



The Bibliography of the Italian Parliament: Building a Digital Parliamentary Research Library

<http://bpr.camera.it>

What is the BPR?



The BPR (the Bibliography of the Italian Parliament and Electoral Studies) is a databank of bibliographical references and a digital library of the Parliament of Italy.

The BPR stores bibliographic

references relating to:

- the Italian Houses of Parliament since the granting of the Albertine Statute in 1848;
- the post-1945 National Consultative Assembly and Constituent Assembly;
- documents (laws, procedures, results) relating to general elections held during the foregoing historical periods.

The BPR encompasses mainly juridical essays, but also research on political and organization science, on political sociology, as well as relevant historiographical literature. The BPR also catalogues documents that can be retrieved from other important juridical websites.

At present, the database encompasses around 18,000 bibliographic references relating to the years 1848 to 2009. Each reference is assigned one or more classification codes, which are taken from a directory of over 100 classifications that are organized into seven major fields, as follows:

A – General topics

B – Institutional relations

C – Sources of law and organizational aspects

- D – The lawmaking function
- E – Parliamentary oversight, policy-setting and information
- F – Members of Parliament: their legal and social status
- H – Elections

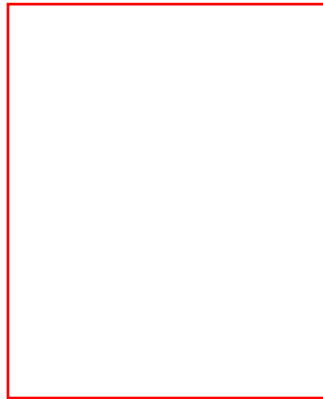
The BPR is also a digital library in the process of construction. The full texts of around 1,300 documents (monographs and articles) are available as "attachments" to the bibliographical information. Most of the works are either in the public domain or under the copyright of the Chamber of Deputies. Where this is not the case, copyright agreements have been reached with publishers to make texts available on the Internet.

Why set up a parliamentary bibliographical database? A brief history

In the beginning was paper.

In 2002, Chamber of Deputies published a book entitled "*BPR: Bibliografia del Parlamento repubblicano 1948-2000*" ("BPR: Bibliography of the Parliament of the Italian Republic 1948-2000") (General Secretariat, Department of Publications and Public Relations, 2002, xlv, 950 pp.).

The volume served several purposes:



At a practical level, it fulfilled the need for a reference source providing a ready response to bibliographical queries by persons seeking documents to do with constitutional law, parliamentary procedure and the history of Parliament. At a research level, it was designed to give access to the wealth of bibliographical material held by the Parliament of Italy, which comprised not only documents connected with juridical aspects, but also publications in the fields of political science, history, social custom, etc.

More generally, the volume was an expression of the belief that a parliamentary library, in common with its major government and institutional counterparts, should be responsible for collecting all publications relating to Parliament, thus serving as its bibliographical archive.



In 2008, to mark the 60th anniversary of the Italian Constitution, an updated version of the BPR was produced, though its terms of reference remained limited to the period of the Italian Republic.

The first database

In 2004, two years after the appearance of the print version of the Bibliography, the BPR database went online at <http://bpr.camera.it>. Like the book, the database at this stage was limited to the Republican period.

The expansion of the database

Later the database was developed and expanded in three directions:

1. The bibliographical references were expanded to cover the period before the founding of the Republic: to the very beginnings of parliamentarism in the nation state, which date to the concession of a constitutional statute by King Charles Albert I (the Albertine Statute of 1848).
2. A completely new section dedicated the electoral process was added. It is divided into three parts: general aspects, electoral systems, electoral behaviour.
3. The database was enriched with the addition of a series of full texts in PDF or HTML that are "attached" to the bibliographical details. Some texts are available thanks to agreements with publishers, others are out of copyright or have been published by the Chamber of Deputies itself. The texts are stored on the Chamber of Deputies' servers or else on remote servers belonging to external publishers.
The availability of full texts has transformed the database into a fully-fledged digital library of the history of parliamentarism, constitutional and legal essays, and electoral history. In addition to the hundreds of journal and review articles, the library contains the full texts of many monographs, including the most important commentaries on parliamentary rules of procedure, manuals on parliamentary law and procedure, as well as many classical works on Italian constitutional law.

With a view to accelerating the process of cataloguing new publications dealing with Parliament or elections, since May 2008 updates to the BPR have appeared in a bulletin that is issued every four months and distributed in both Houses of Parliament and to a body of academics.

Number of BPR records (June 2009)

	Parliamentary research	Electoral research
Republic of Italy (1946-2009)	11,095	3,055
Kingdom of Italy (1848-1945)	2,446	1,413
Constituent Assembly (1946-1947)	372	194

Different parliaments, one classification

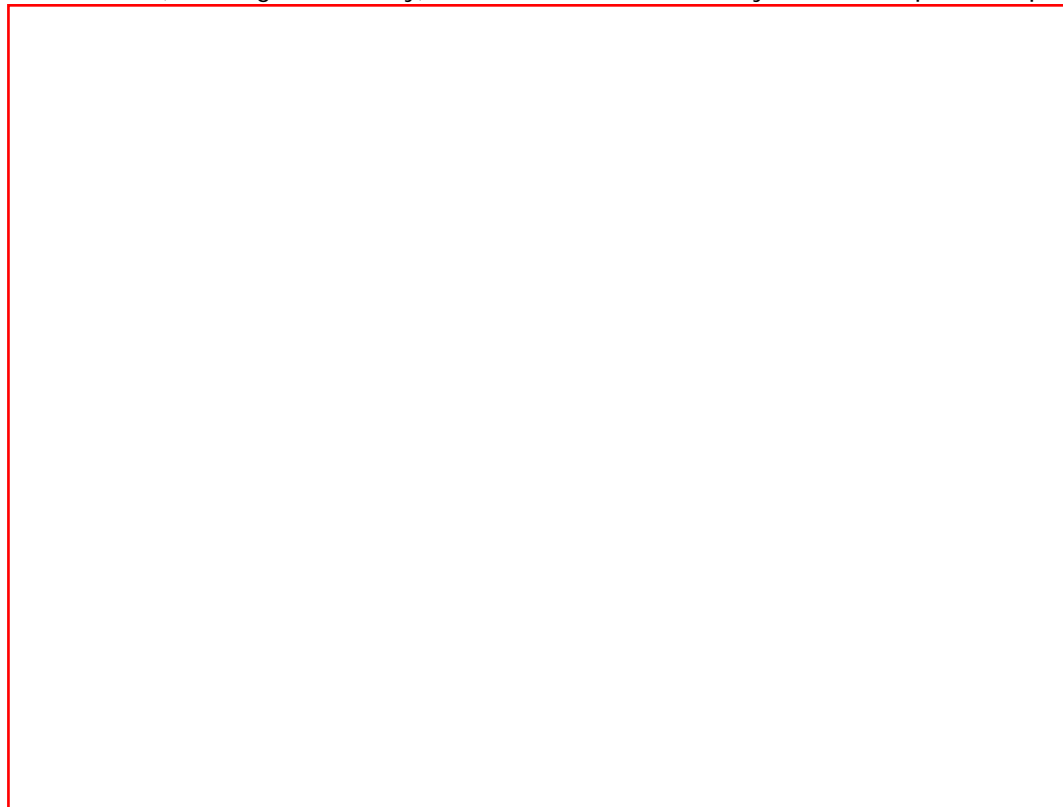
When the BPR database was expanded to include references to the Parliament of the Kingdom of Italy (1848-1945), a decision was taken to leave the system of bibliographical classification unchanged. Every aspect of the parliamentary system as it was in the time of the Liberal State (the monarchy) was mapped on to the system of classification already in place. In other words, it was not deemed necessary to create a discrete set of classifications for the Parliament of the

Kingdom of Italy.

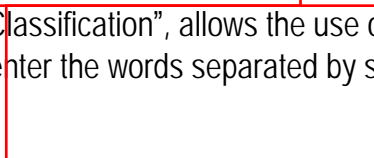
- For example, **class A12** refers to the bicameral structure of the Italian Parliament and the Senate. This classification is used also for the Senate under the monarchy (when its members were not elected but appointed by the King on the basis of 21 categories set forth in the Albertine Statute).
- To take another example, **class D30** includes delegated legislation enshrined in Article 76 of the current Italian Constitution, which prescribes the manner in which Parliament must set out the principles and purpose of delegated laws, and establishes that legislative powers may be delegated for a limited time only. Whereas the Albertine Statute included no such provisions for delegated legislation, under the monarchy many important laws were passed by Government acting with "full powers" vested in it by the House (effectively, a general delegation of legislative powers). The use of the single system of classification is a controversial issue, and at the time it generated considerable research, which is also catalogued under D30.

How to use the BPR

This is the BPR Home Page. The fields in red indicate search keys (author, title, year of publication, classification, etc..). The fields in blue are for refining the search criteria using general parameters. For example, toggling the switches referring to "Sector" will limit the search to parliamentary and/or electoral studies. Similarly, toggling the switches for "Historical Period" will filter the results to include or exclude bibliographic references from the time of the Albertine Constitution (the Kingdom of Italy), the Constituent Assembly and the Republican period.

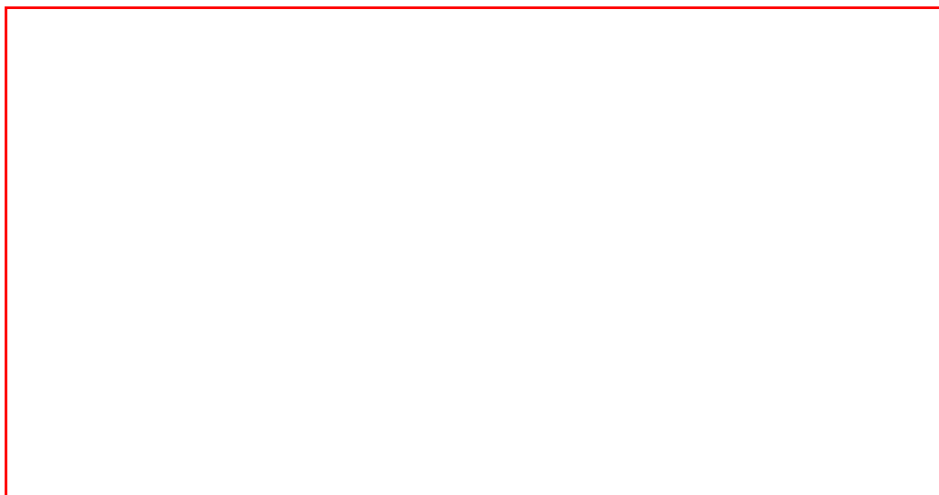


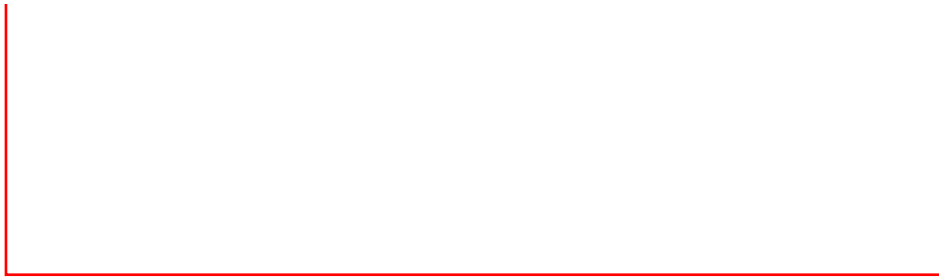
Each field, with the exception of the "Publication Date" and "Classification", allows the use of the Boolean operators AND and OR (uppercase). To search for an exact phrase, simply enter the words separated by spaces, without quotation marks.




The system can display a list of authors and classification codes.

The classifications and the index can be called up by clicking on the button as indicated above.





The search results are displayed in the form of a short list: the results may then be selected, printed or saved as rich text files (RTF) to produce bibliographical lists.

This icon  indicates the presence of a link to the full or partial text of the referenced document. The BPR contains the full text of more than 1,300 documents.



Why is the BPR important?

1. The BPR is designed as an institutional service that enhances the image of the Library. Parliamentary officials have become accustomed to using it as a means of keeping abreast of issues relevant to their work, and have come to rely on it as a means of disseminating the documents they produce.
2. Thanks to its use by university students and its collating of essays and papers on parliamentary themes, the BPR gives Parliament a visible presence in the academic and research spheres.
3. By updating its content every four months, the BPR encourages the acquisition of all publications relating to Parliament and elections. Since this system also discovers publications that would otherwise have escaped notice using the normal channels, the BPR effectively “forces” the Library to make full use of all available national and international sources.
4. The BPR is a complementary resource to the documents available. The BPR conducts searches using OPAC or by going through old catalogues and paper-based bibliographies. It also makes use of professional databanks and sends queries through public search engines such as Google. The BPR thereby bridges the gap between printed material and publications that are also (or only) available in digital form, as well as between old and new publications.
5. The BPR effectively consists of a set of descriptive metadata and is therefore compatible with external applications that harvest data using standard methods. Specifically, the system is compatible with the Open Archives Initiative Protocol for Metadata Harvesting (OAI-PMH) Protocol, which uses HTTP for transmission and XML for data presentation, and with the Dublin Core model.

Future developments of the BPR

On the basis of the current strengths and potential, we can expect the BPR to develop along three main strands, a process that has already begun:

1. The first strand leads to the improvement of the functions of information retrieval and an enhancement of the practicality of the query template (in particular, a distinction may be made between simple Google-style searches and advanced data queries).
2. The second strand leads to making the BPR more accessible by search engines and metadata harvesting applications. In particular, the BPR intends to become compatible with the standards used in the “Cultura Italia” web portal: <http://www.culturaitalia.it/>.
3. The third strand leads towards fostering dialogue with users, especially with researchers and students, by developing “update alerts” (Newsletters, RFID), by encouraging the publication of pre-prints and dissertations on the BPR website, and by drawing attention to the most recent or important publications to appear in digitized form by means of a sort of “virtual showcase”.