

# Career Models in the New Tripolar Order. Political Profiles of the Italian MPs after the 2022 General Elections

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## **Abstract:**

*The 2022 general elections confirmed the instability of the Italian political system and in its shift from a bipolar to a tripolar competition dynamic. The article explores similarities and differences among MPs elected in 2022 during such electoral turmoil, aiming to understand their profiles and career paths. Specifically, the research investigates whether certain elements such as gender and affiliation with an organisational thick or thin party may influence the MPs' career models. We run a multinomial logistic regression to test the effects on multilevel career patterns by relying on an original dataset which comprises the socio-economic and political characteristics of the current MPS and their career trajectories for a total of 588 observations. Our findings show that women are often newcomers, and they are more likely to display an alternative career model. They struggle to fully capitalize on the opportunities offered by multilevel democracy, both before and after attaining their position as MPs. Furthermore, MPs belonging to a party with a strong organisation are more likely to develop unidirectional and integrated models, indicating their ability to navigate the multilevel context with well-planned and structured career paths.*

## **Keywords:**

Political Careers; Political Professionalization; Parliamentarians; Multi-Level Systems; Gendered Career Models; 2022 Italian General Election.

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## Introduction

The Italian party system has undergone several changes in the last twenty years, transitioning from an imperfect bipolarism (D'Alimonte & Chiaramonte, 2010) - also triggered by the changes of the electoral law towards a majoritarian perspective (both with the so-called *Mattarellum* and *Porcellum*) - to a new tripolar phase (Chiaramonte & De Sio, 2015). In particular, after the 2013 general elections, mainstream parties of the centre-right, Go Italy<sup>1</sup> (FI-PDL-FI) and of the centre-left (*Democratici di Sinistra*, DS before and *Partito Democratico*, PD later)- that dominated the political scene from late 1990s to late 2000s- started losing votes whereas new populist parties such as the Five Star Movements (*Movimento Cinque Stelle*, M5s) (Chiapponi, 2017) and radical parties such as the League under the leadership of Matteo Salvini (Passarelli & Tuorto, 2018) and Brothers of Italy (*Fratelli d'Italia*, FDI) under the leadership of Giorgia Meloni (Baldini, Tronconi & Angelucci, 2023) increased their vote share.

In particular, from 2013 onwards, the major party on the left of the political spectrum, the Democratic Party (PD), despite losing votes, maintained an average vote share of around 20%. In contrast, the centre-right area experienced several power rebalances. In fact, in 2013 the biggest party was the PDL of Berlusconi (21.6%), in 2018 the League of Matteo Salvini (17.4%) and in 2022 the FDI of Giorgia Meloni (26%). The third pole which consists of the M5s shows fluctuating results: from 2013 to 2018 there was an impressive increase from 25.5% to 32.8% and then a drop in the last election to 15.6% of the votes.

Moreover, an important institutional change occurred before the 2022 elections. In fact, the constitutional law n. 1/2020 reduced the number of parliamentarians by 600 MPs affecting both the Chamber of Deputies (from 630 to 400) and the Senate (from 315 to 200). As a consequence, such big change in the rules of the game made competition for parliamentary seats fiercer for both incumbents and newcomers.

Against this background, our article tries to understand if and to what extent the profiles of the MPs belonging to different parties are similar or different in this new phase and if these electoral and institutional changes produced coherent changes in the political personnel's profiles. In particular, the paper fills a gap in literature by trying to assess if a specific model of career is typical of women MPs. In fact, notwithstanding the huge number of studies dealing with women's under-representation in assemblies, it is still not clear if a specific pattern emerged for women or not.

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<sup>1</sup> This party was *Forza Italia* (FI) from 1994 to 2008; then *Popolo della Libertà* (PDL) which merged with the *Alleanza Nazionale* in 2009 and subsequently after several splits it was re-labeled *Forza Italia* again from 2013 onwards.

Additionally, referring to the party organisational literature that draws a distinction between thick and thin parties (Gunther & Diamond, 2003), we can expect that parties possessing a well-defined territorial structure are more inclined to present similar political figures, particularly when it comes to their political careers. Conversely, parties with lower levels of institutionalization tend to offer candidates of diverse backgrounds, resulting in less predictable and stable career paths.

By considering the last 2022 general election, we provide an original dataset which collects socio-economic data and political career experiences of 392 deputies and 196 senators, for a total of 588 MPs.

Our article proceeds as follows: section 1 provides our theoretical framework and exposes our main hypotheses; section 2 explains our methodological approach and choices; section 3 provides our descriptive analysis and section 4 shows our findings. Section 5 concludes.

## **1. Theoretical framework and Research Design**

The study of parliamentarians holds a significant place in the field of political science and has long been associated with the concept of political professionalization (Weber, 1919). In fact, a substantial body of contemporary European and American literature on political professionalization primarily revolves around parliamentarians, encompassing both country-specific analyses and comparative studies. (e.g. Squire 1993; Searing, 1994; Norris 1997; Saalfeld 1997; Shabad & Slomczynski, 2002; Borchert, 2003; Cairney, 2007; Koop & Bittner, 2011; Siavelis & Morgenstern, 2012, Heuwieser, 2018; Allen 2018; Ohmura *et al.*, 2018). However, so far in Europe the most important comparative work with a longitudinal perspective is that of Best and Cotta (2000), which has analysed the socio-economic background, the political experience and turnover rates of the European parliamentary representatives from 1948 to 2000.

From a theoretical point of view, the research on political careers can be distinguished between actor-oriented and context-oriented approaches (Jahr & Edinger, 2015), which focus respectively on individual characteristics and on contextual features as explaining factors.

Vercesi (2018) provides a systematic framework for reviewing both approaches in the study of political careers. Notably, among the former, the *personality approach* suggests that individual personality traits have an impact on career trajectories (Lasswell, 1948; Caprara & Silvester, 2018). The *ambition theory approach* (Schlesinger, 1966; Nicholls, 1991; Lawless, 2012) posits that politicians are office seeking and pursue different career paths based on their ambitions. The *social*

*background and socialization approach* (Putnam, 1976; Pilet et al., 2014) asserts that specific offices can only be attained by politicians with particular social characteristics and expertise. Lastly, the *selection and deselection approach* (Searing, 1994; Dowding & Dumont, 2015) operates within a rational choice framework, suggesting that politicians (as agents) are chosen based on their previous experiences.

In contrast, context-oriented approaches in the study of political careers encompass the following perspectives. The *opportunity structure approach* (Botella et al., 2010; Stolz, 2003, 2015; Stolz & Fisher, 2014; Grimaldi & Vercesi, 2018) asserts that career paths are influenced by the availability, accessibility, and desirability of political positions. The *intra-organizational approach* (Thurber, 1976; Hazan & Rahat, 2010; Peters, 2010) suggests that career choices and opportunities within an organization are shaped by formal and informal organizational rules and procedures. The *supply and demand approach* (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995; Krook, 2010; Carnes, 2016) focuses on individuals representing specific social sectors (e.g., women, workers) whose resources and motivations contribute to the supply, while the demand is determined by elite preferences that act as gatekeeping factors. In summary, this approach posits that political careers evolve through a step-by-step process influenced by the interplay of supply and demand dynamics. Our paper builds on the opportunity structure approach which proved to be the most suitable when it comes to consider the broad contextual factors that characterised multi-level democracies. In fact, in Italy, as in all multi-level democracies, politicians have tended to exploit all possible offices from local to regional and national level as opportunities for their political career (e.g. Grimaldi & Vercesi, 2018; Di Capua *et al.* 2022). By relying on Borchert' work (2011) which distinguished three career models based on the hierarchy of the political offices and the direction of career paths, the article investigates what career model prevail among MPs of the XIX legislature in Italy and to what extent such models are affected by the politicians' social background and by the structure of their party organisation. To recall, according to Borchert (2011) in multi-level democracies three career models are likely to emerge, *the unidirectional model* refers to a political system in which a clear hierarchy of political offices exists, and it implies a movement from local to regional to national or European level. *The alternative model* implies a less clear hierarchy of offices with a high degree of autonomy between the levels of government and scarce possibility of "multi-level jumps". Consequently, national and subnational careers are clearly separate as there is no movement from regional to national or European level. Finally, *the integrated model* implies that there is no hierarchy among territorial levels and, thus, movements from the European or the national level to the regional and local level are more likely. Party experience is excluded from this analysis since the career model framework only concerns the occupation of previous institutional positions.

In order to explain the prevalence of one of the three career models mentioned above, we identified specific drivers that draw from the social background and socialization approach, the intra-organizational approach, and the influence of party organizational structures on career paths. In Italy, previous research (Grimaldi & Vercesi, 2018) have proved that, as a result of institutional changes towards greater regionalization, all such career models may coexist at the same time..On the one hand, MPs' socio-economic characteristics seem to be quite similar in comparative perspective (Best & Cotta, 2000) and thus we can assume that certain specific features matter in their selection process. In particular, several studies pointed out that there is a systematic under-representation of women in the legislative assemblies (e.g. Philipps, 1995; Caul, 1999; Matland, 2005; Matland & Montgomery 2003; Norris, 1996; Tremblay, 2008). Despite the introduction of rules to favour gender balance (Dahlerup, 2007; Krook ,2007; Franceschet *et al*, 2012; Hughes *et al*,. 2019) in many European contexts, women continue to represent a minority and in addition, they also have less stable career paths than their male counterparts (Vanlangenakker *et al.*, 2013, Brown *et al.*, 2019; Kerevel, 2019; Kroeber & Hüffelmann, 2021) whereas their longevity in parliamentary office shows mixed evidence (e.g. Praino & Stockemer, 2018; Lazarus *et al*. 2023). The most recent data on women MPs in Europe confirm that by the end of 2022 women were on average 31.1% of MPs in the Lower Chambers and 30.5% in the Upper Chambers (IPU, 2022). However, despite the numerous research on female parliamentary representation, the existence of a specific career model for female MPs has not been widely explored so far. In fact, differently from Verzichelli *et al*. (2022), our purpose is not only to emphasize the huge impact of newcomers and especially of the "female beginners" in the last legislatures (namely from 2013) but to understand if a different career model emerges for female MPs by considering those who show a certain degree of political experience. Consequently, our paper aims to fill this gap in literature.

On the other hand, the existence of a direct connection between the organisational dimension of political parties and the career model has been emphasized repeatedly in the literature (Janda, 1980; Panebianco, 1982; Gunther & Diamond; 2003; Deschouwer, 2006; Thorlakson, 2013). In a nutshell, a strong party organisation at the territorial level is correlated with the presence of more linear, stable and easily predictable career paths, while more fluid organisations may be more susceptible to "horizontal" inflows of political personnel (Panebianco, 1982). However, with a progressive party institutionalisation, the specialisation of internal roles and a greater vertical integration between the political elites of the different levels, career paths become considerably long and stable (Tronconi & Verzichelli, 2019). The reasons for such influence must be sought precisely in the intermediary role that political parties play in recruiting the political class.

In line with these premises, our research questions are the following:

1. Which characteristics do MPs elected in 2022 have? Are there similarities or differences in terms of socio-economic features?
2. What is the most widespread career model among the MPs of the XIX legislature?
3. Does social background and in particular gender affects the MPs' type of career?
4. Do party features affect the MPs' type of career?

To answer these RQs, we rely on different streams of literature related to political class studies with a gender perspective and to organisational party literature.

In line with the international literature on women under-representation, the Italian case is not an exception. Although some researches have pointed out that important steps forward have occurred since the mid-1990s, especially at the local level (Carbone & Farina, 2020), gender equality is still far from being achieved, both in the national parliamentary arena (Verzichelli, 2010; Tronconi & Verzichelli 2015; 2019; Marino *et al.*, 2019; Sampugnaro & Montemagno, 2020), and in the local and regional ones (Carbone & Farina, 2020).

Notwithstanding the introduction of a strong system of quota provision since 2017 (i.e. art. 1.10, e law 165/2017), recent studies pointed out that parties seem to have learned how to circumvent such formal requirements by exploiting the electoral rules and in particular the possibility of multiple-candidacies, so much so that most of the female candidates have not been elected (Regalia 2021; Pansardi & Pedrazzani, 2022). Furthermore, many parties filled in the electoral lists with female political outsiders to comply with the norms (Pansardi & Pinto 2020) and therefore in the XVIII legislature more than 70% of the female newcomers have never held a political office before (Sampugnaro & Montemagno, 2020).

Furthermore, as Verzichelli et al. (2022) have illustrated, following the peak in 2013, approximately 40% of newly elected female politicians were re-elected in subsequent elections. Consequently, these women exclusively gained political experience within the parliamentary arena, thereby exemplifying an alternative career model. Similarly, prior to the implementation of quota systems, studies by Sampugnaro and Montemagno (2020) revealed that a significant number of incumbent women MPs had previously held solely national offices, further highlighting an alternative career trajectory. If these observations hold true for the XIX legislature, it implies that women not only continue to constitute a minority in Parliament, but regardless of their political affiliation, they seldom exhibit a "planned political career" characterized by ascending from lower-level territorial offices to higher-prestige positions.

Consequently, it is more likely for women MPs being picked up without previous experience to fill in party lists -also to comply with the formal regulations on gender balance- and later they gain political experience limited to the national level in comparison to their male counterparts. Therefore, our first hypothesis is that:

H1: *Women MPs are more likely to develop an alternative career model in comparison to men MPs.*

A second set of hypotheses is related to the territorial organisation of political parties. Party organisation represents one of the most investigated concepts in political science (Krouwel, 2006) and it is one of the most important criteria to classify political parties from the very beginning. Despite numerous scientific research having highlighted the diminishing importance of the organisational dimension (Kircheimer, 1966; Katz & Mair, 1995; Carty, 2004; Bolleyer, 2009), a strong heterogeneity among the different parties still exists and it should be considered, especially when it comes to evaluate mainstream versus new challenger or populist parties (Heinisch & Mazzoleni, 2016; Scarrow *et al.*, 2017; Vittori, 2020).

In our paper we explicitly rely on Gunther and Diamond' s (2003) classification of parties according to their organisational strength. They have distinguished between "organisational thick parties" as parties characterised by a strong territorial structure, a large mass membership base and a strong collateral associative network and "organisational thin parties" as parties mainly centred on networks of personal relationships and with a weak (if not absent) territorial organisational structure. Therefore, according to this classification, parties of cadres or notables, purely personal parties (Blondel *et al.*, 2010; Calise, 2015; Pedersen & Rahat, 2021), but also movement parties (Kitschelt, 2006; Della Porta *et al.*, 2017), would be classified as "thin" parties as they are all characterised by a low level of organisational articulation; on the contrary, traditional mass parties and their heirs, endowed with a strong organisational structure, would be classified as "thick" parties.

In particular, in line with such distinction it is likely that thick parties- due to their strong territorial organisation in sections- may facilitate the movement of party personnel between the different levels of government, thus favouring the affirmation of the unidirectional career model and (to a lesser extent) of the integrated model, whereas thin parties with scarce territorial organisation would favour the affirmation of the alternative career model (Pilet *et al.* 2014; Tronconi, 2018, p. 618) by allowing people to gain a political office and maintain it for a while to achieve a certain degree of specialisation

Therefore, parties would constitute the instrument through which politicians could make the most of the career opportunities offered by the multi-level democracy. We expect that:

*H2: MPs belonging to thick parties with strong territorial organisation are more likely to develop a unidirectional career model in comparison to MPs affiliated with thin parties.*

*H2 bis: MPs belonging to thick parties are more likely to develop an integrated career model in comparison to MPs affiliated with thin parties.*

## **2. Data & Methods**

The paper explores the profile of the parliamentary class (both from the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate) elected after the 2022 general election. The analysis has a twofold aim. First, it aims at pinpointing if similar profiles in terms of socio-economic characteristics and career models emerge among MPs affiliated with different political parties in the aftermath of the new tripolar phase of the Italian party system. Secondly, it has an exploratory purpose, investigating whether there is an influence of gender or party features in shaping the career profiles of the different MPs. In this sense, the choice to focus on both deputies and senators (notwithstanding the specificity of the Italian Senate among the European Upper Chambers) was due to the desire to investigate as much as possible the transformations of the Italian parliamentary class. Moreover, for the sake of comparability, we focused only on national MPs, thus excluding the representatives elected in the foreign constituencies. Consequently, our population is composed of 588 MPs (392 from the Chamber and 196 from the Senate).

To investigate the MPs' profiles and how gender and party characteristics affect their model of career, we deemed a quantitative analysis to be the most appropriate choice.

Bivariate analysis and descriptive statistics were used to check similarities and differences among the MPs' profiles related to gender, age cohort, education, profession, the career model and the party membership. Then, a multinomial logistic regression was used to test our initial hypotheses, namely, to check to what extent gender and party territorial organisation affect the development of a specific career model.

Variables were operationally defined in the following ways. On the one hand, the career model, which constitutes the dependent variable of the logit regression model, is operationalised as a three-way



polytomous variable related to the three different types of careers: “unidirectional”, “integrated” and “alternative”.

A career was labelled as “unidirectional” whether it occurred incrementally among different levels of government (municipal, provincial, regional, and national/European), regardless of the initial level and of the length of the career. For example, in the unidirectional career type fall MPs such as Chiara Appendino (M5s), municipal councillor (2011-2016) and then mayor of Turin between 2016 and 2021 and finally deputy (in the current legislature), and Beatrice Lorenzin (PD), municipal councillor in Rome between 2001 and 2006, then MP since the 2006 General election and currently senator.

Conversely, a career model was operationalised as “integrated” if it is not possible to trace a linearity in the career trajectories, due to the alternation of offices in the national and in the local governmental levels. This category includes politicians such as Matteo Renzi (IV), President of the Province (2004-2009), then mayor of Florence between 2009 and 2014, then Prime Minister and MP, but also Matteo Salvini (League), European parliamentarian between 2009 and 2018 and concurrently uninterruptedly municipal councillor in Milan.

Finally, a career type was considered as "alternative" if it was characterised only by experience at the national or at the European level (thus devoid of previous local or regional offices) Subjects such as Pierferdinando Casini (PD), MP continuously since 1983 and currently senator and Giuseppe Conte (M5S), Prime Minister between 2018 and 2021 and currently deputy, belong to this category. It is worth mentioning that we drop from the analysis the newcomers without any previous political experience such as Ilaria Cucchi who never held institutional positions and now she is senator among the ranks of Green - Italian Left Alliance. As a consequence, our analysis was run on a total of 516 observations. The alternative model represents the reference category of the multivariate analysis<sup>2</sup>. In Italy, it is noteworthy that the position of a parliamentarian can be held concurrently with that of a municipal councillor, municipal executive, and mayor of municipalities with a population under 15,000.. Since it is not possible for the dates of assuming office to coincide in two different positions at different governance levels. we can always distinguish between the unidirectional model (when the entry in local office occurred before) and the integrated model (when the entry in the national office occurred after).

On the other hand, party organisation and MPs’ gender were considered as independent variables. Both variables were operationalized in a dichotomous way.

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<sup>2</sup> Conventionally, in multinomial logistic regression in which the dependent variable is not ordinal, the most numerous categories is used as a reference category (the unidirectional model in our case). However, for the purposes of the analysis that is proposing to test what affects the development of a unidirectional or integrated career, it seemed more appropriate to use the alternative model as a reference category.

Indeed, in accordance with Gunther and Diamond's (2003) classification, we opted to categorize parties as thin (assigned a value of 0) or thick (assigned a value of 1) based on their organizational structure. The choice of a dichotomous representation of such characteristic, although it constitutes a simplification of reality, was dictated both by reasons of practicality and comparability. We are aware that starting from the important studies of Janda (1980) and Panebianco (1986), scientific literature proposed a series of indicators to measure the territorial organisational strength of parties (e.g. Katz *et al.*, 1992; Harmel & Janda, 1996; Tavits, 2012; Poguntke *et al.*, 2016). However, some authors have pointed out that some of such indicators cannot be easily applied to new personal or populist parties (Vercesi, 2015, Musella & Vercesi, 2019), making their use in contemporary political systems more complex or scarcely reliable. Moreover, the collection with relative certainty of some of these indicators for small, newly founded parties or for electoral lists that include several different parties may be complex. For these reasons, we deemed the choice of a dichotomous, albeit simple, operationalization as the most appropriate.

Consequently, basing our evaluation on the rich scholarly literature on Italian party organisations (Diamanti, 2009; Ignazi, 2013, Ignazi & Pizzimenti, 2014; Ignazi & Bordandini, 2018, Pizzimenti, 2020; Vittori, 2020; Bordandini et al., 2023), the Democratic Party (PD), the League and Brothers of Italy (FdI) were defined as “thick” parties, whereas Go Italy (FI), the Five Star Movement (M5S), *Noi Moderati* (NM), + Europe (+E), *Azione - Italia Viva* (AZ-IV) and the Green - Italian Left Alliance (AVS) were defined as “thin” parties<sup>3</sup>. Table 1 summarises the modalities of such a variable.

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<sup>3</sup> Beyond party organisational features, another aspect we had considered when analysing political career trajectories, is when the party organisation was founded. In fact, parties that have been active in the political scene for long (or that were founded in contexts of greater stability) are likely to make the most of the territorial dimension compared to recently founded parties (Sikk, 2011, Emanuele & Chiaramonte, 2023) . From an empirical point of view, this aspect has been raised in some recent research on Italian political personnel (Tronconi & Verzichelli, 2015; 2019), which highlighted how recently established parties tend to recruit eccentric parliamentarians compared to the others. We discussed this aspect in the Supplementary material where we also replace our thin and thick parties variable with a specific new and old parties variable as robustness test.

Table 1 Distribution of organisation type and party type in 2022 General elections

	Thin/Thick
AVS	Thin
PD	Thick
+E	Thin
SVP	Thick
AZ-IV	Thin
NM	Thin
FI	Thin
Lega	Thick
FDI	Thick
M5S	Thin
SCN	Thin

(Source: Authors' elaboration)

Lastly, we operationalized gender as a dichotomous variable with value 0 if the MP is male and 1 if is female.

Specific control variables were also used to increase the robustness of the analysis.

The first set of control variables are linked to the MPs' socio biographical profiles. First, we consider age in years from the year of birth to 2022. Scientific literature (Verzichelli, 2010) underlined that most politicians reach the greatest availability of political capital and resources in the middle-aged cohorts 45-55. To avoid a bias related to the non-linear relationship between age and political career, in the multivariate analysis we chose to operationalize age as the square distance between the age of the MP and the apex of the career (50 years)<sup>4</sup>.

We incorporated also these other control variables: education (due to the small number of subjects with less than a bachelor's degree, operationalized as a dichotomous variable with value 1 assigned to bachelor's degree) and original profession, operationalised as polytomous variable divided in six modalities: professional politicians; entrepreneurs, managers and directors; professionals (lawyers, doctors, accountants, etc.); public employees; private employees; other professions.

<sup>4</sup> This operationalisation, although more complex than an operationalisation with an ordinal variable, allows to avoid some distortions related to the numerosity of some categories (eg. the 25-29, the 70 or more).

We also included some context related control variables, such as the House in which the MPs are elected (value 0 for the Chamber of Deputies and 1 for the Senate), whether MPs are elected in a single-member district (SMD) or not and the geographical area of election of each MP, operationalised as a variable with three modalities, North, Red-Belt and South<sup>5</sup>.

Data were extracted from the National Registry of the Local and Regional Administrators available on the website of the Ministry of the Interior<sup>6</sup>, from the Chamber website and from the Senate website<sup>7</sup>.

### **3. Descriptive Analysis: the socio-economic characteristics and the career models of the MPs of the XIX legislature**

In this section we focus on the socio-economic characteristics and career models of the Italian MPs of the XIX legislature by pinpointing differences and similarities among parliamentary parties.

The over-representation of men in the Italian Parliament compared to women comes as no surprise. However, this time the share of women in the Chamber (Fig. 1) is less in comparison with that in the Senate (Fig. 2), namely 32.7% vs. 34.7%, and there was a drop in comparison to the last legislature (where women were 36% in the Chambers and 34% in the Senate, Tronconi & Verzichelli, 2019).

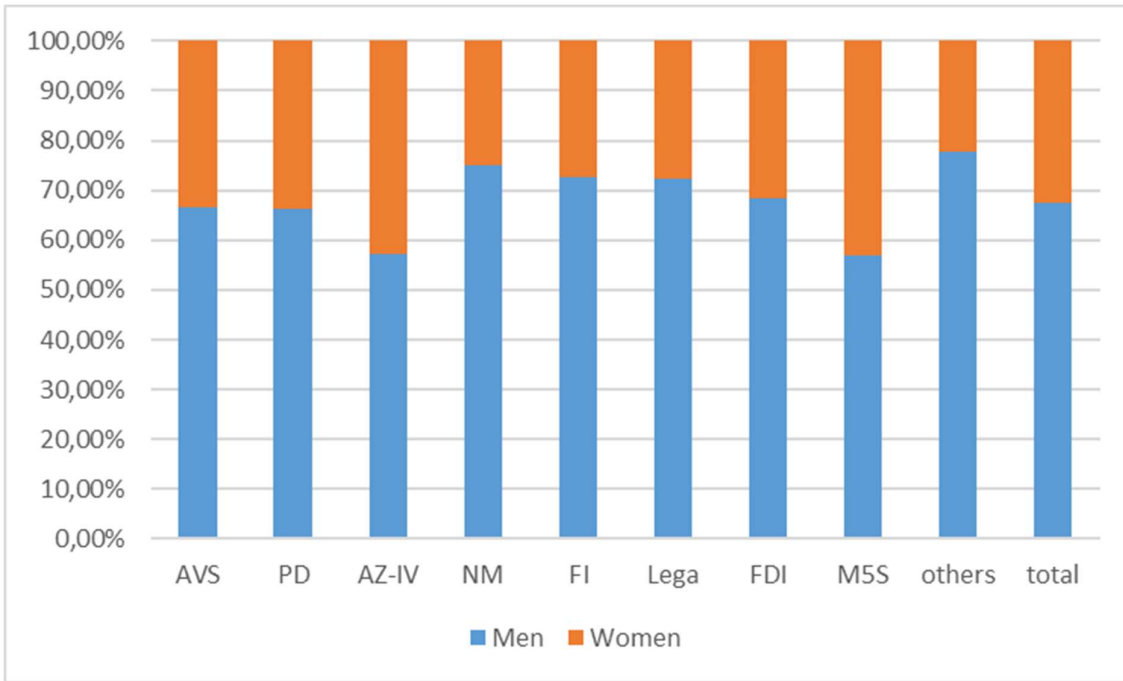
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<sup>5</sup> The North includes the following regions: Aosta Valley, Piedmont, Liguria, Lombardy, Veneto, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Trentino-Alto Adige. The Red Belt comprises: Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany, Umbria and the Marche. Finally, the South and islands comprises: Lazio, Abruzzi, Campania, Basilicata, Molise, Apulia, Calabria, Sicily and Sardinia.

<sup>6</sup> See: <https://dait.interno.gov.it/elezioni/anagrafe-amministratori>

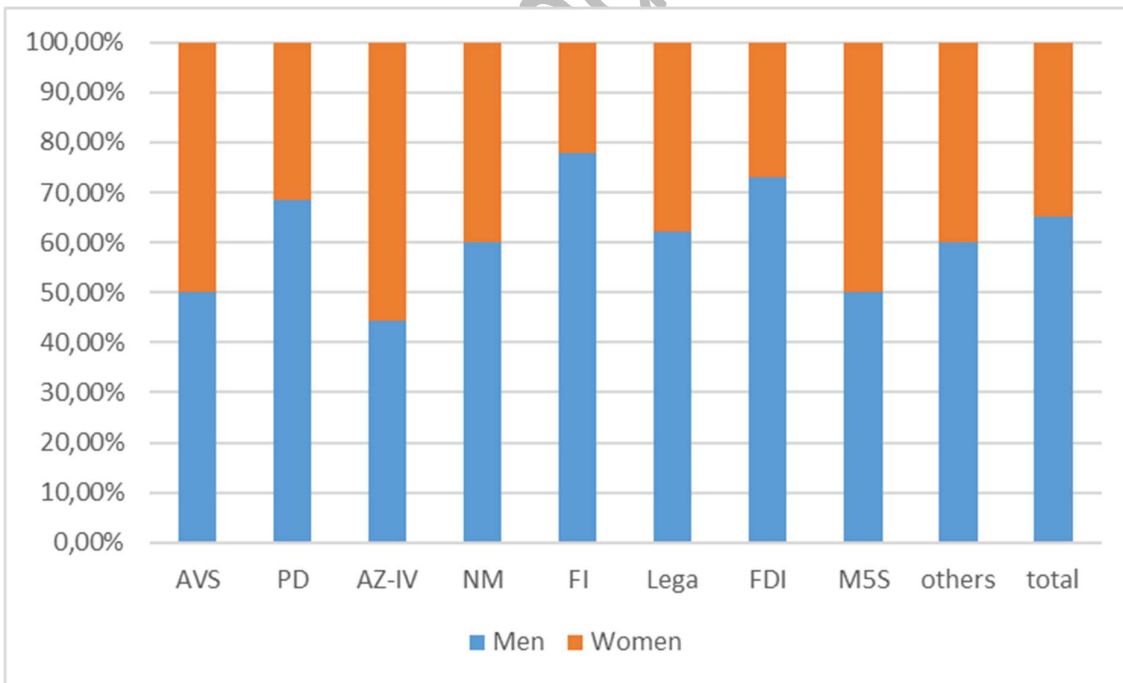
<sup>7</sup> See: <https://www.camera.it/leg19/28> and <https://www.senato.it/leg/19/BGT/Schede/Attsen/Sena.html>

Fig.1 Deputies distribution per gender and parties. (Percentage values)



(Source: Authors' elaboration)

Fig.2 Senators distribution per gender and parties. (Percentage values)



(Source: Authors' elaboration)

Fig. 1 and Fig. 2 show the Deputies and Senators distribution per parties and gender. Starting with right-wing parties in the Chamber of Deputies, both the League and Go Italy (FI) elected around 72% of men and 27% of women. Similarly, the electoral cartel “Noi Moderati” which comprises several centrist parties (like UDC which has been present in Parliament since 2002) elected 75% of men and 25% of women to the Chamber. Among centre-left parties both the Democratic Party and the Greens with the Left elected around 66% of men and 33% of women. In the Senate, only the PD and FI have less women than in the Chamber of Deputies, whereas the general trend is an increase of women in the Senate. In the left of the political spectrum AVS elected 50% of women, and in the centre-right Noi Moderati reached 40% of women and -in the right spectrum- even the League elected 37.9% of women.

The M5S and AZ-IV have the most gender-balanced parliamentary delegation. In fact, both parties elected around 57% of men and 43% of women to the Chamber and in the Senate, they elected 50% of women or even more (AZ-IV 55.6%).

This reasoning does not hold for FDI as it elected 31.6% of women to the Chambers and only 27% to the Senate. This result is probably due to the fact that the bulk of FDI personnel comes from the post-fascist National Alliance (AN), which was founded in 1995 and merged into the People of Freedom (PdL) in 2009, notwithstanding the current FDI emerged from a right-wing split within Silvio Berlusconi’s party.

Shifting to the age of MPs, the difference between the two Chambers is impressive as 53.1% of the deputies are younger than 50 years old whereas 73% of the Senators are older than 49 years old. In fact, most of the Deputies (37.2%) are in the 40-49 years old categories and (29.6%) in the 50-59 cohort. Among Senators the most frequent cohort is 50-59 years old (46.4%) followed by that of 40-49 (27%) (Tab. 1).

Table 1. Deputies (C) and Senators (S), distribution per Age cohorts and parties. (Percentage values)

	25-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69		40-49	50-59	60-69	
	C	C	C	C	C	70+ C	S	S	S	70+ S
AVS	0.0	8.3	50.0	8.3	25.0	8.3	25.0	50.0	0.0	25.0
PD	1.5	9.2	33.8	41.5	10.8	3.1	14.3	60.0	25.7	0.0
Az-IV	0.0	9.5	42.9	38.1	9.5	0.0	66.7	33.3	0.0	0.0
NM	0.0	0.0	50.0	25.0	12.5	12.5	0.0	40.0	40.0	20.0
FI	0.0	13.6	22.7	31.8	27.3	4.5	11.1	27.8	50.0	11.1
Lega	0.0	21.5	44.6	23.1	7.7	3.1	41.4	51.7	6.9	0.0
FDI	0.9	12.0	40.2	28.2	15.4	3.4	19.0	50.8	23.8	6.3
M5S	3.9	29.4	33.3	21.6	9.8	2.0	46.4	39.3	3.6	10.7
Total	1.0	14.8	37.2	29.6	13.8	3.6	27.0	46.4	20.9	5.6

(Source: Authors' elaboration)

In the Chamber of Deputies there are only two parties that elected a high number of people over 50s: the PD (55.4%) and FI (63.6%). In the case of FI, the second most frequent cohort among deputies is that of 60-69 (27.3%). Conversely only the League and the M5s elected a high share of people under 50s, both around 66%. In fact, these are the only parties where the cohort 30-39 is above 20% (21.5% for the League and 29.4% for the M5s). Therefore, not all old parties have relatively old political personnel, as the League is undoubtedly the exception. On the other hand, most of the deputies of the other parties are all younger than 50s but as mentioned only the M5s has a high share of under 40s. Among senators the most frequent cohort is 50-59 years old as mentioned, but with some important exceptions. In fact, 50% of the FI senators and 40% of NM senators are in the cohort 60-69. Thus, they are older than the average. Conversely, the most frequent cohort for AZ-IV and the M5s is that of 40-49 years old, respectively 66.7% and 46.4% of the senators. Furthermore, despite the most frequent cohort being 50-59, 41.4% of senators of the League are between 30 and 39 years old, confirming that the political personnel of the League is generally young. The case of FDI is peculiar since their senators are generally old. The representatives mostly belong to the 50-59 (50.8%) and 60-69 (23.8%) age categories like those of the PD.

As far as education is concerned, there are no relevant differences among the MPs of different parties, since most of the deputies (76.3%) and senators (74%) of all parties have a degree.

Looking at the original profession both in the Chamber and in the Senate the three most frequent categories are: liberal professionals (respectively 40.3% and 48%), managers or entrepreneurs (respectively 16.1% and 19.9%) and employees in the private sector (13.8% and 11.7%). However, in the Chamber of deputies there is also a consistent number of political professionals (12.5%).

For almost all parties, most deputies are liberal professionals and then managers or entrepreneurs. The only exceptions are, the AVS whose majority of deputies are employed in the public sector (25%) and the PD whose majority of deputies (27.7%) are political professionals. Other peculiarities are the following. For AZ-IV it is worth mentioning that the second most frequent category is that of employees in the private sector (28.6%) rather than manager-entrepreneurs and that there is a high share of political professionals (19.1%). For NM the most frequent category is that of managers entrepreneurs (37.5%) rather than liberal professionals which is the second category along with employees in the private sector (both 16.9%). For the League, the second cohort is that of managers-entrepreneurs and employees in the private sector (both 16.9%) whereas the third is that of political professionals (12.3%).

Most of the Senators, irrespective of their party affiliation, are liberal professionals. The only exception in this respect is that of Greens and the Left whose majority of senators are union officials (50%) and employees in the public sector (25%). The second most frequent category is that of manager-entrepreneurs for all parties with the exceptions of the PD and the M5s. In the former case, the second most frequent category is that of union officials (14.3%), in the latter case that of artisans and shopkeepers (17.9%). Finally, it is worth mentioning that 13.8% of the League senators are political professionals. All in all, deputies and senators seem to be quite a homogeneous class with regards to the original profession. There are only a few differences among parties, and these are typical of leftist parties and the M5S. On the one hand, for the leftist parties (AVS and PD) being union officials<sup>8</sup> is still an important background to serve as MPs. On the other hand, especially in relation to the M5S senators the profiles are the most dissimilar with those of the other parties since both artisans and shopkeepers and public employees are highly present.

When it comes to the career models of MPs, the unidirectional model is the most frequent (respectively 44.1% of the deputies and 41.8% of the senators), followed by the integrated model (23.2% of the deputies and 25% of the senators) whereas the alternative model is the least widespread

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<sup>8</sup> For the purposes of the analysis, trade unions officials were included in the “private employees” category.



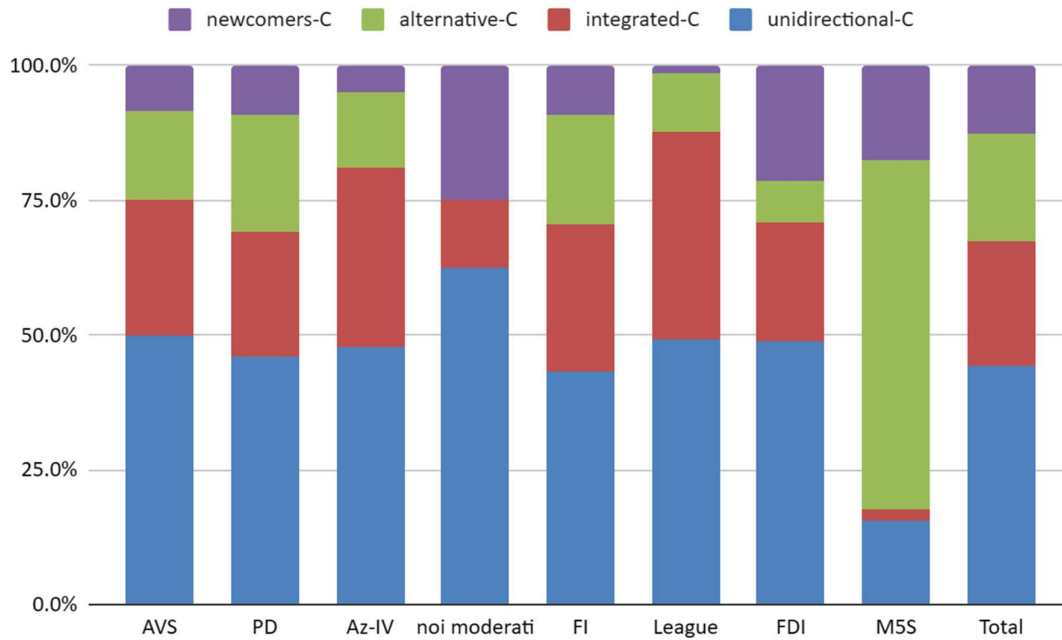
(respectively 20.2% of the deputies and 21.9% of the senators). In addition, the share of newcomers is quite similar in both chambers (respectively, 12.5% and 11.2%).

However, when analyzing gender-based data, it was found that despite the unidirectional model being the most common for both men and women, there is a notable proportion of female deputies (30.5%) and female senators (26.5%) who follow an alternative career model, which ranks as the second most frequent in both cases. Furthermore, a significant percentage of female MPs (15.6% in the Chamber and 17.7% in the Senate) are newcomers without prior political experience. Consequently, considering both categories, it becomes apparent that women face challenges in fully harnessing the opportunities provided by multilevel democracy, as the integrated model remains marginal, and the unidirectional model falls well below the 50% mark for both female deputies and senators. Moreover, there are certain interesting differences in the career paths of deputies and senators according to their party affiliation.

To begin with the Chambers of Deputies, for most deputies, irrespective of their political affiliation, the unidirectional model is the most frequent followed by the integrated model. This means that generally deputies are more likely to obtain political offices by exploiting at the best the possibilities of a multilevel democracy by going up and down territorial levels when political offices are available avoiding concentrating on the national posts only. In particular, this holds true especially for AZ-IV and the League where the integrated model is typical of 33.3% and of 38.5% of their deputies.

Differently, the M5S is the party whose around 65% of deputies displays an alternative model, namely almost all M5S deputies only have experienced national political posts or are newcomers without previous experience (17.6%) and just a minority (15.7%) had some experience at subnational level before (Fig. 3).

Fig.3 Career models of Deputies per party (percentage values).

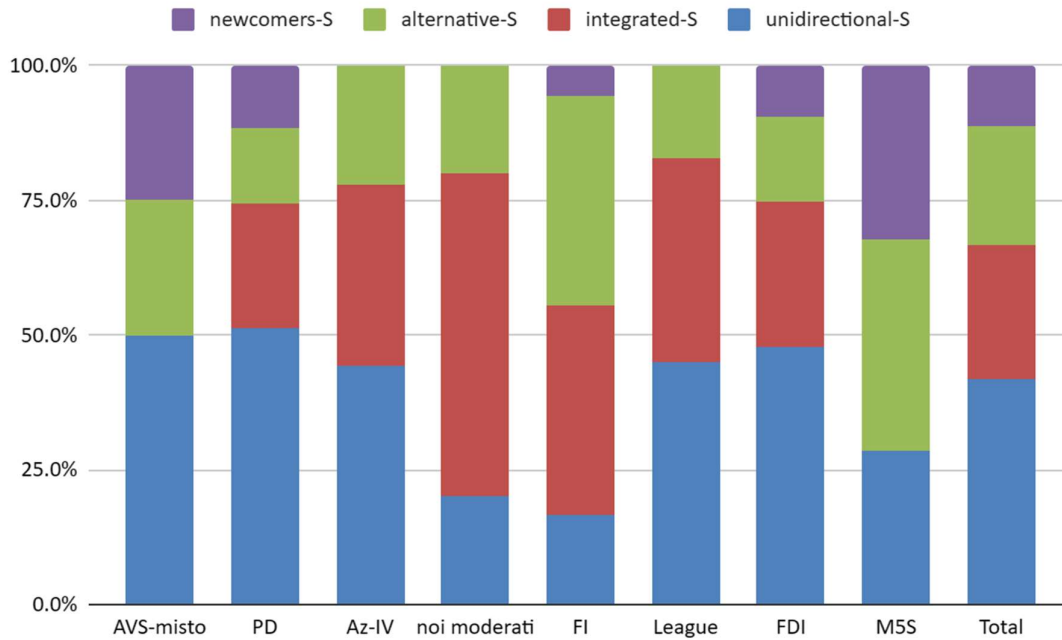


(Source: Authors' elaboration)

When looking at the senators (Fig. 4), both AZ-IV and League senators confirm the distribution emerged for the deputies, thus in both cases the most frequent career model is the unidirectional one (respectively, 44.4% and 48.8%) followed by the integrated one (respectively, 33.3% and 37.9%). Furthermore, even for the M5S the same pattern -emerged for deputies- holds for senators too, as the alternative model is the most widespread (39.3%) despite the increase of the unidirectional model (28.6%) and of the share of newcomers (32.1%). However, for two parties (NM, FI) the career paths of the senators diverge from that of deputies. 60% of NM senators had an integrated model whereas the other two seem marginal (both 20%)<sup>9</sup>. For FI senators the most widespread career models become the alternative and the integrated ones (both 38.9%). All in all, the integrated model is more typical among senators than among deputies for most parties except for AVS where the alternative model skyrockets and the M5S where the unidirectional model increases a bit.

<sup>9</sup> In fact, both Antonio De Poli (at the same time municipal councillor, regional councillor, MEP and deputy since the early 2000s) and Michaela Biancofiore (municipal councillor in Bolzano between 2003 and 2005, then MPs in 2006, then once again municipal councillor in 2010) are particularly fitting examples of MPs who can jump to different offices across territorial levels.

Fig. 4 Career models of senators per party (Percentage values)



(Source: Authors' elaboration)

#### 4. Findings

As stated before, we tested our hypothesis with a multinomial logistic regression with the alternative career type as a base reference. The results of the logit regression are displayed in Table 2; the first part of the table shows the effect on the unidirectional versus the alternative career type whereas the following shows the results on the integrated versus the alternative career type. In the second column is also presented the relative risk ratio (RRR)<sup>10</sup>.

As table 2 shows, both gender and the party organisational feature are statistically significant in the two different models. As far as gender is concerned, the correlation is negative which implies that women MPs are less likely to develop a unidirectional or integrated career pattern as they are more likely to develop an alternative one. The result confirms our first expectation, namely women struggle to develop a linear career, which ascends through the various territorial levels and finally reaches parliamentary posts. Conversely, women are often elected directly to national bodies without other types of political background. Thus, hypothesis H1 is confirmed.

<sup>10</sup> When a multinomial logistic regression is used, the relative risk ratio is used more frequently (Kleinbaum & Klein, 2010). It is calculated exponentiating the multinomial logit coefficients and it shows the risk of the outcome falling in the comparison group compared to the risk of the outcome falling in the referent group changes with the variable in question.

Table 2 Results of multinomial logistic regression

	Model 1 (Unidirectional vs. alternative)		Model 2 (Integrated vs. alternative)	
	B	RRR	B	RRR
Independent variables				
Female	-0.906*** (0.262)	0.404 (0.106)	-1.235*** (0.285)	0.29 (0.082)
Thick Party	1.132*** (0.250)	3.103 (0.776)	1.146*** (0.279)	3.201 (0.894)
Control Variables				
Age	-0.00393*** (0.000971)	0.99 (0.001)	-0.000132 (0.0008)	0.99 (0.000)
Degree	-0.215 (0.310)	0.80 (0.249)	-0.400 (0.347)	0.670 (0.232)
Senate	-0.143 (0.266)	0.867 (0.230)	-0.0632 (0.300)	.065 (0.319)
Single-Member District	0.523* (0.256)	1.688 (0.432)	0.638* (0.279)	1.829 (0.527)
Profession (Reference category: Professional Politicians)				
Entrepreneurs, Managers and Directors	0.0712 (0.501)	1.073 (0.538)	-0.680 (0.544)	0.506 (0.275)
Professionals	1.288 (0.703)	3.62 (2.548)	0.795 (0.763)	2.213 (1.689)
Public Employees	0.277 (0.450)	1.318 (0.593)	-0.273 (0.485)	0.760 (0.368)
Private Employees	1.020 (0.545)	2.771 (1.510)	0.297 (0.582)	1.345 (0.782)
Other Professions	-0.1 (0.590)	0.8 (0.486)	-1.210 (0.667)	0.298 (0.198)
Geographical zone of election (Reference category: North)				
Red Belt	-0.317 (0.369)	0.728 (0.269)	-0.0572 (0.399)	0.944 (0.376)
South	-0.839*** (0.278)	0.432 (0.120)	-0.783* (0.309)	0.456 (0.323)
Constant	1.134 (0.745)	3.106 (2.313)	0.995 (0.846)	2.075 (2.228)
N	516		516	
Pseudo R2	0.104		0.104	

Robust standard errors in parentheses  
 \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001\*\*\*

Shifting to the organisational nature of parties, data show a strongly positive correlation with "thick" parties. This means that, consistently with our expectations, highly structured and organised parties

are keener to offer their MPs stronger and linear career planning and they demonstrate a greater ability to exploit the different institutional incentives that characterise a multilevel system in comparison to scarcely structured parties. As the RRR values indicate, the relationship is particularly strong. The analysis shows that women are less than half (0.404 and 0.29, respectively) as likely as men to develop a unidirectional or integrated career pattern, whereas the representatives of thick parties are more than three times likely (respectively 3.103 and 3.201) to develop these two career patterns. Overall, then, the results seem to confirm the H2 and H2 *bis* hypotheses initially suggested.

Finally, despite not being part of our initial set of hypotheses and not being a central part of our analysis, we dwell briefly on the results of the control variables. On the one hand, it is hard to provide solid interpretations nevertheless we can make certain speculations on such variables that may open up future avenues of research. We found that within model 1, that age is negatively correlated to the unidirectional model.

Consequently, this means that the more the age moves away from the central age group, the probability of developing the unidirectional career model slightly decreases (RRR equals to 0.99), compared to the reference group (the alternative model). We can speculate that the effect of age is probably due to the greater ease of access to office in the political system. In other words, politicians who are in the central age group are probably those with the longer political and institutional curricula and therefore they should have a better chance of exploiting the incentives of the institutional system, by moving more easily between different levels of government, than younger or older politicians who are more likely to be elected directly for national institutions.

Moreover, the regression highlights a significant negative effect of being elected in the South both in Model 1 and Model 2 (coefficient -0.839 and -0.783, RRR 0.43 and 0.46). This is a partially surprising result since, given the literature on the topic, it could be expected that southern politicians have career patterns with long local experiences before reaching national ones (Emanuele & Marino, 2016). However, we believe that this result can be traced to the stronger affirmation of the M5S in the South. In other words, the high electoral strength of the M5S in that area of the country, led to a higher share of Southern MPs without local experience.

However, such speculations should require further empirical investigations.

## 5. Conclusion

This article examined the composition of the Italian parliamentary class that emerged from the last general elections in 2022. More precisely, through a quantitative statistical analysis, the research highlights the similarities and differences of the socio-political characteristics among

parliamentarians of different party groups both in the Chamber and in the Senate and it also provides an exploratory analysis on those factors that can influence their career model.

The results of the research have a double relevance, both on empirical and theoretical grounds.

From a theoretical point of view, the research proved that personal and organisational factors such as gender and the nature of the party to which MPs belong, influence their career models.

Indeed, the analysis has highlighted how, at least in the Italian context, women are not only fewer in number than men, but also have less structured and concentrated career models.

In other words, our findings show that, despite the amount of time women invest in politics, their career model often diverges from that of men. Specifically, our data indicates that women face challenges in fully leveraging the range of political positions available in a multi-level democracy when compared to men. This observation remains consistent regardless of the level of institutionalization within their respective parties.

Furthermore, the research highlighted how the organisational dimension of the party influences the emergence of a specific type of career pattern. In fact, highly organised parties seem to better exploit the opportunities offered by the multilevel institutional system, better plan career trajectories and thus favour unidirectional or integrated models.

Consequently, our research contributed to the debate on gender disparities in politics by looking at women predominant political career models and on intra-organizational approaches by focusing on party structure as drivers of specific career models.

From this point of view, therefore, the research partially fills the gap in the literature, examining whether party institutionalization influences career models.

From an empirical point of view, the analysis underlined that socio-demographic characteristics do not differ particularly from those found for MPs elected in previous electoral rounds. Parliamentarians are in fact generally men, with a high level of education, performing highly qualified professions and with previous political experience at the local level. Specifically, by looking at the gender dimension, the Parliament elected in 2022 has a lower number of women than in 2018, halting the path towards an increase of gender balance that seemed to have started in the two previous legislatures. Some further considerations with reference to Brothers of Italy and the M5S are explored below. Giorgia Meloni's party, the actual winner of 2022 elections, due to its "novelty" within the Italian political system, might have presented certain peculiarities in regard to the recruitment patterns of its parliamentary class. However, as data show, the party seems to largely follow the recruitment methods of traditional parties. Thus, despite the party getting the first female party leader who became

PM, such a novelty did not affect the party recruitment of political personnel. In fact, its parliamentary class is largely made up of male politicians already active in politics during the so-called Second Republic (and in some cases even during the First Republic). Furthermore, women -when present- are newcomers or show a less structured career model. Thus, Meloni's leadership not only did not affect political agenda in terms of increasing gender-related issues (De Giorgi et al. 2023), but also did not affect the recruitment of political personnel in a gender balanced way, so far. The M5S, on the contrary, seems to maintain its specificity. Differently from what commonly expected, there was not a normalisation of the party, which maintained a recruitment mostly centred on political outsiders. The new leadership of the former PM Giuseppe Conte, also favoured by the departure of numerous historical exponents (including the former Minister Luigi Di Maio), managed to maintain such a distinctive trait of the M5S. We will see in the future whether the M5s will be able to maintain this specificity, escaping traditional political and institutional socialisation patterns or not.

Our findings can open interesting future research paths especially by expanding the analysis by adopting a longitudinal and comparative perspective or through a more in-depth and multidimensional operationalization of the party organisation dimension.

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