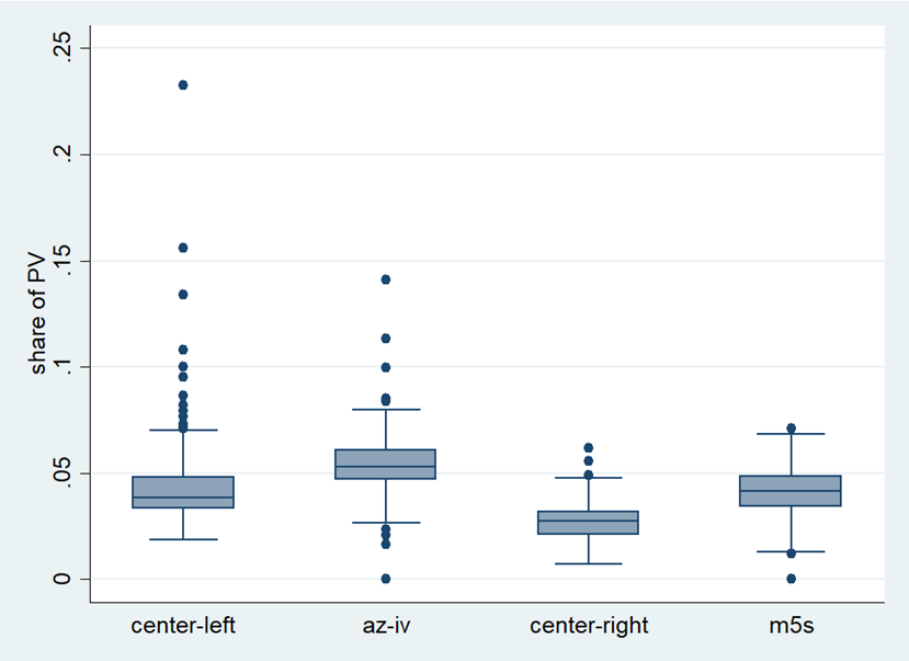
Regarding the distribution of personal votes, there is a noticeable asymmetry. The centre-right coalition tends to receive fewer personal votes compared to the other coalitions. Most centre-right candidates have a personal vote share ranging from approximately 1% to 5%, with a few outliers. The mean value of personal vote share for centre-right candidates is 2.75%, with a median value of 2.72%.[6]

[4] For the purposes of the research and to address the limitations imposed by Italian law, which requires mayors of cities with over 20,000 inhabitants and presidents of regions to resign within seven days from the dissolution of the chambers, candidates were considered in office at the time of the elections if they held a position until the day of parliament's dissolution (July 21).

[5] The data in the PopuList database cover all active Italian parties as of January 1, 2020. Parties or coalitions of parties founded later, such as former Minister Di Maio's Impegno Civico or Maurizio Lupi's Noi Moderati, were considered as 'non-radical/extremist' since they emerged from splits of non-radical/extremist parties.

[6] The centre-right candidates with the highest share of personal votes include Gianfranco Rotondi in the Avellino district (6.2%) and Giorgia Meloni in the L'Aquila district (5.5%) but also Giulio Tremonti (around 5%) in the Lombardy 1-09 SMD (MILANO: NIL 21 - BUENOS AIRES - VENEZIA).

Figure 1. Share of personal vote by coalition at the 2022 Italian general elections[7]



Source: author's elaboration based on data of the Ministry of the Interior.

Values from other coalitions are substantially higher. Centre-left and M5S candidates have a similar distribution of personal votes, between 1% and 7% (mean value 4.5% and 4%, median value 3.8% and 4.2% respectively for the centre-left and for the M5S), even though the centre-left has a remarkably higher number of outliers (in one case collecting more than 20% of personal votes).[8]

Finally, AZ-IV – which did not exist in the previous elections – constitutes the coalition that, overall, managed to make the best use of personal votes. In fact, its candidates collect higher percentages of personal votes, generally ranging between 2% and 8%, with an average value of 5.4% and a median value of 5.3%.[9] Overall, the personal votes distribution among coalitions does not differ significantly from that observed in the 2018 General Election (Pedrazzani & Pinto, 2018; Fruncillo & Giannatiempo, 2018). Use of the personal vote seems substantially limited (although not irrelevant) and seems to be less widespread on the right than in the other coalitions, especially in reference to the centre-left coalition and to AZ-IV.

Moving on to levels of political professionalism (Figure 2), the asymmetry between the centre-right coalition and the other coalitions persists. Centre-right candidates in

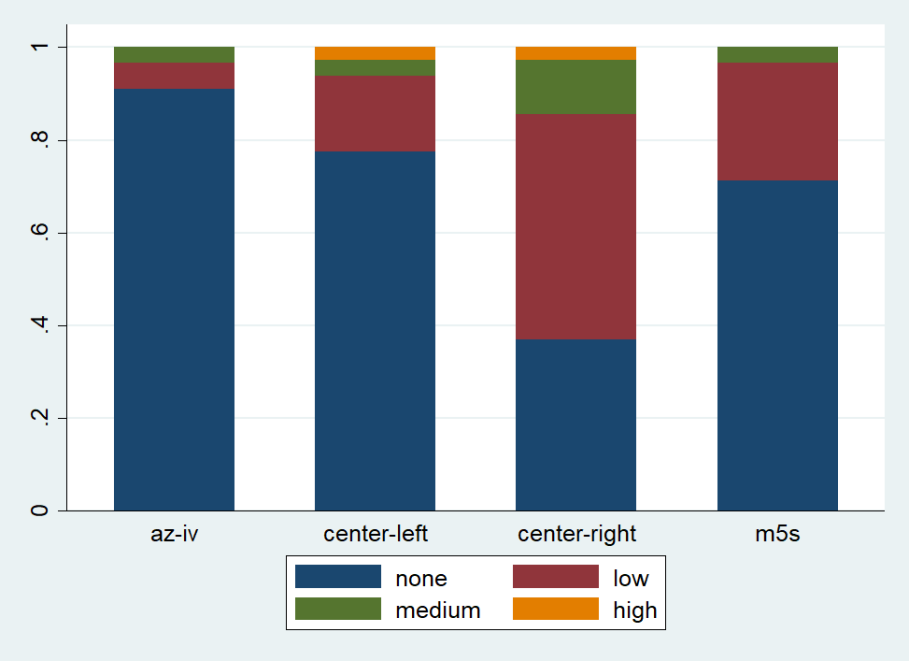
[7] In the data of the Ministry of the Interior, there are four candidates who obtain zero personal votes (two from AZ-IV and two from the M5S) in the two districts of Naples 1-02 and Naples 1-03. Given the general diversity compared to the other data, it is possible that they are a compilation error by the Ministry. However, the data have been retained for completeness (pending further verification) and they do not affect the regression model.

[8] In the centre-left, the absolute champion of personal votes (over 20%) is Franz Ploner, regional councillor of the party only active in the Province of Bolzano Team K, candidate in the Brixen constituency.

[9] Among the candidates who obtained a higher share of personal votes were the National Secretary of the Italian Liberal Youth, Giulia Pantaleo (14.1%), candidate in the Marsala SMD, and the former Minister for Regional Affairs, Enrico Costa (11.3%), candidate in the Cuneo SMD.

the SMDs have higher levels of political professionalization than others. The centre-right is the only coalition in which more than half of the candidates (63%) have some level of professionalization, of which almost half (48%) have a low level of professionalism, while only 14% have a medium and high level of professionalism.

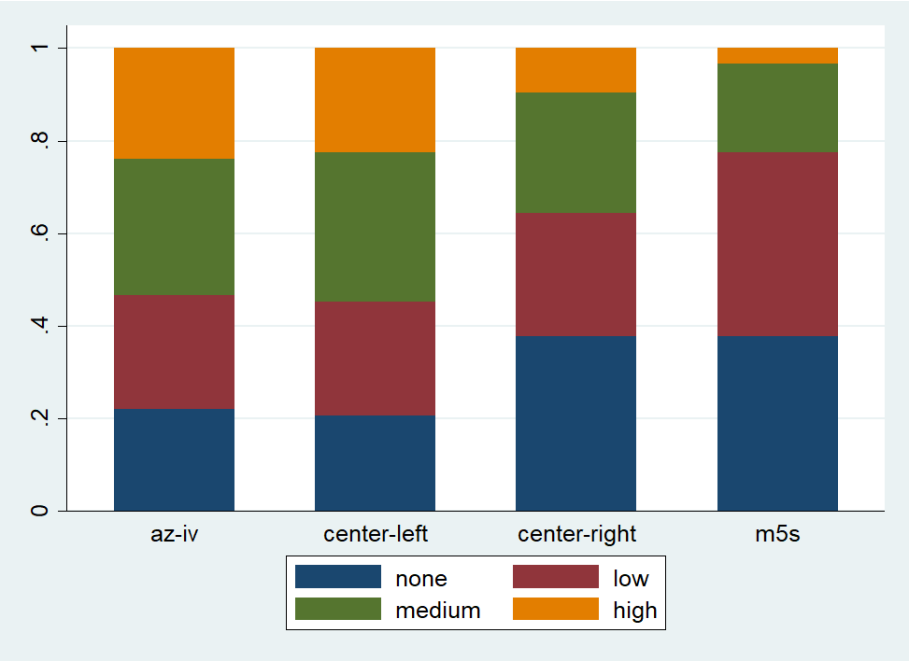
Figure 1. Level of political professionalization by coalition at the 2022 Italian General Election



Source: own elaboration.

In this case as well, the distribution of political professionalization among the M5S and the centre-left coalition is similar, with over two-thirds of the candidates lacking professionalization (77.4% for the centre-left and 71.2% for the M5S). However, a notable difference exists between the two coalitions in terms of candidates with medium and high levels of professional qualifications, comprising approximately 10% of centre-left candidates and only 3% of the M5S (partly due to the complete absence of highly professionalized candidates). On the other hand, AZ-IV stands out as the coalition with the lowest level of non-professionalization, with 91% of candidates lacking professionalization, 3% possessing medium professionalism, and no candidates with high professionalization. It can be hypothesized that the distribution of professionalization levels is influenced by the specific conditions of the 2022 elections. The centre-right coalition's significant advantage and the high probability of winning in most SMDs attracted numerous highly professional politicians who saw their election as highly likely. Conversely, the other coalitions, facing lower chances of victory in SMDs, had fewer national politicians as candidates in those districts, instead focusing on the proportional part of the elections. AZ-IV is an emblematic case, as the remote likelihood of winning SMDs resulted in a strong presence of candidates with no previous national political experience in those districts.

Figure 3. Level of localness by coalition at the 2022 Italian General Election



Source: own elaboration.

The distribution of localness levels exhibits a more balanced pattern (Figure 3). The centre-right and M5S coalitions have the highest number of candidates without localness (55% for both). However, the M5S has a larger proportion of candidates with low localness (39.7%) and a lower proportion of candidates with high localness (3.4%) compared to the centre-right coalition (which has 26.7% and 9.6% of candidates with low and high localness, respectively). On the other hand, in the centre-left and AZ-IV coalitions, candidates with medium and high levels of localness constitute the majority (54.8% and 53.4% of the total, respectively), with a significant presence of candidates with high localness (22.6% and 24%) and a lower presence of candidates without localness (20.5% and 21.9%). These findings align with the observations made for the 2018 elections (Boldrini, 2020). Due to the low likelihood of victory in many SMDs, the centre-left coalition and AZ-IV seem to have favoured the candidacy of 'local' personalities. In contrast, the centre-right coalition, benefiting from its advantage, opted for a less 'local' recruitment strategy with a focus on national politicians. The M5S represents a unique case. However, it should be noted that the party's limited success in local and regional elections (Veltri & Montesanti, 2015) limits the presence of candidates with high localness as operationalized in this research.

Regarding the effects of the independent variables on the share of personal votes, the results of the multivariate analysis are presented in Table 1. The first column displays the non-standardized regression coefficients (b coefficients), while the second column contains the standardized beta coefficients. To simplify the interpretation, the localness and political professionalization indices have been treated as continuous variables. Also, standard errors were clustered at the district level.

Table 1. Effect of personal-votes attributes in determining the share of personal votes of SMDs candidates

	Share of personal votes	
	b	**beta**
Independent variables		
Index of political professionalization	-0.00243* (0.00120)	-0.082* (0.00120)
Index of localness	0.00351*** (0.000729)	0.188*** (0.000729)
Radical/extremist	-0.0158*** (0.00189)	-0.323*** (0.00189)
Control variables		
Female	-0.00145 (0.00149)	-0.037 (0.00149)
University degree	0.000367 (0.00182)	0.008 (0.00182)
Age	0.0000867 (0.0000675)	0.049 (0.0000675)
Original profession (Base category: politicians, entrepreneurs, managers)		
Professionals	-0.000486 (0.00201)	-0.012 (0.00201)
Employees	-0.00186 (0.00210)	-0.044 (0.00210)
Other professions	-0.00277 (0.00354)	-0.032 (0.00354)
SMD geographic localisation (Base category: North)		
Red Belt	-0.00645** (0.00208)	-0.127** (0.00208)
South	-0.00815*** (0.00162)	-0.208*** (0.00162)
_cons	0.0431*** (0.00437)	
N	584	
R-sq.	0.206	

Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses. * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001.

On a general level, the model confirms the influence of the independent variables considered, all of which are statistically significant. Regarding political professionalization, the model shows a negative correlation between professionalization and the percentage of personal votes acquired (standardized coefficient value -0.082). This means that as political professionalization increases, the share of personal votes obtained decreases, contrary to expectations. Therefore, hypothesis 1 *bis* is confirmed.

Regarding localness, the model shows a positive effect on the share of personal votes (beta coefficient 0.188), which aligns with expectations and the literature. This means that as the candidate's localness increases, the percentage of personal votes obtained also increases. Thus, the model highlights pathways of decentralized personalization focused on the local dimension of politics for candidates in SMDs, whereas political professionalization has a negative influence.

Finally, regarding membership in extremist/radical parties, the model demonstrates a strong negative correlation between the percentage of personal votes obtained

and affiliation with these parties. This confirms hypothesis 3, as candidates from radical parties receive a lower percentage of personal votes.

An additional interesting finding from the analysis relates to the control variables. Contrary to that historically stated in the literature (which noted a higher propensity for personal voting in southern constituencies), the analysis shows a statistically significant negative influence of SMDs in the South (and to a lesser extent, in the Red Belt) compared to the North, used as the reference category. This suggests a stronger effect of party mobilization in these regions, particularly in favour of the centre-right, which further limits the development of a strong share of personal votes.

The results presented here align only partially with the findings of previous research on vote personalization in the 2018 elections. Consistent with the literature, the research confirms the importance of local roots in acquiring personal votes (Boldrini, 2023) and the negative effect of political experience (Pedrazzani & Pinto, 2018), indicating that political outsiders tend to gather more personal votes compared to individuals with greater political professionalism (Fruncillo & Giannatiempo, 2018). However, unlike previous research, no statistically significant effect of gender is observed, and the geographical variable exhibits a statistically significant but opposite effect, with candidates from northern regions receiving a higher percentage of personal votes than those from the South. These findings highlight the significant upheavals that have occurred in the country during these elections; however, they are provisional and require further empirical investigation, to verify if this trend will be confirmed.

5. Conclusions

This research explored decentralized personalization patterns of candidates through the examination of a case study, identified in the Italian General Election of 2022. More specifically, this research investigated how specific personal characteristics, including the level of localness, level of political professionalization, and affiliation to a radical/extremist party, influence the acquisition of personal votes. The study aimed to contribute to the scientific literature on personalization in Western countries, but also to explore how these processes play out within an increasingly volatile and deinstitutionalized political environment such as that of Italy's last elections. The research results have implications from both an empirical and a theoretical point of view.

From an empirical point of view, the analysis shows a statistically significant influence of all the independent variables examined, with a positive effect for localness and a negative effect for political professionalization and radical/extremist party membership. Specifically, the research highlighted that local roots matter in influencing the acquisition of personal votes. This contributes in part to explaining the diffusion of candidates with high localness in the SMDs in certain coalitions (i.e. the centre-left and AZ-IV). Because of the starting disadvantage and difficulty in winning SMDs, these two coalitions recruited personalities with high localness to try to gain a competitive advantage over other coalitions. The M5S, instead, seems to maintain its specificity, with a mechanism for selecting candidates and reproducing its ruling class that is different from other parties.

From a theoretical perspective, the research suggests that local roots play an important role in candidates' decentralized personalization, whereas political professionalism seems to have a negative impact on this process. As previously

mentioned, these findings contradict prior expectations and may be attributed to the specific context of the 2022 Italian General Election and the candidate selection strategies of political parties. Observing the results of the analysis, it emerges that, despite the greater number of available resources that political professionalization guarantees (economic, relationships, knowledge, but also the possibility of media exposure) they do not influence the development of personal votes, which instead seems to follow patterns more related to territorial roots. However, these results need further investigation in the future, to explore whether they are an anomaly related to the particular characteristics of the 2022 General Election and the effect of variables that could not be included in this analysis, related, for example, to type of career, its length, and the different positions held.

Finally, the results lead to some further considerations on the evolution of Italian democracy. Previous research has already pointed out the instability and volatility of the Italian political system, in which, on a large scale, there is considerable fluidity in voting orientations, with voters shifting rapidly and massively from one party to another and punishing parties in government. However, this research points to the presence of a second, smaller trend in which local politicians are privileged subjects of personal consensus mobilization during electoral competition. These trends could significantly alter the type of representation and increase the weight of local issues and local political figures in the national political sphere. Future studies will be necessary to determine if these trends persist, what their interactions are, and what direction they will take the Italian political system in the wake of these turbulent times.

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Italian Political Science, VOLUME 17 ISSUE 3

The Italian Political Science community, 2002-2022

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Abstract

What has been the evolution of the Italian Political Science community in the past 20 years? Have there been relevant differences from the career level, geographical, or gender-related viewpoints? This article aims at answering these questions, which are even more interesting on the eve of the start of a new career path for Italian academics, which should markedly modify especially the early stages of career. After discussing the numerical growth of Italian Political Science from 2002 until 2022, the article explores the differences related to career levels and geography. On the former point, there has been an increase in the importance of Associate Professors but also Non-tenure-track academics. In this regard, if the trend experienced in 2018-2022 continued in the following years, we would face a situation where the relative majority of political scientists do not hold a tenure-track position. On the latter aspect, universities located in Northern regions continue employing a relevant sector of the Italian Political Science community, with Central and, especially, Southern universities having a much more marginal role. Finally, the article explores gender-related differences. While there are noticeable signs of a growing prominence of women from the numerical and the growth rate viewpoints, opposite indicators point to a marked difficulty of women to climb the academic career ladder.

1. Introduction

This contribution deals with the evolution of the numerical, qualification-related, geographical, and gender-related distribution of the Italian Political Science community in the last 20 years. The general Research Question (RQ) is to understand the temporal and career-related trajectories of Professors, Researchers, and, for more recent years, Post-Doctoral Research Fellows working within the SPS/04 Scientific Sector Code (SSD – *Settore Scientifico Disciplinare*).[1]

The importance of this RQ is not simply related to the possibility of putting forward a long-term assessment of the changes in the Italian Political Science community. Rather, it is made even more evident at the onset of a new university career reform (Paterlini 2022): one of its most important components probably will be the change in the career track of Italian scholars. More specifically, after the PhD, a new Post-Doctoral research contract would be introduced, followed by a six-year Tenure-Track Researcher position leading to the Associate Professor position, and, finally, a Full Professor position (*ibidem*, Gavosto and Tedesco 2022). All in all, understanding the evolution and the status of the Italian SPS/04 community just before the onset of the umpteenth Ital-

[1] I focus on scholars belonging to the SPS/04 Scientific Sector Code following previous research on the topic (e.g., Capano 2005: 499; Capano and Verzichelli 2010: 115; Marino and Verzichelli 2020).

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ian university reform can be of great interest also to try to understand the possible effects of this reform on the recruitment and career prospects of Italian Political Science scholars.

Data used in this contribution come from two sources: while, for the 2002-2017 period, I have relied on data collected by Luca Verzichelli, I have retrieved data for the 2018-2022 period.[2] The most important difference between the two sources is that data on Post-Doctoral Research Fellows (*Assegnisti di Ricerca*) are only available for the 2018-2022 time frame.[3] As a consequence, when necessary, I will present data by including and excluding this academic career position to make it possible to compare more recent data with older data.

Another difference between the two data sources is that 2002-2017 data were collected at the beginning of each calendar year (i.e., January), while 2018-2022 data were collected in August.

This contribution is structured as follows: in the first section, I present data on the numerical changes in the Italian Political Science community both from a general viewpoint and by considering different academic career levels. The second section tackles the geographical differences across different subnational areas. The third section is devoted to the analysis of gender-related differences. A concluding section follows.

2. Numerical and career-related changes

Let us start by assessing the numerical evolution of the Italian Political Science community over time (Figure 1). The growth of such a community is quite evident, with the number of political scientists growing by more than 60% (from 157 in 2002 to 258 in 2022). Let us remember that, at the end of the 1980s, there were some 106 political scientists in Italy (Morlino 1989: 33). Moreover, the inclusion of Post-Doctoral Research Fellows makes the growth even more evident, with this enlarged Political Science community growing from 287 members in 2018 to 345 in 2022, a rough 17% increase (compared with an approximate 13% increase from 2018 to 2022 if we exclude Post-Doctoral Research Fellows from the count).

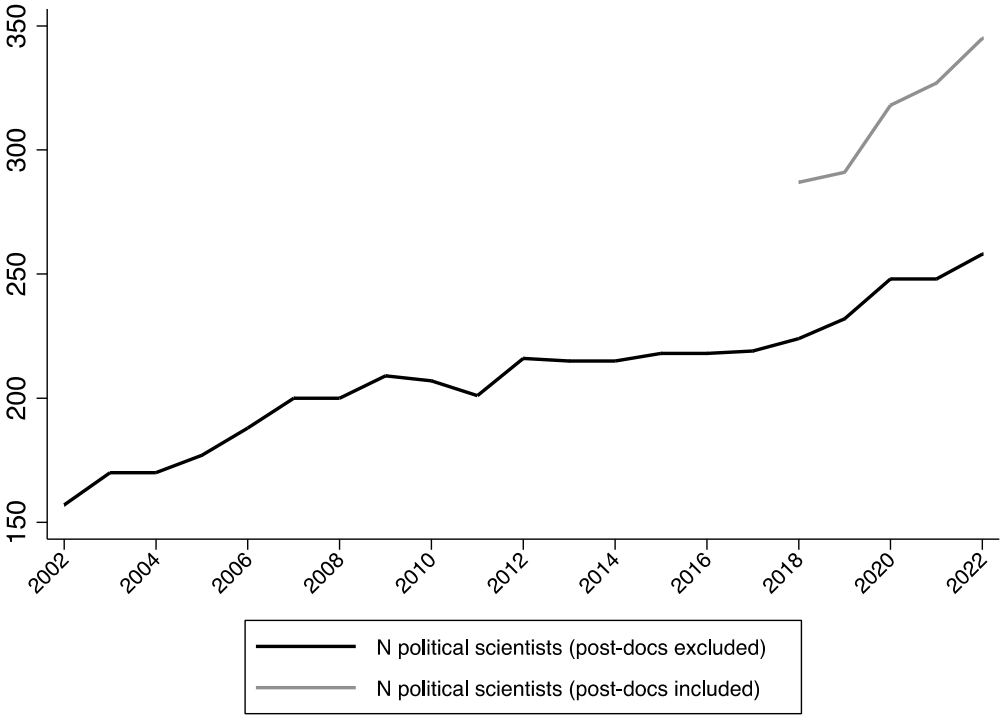
Figure 1 gives us just a general snapshot. More detailed information can be found if we disaggregate the data by focusing on the different career levels within the Italian SPS/04 community. Here, we have a problem to solve, given that data from 2002 until 2022 include career paths according to two (partly) different career structures in Italian academia, an older one and a newer one.[4] Thus, a recoding was necessary to present data that can be compared over time.

[2] More specifically, data for the 2018-2021 period have been collected within the project of the Italian Political Science Association (Società Italiana di Scienza Politica, SISP) which aimed at collecting information on Italian Political Science, its community, and its students.

[3] Data have been downloaded from the CINECA website (https://cercauniversita.cineca.it/php5/docenti/cerca.php). Further, note that Post-Doctoral Research Fellows are not the sole non-tenure-track junior positions in existence in Italian academia: see the discussion in Rostan and Vaira (2011) and Grüning and De Angelis (2021).

[4] The two career structures are those existing before and after the so-called 'Gelmini reform' of the Italian university, passed in 2010 (on the Gelmini reform see Capano 2011; Donina et al. 2015). Nonetheless, the replacement of the older structure with the newer one did not happen abruptly, meaning that the two structures have coexisted or still coexist (especially for some academic positions, as

Figure 1. Numerical evolution of the Italian Political Science community, absolute values, 2002-2022 (Post-Doctoral Research Fellows included and excluded)



Source: own elaboration.

Table 1 below describes the academic positions for which data were available according to the two career structures and their recoding, their (rough) English translation (starting from the categorization presented in Marino and Verzichelli 2020), and the related recoding.

The general idea was to create a categorization to enable the reader to navigate the different career structures easily, and travel across different countries and academic regulations. As explained later in this section, one of the main criteria for recoding was the (*de jure* or *de facto*) presence or absence of a tenure-track career perspective.

Before moving forward, the reader may have noticed the absence of non-tenure-track positions in the first (older) career structure presented in Table 1. Here, we are dealing with a problem of missing data: despite the fact that non-tenure-track positions were present in Italian universities even before the so-called 'Gelmini reform' in 2010 (e.g., see Moscati 2001; Grüning and De Angelis 2021), there are no available data on these positions before 2018 in the dataset used in this contribution, as already discussed above. Therefore, the recoding presented in Table 1 does not deal with all the possible career paths of Italian political scientists in the last 20 years. This limitation must be considered when evaluating and commenting on the data presented in this article.

shown later in the text). For more detailed information on the two career structures, see, for instance, Capano (2020).

Table 1. Recoding of academic positions in the two career structures of the Italian university

First (older) career structure			Second (newer) career structure		
Italian position	**English translation**	**Recoding**	**Italian position**	**English translation**	**Recoding**
			Assegnista di ricerca	Post-Doctoral Research Fellow	Non-Tenure-Track Assistant Professor
			Ricercatore a tempo determinato (Tipo A)	Non-Tenure-Track Researcher	
Ricercatore non confermato	Non-Tenure-Track Assistant Professor	Tenure-track Assistant Professor			Tenure-Track Assistant Professor
Ricercatore	Tenure-Track Assistant Professor		*Ricercatore*	Tenure-Track Assistant Professor	
		Associate Professor	*Ricercatore a tempo determinato (Tipo B)*	Tenure-Track Researcher	Associate Professor
Associato non confermato	Non-Tenure-Track Associate Professor				
Associato confermato	Associate Professor		*Associato confermato*	Associate Professor	
			Associato	Associate Professor	
Straordinario	Non-Tenure-Track Full Professor	Full Professor			Full Professor
Ordinario	Full Professor		*Ordinario*	Full Professor	
			Straordinario a tempo determinato	Temporary Full Professor	

Source: own elaboration.

Concerning the recoding, I have made some arbitrary choices. First, as regards the old career structure, I have grouped the categories of *Ricercatore confermato* (Tenure-Track Assistant Professor) and *Ricercatore non confermato* (Non-Tenure-Track Assistant Professor) positions. Indeed, it has been argued that 'although the position has to be confirmed in order to become fully permanent, the career advancement [from *ricercatori non confermati*] to *ricercatori confermati* is quite often a pure formality' (Graziano 2006: 267). Notice that, in the dataset used for this contribution, over the years, all Non-Tenure-Track Assistant Professors but one became Tenure-Track Assistant Professors or even Associate Professors. Therefore, collapsing these two positions into the 'Tenure-Track Assistant Professor' category seems reasonable. Moreover, in recent years, this category has been the least populated one among the tenure-track positions (see Figures 2-3 below and Ballarino and Perotti 2012: 353).

As for the second choice of categorization, I have placed together Full Professors (*Professore Ordinario*) and Temporary Full Professors (*Professore Straordinario*) in the older career structure. The latter position was considered as a sort of preliminary passage before ending up in the former one (e.g., see Mattei and Monateri 1993). The idea behind the recoding was to create a single category for all the people who reached (or were about to reach) the highest position of the older Italian academic career structure. Another reason supporting the decision to merge these categories is that, in the dataset I have used, all Temporary Full Professors end up holding the position of Full Professors.

Let us then move to the newer career structure. Here (third choice of categorization), I have combined the position of *Ricercatore a tempo determinato* (*Tipo A*)[5] (Non-Tenure-Track Researcher) and the position of *Assegnista di Ricerca* (Post-Doctoral Research Fellow) in the position I have called 'Non-Tenure-Track Assistant Professor'. Indeed, despite the differences existing between the two positions (e.g., in terms of salary or teaching duties), both can be safely considered non-tenure-track. More specifically, there is no formal or substantial guarantee of obtaining a tenure-track position after having been a Post-Doctoral Research Fellow or even a Non-Tenure-Track Researcher. To be fair, from the dataset, it emerges that some academics who were Non-Tenure-Track Assistant Professors did obtain a tenure-track position after some years. Nevertheless, such a promotion is not a sort of automatic passage, and this is why collapsing the two positions into the new one is a reasonable choice. The new position resulting from the recoding is the sole non-tenure track category in the entire categorization. Let us reiterate that this does not mean that non-tenure-track positions were not present in the past, but simply that there are no available data on such positions before 2018.

The fourth choice of categorization was to consider the *Ricercatore a tempo determinato (Tipo B)*.[6] (Tenure-Track Researcher) jointly with the *Professore Associato* (Associate Professor) position. As argued by Capano (2020: 312), 'after three years, associate tenure is substantially guaranteed if the [Tenure-Track Researcher] has the

[5] Within this position, I have considered all the possible sub-positions of *Ricercatore a tempo determinato* (*Tipo A*), that is, *tempo pieno* (full-time) and *tempo definito* (part-time). This position also includes, in line with Marino and Verzichelli (2020), the position of *Ricercatore a tempo determinato* (art.1 comma 14 L. 230/05) (Non-Tenure-Track Researcher, article 1, paragraph 14 of Law 230/05).

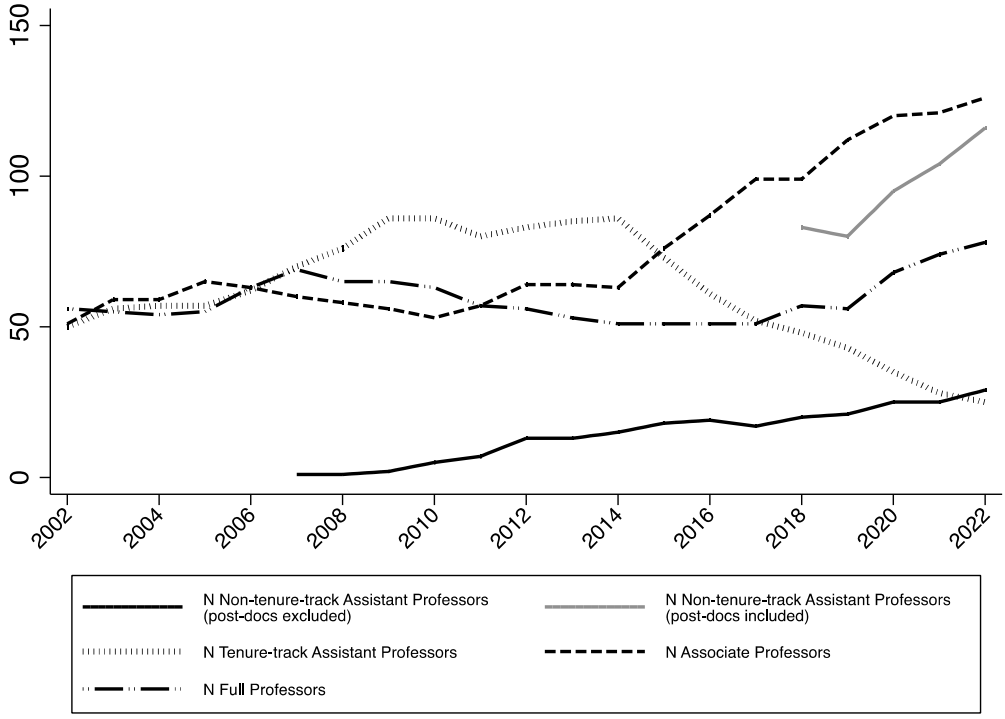
[6] Also in this case, both the *tempo pieno* (full-time) sub-position and the *tempo definito* (part-time) sub-position are considered part of the position *Ricercatore a tempo determinato* (*Tipo B*).

national qualification to be an [Associate Professor]'. Again, I am not arguing that the two positions are identical (e.g., there are noticeable salary differences), but simply that both include people who (*de jure* or *de facto*) hold a tenure-track position.

The fifth and final choice is related to jointly considering the position of *Professore Ordinario* (Full Professor) along with the position of *Professore Straordinario a Tempo Determinato* (Temporary Full Professor). Although the latter position's name is similar to one in the older career structure, in this case, we are just dealing with a fixed-term position which, in the dataset used in this contribution, is sometimes held not only by once Full Professors at the foreseeable end of their career[7] but also by people external to academia (e.g., bureaucrats, military, diplomats, journalists) who have been granted a temporary professorship.[8]

All in all, we have four categories of scholars: Non-Tenure-Track Assistant Professors, Tenure-Track Assistant Professors, Associate Professors, and Full Professors. Figure 2 below reports the numerical evolution of these four categories over time in Italian universities. Post-Doctoral Research Fellows are both included and excluded from the calculus of Non-Tenure-Track Assistant professors.

Figure 2. Numerical evolution of different academic positions within the Italian Political Science community, absolute values, 2002-2022 (Post-Doctoral Research Fellows included and excluded)



Source: own elaboration.

[7] See more information on the website of the Italian Ministry of Education, University, and Research (https://www.miur.gov.it/reclutamento-nelle-universita).

[8] This two-faced attribution of Temporary Full Professorships to former Full Professors and people external to academia is also evident in this document issued by the *Consiglio Universitario Nazionale* (National University Council), an advisory body within the Italian Ministry of Education, University, and Research: https://www.cun.it/uploads/6995/ra_2018_11_08.pdf?v= .

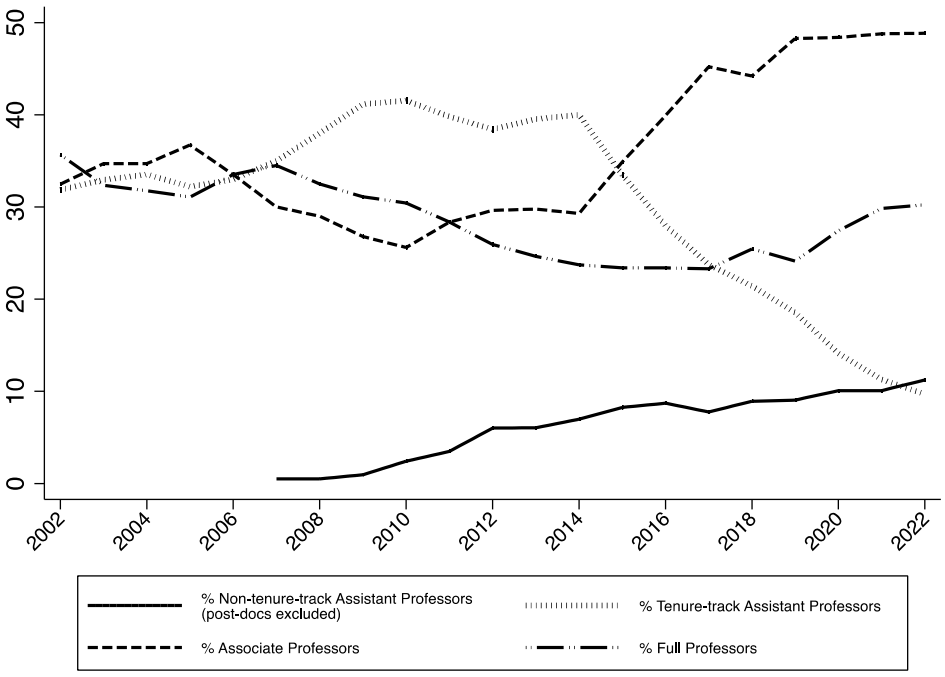
The first element we note is the sharp and sudden increase in Associate Professors between the mid-2010s and the early 2020s. In 2022, there were 126 Associate Professors belonging to the SPS/04 code in Italy. Note that, within this category, from 2014 until 2022, there was an almost constant increase in the weight of Tenure-Track Researchers (*Ricercatore a tempo determinato (tipo B)*), which totaled 1.6% of Associate Professors in 2014 but 19% in 2022.

Second, the number of Tenure-Track Assistant Professors has declined strongly; this category was the least populated in 2022. This last point is even more important if we consider that, between 2007 and 2014, Tenure-Track Assistant Professors were the largest component of the Italian Political Science community. It is worth remembering that these are quite expected findings, given that this category comprises academic positions related to the older career structure, and there have been no new openings for such positions in the last few years.

A final note concerns Non-Tenure-Track Assistant Professors: this category has become quite important in the last few years, surpassing Tenure-Track Assistant Professors. Obviously, such a relevance would be magnified if we included Post-Doctoral Research Fellows in the Non-Tenure-Track Assistant Professor position, as indicated by the grey line in Figure 2 (showing available data for the 2018-2022 period, as explained above).

Having commented on the numerosity of the four categories of our variable related to the two academic career structures, Figure 3 below shows the weight of each category on the total number of Italian political scientists emerging from the 2002-2022 dataset. In this case, to facilitate the readability of the figure, Post-Doctoral Research Fellows have been excluded.

Figure 3. Numerical evolution of different academic positions within the Italian Political Science community, percentages, 2002-2022 (Post-Doctoral Research Fellows excluded)



Source: own elaboration.

A point worth noting emerging from Figure 3 (but also from Figure 2) is that, in 2002, the three categories of tenure-track political scientists in Italy were quite close to one another, both in absolute terms and as a percentage of the total of SPS/04 academics. More specifically, in 2002, the percentages for the three categories were: 31.8% for Tenure-Track Assistant Professors (50 academics), 32.5% for Associate Professors (51 academics), and 35.7% for Full Professors (56 academics). To give a reference point, approximately at the end of the 1980s, there were 37 Full Professors (34.9% of the total), 36 Associate Professors (34%), and 32 Tenure-track Assistant Professors (30.2%) (Morlino 1989: 33).

If we then look at 2022, we note a very different situation: approximately 50% of the Italian Political Science community is made up of Associate Professors, with Full Professors slightly declining to 30%.[9] The imbalance favoring Associate Professors is evident.

Nonetheless, the figure also highlights another important point. Indeed, the (already evident) importance of Non-Tenure-Track Assistant Professors would be even more evident if we included Post-Doctoral Research Fellows in the count. Furthermore, Figures 2 and 3 align with the considerations in Marino and Verzichelli (2020) on the growing numerical consistency of non-tenure-track scholars in the Political Science community in Italy. However, there are two opposite points worth underlining.

On the one hand, we must be careful not to jump to conclusions: we cannot just look at Figures 2 and 3 and conclude that there is a growing numerical importance of Non-Tenure-Track Assistant Professors over time. Such a statement can be considered acceptable only for 2018-2022, when we have data also for Post-Doctoral Research Fellows. Given that we do not have data for Post-Doctoral Research Fellows or comparable positions *before* 2018, we cannot be certain that Non-Tenure-Track Assistant Professors (including people holding a Post-Doctoral Research Fellow position) were less numerous (or less important from a percentage viewpoint) *before* 2018 compared to the 2018-2022 period.

On the other hand, if we just focus on the 2018-2022 period, we can still point to a central element of discussion: Non-Tenure-Track Assistant Professors account for more than 30% of the Italian Political Science community[10] and, if all the trends shown above continued in the future, such a category would become the largest one within a few years, surpassing Associate Professors. This is not something we should take for granted but is simply a (possible) trend to be mentioned and empirically analyzed in the future.

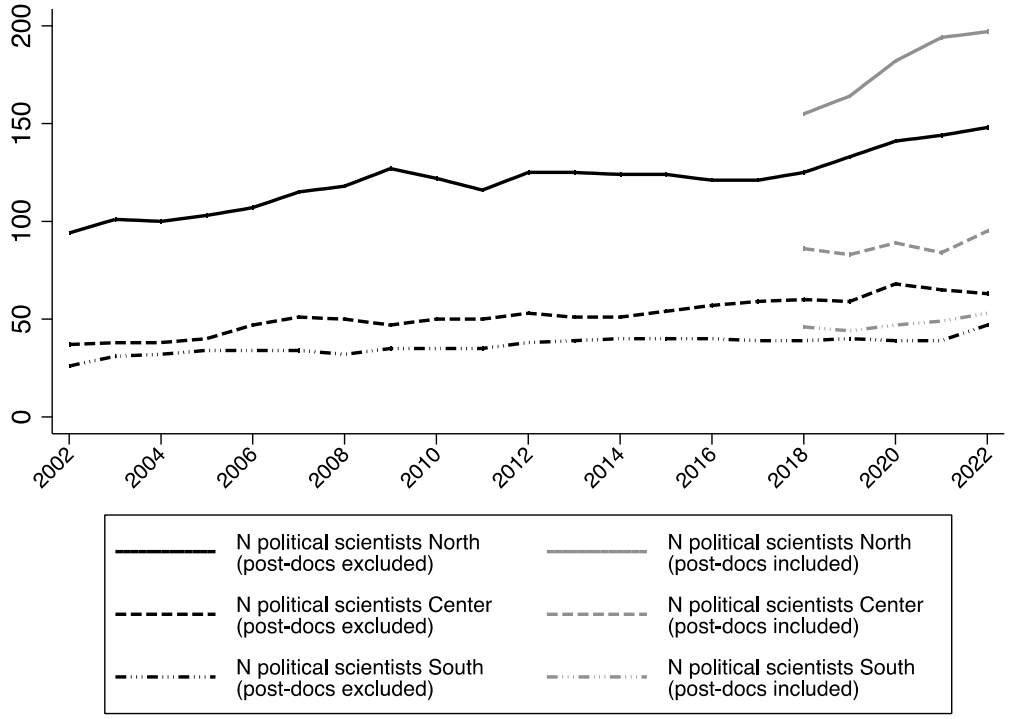
The data shown so far are related to the Italian Political Science community from a general viewpoint. However, what would happen if we focused on the differences at the subnational level over time? The next section answers this question.

[9] More specifically, in 2022, the percentages for the three categories were: 9.7% for the Tenure-Track Assistant Professors, 48.8% for the Associate Professors, and 30.2% for the Full Professors.
[10] This piece of data emerges from the calculus of the percentage of SPS/04 scholars in this category in 2022 (also including Post-Doctoral Research Fellows), equaling 33.6% (116 academics out of 345).

3. Geographical differences

Figure 4 below reports the numerical evolution of our categories of Italian Political Science academics in different Italian areas: North, Center, and South.[11]

Figure 4. Numerical evolution of the Italian Political Science community by areas, absolute values, 2002-2022 (Post-Doctoral Research Fellows included and excluded)



Source: own elaboration

The first element to be mentioned is the clear predominance of northern universities, where many political scientists work. Central and southern universities show much lower numbers: some 50 political scientists work in each of these two areas. It is also interesting to see that the number of political scientists in the center and south areas is very similar over time, with small temporal variations.

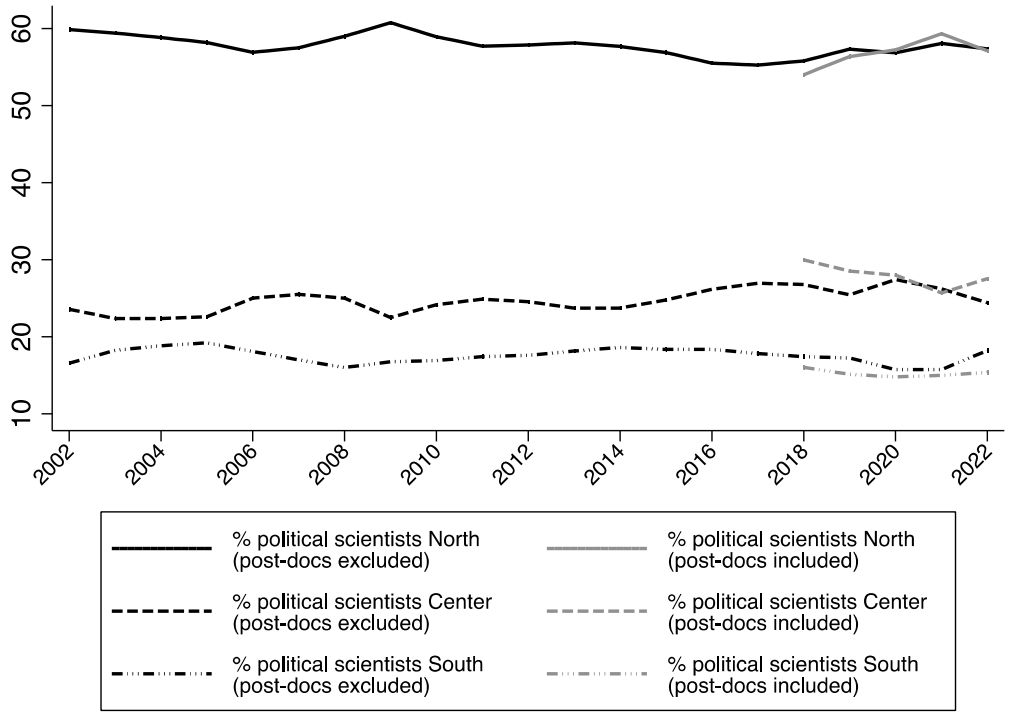
The second takeaway point is related to the difference in importance of Post-Doctoral Research Fellows in the three areas. The grey lines (showing the numerosity of political scientists in the three Italian areas when we include Post-Doctoral Research Fellows) tell us that the bulk of these non-tenure-track scholars work in northern and central universities, while just a small number work in southern academia. The scarcity of political scientists in Southern Italy has, of course, already been discussed (e.g., see

[11] North includes the following regions: Emilia-Romagna, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Liguria, Lombardy, Piedmont, Trentino-Alto Adige, Valle d'Aosta, and Veneto. Center includes the following regions: Lazio, Marche, Tuscany, and Umbria. Finally, South includes the following regions: Abruzzo, Apulia, Calabria, Campania, Molise, Sardinia, and Sicily.

Marino and Verzichelli 2020) and is a long-standing trend (e.g., see Capano and Verzichelli 2010: 106-107), but it is a point worth mentioning.

Figure 5 below reports the same data accounted for in Figure 4, but showing, this time, the percentage of scholars (both including and excluding Post-Doctoral Research Fellows) working in universities in the three areas of Italy.

Figure 5. Numerical evolution of the Italian Political Science community by areas, percentages, 2002-2022 (Post-Doctoral Research Fellows included and excluded)

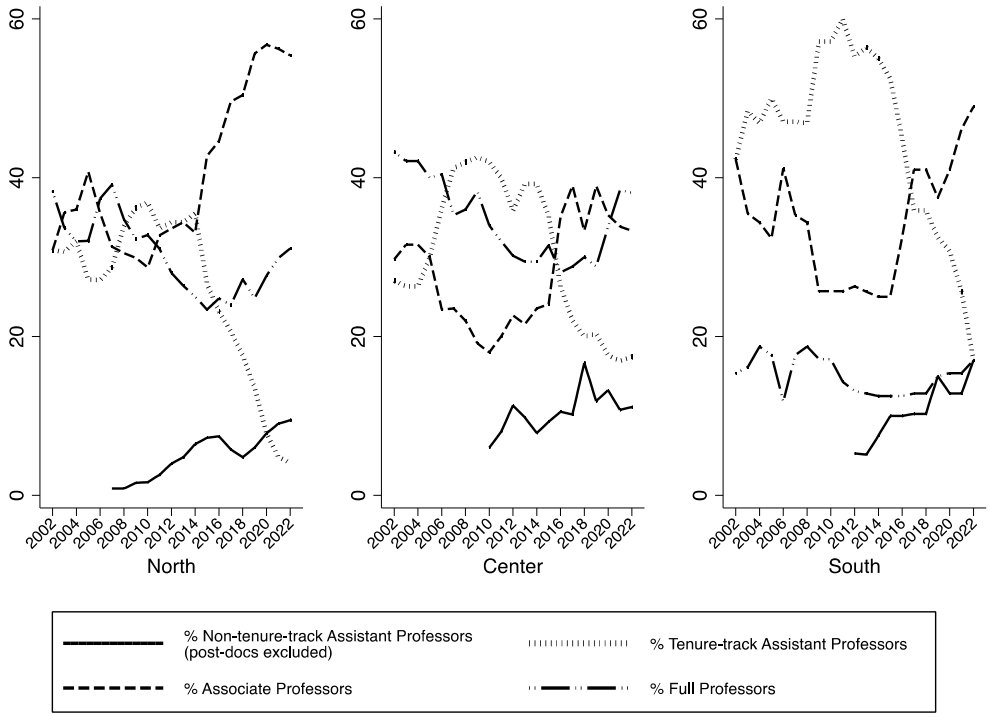


Source: own elaboration

While Figure 5 patently shows the strong and stable predominance of northern universities in attracting and employing a noticeable percentage of Italian Political Science academics, a small final addendum must be made. Including Post-Doctoral Research Fellows in the calculus (grey lines) makes a difference for central and southern universities. In the former case, including this category of scholars increases the percentage of political scientists. In the latter case, such an inclusion always decreases the weight of political scientists in this area. This is another clear sign of the marginality of southern universities not simply for tenure-track positions, but also for non-tenure-track ones.

A final, general, point from Figure 5 is the substantial stability in the weight of academics working in universities belonging to the three Italian areas we have identified. Nonetheless, this stability might hide relevant differences concerning the importance of each career position in each area. Therefore, let us focus on Figure 6 below.

Figure 6. Numerical evolution of different academic positions within the Italian Political Science community, by area, percentages, 2002-2022 (Post-Doctoral Research Fellows excluded)



Source: own elaboration

Figure 6 (which excludes Post-Doctoral Research Fellows) reports the weight of each academic position for each Italian area (north, center, and south). For instance, in 2022, some 55% of political scientists working in northern universities fell into the category of Associate Professor. Preliminarily, the noticeable stability emerging from Figure 5 hides a much more complex pattern. With the partial exception of Full Professors in Southern Italy, there is not a single Italian area where the weight of each academic career level has remained constant over time.

Another, more substantial, piece of evidence is that the evolution in northern universities resembles that happening in all Italian universities (see Figure 3). This is not extremely surprising, given that we have just seen that northern universities employ some 60% of Italian political scientists.

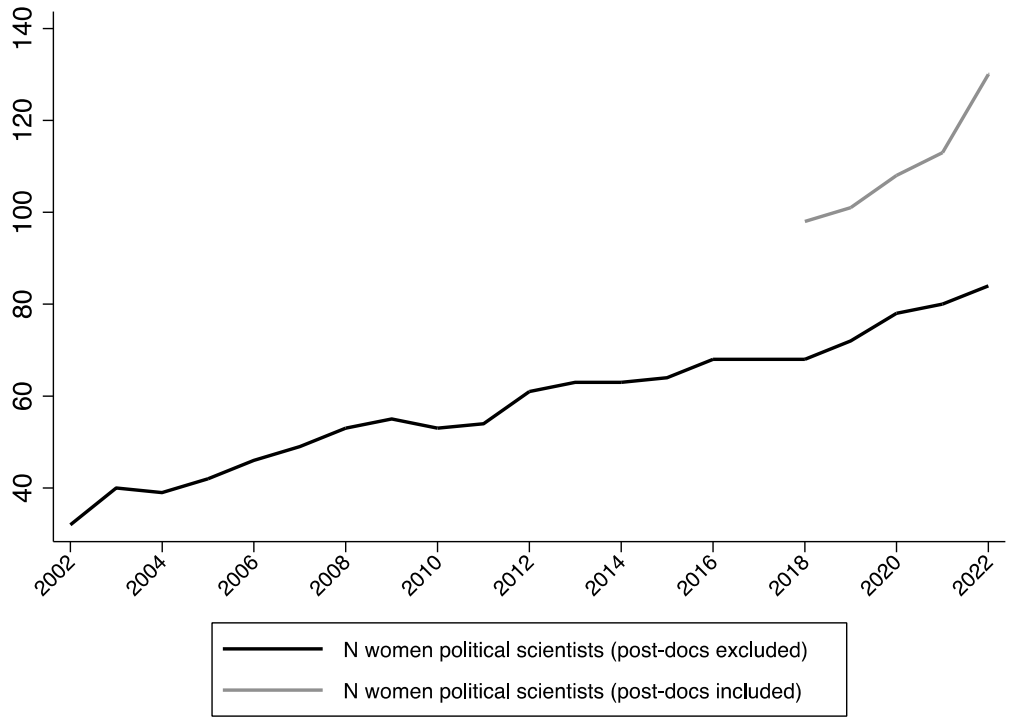
Nonetheless, such a similarity is not found in central and southern universities, which show a deviating pattern vis-à-vis the entire country. For instance, in the 2016-2022 period, in central universities, the Associate or Full Professor categories accounted for a similar percentage of political scientists, while, in Southern Italy, there was a much stronger imbalance between such categories, with the Associate Professor category in a clear leading position.

A final issue to tackle is related to differences between female and male Italian political scientists. The next section is devoted to this task.

4. Gender-related differences

Are there relevant gender-related differences in Italian Political Science (both from a general viewpoint and a career-related viewpoint)? This section starts by exploring the numerical evolution (in absolute values and percentages) of the presence of women in the SPS/04 community. Let us focus on Figure 7 below.

Figure 7. Numerical evolution of different academic positions within the Italian Political Science community, percentages, 2002-2022 (Post-Doctoral Research Fellows included and excluded)



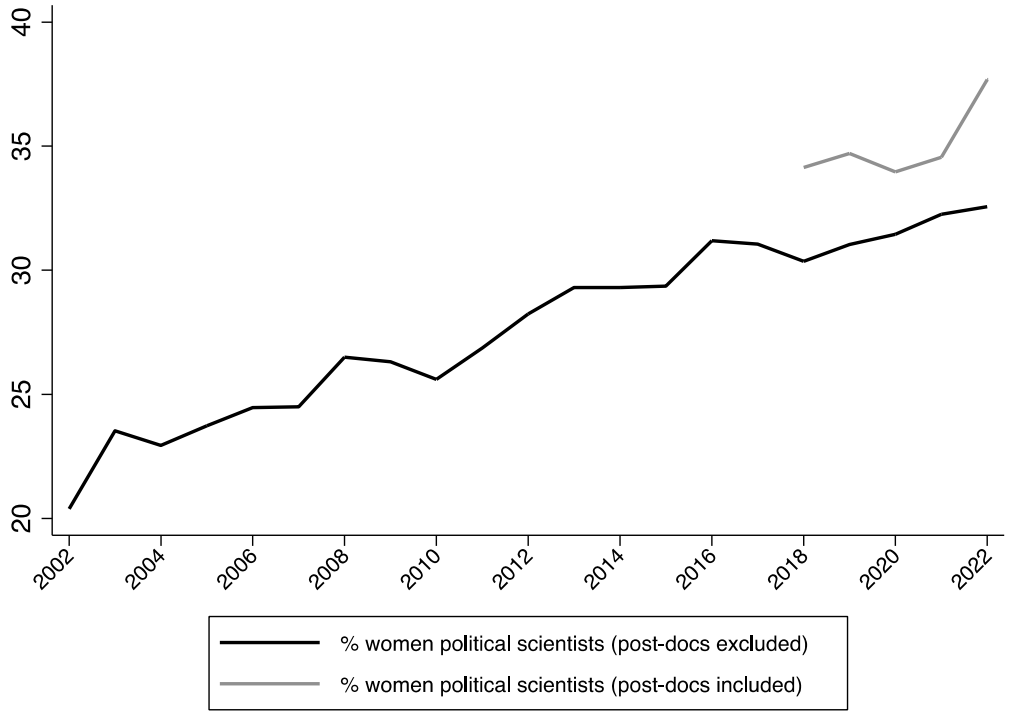
Source: own elaboration

Figure 7 tells us that, in absolute terms, the presence of women in Italian Political Science has increased from 32 academics (2002) to 84 academics (2022), corresponding to an approximate 160% growth. Let us note (see the data in Figure 1) that the corresponding increase in male Italian political scientists between 2002 and 2022 showed an approximate 40% growth.

The difference in the numerical growth rate of women and men in the Italian Political Science community is evident also if we include in our calculations Post-Doctoral Research Fellows. In this case, the number of women grew from 98 (2018) to 130 (2022) (corresponding to an approximate 33% increase), while, in the same period, the number of men increased by roughly 14% (from 189 academics in 2018 to 215 academics in 2022).

The next logical passage is to focus on the evolution of the percentage of women working in the SPS/04 community. First, let us analyze Figure 8 below.

Figure 8. Numerical evolution of women in Italian Political Science community, percentages, 2002-2022 (Post-Doctoral Research Fellows included and excluded)



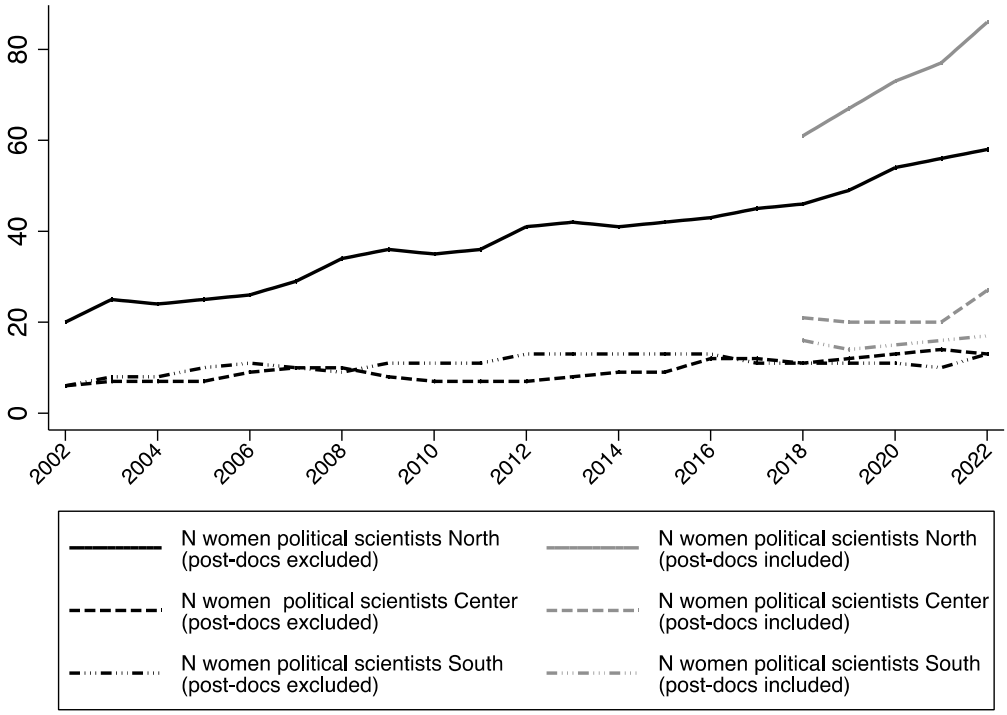
Source: own elaboration

As already shown in Figure 1, the data are reported both by excluding and including Post-Doctoral Research Fellows. There are two main points to note: first, if we exclude Post-Doctoral Research Fellows, the percentage of women grew from 20.4% in 2002 to 32.6% in 2022. This trend was not homogeneous, but this increase is undoubtedly worth mentioning. Second, if we include Post-Doctoral Research Fellows in the calculus, the presence of women in Italian Political Science is more marked: from 2018 until 2022, it grew from 34.1% (2018) to 37.7% (2022).

All in all, the presence of women in Italian Political Science has increased over time and at a faster rate compared to men. Nonetheless, this consideration is tempered by more specific questions. First, are there geographical differences worth mentioning? Second, are there differences related to different career positions?

To answer the first question, Figure 9 shows the number of women political scientists in the three Italian areas presented above. I have preferred to report absolute values instead of percentages to give a more precise snapshot of the numerical consistency of women, also given their scarcity in some Italian regions.

Figure 9. Numerical evolution of women in the Italian Political Science community by areas, absolute values, 2002-2022 (Post-Doctoral Research Fellows included and excluded)



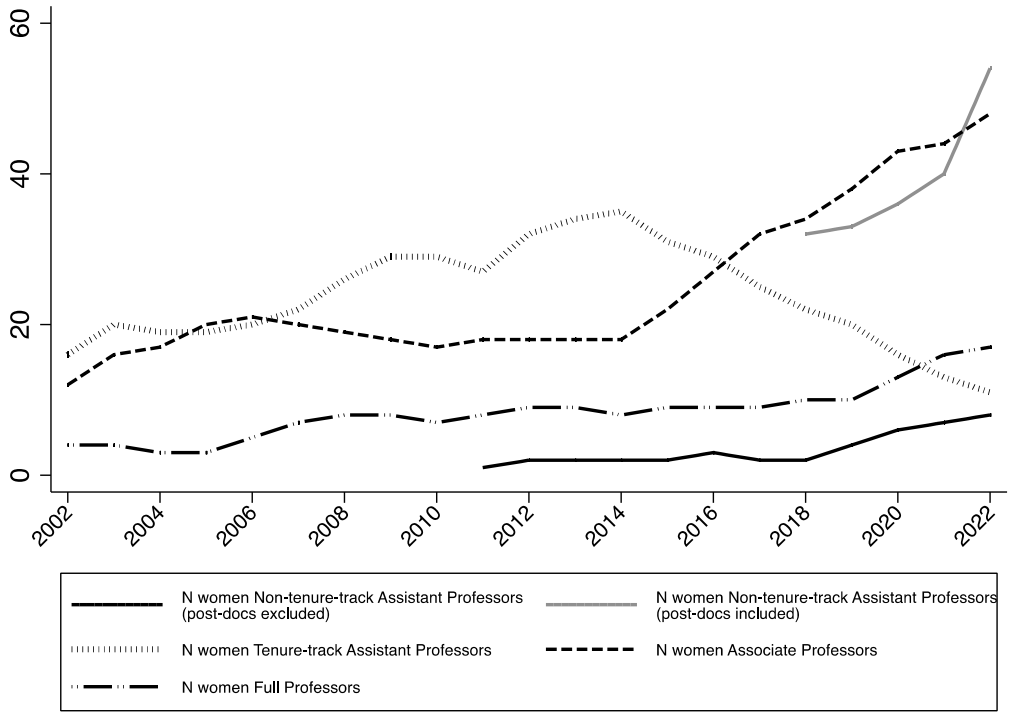
Source: own elaboration

Figure 9 shows the predominance of northern universities in terms of women political scientists. It should also be noted that northern universities are the only ones where the number of women substantially increases. Moreover, the figure shows that, in line with Figure 4, central and southern universities have a similar number of women SPS/04 academics. A final observation is related to the importance of Post-Doctoral Research Fellows. If we include this category of scholars (grey lines), the northern predominance becomes even more evident, but we also note a somewhat sharp increase in the number of women working in central universities.

To answer the second question asked above, Figures 10 and 11 below show (in absolute values and percentages) the weight of women in different academic career categories.

Figure 10 is similar to Figure 2 (which reports data for the entire Italian Political Science community) from different viewpoints: the marked increase in the number of Associate Professors from 2014 onwards, the corresponding decline in the numbers of Tenure-Track Assistant Professors, the overall growing (but more variable) trend of Full Professors, and, finally, the much steeper increase in importance of Non-Tenure-Track Assistant Professors when we include Post-Doctoral Research Fellows in the calculus.

Figure 10. Numerical evolution of women in different academic positions in the Italian Political Science community, absolute values, 2002-2022 (Post-Doctoral Research Fellows included and excluded)



Source: own elaboration

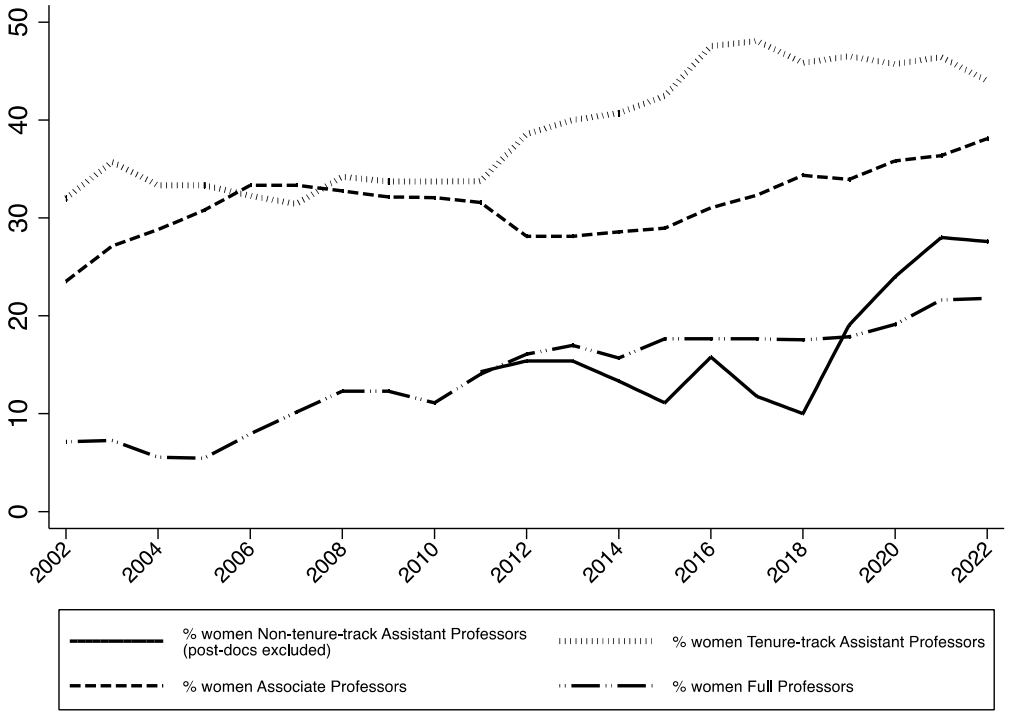
Thus, according to Figure 10, there seem to be no relevant differences between men and women in the numerical evolution of the different categories within Italian Political Science academics. Nonetheless, let us now focus on Figure 11, which reports the weight of women within each academic career category. As seen already in Figure 3, I have excluded Post-Doctoral Research Fellows to facilitate the reading of the figure.

A first element worth mentioning is that, except for the Non-Tenure-Track Assistant Professor position and with the exception of some years, the higher the career position, the lower the number of women. In other words, and from a general viewpoint, it is less likely to find a woman holding a position in Italian Political Science as we move from the Tenure-Track Assistant Professor position to Associate Professor to Full Professor.

Figure 11 also shows that there is no single category within Italian Political Science where women constitute at least 50% of academics. In other words, there are always more men than women in all four categories we have considered.

Moreover, from 2012 onwards, there has been an increase in the weight of women in the Tenure-Track Assistant Professor category. Let us remember that this category has been less and less important from the numerical viewpoint in the past few years and also that, in the last years, there has not been any opening of new positions in this academic category in Italy. If we jointly consider all these pieces of information, Figure 11 tells us that, in the past few years, more men than women either exited academia from the Tenure-Track Assistant Professor position or were able to climb up the academic career ladder.

Figure 11. Numerical evolution of women in different academic positions in the Italian Political Science community, percentages, 2002-2022 (Post-Doctoral Research Fellows excluded)



Source: own elaboration

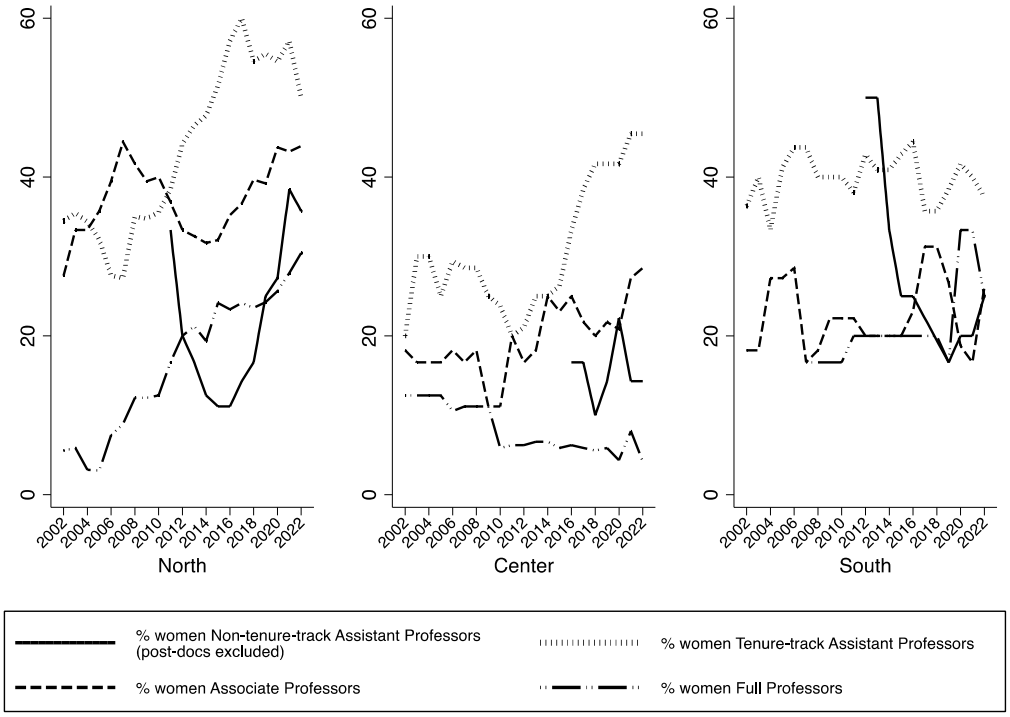
This consideration shall be nonetheless read vis-à-vis another element of discussion: from 2012 onwards, there has also been a certain increase in the weight of women within the Associate and Full Professor categories. This is even more important to mention if we consider Figure 2, where it emerges that these two latter categories have faced a marked numerical increase in the past few years.

Figure 11 reports data for the entire Italian Political Science community. Are there noticeable differences among universities in the three areas we identified earlier (north, center, and south)? Figure 12 below helps us answer this question.

Figure 12 reports the percentage of women in different academic positions in the three Italian areas. For instance, in 2022, some 40% of northern Associate Professors were women.

The first element worth mentioning is a confirmation of what we have already seen in Figure 11: there are very few instances of a stronger or equal presence of women political scientists compared to men. Such a presence can only be found in Northern Italy for Tenure-Track Assistant Professors in the 2015-2022 period and in Southern Italy for Non-Tenure-Track Assistant Professors in the 2012-2013 period. Notice that, as for Northern Italy, as already seen above (Figure 10), the number of Tenure-Track Assistant Professors has been decreasing over time. Moreover, as regards Southern Italy, the number of Non-Tenure-Track Assistant Professors in 2012 and 2013 was very low. In other words, there is not a higher academic position or a numerically consistent one where women are the majority of academics, and this is true for Northern, Central, and Southern Italy.

Figure 12. Numerical evolution of women in different academic positions in the Italian Political Science community, by area, percentages, 2002-2022 (Post-Doctoral Research Fellows excluded)



Source: own elaboration

A second important point emerging from Figure 12 is that some interesting intra-area patterns emerge. For instance, if we consider the Associate and Full Professors, the percentage of women has been increasing over time in northern universities (at least since the mid-2010s) but only partly increasing in central and southern ones (i.e., just for the Associate Professor position and, in some instances, only in the last few years).

A third and final point concerns inter-area differences: despite employing a similar number of women political scientists (see Figure 9), central and southern universities display diverging patterns. Thus, Figure 11 is supplemented by an addendum: there is noticeable inter-area variability in terms of a stronger or weaker women's academic presence.

Are these data similar to those available for Italy's broader social science community? Filandri and Pasqua (2021) present data for the entire 'Area 14', which includes not just SPS/04 academics but also academics belonging to other Scientific Sector Codes, such as Political Philosophy (SPS/01), General Sociology (SPS/07), or Sociology of Political Phenomena (SPS/11).[12] They show that, in 2012, 25.8% of Full Professors, 36.3% of Associate Professors, and 45.5% of Assistant Professors were women. Despite some differences between my categorization and theirs,[13] their data are very helpful

[12] More information on the 'Area 14' and the Scientific Sector codes (SSD) included in this area is available (in Italian) here: https://www.anvur.it/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/VQR-2015-19_Rapporto_Area_GEV14.pdf.

[13] Filandri and Pasqua (2021: 1536-137) have different aggregation rules than mine: for instance, their Associate Professor category does not include the Tenure-Track Assistant Professor category; then,

because they show that, in 2012, there was a higher percentage of men in all academic career levels considered. Moreover, 'Area 14' is not the one with the lowest percentage of women at each career level considered; so much so that if we jointly read their Table 1 and Figure 1 (Filandi and Pasqua 2021: 1538), the values of Area 14 are close to the average values of Italian academia concerning the percentages of women in their Full Professor, Associate Professor and (permanent or temporary) Assistant Professor categories.

Then, Cellini (2022) presents data related to 2015-2018 and shows that, while there is a substantial equilibrium between men and women enrolled in PhD programs in the 'Area 14', moving to Non-Tenure-Track and Tenure-Track positions (presumably, within 'Area 14'), the percentage of women drops to 30%, reaching the lowest value in the Full Professor category (27%). Interestingly, this piece of information is somewhat compatible with the percentage of Full Professors (or equivalent positions) in Iceland, Norway, and Sweden in 2017 (Carlsson et al. 2021).

5. Conclusions

This contribution has been devoted to exploring the Italian Political Science community from 2002 until 2022, on the eve of the start of a university reform that will profoundly change the early stages of academic careers.

First, from a purely numerical viewpoint, Political Science in Italy experienced a noticeable growth, with slightly fewer than 350 academics (including Post-Doctoral Research Fellows) in 2022. Second, this growth was not homogeneous. For instance, universities located in Northern Italy continued to attract a relevant percentage of political scientists and, most importantly, many Post-Doctoral Research Fellows. Another sign of uneven growth is the evident increase in the numerical importance of Non-Tenure-Track Assistant Professors, a category including Post-Doctoral Research Fellows and Non-Tenure-Track Researchers (that is, the *Ricercatore a tempo determinato (Tipo A)*). If the trend seen in 2018-2022 continued in the next few years, we would face a situation where the relative majority of political scientists do not hold a tenure-track position.

A second key point emerging from this contribution is related to the presence of women in Italian Political Science. On the one hand, some evidence points to a stronger weight of these academics: the growing number of women academics, or the higher growth rate of women political scientists. On the other hand, there are other opposite elements worth mentioning: there is not a single academic career level at which women constitute the majority. Moreover, with some exceptions, the percentage of women decreases as we climb the ladder of the academic career. Finally, excluding the Tenure-Track Assistant Professor position (the old *Ricercatore* position, for which there have not been any appointments in the last few years), northern universities display a stronger gender balance than central and southern ones. Clearly, these are descriptive pieces of evidence: more refined future analyses can help us shed more light on the matter.

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their Assistant Professor category likely includes both Non-Tenure-Track Assistant Professors and Tenure-Track Assistant Professors; finally, I am unsure whether the Post-Doctoral Research Fellow category is included or not within their Assistant Professor category.

Indeed, the results of the analyses presented in this article can open many paths for future research, both at the aggregate and individual levels.

Starting with the aggregate level, are the data of the other Scientific Sector codes included with 'Area 14' (where SPS/04 is located) different from the data presented in this article? Or are there similar patterns between, on the one hand, Political Science and, on the other, sectors such as Political Philosophy (SPS/01), General Sociology (SPS/07), or Sociology of Political Phenomena (SPS/11)? Furthermore, what has been the impact of the provision of funding to the so-called 'Departments of Excellence'[14] on the recruitment and career progression of Italian political scientists? More generally speaking, how have changes in the funding of Italian universities impacted the careers of members of the Political Science community?

Moving to the individual level, what are the individual career paths of Italian academics? Are there relevant differences between, say, men and women? In other words, can we find conclusive evidence of gender inequality (e.g., see Engeli and Mügge 2020)?

Moreover, are there noticeable differences in the individual paths of scholars starting their career in southern universities vs. those starting their career in northern or central universities? If there are such differences, what are their determinants? Finally, what would happen if we included in our analyses not just Post-Doctoral Research Fellows as the lowest possible academic career level but PhD-holders and PhD candidates?

In a nutshell, the results of the analyses presented in this article can open many different research paths, each leading to potentially interesting research on the evolution of the academic career of Italian Political Science scholars.

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[14] The 'Departments of Excellence' are a series of departments in Italian universities receiving a special funding after having obtained certain scores on their 'development projects' (https://www.anvur.it/en/activities/departments/).

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