

Bruno Mascitelli, Rory Steele  
& Simone Battiston

# **The 2001 Italian expatriate vote: Was it worth it?**

A view from the Africa-Asia-  
Oceania-Antarctica college



PETER LANG

This book examines the implementation and consequences of the Italian expatriate vote and representation introduced in 2001 in the external electoral colleges with special attention to the Electoral College known as Africa-Asia-Oceania-Antarctica. The Italian elections of 2006, 2008 and 2013 were important moments where the expatriate vote was expressed providing results which Italian lawmakers may have not anticipated. Moreover, the electoral expressions of the external colleges were not always in accord with Italians ones. This study examines how the stakeholders in the Africa-Asia-Oceania-Antarctica college understood and perceived this voting and representation facility after its implementation. What they thought in 2001 and what they think now. The study seeks the views of focus groups across numerous cities in Australia, interviews the protagonists and provides critical commentary on the future of this “right” and whether all this effort “was worth it” in providing Italians abroad with external voting and representation in elections and referendums.

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## Acknowledgments

To those readers who have followed the sequence of publications on this matter by the authors, this is the third book published in English on the Italian expatriate vote and representation. Each of our three studies has had a focus on Italian-Australians within the Africa-Asia-Oceania-Antarctica (AAOA) electoral college for expatriate voters, and on the implementation of the Italian expatriate vote. This study is analyzing the more than ten years experience in which this Italian legislation has been introduced and implemented (since 2001), in particular for the 2006, 2008 and 2013 Italian elections, along with five referendums over these years. This book also provides a number of perspectives, including those of one of the two elected MPs from the AAOA electoral college, those of some candidates who stood in the 2008 elections and, last but not least, those of the voters. Views and opinions among voters were collected through focus groups in the cities of Canberra, Melbourne, and Sydney. They provided excellent data for a thorough analysis of the phenomenon.

Like the other studies we have published, this book was greatly assisted by numerous individuals and organizations which deserve recognition. The preface to this book was generously prepared by Franca Arena. Franca, a former Labor State MP from New South Wales, shares her own experience and views on this controversial piece of legislation which she opposed from the outset. She is also an outspoken commentator on expatriate communities and expatriate voting. We have included in the appendices section part of her correspondence exchanges with the late Italian journalist Indro Montanelli and former diplomat and foreign affairs expert, Sergio Romano. Franca's correspondence was first published in the Italian daily *Il Corriere della Sera*. They make useful reading and supplement the overarching theme of this book.

Our publisher Peter Lang based in Switzerland saw from the outset the value of this project. Adrian Stähli and Ursula Rettinghaus de-

serve special mention for their perseverance and professionalism in guiding us through the publication process. Our heartfelt thanks go to Professor Roberto D'Alimonte, a distinguished scholar in the area of elections studies, government and electoral systems from the School of Government at the LUISS Guido Carli University, Rome. We are most grateful to him for his constructive and effective review of our work. His review ultimately convinced the publisher that the book provided an important contribution to the scholarly community in the area of expatriate voting and electoral studies. We also thank the colleagues within the Faculty of Business and Enterprise at Swinburne University of Technology who have provided encouragement and assistance much of which is considered to be normal practice and in the realm of academic collegiality.

We are greatly indebted to the participants of this project. Hon. Marco Fedi, the elected Member of Parliament for the Italian electoral college of Africa-Asia-Oceania-Antarctica shared with us valuable insights into the Italian expatriate voting phenomenon and provided an important addition to the focus group findings, balancing the debate and understanding in this area. Fedi took the opportunity to respond and clarify many questions raised by the focus groups in the course of the data collection. It should also be noted that Fedi was confirmed for the third time as the Democratic Party (PD) MP for the Italian Chamber of Deputies in the recent 2013 Italian elections. We are also thankful to former candidates on both the centre-left and centre-right side of politics who stood in the 2008 elections within the AAOA electoral college and who offered their view on both the politics and the system of expatriate voting. We sincerely thank (in alphabetical order): Joe Caputo, Luigi Casagrande, Joe Cossari, and Teresa Todaro Restifa.

Most importantly, we express thanks to the thirty-two participants of Italian-Australian extraction who participated in the focus groups held across Canberra, Melbourne, and Sydney. Lack of financial resources made it difficult to extend beyond these capital cities, let alone within the vast AAOA electoral college. We are unable to mention each and every one of the focus group participants but we thank them for making the time and commentary which we hope we have truthfully and effectively summarized. That said, we alone, however are responsible for any mistakes and deficiencies in this study.

## List of Abbreviations

AAOA	Africa-Asia-Oceania-Antarctica
AIRE	<i>Anagrafe degli Italiani Residenti all'Estero</i> (Registry of Italian Nationals Resident Abroad)
AISA	<i>Associazioni Italiane in Sud America</i> (Italian Associations in South America)
ALP	Australian Labor Party
AN	<i>Alleanza Nazionale</i> (National Alliance Party)
AS	<i>Alternativa Sociale</i> (Social Alternative)
CDL	<i>Casa delle Libertà</i> (House of Freedoms)
CGIE	<i>Consiglio Generale degli Italiani all'Estero</i> (General Council of Italians Abroad)
COMITES	<i>Comitato degli Italiani all'Estero</i> (Committee of Italians Abroad)
CMI	<i>Con Monti per l'Italia</i> (With Monti for Italy)
DC	<i>Democrazia Cristiana</i> (Christian Democratic Party)
DS	<i>Democratici di Sinistra</i> (The Democrats of the Left)
FI	<i>Forza Italia</i> (Go Italy)
FT	<i>Fiamma Tricolore</i> (Tricolour Flame)
IdV	<i>Italia del Valori</i> (Italy of Values)
IOM	International Organization of Migration
LN	<i>Lega Nord</i> (Northern League)
M5S	<i>Movimento 5 Stelle</i> (Five Star Movement)
MSI	<i>Movimento Sociale Italiano</i> (Italian Social Movement)
MS-FT	<i>Movimento Sociale Fiamma Tricolore</i> (Social Movement Tricolour Flame)
PCI	<i>Partito Comunista Italiano</i> (Italian Communist Party)
PD	<i>Partito Democratico</i> (Democratic Party)
PDL	<i>Popolo della Libertà</i> (People of Freedom Party)
PIM	<i>Per l'Italia nel mondo</i> (For Italy in the world)
PRC	<i>Partito della Rifondazione Comunista</i> (Refoundation Communist Party)
PS	<i>Partito Socialista</i> (Socialist Party)

SA	<i>Sinistra Arcobaleno</i> (Rainbow Left)
SAE	<i>Συμβούλιο Απόδημων Ελληνισμῶν</i> (World Council of Hellenes Abroad)
SCAE	Senate Committee on Australian Expatriates
UDC	<i>Unione dei Democratici Cristiani e di Centro</i> (Union of Christian and Centre Democrats)
UDEUR	<i>Unione Democratici per l'Europa</i> (Union of Democrats for Europe)
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UP	<i>Unione Prodi</i> (Union Prodi)

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## Preface

I was invited to write the preface to this book on the clear understanding that I have very strongly formulated views on the topic. In addition it was made clear that my approach would present views in a less scholarly format than the rest of the content of this book on Italian expatriate voting which has been in existence for more than ten years after the introduction of the legislation allowing voting and representation to Italians abroad. I am not an academic and my views are based on practical experience as a member of the Italian community in Australia over the last fifty years. In this time I have served in community affairs, as a radio journalist, as a Member of Parliament (MP) in the New South Wales Parliament and as a member of many community organizations. I have taken a strong interest in the issue of Italians overseas voting in the Parliament in Rome - I am opposed to the idea - and I have expressed my views clearly in writing to then Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd in 2008 and on several occasions to the well-known columnist of the *Corriere della Sera*, Sergio Romano.

I have always objected to the term *Italiani all'estero* as the term for Italians abroad. Those members of the Italian community who have lived for years in a country like Australia are more appropriately described as Australians of Italian descent.

My objections to the *voto all'estero* (expatriate voting) are fundamental. I am opposed to the concept of voting for local representatives in another sovereign parliament. In my opinion this is an idea based on political expediency and has the potential to create a detrimental and divisive impact on Italians living permanently in Australia. They have become Australian citizens and to secure representation for them on a regional geographic basis in another sovereign parliament is in my view wrong and ill-judged as an initiative.

Italian nationals who are in Australia on a temporary basis should be able to vote, either by postal vote or by going to an Italian Consulate. They are, after all, casting a vote to represent their local constitu-

ency in Italy. But for the great majority of permanent residents with double nationality, voting in Italian elections and/or electing a representative to the Italian Parliament, makes little sense. Nor should they vote in referendums. It is unacceptable that, on an issue such as the building or not of nuclear power stations, people who do not live in Italy should be able to exert influence. Such people will not have to live through the consequences of their decision.

The number of people of Italian descent around the world is reckoned to be about 60 million (4.3 million of which hold an Italian passport), and that is approximately the size of the population residing in Italy. It is a ludicrous situation to contemplate that even those five million Italian nationals overseas by their vote might change the face of Italian politics.

I have always been opposed to the overseas vote since, and in my view, our immigration is, generally, a permanent one. I firmly believe that looking backwards to our country of origin never helped with the integration of our immigrants into Australian society, and was of very little interest to the next generations.

The overseas voting issue has always had the potential to create discord in the community. That this has not so far happened is really only due to the fact that the majority of Italian Australians have cared very little about this issue and have not voted. However, this could change in the future.

I have met members of one particular Italian political party when they visited Australia. They were active in drumming up support. It made me realize the potential for divisiveness that voting in elections in Italy had for our community. One obvious matter of concern is the potential for electoral fraud. Another is the reliance that candidates might place on one or another of the institutions and structures servicing the community, some of which are supported by the Italian government or by unions and other institutions back in Italy. I do not exclude the *Patronati* [Italian pension offices], which might well influence the voting of those requiring an Italian pension or access to other Italian government entitlements. That the elderly might be vulnerable to outside pressure was brought home to me when I once asked people I knew queuing at a *Patronato* office in Sydney with papers in their



hands how they would vote and received the answer: “Well, the people in the office will tell us”.

In my experience most people in the Italian community in Australia are not interested in the overseas voting issue. Two parliamentarians have been elected to represent them within the vast electorate of Africa-Asia-Oceania-Antarctica (AAOA). I believe that the overwhelming number of Italians in Italy and people of Italian descent in the AAOA electorate have no idea who their representatives are or what they have been doing on their behalf. Their work in the Italian Parliament has been of minimal impact in Australia and I can only assume of no significance elsewhere. Around the world 18 members have been elected to the Italian Parliament by overseas citizens: but with 630 Members of the Lower House (Chamber of Deputies) and 315 Senators their influence can be discounted.

Italy has suffered at a time of financial crisis. It would make sense to reduce the number of politicians in Italy including the 18 members from abroad. In any case there are numerous bodies who represent the interests of Italians abroad, including the *Comitato degli Italiani all'Estero* (COMITES), or Committee of Italians Abroad, and the *Consiglio Generale degli Italiani all'Estero* (CGIE), or General Council of Italians Abroad, the latter a structure of about 94 people who meet regularly around the world at great expense and which has achieved little.

Franca Arena, Sydney