The Colonial Roots of Modern Nationalism: The Case of Italy*

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Abstract

European empires dominated entire continents for centuries. Yet, the literature on colonial legacies has largely focused on the long-term effects of colonialism in former colonies, overlooking its consequences for the former colonial powers themselves. In this article, we study the effect of Italy's colonial expansion in East Africa on contemporary political outcomes. Using data on all Italian soldiers buried in Eritrea and Ethiopia and the contemporary distribution of surnames across Italy, we construct an index of exposure to colonial wars at the municipality level. To isolate exogenous variation in municipalities' exposure, we exploit the historical geographical distribution of mountain troops of the Italian Army, which were largely deployed in East Africa because of Ethiopia's mountainous territory. We show that exposure to the 1930s colonial campaigns increased support for neo-fascist and nationalist parties in the immediate postwar electoral cycles, and still increases support for far-right parties today. Exploring possible mechanisms, we find that: (i) the effect is amplified in municipalities with a larger presence of Black African immigrants; (ii) far-right parties obtain larger electoral returns from anti-immigration rhetoric in municipalities with stronger colonial exposure. Taken together, our results suggest that the racial narratives used to justify the colonial expansion may have persisted across generations and continue to shape political attitudes today.

Keywords: Colonialism, Long-term persistence, Political preferences, IV
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"The white man's house must be outfitted with the best comforts available as it is preferable if he can enjoy his time in the colony, and because he should be able to enjoy the privileges that come with being white." – Carlo Quadrelli, Italian architect for the city of Asmara, Eritrea, 1936

1 Introduction

Between 1492 and 1945, European powers conquered and colonized large parts of the world. Less than a hundred years ago, the African continent was still dominated by European colonial empires. A large body of literature in economics has focused on the long-term effects of colonialism on the *colonized* countries (e.g., Acemoglu et al. [2001], Michalopoulos and Papaioannou [2016]).[1] By contrast, little is known about the effects of colonialism on the former *colonizer* countries. Yet, colonialism is a central episode in European history, with potentially persistent effects on economic and political outcomes.

In this paper, we investigate whether colonial expansion in the past contributes to explaining the rise of far-right parties in today's Europe. Our argument goes as follows. Colonial empires built and spread the view that Europeans were superior to the people they colonized (Hobsbawm [1987], Aldrich and Stucki [2022]). For instance, the 19th–20th century colonial campaigns in Africa were justified by narratives portraying Black populations as inferior and uncivilized. As a people's collective identity is often defined by its contrasts and differences with other groups (Barth [1969], Hobsbawm [2021]), these ideas may have contributed to the birth and spread of European nationalism. Building on the literature on the inter-generational transmission of political attitudes,[2] we conjecture that these xenophobic narratives and the nationalist views they fostered may have persisted after the collapse of colonial empires and still influence political outcomes today. If this is the case, places where the legacy of colonialism is stronger may exhibit higher vote shares today for far-right parties.

We provide empirical evidence consistent with this argument by focusing on the long-term political legacy of Italy's colonial campaigns in East Africa.

[1] See Fenske et al. [2025] for an extensive and recent review.

[2] See, among others: Guiso et al. [2016] on the long-term effects of Italian medieval cities' self-government on civic capital; Becker et al. [2016] on the persistence of institutional trust through the transmission of cultural norms; Voigtländer and Voth [2012] on the persistence of antisemitism in Germany over 600 years; Giuliano and Nunn [2021] on the role of environmental stability for the inter-generational transmission of cultural traits.

Italy's colonial expansion in East Africa began with the occupation of Eritrea in 1890. In 1895, the country attempted to further expand its influence in the area by invading the Kingdom of Ethiopia, but was defeated at the Battle of Adwa in March 1896 (first Italo-Ethiopian war). In 1908, Italy established the colony of Somalia. In October 1935, the Fascist regime declared war again on the Kingdom of Ethiopia (second Italo-Ethiopian war). After a rapid and brutal campaign, on May 9, 1936, Mussolini celebrated the conquest of Addis Ababa and proclaimed the rebirth of the Empire.

The colonial experience was characterized by strong racial segregation. For instance, cities were built such that Italians would live in white/European neighborhoods (Labanca [2002]). The 1938 *Leggi Razziali* (Racial Laws), promulgated under Fascism, provide another prominent example. Aimed at preserving "racial purity", these laws institutionalized racial discrimination both in Italy and in its colonies. Marriages between Italian men and African women were criminalized, and children born from such unions could no longer be recognized by their Italian fathers. Italy's campaigns in East Africa thus provide an ideal setting to study the long-term persistence of colonial racial narratives.

To reach this goal, we construct a novel measure of *exposure* to the colonial expansion at the municipality-level. We proceed as follows. First, we collect data on the surnames of all the soldiers buried in the Italian military cemeteries of East Africa from official documentation provided by the Italian Embassies in Eritrea and Ethiopia.[3] Second, we estimate the contemporary distribution of these surnames across Italian municipalities. Specifically, for each municipality, we count how many households today bear the same surname as one of the buried soldiers. We retrieve this information through a partnership with *Cognomix.it*, a company that records the geographic distribution of Italian surnames based on fixed-line telephone subscription data. Third, we integrate population data and compute an index of *colonial exposure* that captures the intensity of a municipality's historical ties to the country's colonial expansion.[4]

The intuition behind our index is simple. A municipality where the index is very

[3]These cemeteries host soldiers who died during the whole period of Italy's military presence in East Africa, i.e., from (1) the first Italo-Ethiopian war of 1895–96; to (2) the second Italo-Ethiopian war of 1935–1936; (3) the subsequent years of occupation and counter-guerrilla operations (1936–40); and (4) the battles of World War II (1941). Throughout the paper, we refer to (2), (3), and (4) as the "1930s colonial campaigns".

[4]A similar approach can be found in Acemoglu et al. [2022], which uses data on casualties *per capita* to proxy for municipalities' exposure to WWI. We discuss this point in more detail in Appendix A.3.

high hosts many households today who share a surname with a soldier buried in East Africa. Since surnames are geographically clustered, it is likely that the same municipality sent many soldiers to East Africa and therefore that it hosts many of their descendants now. Under this logic, our index captures the intensity of a municipality's exposure to the colonial expansion. To corroborate this intuition, we show that our index is correlated with the presence of streets dedicated to the colonial enterprise.

We start our empirical analysis by showing that municipalities more exposed to colonialism exhibit significantly higher support for far-right parties in recent parliamentary elections. However, these estimates are likely biased because soldiers' deployment to the colonies was not necessarily random. If a municipality was already highly nationalistic in the early 1930s, its citizens might have been more likely to volunteer for the colonial campaigns. Indeed, there is ample historical evidence of the prevalence of voluntary enrollment, reflecting the highly ideological content of these campaigns (Battistelli and Crociani [2013]). In addition, our index of colonial exposure is likely subject to measurement error, which would bias the OLS estimates downward.

To address these concerns, we adopt an Instrumental Variables (IV) approach. Historical sources report that mountain units of the Italian army were intensively deployed to East Africa. These troops were trained for warfare at altitude, a skill that would prove particularly valuable given Ethiopia's mountainous territory (Ardito [2019]). Therefore, we exploit geographic variation in the recruitment of mountain troops as an exogenous source of variation in municipalities' exposure to colonialism. In other words, we compare municipalities with similar geographical and socio-economic characteristics but different historical specialization in mountain troop recruitment.

To isolate geographic variation in mountain troops' recruitment, we use the World War I military Roll of Honor – a database that contains detailed information on all Italian soldiers who died during WWI, including their municipality of origin and military unit. We use this database to identify which municipalities intensively supply mountain soldiers to the Italian army. We then show that the resulting instrumental variable is strongly correlated with municipalities' exposure to the colonial campaigns.

The IV estimates confirm that the colonial campaigns have had a substantial effect on contemporary support for the far-right. Under our preferred specification, a one standard deviation increase in the colonial exposure index induces a 4.3 percentage

point increase in the sum of far-right parties' vote share in the 2013 elections (almost half of the baseline mean).[5] Results are robust to using alternative specifications of the instrument (we use both continuous and binary versions), as well as to the inclusion of geographic, socio-economic, and military-related controls. They also remain statistically significant under weak-instrument-robust Anderson-Rubin inference and when using spatially-corrected standard errors.

We investigate the mechanisms behind these results. First, using data from Acemoglu et al. [2022], we show that our instrument is uncorrelated with different measures of support for fascism in the 1920s-1930s.[6] Therefore, our results are likely to be driven by the long-term consequences of the 1930s colonial campaigns, rather than by those of the 19th century.[7]

Second, we provide evidence that the observed effects are unlikely to be driven by other major conflicts that involved mountain troops, or by the distinctive military identity developed by exposed municipalities. Focusing on pre-1930s potential confounders, we show that our results are robust to controlling for municipalities' exposure to WWI and to the 1860s independence wars, as well as to excluding the provinces that throughout the whole sample have hosted at least once the *Adunata Nazionale degli Alpini*, the annual gathering of the mountain veterans' association. We also document that the results remain positive and statistically significant when excluding from the sample municipalities that (likely) sent mountain soldiers to the WWII Russian campaign (1941–1943), the only other major conflict in which mountain units were involved *after* the 1930s colonial campaigns.[8] These results already hint at what makes colonial wars different from other wars. Unlike other conflicts, they combined military participation with intensive exposure to racial narratives of domination.

We then provide indirect evidence for the prominent role played by these racial narratives. We show that the effect of colonial exposure on far-right vote share is

[5]Our main results focus on the 2013 parliamentary election, as it is the first election after 2009, i.e., the period in which the distribution of surnames is measured.

[6]This result also supports the validity of the exclusion restriction assumption, as it confirms that municipalities' propensity to supply mountain soldiers is plausibly uncorrelated with the number of volunteers that participated in the invasion of Ethiopia in 1935.

[7]This is consistent with the *scale* of the 1935 invasion of Ethiopia (which involved over 330,000 soldiers, against fewer than 20,000 in the first Italo-Ethiopian war), and with the intense racial connotation marking both the campaign and the subsequent years of colonization.

[8]We recover this information from historical records of the Italian Military Library. We also show that exposure to the Russian front does not predict contemporary support for far-right parties, once we control for colonial exposure.

amplified in municipalities with a larger presence of Black African immigrants (the group against whom colonial narratives were directed), while no similar pattern holds for non-Black African immigrants.

We also document that the effect has persisted across the entire post-war period, from the first democratic election in 1948 to the most recent one in 2022, consistent with a pattern of inter-generational transmission of political attitudes.

Moreover, we test whether far-right parties obtain larger electoral returns in municipalities with stronger colonial exposure when adopting anti-immigration rhetoric. To this end, we apply text analysis techniques to over 2 million speeches delivered between 1948 and 2022 at the Italian Parliament. This allows us to measure the intensity of far-right parties' anti-immigration rhetoric across all election cycles, and to exploit its variation over time. We build two distinct measures, capturing the *salience* of immigration in parliamentary discourse, and the ideological *sentiment* with which this topic is discussed. The former measure is obtained by simply counting the occurrence of a series of keywords across the speeches of far-right members of Parliament. The latter is obtained by submitting each speech to a Large Language Model (LLM) for ideological classification. We document that immigration has become increasingly salient in far-right parliamentary discourse over time, and that these parties have progressively shifted toward a more hostile rhetoric toward this topic.

Our estimates show that far-right parties' electoral returns to anti-immigration rhetoric (both in terms of salience and sentiment) are significantly larger in municipalities with stronger colonial exposure. We repeat the exercise using the salience of five other (typically right-wing) topics. The results of this *placebo* exercise reveal that exposed municipalities are not generically more responsive to far-right messages. On the contrary, they respond specifically to anti-immigration rhetoric.

Taken together, our results suggest that the racial narratives used to justify the 1930s colonial campaigns may have persisted across generations and continue to shape political attitudes in today's Italy.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. The next paragraph reviews the literature and discusses our contribution. Section 2 provides historical background on Italy's colonial expansion in East Africa. Section 3 describes the data and the construction of the colonial exposure index. Section 4 presents our empirical strategy.

Section 5 presents the main results. Section 6 rules out alternative explanations, and discusses potential mechanisms. Section 7 concludes. Additional details, results, robustness checks, and methodological discussions are reported in the Appendix.

Literature and Contribution Historians and sociologists have long argued that the colonial narratives may continue to fuel racial discrimination in former colonial powers. Scholars have made this argument both for Italy (Labanca [2002], Del Boca [2005], Giuliani and Lombardi-Diop [2013]) and for other European countries (Gilroy [2005], Stoler [2016]). However, to the best of our knowledge, this paper is the first to provide empirical evidence that these narratives still shape voting behavior today.

This paper contributes to three streams of literature at the intersection of economics and political science. First, it contributes to the literature on colonial legacies. As already mentioned, this literature has largely focused on the long-term effects of colonialism in the former colonized countries.[9] The main lesson from this literature is that colonial institutions continue to shape and undermine the development path of former colonized countries (Acemoglu et al. [2001], Michalopoulos and Papaioannou [2020]).

This paper also speaks to the literature on the historical roots of contemporary political outcomes (Cirone and Pepinsky [2022]). The main historical events of the 20th century have been shown to persistently shape political attitudes in today's Europe. For example, Fontana et al. [2023], Tur-Prats and Valencia Caicedo [2025] and Rozenas and Zhukov [2019] show that the Nazi occupation of Italy, the Spanish Civil War, and the Stalinist repression, respectively, have had persistent effects on political attitudes. We contribute to this literature by focusing on colonial campaigns, a major historical phenomenon whose political legacy in colonizer countries remains understudied.

Finally, we contribute to the literature on the causes of the rise of far-right populist parties in Europe (Guriev and Papaioannou [2022]). The main existing explanations highlight economic insecurity (Guiso et al. [2024], Panunzi et al. [2024]), globalization and trade (Colantone and Stanig [2018], Dippel et al. [2022]), and immigration (Edo et al. [2019], Tabellini [2020]). We contribute to this literature by discussing a possibly overlooked channel: the historical persistence of colonial narratives.

[9] A notable exception is given by Acemoglu et al. [2005], which focuses on the long-term effects of overseas expansion on European countries, and shows how the Atlantic trade shaped institutional change and economic growth in early modern Europe.

2 Historical Background

Italy was a late-comer in the *Scramble for Africa*. Between 1880 and 1914, European powers colonized almost the entire African continent. Britain and France led the race. The Kingdom of Italy – a relatively young and poor nation unified in 1861 (Federico et al. [2025]) – struggled to compete.

Italy's colonial expansion began in (what is now) Eritrea. Following the occupation of the Red Sea port of Massawa and a subsequent series of treaties with local rulers, Eritrea was officially declared an Italian colony in 1890.

In 1895, Italy attempted to further expand its influence in the area by invading the Kingdom of Ethiopia, but was defeated at the Battle of Adwa in March 1896 (first Italo-Ethiopian war). The battle resulted in massive losses. Of the roughly 15,000 Italian soldiers deployed, around 5,000 died (Labanca [2002, p. 85]). Adwa was the first major battle in which a white European army was defeated by a Black African one, and for this reason it was perceived as a national humiliation in Italy.

By contrast, Somalia came under Italian control through a series of protectorates established from the late 1880s and was formally declared a colony in 1908.[10] Before the 1930s, however, the Italian presence in Africa was limited. In 1931, the total Italian population across all African colonies amounted to about 38,000 individuals, of whom roughly 8,000 lived in Eritrea (see Figure A2 in the Appendix).[11]

Under Fascism, Italy's colonial ambitions revived.[12] In October 1935, Mussolini's government launched another invasion of Ethiopia (second Italo-Ethiopian war). This campaign was framed as revenge for the defeat at Adwa and as a demonstration of the nation's regained strength. The war mobilized large parts of society. Between October 1935 and May 1936, 330,000 soldiers were deployed to East Africa (Labanca [2002, p. 194]). Fascist volunteer militias – the *Camicie Nere* (Blackshirts) – were deployed alongside regular troops.

The second Italo-Ethiopian war ended in May 1936 with the conquest of Addis Ababa and the proclamation of the *Africa Orientale Italiana* (Italian East Africa, here-

[10] Italy also took control over the North African provinces of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica after declaring war on the Ottoman Empire in 1911.

[11] See the 1931 census, available here.

[12] See Bertazzini [2020] for a review of the economic history literature on Italian colonialism. See also Del Boca [1976], Labanca [2002] and Deplano [2015], among others.

inafter referred to as AOI). As first documented by Del Boca [1976], the fast victory was also made possible by the use of chemical weapons, a practice which violated international law.

During Fascism, Italian settlements in AOI boomed. Between 1931 and 1940, the Italian population in Eritrea (including both soldiers and civilians) increased to approximately 150,000 people (Figure A2). Between 1935 and 1936 alone, Italian civilians' immigration to East Africa increased by 66%.[13] These numbers reflect both the military mobilization related to the invasion of Ethiopia and the regime's deliberate encouragement of settler migration.

As of 1940, most Italians living in AOI were located in Eritrea and Scioa, the area around Addis Ababa (see Figure A3 in the Appendix). While Italians made up only a small share of the total population of AOI, they were concentrated in the main cities. In Asmara, the capital of Eritrea, approximately 57% of the residents were Italian. In Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's main city, around 23% were Italian. However, Italian control over Ethiopia was fragile. While Italian forces held Addis Ababa and the main urban centers, large parts of the rural territory were never effectively pacified. Ethiopian forces conducted guerrilla operations throughout the occupation, and by the time British forces entered Ethiopia in 1941, significant portions of the country had never been brought under stable Italian administration.

Since the 1890s, where Italian presence was established, the colonial experience was characterized by strict racial segregation. In the main cities, the separation between Italian settlers and the native population was enforced through a system of *apartheid*, as described by Labanca [2002, p. 360]:

> *White citizens were forbidden to reside in indigenous neighborhoods; colonial subjects were prohibited from entering public establishments reserved for whites [...]; taxi drivers and transport operators were forbidden from carrying indigenous passengers.*
> (Authors' translation from Italian)

Racial segregation intensified under Fascism and following the conquest of Ethiopia. The regime's racial policies culminated in 1938 with the enactment of the *Leggi Razziali* (Racial Laws), which institutionalized racial discrimination. Relations between Italian

[13] We recover this information from archival sources at *Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale. Archivio Storico Diplomatico, Roma - Ministero Africa Italiana vol. IV Fondo Statistica, b. 3*, accessed on 24 November 2025.

men and African women (widespread among soldiers in the colonies) were criminalized, and children born from such unions could no longer be recognized by their Italian fathers. This marked a sharp difference compared to the early decades of colonization.[14]

Over 1941-1943, following military defeat during World War II, Italy lost control of all its African colonies.[15]

3 Data

3.1 Exposure to Colonialism

Our goal is to estimate the long-term political consequences of Italy's colonial expansion in East Africa. To this end, we construct a novel measure of municipality-level exposure to colonialism across the country. We proceed in three steps.

First, we collect data on the surnames of all soldiers buried in the Italian military cemeteries in East Africa. These data come from official documents provided by the Italian Embassies in Eritrea and Ethiopia. For each buried soldier, these documents record the name and surname and, in some cases, the military unit, the district, and the year of death. There are 6,559 *unique* surnames.[16]

Second, we estimate the contemporary geographic distribution of these surnames by counting, for each municipality, the number of households whose surname matches that of a buried soldier. This is possible thanks to a partnership with *Cognomix.it*, a company that records the geographic distribution of Italian surnames based on households' fixed-line telephone contracts (as of 2009).

Third, we integrate population data from the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT), and compute the following index of colonial exposure:

$$All\ Colonial\ Exposure_m = \frac{All\ Surnames_m}{Population_m} \times 1000,$$

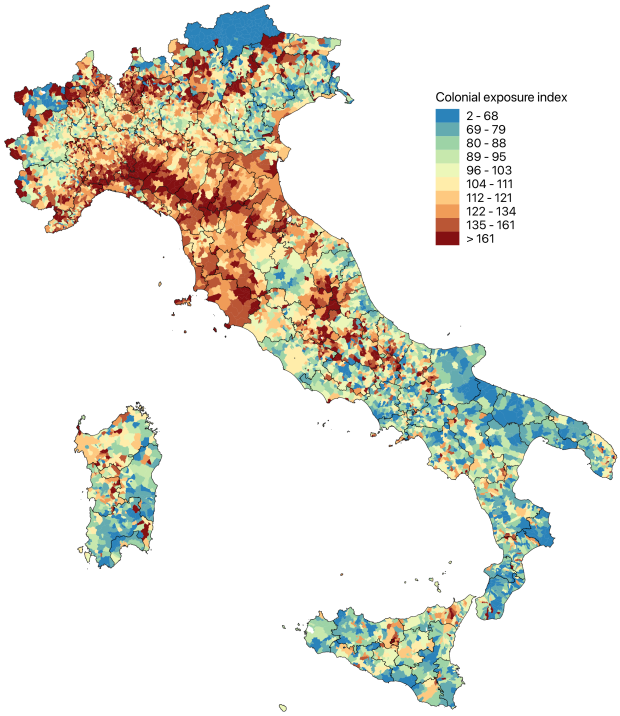
[14] During the period 1890-1930s, children born from an Italian man and an African woman could obtain Italian citizenship even without formal paternal recognition.

[15] A partial exception is Somalia, which Italy administered again from 1950 to 1960 under a UN trusteeship to prepare it for independence.

[16] See Appendix A. Soldiers in our sample cover the entire period of Italy's military presence in East Africa. For instance, 99% of the soldiers for which the year of death is recorded died either at the Battle of Adwa (1896) or during the 1930s colonial campaigns (1935–1941). To reduce measurement error, we exclude the most common surnames (i.e., any surname that belongs to the 100 most common Italian surnames according to *Cognomix.it*). The full list of excluded surnames is reported in Table A2. See also Appendix A.3 on measurement error.

where $All\ Surnames_m$ denotes the number of matching surnames in municipality m, and $Population_m$ is the total population of municipality m in 2009.[17] Figure 1 illustrates the geographic distribution of the index across 7,887 Italian municipalities.[18]

Figure 1: Colonial Exposure by Municipality



Note: The map shows the intensity of colonial exposure by municipality in Italy. The color scale is based on a quantile classification, where each color bin contains the same number of municipalities. Higher values reflect a stronger historical connection to the country's colonial expansion in East Africa. Black lines correspond to 2025 province boundaries.

The intuition behind our index is simple. Consider a municipality where the index of colonial exposure is very high. This means that many households today share the surname of a soldier buried in East Africa. Since Italian surnames are geographically clustered,[19] it is likely that the municipality deployed many soldiers to the colonial campaigns and, therefore, that it hosts many descendants of these soldiers today.[20]

[17] Population data from ISTAT are available here. We use population data from 2009 to ensure consistency with the timing of measurement of the surnames frequency data. Table A3 reports the number of surnames matched to at least one household in the contemporary surnames distribution.

[18] As of 2025, Italy comprises 7,896 municipalities, so our sample covers nearly the entire country. The small number of municipalities not included reflects cases where administrative identifiers could not be matched across data sources.

[19] For instance, *Abatino* – the first surname in alphabetical order in our list of buried soldiers – was borne by 24 families across Italy in 2009, of which one third resided in the single municipality of Cerignola, in the province of Foggia, Puglia (see *Cognomix.it*).

[20] Importantly, our measure is based on where these descendants *live today*, not on the soldiers' municipality of origin, which makes our index robust to internal migration. We discuss this point in more detail in Appendix A.3.

Under this logic, our index of colonial exposure captures the intensity of a municipality's historical ties to the colonial expansion. If this is true, the index should be correlated with other measures of the same underlying phenomenon. For instance, municipalities with stronger colonial ties may have more streets whose names are dedicated to colonial battles, locations, and protagonists.

To assess the validity of our measure, we construct an index of *Colonial Streets Density*. First, we establish a list of keywords referring to places associated with the East African campaigns. Then, we use OpenStreetMap (OSM) to match these keywords against the name of every street in Italy. For each municipality, we count the number of "colonial streets" and divide it by municipal area to obtain an index of *Colonial Streets Density* (colonial streets per 100 km^2). In Table A4, we show that our measure of colonial exposure is positively associated with the presence of streets dedicated to the memory of the colonial campaigns.

3.2 Electoral Data and Covariates

In order to empirically investigate the relationship between colonial exposure and support for far-right parties, we use municipality-level data on electoral results from the Italian Ministry of Internal Affairs. Our main outcome is the sum of far-right parties' vote shares in the 2013 parliamentary election.[21] Its spatial distribution is shown in Panel (c) of Figure A4. We focus on this election cycle because it is the first after 2009 (the year in which we observe the geographical distribution of surnames). Later in the paper, we extend our analysis to all election cycles between 1948 and 2022.

We control for a comprehensive set of municipalities' geographic, demographic, and economic characteristics. In particular, we integrate additional ISTAT data on the share of university graduates, the employment rate, the share of residents aged 65 or older, as well as urbanization level, altitude, land area, and geographic coordinates (latitude and longitude). We further add data on income *per capita* from the Italian Ministry of

[21] See Eligendo Open Data. The Italian parliament comprises two chambers. We focus on elections to the *Camera dei Deputati* (Chamber of Deputies), as elections to the *Senato della Repubblica* (Senate of the Republic) used to be reserved for citizens aged 25 or older (until 2021). Moreover, Italy has used mixed electoral systems combining majoritarian and proportional elements during two distinct phases (1993–2005, and 2017–present). Throughout the paper, we focus on municipality-level vote shares from the proportional component of the ballot. We classify parties' political affiliation by submitting their official names to a large language model (ChatGPT) and reviewing each list by hand (see Table A8). For instance, in 2013, the main far-right parties are *Fratelli d'Italia* and *Lega Nord*.

Economy and Finance (MEF).[22]

Furthermore, we integrate municipality-level data from Acemoglu et al. [2021] to control for exposure to World War I, military tradition, and other relevant characteristics that could affect electoral outcomes. Specifically, we include data on WWI casualties *per capita*, on the share (out of the total male population) of WWI volunteers, on the share of veterans from previous conflicts (classes 1874–1895 and 1896–1900), and on the presence of any volunteer in the 1866 independence war. To account for socio-economic conditions, we also include data on population and (male) literacy in 1911, on the share of industrial workers in 1911, on a dummy for widespread land ownership in the municipality in 1885, and on the violent crime rate in 1874.

These variables are available only for a subset of municipalities. This happens for two reasons. The first reason is that the dataset from Acemoglu et al. [2021] contains information for 5,775 municipalities. Moreover, many of these municipalities have been subject to administrative mergers over time. After accounting for these mergers, we are left with 4,863 municipalities.[23] We refer to this smaller sample of municipalities as to the *historical sample*.[24]

The descriptive statistics for the main variables used in our analysis are reported in Table A7 in the Appendix.

4 Empirical Analysis

4.1 OLS Estimates

We start our empirical investigation by examining the relationship between our index of colonial exposure and contemporary support for far-right parties. Table 1 reports the results of an OLS regression of far-right parties' vote share in the 2013 parliamentary election on colonial exposure and the set of controls described in Section 3, estimated

[22]The data on the share of university graduates, employment rate, and share of residents aged 65 or older are available in the ISTAT 2011 census, and the data on urbanization level, altitude, and land area are available at ISTAT. The geographic coordinates are taken from the 2025 shape file from ISTAT. The data on income *per capita* is available at MEF Open Data.

[23]Italian municipalities are periodically subject to administrative mergers. Whenever a merger takes place, we assign the newly created municipality a population-weighted average of the variable of interest across the pre-merger municipalities.

[24]Panel (A) of Figure A4 in the Appendix illustrates the geographical coverage of the *historical sample* as compared to the *main sample*.

on the main sample (Columns 1–4) and on the historical sample (Columns 5–6).

Table 1: Colonial Exposure and Contemporary Support for Far-right Parties

	Main sample				Historical sample	
Dep. var.: FR vote share, 2013	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Colonial exposure	0.0071***	0.0034**	0.0042**	0.0045***	0.0065***	0.0064***
	(0.0020)	(0.0015)	(0.0017)	(0.0017)	(0.0021)	(0.0021)
Controls:						
Province FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Geographic		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Demographic			✓	✓	✓	✓
Economic				✓	✓	✓
Fascist vote share in 1924						✓
Observations	7,879	7,879	7,879	7,879	4,863	4,863
Number of clusters	107	107	107	107	96	96
Mean dep. var.	9.6%	9.6%	9.6%	9.6%	11.5%	11.5%

Notes: The variable *FR (Far-right) vote share, 2013* ranges from 0 to 100. The *Colonial exposure* index is computed from the surnames of *all soldiers* buried in East Africa. All specifications include province fixed effects (FE). Column (1) presents the baseline specification with province FE only. Column (2) adds geographic controls (altitude, squared altitude, cubic altitude, latitude, longitude and land area). Column (3) adds contemporary demographic controls measured in 2009–2011 (population in 2009, share of people aged 65 or older, share of graduates, and urbanization level). Column (4) further includes contemporary economic controls measured in 2009–2011 (income per capita and share of working population). Columns (5) and (6) replicate column (4) on the historical sample. Column (6) additionally controls for fascist vote shares in 1924. The main sample includes 7,879 out of 7,887 municipalities, as a small number of municipalities recorded no far-right party candidate in the 2013 parliamentary election. Standard errors clustered at the province level are in parentheses. Significance levels: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

We first look at Columns (1) to (4). The coefficient is positive and statistically significant across all specifications, suggesting that municipalities more exposed to the country's colonial expansion in East Africa exhibit higher support for far-right parties 80 years later.

However, these estimates are likely biased because soldiers' deployment to the colonies was not necessarily random. If a municipality's residents were already highly nationalistic before the colonial expansion, they might have been more likely to volunteer for the colonial campaigns.[25]

We partially address this issue by controlling for the Fascist party's vote share in 1924.

[25]There is ample historical evidence on the prevalence of voluntary enrollment of the *Camicie Nere* (Blackshirts) – the Fascist party's volunteer militia, formally known as the *Milizia Volontaria per la Sicurezza Nazionale* (MVSN) – in the 1930s colonial campaigns (Battistelli and Crociani [2013]). In fact, many MVSN volunteers are buried in the Italian military cemeteries in East Africa (see Table A1). The surnames of these soldiers enter the construction of our colonial exposure index. A natural question is why excluding these surnames would not solve the self-selection problem. The main reason is that some soldiers of the *regular* army may also have volunteered in the colonial campaigns. In this sense, a very well-known example is the journalist Indro Montanelli, who volunteered for the invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 at the age of 26 and served as an officer in the XX *Battaglione Eritreo* (Montanelli [1936]).

This variable is available only for the *historical sample* (see Section 3).[26] The coefficient remains positive and significant across the two specifications (Columns (5) and (6)), suggesting that the positive relationship between colonial exposure and contemporary far-right vote share is not driven by support for fascism in the 1920s.

However, this does not fully rule out endogeneity concerns. In fact, much of the Fascist regime's consolidation of consensus occurred years after taking power, and peaked in 1935–1936, in part due to the victory in Ethiopia (De Felice [1974]). This implies that support for fascism before the invasion of Ethiopia may not be fully captured in the 1920s elections. In addition, our index of colonial exposure is likely subject to measurement error, which would bias OLS estimates toward zero.[27] To address these concerns, we propose an IV approach.

4.2 Instrumental Variable

Our goal is to isolate exogenous variation in municipalities' exposure to Italy's colonial expansion in East Africa. As discussed above, the main threat to identification is self-selection into treatment. Therefore, our IV strategy exploits municipalities' propensity to supply conscripted (rather than volunteer) soldiers to the colonial campaigns.

According to historical sources, mountain units of the Italian army were largely deployed to East Africa because of their training for warfare at altitude (Ardito [2019]). We exploit geographical differences in the recruitment of mountain troops as an exogenous source of variation in colonial exposure. In other words, we compare municipalities with similar geographical and socio-economic characteristics but different historical specialization in mountain troop recruitment.

4.2.1 Construction of the Instrument

We do not have precise data on the geographic distribution of mountain troops. Therefore, we use the World War I military Roll of Honor to estimate the likelihood of historically supplying mountain troops, across municipalities. This database contains information on all Italian soldiers who died during WWI. For each dead soldier, it lists

[26] The 1924 election was the last election in the country, held under significant and violent interference from the Fascist party. Results are similar when using the 1919 or 1921 elections instead. These electoral data come from Acemoglu et al. [2021].

[27] See Appendix A.3 for a detailed discussion on measurement error.

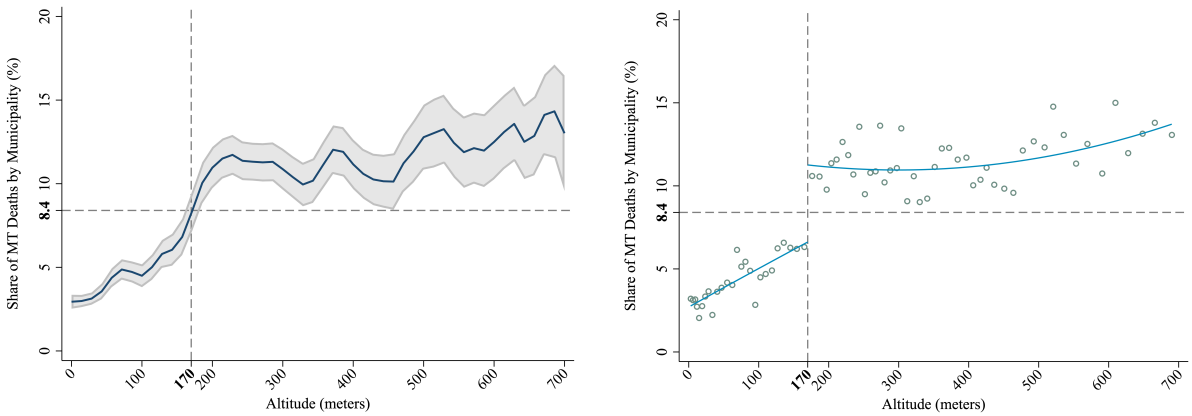
the municipality of origin and military unit. For each municipality, we compute the proportion of dead soldiers who were enrolled in a mountain unit. That is,

$$\textit{Share of Mountain Troops}_m = \frac{\textit{Soldiers from Mountain Troops}_m}{\textit{All Soldiers}_m} \times 100,$$

where $\textit{Soldiers from Mountain Troops}_m$ denotes the number of soldiers born in municipality m who died during WWI while enrolled in a mountain troop; and $\textit{All Soldiers}_m$ is the total number of soldiers born in municipality m who died during WWI.[28]

Our goal is to identify which municipalities belong to mountain troops' recruiting area. That is, to create a dummy variable indicating whether a municipality historically supplies mountain units or not. To do this, we identify a threshold in the *Share of Mountain Troops* above which a municipality can be classified as historically supplying mountain troops. We know that mountain units recruited soldiers who were familiar with mountain environments. We then look at the relationship between the *Share of Mountain Troops* and the *Altitude* of the municipality's major center (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Relationship Between the *Share of Mountain Troops* and *Altitude*



(a) Local polynomial smoothing (b) Bin scatterplot

Note: Local polynomial smoothing (Panel (a)) and bin scatterplot (Panel (b)) of the relationship between the *Share of Mountain Troops* and the *Altitude* of the municipality's major center. In the bin scatterplot, each dot represents the mean within bins of about 100 municipalities.

Figure 2 shows that the *Share of Mountain Troops* increases gradually with *Altitude*, up to approximately 170 meters. After this point, it rises sharply and stabilizes at a

[28] A soldier is classified as belonging to a mountain troop if the unit listed in the WWI casualty records corresponds to an *Alpini* unit, *Mountain Artillery* unit, or any logistic, medical, or support unit explicitly designed for mountain warfare, as explained in Appendix B.

substantially higher level.[29] The horizontal dashed line corresponds to the average *Share of Mountain Troops* among municipalities located slightly above the 170-meter altitude threshold (8.4%). We use these two thresholds to construct our *Mountain Troop* dummy variable as follows:

$$\textit{Mountain Troop}_m = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if } \textit{Share of Mountain Troops}_m \geq 8.4 \text{ and } \textit{Altitude}_m \geq 170 \\ 0 & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases}$$

$\textit{Mountain Troop}_m$, our main instrument, is a dummy variable indicating, for each municipality, whether they historically supplied mountain units or not.[30] In Figure A6 in the Appendix, we show that our main results are robust to alternative definitions of the instrument (including both binary and continuous versions) and do not depend on any specific discretization.

4.2.2 Relevance of the Instrument

To ensure that our instrument truly captures the historical distribution of mountain units across Italy, we first compare it with other measures of the presence of mountain troops.

We compare four measures. First, we use anecdotal evidence on the traditional recruiting areas of *Alpini* brigades (the main mountain unit) from *Wikipedia*. Second,

[29] This is consistent with the recruitment pattern of mountain soldiers. While mountain units initially recruited men from very high-altitude municipalities, they increasingly preferred specialized *training* over the place of residence (see *Associazione-Nazionale-Alpini.it*). The objective gradually became to enroll men who were trained to mountain environments. For example, in Alba (a municipality in the region of Piedmont located at 172 meters of altitude), the *Share of Mountain Troops* is 29%, consistent with the fact that men from Alba were trained in the nearby mountains and therefore fulfilled the criteria to be recruited in a mountain unit. This also suggests that municipalities located at very low altitude are very unlikely to supply mountain units as their residents are arguably less familiar with mountain environments.

[30] In our preferred specification, we use both *Altitude* and the *Share of Mountain Troops* to define the instrument. In fact, the historical recruitment pattern of mountain soldiers described in Footnote 29 suggests that altitude is (arguably) a necessary – but not sufficient – condition for a municipality to historically supply mountain units. Using only the *Share of Mountain Troops* to define the instrument would risk classifying as *Mountain Troop* some low-altitude municipalities where a high share arises spuriously. In fact, a high *Share of Mountain Troops* could be driven by a small number of casualties. For example, in Borghetto Santo Spirito (a coastal municipality at 2 meters of altitude) 5 soldiers died during WWI, of whom 1 was enrolled in a mountain unit, giving a share of mountain troops of 20%. We therefore prefer the more conservative two-threshold approach in our main specification. In Figure A6 in the Appendix, we show that the results are robust to using only the *Share of Mountain Troops* threshold to define the instrument (without conditioning on *Altitude*).

we use the military district (i.e., the province of enrollment) of soldiers buried in East Africa (available only for 51% of them) to build a province-level indicator of the share of mountain soldiers.[31] Third, we use these soldiers' surnames. For each municipality, we count the number of present-day families (per 1,000 inhabitants) who bear the same surname of a mountain troop soldier buried in East Africa. In other words, this variable captures the geographic distribution of the mountain soldiers' surnames. Throughout the paper, we refer to it as *Mountain Troop Exposure*.[32] Figure A5 in the Appendix shows the spatial distribution of these three variables and the instrument. The four maps strongly overlap.

We then test the relevance of the instrument through the following first-stage specification:

$$Colonial\ Exposure_m = \gamma_0 + \gamma_1 Mountain\ Troop_m + \gamma_2 W_m + \delta_p + \varepsilon_m, \tag{1}$$

where $Colonial\ Exposure_m$ is *an* index of colonial exposure in municipality m; $Mountain\ Troop_m$ is the dummy variable for the historical presence of mountain troops in municipality m (our main instrument); W_m is the vector of covariates described in Section 3; and δ_p are province fixed effects (FE). Standard errors are clustered at the province level. Equation (1) tests whether the historical presence of mountain troops systematically predicts colonial exposure once we account for province FE and a set of geographic, demographic, and socio-economic characteristics.

We use two indices of colonial exposure. The first index is computed using all surnames of buried soldiers (*All Colonial Exposure*; see Section 3.1). The second index is *Mountain Troop Exposure*, which – as discussed above – is computed using only the surnames of soldiers belonging to mountain units. This allows us to perform a key comparison. If our IV effectively captures municipalities' propensity to conscript soldiers into mountain units of the army, we should expect to observe a stronger first-

[31] For each province p, we compute:

$$Share\ of\ Mountain\ Troops_p = \frac{Soldiers\ from\ Mountain\ Troops_p}{All\ Soldiers_p} \times 100\ ,$$

where $Soldiers\ from\ Mountain\ Troops_p$ is the number of mountain soldiers from province p who are buried in East Africa, and $All\ Soldiers_p$ is the total number of buried soldiers from province p.

[32] In the next paragraph, we explain why we do not use this variable as our main colonial exposure index.

stage F-statistic when using the *Mountain Troop Exposure* as the endogenous variable.[33]

Table 2 reports the results of Equation (1) using *All Colonial Exposure* as the endogenous variable in Columns (1)–(3), and using *Mountain Troop Exposure* in Columns (4)–(6). All variables are standardized, so coefficients are expressed in standard deviation units.[34]

Table 2: Historical Presence of Mountain Troops and Colonial Exposure

Dependent variable:	All colonial exposure			Mountain troop exposure		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Mountain Troops	0.19***	0.10***	0.09***	0.20***	0.14***	0.14***
	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.02)
Controls:						
Province FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Geographic		✓	✓		✓	✓
Contemporary Demog + Econ			✓			✓
Observations	7,301	7,301	7,301	7,301	7,301	7,301
Number of clusters	107	107	107	107	107	107
1st stage F-stat	57.26	13.89	15.43	50.39	28.91	31.82

Note: This table reports the first-stage results corresponding to Equation 1. All variables are standardized to have mean zero and unit standard deviation. Columns (1)–(3) use the colonial exposure variable computed from the surnames of *all soldiers* buried in East Africa as the dependent variable. Columns (4)–(6) use the colonial exposure variable computed from the surnames of *mountain troop soldiers* buried in East Africa as the dependent variable. Columns (1) and (4) include province fixed effects only. Columns (2) and (5) add geographic controls (altitude, squared altitude, land area, and geographic coordinates). Columns (3) and (6) further add contemporary (2009–2011) demographic controls (population, share of people aged 65+, share of graduates, urbanization level) and economic controls (income per capita and employment rate). The sample includes 7,301 out of 7,887 municipalities, as a small number of historical municipalities in the WWI casualty database could not be unambiguously matched to their current administrative successors and were therefore excluded. Standard errors clustered at the province level are in parentheses. Significance levels: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

We start with column (1), which includes province FE only. The historical presence of mountain troops is associated with a 0.19 standard deviation increase in *All Colonial*

[33]Two additional questions may arise. First, one may wonder why we need to instrument *Mountain Troop Exposure*. The reason is that some mountain soldiers may have volunteered for the colonial campaigns. The IV allows us to isolate exogenous variation because it exploits the location of mountain units' barracks and recruiting areas, which is plausibly exogenous to political preferences (see Section 4.2.3). Second, one may ask why we do not restrict our attention exclusively to these surnames. In this case, there are two main answers. The first reason is that the number of mountain soldiers recorded in the Italian Embassies' documents is likely *undercounted* because information on the military unit is missing for 52% of the soldiers with no recorded date of death (which are more than 1,000 and that most likely died during the 1935-1936 campaigns, when mountain units were massively deployed). Moreover, because of Ethiopia's mountainous terrain, *treated* municipalities plausibly sent more soldiers from other units too.

[34]We report standardized coefficients to allow comparison across outcomes measured on different scales. All variables entering the regressions (outcome, instrument, and covariates) are standardized to have mean zero and unit standard deviation, so the reported estimates represent the effect of a one-standard-deviation change in the regressor on a one-standard-deviation change in the outcome.

Exposure. In column (2), we add geographic controls. The coefficient declines, suggesting that part of the unconditional correlation operates through geography. Importantly, however, a large and statistically significant effect remains. Column (3) further adds contemporary demographic and economic controls. The coefficient remains stable at 0.09 standard deviations. The first-stage F-statistics are above conventional thresholds in all specifications, confirming the strong relevance of the instrument.

In Columns (4)–(6), the endogenous variable is the *Mountain Troop Exposure*. The coefficients are larger and the first-stage F-statistics are substantially higher (31.8 against 15.4 in the most demanding specification), as expected.

4.2.3 Exogeneity of the Instrument

For our IV strategy to be valid, the instrument must affect contemporary far-right support only through colonial exposure (the exclusion restriction assumption). The main threat to this assumption is that, even before the colonial expansion in East Africa, residents of municipalities that supplied mountain troops may have systematically differed in their support for nationalist or authoritarian ideals. If so, the instrument would capture these pre-existing political preferences rather than the causal effect of the colonial campaigns, thereby violating the exclusion restriction.

We address this concern by examining the relationship between the *Mountain Troop* dummy and support for fascism. Specifically, we look at the correlation between our instrument and the Fascist party's vote share in 1919, 1921, and 1924, the intensity of fascist violence and killings over 1920–1922, the presence of a fascist branch in 1921, and the presence of donors to the Fascist party over 1921–1925.[35]

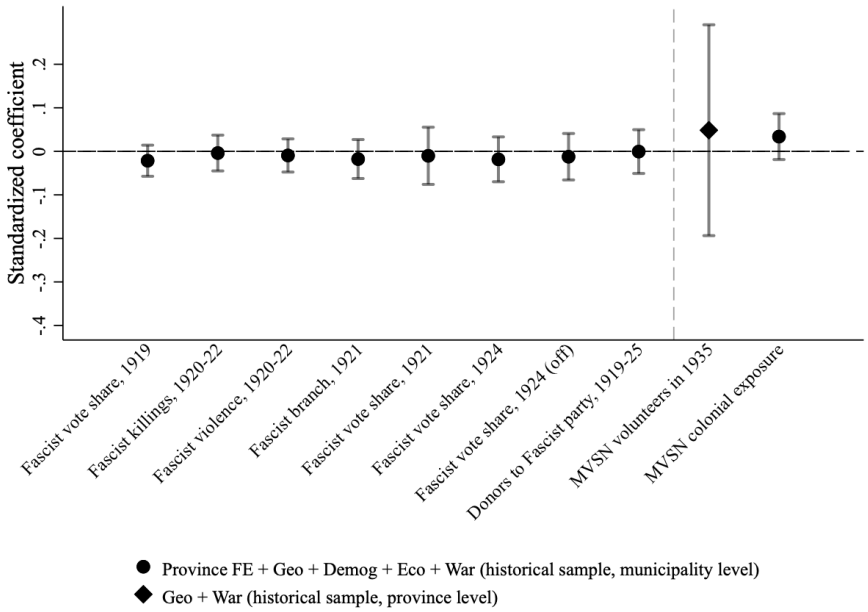
As already discussed, however, support for fascism peaked in the 1930s. To take this into account, we complement the exercise described above with two additional measures of support for fascism. First, we measure the share of MVSN volunteers among all buried soldiers deployed by each province. This variable measures the propensity of each province to deploy volunteers for the invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 (see also Panel (c) of Figure A5). Second, we track the geographic distribution of these MVSN fighters' surnames at the municipality level. Because surnames are geographically clustered, this variable captures where these fascist volunteers were likely to come

[35] All these variables are taken from Acemoglu et al. [2021].

from.[36]

We require all these measures of support for fascism to be uncorrelated with municipalities' propensity to supply mountain units. The intuition behind this test is as follows. A significant correlation would provide no useful information, as it could either reflect the persistence of pre-existing ideological differences between *treated* and *non-treated* municipalities (a violation of the exclusion restriction), or it could simply capture the positive effects of the 19th century colonial campaign on support for nationalist parties (a result which would be somehow coherent with our argument).

Figure 3: Mountain Troop Specialization and Support for Fascism



Note: The figure reports standardized coefficients and 95% confidence intervals of the relationship between mountain troop specialization and support for fascism. All dependent variables and the instrument are standardized to have mean zero and unit standard deviation. The 1920s outcomes come from Acemoglu et al. [2021], while *MVSN volunteers in 1935* and *MVSN Colonial Exposure* are computed using the Italian Embassies' documents. *MVSN volunteers in 1935* is measured at the province level and its specification includes geographic and WWI-related controls with robust standard errors. All the other outcomes are measured at the municipality level and their specifications include province FE, geographic controls (altitude, squared altitude, cubic altitude, latitude, longitude and land area), demographic controls (population and male literacy in 1911), economic controls (share of industrial workers in 1911, land ownership in 1885, and crime rate in 1874), and WWI-related controls (WWI casualties *per capita*, share of WWI volunteers out of the total male population, share of veterans from previous wars, and a dummy for any volunteer in the 1866 independence war). The vertical dashed line separates the measures of support for fascism in the 1920s (left) from the two measures based on MVSN volunteers' participation in the 1930s colonial campaigns (right).

By contrast, Figure 3 shows that the (standardized) coefficients from these regressions are all centered around zero and statistically insignificant across all specifications. This provides information. Municipalities which supply mountain soldiers were not

[36] *MVSN Colonial Exposure* is computed from 374 unique surnames (against 6,559 unique surnames for our main index of colonial exposure). The military district is recorded for 36 out of the 390 MVSN volunteers (9%), and is measured at the province level (thus providing less identifying variation).

more likely to support nationalist, far-right parties before the 1930s. Two implications follow. First, if they are today, it must be the effect of something which happened *after* the 1930s. This rules out pre-existing ideological differences correlated with the instrument.[37] Second, the 1895–96 war itself appears to have had no lasting effect on political attitudes.[38]

In other words, any reduced-form relationship we may find is then most likely driven by the 1930s campaigns in Ethiopia, rather than by the 19th century's colonization. This is consistent with the scale of the 1930s campaigns (which involved more than 330,000 soldiers, against fewer than 20,000 in the first war), and with the intense racial connotation marking both the campaign and the subsequent years of colonization.[39]

5 Main Results

5.1 Colonialism and Contemporary Political Attitudes

We estimate the following second-stage specification:

$$\textit{Far-right Vote Share}_{c,m} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \widehat{\textit{Colonial Exposure}}_m + \beta_2 W_m + \delta_p + \varepsilon_m, \tag{2}$$

where $\textit{Far-right Vote Share}_{c,m}$ denotes far-right parties' vote share in election cycle c in municipality m; $\widehat{\textit{Colonial Exposure}}_m$ is the fitted value of *Colonial Exposure* instrumented with the *Mountain Troop* dummy in the first-stage specification (Equation (1)); W_m is the vector of covariates already included in Equation (1); and δ_p are the province FE. Our parameter of interest is β_1. Standard errors are clustered at the province level.

[37] In Figure A9 in the Appendix, we also show that the instrument is uncorrelated with the vote share of Catholic parties in all elections since 1919.

[38] Another interpretation is that the political legacy of the 1895–96 war remained politically dormant until the Fascist regime reactivated it in 1935, by framing the invasion of Ethiopia as revenge (as in Fouka and Voth [2023], Ochsner and Roesel [2024]). We nonetheless view this possibility as less likely.

[39] One may try to estimate the relationship between far-right vote share and colonial exposure separately for the 1895–96 war and the 1930s campaigns, by constructing an *Adwa Exposure* index and a *Post-Adwa Exposure* index from the surnames of the soldiers who died in each period. However, both variables are endogenous in the far-right vote-share regression – as explained in Section 4.1 – and a single instrument – the *Mountain Troop* dummy – cannot identify two endogenous regressors. To identify the effect of each, we would need two excluded instruments. Moreover, because surnames are geographically clustered, the two indices are highly correlated ($\rho = 0.82$), so their separate effects cannot be reliably estimated in an OLS regression because of multicollinearity. We therefore rely on the evidence provided by Figure 3 and on the relative scale and ideological content of the two campaigns to argue that our results are driven by the 1930s colonial campaigns (whether or not they also reactivated the political legacy of the 1895–96 war, if any).

In Table 3, we report the 2SLS estimates (Panel A) of the effect of colonial exposure on the aggregate vote share of far-right parties in the 2013 parliamentary election (c = 2013 in Equation (2)). We also include OLS and reduced-form estimates (Panel B and C, respectively). All variables are standardized to have mean zero and unit standard deviation, so coefficients are expressed in standard deviation units. Columns (1)–(3) use *All Colonial Exposure* as the endogenous variable, while columns (4)–(6) use *Mountain Troop Exposure*.

Table 3: Colonial Exposure and Contemporary Support for Far-right Parties

	All colonial exposure			Mountain troop exposure		
Dep. var.: FR vote share, 2013	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Panel A: 2SLS						
Colonial Exposure	0.623***	0.553**	0.561**	0.570***	0.374**	0.378**
	(0.144)	(0.223)	(0.243)	(0.153)	(0.146)	(0.155)
Implied votes gain 1 SD ↑ in Colonial Exposure	+4.7pp	+4.2pp	+4.3pp	+4.3pp	+2.8pp	+2.9pp
Kleibergen-Paap F-stat	57.29	13.87	15.42	50.37	28.83	31.70
Anderson-Rubin 95% CI	[0.29, 0.90]	[0.12, 1.16]	[0.11, 1.21]	[0.25, 0.93]	[0.09, 0.74]	[0.08, 0.75]
Panel B: OLS						
Colonial Exposure	0.056***	0.027**	0.035**	0.050***	0.020	0.021*
	(0.017)	(0.012)	(0.014)	(0.018)	(0.013)	(0.011)
Panel C: Reduced form						
Mountain Troop (dummy)	0.114***	0.052**	0.051**	0.114***	0.052**	0.051**
	(0.031)	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.031)	(0.021)	(0.021)
Controls:						
Province FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Geographic		✓	✓		✓	✓
Contemporary Demog + Econ			✓			✓
Observations	7,296	7,296	7,296	7,296	7,296	7,296
Number of clusters	107	107	107	107	107	107
Mean dep. var.	9.6%	9.6%	9.6%	9.6%	9.6%	9.6%
SD dep. var.	7.6%	7.6%	7.6%	7.6%	7.6%	7.6%
SD Colonial Exposure	56.7	56.7	56.7	16.0	16.0	16.0

Note: 2SLS (Panel A) and OLS (Panel B) regressions of *Far-right vote share* in 2013 on *Colonial Exposure*; reduced-form (Panel C) regression of *Far-right vote share* in 2013 on the *Mountain Troop* dummy. All variables are standardized to have mean zero and unit standard deviation. Columns (1)–(3) use the colonial exposure variable computed from the surnames of *all soldiers* buried in East Africa as the endogenous variable. Columns (4)–(6) use the colonial exposure variable computed from the surnames of *mountain troop soldiers* buried in East Africa as the endogenous variable. The excluded instrument in Panel A is the *Mountain troop* dummy. The row *Implied votes gain 1 SD ↑ in Colonial Exposure* reports the change in far-right vote share (in percentage points) associated with a one-standard-deviation increase in colonial exposure. The Anderson-Rubin 95% confidence interval is robust to weak instruments. All specifications include province FE. See the *Note* of Table 2 for more details on the control variables included in each specification. The number of observations differs slightly from Table 2 as a small number of municipalities recorded no far-right party candidacy in the 2013 parliamentary election. Standard errors clustered at the province level are in parentheses. Significance levels: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

We start with columns (1)–(3). In the baseline specification with province FE only (Column 1), *All Colonial Exposure* has a large and statistically significant effect on *Far-*

right vote share: a one standard deviation increase in colonial exposure raises far-right vote share by 0.62 standard deviations. The coefficient is reduced when adding geographic controls (Column 2) but remains stable and statistically significant when we further include contemporary demographic and economic controls (Column 3). In this last and most demanding specification, a one standard deviation increase in *All Colonial Exposure* raises far-right vote share by 0.56 standard deviations, which implies a 4.3 percentage point increase in far-right vote share, relative to a baseline mean of 9.6%.

The Kleibergen–Paap statistics remain above conventional thresholds in all specifications, suggesting that the instrument provides sufficiently strong identifying variation for reliable IV inference. To further address potential weak-instrument concerns, we follow Keane and Neal [2023] and report the Anderson-Rubin confidence interval. Across all specifications, the interval excludes zero, suggesting that the IV estimates remain statistically significant under weak-instrument-robust inference.

Columns (4)–(6) replicate the analysis using *Mountain Troop Exposure* as the endogenous variable. The estimates are positive and statistically significant across all specifications and consistent with the results in Columns (1)–(3), but the Kleibergen-Paap F-statistics are higher. This is consistent with the instrument being more directly relevant to the *Mountain Troop Exposure*.

Panel B reports the corresponding OLS estimates. These are positive and precisely estimated but substantially smaller in magnitude compared to the 2SLS estimates.[40] Panel C presents the estimated reduced-form relationship between the *Mountain Troop* dummy and *Far-right vote share* in 2013.

5.2 Robustness Checks

Instrument Definition First, we examine whether our results depend on the specific discretization used to construct the *Mountain Troop* instrument. In Figure A6, we show that our results are robust to alternative definitions of the instrument based on (i) holding the *Altitude* cutoff fixed at 170 meters and varying the *Share of Mountain Troops* threshold, (ii) using alternative combinations of *Altitude* and *Share of Mountain Troops* thresholds, and (iii) using different thresholds of the *Share of Mountain Troops* without conditioning on *Altitude*. These exercises indicate that our results do not depend on any

[40] We discuss the differences between the OLS and 2SLS estimates in Appendix A.3.

specific discretization.[41] Furthermore, in Table A9, we show that the results are robust to using the continuous *Share of Mountain Troops* instead of the binary classification.

Spatially-Corrected Standard Errors A recent article, Conley and Kelly [2025], argues that historical persistence regressions may underestimate the standard errors because of spatial correlation in the error term. To address this concern, we compute spatially robust standard errors using the arbitrary clustering approach developed by Colella et al. [2019].[42] In Table A10, we show that the results are robust when we allow errors to be correlated within *radii* of 100, 200 and 300 kilometers. This suggests that our results are not driven by correlation in spatial noise.

Controlling for Pre-Colonial-Campaigns Characteristics Finally, we re-estimate our main specification on the *historical sample* to control for exposure to WWI, military tradition and socio-economic characteristics that could still affect contemporary voting behavior.[43] Since these variables are measured in the 1910s and 1920s, we report the results using *Post-Adwa Exposure* – constructed excluding the surnames of the soldiers who died in 1896 at the Battle of Adwa – as the endogenous variable alongside *All Colonial Exposure* (to avoid potential *bad controls* issues). In Table A11, we show that the 2SLS estimates remain positive, statistically significant, and quantitatively similar across all specifications and for both exposure measures. This suggests that our results are not driven by pre-existing socio-economic or military characteristics of the municipalities that historically supplied mountain troops.

[41] Specifically, we show that both the first-stage and the 2SLS estimates remain positive and stable across thresholds, and precision declines only at extreme values, where the instrument weakens because too many or too few municipalities are classified as mountain-troop suppliers.

[42] In our setting, unobserved heterogeneity may be spatially correlated across neighboring municipalities (even across provincial boundaries), meaning that standard errors based on administrative clustering may be underestimated. The arbitrary clustering approach is particularly suitable to our setting, as the variance–covariance matrix (VCV) estimator developed in this approach extends Conley-type distance-based spatial correction to two-stage least squares (2SLS) estimation.

[43] A possible concern would be that municipalities more exposed to the colonial campaigns may have also been more exposed to *any* other war. To take care of this, this specification compares municipalities with similar military traditions, but different specializations in mountain troops' recruitment. See also Section 6.1.

6 Ruling Out Alternative Explanations and Mechanisms

The previous section argues that Italy's 1930s colonial campaigns in East Africa have increased contemporary support for far-right parties. Previous papers (e.g., Erikson and Stoker [2011], Koenig [2023]) have documented the existence of a *veteran effect*, according to which war participation increases support for nationalist views. We argue that an additional mechanism contributes to explain our results: the inter-generational transmission and spread of the racial narratives that were used to justify colonization and that soldiers were intensively exposed to. In this section, we provide empirical evidence to support this argument.

First, we discuss potential alternative explanations. In particular, we argue that the observed effects are unlikely to be confounded by other historical events that involved mountain troop municipalities. One could be concerned that mountain soldiers may have been exposed to *other* conflicts that also shaped their political attitudes. A related concern is that municipalities with a tradition of supplying mountain troops may have developed a distinctive military Alpine identity, sustained by veterans' associations, that shapes voting behavior independently of any exposure to East Africa. Both concerns would amount to violations of the exclusion restriction assumption, which requires the geographic distribution of mountain troops to affect political outcomes *only through* increased exposure to the colonial campaigns. In Section 6.1, we discuss several tests that support the credibility of this assumption.

Second, one may be concerned that even if the colonial campaigns did spread nationalist views and increase the support for the far-right, this happened through channels unrelated to exposure to racial colonial narratives. In fact, the colonial campaigns were a *bundled treatment* for Italian soldiers, combining a strong exposure to racial narratives and the participation in a victorious military enterprise. In Section 6.2, we integrate new data and perform a set of empirical exercises that suggest that the exposure to the racial colonial narratives is indeed an important channel behind our results.

6.1 Alternative Explanations and the Exclusion Restriction

The main concern regarding potentially alternative explanations is that municipalities that historically supplied soldiers to mountain troops of the Italian Army may also have

been exposed to other conflicts that influenced their political attitudes, independently of the colonial campaigns. We argue that this is unlikely to be the case. We distinguish between conflicts that occurred before and after the 1930s campaigns, which – as already discussed – is arguably the main driver of our observed results (see Section 4.2.3).

6.1.1 Pre-1930s Confounders

Municipalities which supplied many mountain soldiers to the colonial campaigns may have also supplied more soldiers to previous conflicts. This could have potentially shaped their political attitudes. For instance, Acemoglu et al. [2022] shows that municipalities more exposed to WWI exhibited higher support for fascism in the 1920s.

We already show in Figure 3 of Section 4 that our instrument does not predict support for fascism in the 1920s–1930s. Moreover, in Section 5.2, we test our second-stage specification controlling for municipalities' exposure to WWI and their involvement in the 1860s independence wars. The 2SLS estimates remain stable, indicating that exposure to these earlier conflicts is unlikely to confound our findings.

However, municipalities which historically supplied mountain troops may have developed a specific "Alpine" identity, forged during WWI and institutionalized by the *Associazione Nazionale Alpini (ANA)* (National Alpine Association), the mountain veterans' organization founded in 1919. This particular collective identity may, in turn, directly affect voting behavior and confound our estimates.

To address this concern, we re-estimate Equation (2) after excluding the provinces that include a municipality that has ever hosted the *Adunata Nazionale degli Alpini*, the association's annual national gathering. The intuition is that the municipalities (and surrounding areas in the same province) that have hosted an *Adunata* since the first gathering in 1920 (listed in Table A12) are likely to have a more intense Alpine identity (if any). The 2SLS estimates remain positive, statistically significant, and quantitatively similar to those of Table 3 across all specifications (see Table A13). This suggests that the observed effects in Section 5 are not driven by the municipalities in which the Alpine identity is most strongly institutionalized. We now turn our attention to post-1930s conflicts.

6.1.2 Post-1930s Confounders: Mountain Troops Involvement in WWII

In this section, we focus on the *only* other major conflict involving mountain units after the 1930s: the Russian campaign during World War II (Ardito [2019]). Our goal here is to assess whether this event threatens the validity of our design.

Between 1941 and 1943, Italy deployed about 200,000 soldiers to the Eastern Front (Ardito [2019, p. 172]), fighting alongside Nazi Germany against the Soviet Union. This campaign included three brigades of the *Alpini*, the main mountain unit of the Italian Army. These brigades were largely destroyed during the Soviet winter offensive of 1942–43. Many soldiers died, and others were taken prisoner and sent to Gulags. The sign of the political legacy of this experience is *a priori* ambiguous. On the one hand, it may have fostered anti-communist views, and thereby increased support for far-right parties. On the other hand, the crushing defeat may have been seen as a betrayal by the Fascist regime, encouraging anti-fascist views. Either way, our instrument could be capturing multiple historical experiences rather than isolating the effect of the 1930s colonial campaigns, and we therefore treat the Russian campaign as a potential confounder of uncertain sign.

Municipalities Exposed to the Russian Campaign Out of the Sample To address this concern, we exclude municipalities that likely supplied soldiers to the Russian campaign.[44] Then, we re-estimate Equation (2) in this restricted sample of municipalities. Table A14 in the Appendix reports the 2SLS, OLS and reduced-form estimates using this restricted sample. The estimates remain positive and statistically significant across all specifications. This confirms that the effects identified in Section 5 are unlikely to be driven by historical exposure to the Russian campaign.

Checking the Validity of the Approach To verify that this restricted sample effectively excludes municipalities that were exposed to the Russian campaign, we apply the same approach used for colonial exposure.

[44] To identify these municipalities, we rely on official historical records from the Italian Military Library. These documents indicate that three *Alpini* brigades were deployed to the Russian front: the *Julia*, the *Tridentina*, and the *Cuneense* (see Figure A7 in the Appendix). We then exclude all municipalities in provinces within the traditional recruiting areas of these brigades (see Panel (b) of Figure A5). Specifically, the excluded provinces are Udine, Pordenone, Gorizia, Treviso, L'Aquila, Teramo, Pescara, Chieti (*Julia* brigade), Bolzano, Trento, Verona (*Tridentina* brigade), and Cuneo (*Cuneense* brigade).

The ideal exercise would be as follows. First, we would collect the surnames of all Alpini soldiers who died in Russia. Second, we would estimate their surnames' contemporary geographic distribution at the municipality level. Finally, we would check whether the municipalities where these surnames are more concentrated correspond to those we excluded from the sample (Table A14).

Data limitations prevent us from running this exercise for all the three brigades. A list of fallen soldiers is available only for the *Cuneense* brigade.[45] We therefore restrict the analysis to this brigade. Specifically, we collect the surnames of the approximately 3,000 *Cuneense* soldiers who died in Russia and estimate their contemporary geographic distribution across Italian municipalities. The result, shown in Panel (e) of Figure A4 in the Appendix, is reassuring. The descendants of the *Cuneense* soldiers are highly concentrated in the province of Cuneo, which is precisely the province we exclude in Table A14 as the recruiting area of the *Cuneense* brigade. While we cannot run the same exercise for the *Julia* and *Tridentina* brigades, we are confident that the same logic should apply.

No Effect of Russian Front Exposure As a further exercise, we show that exposure to the Russian front does not predict contemporary support for far-right parties, once we control for colonial exposure. To this end, we use the geographic distribution of the *Cuneense* surnames already constructed above – that is, the municipality-level share of contemporary residents whose surname appears in the list of the *Cuneense* soldiers who died in Russia – as a proxy for local exposure to the Russian front. As discussed above, data limitations restrict this measure to the *Cuneense* brigade.

We then regress the far-right vote share in 2013 (our main outcome) on this *Russian Front Exposure* index, *All Colonial Exposure*, and the full set of controls (see Equation (2)). We run this exercise on both the main and historical samples. The results show no statistically significant relationship between *Russian Front Exposure* and contemporary support for far-right parties, across all specifications and samples.[46] By contrast, *All Colonial Exposure* remains positive and significant (see Table A15 in the Appendix).

[45] See *Alpini-Cuneense.it*. Note also that the *Tridentina* brigade is very unlikely to be biasing our results because its traditional recruiting areas are mostly concentrated within the Region of *Trentino-Alto Adige*, which was not part of Italy until the end of WWI, so that its mountain-troop specialized municipalities are already excluded from the construction of the instrument (which is built using data from WWI). See Figure A5.

[46] This null effect is itself consistent with the ambiguity described above.

6.1.3 An Additional Test for the Exclusion Restriction

The concerns described in the previous two sections amount to violations of the exclusion restriction assumption. To further investigate the plausibility of this assumption, we restrict the sample to municipalities in the bottom quartile of predicted colonial exposure from the first-stage specification (i.e., $\widehat{Colonial\ Exposure}$) – the "never-takers" sub-sample.[47] In this sub-sample, colonial exposure is very low. Therefore, if the effect of the *Mountain Troop* dummy is working *only through* colonial exposure, the same dummy should have no effect on the outcome. We estimate the reduced-form relationship between the *Mountain Troop* dummy and support for far-right parties in this sub-sample of "never-takers" and compare it to the full sample. The results are shown in Figure A8 in the Appendix. In both main and historical samples, the effect of the *Mountain Troop* dummy is not statistically different from zero in the "never-taker" sub-sample. This increases our confidence in the fact that the instrument affects contemporary support for far-right parties only through colonial exposure.

6.2 Persistence of Colonial Narratives

In Section 6.1, we have argued that our main results are unlikely to be driven by other historical events. We can therefore be confident that Italy's colonial campaigns in East Africa have had a causal effect on contemporary political outcomes. However, why is that the case? What are the mechanisms behind these results?

We argue that an important driver behind our results is the long-term persistence of the colonial racial narratives to which soldiers were intensively exposed during the colonial campaigns. Since almost all the soldiers deployed in 1935–36 returned home, these narratives were plausibly transmitted across generations by returning veterans and their families.[48] We provide three sets of results.

First, we show that the effect of colonial exposure on far-right vote share is stronger in municipalities with a larger Black African immigrant population. This suggests

[47] This falsification exercise is also used in Acemoglu et al. [2022].

[48] The Battle of Adwa (1896) was marked by a very high mortality rate (one soldier out of three died at Adwa) (Labanca [2002, p. 85]). By contrast, out of the 330,000 soldiers who fought in Ethiopia between 1935 and 1936 (Labanca [2002, p. 194]), less than 3,000 Italians were found dead, representing a mortality rate of less than 1%. This suggests that around 99% of the soldiers survived. Many returned home shortly after the victory, while others remained in East Africa, taking part in the counter-guerrilla operations and, later, in the WWII battle of Keren (1941).

that in municipalities more exposed to the colonial racial narratives, voters may hold more negative attitudes toward Black African immigrants, which translates into higher support for the far-right (whose platform is built on anti-immigration positions).

Second, we show that the effect is not specific to the 2013 election but has persisted since 1948 (the first free election after WWII and the fall of the Fascist regime). The colonial campaigns thus created a durable legacy, transmitted across generations.

Finally, we apply text analysis to the speeches of far-right Members of Parliament (MPs) to measure the intensity of anti-immigration rhetoric across election cycles. We show that the electoral returns to this rhetoric are larger in municipalities with stronger colonial exposure. Since anti-immigration rhetoric often carries explicit racial content, this result supports our claim that the colonial legacy operates through the persistence of the racial narratives, rather than only through the long-term consequences of veterans' exposure to war.

The next subsections develop each argument in detail.

6.2.1 Cross-Sectional Heterogeneity

We start from the first prediction. If the colonial racial narratives have persisted over time, their political effects should be stronger in municipalities where Black African immigrants are more visibly present. Black people were the very target of the colonial narratives. Therefore, their presence today should make the narratives more politically consequential. We integrate data on migrant residents in each municipality and estimate the following specification:

$$\begin{aligned} \textit{Far-right Vote Share}_m &= \rho_0 + \rho_1 \widehat{\textit{Colonial Exposure}}_m + \rho_2 SSA_m \\ &+ \rho_3 \left(\widehat{\textit{Colonial Exposure}}_m \times SSA_m \right) + \rho_4 W_m + \delta_p + \varepsilon_m, \end{aligned} \tag{3}$$

where $\textit{Far-right Vote Share}_m$ denotes the (standardized) far-right vote share in municipality m in 2013; $\widehat{\textit{Colonial Exposure}}_m$ is the (instrumented, standardized) index of colonial exposure; SSA_m is the (standardized) share of Sub-Saharan African migrants among the total migrant population in municipality m in 2009; W_m is the vector of covariates already included in Equation (1) and (2); and δ_p are the province FE.[49]

The results are reported in Table 4. Columns (1)–(3) use *All Colonial Exposure* as the

[49] The data on migrant residents come from ISTAT-Demo.

endogenous variable, while columns (4)–(6) use *Mountain Troop Exposure*. Across all specifications, colonial exposure is associated with higher far-right vote shares, consistent with the results in Table 3. Importantly, the interaction between colonial exposure and the share of Sub-Saharan African (SSA) migrants is positive and statistically significant when using our main measure. This implies that the effect of colonial exposure is *amplified* in municipalities with a larger presence of SSA migrants.

Table 4: Heterogeneous Effect of Colonial Exposure on Contemporary Voting Behavior Based on the Presence of Sub-Saharan African Migrants

	All colonial exposure			Mountain troop exposure		
Dep. var.: Far-right vote share, 2013	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Colonial Exposure	0.653***	0.575**	0.581**	0.567***	0.363**	0.368**
	(0.155)	(0.240)	(0.253)	(0.155)	(0.147)	(0.156)
Implied votes gain 1 SD ↑ in Colonial Exposure	+4.9pp	+4.4pp	+4.4pp	+4.3pp	+2.7pp	+2.8pp
African migrants (share)	-0.010	-0.019	-0.011	-0.019	-0.024*	-0.014
	(0.026)	(0.024)	(0.021)	(0.015)	(0.013)	(0.011)
Colonial exposure × Migrants	0.205*	0.193*	0.176*	0.043	0.045*	0.044
	(0.114)	(0.114)	(0.103)	(0.028)	(0.025)	(0.027)
Marginal effect of interaction (pp)	+1.6pp	+1.5pp	+1.3pp	+0.3pp	+0.3pp	+0.3pp
Controls						
All migrants (share)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Province FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Geographic		✓	✓		✓	✓
Contemporary Demog + Econ			✓			✓
Observations	7,296	7,296	7,296	7,296	7,296	7,296
Number of clusters	107	107	107	107	107	107
Kleibergen-Paap F-stat	15.84	6.64	7.50	23.68	13.81	15.05
Anderson-Rubin p-value	0.016	0.019	0.026	0.016	0.019	0.026
Mean dep. var.	9.6%	9.6%	9.6%	9.6%	9.6%	9.6%
SD dep. var.	7.6%	7.6%	7.6%	7.6%	7.6%	7.6%
SD Colonial Exposure	56.7	56.7	56.7	16.0	16.0	16.0

Note: 2SLS regression results of *Far-right vote share* in 2013 on the interaction of *Colonial Exposure* and the share of *Sub-Saharan African migrants* (Equation (3)). All variables are standardized to have mean zero and unit standard deviation. *African migrants (share)* is the number of Sub-Saharan African migrants over the total number of migrants in each municipality in 2009. *Colonial Exposure × Migrants* is the interaction of *Colonial Exposure* and the share of *Sub-Saharan African migrants*. The excluded instruments are the *Mountain Troop* dummy and its interaction with the share of *Sub-Saharan African migrants*. The row *Implied votes gain 1 SD ↑ in Colonial Exposure* reports the change in far-right vote share (in percentage points) associated with a one-standard-deviation increase in colonial exposure. The Anderson-Rubin p-value tests the joint null hypothesis that the coefficients on *Colonial Exposure* and *Colonial Exposure × Migrants* are both zero and it is robust to weak instruments. All specifications include the share of (all) migrants over the total population as well as province FE. See the *Note* of Table 2 for more details on the control variables included in each specification. Standard errors clustered at the province level are in parentheses. Significance levels: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

In our preferred specification (Column 3), a one standard deviation increase in colo-

nial exposure raises far-right vote share by 4.4 percentage points, and a one-standard-deviation increase in the share of SSA migrants adds a further 1.3 percentage points. The results on the interaction term are consistent when using *Mountain Troop Exposure* as the endogenous variable (Columns (4)–(6)), but less precisely estimated. As in our baseline, the Kleibergen-Paap F-statistics are higher for *Mountain Troop Exposure* than for *All Colonial Exposure*, consistent with the instrument being more directly relevant to the former. The Anderson-Rubin test rejects the joint null that colonial exposure and its interaction with the share of SSA migrants have no effect, at conventional levels across all specifications.

Finally, we conduct a placebo test using the share of North-African (NA) migrants instead of Sub-Saharan African migrants. Since the colonial racial narratives targeted Black populations specifically, we should not find similar results when interacting colonial exposure with the presence of NA migrants. In Table A16 in the Appendix, we show that the interaction between colonial exposure and the share of NA migrants is indeed close to zero, with very large standard errors, across all specifications. This suggests that the effect operates through the racial narratives directed at Black populations, rather than through a generic hostility toward immigrants.

6.2.2 Long-term Persistence

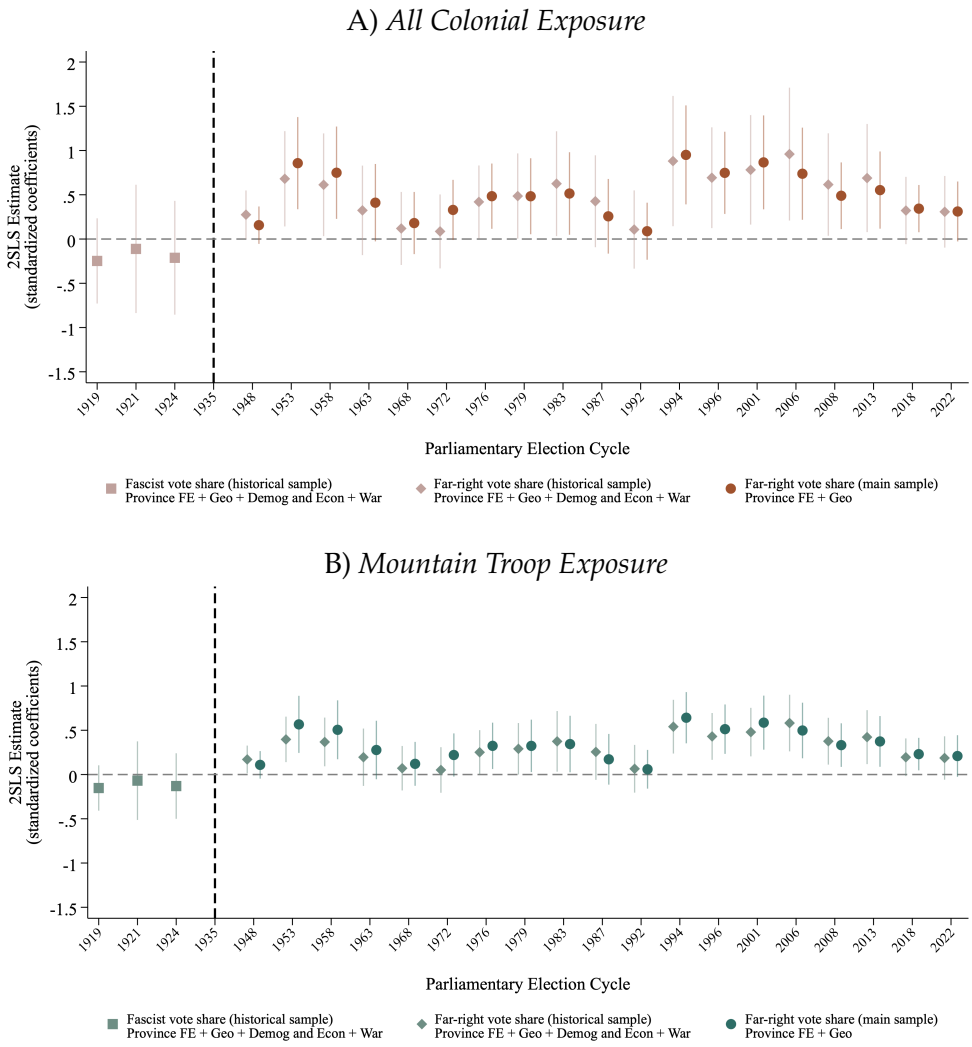
We turn to the second prediction. If our results reflect the long-term persistence of colonial racial narratives, then the political effects of colonial exposure should be visible not only in 2013 but throughout the whole post-war period.

In this section, we re-estimate our second-stage specification (Equation (2)) across all parliamentary elections from 1948 (the first election after the collapse of the Fascist regime) to 2022 (the latest parliamentary election). We use both the main sample and the historical sample. When using the main sample, we remove the demographic and economic controls included in W_m, and keep only the time-invariant province FE and geography controls.[50] When using the historical sample, we include the 1910s–1920s covariates alongside the province FE and geography controls. We also estimate

[50]Time-varying demographic and economic controls are available only from the early 2000s onwards. To ensure comparability of estimates across all election cycles, we include only the time-invariant controls (province FE and geography controls) in each specification. Table 3 shows that these time-invariant controls are the most relevant for explaining far-right vote shares in contemporary elections. The parties classified as far-right in each year are reported in Table A8.

Equation (2) on the elections of 1919, 1921, and 1924 as a placebo test. The results are reported in Figure 4. Panel A uses *All Colonial Exposure* as the endogenous variable, while Panel B uses *Mountain Troop Exposure*. [51]

Figure 4: Colonial Exposure and Support for Far-right Parties in Parliamentary Elections, 1948-2022



Note: 2SLS estimates of the relationship between *Colonial Exposure* and *Far-right vote share* across all parliamentary election cycles from 1948 to 2022. Panel A uses the colonial exposure variable computed from the surnames of *all soldiers* buried in East Africa as the endogenous variable. Panel B uses the colonial exposure variable computed from the surnames of *mountain troop soldiers* buried in East Africa as the endogenous variable. Both Panels also show the (placebo) estimates on support for fascism in the 1920s, i.e., before the second Italo-Ethiopian War (1935–36). Standardized coefficients and 95% confidence intervals with standard errors clustered at the province level are reported.

[51] In this section, we use the 2009 geographic distribution of the buried Italian soldiers' surnames estimated with *Cognomix.it* as a measure of colonial exposure across *all* election years since 1948. This is a valid approach under the assumption that migration patterns are not correlated with colonial exposure, such that the 2009 surnames distribution provides a valid proxy for municipalities' colonial exposure in earlier and later years. The *Cuneense* exercise of Section 6.1 provides indirect evidence in favor of this assumption. The surnames of the soldiers of that brigade, who were recruited territorially in the province of Cuneo and died in Russia in 1941–43, are still strongly concentrated in that same province decades later (Panel (e) of Figure A4).

Four main patterns emerge. First, the placebo estimates for the pre-treatment elections of 1919, 1921, and 1924 are not statistically significant. Municipalities *exogenously* more exposed to the colonial campaigns were not already more inclined to support nationalist or authoritarian parties before the 1930s colonial campaigns. Second, the effect is positive and significant in the immediate post-war elections and persists throughout almost the entire post-war period. Third, this persistence is only interrupted in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the protest movements of 1968 raised the social cost of voting for neo-fascist parties and pushed the *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (MSI, the main neo-fascist, far-right party before the 1990s) to the margins of the political system. The effect re-emerges in the mid-1970s. Fourth, the effect spikes in 1994, the election that followed the collapse of the *Prima Repubblica* (First Republic) and the entry of the far-right into mainstream governing coalitions.[52]

In Figure A10 in the Appendix, we re-estimate Equation (2) separately for the two main far-right parties, namely *Lega* (born as a Northern autonomist movement and later promoting strong anti-immigration views) and *Fratelli d'Italia* (the post-fascist successor party) in 2013, 2018, and 2022 (all elections taking place after 2009, when the distribution of surnames is measured). In the two election cycles where both parties obtained more than 2% nationally (2018 and 2022), the effect of colonial exposure on far-right vote share is not specific to either party. This suggests that the observed effects reflect (at least in part) identitarian and nationalist ideals and are not reducible to Northern, Alpine regionalism.

6.2.3 Electoral Returns to Anti-Immigration Rhetoric

As a final step, we test whether far-right parties' electoral returns to anti-immigration rhetoric are larger in municipalities with higher colonial exposure. The intuition behind this exercise is the following. The long-term effects documented in Figure 4 could potentially reflect mechanisms that are unrelated to the persistence of colonial racial narratives. In particular, the main concern is that the shared military experience among soldiers, combined with the perception of victory in Ethiopia, may have generated lasting approval toward the Fascist regime that commanded the campaign. This loyalty could then have been transmitted across generations and still translate into higher

[52]The MSI was reconstituted as *Alleanza Nazionale* at the 1995 Fiuggi Congress, distancing itself from fascist symbolism and repositioning as a conservative and "modern" party.

support for the far-right today.[53] If this is the case, colonial exposure might increase the vote share of far-right parties, but it should not specifically amplify the returns from xenophobic or anti-immigration rhetoric.

In this section, we test against this hypothesis. We apply text analysis techniques to the speeches of far-right MPs to measure the intensity of their parties' anti-immigration rhetoric in each election cycle. Then, we exploit time variation in these measures to estimate whether the electoral returns to anti-immigration rhetoric are larger in municipalities with higher colonial exposure.

Text Analysis: Methodology We now briefly describe the methodology used to measure the salience and sentiment of far-right parties' immigration rhetoric over time.

We use data on all parliamentary speeches delivered by Italian MPs over the period 1948–2022 from Cova [2024]. We have information for more than 2 million speeches containing over 470 million words (see Cova [2025]). We then write down a list of immigration-related keywords (see Table A19 in the Appendix). For each speech, s, we count how many words match one of these keywords. Finally, we count the share of immigration-related words out of the total number of words spoken by all MPs of a given party (or of a group of parties), p, in legislature t, as follows:

$$Word\ Share_{p,t} = \frac{\sum_{s \in t} Keywords_{p,s}}{\sum_{s \in t} Total\ Words_{p,s}}$$

where $Keywords_{p,s}$ denotes the number of immigration-related keywords appearing in speech s delivered by MPs of party p; $Total\ Words_{p,s}$ denotes the total number of words contained in the same speech; and the summation runs over all speeches s delivered by the MPs of party p in legislature t. The variable *Word Share* therefore captures the *salience* of immigration in a party's parliamentary activity.

As a second step, we construct a measure that captures parties' sentiment toward immigration. We proceed as follows. First, we keep only speeches that contain at least two immigration-related keywords. We end up with a total of approximately

[53] As already discussed, some previous studies show that war participation can influence voting behavior. See, for example, Koenig [2023] and Erikson and Stoker [2011]. In our setting, this may be particularly concerning because the Fascist regime portrayed the victory in Ethiopia as a national success to consolidate consensus. Such framing may have increased participants' support for the far right, even if Italy's control over Ethiopia was only partial and temporary (see Section 2).

250,000 speeches across all election cycles. Each of these speeches is then evaluated by an LLM (Claude Haiku 4.5). The LLM (accessed via API) is asked to assign each speech an integer *ideological score* ranging from -2 to +2, where -2 indicates a strongly right-wing (restrictionist/securitarian) position and +2 a strongly left-wing (pro-immigration/humanitarian) position.[54] For each legislature, t, and party, p, we then aggregate the MPs' individual ideological scores using a keyword-weighted average:

$$Ideological\ Score_{p,t} = \frac{\sum_{s \in t} Keywords_{p,s} \times score_{p,s}}{\sum_{s \in t} Keywords_{p,s}}.$$

The variable *Ideological Score* therefore captures the *sentiment* with which parties discuss immigration in parliamentary speeches.

Figure A12 in the Appendix shows the evolution of both the salience and ideological orientation of immigration-related parliamentary discourse since 1948, separately for each party category (left, center-right, and far-right).[55] Two clear patterns emerge. First, immigration has become increasingly salient in parliamentary discourse over time, with a marked acceleration since the 1990s. Second, immigration rhetoric has become increasingly polarized over time. Left-wing parties have progressively adopted more pro-immigration positions, while right-wing parties have shifted toward an increasingly restrictionist and securitarian rhetoric.

Text Analysis: Empirical Strategy and Results We now test whether municipalities with higher colonial exposure exhibit a stronger electoral response to far-right parties' anti-immigration rhetoric through the following specification:

$$Far\text{-}right\ Vote\ Share_{m,c} = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 \left(\widehat{Colonial\ Exposure}_m \times Speech_c \right) + \mu_m + \lambda_{p,c} + \varepsilon_{m,c} \quad (4)$$

where $Far\text{-}right\ Vote\ Share_{c,m}$ denotes the (standardized) far-right vote share in municipality m and election c; $\widehat{Colonial\ Exposure}_m \times Speech_c$ is the fitted value from the first stage, in which the endogenous interaction between colonial exposure and the variable

[54] Importantly, the model is given neither the name of the MP who delivers the speech nor their party. In Appendix D, we describe in more detail the methodology. In particular, Figure A14 reports the prompt we submitted to Claude Haiku 4.5, both in Italian (the original language of the prompt) and English. Figure **??** provides two examples of classified speeches, one strongly right-wing (score −2) and one strongly left-wing (score +2).

[55] See Table A18 in the Appendix for a detailed classification of each party category.

capturing immigration rhetoric's salience (*Word Share*) or sentiment (*Ideological Score*) is instrumented by the interaction of the *Mountain Troop* dummy and the same immigration rhetoric variable; μ_m are municipality FE, absorbing all time-invariant unobserved heterogeneity at the local level; $\lambda_{p,c}$ are province × altitude × election-year FE, where altitude is a dummy equal to one for municipalities at or above 170 meters.[56] Standard errors are clustered at the province level. The parameter of interest, α_1, captures the extent to which far-right parties' anti-immigration rhetoric yields larger electoral returns in more colonially-exposed municipalities.

The results are reported in Table 5. Columns (1) and (2) use *All Colonial Exposure* as the endogenous variable, while columns (3) and (4) use *Mountain Troop Exposure*. Within each pair, the first column uses the *Word Share* as the immigration-related speech variable and the second uses the *Ideological Score*.

Across all specifications, the estimates are positive and statistically significant for the *Word Share* specification and negative and statistically significant for the *Ideological Score* specification. This implies that more intense and more right-wing immigration rhetoric amplifies far-right vote share in municipalities with higher colonial exposure. Using our main measure (*All Colonial Exposure*), a one standard deviation increase in the interaction of colonial exposure and immigration-related *Word Share* is associated with a 0.516 standard deviation increase in far-right vote share (Column 1). Similarly, a one standard deviation decrease in the interaction of colonial exposure and immigration-related *Ideological Score* (meaning that far-right parties are framing immigration in a more restrictionist or securitarian way) is associated with a 0.454 standard deviation increase in far-right vote share (Column 2).

Although the first-stage Kleibergen-Paap F-statistics fall below conventional thresholds in the *All Colonial Exposure* specifications, the Anderson-Rubin p-values confirm that the estimated interaction is statistically significant. The first stage is stronger for *Mountain Troop Exposure*, where the instrument is more directly relevant.

We assess the robustness of these results in three ways. First, one may be concerned that the results are driven by a specific election year in which an unusually intense anti-immigration campaign happened to coincide with particularly high far-right vote shares

[56] We include altitude FE to address the concern that small mountain municipalities may follow systematically different political trajectories than larger urban municipalities located within the same province but at lower altitudes.

in colonially-exposed municipalities, generating a spurious correlation. To address this concern, we re-estimate Equation (4) while dropping one election year at a time from the sample. These leave-one-out (LOO) estimates are reported in Figure A11 in the Appendix. The point estimates are all stable in sign, magnitude, and statistical significance, indicating that the results are not driven by any particular election year.

Table 5: Heterogeneous Effect of Far-right Parties' Immigration Rhetoric Based on Colonial Exposure

	All colonial exposure		Mountain troop exposure	
Speech interaction var.:	Word Share	Ideological Score	Word Share	Ideological Score
Dep. var.: FR vote share	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Colonial Exposure × Speech	0.518**	-0.456**	0.250***	-0.208***
	(0.222)	(0.194)	(0.083)	(0.068)
Implied votes gain 1 SD ↑ in Colonial Exp. × Speech	+6.1pp	-5.4pp	+3.0pp	-2.5pp
Controls:				
Municipality FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Prov × Altitude × Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	139,445	139,445	139,445	139,445
Clusters	107	107	107	107
Kleibergen-Paap F-stat	4.81	5.13	10.44	10.82
Anderson-Rubin p-value	0.054	0.051	0.054	0.051
Mean dep. var.	4.42%	4.42%	4.42%	4.42%
SD dep. var.	11.84%	11.84%	11.84%	11.84%

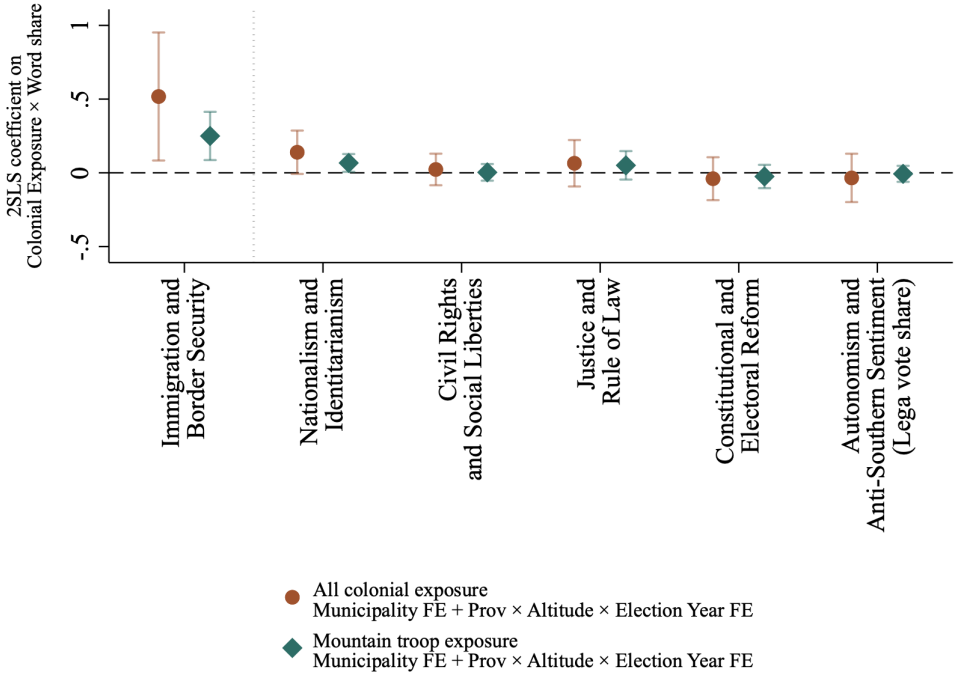
Note: 2SLS regression results of *Far-right vote share* on the interaction of *Colonial Exposure* and the immigration-related parliamentary *Speeches* variables (Equation (4)). The excluded instruments are the *Mountain Troop* dummy and its interaction with the *Speeches* variables. All variables are standardized to have mean zero and unit standard deviation. All columns use all election cycles and parliamentary speeches since 1948. Columns (1)–(2) use the colonial exposure variable computed from the surnames of *all soldiers* buried in East Africa as the endogenous variable. Columns (3)–(4) use the colonial exposure variable computed from the surnames of *mountain troop soldiers* buried in East Africa as the endogenous variable. The row *Implied votes gain 1 SD ↑ in Colonial Exp. × Speech* reports the change in far-right vote share (in percentage points) associated with a one-standard-deviation increase in the *Colonial Exposure* × *Speech* interaction. All columns include municipality FE and province × altitude × election year fixed effects, where altitude is a dummy equal to one for municipalities above 170 meters. The Anderson-Rubin p-value is robust to weak instruments. Standard errors clustered at the province level in parentheses. Significance levels: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Second, one may worry that the estimates are driven by differential immigration inflows. In Table A17 in the Appendix, we show that the results in Table 5 are robust to additionally controlling for the share of immigrants among the population and the share of Sub-Saharan African immigrants among the total immigrant population in municipality m and election year c (though this restricts the sample to the 2006–2022 elections for which municipality-level immigration data are available).

A third potential concern is that municipalities with higher colonial exposure may

simply respond more strongly to far-right parties independently of the content of their rhetoric. Under this interpretation, the estimated interaction would not reflect a specific reaction to immigration-related narratives, but rather a broader tendency of colonially-exposed municipalities to align more closely with far-right parties whenever they increase the salience of any issue. To address this concern, we conduct placebo tests using parliamentary speeches on topics unrelated to immigration.

Figure 5: Placebo Test: 2SLS Estimates for the Salience (*Word Share*) of Immigration versus Alternative Topics



Note: The figure reports 2SLS estimates of the interaction between *Colonial Exposure* and *Word Share*, for immigration (main result, reported in Table 5) and for five topics unrelated to immigration. Each coefficient captures the electoral returns to far-right parties' rhetoric on that topic in municipalities with higher colonial exposure. The vertical dotted line separates the main result (left) from the placebo topics (right). The outcome is the *Far-right vote share* for immigration and for the first four placebo topics. For the fifth placebo, autonomism and anti-Southern sentiment, the outcome is instead the *Lega*'s own vote share, since the *Lega* is the party that relies intensively on autonomist rhetoric and pooling it with parties that never used this vocabulary would mechanically attenuate the estimate. For each topic, two estimates are reported, differing in the endogenous variable used – *All Colonial Exposure* (circles) versus *Mountain Troop Exposure* (diamonds). In each specification, the interaction between *Colonial Exposure* and the topic's *Word Share* is instrumented by the interaction of the *Mountain Troop* dummy and the same *Word Share*; for the placebo topics, we additionally control for the interaction of *Colonial Exposure* and immigration-related *Word Share*, the two endogenous interactions being instrumented jointly. All specifications include municipality FE and province × altitude × election-year FE, where altitude is a dummy equal to one for municipalities at or above 170 meters. All variables are standardized to have mean zero and unit standard deviation. Standard errors are clustered at the province level. 95% confidence intervals are shown.

Figure 5 reports 2SLS estimates of the interaction between *Colonial Exposure* and *Word Share* for five alternative topics (Nationalism and Identitarianism, Civil Rights and Social Liberties, Justice and Rule of Law, Constitutional and Electoral Reform, and Autonomism and Anti-Southern Sentiment) alongside the main result for immigra-

tion.[57] The placebo topics have been selected because they are common themes for Italian far-right parties, while being unrelated to immigration rhetoric. For each topic, we report two estimates, corresponding to the two measures of colonial exposure (*All Colonial Exposure* and *Mountain Troop Exposure*).

Consistent with Table 5, the coefficient on immigration is positive, large, and statistically significant across both specifications. By contrast, the coefficients for all five placebo topics are small and statistically indistinguishable from zero in nearly all cases, and with both exposure measures. This pattern strongly suggests that the effect identified in Table 5 is specific to immigration rhetoric and is not a generic feature of far-right parliamentary discourse.

7 Conclusion

In this paper, we study the long-term political consequences of Italy's colonial expansion in East Africa using an instrumental-variable approach. Our instrument exploits municipalities' historical propensity to supply mountain troops to the Italian Army. Because Ethiopia's mountainous territory made these troops particularly valuable, mountain units were largely deployed to East Africa, providing an exogenous source of variation in municipalities' exposure to colonialism.

Our results suggest that Italy's colonial expansion – and in particular the 1930s colonial campaigns under the Fascist regime – has had a persistent and substantial impact on political attitudes. Municipalities more exposed to colonialism exhibit significantly higher support for neo-fascist and nationalist parties in the immediate postwar electoral cycles, and still show higher support for far-right parties today.

We provide evidence that this effect operates (at least partially) through the exposure to (and inter-generational transmission of) the racial narratives used to justify the colonial campaigns. In particular, we show that the effect of colonial exposure on far-right vote share is amplified in municipalities with more Black African migrants (the group explicitly targeted by these colonial racial narratives). Moreover, far-right parties' anti-immigration rhetoric yields significantly larger electoral returns in municipalities

[57] The evolution of the salience of these five alternative topics in parliamentary discourse since 1948 for each party category is shown in Figure A13 in the Appendix. For the last topic, we use the *Lega*'s vote share as the outcome (rather than the aggregate far-right vote share) because autonomist and anti-Southern rhetoric is specific to this party.

with higher colonial exposure.

To the best of our knowledge, this paper provides the first causal evidence on the political legacy of colonialism within former colonizing countries. European colonial expansion broadly relied on racial narratives to justify domination, from the Spanish conquest of the Americas to the late nineteenth-century scramble for Africa. If these narratives persisted through inter-generational transmission – as our results suggest it may be the case for Italy – similar mechanisms may have shaped (and continue to shape) political attitudes in other former colonial powers, thereby contributing to the rise of the far-right observed in today's Europe.

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Online Appendix

A The Italian Cemeteries Database

A.1 Source and Description of the Data

In April 2020 and August 2021, the Italian Embassies in Eritrea and Ethiopia published the *Guida dei Cimiteri e dei Sacrari Militari Italiani* (Guide to Italian Military Cemeteries) to preserve the memory of the soldiers buried in the Italian cemeteries in East Africa.[58]

Each document provides contextual information on the names of identified soldiers, and, when available, on their military unit, military district, and date of death. We process the raw text files and extract all relevant information. In this Section, we refer to the resulting data file to as the *cemeteries database*. Table A1 provides a summary.

A.1.1 Temporal Coverage

The burial records span the entire period of Italy's military presence in East Africa. Approximately 60% of the soldiers died at the Battle of Adwa (1896), during the first Italo-Ethiopian war (1895–96). About 20% died during the 1930s colonial campaigns (1935–1941), which encompass the second Italo-Ethiopian war (1935–1936), the subsequent years of colonization and counter-guerrilla operations (1936–40), and the Battle of Keren during World War II (1941). Less than 1% of the soldiers died after 1941 (when Italy lost its colonies during World War II)[59], and only 0.3% died between 1897 (the year after the defeat of Adwa) and 1934 (the year before the invasion of Ethiopia).

The date of death is missing for 17% of the soldiers. We know from historical sources that the number of Italian soldiers who died during the 1935–36 war is around

[58] The *Guida dei Cimiteri e dei Sacrari Militari Italiani* are available here (Eritrea) and here (Ethiopia). These documents were compiled from archival records held at the *Commissariato Generale per le Onoranze ai Caduti (Onorcaduti)* (General Commissioner for Honors to the Fallen) – established by the Italian Ministry of Defense – and from documents preserved at the Italian Embassies in Eritrea and Ethiopia. There are five Italian cemeteries in Eritrea – Asmara, Keren, Massawa, Adi Quala, and Dogali – and four in Ethiopia – Addis Ababa, Adigrat, Mekelle (Macallè) and Worsege Pass (Passo Uarieu). The cemeteries of Dogali and Worsege Pass contain the remains of the (respectively) approximately 500 and 225 *unidentified* soldiers who died during the Battle of Dogali (1887) and the battles of Tembien during the second Italo-Ethiopian War (1935–1936). Because their identity is unknown, the surnames of these soldiers do not enter the construction of the colonial exposure index.

[59] Although Italy lost effective control of its East African colonies in 1941 (when British forces occupied Italian Somaliland), Italian forces returned in 1950 to administer the United Nations Trust Territory of Somaliland under the *Amministrazione Fiduciaria Italiana della Somalia (AFIS)* until 1960.

3,000 (Labanca [2002, p. 194]), which substantially exceeds the 1,602 soldiers already attributed to the 1930s colonial campaigns in the cemeteries database. By contrast, around 5,000 Italian soldiers died at the Battle of Adwa (Labanca [2002, p. 85]), which is very close to the 5,367 soldiers already attributed to this conflict. Therefore, the soldiers for which the date of death is *unknown* most likely died during the 1930s colonial campaigns. Another piece of evidence emerges when looking at these soldier's military unit. Some of them were enrolled in the *Regia Aeronautica* (Air Force), which was established in 1923, more than thirty years *after* the Battle of Adwa, and around ten years *before* the invasion of Ethiopia in 1935. Also, it has been well documented that, during the 1935–36 war, Italian forces used chemical weapons (including mustard gas) delivered by aerial bombardment in Ethiopia. Taken together, this historical evidence suggest that the soldiers with missing dates of death likely died during the 1930s colonial campaigns.

Table A1: The Cemeteries Database: Summary Statistics

	Battle of Adwa (1896)		Interwar (1897–1934)		Colonial campaigns (1935–1941)		Post-WWII (1941+)		Unknown		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Surnames												
All	5,367	63.3	22	0.3	1,602	18.9	77	0.9	1,413	16.7	8,481	100.0
Unique	4,433		19		1,479		77		1,302		6,559	
Military Unit												
Infantry	4,327	80.6	0	0.0	172	10.7	1	1.3	131	9.3	4,631	54.6
Artillery	481	9.0	0	0.0	58	3.6	0	0.0	73	5.2	612	7.2
Mountain troop	456	8.5	0	0.0	81	5.1	0	0.0	25	1.8	562	6.6
Air Force	0	0.0	0	0.0	54	3.4	0	0.0	100	7.1	154	1.8
Navy	0	0.0	4	18.2	82	5.1	5	6.5	54	3.8	145	1.7
Fascist Militia (MVSN)	0	0.0	0	0.0	390	24.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	390	4.6
Other	25	0.5	18	81.8	413	25.8	40	51.9	300	21.2	796	9.4
Unknown	78	1.5	0	0.0	352	22.0	31	40.3	730	51.7	1,191	14.0
Military district												
Known	4,063	75.7	0	0.0	36	2.2	0	0.0	213	15.1	4,312	50.8
Unknown	1,304	24.3	22	100.0	1,566	97.8	77	100.0	1,200	84.9	4,169	49.2

Note: The table summarises the information available in the cemeteries dataset. *Surnames – All* reports total soldier records; *Unique* reports distinct surnames per period (a surname appearing in multiple periods is counted in each, so column totals do not sum to the overall total). *Infantry* includes Grenadiers (*Granatieri di Sardegna*), given their equivalent role as line infantry; *Other* includes Logistics & Supply, Corps of Engineers, Cavalry, Armoured Corps, Colonial Troops, Carabinieri (Military Police), Medical Corps, Guardia di Finanza (Financial Police), Polizia dell'Africa italiana (Italian African Police, PAI), and Civilians.

A.1.2 Military Unit and District

The cemeteries database also reports the military unit for 86% of the soldiers. Mountain soldiers (7%) were involved in both the Battle of Adwa and the 1930s colonial campaigns, confirming that mountain units took part in Italy's military operations dur-

ing the whole period of colonial expansion in East Africa. The database also records members of the *Milizia Volontaria per la Sicurezza Nazionale* (Voluntary Militia for National Security, MVSN, 5%), the Fascist party's volunteer militia, also known as the *Camicie Nere* (Blackshirts). Consistent with the mobilization of ideologically committed volunteers for the invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, they all died during the 1930s colonial campaigns.[60] For about half of the soldiers, the cemeteries data also record the military district of origin – the Italian province from which the soldier was conscripted. We use this information in Section 4 to assess the validity of our instrument (see Panel (c) of Figure A5).

A.2 Exposure to Colonialism

A.2.1 Construction of the Index of Colonial Exposure

Section 3 describes the three-step construction of our index of colonial exposure. Table A2 lists the 100 most common Italian surnames excluded from the construction of the index to reduce measurement error arising from homonymy.

Table A2: Common Italian Surnames Excluded from the Analysis

Alfieri	Amato	Barbieri	Barone	Basile	Basso	Bellini	Benedetti	Bernardi
Bianchi	Bianco	Bruno	Caputo	Caruso	Cattaneo	Cattani	Colombo	Conti
Coppola	Costa	De Luca	De Rosa	De Santis	Donati	Esposito	Fabbri	Farina
Ferrari	Ferraro	Ferri	Fiore	Fontana	Galli	Gallo	Gatti	Gentile
Giordano	Giuliani	Grassi	Grasso	Greco	Guerra	Leone	Lombardi	Lombardo
Longo	Mancini	Marchetti	Mariani	Marini	Marino	Martini	Martino	Mazza
Messina	Milani	Monti	Morelli	Moretti	Orlando	Pagano	Palumbo	Parisi
Pellegrini	Piazza	Piras	Pugliese	Ricci	Rinaldi	Rizzi	Rizzo	Romano
Rossi	Rossetti	Rosso	Ruggiero	Russo	Sala	Sanna	Santoro	Sartori
Serra	Taddei	Testa	Valentini	Villa	Vitale	Vitali		

Note: The table lists all the surnames in our data that are among the 100 most common Italian surnames, according to *Cognomix.it*. These surnames are excluded from the construction of the index of colonial exposure to reduce measurement error arising from homonymy (the risk of incorrectly attributing a household to a buried soldier's family solely because of a widespread surname).

Also, as explained in Sections 4.2 and 5.2, we construct two additional indices of colonial exposure, based on different sub-samples of surnames. Table A3 reports, for each index, the number of soldiers in the underlying sample, the unique surnames

[60] The over-representation of MVSN volunteers among the soldiers who died during the 1930s campaigns (almost 25%) most likely reflects the fact that these ideologically motivated fighters typically lacked the military training of regular conscripts, and therefore faced a higher probability of dying in combat compared to conscripted soldiers.

they yield, those remaining after the exclusion, and those matched to at least one household in the contemporary distribution. *All Colonial Exposure* is constructed from 6,559 unique surnames, of which 6,349 remain after excluding the most common ones. Of these, 5,376 are matched to at least one household in the contemporary distribution of surnames. The *Mountain Troop Exposure* uses 529 unique surnames, of which 509 are classified as non-common ones, and 436 matched. The *Post-Adwa Exposure* uses 2,695 unique surnames, of which 2,615 are non-common ones, and 2,121 matched.

Table A4 shows that all three measures of colonial exposure are positively associated with colonial street density (see Section 3).

Table A3: Construction of the Colonial Exposure Indices

	All soldiers surnames	Unique surnames	Excluding most common surnames	Matched surnames
All Colonial Exposure	8,481	6,559	6,349	5,376
Mountain Troop Exposure	562	529	509	436
Post-Adwa Exposure	3,114	2,695	2,615	2,121

Note: The table reports, for each colonial exposure index, the number of soldiers in the underlying sample, the number of unique surnames they yield, the number remaining after excluding the 100 most common Italian surnames (see Table A2), and the number matched to at least one household in the *Cognomix.it* data as of 2009 (i.e., the number of surnames effectively used to construct the index). *All Colonial Exposure* uses the full database, while *Mountain Troop Exposure* is restricted to soldiers belonging to mountain units, and *Post-Adwa Exposure* excludes soldiers who died during the Battle of Adwa (1896).

Table A4: Colonial Exposure and Colonial Street Names

Dep. var.: Colonial Streets Density	All colonial exposure	Mountain troop exposure	Post-Adwa exposure
Colonial Exposure	.033*	.018*	.028*
	(.02)	(.009)	(.016)
Controls:			
Province FE	✓	✓	✓
Geographic	✓	✓	✓
Observations	7,887	7,887	7,887
Number of clusters	107	107	107
Mean dep. var.	1.1	1.1	1.1
SD dep. var.	11.4	11.4	11.4
SD colonial exposure	59.2	16.2	33.6

Note: OLS regressions of *Colonial Streets Density* on alternative measures of colonial exposure. All variables are standardized to have mean zero and unit standard deviation. *Colonial Streets Density* is constructed from OpenStreetMap data by matching street names against a list of keywords referring to colonial-era places (e.g., Adua, Asmara, Eritrea, Etiopia, Amba Aradam) and figures (e.g., Balbo, Graziani, Badoglio). The most frequently matched keywords are *Adua* (536 streets), *Macalle* (169), *Dogali* (155), *Eritrea* (152), and *Asmara* (137). The reported mean and standard deviation of the dependent variable and the standard deviation of colonial exposure refer to the original, non-standardized variables. All columns include province FE and geographic controls (altitude, land area, geographic coordinates, and urbanization level). Standard errors clustered at the province level are in parentheses. Significance levels: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

A.3 Discussion on the Surname-based Methodology

A.3.1 Strengths and Limitations

An alternative approach would be to measure colonial exposure using the soldiers' *municipality of origin*. We do not observe this information.[61] In any case, we believe that our approach has some advantages, as it is robust to internal migration issues. When the families of soldiers moved away from their municipality of origin, we still track their descendants to their *current* place of residence. This is the main strength of our measure.

On the other hand, our approach suffers from measurement error. In particular, our measure may *overcount* descendants because of homonymy, i.e., individuals who share the surname of a buried soldier without being related to him.

Even if we partially take care of this when excluding the most common surnames as explained above, this source of measurement error is unlikely to be *classical* (i.e., uncorrelated with the true underlying measure).

We follow Nunn [2008] to characterize the sign of the resulting bias. The key observation is that overcounting from homonymy is concentrated precisely where true exposure is high. Our index works because surnames are geographically clustered. However, for the same reason, a household that bears a soldier's surname *without* descending from him is most likely to reside in the soldier's area of origin. Since the buried soldiers were disproportionately drawn from mountain-troop recruiting areas, the homonymy overcount is arguably correlated with mountain-troop specialization.

We formalize the implications of overcounting as follows. Let a_m be a measure of municipality m's mountain-troop specialization, E_m^* its *true* colonial exposure, and M_m our *measured* colonial exposure index, all expressed as deviations from the mean. Assume we have:

$$E_m^* = \alpha a_m + \varepsilon_m, \qquad M_m = E_m^* + \gamma a_m + \nu_m, \qquad \textit{FR Vote Share}_m = \beta E_m^* + \omega_m,$$

where $\alpha > 0$ (the first stage), $\beta > 0$, ν_m is classical noise, and $\gamma > 0$ captures the fact that the net overcount rises with mountain-troop specialization. Substituting, the observed

[61] To the best of our knowledge, no such database is available for Italy's colonial campaigns. The cemeteries database does not record the municipality of origin of the buried soldiers either.

index is $M_m = (\alpha + \gamma)a_m + \varepsilon_m + \nu_m$. Since $\gamma > 0$, our index overstates how steeply exposure rises with mountain-troop specialization, while the outcome responds only to true exposure and therefore rises with a_m at the rate $\beta\alpha$. OLS thus attributes the same increase in votes to a larger increase in measured exposure, and underestimates β. An OLS regression of the outcome on M_m then converges to

$$\text{plim } \hat{b}_{OLS} = \beta \cdot \frac{\alpha(\alpha + \gamma)\sigma_a^2 + \sigma_\varepsilon^2}{(\alpha + \gamma)^2\sigma_a^2 + \sigma_\varepsilon^2 + \sigma_\nu^2}.$$

When $\gamma = 0$, this reduces to the standard attenuation formula. When $\gamma > 0$, since $(\alpha + \gamma)^2 > \alpha(\alpha + \gamma)$, the estimated coefficient is biased toward zero even absent any classical noise. The non-classical component reinforces the attenuation. OLS estimates are therefore a lower bound of the true effect.

To quantify the implication of measurement error, we directly assess the reliability of our index of colonial exposure by measuring how much of its variation is *signal* rather than *noise*. Since the index is a sum over 5,376 matched surnames, we can randomly partition the surnames into two halves and construct two exposure indices, $ColExp_A$ and $ColExp_B$, from the disjoint halves. $ColExp_A$ and $ColExp_B$ are two proxies for the same underlying index, and their measurement errors are independent by construction, so their correlation across municipalities estimates the reliability of a half-length index (i.e., $ColExp_A$ or $ColExp_B$), which the Spearman–Brown formula $2\rho/(1+\rho)$ converts into the reliability of the full-length colonial exposure index (Spearman [1910]; Brown [1910]). This approach has been used in economics to quantify attenuation from duplicate measurements of the same construct (e.g., Ashenfelter and Krueger [1994]).

Table A5 reports the results, averaged over 500 random splits. The reliability of the index is 0.77; the reliability of the residual variation left after partialling out province fixed effects and the full set of controls is 0.72. This means that roughly three quarters of the relevant variance is *signal*. Ashenfelter and Krueger [1994] measure the reliability of self-reported years of schooling by correlating each individual's own report with the report given by their twin, and obtain 0.88 in levels, falling to roughly 0.57 once schooling is differenced within twin pairs. This suggests that our index, which retains a reliability of 0.72 after partialling out province fixed effects and controls, is reliable by the standards of this literature.

Table A5: Split-Half Reliability of the Colonial Exposure Index

	Index in levels (λ)	Residual variation (λ_W)
Half-index correlation $\rho(A, B)$	0.625	0.558
Reliability (Spearman–Brown)	0.770	0.716
	[0.753, 0.786]	[0.698, 0.736]
Implied noise share	23.0%	28.4%
Implied SD(error)/SD(signal)	0.55	0.63
Random splits	500	
Matched surnames	5,597	
Observations	7,296	

Note: The table reports a direct measurement of the reliability of *Colonial Exposure*. In each of 500 replications, the matched surnames are randomly partitioned into two halves and two exposure indices, A and B, are constructed from the disjoint halves exactly as in Section 3. The partition is drawn once over the list of matched surnames and applied to every municipality, so A and B differ only in which surnames enter the numerator. Both proxy the same underlying municipal exposure with error that is independent across halves, so their correlation across municipalities estimates the reliability of a half-length index; the Spearman–Brown formula $2\rho/(1+\rho)$ converts it into the reliability of the full-length index. *Index in levels* correlates the raw half-indices; *Residual variation* correlates their residuals after partialling out province fixed effects and the control vector of column (3) of Table 3, and therefore measures the reliability of the variation used in our regressions. The control vector explains 0.253 of the variance of the index, which is why little reliability is lost between the two columns. Values are means over the 500 splits, with 5th–95th percentiles in brackets; the sample is the estimation sample of Table 3. Because the design captures only error independent across surnames, and not error common to all surnames within a municipality, the reported reliabilities are upper bounds.

Measurement error therefore explains part of the gap between the OLS and 2SLS estimates. The gap may also reflect the fact that the IV identifies a local average treatment effect (LATE). It recovers the effect for municipalities whose exposure is driven by mountain-troop specialization. For these municipalities, colonial participation may have had stronger political effects than for the average exposed municipality.

A.3.2 Underlying Assumptions

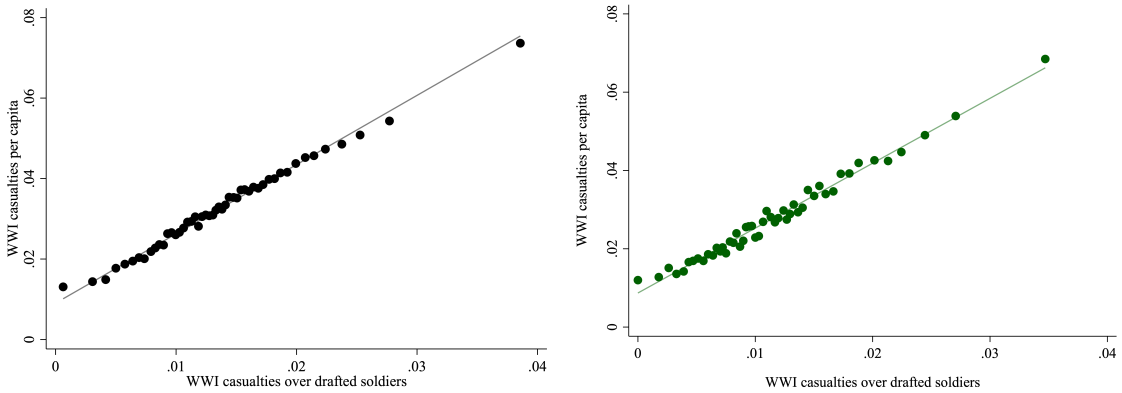
Two assumptions are needed for our index to proxy municipalities' exposure to colonialism. The first assumption is that soldiers' risk of dying in East Africa was independent of their municipality of origin: municipalities that *lost* more soldiers are also those that *sent* more soldiers. We provide indirect evidence in favor of this argument using WWI data from Acemoglu et al. [2021].

Specifically, we compare WWI casualties *per capita* and the casualty rate among *drafted* soldiers, across municipalities. The two variables are highly correlated (ρ = 0.85). This suggests that the geographic variation in casualties reflects where men were deployed, rather than differences in mortality by place of origin. Moreover, the casualty

rate among drafted soldiers varies little across municipalities (standard deviation of 0.0075 around a mean of 0.015). This is consistent with roughly uniform mortality. The same holds in the sub-sample of mountain troop municipalities ($\rho = 0.79$; standard deviation of 0.0068 around a mean of 0.012).

Figure A1 shows that both relationships are almost perfectly linear. To the extent that the same logic applies to the colonial wars, the surnames of the soldiers buried in Italian cemeteries in East Africa proxy for the municipalities that were most intensively involved in the colonial expansion in this region.

Figure A1: World War I: Casualties *per Capita* Versus Casualties Among Drafted Soldiers



(a) All municipalities (b) Mountain troop municipalities

Note: Bin scatterplots of the relationship between WWI casualties per capita (share of dead soldiers out of the male population aged six and above) and WWI casualties among drafted soldiers, across municipalities. Panel (a) uses the full historical sample; Panel (b) uses only the municipalities that historically supply mountain units – i.e., where the *Mountain Troop* dummy is equal to 1. Each dot represents the mean within bins of approximately 100 municipalities.

We argue that the colonial campaigns' legacy was carried primarily by the *returning* veterans, who were directly exposed to the racial narratives and may have transmitted them to their families. For the surnames of the buried soldiers to proxy for the returning veterans, we make another assumption: the descendants of the buried and returning soldiers have followed similar migration patterns over time. We cannot test this directly. However, migration is primarily driven by labor market opportunities, which are unlikely to differ systematically between the families of soldiers who died and those who returned.

B Mountain Troop Classification

A soldier, i, born in municipality m, is classified as belonging to a mountain troop if the unit listed in the WWI casualty database corresponds to an *Alpini* unit, *Mountain Artillery* unit, or any logistic, medical, or support unit explicitly designed for mountain warfare (e.g. *salmerie*, *carreggio*, or *reparti someggiati*) and organically attached to mountain divisions. Formally, we construct:

$$\textit{Soldiers from Mountain Troops}_m = \sum_{i \in m} 1\{\text{Military Unit}_i \in \mathcal{M}\},$$

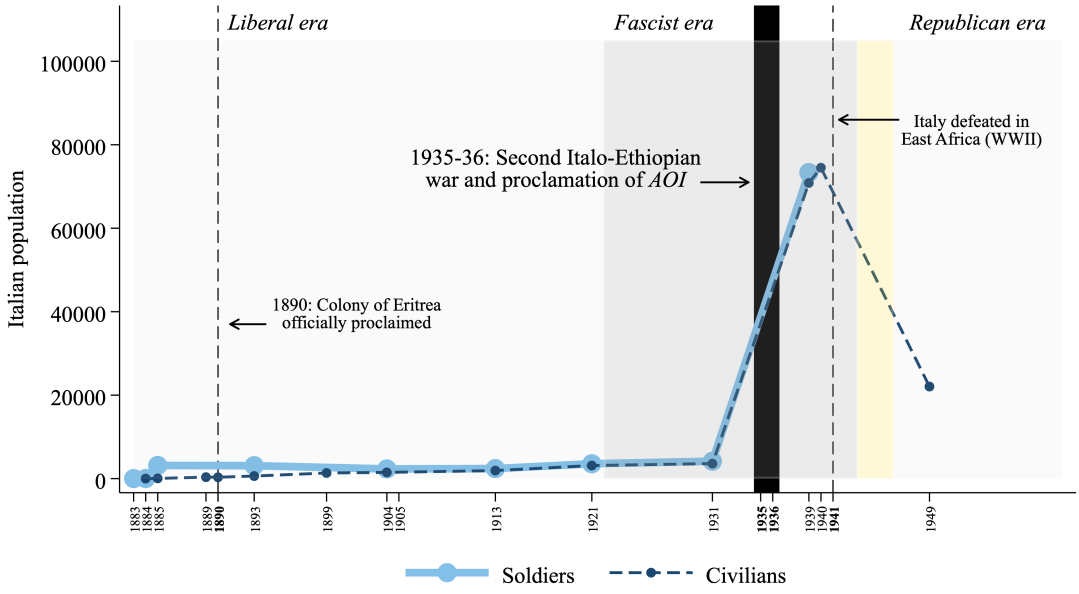
where $\mathcal{M}$ denotes the set of mountain units listed in Table A6.

Table A6: Military Units Included in *Soldiers from Mountain Troops*

Unit Categories	**Description**	**Examples of Units Included**
Mountain Infantry (*Alpini*)	Mountain infantry units trained for combat in high-altitude environments. The *Alpini* form the core of Italian mountain troops.	*1-11 Reggimento alpini; 22, 25, 28, 63 Reggimento alpini; Battaglioni alpini (e.g. Battaglione Feltre); Gruppi alpini; Raggruppamenti alpini; Volontari alpini*
Mountain Artillery (*Artiglieria da montagna*)	Artillery units equipped with dismantlable guns transported by pack animals, designed specifically for mountain warfare.	*1-36 Reggimento artiglieria da montagna; Gruppi e batterie di artiglieria da montagna (e.g. 108, 121, 180 Batteria da montagna)*
Pack and Transport Units (*Salmerie, Carreggio*)	Logistic units using pack animals to transport ammunition, food, and equipment in mountainous terrain.	*Colonne carreggio e salmerie; Parchi carreggio e salmerie; Reparti salmerie; Sezioni salmerie; Colonne munizioni gruppo alpini*
Pack-Animal Medical and Support Units (*Reparti someggiati*)	Medical and auxiliary units operating with pack animals, explicitly designed for high-altitude and hardly accessible terrain.	*Reparto someggiato; Reparto someggiato di sanità; Sezioni di sanità someggiate*
Alpini Specialized Units	Specialized combat and support units organically attached to *Alpini* formations.	*Compagnie mitraglieri alpini; Alpini d'assalto; Compagnie mitraglieri FIAT alpini; Plotoni alpini autonomi*
Alpini Volunteer and Auxiliary Corps	Volunteer and auxiliary formations explicitly identified as Alpini or mountain units.	*Corpo volontari alpini; Volontari alpini battaglione Feltre; Batteria da montagna volontari italiani*

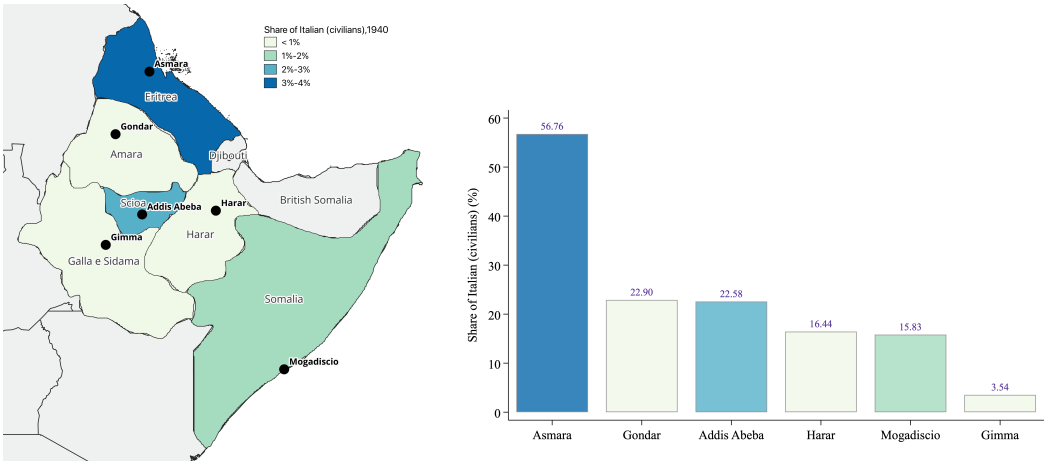
C Additional Figures and Tables

Figure A2: Italian Population in Eritrea: Liberal Era versus Fascist Era



Note: Source: Authors' elaboration based on archival data from *Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale. Archivio Storico Diplomatico, Roma - Ministero Africa Italiana vol. IV Fondo Statistica, b. 3*, accessed on 24 November 2025. The yellow shaded area corresponds to the Italian Civil War, from September 1943 to April 1945. The period is followed by an institutional referendum and the birth of the Italian Republic in 1946.

Figure A3: Italian Population in AOI in 1940



(a) In each governorate

(b) In the main cities

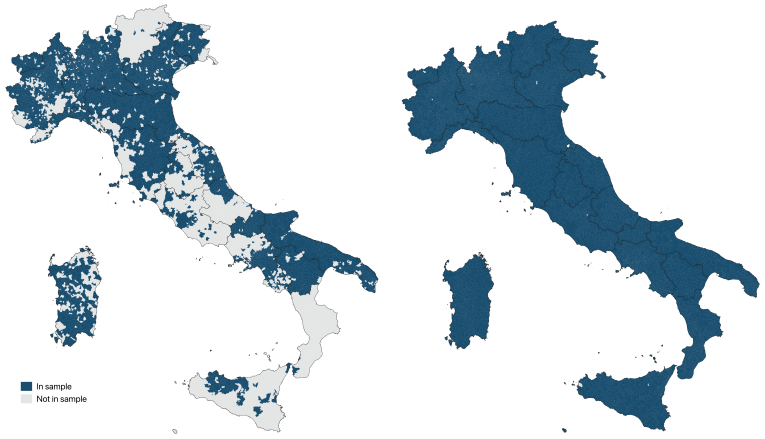
Note: Source: Authors' elaboration based on archival data from *Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale. Archivio Storico Diplomatico, Roma - Ministero Africa Italiana vol. IV Fondo Statistica, b. 3*, accessed on 24 November 2025. City names follow Italian colonial usage.

Table A7: Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Main variables					
All Colonial Exposure	7,887	112.78	59.20	1.83	1,000.00
Mountain Troop Exposure	7,887	14.24	16.25	0.00	259.26
Post-Adwa Exposure	7,887	53.82	33.62	0.00	719.65
Mountain Troop (dummy)	7,887	0.24	0.43	0.00	1.00
Far-right vote share, 2013 (%)	7,879	9.57	7.57	0.00	56.52
Sub-Saharan African migrants (share)	7,887	3.87	4.83	0.00	54.90
Geographic controls					
Altitude (meters)	7,887	354.74	296.09	0.00	2,035.00
Land area (km^2)	7,887	38.28	50.87	0.12	1,287.36
Contemporary demographic controls (main sample)					
Population, 2009 (thousands)	7,887	7.53	40.30	0.03	2,614.06
Share of residents aged 65 or older, 2011	7,887	0.23	0.06	0.05	0.62
Urbanization level, 2009	7,887	2.64	0.55	1.00	3.00
Share of graduates, 2011	7,887	7.28	2.70	0.00	27.47
Income per capita, 2009	7,887	11,296.51	2,909.02	2,664.49	32,623.21
Employment rate, 2011	7,887	39.04	6.41	17.40	58.04
Historical demographic controls (historical sample)					
Population, 1911 (thousands)	4,836	4.79	18.37	0.10	615.72
Male literacy, 1911	4,836	0.73	0.20	0.10	1.00
Industrial workers over male pop., 1911	4,836	0.11	0.19	0.00	3.54
Land ownership, 1885	4,836	0.56	0.50	0.00	1.00
Crime rate, 1874	4,836	6.66	6.75	0.00	98.18
War/Militarization-related controls (historical sample)					
WWI casualties per capita	4,836	20.41	15.63	0.72	814.00
Volunteers in WWI (share)	4,836	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.003
Veterans classes 1874–1895	4,836	0.23	0.06	0.10	0.41
Veterans classes 1896–1900	4,836	0.14	0.02	0.07	0.20
Volunteers 1866 Independence war (dummy)	4,836	0.41	0.48	0.00	1.00

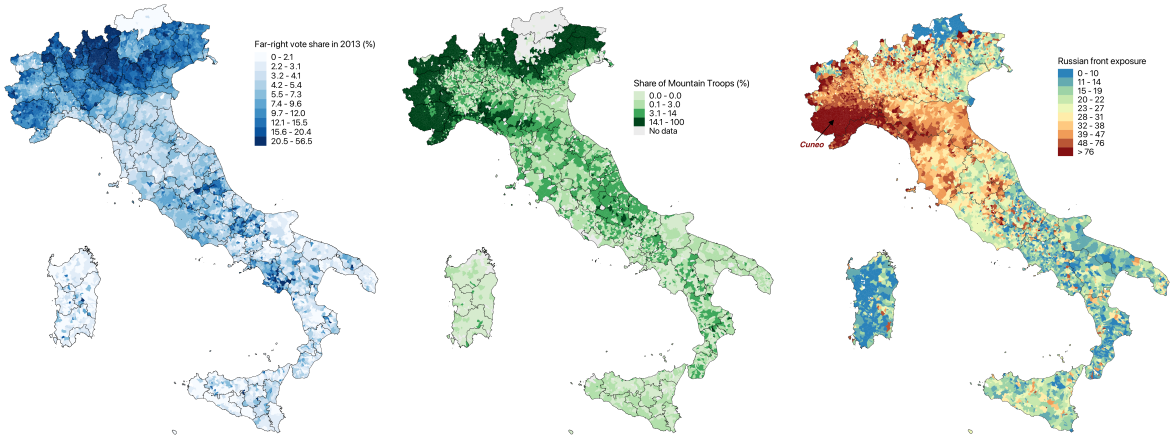
Figure A4: Additional Maps

A) *Data Coverage*



(a) Historical sample (b) Main sample

B) *Spatial Distribution of Other Variables*



(c) Far-right vote share, 2013 (d) Share of Mountain Troops (e) Russian Front Exposure

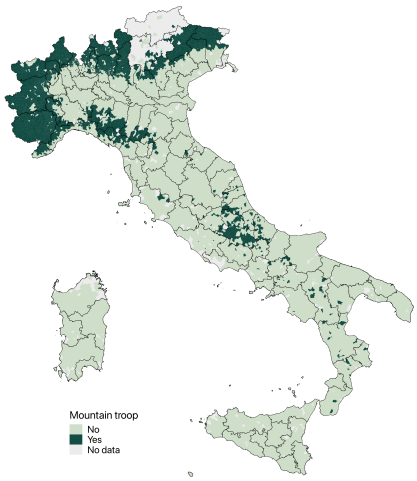
Note: Panel (a) shows the coverage of the *historical sample*, which includes 4,863 municipalities. Panel (b) shows the coverage of the *main sample*, which includes 7,887 municipalities. The reduced coverage in the historical sample reflects both the limited availability of pre-1930 socio-economic and political data and the aggregation of municipalities resulting from administrative mergers. Panel (c) shows the distribution of far-right parties' vote share in the 2013 parliamentary election. Panel (d) shows the spatial distribution of the *Share of Mountain Troops*. Panel (e) shows the intensity of exposure to the Russian campaign (1941–43) across municipalities, constructed using the surnames of soldiers belonging to the *Cuneense* Alpini brigade who died in Russia during WWII; the arrow identifies the province of Cuneo, the historical recruiting basin of the brigade.

Table A8: Classification of Far-right Parties by Election Year

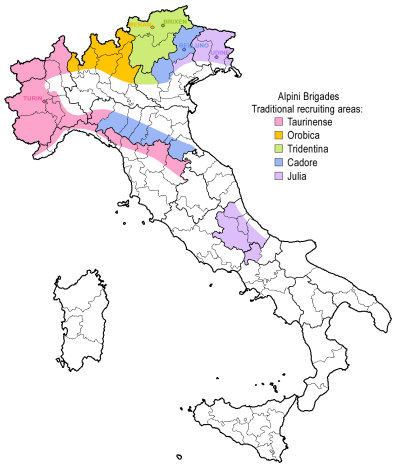
Year	Parties classified as Far-Right	Vote share
1948	MSI; BN; GPLD; PNM-AL; FAI; FUA; PL	8.0%
1953	MSI; PNM; PMNI; LM; MNI; PVN; PUN; PNF	10.5%
1958	MSI; PMP; PNM; MNI; PNL	6.9%
1963	MSI; PMN	3.3%
1968	MSI; PMN	2.8%
1972	MSI	5.3%
1976	MSI-DN	4.1%
1979	MSI-DN	3.6%
1983	MSI-DN; PMN	4.7%
1987	MSI-DN	4.4%
1992	MSI-DN	3.9%
1994	AN; LN; LAB	21.2%
1996	MST; AN; LN	28.3%
2001	FT; FN; AN; LN; FrN	16.4%
2006	ASM; AN; FT; LN; DeN	18.8%
2008	FN; LN; LD-FT	13.8%
2013	FdI; LN; CP; FT; FN; LD; IAI; RMI; PN	9.6%
2018	FdI; LN; CP; IagI; BNL	25.3%
2022	FdI; Lega; CP; Italexit; AINOGP; BNL	36.8%

Note: The table lists all parties classified as *Far-right* in each parliamentary election cycle over 1948–2022, along with their aggregated vote share. Classification was produced by submitting the official list names recorded in the Italian Ministry of Internal Affairs data to a large language model, and subsequently reviewed by the authors list by list. The review led us to reclassify three single-issue lists whose names contain the word *Nazionale* but which are unrelated to the far right: the *Partito Nazionale Inquilini*, a tenants' association list (1983 and 1987), and the *Movimento Nazionale Italiano Caccia* and *PNI Caccia e Pesca*, hunting and fishing lists (1987). Monarchist lists are retained in the far-right family, following the standard treatment of the MSI–monarchist bloc as the right of the First Republic. Abbreviations: MSI = Movimento Sociale Italiano; BN = Blocco Nazionale; GPLD = Gruppo Politico La Destra; PNM-AL = Partito Nazionale Monarchico Alleanza dei Lavoratori; FAI = Fronte Antibolscevico Italiano; FUA = Fronte Unito Anticomunista; PL = Patria e Libertà; PNM = Partito Nazionale Monarchico; PMNI = Partito Monarchico Nazionale Italiano; LM = Lista Monarchica; MNI = Movimento Nazionale Italiano; PVN = Partito Volontà Nazionale; PUN = Partito Unione Nazionale; PNF = Partiti Nazionali Federati; PMP = Partito Monarchico Popolare; PNL = Partito Nazionale Lavoro; PMN = Partito Monarchico Nazionale; MSI-DN = Movimento Sociale Italiano – Destra Nazionale; AN = Alleanza Nazionale; LN = Lega Nord; LAB = Lega Angela Bossi; MST = Movimento Sociale Tricolore; FT = Fiamma Tricolore; FN = Forza Nuova; FrN = Fronte Nazionale; ASM = Alternativa Sociale Mussolini; DeN = Destra Nazionale; LD = La Destra; LD-FT = La Destra – Fiamma Tricolore; FdI = Fratelli d'Italia; CP = CasaPound; IAI = Io Amo l'Italia; IagI = Italia agli Italiani; RMI = Rifondazione Missina Italiana; PN = Progetto Nazionale; BNL = Blocco Nazionale per le Libertà; Italexit = Italexit per l'Italia; AINOGP = Alternativa per l'Italia – No Green Pass.

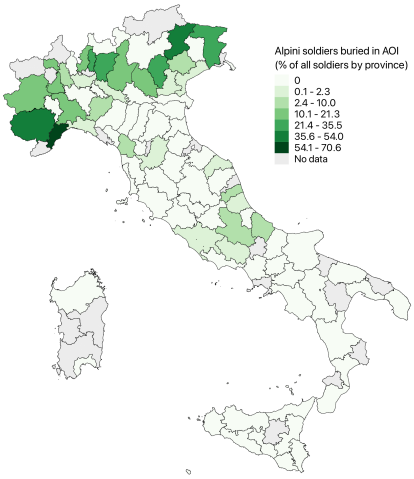
Figure A5: Historical Distribution of Mountain Troops



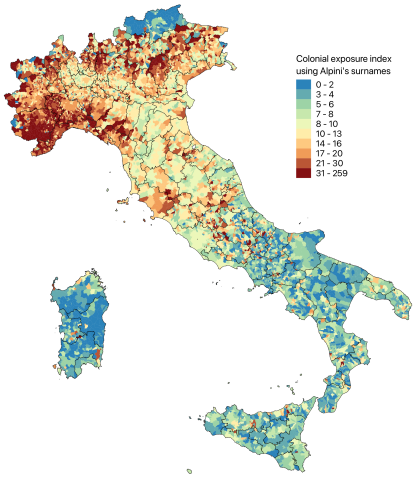
(a) Estimated using WWI casualties record



(b) From anecdotal sources



(c) Using soldiers' military district

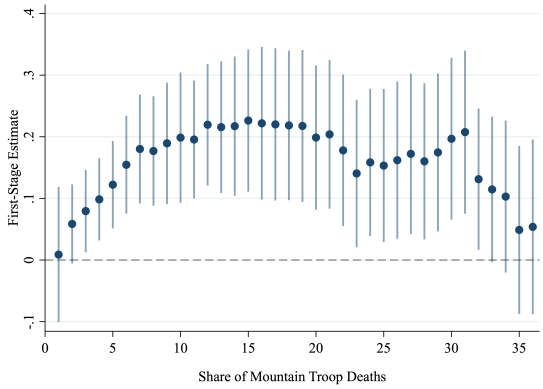


(d) Using mountain soldiers' surnames

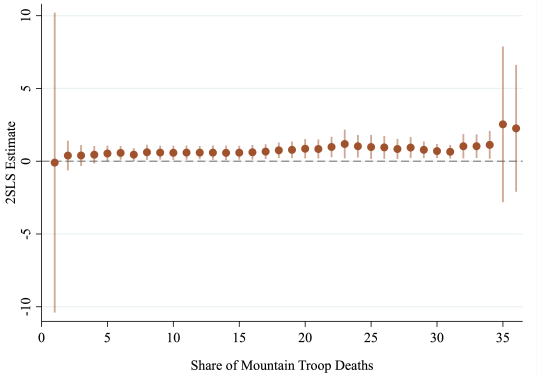
Note: The map on Panel (a) shows the distribution of the instrument (*Mountain Troop* dummy), estimated using the WWI database. The region in gray in the North-East area, for which we have no data, is the *Trentino-Alto Adige* region, which became part of Italy only after the end of WWI. The map on Panel (b) comes from *Wikipedia*. The map on Panel (c) shows the share of mountain troop soldiers among all soldiers buried in East Africa for each province (indicated as *Military district* in Table A1). The map on Panel (d) shows the contemporary spatial distribution of the descendants of the mountain troop soldiers buried in East Africa. Black lines indicate 2025 province boundaries.

Figure A6: First-Stage and 2SLS Estimates With Alternative Definitions of the Instrument

A) Fixing $Altitude = 170m$ and varying the *Share of Mountain Troop Deaths* threshold

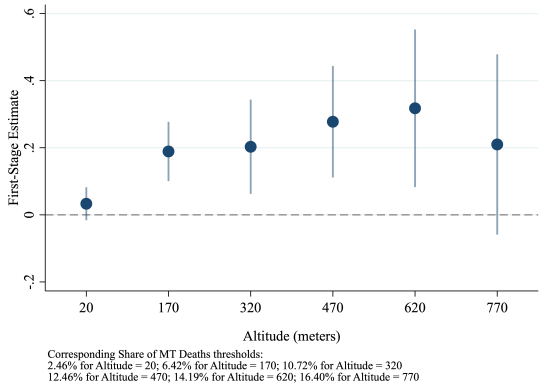


(a) First-stage estimates

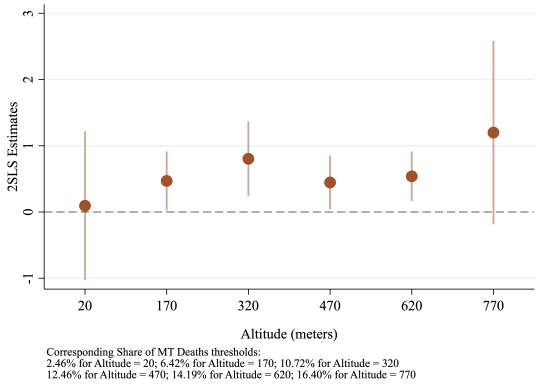


(b) Second-stage estimates

B) Alternative Combinations of *Altitude* and *Share of Mountain Troop Deaths* thresholds

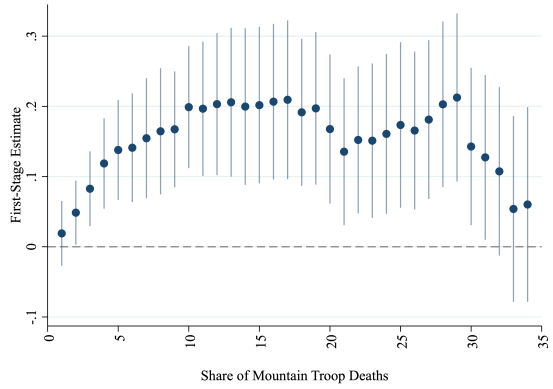


(c) First-stage estimates

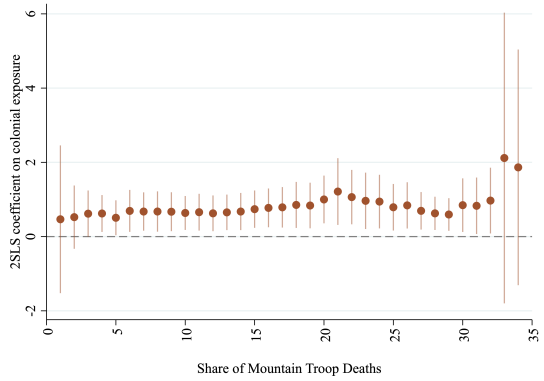


(d) Second-stage estimates

C) Varying the *Share of Mountain Troop Deaths* threshold only



(e) First-stage estimates



(f) Second-stage estimates

Note: The figure reports first-stage and 2SLS coefficient estimates obtained using alternative definitions of the *Mountain Troop* dummy instrument. In Panel A, we fix the altitude cutoff at 170 meters and vary the *Share of Mountain Troops* threshold. In Panel B, we use alternative combinations of altitude and *Share of Mountain Troops* thresholds. In Panel C, we vary the *Share of Mountain Troops* threshold only, without conditioning on altitude. Vertical bars represent 95% confidence intervals with standard errors clustered at the province level. All specifications include province FE and the full set of controls from Equations (1) and (2).

Table A9: Colonial Exposure and Contemporary Support for Far-right Parties – Instrument Defined Using the Continuous *Share of Mountain Troops*

	All colonial exposure			Mountain troop exposure		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Panel A: First Stage						
Dep. var.: Colonial Exposure						
Mountain troop (share)	0.179***	0.080***	0.080**	0.204***	0.135***	0.132***
	(0.031)	(0.030)	(0.031)	(0.029)	(0.026)	(0.025)
F-statistic	33.41	7.18	6.86	47.88	26.83	28.87
Observations	7,301	7,301	7,301	7,301	7,301	7,301
Number of clusters	107	107	107	107	107	107
Panel B: 2SLS						
Dep. var.: FR Vote Share 2013						
Colonial Exposure	0.766***	0.922***	0.894***	0.671***	0.547**	0.540**
	(0.156)	(0.298)	(0.263)	(0.191)	(0.222)	(0.223)
KP F-statistic	33.28	7.15	6.84	48.02	26.68	28.70
Observations	7,296	7,296	7,296	7,296	7,296	7,296
Number of clusters	107	107	107	107	107	107
Mean dep. var.	9.6%	9.6%	9.6%	9.6%	9.6%	9.6%
SD dep. var.	7.6%	7.6%	7.6%	7.6%	7.6%	7.6%
SD Colonial Exposure	56.73	56.73	56.73	16.02	16.02	16.02
Controls:						
Province FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Geographic		✓	✓		✓	✓
Contemporary Demog + Econ			✓			✓

Note: The table replicates the first-stage (Panel A) and 2SLS (Panel B) specifications from Tables 2 and 3 using the continuous *Share of Mountain Troops* as the instrument, in place of the binary *Mountain Troop* dummy. All variables are standardized to have mean zero and unit standard deviation. Columns (1)–(3) use the colonial exposure variable computed from the surnames of *all soldiers* buried in East Africa as the endogenous variable. Columns (4)–(6) use the colonial exposure variable computed from the surnames of *mountain troop soldiers* buried in East Africa as the endogenous variable. Standard errors clustered at the province level in parentheses. Significance levels: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table A10: First-Stage and 2SLS Estimates Using Spatially-Corrected Standard Errors

	All colonial exposure			Mountain troop exposure		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Panel A: Bartlett kernel, cutoff = 100 km						
First stage:						
Mountain Troops	0.18***	0.09***	0.09***	0.20***	0.14***	0.13***
	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.022)	(0.028)	(0.026)	(0.025)
2SLS:						
Colonial Exposure	0.62***	0.55***	0.56**	0.57***	0.37***	0.37***
	(0.146)	(0.206)	(0.219)	(0.132)	(0.128)	(0.132)
KP F-statistic	60.55	16.05	15.87	46.60	26.82	26.66
Observations	7,296	7,296	7,296	7,296	7,296	7,296
Panel B: Bartlett kernel, cutoff = 200 km						
First stage:						
Mountain Troops	0.18***	0.09***	0.09***	0.20***	0.14***	0.13***
	(0.020)	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.033)	(0.026)	(0.025)
2SLS:						
Colonial Exposure	0.62***	0.55***	0.56***	0.57***	0.37***	0.37***
	(0.162)	(0.195)	(0.205)	(0.145)	(0.138)	(0.138)
KP F-statistic	79.55	35.47	30.91	33.84	26.46	26.61
Observations	7,296	7,296	7,296	7,296	7,296	7,296
Panel C: Bartlett kernel, cutoff = 300 km						
First stage:						
Mountain Troops	0.18***	0.09***	0.09***	0.20***	0.14***	0.13***
	(0.022)	(0.013)	(0.014)	(0.037)	(0.026)	(0.024)
2SLS:						
Colonial Exposure	0.62***	0.55***	0.56***	0.57***	0.37***	0.37***
	(0.148)	(0.169)	(0.180)	(0.128)	(0.121)	(0.117)
KP F-statistic	64.02	49.37	36.95	27.38	26.87	28.47
Observations	7,296	7,296	7,296	7,296	7,296	7,296
Controls:						
Province FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Geographic		✓	✓		✓	✓
Contemporary Demog + Econ			✓			✓

Note: The table replicates the first-stage and 2SLS specifications from Tables 2 and 3 using spatially-corrected standard errors following Colella et al. [2019], allowing for spatial correlation within radii of 100, 200, and 300 kilometers. All variables are standardized to have mean zero and unit standard deviation. Columns (1)–(3) use the colonial exposure variable computed from the surnames of *all soldiers* buried in East Africa as the endogenous variable. Columns (4)–(6) use the colonial exposure variable computed from the surnames of *mountain troop soldiers* buried in East Africa as the endogenous variable. Standard errors based on the Bartlett kernel are in parentheses. Significance levels: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table A11: Colonial Exposure and Contemporary Support for Far-right Parties – Controlling for Pre-Colonial-Campaigns Characteristics

	All Colonial Exposure			Post-Adwa Colonial Exposure		
Dep. var.: FR vote share, 2013	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Panel A: 2SLS						
Colonial Exposure	0.520**	0.520**	0.608**	0.577**	0.590*	0.703**
	(0.229)	(0.251)	(0.272)	(0.265)	(0.302)	(0.334)
Implied votes gain 1 SD ↑ in Colonial Exposure	+4.2pp	+4.2pp	+4.9pp	+4.6pp	+4.7pp	+5.6pp
Kleibergen-Paap F-stat	8.92	10.58	10.04	9.41	10.28	9.15
Anderson-Rubin 95% CI	[0.06, 1.24]	[0.03, 1.27]	[0.10, 1.48]	[0.06, 1.45]	[0.05, 1.61]	[0.11, 1.93]
Panel B: OLS						
Colonial Exposure	0.038**	0.047***	0.046***	0.025*	0.030**	0.030**
	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.015)	(0.014)	(0.015)	(0.014)
Panel C: Reduced form						
Mountain Troop (dummy)	0.052**	0.049**	0.057**	0.052**	0.049**	0.057**
	(0.023)	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.023)	(0.022)	(0.022)
Controls:						
Province FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Geographic	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Contemporary Demog + Econ		✓	✓		✓	✓
War/Militarization			✓			✓
Observations	4,833	4,833	4,833	4,833	4,833	4,833
Number of clusters	96	96	96	96	96	96
Mean dep. var.	11.5%	11.5%	11.5%	11.5%	11.5%	11.5%
SD dep. var.	8.0%	8.0%	8.0%	8.0%	8.0%	8.0%
SD Colonial Exposure	56.6	56.6	56.6	15.8	15.8	15.8

Note: 2SLS (Panel A) and OLS (Panel B) regressions of *Far-right vote share* in 2013 on *Colonial Exposure*; reduced-form (Panel C) regression of *Far-right vote share* in 2013 on the *Mountain Troop* dummy. All variables are standardized to have mean zero and unit standard deviation. Columns (1)–(3) use the colonial exposure variable computed from the surnames of *all soldiers* buried in East Africa as the endogenous variable. Columns (4)–(6) use the colonial exposure variable computed by excluding the surnames of the soldiers buried in East Africa *who died during the Battle of Adwa (1896)* as the endogenous variable. The excluded instrument in Panel A is the *Mountain troop* dummy. The row *Implied votes gain 1 SD ↑ in Colonial Exposure* reports the change in far-right vote share (in percentage points) associated with a one-standard-deviation increase in colonial exposure. The Anderson-Rubin 95% confidence interval is robust to weak instruments. All specifications include province FE. See the *Note* of Table 2 for more details on the control variables included in each specification. The number of observations differs slightly from Table 1, as a small number of historical municipalities in the WWI casualty database could not be unambiguously matched to their current administrative successors and were therefore excluded. Standard errors clustered at the province level are in parentheses. Significance levels: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table A12: Municipalities Hosting the *Adunata Nazionale degli Alpini*, by Province, 1920–2027

Province	Municipalities (years)	Province	Municipalities (years)
Aosta (AO)	Aosta (1923; 2003)	Modena (MO)	Modena (1978)
Asti (AT)	Asti (1995; 2016)	Napoli (NA)	Napoli (1932; 1936; 1956; 1973)
Bari (BA)	Bari (1993)	Padova (PD)	Padova (1976; 1998)
Belluno (BL)	Cortina d'Ampezzo (1921; 1953), Pieve di Cadore (1927; 1935)	Parma (PR)	Parma (2005)
Bergamo (BG)	Bergamo (1962; 1986; 2010)	Pescara (PE)	Pescara (1989)
Biella (BI)	Biella (2025)	Piacenza (PC)	Piacenza (2013)
Bologna (BO)	Bologna (1933; 1969; 1982)	Pordenone (PN)	Pordenone (2014)
Bolzano (BZ)	Bolzano (1949; 2012)	Reggio Emilia (RE)	Reggio nell'Emilia (1997)
Brescia (BS)	Brescia (1970; 2000; 2027), Ponte di Legno (1924)	Rimini (RN)	Rimini (2022)
Catania (CT)	Catania (2002)	Roma (RM)	Roma (1929; 1934; 1954; 1968; 1979)
Cremona (CR)	Cremona (1999)	Torino (TO)	Torino (1928; 1940; 1961; 1977; 1988; 2011)
Cuneo (CN)	Cuneo (1971; 2007)	Trento (TN)	Canazei (1926), Trento (1922; 1938; 1958; 1987; 2018)
Firenze (FI)	Firenze (1937; 1957; 1975)	Treviso (TV)	Treviso (1967; 1994; 2017)
Genova (GE)	Genova (1931; 1952; 1963; 1980; 2001; 2026)	Trieste (TS)	Trieste (1930; 1939; 1955; 1965; 1984; 2004)
Gorizia (GO)	Gorizia (1951)	Udine (UD)	Udine (1925; 1974; 1983; 1996; 2023)
L'Aquila (AQ)	L'Aquila (2015)	Venezia (VE)	Venezia (1960)
La Spezia (SP)	La Spezia (1966; 1985)	Verona (VR)	Verona (1964; 1981; 1990)
Latina (LT)	Latina (2009)	Vicenza (VI)	Asiago (1920; 2006), Bassano del Grappa (1948; 2008), Vicenza (1991; 2024)
Milano (MI)	Milano (1959; 1972; 1992; 2019)		

Note: The table lists, by province, all municipalities that have hosted the *Adunata Nazionale degli Alpini* – the annual national gathering of the *Associazione Nazionale Alpini* (ANA) – with the year(s) in which each municipality hosted the event in parentheses, from the first gathering in 1920 to the announced 2027 edition. Source: ANA.it.

Table A13: Colonial Exposure and Contemporary Support for Far-right Parties – No *Adunata Nazionale degli Alpini*

	All colonial exposure			Mountain troop exposure		
Dep. var.: FR vote share, 2013	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Panel A: 2SLS						
Colonial Exposure	0.642***	0.578**	0.514**	0.543**	0.432**	0.399*
	(0.213)	(0.226)	(0.235)	(0.227)	(0.191)	(0.214)
Implied votes gain 1 SD ↑ in Colonial Exposure	+4.9pp	+4.4pp	+3.9pp	+4.1pp	+3.3pp	+3.0pp
Kleibergen-Paap F-stat	24.14	18.03	16.07	21.09	16.52	16.40
Anderson-Rubin 95% CI	[0.03, 1.11]	[0.07, 1.20]	[-0.05, 1.10]	[0.01, 1.25]	[0.05, 1.10]	[-0.03, 1.10]
Panel B: OLS						
Colonial Exposure	0.059**	0.039**	0.041*	0.046*	0.026	0.018
	(0.025)	(0.019)	(0.022)	(0.027)	(0.022)	(0.020)
Panel C: Reduced form						
Mountain Troop (dummy)	0.105**	0.070**	0.060*	0.105**	0.070**	0.060*
	(0.043)	(0.030)	(0.031)	(0.043)	(0.030)	(0.031)
Controls:						
Province FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Geographic		✓	✓		✓	✓
Contemporary Demog + Econ			✓			✓
Observations	4,266	4,266	4,266	4,266	4,266	4,266
Number of clusters	70	70	70	70	70	70
Mean dep. var.	9.6%	9.6%	9.6%	9.6%	9.6%	9.6%
SD dep. var.	7.6%	7.6%	7.6%	7.6%	7.6%	7.6%
SD Colonial Exposure	52.9	52.9	52.9	13.2	13.2	13.2

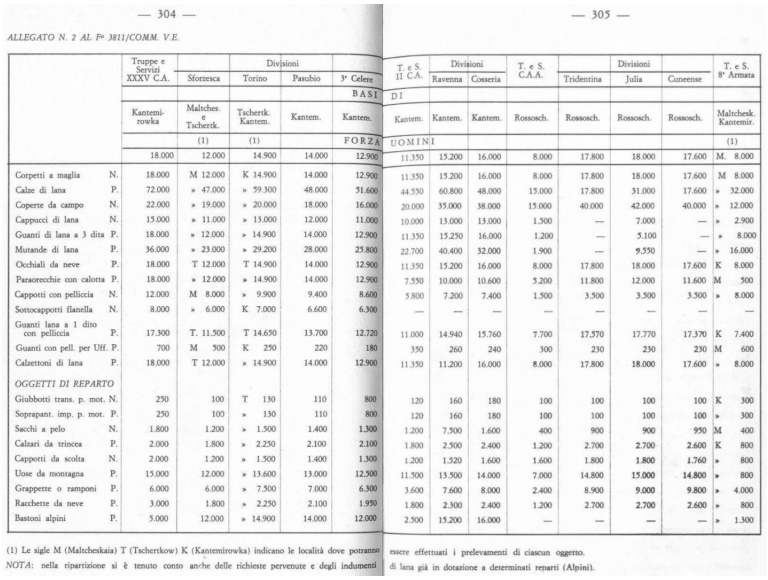
Note: 2SLS (Panel A) and OLS (Panel B) regressions of *Far-right vote share* in 2013 on *Colonial Exposure*; reduced-form (Panel C) regression of *Far-right vote share* in 2013 on the *Mountain Troop* dummy. All variables are standardized to have mean zero and unit standard deviation. The sample excludes the municipalities located in a province that has ever hosted an *Adunata Nazionale degli Alpini*. Columns (1)–(3) use the colonial exposure variable computed from the surnames of *all soldiers* buried in East Africa as the endogenous variable. Columns (4)–(6) use the colonial exposure variable computed from the surnames of *mountain troop soldiers* buried in East Africa as the endogenous variable. The excluded instrument in Panel A is the *Mountain troop* dummy. The row *Implied votes gain 1 SD ↑ in Colonial Exposure* reports the change in far-right vote share (in percentage points) associated with a one-standard-deviation increase in colonial exposure. The Anderson-Rubin 95% confidence interval is robust to weak instruments. All specifications include province FE. See the *Note* of Table 2 for more details on the control variables included in each specification. The number of observations differs slightly from Table 2 as a small number of municipalities recorded no far-right party candidacy in the 2013 parliamentary election. Standard errors clustered at the province level are in parentheses. Significance levels: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table A14: Colonial Exposure and Contemporary Support for Far-right Parties – No Exposure to Russian Campaigns

	All colonial exposure			Mountain troop exposure		
Dep. var.: FR vote share, 2013	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Panel A: 2SLS						
Colonial Exposure	0.686***	0.670***	0.674***	0.603***	0.462***	0.456***
	(0.148)	(0.212)	(0.238)	(0.159)	(0.145)	(0.157)
Implied votes gain 1 SD ↑ in Colonial Exposure	+5.3pp	+5.2pp	+5.2pp	+4.6pp	+3.6pp	+3.5pp
Kleibergen-Paap F-stat	52.42	15.13	16.04	58.06	42.45	48.79
Anderson-Rubin 95% CI	[0.33, 0.98]	[0.28, 1.25]	[0.23, 1.31]	[0.27, 1.00]	[0.18, 0.83]	[0.15, 0.83]
Panel B: OLS						
Colonial Exposure	0.070***	0.038***	0.044***	0.067***	0.029**	0.026**
	(0.017)	(0.014)	(0.016)	(0.017)	(0.014)	(0.013)
Panel C: Reduced form						
Mountain Troop (dummy)	0.137***	0.076***	0.071***	0.137***	0.076***	0.071***
	(0.034)	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.034)	(0.023)	(0.023)
Controls:						
Province FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Geographic		✓	✓		✓	✓
Contemporary Demog + Econ			✓			✓
Observations	6,356	6,356	6,356	6,356	6,356	6,356
Number of clusters	95	95	95	95	95	95
Mean dep. var.	9.3%	9.3%	9.3%	9.3%	9.3%	9.3%
SD dep. var.	7.7%	7.7%	7.7%	7.7%	7.7%	7.7%
SD Colonial Exposure	55.5	55.5	55.5	15.1	15.1	15.1

Note: 2SLS (Panel A) and OLS (Panel B) regressions of *Far-right vote share* in 2013 on *Colonial Exposure*; reduced-form (Panel C) regression of *Far-right vote share* in 2013 on the *Mountain Troop* dummy. All variables are standardized to have mean zero and unit standard deviation. The sample excludes municipalities that sent mountain soldiers to the Russian campaign, i.e., those in the following provinces: Udine, Pordenone, Gorizia, Treviso, L'Aquila, Teramo, Pescara, Chieti (*Julia* brigade), Bolzano, Trento, Verona (*Tridentina* brigade), and Cuneo (*Cuneense* brigade). Columns (1)–(3) use the colonial exposure variable computed from the surnames of *all soldiers* buried in East Africa as the endogenous variable. Columns (4)–(6) use the colonial exposure variable computed from the surnames of *mountain troop soldiers* buried in East Africa as the endogenous variable. The excluded instrument in Panel A is the *Mountain troop* dummy. The row *Implied votes gain 1 SD ↑ in Colonial Exposure* reports the change in far-right vote share (in percentage points) associated with a one-standard-deviation increase in colonial exposure. The Anderson-Rubin 95% confidence interval is robust to weak instruments. All specifications include province FE. See the *Note* of Table 2 for more details on the control variables included in each specification. Standard errors clustered at the province level are in parentheses. Significance levels: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Figure A7: Military Brigades Sent to the Russian Front, 1941-43



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ALLEGATO N. 2 AL Fº 3811/COMM. V.E.

		Truppe e Servizi XXXV C.A.	Divisioni Sforzesca	Torino	Pasubio	3ª Celere	T. e S. II C.A.	Divisioni Ravenna	Cosseria	T. e S. C.A.A.	Divisioni Tridentina	Julia	Cuneense	T. e S. 8ª Armata
						BASI DI								
		Kantemirowka	Maltches. e Tschertk.	Tschertk. Kantem.	Kantem.	Kantem.	Kantem.	Kantem.	Kantem.	Rossosch.	Rossosch.	Rossosch.	Rossosch.	Maltchesk. Kantemir.
			(1)	(1)		FORZA UOMINI								(1)
		18.000	12.000	14.900	14.000	12.900	11.350	15.200	16.000	8.000	17.800	18.000	17.600	M. 8.000
Corpetti a maglia	N.	18.000	M 12.000	K 14.900	14.000	12.900	11.350	15.200	16.000	8.000	17.800	18.000	17.600	M 8.000
Calze di lana	P.	72.000	» 47.000	» 59.300	48.000	51.600	44.550	60.800	48.000	15.000	17.800	31.000	17.600	» 32.000
Coperte da campo	N.	22.000	» 19.000	» 20.000	18.000	16.000	20.000	35.000	38.000	15.000	40.000	42.000	40.000	» 12.000
Cappucci di lana	N.	15.000	» 11.000	» 13.000	12.000	11.000	10.000	13.000	13.000	1.500	—	7.000	—	» 2.900
Guanti di lana a 3 dita	P.	18.000	» 12.000	» 14.900	14.000	12.900	11.350	15.250	16.000	1.200	—	5.100	—	» 8.000
Mutande di lana	P.	36.000	» 23.000	» 29.200	28.000	25.800	22.700	40.400	32.000	1.900	—	9.550	—	» 16.000
Occhiali da neve	P.	18.000	T 12.000	T 14.900	14.000	12.900	11.350	15.200	16.000	8.000	17.800	18.000	17.600	K 8.000
Paraorecchie con calotta	P.	18.000	» 12.000	» 14.900	14.000	12.900	7.550	10.000	10.600	5.200	11.800	12.000	11.600	M 500
Cappotti con pelliccia	N.	12.000	M 8.000	» 9.900	9.400	8.600	5.800	7.200	7.400	1.500	3.500	3.500	3.500	» 8.000
Sottocappotti flanella	N.	8.000	» 6.000	K 7.000	6.600	6.300	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Guanti lana a 1 dito con pelliccia	P.	17.300	T. 11.500	T 14.650	13.700	12.720	11.000	14.940	15.760	7.700	17.570	17.770	17.370	K 7.400
Guanti con pell. per Uff.	P.	700	M 500	K 250	220	180	350	260	240	300	230	230	230	M 600
Calzettoni di lana	P.	18.000	T 12.000	» 14.900	14.000	12.900	11.350	11.200	16.000	8.000	17.800	18.000	17.600	» 8.000
OGGETTI DI REPARTO														
Giubbotti trans. p. mot.	N.	250	100	T 130	110	800	120	160	180	100	100	100	100	K 300
Soprapant. imp. p. mot.	P.	250	100	» 130	110	800	120	160	180	100	100	100	100	» 300
Sacchi a pelo	N.	1.800	1.200	» 1.500	1.400	1.300	1.200	7.500	1.600	400	900	900	950	M 400
Calzari da trincea	P.	2.000	1.800	» 2.250	2.100	2.100	1.800	2.500	2.400	1.200	2.700	2.700	2.600	K 800
Cappotti da scolta	N.	2.000	1.200	» 1.500	1.400	1.300	1.200	1.520	1.600	1.600	1.800	1.800	1.760	» 800
Uose da montagna	P.	15.000	12.000	» 13.600	13.000	12.500	11.500	13.500	14.000	7.000	14.800	15.000	14.800	» 800
Grappette o ramponi	P.	6.000	6.000	» 7.500	7.000	6.300	3.600	7.600	8.000	2.400	8.900	9.000	9.800	» 4.000
Racchette da neve	P.	3.000	1.800	» 2.250	2.100	1.950	1.800	2.300	2.400	1.200	2.700	2.700	2.600	» 800
Bastoni alpini	P.	5.000	12.000	» 14.900	14.000	12.000	2.500	15.200	16.000	—	—	—	—	» 1.300

(1) Le sigle M (Maltcheskaia) T (Tscherkow) K (Kantemirowka) indicano le località dove potranno essere effettuati i prelevamenti di ciascun oggetto.

NOTA: nella ripartizione si è tenuto conto anche delle richieste pervenute e degli indumenti di lana già in dotazione a determinati reparti (Alpini).

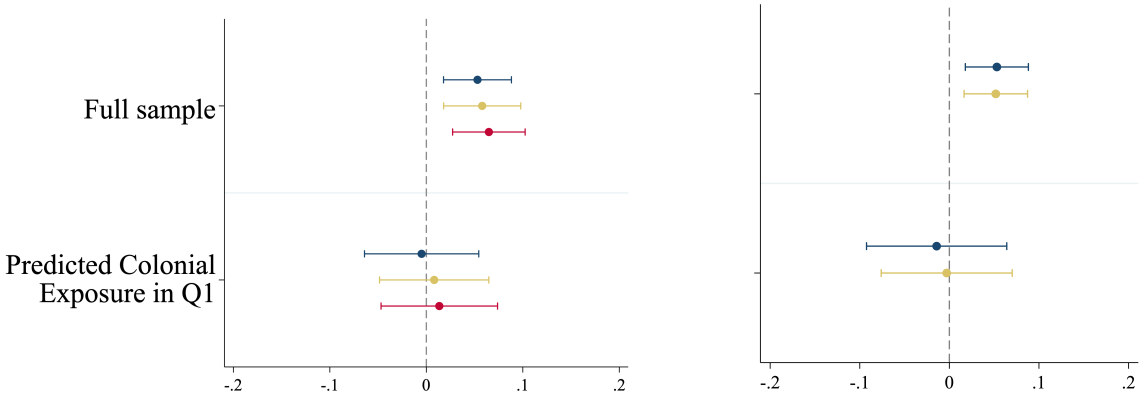
Note: The figure reproduces an excerpt from official Italian military records indicating which Alpini brigades were deployed to the Russian front during the 1941–43 campaign. Columns 11, 12 and 13 of the table indicate that the *Tridentina*, *Julia* and *Cuneense* Alpini brigades participated in the Russian campaign. Source: Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito, *I servizi logistici delle unità italiane al fronte russo 1941-43*, Rome, 1975, p. 304. Available at the online archives of the Italian Military Library.

Table A15: Russian Front Exposure and Contemporary Support for Far-right Parties

	Main Sample			Historical Sample			
Dep. var.: FR vote share, 2013	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Russian Front Exposure	0.012	0.004	0.004	-0.012	-0.021	-0.021	-0.022
	(0.027)	(0.026)	(0.024)	(0.035)	(0.032)	(0.029)	(0.030)
Colonial Exposure	0.052**	0.026	0.034*	0.085***	0.051**	0.060**	0.060***
	(0.020)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.025)	(0.024)	(0.023)	(0.022)
Controls:							
Province FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Geographic		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Demog + Econ			✓			✓	✓
War/Militarization							✓
Observations	7,263	7,263	7,263	4,809	4,809	4,809	4,809
Number of clusters	107	107	107	96	96	96	96
Mean dep. var.	9.6%	9.6%	9.6%	11.5%	11.5%	11.5%	11.5%

Note: OLS regressions of *Far-right vote share* in 2013 on *Russian Front Exposure* and *Colonial Exposure*. *Russian Front Exposure* is constructed using the surnames of soldiers from the *Cuneense* Alpini brigade who died during the 1941–43 Russian campaign, following the same surname-based methodology used for *Colonial Exposure*. All variables are standardized to have mean zero and unit standard deviation. All columns use the colonial exposure variable computed from the surnames of *all soldiers* buried in East Africa as the dependent variable. Columns (1)–(3) use the main sample; Columns (4)–(7) use the historical sample. Geographic controls include altitude, land area, latitude, and longitude. For the main sample, demographic and economic controls include population in 2009, share of people aged 65+, share of graduates, urbanization level, income per capita, and employment rate. For the historical sample, demographic and economic controls include population, male literacy rate, and the share of industrial workers in 1911, farm ownership in 1885, crime rate in 1874, and the contemporary demographic and economic controls. War- and militarization-related controls include WWI casualties and volunteers per capita, veterans from previous conflicts, and a dummy for any volunteer in the 1866 independence war. Standard errors clustered at the province level are in parentheses. Significance levels: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

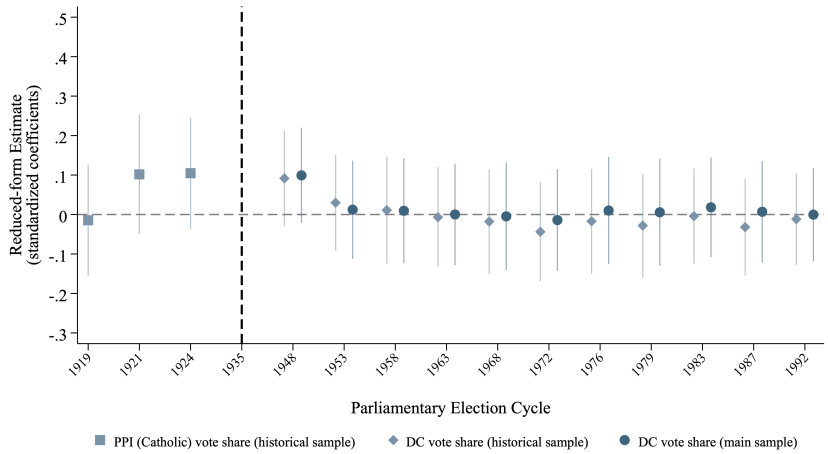
Figure A8: Reduced-Form Estimates of Far-right Vote Share in 2013 on the Historical Presence of Mountain Troops: Full Sample versus Never-Takers



(a) Historical sample (b) Main sample

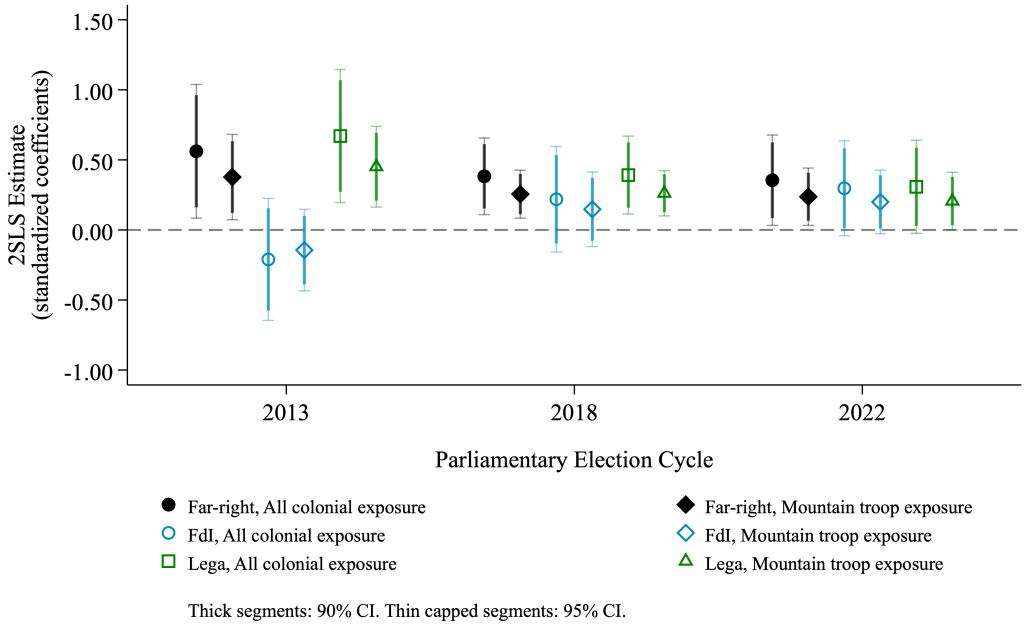
Note: The figure reports coefficient estimates and 95% confidence intervals for reduced-form regressions of *Far-right vote share* in 2013 on the *Mountain Troop* dummy. We compare the full sample to the sub-sample of municipalities for which the predicted *All Colonial Exposure* (computed from the surnames of *all soldiers* buried in East Africa) from the first-stage regression belongs to the bottom quartile (Q1). For each sample, the top-blue specification includes province FE and geographic controls, and the middle-yellow specification adds demographic and economic controls. In Panel (a), we further control for war- and militarization variables (bottom-red specification).

Figure A9: Mountain Troop Specialization and Support for Catholic Parties, 1919–1992



Note: The figure reports reduced-form estimates and 95% confidence intervals of the relationship between the *Mountain Troop* dummy and support for Catholic parties, before and after the 1930s colonial campaigns. The outcomes are the vote share of the *Partito Popolare Italiano* (PPI) in the parliamentary elections of 1919, 1921, and 1924 (squares), and the vote share of the *Democrazia Cristiana* (DC) in every parliamentary election from 1948 to 1992 (diamonds and circles) – the DC was dissolved in January 1994. All outcomes and the instrument are standardized to have mean zero and unit standard deviation. Specifications on the historical sample include province FE, geographic controls (altitude, squared altitude, cubic altitude, latitude, longitude, land area), demographic controls (population and male literacy in 1911), economic controls (share of industrial workers in 1911, land ownership in 1885, and crime rate in 1874), and WWI-related controls (WWI casualties *per capita*, share of WWI volunteers out of the total male population, share of veterans from previous wars, and a dummy for any volunteer in the 1866 independence war). Specifications on the main sample include province FE and geographic controls only, as the remaining variables are unavailable outside the historical sample. Standard errors are clustered at the province level. The vertical dashed line marks the 1935 invasion of Ethiopia and separates the pre-treatment elections (left) from the post-war ones (right).

Figure A10: Colonial Exposure and Support for the Far-right by Party: *Fratelli d'Italia* and *Lega*, 2013–2022



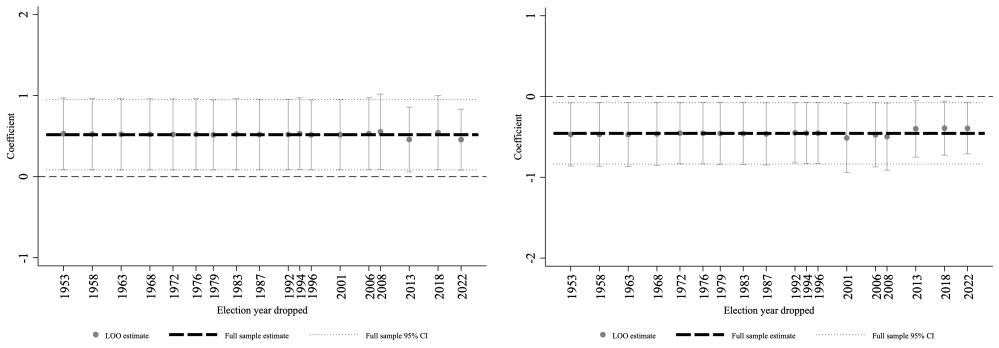
Note: The figure reports 2SLS estimates of Equation (2) for the aggregate far-right vote share (black), the vote share of *Fratelli d'Italia* (blue), and the vote share of the *Lega* (green), in the parliamentary elections of 2013, 2018, and 2022. For each outcome, two estimates are reported, differing in the endogenous variable used: *All Colonial Exposure* (filled and hollow circles/squares) versus *Mountain Troop Exposure* (diamonds and triangles). In all cases the excluded instrument is the *Mountain Troop* dummy. All specifications are estimated on the main sample and correspond to the most demanding specification of Table 3 (columns (3) and (6)): province FE, geographic controls, and contemporary demographic and economic controls. All variables are standardized to have mean zero and unit standard deviation. Thick segments denote 90% confidence intervals and thin capped segments 95% confidence intervals. Standard errors are clustered at the province level. The national vote shares of the two parties were 1.96% (*Fratelli d'Italia*) and 4.10% (*Lega*) in 2013, 4.35% and 17.37% in 2018, and 26.00% and 8.78% in 2022 (Eligendo Open Data).

Table A16: Investigating the Mechanism: Placebo Test

	All Colonial Exposure			Mountain troop exposure		
Dep. var.: FR vote share, 2013	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Colonial Exposure (CE)	0.669***	0.567**	0.579**	0.580***	0.371**	0.377**
	(0.159)	(0.225)	(0.240)	(0.158)	(0.146)	(0.154)
CE × North African migrants	0.069	0.052	0.066	0.009	0.013	0.020
	(0.066)	(0.055)	(0.054)	(0.030)	(0.024)	(0.024)
Controls:						
North-African migrants (share)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
SSA migrants (share)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
All migrants (share)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Province FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Geographic		✓	✓		✓	✓
Contemporary Demog			✓			✓
Contemporary Income			✓			✓
Observations	7,296	7,296	7,296	7,296	7,296	7,296
Number of clusters	107	107	107	107	107	107
KP F-statistic	26.12	7.09	7.80	25.50	14.60	15.56

Note: 2SLS regression results of *Far-right vote share* in 2013 on the interaction of *Colonial Exposure* and the share of *North-African migrants*. All variables are standardized to have mean zero and unit standard deviation. *CE × North-African migrants* is the interaction of *Colonial Exposure* and the share of *North-African migrants*. The excluded instruments are the *Mountain Troop* dummy and its interaction with the share of *North-African migrants*. All specifications include the share of (all) migrants over the total population, the share of *Sub-Saharan African migrants*, as well as province FE. See the *Note* of Table 2 for more details on the control variables included in each specification. Standard errors clustered at the province level are in parentheses. Significance levels: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

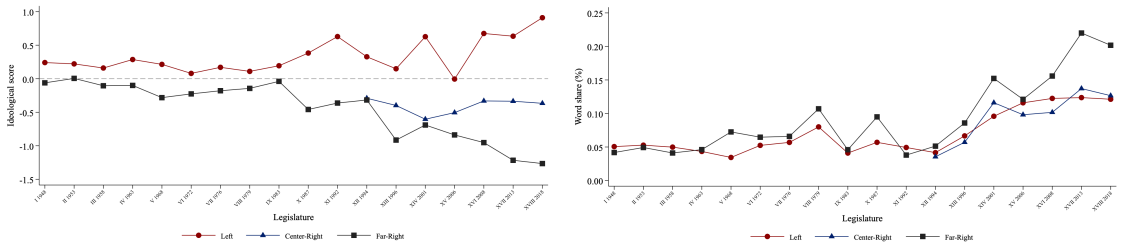
Figure A11: Leave-One-Out Estimates



(a) *Word Share* (b) *Ideological Score*

Note: Each Panel reports leave-one-out (LOO) 2SLS estimates of the effect of *Colonial Exposure* × *Speech* on *Far-right Vote Share*, dropping one election year at a time from the 1948–2022 sample. The colonial exposure variable is the one computed from the surnames of *all soldiers* buried in East Africa. Panel (a) uses the *Word Share* as the speech variable; Panel (b) uses the *Ideological Score*. Gray circles denote LOO point estimates with 95% confidence intervals. The thick dashed line indicates the full-sample estimate reported in Table 5 and the dotted lines its 95% confidence interval. All specifications include municipality FE and province × altitude × election-year FE. Standard errors are clustered at the province level.

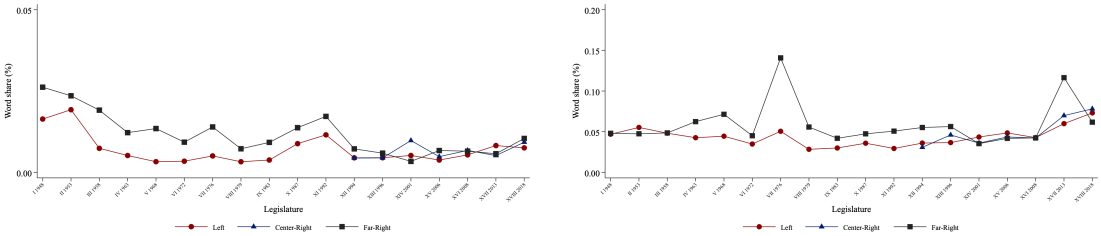
Figure A12: Immigration Rhetoric in Parliamentary Speeches over 1948–2022



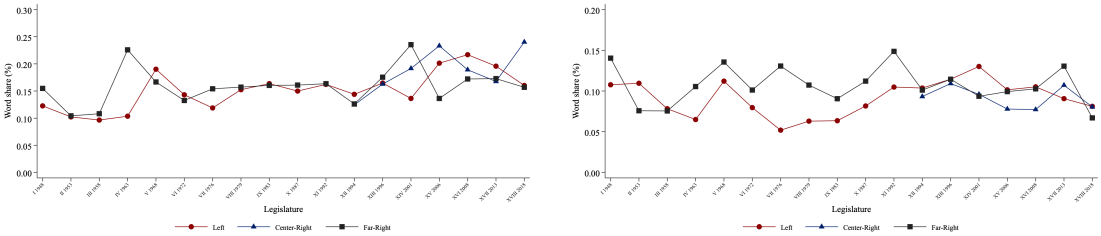
(a) *Ideological Score* (b) *Word Share*

Note: Time series of the *Ideological Score* (Panel A) and *Word Share* (Panel B) by Left, Center-right and Far-right parties, across 18 legislatures from 1948 to 2022. The *Word Share* is defined as the share of immigration-related keywords in total words spoken by each party family in each legislature. A higher (lower) *Ideological Score* indicates more left- (right-) wing rhetoric. The single parties included in Left, Center-right and Far-right in each legislature are reported in Table A18 in the Appendix. The x-axis reports both the legislature number (Roman numerals) and the corresponding first year of the legislature. Data source: Cova [2024].

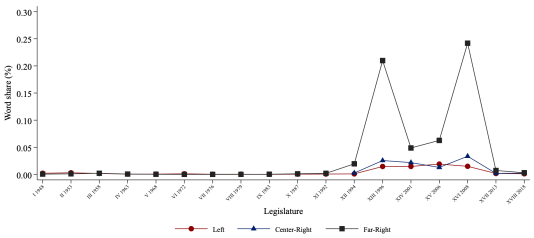
Figure A13: Salience (Word Share) of Topics Unrelated to Immigration in Parliamentary Speeches over 1948–2022



(a) Nationalism and Identitarianism (b) Civil Rights and Social Liberties



(c) Justice and Rule of Law (d) Constitutional and Electoral Reform



(e) Autonomism and Anti-Southern Sentiment

Table A17: Heterogeneous Effect of Far-right Parties' Immigration Rhetoric Based on Colonial Exposure – With Immigration Controls

	All colonial exposure		Mountain troop exposure	
Speech interaction var.:	Word Share	Ideological Score	Word Share	Ideological Score
Dep. var.: FR vote share	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Colonial Exposure × Speech	0.621**	-1.289**	0.287**	-0.563***
	(0.294)	(0.627)	(0.114)	(0.211)
Implied votes gain 1 SD ↑ in Colonial Exp. × Speech	+11.3pp	-23.4pp	+5.2pp	-10.2pp
Controls:				
Immigration trends	✓	✓	✓	✓
Municipality FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Prov × Altitude × Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	38,990	38,990	38,990	38,990
Clusters	107	107	107	107
Kleibergen-Paap F-stat	3.86	4.17	9.12	9.69
Anderson-Rubin p-value	0.090	0.084	0.090	0.084
Mean dep. var.	15.55%	15.55%	15.55%	15.55%
SD dep. var.	18.14%	18.14%	18.14%	18.14%

Note: 2SLS regression results of *Far-right vote share* on the interaction of *Colonial Exposure* and the immigration-related parliamentary *Speeches* variables (Equation (4)). The excluded instruments are the *Mountain Troop* dummy and its interaction with the *Speeches* variables. All variables are standardized to have mean zero and unit standard deviation. All columns use all election cycles and parliamentary speeches since 1948. All columns control for municipality-level immigration trends (all immigrants and Sub-Saharan African immigrants), restricting the sample to the 2006–2022 elections. Columns (1)–(2) use the colonial exposure variable computed from the surnames of *all soldiers* buried in East Africa as the endogenous variable. Columns (3)–(4) use the colonial exposure variable computed from the surnames of *mountain troop soldiers* buried in East Africa as the endogenous variable. The row *Implied votes gain 1 SD ↑ in Colonial Exp. × Speech* reports the change in far-right vote share (in percentage points) associated with a one-standard-deviation increase in the *Colonial Exposure × Speech* interaction. All columns include municipality FE and province × altitude × election year fixed effects, where altitude is a dummy equal to one for municipalities above 170 meters. The Anderson-Rubin p-value is robust to weak instruments. Standard errors clustered at the province level in parentheses. Significance levels: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table A18: Party Families by Legislature

Legislature	Far-Right	Center-Right	Left
I (1948)	MSI, BN, PNM	—	PCI, FDP
II (1953)	MSI, BN, PNM	—	PCI
III (1958)	MSI, PNM, PMP	—	PCI
IV (1963)	MSI, PNM, PMP, PDIUM	—	PCI
V (1968)	MSI, PDIUM	—	PCI-PSIUP
VI (1972)	MSI, PDIUM	—	PCI
VII (1976)	MSI	—	PCI
VIII (1979)	MSI	—	PCI, PUP
IX (1983)	MSI	—	PCI, DP
X (1987)	MSI	—	PCI, DP
XI (1992)	MSI, LN	—	PDS, DP
XII (1994)	MSI, AN, LN	FI, PLI, PBG	PDS, AP
XIII (1996)	AN, LN	FI, PL, CD	DS, Ulivo, PP
XIV (2001)	AN, LN	FI, CdL, CD	DS, Ulivo, Marg., CS
XV (2006)	AN, LN	FI, CdL	DS, Ulivo, Marg., CS
XVI (2008)	AN, LN	FI–PdL	PD
XVII (2013)	LN, FdI	FI, PdL	PD
XVIII (2018)	LN, FdI	FI	PD

Note: The table lists the parties included in each party family for the construction of the parliamentary speech variables described in Section 6. Only parties that obtained at least one seat in the *Camera dei Deputati* are included, since unelected parties delivered no parliamentary speeches. This explains why some far-right parties listed in Table A8 do not appear here. *Center-Right* is absent before legislature XII (1994) as *Forza Italia* was founded in 1994. Abbreviations – *Far-Right:* MSI = Movimento Sociale Italiano; BN = Blocco Nazionale; PNM = Partito Nazionale Monarchico; PMP = Partito Monarchico Popolare; PDIUM = Partito Democratico Italiano di Unità Monarchica; AN = Alleanza Nazionale; LN = Lega Nord; FdI = Fratelli d'Italia. *Center-Right:* FI = Forza Italia; PLI = Polo per le Libertà; PBG = Polo del Buon Governo; PL = Polo delle Libertà; CD = Centrodestra; CdL = Casa delle Libertà; PdL = Il Popolo della Libertà. *Left:* PCI = Partito Comunista Italiano; FDP = Fronte Democratico Popolare; PSIUP = Partito Socialista Italiano di Unità Proletaria; PUP = Partito di Unità Proletaria; DP = Democrazia Proletaria; PDS = Partito Democratico della Sinistra; DS = Democratici di Sinistra; AP = Alleanza dei Progressisti; PP = Popolari per Prodi; Marg. = Democrazia è Libertà – La Margherita; CS = Centrosinistra; PD = Partito Democratico.

D Analyzing Far-right Parties' Immigration Rhetoric in Parliamentary Speeches: Methodology

In this section, we provide more details on the methodology employed to analyze far-right parties' immigration rhetoric in parliamentary speeches at the Italian Parliament *(Camera dei Deputati)* from 1948 to 2022 (18 legislatures).

We use Cova [2024], a dataset that brings together all parliamentary speeches from 1948 to 2022. For each speech, we know the speaker's name and party affiliation, along with the date of the speech and the raw text that we analyze. We start by establishing a list of immigration-related keywords (Table A19). All speeches that match at least 2

keywords are read by Claude (`claude-haiku-4-5-20251001`) via the Anthropic Batch API. Prior to classification, each speech text is truncated to its first 200 words and then included as the `text` variable in the prompt reported in Figure A14. The model then assigns each speech an integer score according to the following scale: −2 = Strongly restrictionist/securitarian: border closures, deportations, immigration as a threat; −1 = Moderately restrictionist; 0 = Neutral / mixed / purely procedural content; +1 = Moderately pro-immigration; +2 = Strongly pro-immigration/humanitarian: welcoming stance, migrants' rights, integration.

A score of 0 captures speeches that describe immigration policy without taking a position, quote multiple viewpoints, or deal exclusively with procedural matters.

Table A19: Immigration-Related Keywords

Regex Pattern	Example Matches (Italian)	English Translation
`immigr\w*`	immigrazione, immigrati, immigrante	immigration, immigrants, immigrant
`migranti?`	migrante, migranti	migrant, migrants
`profugh\w*`	profugo, profughi, profuga	refugee (displaced), refugees
`rifugiat\w*`	rifugiato, rifugiati, rifugiata	refugee, refugees
`asilo`	asilo (politico), diritto d'asilo	asylum, right of asylum
`clandestin\w*`	clandestino, clandestinità	undocumented (immigrant), illegality
`stranieri?`	straniero, stranieri	foreigner, foreigners
`extracomunitari?`	extracomunitario, extracomunitari	non-EU citizen, non-EU citizens
`frontiera\w*`	frontiera, frontiere, frontaliero	border, borders, cross-border worker
`sbarchi?\b`	sbarco, sbarchi	landing, boat arrivals
`rimpatri\w*`	rimpatrio, rimpatri, rimpatriare	repatriation, to repatriate
`accoglienz\w*`	accoglienza, accogliere	reception, hospitality, to welcome
`sicurezz\w*`	sicurezza, sicurezze	security, public safety
`ordine pubblico`	ordine pubblico	public order
`delinquenz\w*`	delinquenza	delinquency, crime
`delinquent\w*`	delinquente, delinquenti	criminal, criminals
`degrado\b`	degrado	urban decay, degradation

Note: The table lists the search strings (regex patterns) used to identify immigration-related keywords in parliamentary speeches. Each pattern is designed to capture a family of related Italian words through suffix variation. The `\w*` operator matches any sequence of word characters following the stem, while `\b` enforces a word boundary to avoid partial matches. A speech must match at least two distinct patterns to be included in the scoring sample, in order to exclude speeches with only incidental mentions of immigration-related terms.

Figure A14: Ideological Score: Prompt

A) *Original (Italian)*

```
Sei un esperto di storia politica italiana. Analizza il seguente discorso
parlamentare sul tema dell'immigrazione e della sicurezza.

Assegna un PUNTEGGIO da -2 a +2 secondo questo asse ideologico:
-2 = fortemente di destra (restrittivo/securitario: chiusura delle frontiere,
espulsioni, immigrazione come minaccia)
-1 = moderatamente di destra
 0 = neutro / misto / puramente procedurale
+1 = moderatamente di sinistra
+2 = fortemente di sinistra (aperto/pro-immigrazione: accoglienza, integrazione,
diritti dei migranti)

IMPORTANTE: valuta la posizione ideologica dell'oratore, non il suo atteggiamento
verso un provvedimento specifico.
Un deputato di sinistra che critica una legge restrittiva sta comunque esprimendo
una posizione pro-immigrazione (+2),
anche se il tono è di opposizione e polemico.

Discorso:
{text}

Rispondi SOLO in questo formato (due righe):
PUNTEGGIO: <intero da -2 a +2>
GIUSTIFICAZIONE: <una frase in italiano>
```

B) *Translation (English)*

```
You are an expert in Italian political history. Analyse the following
parliamentary speech on the topic of immigration and security.

Assign a SCORE from -2 to +2 according to this ideological axis:
-2 = strongly right-wing (restrictionist/securitarian: border closures,
deportations, immigration as a threat)
-1 = moderately right-wing
 0 = neutral / mixed / purely procedural
+1 = moderately left-wing
+2 = strongly left-wing (open/pro-immigration: welcoming, integration, migrants'
rights)

IMPORTANT: assess the ideological position of the speaker, not their attitude
towards a specific bill.
A left-wing MP criticising a restrictive law is still expressing a pro-
immigration position (+2),
even if the tone is oppositional and polemical.

Speech:
{text}

Reply ONLY in this format (two lines):
SCORE: <integer from -2 to +2>
JUSTIFICATION: <one sentence in Italian>
```

Note: Prompt used to assign the *Ideological Score* to each parliamentary speech that contain at least two immigration-related keywords. Panel A shows the original prompt in Italian (the language in which it was submitted to the model). Panel B shows the English translation. The prompt instructs the model to assign a discrete score on a five-point ordinal scale ranging from −2 (strongly restrictionist/securitarian) to +2 (strongly pro-immigration/humanitarian), based on the first 200 words of each speech. The "IMPORTANT" clause ensures that the model assesses the ideological position of the speaker rather than their attitude toward a specific bill, so that opposition MPs are not misclassified based on the polemical tone of their intervention. Classification is performed by Claude Haiku (`claude-haiku-4-5-20251001`), queried via the Anthropic Batch API.