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Candidate selection procedures and women's representation in Italy

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Abstract

Political parties play the most prominent role in shaping the gender composition of parliaments. Through political recruitment, parties might act in such ways as to promote or hinder gender equality in terms of women's chances of accessing parliamentary seats. While external factors, such as the electoral system and the presence of legislated gender quotas, have been widely studied as affecting parties' attitudes towards gender equality, candidate selection procedures are one of the most important, although still understudied, features internal to party organisation that have an impact on women's representation. By taking the Italian 2013 elections as a case study, our empirical analysis shows that inclusive selection methods, such as open primaries, increase female candidates' chances of getting elected in comparison to other, more exclusive methods, such as selection by party leadership.

1. Introduction

The claim for an equal representation of women in political institutions in Italy has entered the debate quite forcefully in the last few decades. Yet, as witnessed by the recent composition of the Draghi Government (13th February 2021), which includes only eight female ministers out of a total of twenty-three, gender balance in representation is far from constituting a well-established feature of Italian politics.

The prominent role of political parties in the promotion or hindering of gender equality in political representation is widely recognized (Kittilson 2006; Norris and Lovenduski 1995). Since candidate selection procedures, list ordering and safe-seat placement are in the hands of political parties, party gatekeeping (Norris and Lovenduski 1995; Kunovich and Paxton 2005; Pansardi and Vercesi 2017) is frequently called into question as one of the main explaining factors of the reproduction of gender differences in political representation. Parties' electoral strategies are generally understood as shaped by a set of external and internal constraints that have an independent effect on gender equality in representation. However, while external factors, such as the characteristics of the electoral system and the presence of legislated gender quotas, have been widely studied as affecting parties' attitudes towards gender equality in representation, parties' internal factors, such as intra-party dynamics and candidate selection methods, are a far less studied topic (Kittilson 2006; Gauja and Cross 2015).

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Candidate selection procedures are one of the most important features of party organisation that have an impact on women's representation. According to the seminal work of Rahat and Hazan (2001), parties can opt for a fully inclusive candidate selection process, which may involve participation and voting by party members at the local level, or even be open to the entire national electorate, as in the case of open primary elections. On the other hand, parties can give party leaders and elites a good deal of discretionary power, adopting highly centralized procedures for selecting candidates and compiling and ordering lists. However, there is contrasting evidence in the literature about the impact of inclusive versus exclusive candidate selection procedures on women's representation.

In this article, we are interested in ascertaining whether different candidate selection procedures affect female candidates' chances of getting elected, taking the 2013 Italian election as a case study. The electoral system in place in 2013 consisted in a proportional system with majority bonus and was characterized by blocked electoral lists for each of the 26 multi-member constituencies in the lower chamber, with the order of candidates decided by each party before the elections. The main reason for selecting this case lies in the fact that 2013 showed an unprecedented and unreplicated variety of methods of candidate selection, led by the adoption of largely inclusive selection procedures by three of the main competing parties, the Democratic Party (Pd), Left, Ecology and Freedom (Sel) and the Five Star Movement (M5s) (Lanzone and Rombi 2014; Seddone and Venturino 2013; Sandri, Seddone and Venturino 2015). With almost all parties returning to centralized selection procedures in the 2018 election, the 2013 election is a unique case worth investigating.

By relying on original data from the 2013 Italian Candidates Survey (Di Virgilio et al. 2015; Di Virgilio and Segatti 2016), we empirically study whether selection procedures have different effects on male and female candidates' electoral vulnerability – i.e., uncertainty about their election prospects – and consequently on their chances to be elected. In particular, unlike previous studies which found mixed evidence of the effect of inclusive versus exclusive candidate selection methods on women's representation by studying the share of female candidates in party lists (Matland and Studlar 1996; Kittilson 2006; Aldrich 2020; Pruysers and Cross 2016), we shift our unit of analysis to individual candidates, linking candidate selection procedures to subjective and objective measures of vulnerability to electoral defeat. Accordingly, by studying the impact of party choices on list or district placement (Rahat, Hazan and Katz 2008; Guaja and Cross 2015), we provide a more fine-grained analysis of the effect of candidate selection methods on women's representation.

The article is organized as follows. In the next section, we present our theoretical framework and introduce our hypotheses about the effect of candidate selection procedures on the electoral vulnerability of female candidates. In the second section, we introduce our case study, which focuses on the examination of the effects of selection procedures on candidates' electoral vulnerability in multi-member districts in the 2013 Italian general election. In the third section, we introduce our data operationalization and methods and in the fourth we present and discuss our empirical findings. Lastly, we conclude by assessing our results in the light of our main theoretical assumptions.

2. Political party gatekeeping and candidate selection

Women's under-representation in national parliaments is frequently explained, in international literature, by looking at two different, though intertwined, aspects. On the one hand, since candidate selection procedures, list ordering and safe-seat placement are in the hands of political parties, *gendered party gatekeeping* (Norris and Lovenduski 1995; Kunovich and Paxton 2005) is frequently called into question as one of the main explaining factors of the reproduction of gender differences in political representation. Party gatekeeping refers to the 'barriers of entrance' placed by long-term party members (Kittilson 2006), who detain most of the party's political resources, against groups of newcomers – such as aspiring female politicians – who might threaten their privileged position within the party and/or their parliamentary seat. On the other hand, voters might show unfavourable attitudes towards female candidates (Sanbonmatsu 2002; Pansardi and Pinto 2020), accordingly affecting women's descriptive representation both directly and indirectly: directly, by penalizing female candidates *vis-a-vis* male candidates at the ballot; indirectly, by influencing parties' candidate selection strategies and negatively affecting the promotion of female candidates.

Intra-party dynamics, however, such as candidates' selection methods, might have an independent effect on women's representation. While the literature agrees on assuming an effect of candidate selection procedures on women's representation, no agreement is to be found on the direction of the effect. Rahat, Hazan and Katz (2008) suggest the negative effect of more inclusive selection methods – such as open primaries – on gender balance in representation. This is so because open primary elections may suffer from gender-biased voting as much as general elections. Moreover, the electorate choices in primary elections might be influenced by the effect of incumbency and candidate visibility and reputation as much as in national elections, thus negatively affecting possible female newcomers. On the other hand, centralized selection by the party leadership might positively affect women's representation, because party leaders might choose to endorse gender equality either as a genuinely recognized political value (Kittilson 2006) or as an electoral strategy (Matland and Studlar 1996).

Between the two sides of the continuum, selection by party members – at the local or central level – is, according to Rahat, Hazan and Katz (2008), the candidate selection method that might have the most negative effect on women's representation. It is so because local and central party members are those whose privileges and power resources – and, potentially, whose parliamentary seats – are those most directly threatened by groups of newcomers such as aspiring female politicians (Kittilson 2006; Pruysers and Cross 2016).

However, recent literature (Luhiste 2015; Aldrich 2020) has effectively problematized the link between the exclusivity of the selection method and the promotion of gender balance in Parliament. According to Aldrich (2020), more exclusive selectorates would be more effective in promoting women's representation only if there were an actual commitment to gender equality on the part of the party central elites. The results of previous studies on the role of selection procedures on women's representation are thus not conclusive: if party leadership is committed to a gender equality strategy, an exclusive selection process might be more effective as primary elections may replicate gender biased choices observed in the electorate (Rahat, Hazan and Katz 2008). On the contrary,

inclusive selection procedures can be more helpful in promoting women's representation in the event that party leadership is less favourable towards gender balance than voters at large or party members (Kittilson 2006; Matland and Studlar 1996). Accordingly, we present two alternative hypotheses:

> **H1a.** *The more exclusive the party selectorate, the less vulnerable female candidates are to electoral defeat*;
>
> **H1b.** *The more exclusive the party selectorate, the greater the vulnerability of female candidates to electoral defeat*.

3. The Italian 2013 election as a case study

In order to test whether women candidates are favoured or penalised by different selection procedures, we choose to focus on the 2013 Italian general election instead of the most recent one (2018). There are three reasons for this choice. First, there is almost no variance between candidate selection procedures in the 2018 election: most parties centralised the selection of candidacies both in single-member and multi-member districts, often 'parachuting' key candidates into safer districts, even in the absence of any link with the local constituency. The only party adopting an open selection procedure was the M5s, but only for candidates in the proportional tier. On the contrary, as mentioned in the Introduction, in 2013 we observed, for the first time, a huge variation in selection procedures across parties according to the selectorates' inclusiveness/exclusiveness dimension: from voters at large to party leadership. Accordingly, the 2013 election is a unicum in terms of the variety of candidate selection methods used by parties and is thus the best test for assessing their effects on women's representation. Secondly, the introduction of gender quotas in the 2018 election forced parties to increase the share of women in their lists and to alternate women and men in terms of list placement (Donà 2018; Regalia and Legnante 2018; Sampugnaro and Montemagno 2020), mitigating, therefore, between-party differences in terms of the promotion of women candidates and making this case less suitable for our kind of study. Thirdly, we have no individual level candidate data for the 2018 elections, while for 2013 we can take advantage of the data included in the Italian Candidates Survey (ICS).

The ICS collected original survey data with the aim of gaining new insights into the role of political elites, and specifically candidates in the Italian general elections held in February 2013 (Di Virgilio et al. 2015; Di Virgilio and Segatti 2016). Focusing on the relationships between candidates, parties and voters, the ICS covers several topics, including the candidate selection process.[1] In particular, the ICS directly asked candidates who made the decision about their nomination and at what level the decision was made. The replies to these questions allow us to operationalise the two main dimensions of the selection process identified by Rahat and Hazan (2001) and can be helpful in mapping selection procedures – which are often informal and occur in a non-standardised way – across parties and candidates. The ICS includes answers from a representative selection

[1] The ICS is part of the Comparative Candidates Survey Project, a cross national elite survey, which combines an internationally agreed core questionnaire and a locally adapted set of questions that try to capture the specifics of the national political and electoral systems.

of 672 candidates from the main political parties.[2] Accordingly, by relying on original data from the 2013 ICS, we empirically study whether selection procedures have different effects on male and female candidates' electoral vulnerability, and consequently on their chances of being elected.

4. Data and methods

Parties' candidate selection procedures constitute the main independent variable of our study. Rahat and Hazan (2001) provided a typology of candidate selection procedure based on two dimensions: the inclusiveness/exclusiveness of selectorates and the level of nomination. The first dimension varies from a pole coinciding with the entire electorate to that of a restricted élite. The second dimension varies depending on whether the selection of candidates is entrusted to a national body or to decentralised, regional or local bodies.

Based on these two main characteristics of the selection process, we produced a six-point selection index for each candidate by combining survey responses to two questions in the ICS. Firstly, in order to measure the *exclusivity* of the selectorate, each candidate was asked who made the decision for her/his nomination, coding the answers in four ways: voters at large; party members; an assembly of delegates of my party; party leadership. Secondly, in order to identify the degree of *centralisation* of the selection process, each potential representative was asked at what level the decision about her/his nomination was made. The answers were then classified according to two categories: local or national level. Bridging together candidates' individual responses to both questions, we created a six-point index of selection, in which the lowest level was ascribed to candidates selected with the most inclusive and decentralized selection mechanism: selection by voters at large at the local level. The next category depicts an internal procedure in which candidates were selected by party members at local level. The next two categories represent more informal selection processes in which candidates were selected by party elites either at the local or the national level. Finally, the last two categories describe selection procedures ruled by party leaders with or without local incentives (see Table 1).[3]

Table 1. Selection index

Value	Category
1	Voters at local level
2	Party members at local level
3	Party delegates at local level
4	Party delegates at national level
5	Party leadership at local level
6	Party leadership at national level

Note: the selection index combines the inclusiveness/exclusiveness of the selectorate and the level at which the nomination was made.

[2] For a discussion about response rates and the representativeness of the selection of candidates see Di Virgilio et al. (2015).
[3] See Shomer (2009) for a similar index applied to the case of Israel.

It is worth noting that higher values of the selection index are related not only to different candidate selection procedures, but also to different incentives to cultivate a personal versus party reputation (Carey and Shugart 1995). When the party leadership has the final say in all the stages from recruitment to final selection, candidates' re-election depends exclusively on party decisions. Conversely, in open primaries, candidates are directly responsible for their final selection and thus re-election.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of the selection index computed by combining the inclusiveness/exclusiveness of selectorates and the level of nomination measured at the candidate's level across the parties included in our analysis. The recruitment of candidates in the Italian political system has long been concentrated in the hands of a few leaders, albeit with some differences in the degree of decentralisation of the selection process between the various parties. As mentioned above, the 2013 elections, however, contributed to breaking this pattern, since the M5s, the Pd and Sel organised a mechanism for the selection of potential representatives based on primary elections with very different characteristics in terms of both selectorate inclusivity and the degree of decentralisation of the selection process (Regalia and Valbruzzi 2016; Sandri, Seddone and Venturino 2015; Venturino and Seddone 2017).[4]

With respect to the first aspect, the M5s primaries were characterised by a greater degree of exclusivity than those of the Pd and Sel, limiting the vote only to party members. As a matter of fact, the M5s restricted the possibility of participating in the vote for the choice of candidates to those registered on the party's website before 2012 (just over 30,000 people). On the contrary, Pd and Sel opted for a more inclusive strategy, extending participation to voters at large. More precisely, the Pd and Sel allowed not only registered members to vote, but also all those who had participated in the November 2012 primaries to choose the leader of the centre-left coalition (a pool of more than three million people).

As regards the degree of decentralisation of the selection process, in all three parties the candidates were chosen at the local level, with a more or less marked involvement of the national leadership. In the M5s, candidate lists were proposed at the local level, but they required the final approval of the leader Beppe Grillo. National leadership had the authority to not validate the lists if they did not meet the very strict party requirements regarding eligibility to stand as a candidate. According to M5s' eligibility requirements, candidates were chosen from among party members who were at least 25 years old, had no legal debts, and who were resident in the constituency in which they competed. Finally, candidacy was only open to those who had previously run without being elected in the local or regional elections in which the M5s competed between 2008 and 2012. Sel and Pd opted instead for provincial lists with less stringent candidacy requirements. However, the national party leadership of the two parties reserved the right to nominate one candidate for every ten outside the mechanism of the primaries.[5]

Finally, there are differences between the three parties as regards the type of ballot used for the primaries that can be relevant for our analysis. The PD and Sel ensured

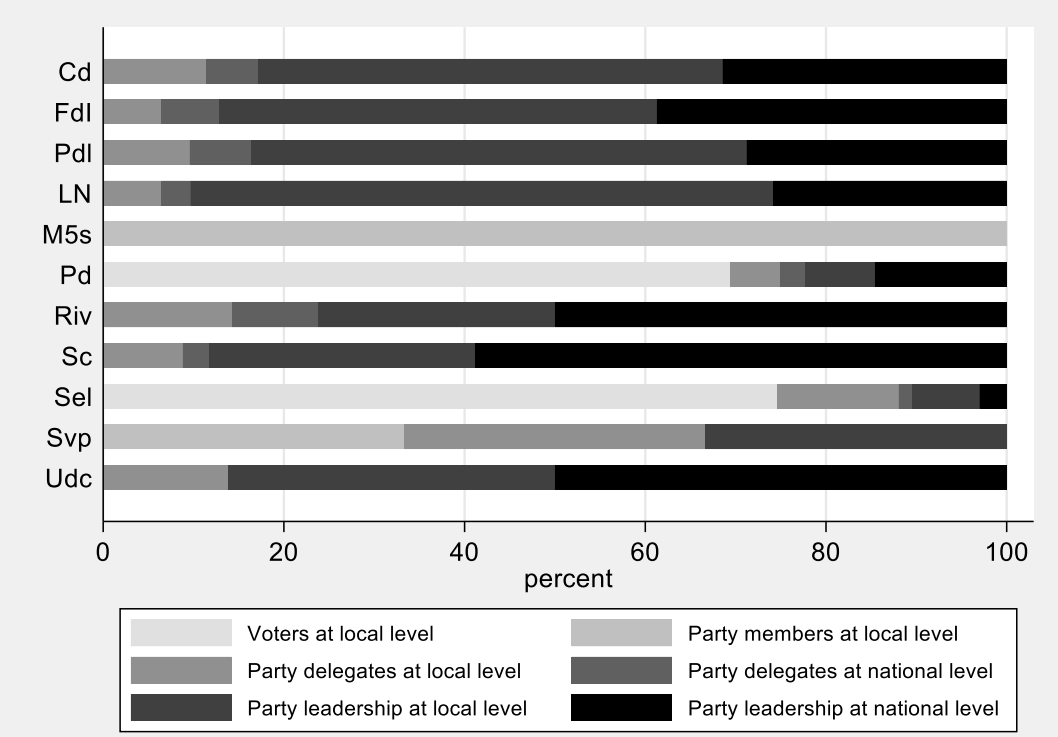
[4] The Svp – a minor regional party – also organized a primary election in the context of the 2013 election (see Seddone and Venturino 2017 for more information).

[5] The candidates indicated by the national leadership were placed in safe positions, so much so that only 67% and 51% of those elected to the Chamber of Deputies by Pd and Sel respectively were actually selected through the primaries (Pinto and Pedrazzani 2015).

gender balance by using a legal provision that allowed voters to express two preferences, one for a male and one for a female candidate. The M5s allowed up to three preferences without any formal provision on gender balance.

The other parties included in our analysis opted instead for more informal procedures characterised by a high level of centralization and direct involvement of the party leadership in candidate selection.

Figure 1. Candidates' selection procedures across parties (2013)



Party acronyms: Cd (*Centro democratico*, Democratic Centre); FdI (*Fratelli d'Italia*, Brothers of Italy); PdI (*Popolo della libertà*; People of Freedom); LN (*Lega Nord*, Northern League); M5s (*Movimento 5 Stelle*, Five Star Movement); Pd (*Partito demoratico*, Democratic Party); Riv (*Rivoluzione civile*; Civil Revolution); Sc (*Scelta civica*, Civic Choice); Sel (*Sinistra, ecologia e libertà*, Left, ecology and Freedom); Svp (*Südtiroler Volkspartei*, South Tyrol Peoples Party); Udc (*Unione di centro*, Union of the Centre).
Source: own elaboration.

In this study, we use the selection index described above in combination with candidate gender as our main independent variables in order to investigate whether women candidates are advantaged or disadvantaged by exclusive versus inclusive selection mechanisms. Unlike previous studies (Kittilson 2006; Pruysers and Cross 2016; Aldrich 2020), in this article we do not investigate the effect of candidate selection procedures by relating it to the share of female candidates, but we explore parties' electoral strategies and potential gatekeeping more closely by looking at actual candidates' chances of getting elected in terms of electoral vulnerability: i.e., in terms of the impact of party choices on list or district placement.

While a candidate's own perception of her chances of getting elected can constitute a proxy of her actual chances, in this study we include both subjective and objective measures of electoral vulnerability. In particular, to assess women's chances of getting

elected, we follow Rahat, Hazan and Katz (2008) and, together with a measure based on the ICS data, we include a measure based on list position and seat safety. By assuming a stronger commitment to gender equality by those parties that place women in higher positions on the electoral list and in districts where they expect a larger share of votes, we are able to directly relate the party candidate selection procedure with their party gatekeeping strategy.

Given the nature of the electoral system used in the 2013 election – a bonus-adjusted proportional system with closed lists – we accordingly use as dependent variables two measures of electoral vulnerability (André, Depauw and Martin 2015). Our first measure concerns *subjective* electoral vulnerability and is based on ICS data with regard to candidates' expectations about their chances of winning the election. In particular, candidates were asked to rate their uncertainty about their election prospects on a scale ranging from (1) 'I thought I could not lose' to (5) 'I thought I could not win'. Higher values on this question correspond, therefore, to a greater perception of vulnerability. Although the perception of precariousness is strongly associated with actual measures of vulnerability, we also include in our analysis an *objective* electoral vulnerability indicator which reflects several features that can shape candidates' likelihood of being elected: list position, district magnitude and the seats won by parties in each district.[6] Higher values of the objective indicator correspond to greater vulnerability.

The relationship between gender and selection on the one hand, and vulnerability on the other hand, is evaluated taking into account several covariates that are assumed to affect the latter. The use of survey data often allows a fine-grained operationalisation of the control variables. At the individual level, we first include a categorical variable associated to candidates' political experience. Combining questions related to prospective legislators' previous experience in elected institutions at the national or local level, we created a typology in which candidates are classified according to four categories: no political experience, experience only at the local level, experience both at the local and national level, or finally experience at the national level exclusively (Pinto and Verzichelli 2016). Second, we include a four-point index measuring candidates' level of education (1 = middle school, 2 = high school, 3 = university degree, 4 = Master or PhD). Third, we add a variable measuring candidates' age in number of years. Fourth, we compute a four-point index of localness according to whether a candidate is: neither born nor located in the district (1), born but not located in the district (2), not born but located in the district (3), born and located in the district (4) (Marangoni and Tronconi 2011). The higher the value of the index, the greater should be candidates' local bonds. Finally, we include a covariate measured at the district level controlling for the log-transformed value of district magnitude (Carey and Shugart 1995). Table 2 reports descriptive statistics by parties of the variables described above. We do not directly incorporate party dummies, but we control for party differences and potential unobserved factors by computing random intercepts at the party level.

[6] In order to compute electoral vulnerability in closed list proportional systems, we use the following formula: $L/M(S+1)$, where L is the candidate list position, S is the seats won by the party to which the potential legislator belongs, and M is the district magnitude. We add a one to the denominator in order to take into account those parties included in the ICS which did not win any seat (Pinto 2016). For a further discussion about the computation of electoral vulnerability in plurality and proportional systems with open or closed lists see André, Depauw and Martin (2015).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics by parties.

	% of female among respondents	Sub./Obj. Vulnera-bility	Selection (Mean)	Career (Mode)	Education (Mean)	Age (Median)	Localness (Mean)
Cd	14	4.25/0.26	3.66	No exp.	2.69	52	3.39
FdI	19	4.21/0.28	3.94	Local Politicians	2.68	45	3.84
PdI	21	3.86/0.12	3.62	Local Politicians	2.70	47	3.73
LN	28	4.10/0.12	3.52	Local Politicians	2.44	45	3.90
M5s	13	3.72/0.11	2.00	No exp.	2.54	38	3.77
Pd	45	3.17/0.04	1.20	Local Politicians	2.81	50	3.57
Riv	40	4.31/0.35	4.05	No exp.	2.76	52	3.49
Sc	16	3.91/0.14	4.19	No exp.	2.81	50	3.57
Sel	39	4.28/0.13	0.72	Local Politicians	2.67	50	3.67
Svp	0	4.33/0.10	2.00	Local Politicians	3.00	48	4.00
Udc	33	3.94/.22	4.00	Local Politicians	2.89	52	3.64
Tot.	**28**	**3.81/0.14**	**2.58**	**No exp.**	**2.70**	**47**	**3.65**

Source: own elaboration.

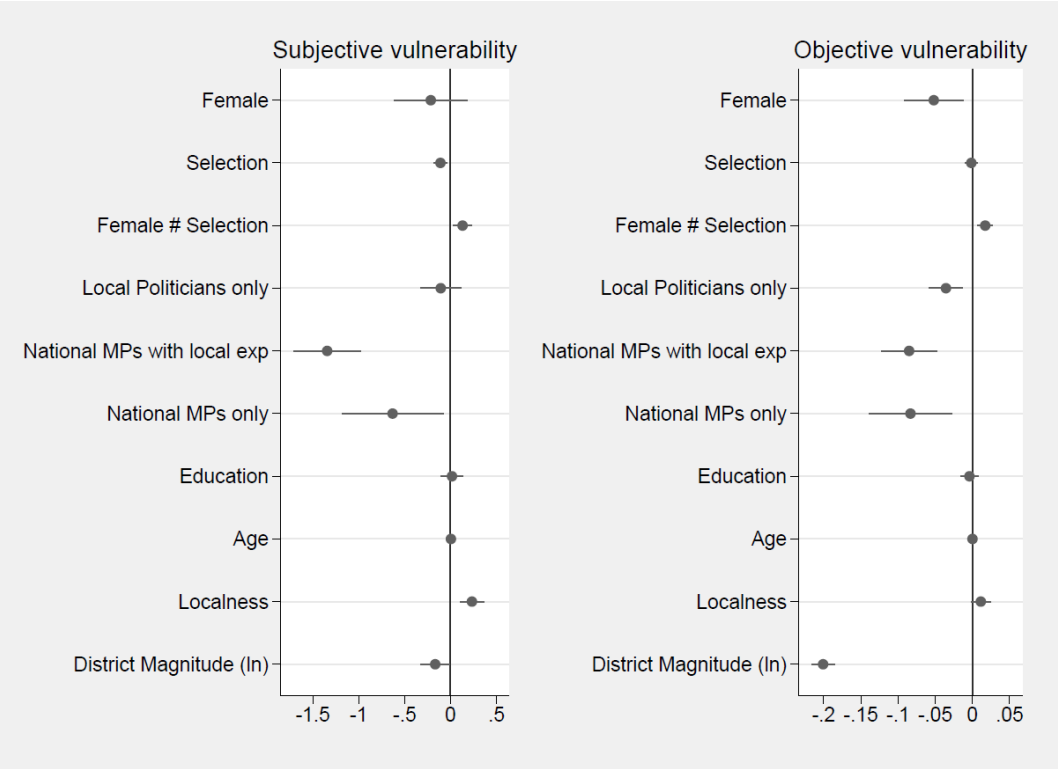
5. Findings

We perform our analysis using two multi-level models to account for the hierarchical structure of the data (i.e., candidates are clustered across different parties; for more details on the use of multilevel analysis, see Rabe-Hesketh and Skrondal 2012). Figure 2 presents the results of the multilevel models in a graphical way (see the Appendix for regression tables). The left panel uses as a dependent variable the measure of subjective vulnerability; the right panel uses instead the objective measure of electoral vulnerability. The graph should be interpreted as follows: dots represent regression coefficient, while segments refer to 95 percent CIs. When CIs cross the zero-line, the covariates' impact is not statistically significant. By contrast, when they are located on the right (left) of the origin, variables positively (negatively) influence candidates' precariousness.

In order to test whether or not women are penalised according to different selection procedures, we include in the models the interaction between gender and the selection index. As Figure 2 shows that the interaction is statistically significant in both models, however, in order to assess its substantive impact we rely on graphical interpretation as suggested by Brambor, Clark and Golder (2006). The dots in Figure 3 represent the contrast between genders, i.e. the difference between the average value of vulnerability predicted for men and women, plotted against each value of the selection index. The segments represent the 95 percent confidence intervals. When the confidence intervals are both below or above the horizontal zero-line the difference is statistically significant. Women candidates are more vulnerable than male colleagues when dots are above the

origin; on the contrary, female prospective legislators are less precarious than male candidates when dots are below the zero-line. Both the panels in Figure 3 highlight that, other things being equal, women are significantly more vulnerable than men when candidates are selected either by party elites or the party leader at the national or local level (selection index = 4, 5, 6). Substantially, these results support H1b, meaning that female potential legislators are located in more vulnerable positions in party lists than men when they are selected by a more exclusive selectorate.

Figure 2. Assessing electoral vulnerability under different candidates' selection procedures (2013)



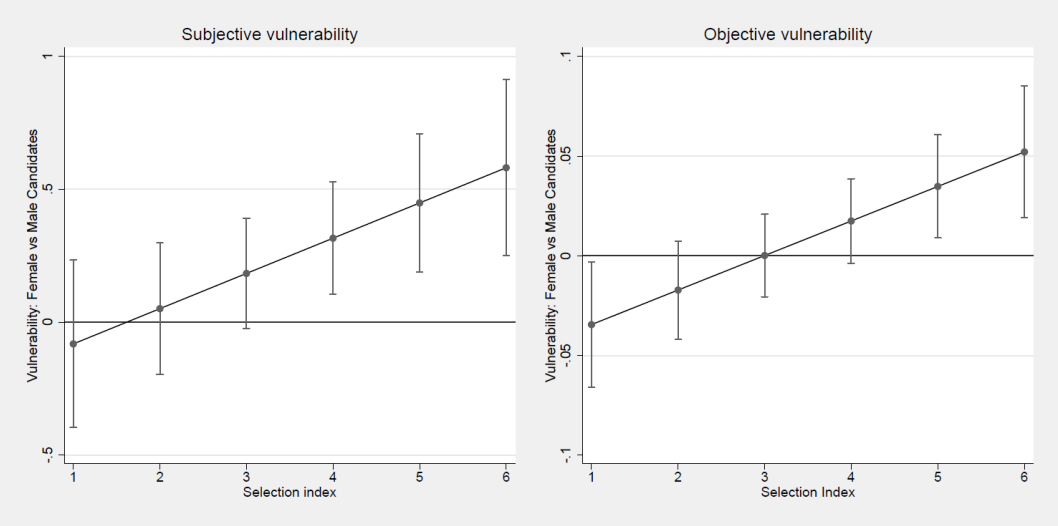
Note: Multi-level linear regression models. Constant term and inter-party variance components are not reported. N = 658/663. Omitted baseline category for political experience: no-experience. Segments represent 95 per cent confidence intervals.
Source: own elaboration.

While our results clearly indicate that exclusive selection procedures are associated with greater vulnerability of female potential legislators, they are less robust with regard to the impact of inclusive selection practices. The right panel of Figure 3, which uses the measure of objective vulnerability, shows indeed that female candidates are favoured in comparison to men when selection is made with open primaries (selection index = 1).[7] This result, however, is no more statistically significant when the measure of subjective vulnerability is used (left panel). Notwithstanding, our analysis shows that candidate

[7] These results should also be read in the context of the parties that promoted open selection procedures. As mentioned above, the Pd and Sel guaranteed gender balance employing a 'double gender preference'. In the M5s primaries, on the other hand, all candidates with no political experience took part, thus negating any resource-based advantage for experienced male candidates.

selection procedures matter and are not completely neutral in relation to the promotion of women candidates.[8]

Figure 3. Contrast of electoral vulnerability between genders under different candidate selection procedures



Note: Contrasts are computed holding constant the values of the other variables.
Source: own elaboration.

Among the control variables, as Figure 2 shows, only a few covariates are strongly significant. Other things being equal, experienced candidates are on average less vulnerable than prospective legislators without experience (the reference category). Conversely, electoral precariousness is on average higher among candidates with stronger local bonds in the district. This result is in contrast with previous findings in the literature, as Shugart, Valdini and Suominen (2005), in their comparative analysis of six European established democracies, showed that, contingent upon electoral rules, having been born in one's district helps to win mandates. However, the same literature also underlines the importance of having gathered political experiences in district level electoral offices. Our models, indeed, show that candidates with local experience are less vulnerable than those without experience. Finally, both models emphasise that higher district magnitude implies, on average, a lower level of candidate vulnerability.

5. Conclusions

Our study shows that different candidate selection procedures have different effects on female and male candidates' electoral vulnerability. In particular, in contrast with Rahat, Hazan and Katz (2008), our findings show that for female candidates selected by party leadership the chances of being elected are significantly worse than those of their male counterparts. By contrast, our work on the 2013 elections confirms the findings of

[8] As suggested by Berry, Golder and Milton (2012), we also test the other side of the interaction, i.e., the marginal impact of selection across genders. Results confirm that as we move towards more centralized selection procedures, women's vulnerability significantly increases, while men's precariousness decreases.

other descriptive studies (Regalia and Valbruzzi 2016; Venturino and Seddone 2017) and shows that, for candidates selected by open primaries, women have a better chance of being elected than men.

Accordingly, evidence suggests that the selection procedure has an effect on parties' electoral strategy that is different for male and female candidates. Women candidates selected with exclusive methods are subject to party gatekeeping and are penalized in terms of list placement, thus affecting their chances of gaining a seat in parliament. The opposite is true in the case of women candidates selected with inclusive methods. Not only does the negative effect of gender on list placement disappear in the case of female candidates selected by open primaries, but women candidates are promoted in comparison to their male counterparts. In this case, party gatekeeping is replaced by a gender positive bias, since parties exploit the primary-winning candidates' visibility, reputation and personal resources gained through competition in primary elections by placing them in higher list positions.

Although our analysis takes into account unobserved party-related factors by estimating random intercepts at the party level, it is worth noting that two of the parties which adopted more inclusive selection procedures in the 2013 elections (Pd and Sel) belong to the centre-left and left of the political spectrum, which is generally associated with a more positive cultural and ideological attitude towards gender equality in representation (Caul 1999; Kittilson 2006; Reynolds 1999; Rule 1987). Moreover, these two parties promoted gender balance in their primaries by allowing voters to vote for two candidates of different genders, and were the only ones to include statutory gender quotas for their participation in the 2013 elections. It is worth mentioning that these quotas only prescribed that no gender should appear on the lists for more than the 40% of times. Accordingly, they had no direct effect on female candidates' list placement in winnable list positions, and thus had no impact on reducing candidates' electoral vulnerability. However, it is certainly an expression of a stronger commitment towards gender equality by the party leadership of these parties *vis-a-vis* their competitors.

The elements reported above might affect female candidates' electoral vulnerability and potentially interact with the effect of the selection procedures for Pd and Sel. However, this is not the case for the M5s, whose positioning on the left-right continuum is rather ambiguous and never included mechanisms such as quotas for the promotion of female candidates. The M5s is actually the party which, overall, greatly contributed to the femininization of the 2013 legislature by attesting a rate of 34.3% female MPs – opposed to a mere 15.3% of female candidates on the electoral lists (Pansardi and Pedrazzani 2019). As a result of the online consultation for candidate selection (Lanzone and Rombi 2014), M5s members selected only a minority of female candidates, and yet, the majority of those selected were placed in winning position on the electoral lists. Accordingly, while we can assume that for Pd and Sel ideological factors interact with candidate selection procedures in the promotion of female candidates, the selection procedure alone seems to be able to explain the strong positive results of the M5s in terms of women's representation.

Overall, while international literature provides mixed evidence (Aldrich 2020; Gauja and Cross 2015; Luhiste 2015; Pruysers and Cross 2016; Rahat, Hazan and Katz 2008) about the relation between selection procedures and women's representation, our

results are quite straightforward and show that more inclusive procedures grant women better chances of election. To offer more ground to attest the positive effect of inclusive selection methods on women's representation further studies are needed, in particular, studies that go beyond the single national cases until now produced and offer a comparative perspective on this topic. While studies of this type are complicated by the paucity of cases in which inclusive procedures, such as open primaries, are used to select prospective parliamentary candidates – in particular, in proportional electoral systems – an assessment of the impact of selection methods on women's representation can offer a further reason to students of party organization and gender politics to argue for more intra-party democracy.

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Appendix

Table A1. Assessing electoral vulnerability under different candidate selection procedures (2013)

	(1) Subjective vulnerability	(2) Objective vulnerability
Female	-0.214	-0.052*
	(0.203)	(0.020)
Selection	-0.109**	-0.001
	(0.039)	(0.004)
Female X Selection	0.133**	0.017**
	(0.051)	(0.005)
Local Politicians Only	-0.105	-0.035**
	(0.112)	(0.011)
National MPs with local exp.	-1.344**	-0.085**
	(0.188)	(0.019)
National MPs only	-0.630*	-0.083**
	(0.282)	(0.028)
Education	0.017	-0.004
	(0.060)	(0.006)
Age	0.006	0.001
	(0.004)	(0.001)
Localness	0.235**	0.011+
	(0.065)	(0.007)
District Magnitude (ln)	-0.166*	-0.201**
	(0.080)	(0.008)
Constant	3.834**	0.788**
	(0.546)	(0.059)
SD (Party)	0.354***	0.082***
	(0.098)	(0.021)
SD (Residual)	1.118***	0.111***
	(0.031)	(0.004)
AIC	2060.059	-967.958
BIC	2118.418	-909.500
N	658	663

Note: Multi-level regression models. Omitted baseline category for political experience: no-experience. Standard errors in parentheses. + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

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Is something changing? The impact of the COVID-19 emergency on Italians' attitudes towards the EU

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Abstract

The COVID-19 outbreak has had a strong impact on several aspects of private and public life all over the country. This article in particular deals with the impact of the pandemic crisis on attitudes towards the European Union. Based on an opinion survey administered after the COVID-19 first wave to a representative sample of Italians, this article provides preliminary results on whether the health crisis has impacted Italians' perceptions of EU membership. Findings suggest that one fifth of the respondents changed their minds about the EU in a relatively short time span. Among possible explanations for this shift, party cueing is shown to be the most important factor in transforming public perception of Europe, while the pattern is less clear for the perception of the pandemic risk and the economic outlook.

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 outbreak has had a strong impact on several crucial fields in democracies, such as politics, economy, and social organization. Although the pandemic and its management are still ongoing and therefore a complete interpretation is not yet possible, several studies have addressed the consequences of the pandemic on citizens' political attitudes, with conflicting results (Schraff 2020). On the one hand, some research shows that the pandemic crisis has favoured incumbent governments, which means that citizens tend to 'rally around the flag' in times of crisis (Bol et al. 2020; Baekgaard et al. 2020; Devine et al. 2020). At the same time, however, other studies show that citizens have responded to this crisis by relying on their previous political values and beliefs (Calvillo et al. 2020). People reacted in different ways to pandemic-related policies, based on their level of support for the leader/party proposing a policy (Allcott et al. 2020). Even in these pandemic times, therefore, party cues have an influence on citizens' behaviour, such as compliance with anti-Covid measures (Painter and Qiu 2021; Grossman et al. 2020).

Against this backdrop, the impact of the pandemic on attitudes towards the EU is still underexplored. The few studies currently available lead to divergent interpretations also in the field of EU integration. Gianmarco et al. (2020), through an online survey experiment in Italy, Spain, Germany and the Netherlands, have found a growing demand for

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competent leadership and that the COVID-19 crisis has led to severe drops in interpersonal and institutional trust, as well as less support for the EU. Focusing on Italy, Basile et al. (2021) show, however, that the picture is more complex: although in a trend of decreasing support, Italian citizens are willing to support burden-sharing to face the costs of the most urgent crises affecting EU countries. This includes, but is not limited to, the COVID-19 pandemic: the multiple crises affecting Europe may have produced the ideal conditions under which the EU could take a step towards deeper integration in the future.

In this global crisis — characterized by territorial specificities concerning both the pandemic and the economic dimension — the EU has had to overcome several problems in acting as a single political player. Lacking a common health protocol, during the first phase of the COVID-19 emergency, the EU Commission focused on the economic side. It adopted a slightly different approach from the past, calling for coordination between member states within the European Council. In particular, it called for measures aiming at softening the impact of the economic crisis via a massive programme of investment and financial flexibility, rather than austerity measures (Pacces and Weimer 2020). Nonetheless, and to some extent unsurprisingly, the pandemic emergency has re-ignited most of the classical divides within the EU, echoing the debate in the aftermath of the Great Recession in the second half of the 2000s about the economic solidity of northern and southern countries (de la Porte and Jensens 2021). Agreement on a set of measures — the Recovery Plan — came in late July 2020. The consequences of this situation, however, still appear contradictory and uncertain. The emphasis on a shared plan of interventions supporting the countries most affected by the pandemic emergency — and the concomitant relaxation of austerity — signals a drastic change in the EU approach (Luo 2021). This prolonged emergency situation has produced (and is producing) intertwined effects on both the supply side and the demand side.

With respect to the focus of this article, three different dimensions emerging from this crisis situation are relevant: citizens' perception of the risks associated with COVID-19, the perceived economic consequences of the management of the pandemic, and the political positioning of the parties regarding Europe. The aim of this article is to clarify whether, in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis, the pandemic has changed people's attitudes[1] towards the EU and, if so, whether they have improved or worsened. As mentioned above, there is no consensus in the literature on the consequences of such a crisis on citizens' attitudes.

The main contribution of this article, therefore, is to provide new empirical evidence and add literature on this ongoing process, also testing the likely factors that explain these changes.

Relying on evidence based on an opinion survey with a representative sample of Italians after the COVID-19 first wave, this article provides preliminary results on whether the global health crisis has impacted Italians' perceptions about EU membership. Findings suggest that one fifth of the respondents changed their minds about the EU in a relatively short time span. We also noted that in most cases this change of heart goes towards an improved attitude towards the EU institutions. When investigating factors

[1] In this article we use the term 'change' to indicate the shift in individual attitudes before and after the pandemic outbreak. This change is not measured through a panel design, but through questions regarding the prospective evaluation of the respondents. See Methods section below.

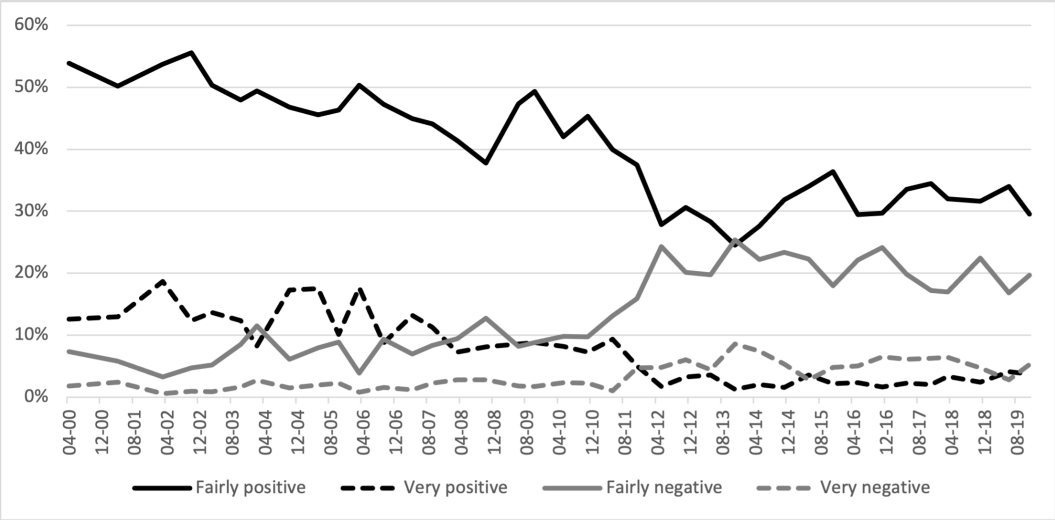
driving this change, the voters' reliance on parties emerges as the most relevant, while the pattern is less clear about perceptions of the pandemic risk and the economic outlook.

In what follows, the next section will provide a general background on attitudes toward the EU and the COVID-19 emergency in Italy while the third section summarises the theoretical framework and articulates the hypotheses. The research design will then be discussed in section four, while section five presents the data and results of analysis. The discussion and limitations of the study are presented in the last section

2. Attitudes toward the EU and the COVID-19 emergency in Italy

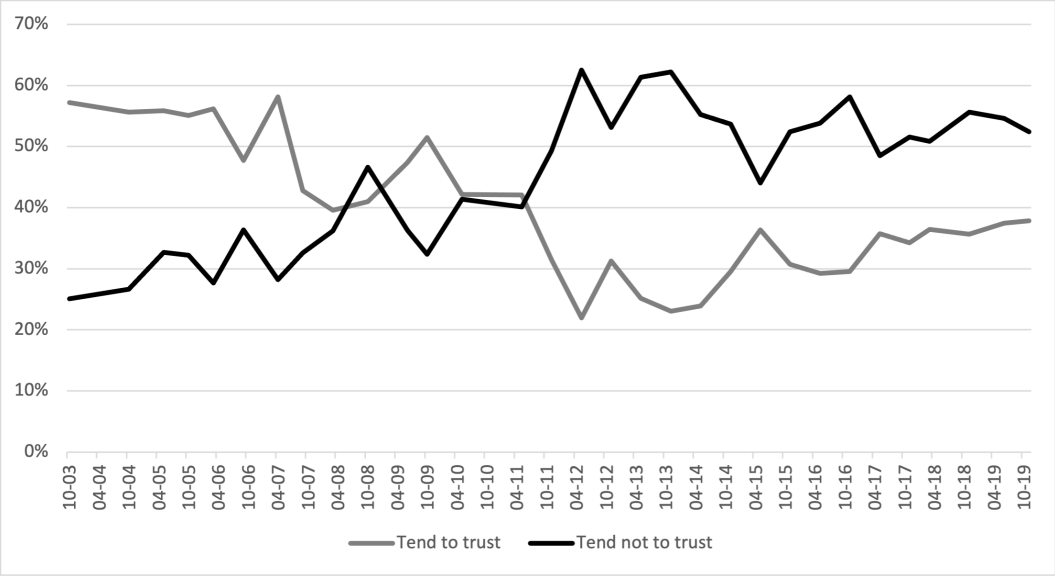
As is well known, Italy has long been one of the strongest supporters of the European project (Cotta et al. 2005). This situation started to change in the 1990s, moving the country towards a more 'disenchanted Europeanism' (Cotta 2005: 35). The effects of the 1992 Maastricht Treaty and the financial recovery necessary for participation in the Economic and Monetary Union process (Ferrera and Gualmini 1999), together with further transfers of national sovereignty contained in the 2007 Lisbon Treaty, led to an increase in Euroscepticism (Verney 2011; Down and Wilson 2008). In the 2009 European elections, this initial Euroscepticism was 'stronger among citizens than in the party system, socioeconomic elites and the media' (Bellucci and Conti 2012). The attitude towards the EU of a growing share of citizens went in those years 'from enthusiasm to scepticism' (Bellucci and Serricchio 2012). In the following years, the Great Recession and the need to comply with EU financial requirements had several consequences on the attitudes of Italians towards the EU (Bellucci 2014; Armingeon et al. 2016). While Eurobarometer data shows that the percentage of those evoking a positive image of the EU had already started to decline in the early 2000s and latent dissatisfaction had started to rise (Figure 1), it was in the 2011-2013 period that opinions worsened significantly, decreasing by up to 20 percentage points.

Figure 1. Image of the EU in Italy



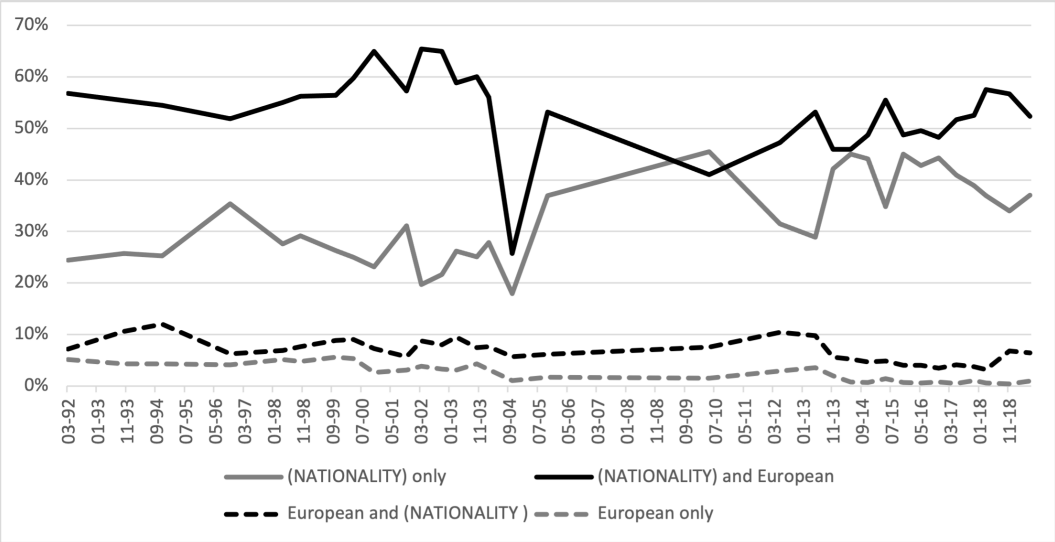
Source: Eurobarometer Interactive. Note: reply to the question, "In general, does the European Union conjure up for you a very positive, fairly positive, neutral, fairly negative or very negative image?"

Figure 2. Trust in the EU in Italy



Source: Eurobarometer Interactive. Note: reply to the question, "I would like to ask you a question about how much trust you have in certain media and institutions. For each of the following media and institutions, please tell me if you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it: The European Union".

Figure 3. European identity



Source: Eurobarometer Interactive. Note: reply to the question, "In the near future, do you see yourself as...?".

However, in this critical climate of opinion surrounding the EU integration project, one particular figure emerging from Eurobarometer data is especially interesting. While the figures concerning trust in the EU signal a decreasingly supportive mood (Figure 2), when asked about their identities as European citizens, Italians still appear relatively close to the European ideal and there is no evidence of decreasing trends. Rather than a

rejection of the European project in principle, the Italian respondents seemed to express discontent as a consequence of the 'spiral of Euroscepticism' that has involved citizens, parties and representative institutions in the last decade (Conti et al. 2020).

It was within this context of mixed signals, of decreasing support but stable pro-EU identity, that the pandemic broke out. The consequences on citizens' attitudes are not entirely clear and are currently under the spotlight of researchers. The consequences on the political system, on the other hand — although not necessarily clear — have been much more evident: the pandemic has forced parties in Europe to tackle an issue that has strong supranational implications. This has led people to question, and in some cases redefine, their orientation towards the EU. This certainly happened in Italy where the need for management of the pandemic modified (and is still modifying) the orientation of several parties towards the EU. As regards the parties in power when the survey was administered (late June 2020), they supported the pro-EU government led by Giuseppe Conte (Conte II). While this support is completely coherent for the Democratic Party (PD, Partito Democratico) — which has always had a pro-European vocation (Bobba and Seddone 2020) — it is something new as far as the Five Star Movement (M5S, Movimento 5 Stelle) is concerned. Listed for a while among Italian Eurosceptic parties (Emanuele et al. 2016; Maggini and Chiaramonte, 2019; Pirro and van Kessel 2018), its positioning towards the EU in the European Parliament has also been defined as confused (Salvati 2019). It is therefore no coincidence that, even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the M5S started changing their minds about the EU by endorsing Ursula Van der Leyden as the president of the EC and by forming the governing alliance with the PD in September 2019. Further, since the pandemic outbreak, the M5S have become more likely to support European integration, conveying Europhile messages to their voters. This orientation also seems to be confirmed by their support for the pro-European government led by Mario Draghi, a controversial figure in the M5S narrative, defined as an 'apostle of the elite' by one of the Movement's leading figures.[2] Besides, it is worth noting that the M5S supported the Conte government's strategy and position leading to the Next Generation plan and it justified its Europhile position by stressing the need to address economic hardship at the national level.

The opposition parties have also been affected by the consequences of the pandemic crisis. After a season of partly ideological and partly strategic criticism of the EU (Quaglia 2011), Go Italy (FI, Forza Italia) moved towards a more mainstream pro-EU position, starting with the 2014 European elections (Conti et al. 2020). Since the start of the pandemic, FI has further endorsed the government's initiative and clarified its support for the EU, distinguishing itself from its alleged allies the League (Lega) and Brothers of Italy (FdI, Fratelli d'Italia). These two parties are certainly the most Eurosceptic as they have introduced some positions of rejection such as exit from the Euro and suspension of the Schengen treaty to reintroduce border controls (Conti et al. 2020). However, while FdI has maintained unchanged its positions even during the pandemic, rejecting any possible collaboration with all the latest governments (Conte I, II and Draghi), the ideological and strategic Euroscepticism of the League has instead wavered in the face of the possibility of drawing benefit from the management of Next Generation EU funds. This probably explains the decision of its leader, Matteo Salvini, to support Mario Draghi's

[2] The Guardian view on Mario Draghi: the right man for Italy … for now. The Guardian, February 4, 2021.

government: 'I prefer to be involved and manage 209 billion rather than stay outside [the government]'.[3]

In short, even if for different reasons and at different times, the pandemic has had an impact on the main parties, shifting, at least temporarily, the axis of their political orientation from substantial Euroscepticism to a moderate pro-EU orientation.

3. Determinants of attitudes toward the EU

The literature has identified several determinants that may contribute to shaping citizens' attitudes toward European integration. For this article we rely on (a) literature about the EU institutions conceived as a rescuer-actor for solving particular crises or societal needs requiring transnational governance; (b) the utilitarian approach, in terms of individuals' economic outlook perceptions; (c) party cueing, meant as a common heuristic used by citizens to disentangle complex issues, such as EU matters.

A first branch of literature, which is particularly relevant considering the current situation of the pandemic crisis, reads the EU institutions as a fundamental part of the multilevel governance system operating in Europe. In this perspective, when policy problems or societal needs are transnational and require coordination at the European level, the EU institutions play a crucial role and EU citizens are likely to recognize their responsibility (Hobolt and Tilley, 2014). The COVID-19 emergency, in this respect, has opened up new scenarios in the relationship between member states and especially between domestic and European politics. The very dynamics of a pandemic emergency like the COVID-19 outbreak have indeed required coordination and cooperation between countries. After initial hesitation, the EU in this respect has put in force extraordinary economic measures for fighting the economic crisis (through the European Stability Mechanism and the Next Generation fund) and started a centralized strategy to accelerate the purchasing, development, manufacturing and deployment of vaccines against COVID-19 (EU Commission 2020). Previous research has demonstrated that in the case of critical issues, citizens tend to perceive the EU institutions as more competent and effective in facing these societal challenges. As regards the migration crisis and EU immigration policy, for example, Conti et al. (2019) found that citizens worried about this issue are likely to delegate the definition of policy solutions to the EU institutions. This kind of result is consistent with the literature maintaining that citizens (still) tend to identify the EU as a reliable transnational rescuer able to address (and solve) critical issues at the national level (Milward 1992), even despite the Great Recession Crisis (Isernia and Cotta 2016). Drawing from this literature, the first hypothesis aims at assessing the relationship between perception of the pandemic risk and evaluation of the EU:

> **H1:** *Higher levels of pandemic risk perception are related to a positive evaluation of EU integration.*

As concerns the utilitarian perspective, studies suggest that the economic dimension has an effect on individual attitudes towards the EU. Indeed, the literature has found that a personal capacity to better adapt (or not) to the EU's setting of rules on the

[3] La giravolta moderata di Salvini: 'Preferisco mettermi in gioco e gestire 209 miliardi che stare fuori'. Open, February, 6, 2021.

economic dimension impacts how individuals perceive the very role of the EU. For example, those benefitting from market liberalization prove to be more likely to support the EU integration project (Anderson and Reichert 1995). In addition, studies also found that people's feelings towards the EU are often consistent with their economic interests (Gabel 1998). Besides individual assessment of the economy, scholars have underlined that people's perceptions of the EU are also affected by a more general evaluation of their country's economic performance (Eichenberg and Dalton 1993; Anderson and Reichert 1995). In this respect, studies argue that the level of EU support depends also on individual perceptions of the country role within the EU and in particular the relationship/connections with other member states. Precisely, dimensions such as country security, national trade interests within the EU, or even the country's ability to get net returns from the EU budget, are said to shape citizens' attitudes towards the EU (Eichenberg and Dalton 1993; Anderson and Reichert 1996).

This literature led us to formulate a specific hypothesis to test whether and to what extent individual perception of the country's economic outlook affects attitudes towards EU integration. Specifically, we expect a congruence between economic outlook and EU evaluation. Accordingly, our second hypothesis is spelt out as follows:

> **H2:** *Citizens' positive expectations of the country's economic outlook are related to a positive evaluation of EU integration*

In general, citizens are said to lack general political sophistication; they have a limited ability to think in the abstract about political matters and they also lack factual information about politics (e.g., Campbell et al. 1960; Converse 1964; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). Nonetheless, despite this scarce knowledge and a limited availability of information, the literature underlines that they may overcome their information shortfalls by relying on heuristics to infer their position on an issue (Snidernman et al. 1991; Lupia 1992; 1994; Dancey and Sheagley 2012; Kuklinski and Quirk 2000). Citizens, indeed, use diverse kinds of information shortcuts to fill the information gap, relying on party identification, election campaigns, media contents or elite endorsements (Downs 1957; Lodge et al. 1995; Iyengar and Kinder 1987; Lupia 1994). As concerns the European Union, an extensive literature has demonstrated that messages from political parties have a strong influence on citizens' attitudes to the EU (see for example Pannico 2017; Torcal et al. 2018; Stoeckel and Kuhn 2018; Pannico 2020). EU matters, indeed, prove particularly difficult to understand and European issues are usually marginal in national politics (Van der Eijk and Franklin 2004). Even from an electoral point of view, EP elections are interpreted as 'second order elections', implying that citizens tend to perceive these elections as being less at stake, which disincentivizes voting mobilization (Reif and Schmitt 1980; Hobolt 2014). Furthermore, studies have also highlighted that European citizens are actually poorly informed about EU politics (Anderson 1998; Baglioni and Hurrelmann 2016; Hobolt 2007). Therefore, they are more likely to align their evaluations of the EU with the positions of the parties to which they feel closest. Relying on this literature, we therefore expect that partisanship has an impact on individuals' evaluations of the EU. Precisely, the last hypothesis reads as follows:

> **H3:** *Citizens' evaluations towards the EU are congruent with the orientation of their party.*

4. Methods

4.1. Data

The data employed in this study are based on an opinion survey from the project 'The impact of COVID-19 pandemic crisis on social and institutional trust'.[4] Interviews were administered to respondents through CAWI/CATI (Computer-Assisted Web Interview) mode between 26 June and 3 July 2020. Respondents were selected from an opt-in community maintained by SWG (a private Italian research company). The sampling design accounts for age, gender and geographical distribution of the Italian population. In total, the dataset includes 2,265 respondents. It is worth noticing that the period of data collection is shown to be particularly appropriate for the purposes of this study. As concerns the pandemic emergency, indeed, the contagion rate signalled a cooling phase. Therefore, containment measures and restrictions were no longer in force. Instead, focusing on the EU dimension, the end of June coincides with negotiations within the European Council about the definition of recovery measures. As a result, EU issues were again at the top of the public agenda, emphasizing the prominence of EU political actors such as the EU commission in this phase of mediating between diverse (and often conflicting) domestic interests (Botta et al. 2020).

4.2. Mesures: the dependent variable

Our hypotheses have been tested through a multinomial logit model investigating kinds of individual opinions about the EU. We were specifically interested in identifying which factors contributed to shaping EU evaluation in positive or negative terms.

The dependent variable (DV) was computed by combining two different items referring, respectively, to the retrospective and prospective evaluation of Italian EU membership (see Table 1). The first item, thus, is spelt out as follows: *With regard to the last few years, do you think that EU membership has been [good, bad, neither good or bad] for Italy?*. The second item, instead, was deliberately framed around the pandemic and allows the respondent a near-future prospective evaluation: *In the light of the COVID-19 crisis, do you think that EU membership will be [good, bad, neither good or bad] for Italy in the next few months?*

We then computed a trichotomous variable accounting for the direction of changes in prospective attitudes towards the EU in the light of the pandemic emergency. Those confirming their opinion on Italian membership in both retrospective and prospective evaluations have been coded as neutral (=1). The group of respondents whose evaluations worsened is composed of those moving from a positive to a negative or neutral evaluation, as well as those shifting from neutral to negative opinions (=0). Finally, an improved perception of EU membership is identified in respondents who move from negative and neutral opinions towards a positive prospective evaluation of EU in the light of the pandemic emergency. Respondents moving from neutral to fully positive opinions also fall into this category (=2).

[4] The project was funded by the Collegio Carlo Alberto and the Department of Cultures, Politics and Society, University of Turin.

Table 1. Dependent variable detail

		In the light of the COVID-19 crisis, do you think that EU membership will be for Italy in the next few months?		
		good	**neither good nor bad**	**bad**
With regard to the last few years, do you think that EU membership has been for Italy?	**good**	same	worsened	worsened
	neither good nor bad	improved	same	worsened
	bad	improved	improved	same

4.3. Measures: independent variables

As concerns individual outlook on the economic dimension, this was operationalized by means of a 1-5 scale variable measuring the individual's economic prospective evaluation where 1 indicates an improvement in personal economic conditions, while 5 refers to a worsening of personal economic conditions.[5] As regards, instead, the partisanship dimension we relied on a set of dichotomous variables accounting for respondent voting behaviour in the 2019 EP elections. We focused on those parties that allow for a reasonable numerosity to be tested, that is: FI, FdI, M5S, League and PD.

Finally, for assessing H3 — testing the effects of pandemic concerns on EU evaluations — we considered two items accounting for individual concerns on the pandemic side. Accordingly, the first variable measures on a 0-10 scale the respondent's perceived risk of getting infected,[6] while a second variable measures, still on a 0-10 scale, the respondent's perceived risk that the country will face a second wave of contagion.[7] In both cases, 0 was meant as a minimum/null level of concern while 10 indicated the maximum level of concern.

Table 2. Descriptives

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
EU change attitude	2165	1.05	.44	0	2
EU retrospective evaluation	2201	1.779	.822	1	3
EU prospective evaluation	2186	1.73	.821	1	3
Risk of 2nd COVID-19 wave	2216	6.576	2.174	0	10
Risk of COVID-19 infection	2131	4.643	2.059	0	10
Economy evaluation (next 12 months)	2172	3.389	.867	1	5
FI vote in 2019 EP elections	2265	.04	.195	0	1
FdI vote in 2019 EP elections	2265	.037	.188	0	1
M5S vote in 2019 EP elections	2265	.159	.366	0	1
LEGA vote in 2019 EP elections	2265	.174	.379	0	1
PD vote in 2019 EP elections	2265	.246	.431	0	1

[5] The original wording of the question was: "Looking to the future, do you expect your economic situation over the next 12 months to be...?".
[6] The original wording of the question was: "In your opinion, how possible is it that you will get infected by the COVID-19 virus?".
[7] The original wording of the question was: "In your opinion, how possible is it that in the next few months there will be a second wave of contagion in Italy?".

5. Findings

A general overview of our data suggests that most of the respondents have not changed their minds about the EU. As detailed in Table 3, indeed, the prospective evaluation about EU membership in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic does not show relevant differences compared to the retrospective evaluations. About 80.37% of the sample confirmed their opinions while those changing their attitudes about their country's EU membership account for one fifth of the sample. Notably, given that rapid and sudden changes in attitudes are usually quite rare — even if minor — this portion of respondents must be considered as a potential (and remarkable) signal of the pandemic's impact on citizens' perceptions about the EU. Also, it is worth noticing that when looking at the direction of the switch in attitudes we found that 7.3% of the respondents have moved towards worsened feelings, while 12.3% have instead improved their sentiments towards the EU (Table 3).

Table 3. Switch in attitudes towards EU membership

	Percent
Worsened EU attitude	7.30
Same EU attitude	80.37
Improved EU attitude	12.33
N	2,165

In order to identify the potential factors contributing to explaining changes in respondents' attitudes towards EU membership, we ran a multinomial logistic model assessing the impact of independent variables accounting for pandemic, economic and political dimensions on the direction of shifting attitudes towards the EU. Interestingly, we found that the worsening and improving of individuals' opinions on EU membership are affected by a diverse set of factors working differently in terms of both significance and direction of the impact. In particular, our analyses suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic has an effect on attitudes towards the EU. In this respect, H1 — testing the EU rescuer argument — has quite blurred results. While concern about a second wave of COVID-19 contagion is not significant, meaning that it does not affect prospective evaluations of the EU, we found that concern about individual infection has an impact on decreasing the chances of improving evaluation of EU membership, while it has no effect on the worsening of individuals' attitudes, as compared to those maintaining a stable attitude towards the EU. Conversely, the economic factors (H2) have an effect only on the latter. Indeed, a negative outlook towards the economy decreases the chances of a turn towards negative EU attitudes if compared with those maintaining their opinion of the EU. Finally, H3, focusing on the party cueing dimension, is instead fully confirmed, signalling that partisanship plays a crucial role in orienting citizens' feelings on EU matters. It indeed proves significant in any case. The analyses show that — compared with those respondents maintaining their opinion on the EU — the vote for FDI, Lega in the 2019 EP is less likely to have a negative effect on the individual's attitudes towards the EU. Also, for respondents voting FI and M5S, the model shows a greater likelihood of change towards a positive attitude, as compared to those maintaining their evaluation on

EU membership. Finally, it should be noted that the electoral support for PD in the 2019 EP elections does not increase the chances of changing the evaluation on EU matters in either a positive or a negative direction. All in all, we find partial confirmation of our hypotheses. The three dimensions tested in our model indeed prove to have an impact on the switch of individual attitudes towards the EU. However, the kind of impact is different when investigating the direction of change.

Table 4. Multinomial Logit model (DV: worsening, improving and same EU attitudes)

	RRR	St. Err.	Sig
Worsening evaluation of EU membership			
Risk of COVID19 infection (0-10 scale)	.968	.04	
Risk of COVID19 2nd wave (0-10 scale)	.967	.038	
Economy evaluation (next 12 months)	.821	.085	*
FI	.96	.35	
FDI	.38	.218	*
M5S	.615	.195	
LEGA	.422	.106	***
PD	.392	.118	***
Constant	.431	.179	**
Improving the evaluation on EU membership			
Risk of COVID19 infection (0-10 scale)	.926	.031	**
Risk of COVID19 2nd wave (0-10 scale)	.993	.032	
Economy evaluation (next 12 months)	.995	.081	
FI	1.662	.474	*
FDI	1.116	.384	
M5S	2.124	.42	***
LEGA	.928	.168	
PD	.448	.122	***
Constant	.262	.091	***
Number of obs.	1988.000		
Pseudo r-squared	0.027		
Log Likelihood	-1271.394		

Source: *** p<.01, ** p<.05, * p<.1. Same evaluation on EU membership is the base outcome.

6. Conclusions

The pandemic emergency has, of course, impacted the public debate redefining political priorities, reshaping the political agenda also at the EU level. In this study we were interested in verifying whether and to what extent Italians' attitudes towards the EU may have changed in the immediate aftermath of the first wave of contagion and, more specifically, we investigated factors determining the worsening or else an improvement of Italians' opinions of EU matters.

Relying on individual survey data, we found that about one fifth of the respondents changed their attitude towards the EU. Given that feelings about the EU are not usually subject to drastic and radical shifts, this quota should be considered relevant, signalling that the pandemic emergency may have produced a re-definition of the EU image. In

particular, among these respondents, we can see a greater tendency to improve their opinion of EU matters, rather than turn to more negative evaluations.

When tested via inferential analysis, however, our results appear less univocal. If there were any doubts regarding the impact of party cueing on citizens' evaluations towards the EU (e.g., Carrieri 2020), in line with previous literature (see Hobolt 2007) findings suggest that partisanship affects individuals' perceptions of EU matters. Conversely, results on the utilitarian dimension are blurred, and the same applies to the pandemic dimension. More precisely, data suggest that even if the pandemic is interpreted exactly as one of those societal challenges needing a transnational policy intervention where the EU represents the fundamental (and leading) institution the path (and impact) of this health crisis is still unclear. In this respect, the EU may emerge as a rescuer. For sure, the pandemic emergency, combining both the health and economic crises, requires a sound ability to adapt and it could be interpreted as a trigger for a more profound change at the institutional level (Wolff and Ladi 2020).

The limitations of the article are clear both in terms of theoretical expectations and data availability. This study was carried out during a peculiar period that is still ongoing. Its merit is probably to have identified a notable change (about 20%) in the opinions of Italian citizens towards the EU — namely attitudes that normally don't change quickly. However, the reasons for this change do not emerge clearly from our analysis. On the one hand, when testing for diverse and possible changes in EU attitudes, the results do not appear robust enough, due to the limited number of cases. On the other hand, the availability of other variables — such as vertical and horizontal trust, territorial data about the management of the pandemic, reduction in income levels — could have offered additional interpretations. Besides, our data are a snapshot of a very precise phase of the pandemic crisis: the end of the first wave. Obviously, it is conceivable that the persistence of the crisis and the role played by the European institutions have continued to affect changes of opinion. Further studies should therefore move forward, disentangling the role of the EU at the economic and health levels. Italy is now preparing its recovery and resilience plan, the consequences of which should begin to be perceived in the coming months. At the same time, the vaccination campaign begun in January 2021 is expected to be fully operational before the summer. The success of both these processes will affect the support of Italian public opinion for the European integration project.

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The Broken Promise of Postmaterialism? Analysing Western European Parties' Emphases Through Manifesto Data (1990-2019)

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Abstract

The scholarly debate on the materialist/postmaterialist issue dimension mainly focuses on the demand-side of electoral politics, often asserting the well-known Inglehartian value-change thesis. This paper instead turns to the less studied supply-side, by empirically analysing the electoral supply of Western European political parties in first-order elections between 1990 and 2019. It relies on Manifesto Project (MARPOR) data on electoral manifestos to answer the research question on whether parties put greater emphasis on materialist or post-materialist issues. Specifically, it aggregates MARPOR categories in theoretically informed scores of materialism and postmaterialism to allow for cross-country and cross-time comparisons. In doing so, it empirically demonstrates that parties emphasise materialist questions significantly more than postmaterialist ones, throughout the entire timeframe. Such a finding is robust to various spatial and temporal checks, as well as several alternative aggregation specifications. It also holds in the particularly challenging context of Italy, which is illustrated in detail to reinforce the pooled conclusions. The presented results disconfirm postmaterialist arguments on the supply-side of electoral politics within the selected context of analysis, corroborating and extending in time previous work that went in this direction. This article contributes to the literature on electoral and issue politics, potentially opening up important research avenues.

1. Introduction

This article provides empirical evidence that materialist issues still constitute the main focus of political parties in their electoral supply, contrary to what is argued by the literature on postmaterialism. It does so by analysing Manifesto Project (MARPOR) data for all Western European parties contending national elections between 1990 and 2019, whilst answering the research question about whether materialist or post-materialist issues are more salient in such documents. The debate on the materialist/postmaterialist conflict constitutes a prolific research area, its most well-known theoretical argument being the so-called destructuration/dealignment or '*value-change*' (Abramson and Inglehart, 1995) thesis. This proposition posits that the more the changing conditions of advanced industrial societies provide greater satisfaction to the material needs of many, the more values, attitudes and political opinions will be shaped by non-material questions. Yet a sizeable portion of the scholarship insists that the traditional materialist, left-right axis remains the key determinant of political behaviour for both political parties and voters.

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This article adds to this debate by focusing on the less studied supply-side of electoral politics. Given the ascertained multidimensionality of the Western European policy space, with several accounts depicting it to be made up of at least a socio-economic left-right and a non-materialist axis (Lorenzini, Hutter and Kriesi, 2016; Rovný and Polk, 2013; Enyedi and Deegan-Krause, 2010), this paper tests the destructuration/dealignment thesis from a salience theory (Budge and Farlie, 1983) viewpoint. That is, it seeks to verify whether the postmaterialist dimension rose in importance on the supply-side of electoral competition, becoming the main axis in such a multidimensional policy space. It provides a novel contribution, which also analyses recent periods previously not covered by the literature.

This paper is structured as follows: Section 2 reviews the scholarly contributions on materialism and postmaterialism. Section 3 illustrates the research design of the article by introducing its research questions and hypotheses, data and spatial-temporal framework, and employed method of analysis. Section 4 provides and discusses the results of the empirical analysis by focusing on a baseline model and testing the pooled findings on the especially challenging Italian case, whilst also presenting robustness checks based on several alternative specifications. Lastly, Section 5 concludes by elaborating further on the findings and contribution of this paper, pointing out avenues for potential and relevant future research efforts to be based on the present work.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. (Left-right) Materialism

For several decades, the materialist contraposition between economic left and right positions was assumed to be the main dimension of political conflict and party competition. This tendency dates back to the seminal work by Anthony Downs (1957) on spatial competition in party politics. Borrowing from Hotelling's (1929) location model of inter-firm competition, the Downsian framework postulates the general principle whereby parties will compete against each other by adopting strategic positions, according to the distribution of voters ordered along one single dimension. Such a continuum is interpreted by Downs as the degree of government intervention in the economy (Stokes, 1963), which crucially influenced numerous scientific analyses in subsequent decades.

More specifically, this conflict is also referred to as '*Leftist-Rightist Materialism*', of which Knutsen shows both conceptual characteristics and analytical relevance. Theoretically, he argues, the left-right materialist question centres around the distribution of economic resources and power (Lafferty and Knutsen, 1984; Knutsen, 1988, 1989, 1995). It does so given the nature of left-right semantics as a heuristic device for the simplification of political complexities (Laponce, 1981; Fuchs and Klingemann, 1990), by incorporating themes such as market economy versus state regulation, protection of workers' rights versus pre-eminence of private enterprise, and socioeconomic equality versus inequality. Moreover, this axis constitutes an issue dimension in itself, separate from and independent of additional ones. All of these attributes follow Lipset and Rokkan's (1967) traditional structure of political cleavages in Western European industrial societies.

Empirically, Knutsen's (1988) analysis is one of many demonstrating the primacy of the left-right materialist dimension in shaping political competition in Western Europe. He investigated the importance of this continuum vis-à-vis the '*new politics*' dimension (Inglehart, 1977) in structuring and polarising public opinion in ten Western European countries in the 1970s and 1980s. By doing so, he found that the materialist axis was confirmed as the principal determinant of party preference and vote choice. This proposition is confirmed by other classic studies, especially within the theoretical strand of salience theory (Budge and Farlie, 1983). According to this framework, voting is first and foremost shaped by those issues and values which dominate the political agenda of a specific party-competition arena. In this vein, Lijphart's (1984) investigation of the salience of issue dimensions in 21 Western democracies showed that the left-right materialist axis was the only one to be salient in every single country. Furthermore, this dimension had high salience in 18 such territorial units, far outnumbering any other alternative. Likewise, Budge and Farlie's (1983) examination of issue-types in 23 democracies worldwide since the end of World War II reasserts the dominance of left-right materialism in issue agendas, accounting for roughly half of the overall salience of all issues.

Following on from the fundamental role played by left-right materialism in structuring Western politics, scholars have also engaged in linking this issue dimension with other important perspectives on electoral dynamics and voting behaviour. For instance, the centrepiece of conventional class voting viewpoints (Heath et al., 1985; Lipset and Rokkan, 1967) is the common economic interest stemming from affiliation to the same social group. This is crucial in times such as the post-war period, during which Western European democracies recorded high levels of party identification with political formations ideologically close to voters (van der Eijk and Niemöller, 1983; Alford, 1967). Such a consideration was primarily based on economic motives. Another relevant strand of literature, which analyses economic voting (Sanders, 1995; Lewis-Beck, 1990; Gow, 1990), takes the dialectic on traditional left-right materialist issues to be the most decisive causal factor of voting behaviour. Crucial here is the theorised link between economic conditions and electoral outcomes. Overall, this review illustrates how central left-right materialism has been in understanding and analysing Western politics for multitudes of social scientists, spanning more than half a century.

2.2. Postmaterialism

Yet the materialist hegemony as an analytical tool would come to be more and more challenged the further away in time scholars moved from the immediate post-war years. This is primarily due to Ronald Inglehart's (1971, 1977) '*silent revolution*': i.e., a deep and widespread transformation in value priorities amongst different generations of voters in Western countries, due to changing conditions in advanced industrial societies. Indeed, the Inglehartian theory posits that an irreversible shift in the hierarchy of values of Western electors, from materialism to *postmaterialism*, has occurred along a generational fault line (Inglehart, 2008). Specifically, those who spent their formative years in conditions of greater material security present a postmaterialist configuration of values. They thus prioritise issues such as the non-material quality of life, environmentalism, peace and disarmament, democratic participation and the expansion of freedoms and civil rights, among others. Hence, the younger and the more prosperous the individual, the

more postmaterialist their values, whilst the opposite is true for older and less secure cohorts, more attached to traditional materialist orientations.

Postmaterialism has been said to constitute a restructuration of political cleavages in Western societies (Inglehart, 1984), in a twofold manner. First is the change in how to conceive of the dimensionality of the political space, now seen as in need of both the traditional left-right materialist continuum and the integration of a vertical dimension. Second is the greater relative importance of the latter axis, compared to the former, in structuring value and electoral preferences in Western political systems. On the back of Inglehart's theoretical framework, several alternative and additional formulations of the same vertical axis have also been presented in the literature. Some authors focused on the *novelty* of the proposed electoral demand and offer, hence distinguishing between (postmaterialist) new politics and (materialist) old politics (Müller-Rommel, 1989; Franklin, 1992). Others relied on attitudes towards political authority and freedoms, therefore naming their dimension of contestation 'authoritarian-libertarian' (Kitschelt, 1994; Flanagan and Lee, 2003). Moreover, other works (Hooghe, Marks and Wilson, 2002; Bakker et al., 2012) expanded the postmaterialist intuition by constructing an elaborate 'GAL/TAN' axis. This opposes ecology, alternative politics and libertarianism on the 'GAL' pole to traditional moral values, opposition to immigration and defending the national community on the 'TAN' pole. Finally, in recent years the idea of a '*demarcationist*' cleavage has been introduced, with globalisation and its winners and losers at the heart of the conflict (Kriesi et al., 2006; Emanuele, Marino and Angelucci, 2020).

The far-reaching impact of the postmaterialist move captured the attention of the social sciences as a whole. As Promislo et al. (2015) underline, change deriving from the postmaterialist wave can be catalogued under several different categories. From a political viewpoint in particular, new parties, movements and forms of activism have emerged (Inglehart, 1997) as a consequence of the cultural shifts derived, in turn, from the changing values in Western societies (de Graaf and Evans, 1996; Abramson and Inglehart, 1995; Dalton, 1996). At the same time, existing political formations have often altered their organisational configurations. Several empirical studies also came to important conclusions concerning the implications of postmaterialism in structuring politics across the Western world. Kriesi (2010) demonstrates the effective existence of a value-based cleavage in Western Europe after the 1950s in terms of the three necessary elements to be classified as such, according to Bartolini and Mair (1990): a social divide, a sense of belonging to either of the two camps and an organisational structure of this conflict. Other sources confirmed that materialist left-right and postmaterialist values establish issue dimensions that are separate and independent from one another (for an overview, see: Lindell and Ibrahim, 2020). Furthermore, it was demonstrated that postmaterialist values are a powerful determinant of the rising vote for radical parties, both left and right, in Europe (Norris and Inglehart, 2019).

Nevertheless, for the present investigation, the key development deriving from this strand of literature is the very core of Inglehartian theory: i.e., the so-called destructuration/dealignment or value-change thesis. This argument affirms the weakening of traditional cleavages, such as the class cleavage upon which left-right materialism rests, and of the voting patterns based on them. Consequently, in terms of value hierarchies and dimensions of political competition, we shall expect an increasing prominence of

postmaterialism in shaping public opinion, party positions and electoral outcomes. This should happen alongside a decrease in the importance of materialism. Indeed, such an occurrence is empirically observed in classic political science works on attitudinal and electoral change in Western advanced industrial democracies (Dalton et al., 1984; Franklin et al., 1992). Clear generational trends were also observed, as hypothesised by this theoretical framework (van der Brug, 2010). More recent contributions highlight how materialist left-right positions are obscured by postmaterialist GAL/TAN attitudes when it comes to predicting support for European integration, in a postfunctionalist framework (Hooghe and Marks, 2008; Lubbers and Jaspers, 2011). Lastly, political competition seems to be increasingly structured around non-economic considerations, as the literature on the demarcationist issue dimension (e.g., Kriesi et al., 2006, 2012) suggests. In conclusion, a large number of sources provide robust and varied empirical evidence for the destructuration/dealignment thesis, especially on the demand-side of electoral politics.

3. Research design

3.1. Research question and hypothesis

The presented literature is largely centred around the configuration of public opinion and electorates in terms of values and attitudes: i.e., on the demand-side of political competition. Whilst contributions on the offer of political formations are also present (Hooghe and Marks, 2018; Hutter, Kriesi and Vidal, 2008; Stoll, 2010), such studies are, however, less common than those concerning the electoral demand. Therefore, the present investigation aims at exploring whether the postmaterialist turn has occurred on the other side of the circuit of representation: the supply-side of electoral politics. In other words, this paper focuses on political parties, specifically with regard to their electoral supply. From this perspective, in light of the illustrated debate, it is possible to introduce the main research question [RQ1] surrounding whether postmaterialism overshadowed materialism in terms of party emphasis, with reference to the spatial and temporal framework analysed in this paper. Moreover, precisely in light of such a broad cross-sectional and longitudinal scope, it is also possible to ask a number of additional research questions [RQ2, RQ3 and RQ4] to explore fine-grained patterns more closely.

> **[RQ1]: Have Western European political parties placed more emphasis on materialist issues or postmaterialist issues in recent decades?**
>
> [RQ2]: How does the emphasis of parties on materialist and postmaterialist issues evolve over the investigated timeframe?
>
> [RQ3]: Are there geographical differences in the patterns of emphasis on materialist and postmaterialist issues across Western Europe?
>
> [RQ4]: Do different party families emphasise materialism and postmaterialism differently?

The theoretical framework illustrated here allows for the formulation of a key argument, in order to guide the subsequent empirical analysis. Indeed, as shown for the demand-side of electoral politics, whereas materialist issues seem to be prevalent in contexts of relative physical and economic insecurity such as the immediate post-war years,

the situation seems to be different afterwards. That is, the further away in time voting generations and scholarly contributions move from the period of post-war reconstruction, the greater the emphasis that electors are expected to put on postmaterialist rather than materialist questions. This occurrence is hypothesised to be primarily because of the progressive increase in material security of advanced industrialised societies over time. Due to the reasonable expectation of politicisation of the materialist/postmaterialist conflict in Western political systems, whereby party-voter congruence (Carrieri, 2020) on such issues should be found, we would assume that the same trend is reflected in the electoral supplys of political parties. Hence, given the spatial-temporal framework of this analysis as per the following section, it is possible to formulate a central hypothesis: in general, we expect political parties to put greater emphasis on postmaterialist issues than on materialist issues [H1]. Further, in response to the presented additional research questions, we expect both postmaterialism to be increasingly emphasised and materialism to be increasingly de-emphasised during the 1990s and 2000s. This trend should be less clear in the 2010s, given both the material insecurity brought about by the global financial and Eurozone crises and the expected greater salience of postmaterialism, mainly due to Europe's migrant emergency [H2]. Finally, postmaterialism should be emphasised more strongly in contexts such as Continental Europe [H3]. This is primarily because of the strong green and nationalist parties that have emerged in this geographical area, which in general are expected to be the greatest emphasisers of postmaterialism alongside special issue parties [H4]. Materialism, on the other hand, should have a competitive advantage in contexts where there is either a tradition of powerful labour representation or where strong green movements are lacking.

> **[H1]: Western European political parties will emphasise postmaterialist issues more than materialist issues in recent decades.**
>
> [H2]: During the 1990s and 2000s, postmaterialism will be increasingly emphasised, whilst materialism will be increasingly de-emphasised. This trend should be less clear in the 2010s.
>
> [H3]: Postmaterialism will be emphasised more strongly in Continental Europe than in the remaining geographical clusters.
>
> [H4]: Green, nationalist and special issue parties will emphasise postmaterialism more strongly than other party families.

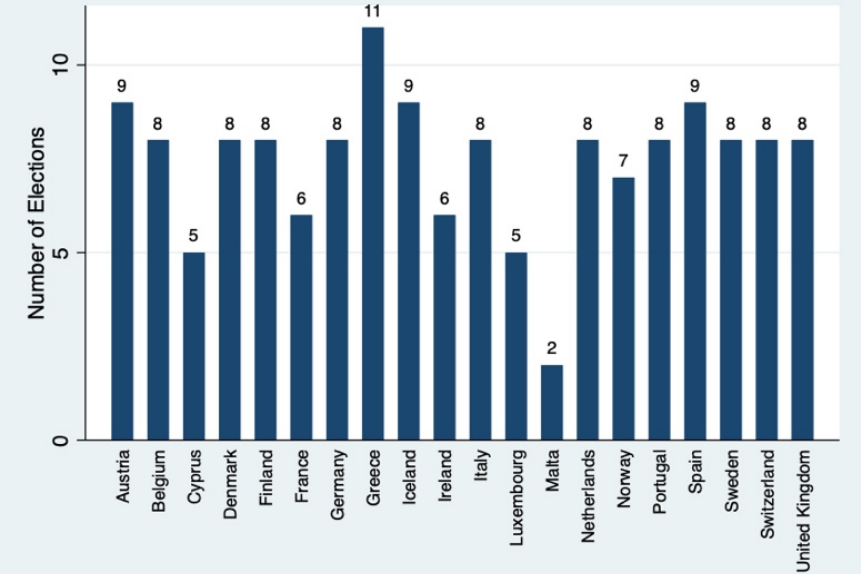
3.2. Data and spatial-temporal framework

To answer the introduced research questions and test the presented hypotheses, this analysis will employ the data on electoral manifestos provided by the *Manifesto Project* (henceforth '*MARPOR*').[1] Such documents, which are produced by parties ahead of electoral campaigns, have become a standard source of supply-side data in electoral studies, for two reasons. Firstly, electoral manifestos are crucial documents for political competition and party democracy, because of the essential functions that they fulfil during campaigns (Eder, Jenny and Müller, 2017). Indeed, they provide the official stances of a party, which are then often reflected in policy outputs at the governmental level (Brouard et al., 2018), they streamline the party efforts during campaigns, and they are

[1] The Manifesto Project Dataset version employed at the time of the analysis is *2020a*.

used as campaign material. Secondly, the MARPOR is one of the largest research projects in comparative political science worldwide. It supplies scholars with content analyses of electoral manifestos according to a coding scheme that consists of seven domains and 56 categories. Through this framework, the project examines around 4650 documents of almost 1200 parties, covering more than 750 elections from 1920 up to the present in 56 countries spanning five continents (Volkens et al., 2020). For the present purpose of analysing whether parties place more emphasis on postmaterialist rather than materialist issues, these features and tools make the MARPOR better equipped compared to the main alternatives of expert surveys. Furthermore, the MARPOR adopts a salience theoretical framework (Budge and Farlie, 1983) which is ideal for answering the research question at hand; hence, a theoretical perspective that will also be adopted here.

Figure 1. Distribution of elections per country covered by the MARPOR



Source: own elaboration

The spatial focus of this paper is the entirety of Western Europe, defined according to conventional criteria in empirical political science (see, for instance, Emanuele, 2018; Lago and Montero, 2014; Caramani, 2004). Consequently, the territorial units under scrutiny amount to 20 nations, further grouped into four geographical clusters: the British Isles and Continental, Northern and Southern Europe.[2] Timewise, the empirical focus of this article is on the three decades following the political watershed of the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989). Therefore, it considers all elections for which MARPOR data is available between 1990 and 2019. With regard to the relevant scholarly debate, this choice of time period allows for an extension of Stoll's (2010) article, in which the author performs a comparable supply-side analysis of manifesto data from 1950 to 2005. Hence,

[2] Complete list of countries: Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom. *Clusters:* a. British Isles: Ireland, United Kingdom; b. Continental Europe: Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Switzerland; c. Northern Europe: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden; d. Southern Europe: Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain.

such a choice would allow not only for confirmation or rejection of prior conclusions, but also for generating novel findings related to a period which is more recent and so far not covered. Stemming from the introduced spatial-temporal framework, all the available electoral manifestos for all party systems are analysed, in every election covered by the MARPOR: i.e., a total of 1159 documents by 307 parties over 146 elections. The distribution of elections per country is presented in Figure 1.

3.3. Method of analysis

The empirical test of the presented hypotheses will be conducted by employing MARPOR data. Specifically, the scores of both the postmaterialist and the materialist MARPOR categories will be aggregated, so as to allow for comparing the percentage of each analysed electoral manifesto devoted to either of the two types. In this way, it will be possible to assess which of the two kinds of issues is more emphasised by political parties in their electoral supply. The main hypothesis of this paper [H1] will be tested against several different specifications: that is, the aggregation of the MARPOR categories belonging to either of the two poles will be undertaken according to different theoretical indications. This will ensure the robustness of the findings of this empirical analysis, by checking whether they hold in alternative models.

The baseline specification ('*Spec 1*') sees, on the one hand, the materialist themes operationalised by employing most of the MARPOR categories that either belong to domain #4 on the economy in the coding scheme of the project (Werner, Lacewell and Volkens, 2015); or deal with material economic themes such as, for instance, the welfare state and labour rights and retribution. On the other hand, postmaterialist issues will be made operational by employing those MARPOR categories that better represent the GAL/TAN issue dimension. This specification will be the main focus of the ensuing analysis: additional models are included for robustness checks only and the details about these, such as the related aggregations, are reported in the *Appendix*. The GAL/TAN dimension was chosen as it was considered better positioned, compared to alternative theoretical specifications including Inglehart's own (1977), to operationalise postmaterialism within the boundaries of the MARPOR coding scheme. This is because, by being spelt out in greater detail and specificity, the GAL/TAN conceptualisation makes it possible to identify more relevant MARPOR categories to be employed than any other alternative. It thus allows for a more complete test of the presented hypothesis.

Practically, for the baseline model (*Spec 1*) the MARPOR items were aggregated as per Figure 2.[3] Additionally, this paper will present the results of an alternative model

[3] Firstly, the issues falling under the labels *per401* to *per415* (all within the '*economy*' domain) were considered as materialist, in addition to the categories on expanding or reducing public expenditure for welfare state and educational provisions (*per504* to *per507*) and on how to relate to workers and farmers (*per701* to *per703*). Secondly, the following MARPOR categories and their related positional opposites in the coding scheme, where available, were aggregated as postmaterialist. These are *per416* on environmental sustainability and *per501* on environmental protection, *per202* on alternative versus traditional forms of democracy, *per201* on freedoms, *per603* on promoting traditional values (versus its positional opposite, *per604*), *per608* on negative attitudes toward diversity (versus *per607*), and *per601* on promoting national values (versus *per602*). The *per503* on equality was not included in the model, as its ambiguous formulation makes it impossible to distinguish between its materialist (redistribution of resources) and postmaterialist (equal rights and against discrimination) components. Furthermore, some caveats apply to the *per416* on environmental sustainability. This item, which also refers to anti-growth

('*Spec 2*'), which operationalises materialism in the same way as *Spec 1*, whilst approaching postmaterialism differently. Indeed, the latter is made operational by looking at Inglehart's very definition of postmaterialism. This is centred specifically on democratisation, rights and freedoms, making life more humane, improving the quality of life and focusing on the non-material necessities of the individual. Hence, this model tests the presented hypothesis against a more direct definition of postmaterialism in relation to Inglehart's work. It constitutes a supplementary check vis-à-vis the results of the empirical analysis, thus enhancing their robustness. Finally, further specifications ('*Spec 3*', '*Spec 4*' and '*Spec 5*') which implement the aspect of political ideology in the analysis will also be presented. Here, political ideology is intended as the semantic opposition between left and right poles concerning the attitudes towards three fundamental questions: inequalities, social change and human nature (White, 2011, 2013; Bobbio, 1997; Anderson, 1998; Lukes, 2003). Indeed, according to this conceptual definition, both materialist and postmaterialist questions can potentially assume an ideological value, according to whether they fit these theoretical prescriptions. The significance of such specifications for the robustness of the findings will be illustrated upon presentation of the results.

Figure 2. Spec I Aggregation

Materialist MARPOR Categories – Spec 1	**Postmaterialist MARPOR Categories – Spec 1**
per401 - Free Market Economy	*per201* - Freedom and Human Rights
per402 - Incentives: Positive	*per202* - Democracy
per403 - Market Regulation	*per416* - Anti-Growth Economy and Sustainability
per404 - Economic Planning	*per501* - Environmental Protection
per405 - Corporatism/Mixed Economy	*per601* - National Way of Life: Positive
per406 - Protectionism: Positive	*per602* - National Way of Life: Negative
per407 - Protectionism: Negative	*per603* - Traditional Morality: Positive
per408 - Economic Goals	*per604* - Traditional Morality: Negative
per409 - Keynesian Demand Management	*per607* - Multiculturalism: Positive
per410 - Economic Growth: Positive	*per608* - Multiculturalism: Negative
per411 - Technology and Infrastructure: Positive	
per412 - Controlled Economy	
per413 - Nationalisation	
per414 - Economic Orthodoxy	
per415 - Marxist Analysis: Positive	
per504 - Welfare State Expansion	
per505 - Welfare State Limitation	
per506 - Education Expansion	
per507 - Education Limitation	
per701 - Labour Groups: Positive	
per702 - Labour Groups: Negative	
per703 - Agriculture and Farmers	

Source: own elaboration

politics, was included in its entirety because, by design of the MARPOR coding scheme, it is impossible to separate the scores for the anti-growth and sustainability parts for large parts of the dataset. The smaller *per416_2*, which is solely on environmental sustainability, was not considered instead, as it would have resulted in many missing values, given that it only covers a small portion of the MARPOR dataset. Moreover, the positional opposite of *per416*, i.e. *per410* on the positive role of economic growth, was not aggregated to the postmaterialist pole, but rather to the materialist one. This is because, as per the description provided in the MARPOR codebook, this category is specifically and solely centred around the economy and material production. Instead, the focus of *per416* is political rather than economic, in light of which this decision appears justified. Figure 2 illustrates the MARPOR categories of the baseline model.

4. Results

4.1. Baseline model (Spec I)

The empirical analysis of this paper provides us with surprising results. Indeed, the central finding of this investigation as a whole is an outright rejection of the main hypothesis derived from the literature [H1]. That is, Western European political parties emphasise materialist issues significantly more than postmaterialist ones in their electoral manifestos, during the selected timeframe (1990-2019). This is evident when analysing how many manifestos dedicate a larger space to materialism or postmaterialism, by looking at the sums of the raw percentages provided by the MARPOR dataset for the categories referring to either of the two poles. Indeed, focusing specifically on the baseline model (*Spec 1*), the number of electoral manifestos placing greater emphasis on materialist themes than they do with postmaterialist ones is 997 out of 1159, with only 172 documents emphasising postmaterialism more than materialism. Percentagewise, this translates into 85.16% of all analysed manifestos favouring materialist over postmaterialist issues, and only 14.84% vice-versa. Such a ratio of almost 6 to 1 indicates that, in recent decades, materialism has still been considered more salient than postmaterialism on the supply-side of electoral politics in roughly six times the number of documents than those that opt for the opposite approach. This conclusion is in striking contrast with previous well-known arguments made by several scholars, substantively as well as in terms of magnitude. Moreover, whilst this result and its proportions might seem a direct consequence of the imbalance in the number of MARPOR categories making up the two poles, with the materialist end far outnumbering the postmaterialist one, controlling for such a fact provides reassurance. Indeed, when the percentage of manifestos favouring either of the two poles is weighted by the percentage of a document that each related set of MARPOR items would occupy, in the ideal situation where all 56 of them are emphasised equally, the finding is confirmed.[4] In Spec 1 a majority of manifestos (51.16% versus

[4] The rationale for the weighting procedure is controlling for the effects deriving from a potential imbalance in the number of MARPOR categories making up the materialist and postmaterialist poles in different specifications, which in itself is only determined by the specific theoretical framework of reference and how this fits the pre-existing MARPOR coding scheme. Indeed, a greater emphasis on either of the two poles in a given manifesto might not necessarily derive from the fact that, for instance, materialist themes are more emphasised than postmaterialist ones, but from the document presenting more materialist than postmaterialist MARPOR categories, hence the resulting aggregate emphasis being greater. To apply such a control, the weighting procedure artificially creates the situation whereby all MARPOR categories are emphasised equally in any given manifesto. There being 56 MARPOR categories to cover 100% of the space of any given document, the percentage that any MARPOR category should occupy is $100\%/56 \simeq 1.79\%$. This is subsequently multiplied by the number of categories making up the materialist and postmaterialist poles for any given specification. These values become, then, the denominators of the ratios which see as the numerators the sum of the emphases on the categories belonging to, respectively, the materialist and postmaterialist poles in any given manifesto. The results of such ratios are the weighted emphases on materialism and postmaterialism. Therefore, if we are affirming that a manifesto emphasises materialism more than postmaterialism, this result is only robust to the weighting procedure if also the weighted emphasis on materialism is greater than the weighted emphasis on postmaterialism.

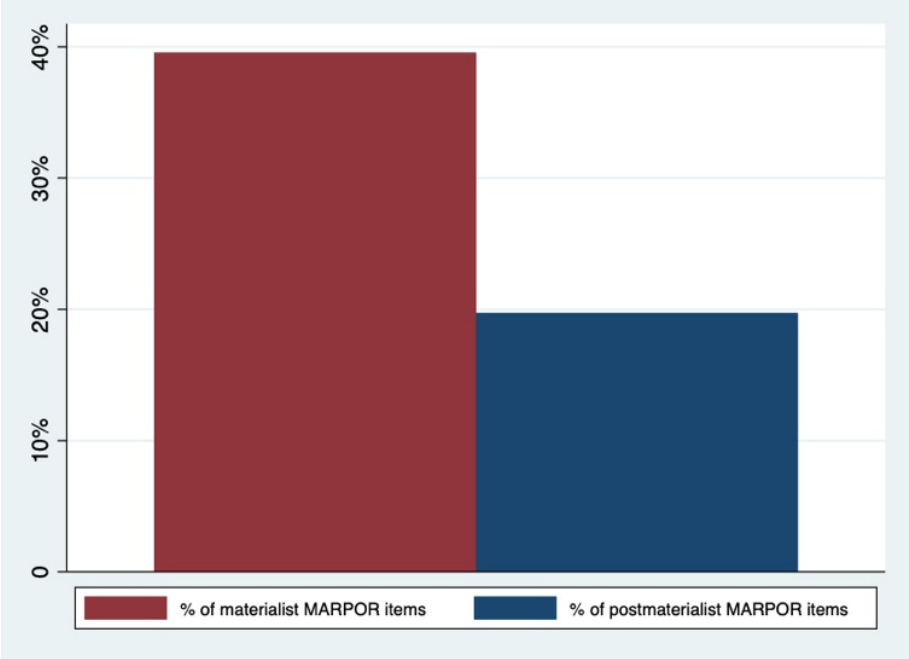
48.23%) still emphasise materialism over postmaterialism, even after this procedure.[5] This weighting procedure is replicated with every additional model.

Further elaborations illustrate more facets of the presented finding. The bar chart in Figure 3 shows the pooled mean values of the emphasis put on both materialist and postmaterialist issues as a percentage of each document, across all the analysed electoral manifestos. As is evident, on average, materialist themes are emphasised twice as much as postmaterialist ones in any given manifesto. In itself, this constitutes another strong result and challenge to the destructuration/dealignment thesis. Materialism is usually almost half of the focus of any document (39.55%), reasserting itself as a very important component of the electoral supply. On the other hand, whilst postmaterialism also appears as relevant in electoral manifestos, accounting for one-fifth of the overall emphasis (19.72%), it is still significantly trumped by its materialist counterpart. A look at the evolution over time of the emphasis on materialism and postmaterialism across the employed dataset further confirms and enriches this conclusion, whilst contradicting [H2]. As per Figure 4, the gap between the focus on the two poles is reinstated by this longitudinal perspective. Indeed, the distance between the salience put on materialist and postmaterialist MARPOR items consistently remains sizeable over the selected timespan. This is surprising, as it appears that the global and European financial crises in the late 2010s did not have a significant impact on the balance between materialism and postmaterialism in the electoral supply of parties. Materialism and postmaterialism are closer, although still rather apart, only in the early-to-mid-1990s, the very period of Tony Blair and John Prescott's mantra: '*we are all middle class now*'. Furthermore, on average, postmaterialist emphases hover around 20% with no discernible trend, if not in the late 2010s. As expected, there is a steep increase in the salience of postmaterialism during this period, which can potentially be linked to the 2014 European migrant crisis. Moreover, the increasing relevance of the debate surrounding the environment might also be a contributing factor. Still, mean materialist emphases present a clearer and more marked linear increasing trend throughout the analysed timeframe. This finding is reinforced by a strong positive correlation between election year and mean emphases on materialism, with *Pearson's r* = 0.745 at 0.01 significance level; whilst the correlation between time and mean emphases on postmaterialism is weak (*Pearson's r* = 0.299).[6] Once more, this also comes in stark contradiction to many influential theoretical arguments. Indeed, not only does the salience of materialism not decrease, but it rather increases whilst, instead, postmaterialist emphases remain mostly stable, without growing significantly. As a result of this, the rift between the two poles actually widens over time.

[5] The following consideration could also be added: the fact that the MARPOR codebook includes more materialist than postmaterialist items by design also constitutes a noteworthy descriptive finding in itself.

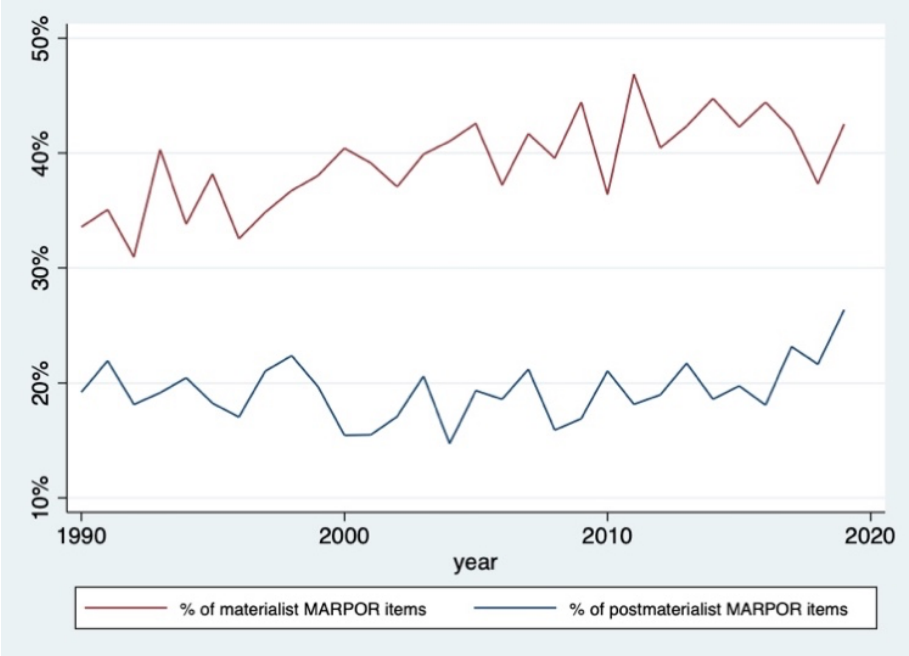
[6] See *Appendix*.

Figure 3. Pooled Mean Emphases on Materialism and Postmaterialism



Source: own elaboration

Figure 4. Evolution of Pooled Mean Emphases over Time



Source: own elaboration

Figure 5 shows a more fine-grained picture of how the pooled mean emphasis put by the analysed parties on materialism and postmaterialism in their manifestos developed over each decade. It can be observed that, whilst the salience on materialist issues

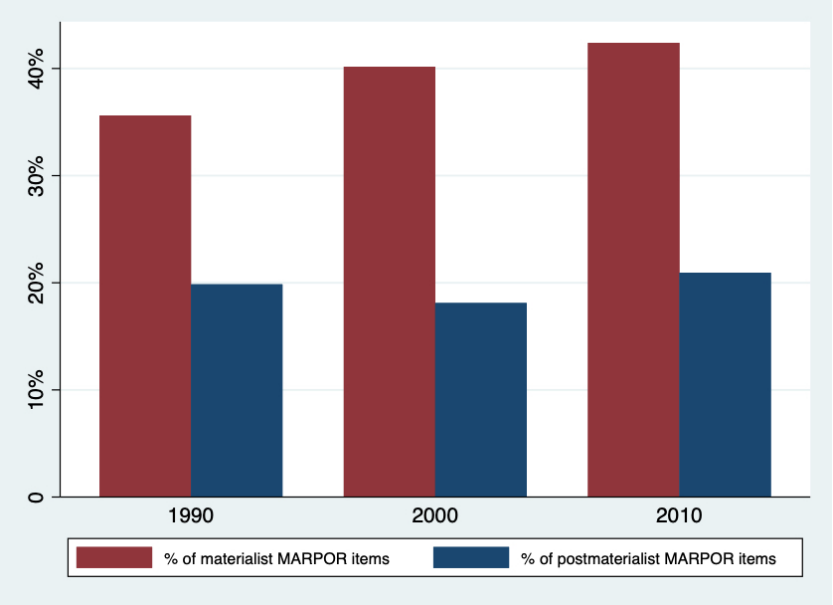
increases constantly, the focus on postmaterialist themes decreases from the 1990s to the 2000s and increases in the 2010s. Interesting patterns emerge when breaking down the temporal evolution of materialist and postmaterialist emphases from a spatial viewpoint, as they tend to move together across the different areas of Western Europe.[7] Indeed, as a general trend, materialism is more emphasised than postmaterialism in the 1990s, especially in the last years of the decade, whilst the opposite is true in the 2000s. In the 2010s, it is possible to speculate about the impact of the economic and migrant crises. The former hits between the late 2000s and early 2010s and coincides with a spike in materialist emphases in the first half of the decade. However, as the traumatic outbreak of the economic crisis fades away, this seems to be replaced from 2014 onwards with Europe's migrant crisis, which instead corresponds to a complete reversal of the precedent trend in the second half of the 2010s. During this period, indeed, the most decisive rise yet in the relevance of postmaterialist policy positions is observed, at the expense of materialism. The illustrated data shows that this is both a clear and ongoing trend: therefore, it will be interesting to see whether it will continue in the future. As an exception to the outlined trends, Southern Europe appears to constitute a spatial outlier, given that it only follows the illustrated patterns in the 1990s. In the 2000s, the emphasis on materialist issues by Southern European parties clearly increases, whereas it decreases in the early 2010s, remaining stable in the second half of the decade. The 2010-2015 period also sees an increase in postmaterialist emphases not registered elsewhere; whilst in the other periods, including from 2015 onwards, Southern Europe follows the general patterns of salience of postmaterialism. In light of the illustrated trends, the Southern European case remains counterintuitive and puzzling. Hit the hardest by the economic turmoil and with three countries undergoing international financial bailouts (Greece, Portugal and Spain), the diminished salience of materialism throughout the 2010s counters expectations, making it particularly difficult to interpret. Perhaps the anticipated emphasis on materialist questions in the 2000s, probably due to already weaker economic outlooks in the area, gives way earlier to the prominence of postmaterialist questions, already arising in the early 2010s, including, especially, the issue of mass migration, which is most salient in this area. Nevertheless, due to its peculiarities and counter intuitiveness, Southern Europe surely demands a closer look, which is beyond the scope of this paper.

With specific reference to [RQ3], Figure 6 also illustrates the pooled mean emphases on materialism and postmaterialism in the various clusters. Throughout every geographical grouping, materialist issues are, on average, given greater salience than postmaterialist ones. This confirms that the main finding of this study is spatially robust. Nevertheless, some interesting differences emerge from the graph. It is noticeable that the distance between the two poles is narrower in Continental Europe, where materialism is at its lowest and postmaterialism at its highest, hence confirming [H3]. This outcome is not surprising, as we can expect to find relevant political formations emphasising postmaterialist issues in this geographical area, such as radical right (e.g. Front National in France and Alternative für Deutschland in Germany) and green parties (e.g. in Austria, Belgium and Germany), on both empirical and theoretical grounds (Charalambous, 2015; Ignazi, 1997; van Haute, 2019; Müller-Rommel, 1994). On the contrary,

[7] Supporting figures are included in Section d) in the *Appendix*.

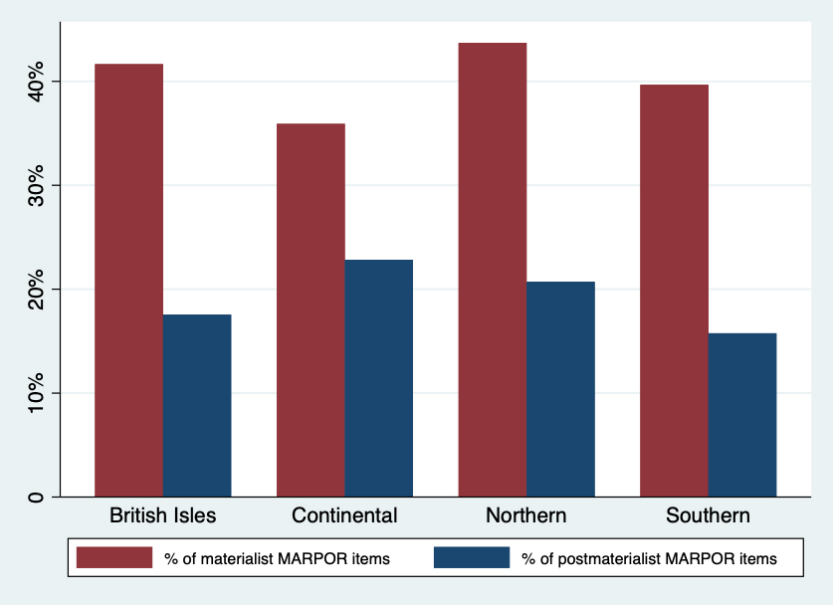
the gaps in the remaining groupings are very large. Speculating on the reasons why such differences occur is challenging: however, as per [H3], one might notice how certain trends are associated with the presence of powerful labour representation (e.g. British Isles and Northern Europe) or to the absence of strong green movements (e.g. Southern Europe).

Figure 5. Pooled Mean Emphases per Decade



Source: own elaboration

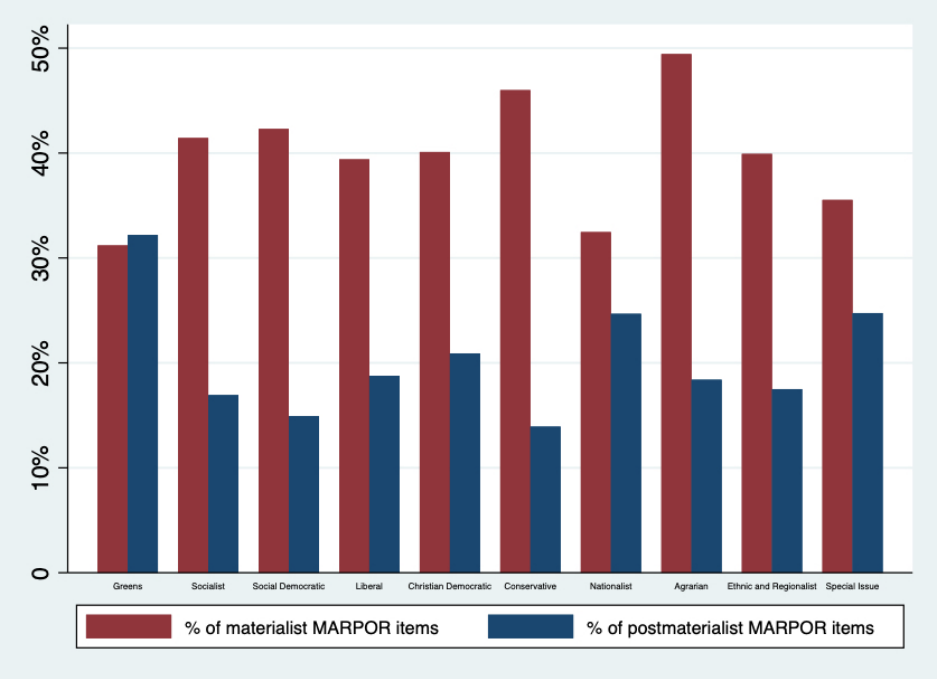
Figure 6. Pooled Mean Emphases per Territorial Cluster



Source: own elaboration

Very interesting findings are provided by looking at differences between different party families, in response to [RQ4]. Figure 7 displays bar charts with the pooled mean emphases across the analysed dataset per party family, according to the MARPOR classification. It is immediately evident that this is the only test providing a partial disconfirmation of the presented general conclusion. This is because green parties emphasise postmaterialist issues more than materialist ones in their electoral manifestos. The explanation to this exception is logical and convincing, given the focus of such formations on questions related to the environment. However, the gap between the salience of these two poles varies between different party families, and such a variation could be accounted for descriptively along the same lines. Indeed, the other two groupings which present a much more balanced configuration of emphases compared to the rest are nationalist and special issue parties. Again, this makes sense in light of their focus, respectively, on the 'TAN' side of the postmaterialist axis and on questions that escape the logics and boundaries of traditional, left-right materialist politics. This confirms [H4], which is further reinforced by the very large rifts recorded for mainstream parties, including socialist and social democratic formations, due to their strong emphasis on materialist issues related to traditional economic-left issues.

Figure 7. Pooled Mean Emphases per Party Family



Source: own elaboration

4.2. The Italian case: a challenging test

The Italian case provides a demanding test of the illustrated main finding, as it constitutes a particularly fertile breeding ground for postmaterialism from a political and historical viewpoint.[8] Several scholarly contributions analyse the dimensionality of the

[8] Further visual references for the Italian case are provided in the *Appendix*.

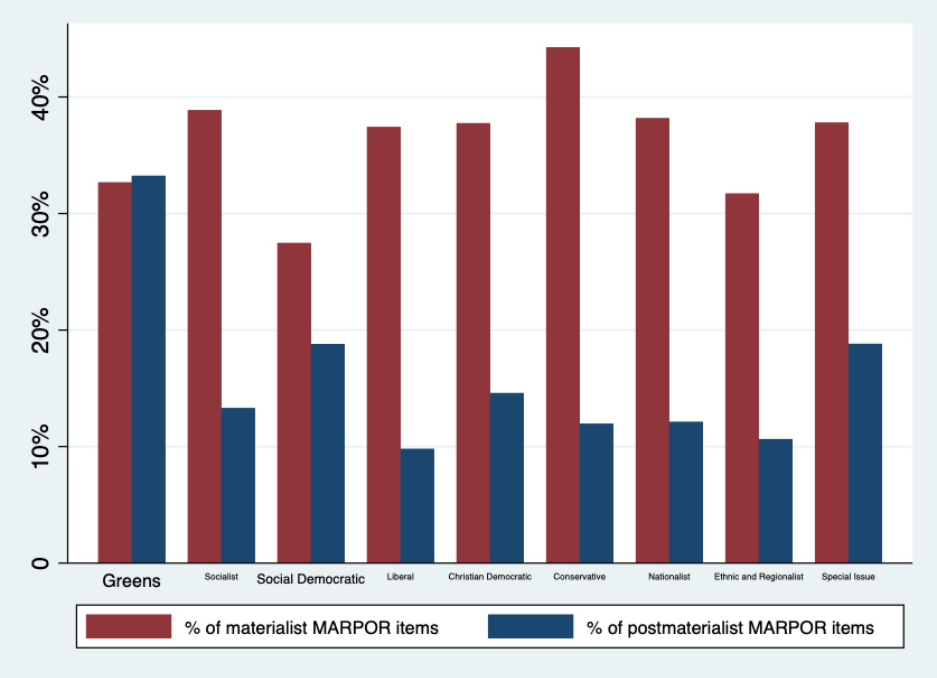
Italian policy space in recent decades (see, for instance, Giannetti, Pedrazzani and Pinto, 2016; Di Virgilio et al., 2015), highlighting in all cases a multidimensional, and at least bi-dimensional structure of competition. Among these works, Giannetti, Pedrazzani and Pinto (2018) point to the rise of a cultural, non-materialist axis of competition at the expense of the declining salience of materialist issues in parties' electoral supply between 2001 and 2018. Further, these empirical conclusions are reinforced by some historical peculiarities of the Italian case. Specifically, differently from other Western European democracies, the class conflict in Italy was always played down by the inter-class, social market economy-based worldview and political agenda of the hegemonic Democrazia Cristiana (DC) up until the 1990s. Coupled with the unique proximity and political influence of the Catholic Church, such a context contributed to scaling down the class conflict, whilst at the same time generating extremely intense conflicts on non-economic issues. These included postmaterialist questions centred around quality of life, such as civil rights (e.g. abortion and divorce). Moreover, in recent times the importance of postmaterialism for Italian political competition resurfaced through the rise and action of the Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S) (Conti and Memoli, 2015). Indeed, M5S's traditional focus prominently features postmaterialist themes such as alternative forms of (direct) democracy and safeguarding the environment, to which it dedicates two of its five core commitments ('*stars*'). In light of all these, the Italian case constitutes a particularly demanding context on which to test the prevalence of materialist over postmaterialist issues in terms of party salience, as we expect the latter to be particularly relevant. Do the pooled findings of this paper hold in Italy too?

By replicating the analysis in full, its core result is fully confirmed in this particular context: in the last thirty years, Italian parties have emphasised materialism much more than postmaterialism in their electoral manifestos. In Italy, materialist MARPOR items trumped their postmaterialist counterparts in 86.17% of documents (81 out of 94), with the opposite scenario only occurring in 13.83% of the examined instances (13). As regards the pooled analysis, this conclusion is robust to the aforementioned weighting procedure. After this step, more than twice as many manifestos still feature materialism (68.09%) more prominently than postmaterialism (31.91%): respectively, 64 versus 30 documents. The mean emphases on the two poles are also in line with the pooled findings, as materialist MARPOR categories occupy, on average, 36.86% of any given manifesto. Postmaterialist emphases, on the other hand, only constitute, on average, 15.23% of any document, yet again more than doubled by the focus on materialist themes.

The temporal evolution of the relevance of materialism and postmaterialism is also coherent with the pooled analysis: indeed, whilst the emphases on the former increase more visibly over time, those on the latter only follow suit ever so slightly. At the same time, the rise in postmaterialist emphases in the 2010s can be linked to both the relevance of the migration and environmental debates, shared with the rest of Western Europe, and to the aforementioned emergence of M5S. However, a close-up of party families confirms the main finding of the pooled analysis in that the partial exception to it is the grouping of the greens (which includes the *Federazione dei Verdi* and *Il Girasole*), which is the only one to favour postmaterialist emphases over materialist ones. This means that even special issue parties, to which the M5S belongs, present a wide drift between the two poles, although the MARPOR dataset only reports two observations (2013

and 2018) for this party. Finally, as per Figure 8, it is Italian social democracy that, despite longstanding commitments on left-wing materialist questions, presents the closest configuration of materialist and postmaterialist issue salience after the greens. In the MARPOR dataset, this party family includes many and varied political actors, among which the principal ones are the *Partito Socialista Italiano*, *L'Ulivo* and *Partito Democratico*. While one can only speculate about this curious facet, we are reminded here of the argument that in Italy a fully-fledged, Scandinavian-like social democratic movement never truly came to fruition (Pasquino, 2013), a fact of which this may even be a side-effect. In conclusion, the main results of this study are strongly confirmed and reinforced by this probe into the case of Italy: i.e., a particularly challenging context for the prevalence of materialist emphases, because of the reasons outlined above.

Figure 8. Mean Emphases per Party Family in Italy



Source: own elaboration

4.3. Robustness checks

The complete replication of the pooled empirical analysis with the alternative specifications, in order to test the robustness of the illustrated findings, provides convincing results. Table 1 reports the percentages of how many electoral manifestos emphasise materialism over postmaterialism and vice-versa, per every model. For the *Spec 2* model, which operationalised postmaterialism by following Inglehart's definition and materialism in the same way as the baseline model (*Spec 1*), the results are confirmed. Indeed, in 89.3% of all analysed manifestos greater emphasis is put on materialist rather than postmaterialist issues, the opposite case occurring in 10.7% of all documents. This is reinforced by the same weighting procedure as above, which confirms the conclusion reached. Therefore, not only is the initial finding backed up by this alternative specification, but it is also incremented in its proportions. This indicates that the baseline model

(*Spec 1*) actually constitutes a conservative estimate, with favourable amplifying effects towards postmaterialism. The pooled mean emphases on the two poles are also in line with the findings: the value for postmaterialism amounts to 17.78% for any given manifesto, and the score for materialism stays at 39.55%. The additional checks in terms of the spatial-temporal framework and party families also confirm the robustness of the results, whilst concurrently exacerbating the predominance of materialism over postmaterialism. Indeed, with this specification the greens too emphasise the former more than the latter, given the absence of MARPOR categories on environmentalism in this aggregation. All the checks are available in the *Appendix*.

Table 1. Percentage of Manifestos with Prevalence of either Materialism or Postmaterialism per Model

Model	Materialism > Postmaterialism	Postmaterialism > Materialism
Spec 1	85.16%	14.84%
Spec 2	89.30%	10.70%
Spec 3	92.40%	7.60%
Spec 4	77.50%	22.50%
Spec 5	81.40%	18.60%

Furthermore, specifications that account for the dimension of political ideology whilst analysing materialist and postmaterialist questions have been included, to provide additional theoretical refinement to this study. The first of such models, *Spec 3*, presents altogether different operationalisations of materialism and postmaterialism. However, the following two specifications, *Spec 4* and *Spec 5*, operationalise postmaterialism in the same way as, respectively, the *Spec 1* and *Spec 2* models. Indeed, they include the issues indicated by GAL/TAN (*Spec 4*) or Inglehart himself (*Spec 5*) as postmaterialist. Yet they do so whilst still sharing the same operationalisation of materialism as *Spec 3*, and thus decreasing the number of MARPOR categories making up the materialist pole compared to the previous two specifications. By design, this should result in a relatively favourable bias towards postmaterialist issues, hence contributing to the reduction of potential gaps. This element is very important, as it comes into play when looking at the results. Indeed, all three models confirm tout-court the findings of the analysis.[9] In particular, this is also true for the two specifications where the number of materialist MARPOR categories included was reduced without changing the postmaterialist pole, which stayed either GAL/TAN (*Spec 4*) or Inglehartian (*Spec 5*). These report scores related to the percentage of documents emphasising more materialism than postmaterialism of, respectively, 77.5% versus 22.5% and of 81.4% versus 18.6%. Additionally, the mean emphases on the materialist and postmaterialist poles amount to, respectively, 27.28% versus 18.06% and 27.28% versus 15.14%.[10] To summarise, the findings of this paper are wholly confirmed even when penalising materialist scores through specific aggregation choices. This contributes to providing full reassurance about the robustness of the presented results.

[9] It should be noted that Spec 4 is the only case in which the weighting procedure provides a different finding, as it results in a majority of manifestos emphasising postmaterialism more than materialism (52.98% versus 46.25%).
[10] The complete checks are available in the *Appendix*.

5. Conclusions

This paper analysed the research puzzle surrounding whether the destructuration/dealignment thesis can find empirical confirmation from the less studied supply-side of electoral politics. It sought to test this hypothesis from a salience theory viewpoint, within the framework of the Western European multidimensional space of political competition. Hence, it asked the research question about which of the two poles of the materialist/postmaterialist issue dimension is more emphasised by the key actors of the electoral supply, i.e., parties. Specifically, it looked at MARPOR data on electoral manifestos for all political formations contesting an election in Western Europe between 1990 and 2019. After reviewing the scholarly contributions on materialism and postmaterialism and the related debate, it introduced the hypotheses to be tested here. Based on large parts of the specialised literature, given the historical developments in Western European societies and the selected timeframe of analysis, the main expectation was that political parties would place greater emphasis on postmaterialist rather than materialist issues, in line with the destructuration/dealignment thesis. The article conducted empirical tests on the MARPOR data, developing aggregated scores for materialist and postmaterialist issues in line with the theoretical prescriptions. The analysis provided an outright rejection of the main hypothesis, showing how almost all Western European parties have emphasised materialist questions significantly more than postmaterialist questions in the past 30 years; and increasingly so over time. This result is robust to several spatial and temporal checks, as well as to alternative model specifications based on different theoretical prescriptions. Moreover, all the findings were confirmed when the challenging Italian context was scrutinised, further reinforcing their applicability. This paper contributes to the empirical literature on electoral and issue politics. It considerably extends the temporal reach of comparable works on this topic (Stoll, 2010) whilst further confirming their results, which pointed to a predominance of the (materialist) socioeconomic dimension in Western European electoral manifestos.

The picture provided here, though, is only partial, as its specific focus was the electoral supply of parties. What about the demand-side of electoral politics? From this viewpoint, new questions are opened up by this contribution: do these findings also hold among electorates and public opinions? Does one side of the circuit of representation represent a good indication of the other, or not? And if not, why is there no congruence between the two? Surely, the theoretical stakes of such dilemmas are clear and important. On the one hand, were my findings to be confirmed also on the demand-side of Western European electoral politics, this would mean that the postmaterialist value-change thesis is to be fully rejected. Such an exploration is beyond the scope of this paper. However, even a superficial look at the European Election Studies' Voter Study data for the spatial-temporal framework analysed here (EES 1994, 1999, 2004, 2009, 2014, 2019) casts doubt on the postmaterialist arguments. Indeed, the '*most important issue*' for European electors in terms of salience is always a materialist question on either the economy or unemployment and by quite some margin. On the other hand, matters would be made even more complex if the findings of this paper were rejected on the demand-side. This occurrence would signify a lack of politicisation of the materialist/postmaterialist conflict in European political systems, given the absence of party-voter congruence. It would, therefore, lead to questions as to why parties are not

responsive (Mair, 2009), which would require and deserve causal analyses in future research efforts. Moreover, would this misalignment be because of the increasing affluence of Western European societies, as per the postmaterialist thesis? Would it be due to a generational effect or to more of a period effect, linked to exogenous factors such as inflation and unemployment at a given time? Or do parties simply have strategic incentives based on configurations of issues that ensure the best electoral performance (De Sio and Weber, 2014), potentially transcending coherent dynamics on issue dimensions? These important questions are fertile ground for future research contributions, which can build upon the empirical findings of this paper as a departure point.

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Appendix

A) Aggregations of alternative models

Spec 2 Aggregation

Materialist MARPOR Categories – Spec 2

per401 - Free Market Economy
per402 - Incentives: Positive
per403 - Market Regulation
per404 - Economic Planning
per405 - Corporatism/Mixed Economy
per406 - Protectionism: Positive
per407 - Protectionism: Negative
per408 - Economic Goals
per409 - Keynesian Demand Management
per410 - Economic Growth: Positive
per411 - Technology and Infrastructure: Positive
per412 - Controlled Economy
per413 - Nationalisation
per414 - Economic Orthodoxy
per415 - Marxist Analysis: Positive
per504 - Welfare State Expansion
per505 - Welfare State Limitation
per506 - Education Expansion
per507 - Education Limitation
per701 - Labour Groups: Positive
per702 - Labour Groups: Negative
per703 - Agriculture and Farmers

Postmaterialist MARPOR Categories – Spec 2

per201 - Freedom and Human Rights
per202 - Democracy
per301 - Decentralisation: Positive
per302 - Centralisation: Positive
per603 - Traditional Morality: Positive
per604 - Traditional Morality: Negative
per606 - Civic Mindedness: Positive
per607 - Multiculturalism: Positive
per608 - Multiculturalism: Negative
per705 - Underpriviledged Minority Groups
per706 - Non-economic Demographic Groups

Spec 3 Aggregation

Materialist MARPOR Categories – Spec 3

per401 - Free Market Economy
per402 - Incentives: Positive
per403 - Market Regulation
per409 - Keynesian Demand Management
per412 - Controlled Economy
per413 - Nationalisation
per 414 - Economic Orthodoxy
per504 - Welfare State Expansion
per505 - Welfare State Limitation
per506 - Education Expansion
per507 - Education Limitation
per701 - Labour Groups: Positive
per702 - Labour Groups: Negative

Postmaterialist MARPOR Categories – Spec 3

per104 - Military: Positive
per105 - Military: Negative
per201.2 - Human Rights
per601 - National Way of Life: Positive
per602 - National Way of Life: Negative
per603 - Traditional Morality: Positive
per604 - Traditional Morality: Negative
per605.1 - Law and Order: Positive
per605.2 - Law and Order: Negative
per607 - Multiculturalism: Positive
per608 - Multiculturalism: Negative

Spec 4 Aggregation

Materialist MARPOR Categories – Spec 4

per401 - Free Market Economy
per402 - Incentives: Positive
per403 - Market Regulation
per409 - Keynesian Demand Management
per412 - Controlled Economy
per413 - Nationalisation
per 414 - Economic Orthodoxy
per504 - Welfare State Expansion
per505 - Welfare State Limitation
per506 - Education Expansion
per507 - Education Limitation
per701 - Labour Groups: Positive
per702 - Labour Groups: Negative

Postmaterialist MARPOR Categories – Spec 4

per201 - Freedom and Human Rights
per202 - Democracy
per416 - Anti-Growth Economy and Sustainability
per501 - Environmental Protection
per601 - National Way of Life: Positive
per602 - National Way of Life: Negative
per603 - Traditional Morality: Positive
per604 - Traditional Morality: Negative
per607 - Multiculturalism: Positive
per608 - Multiculturalism: Negative

Spec 5 Aggregation

Materialist MARPOR Categories – Spec 5

per401 - Free Market Economy
per402 - Incentives: Positive
per403 - Market Regulation
per409 - Keynesian Demand Management
per412 - Controlled Economy
per413 - Nationalisation
per 414 - Economic Orthodoxy
per504 - Welfare State Expansion
per505 - Welfare State Limitation
per506 - Education Expansion
per507 - Education Limitation
per701 - Labour Groups: Positive
per702 - Labour Groups: Negative

Postmaterialist MARPOR Categories – Spec 5

per201 - Freedom and Human Rights
per202 - Democracy
per301 - Decentralisation: Positive
per302 - Centralisation: Positive
per603 - Traditional Morality: Positive
per604 - Traditional Morality: Negative
per606 - Civic Mindedness: Positive
per607 - Multiculturalism: Positive
per608 - Multiculturalism: Negative
per705 - Underpriviledged Minority Groups
per706 - Non-economic Demographic Groups

B) Correlation analyses

Correlation Between Election Year and Pooled Mean Emphases on Materialism

```
. pwcorr avg_mat year, star(.01)

             |  avg_mat     year
-------------+--------------------
     avg_mat |   1.0000
        year |   0.7447*  1.0000
```

Correlation Between Election Year and Pooled Mean Emphases on Postmaterialism

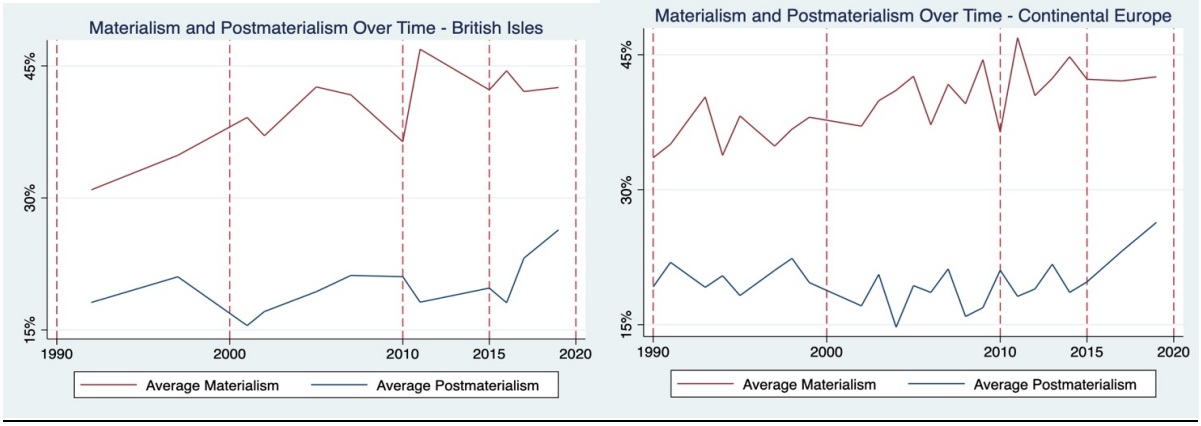
```
. pwcorr avg_postmat year

             |  avg_po~t     year
-------------+--------------------
 avg_postmat |   1.0000
        year |   0.2990   1.0000
```

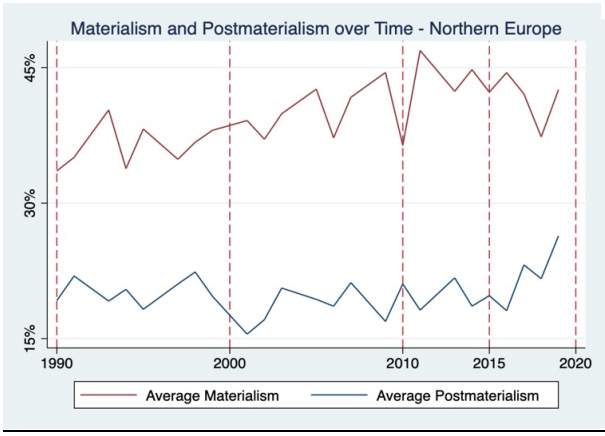
C) Weighting procedure

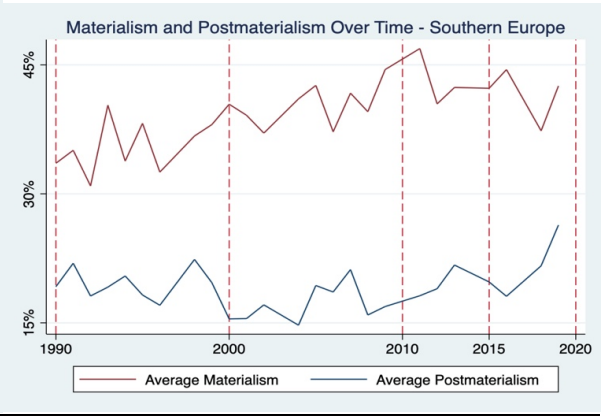
Percentage of Manifestos with Prevalence of Emphases on either Materialism or Postmaterialism After Weighting Procedure

	Manifestos Where Mat>PM (Emphasis)	Manifestos Where PM>Mat (Emphasis)
Spec 1	**51.16%**	48.23%
Spec 2	**59.88%**	39.52%
Spec 3	**88.27%**	10.70%
Spec 4	46.25%	**52.98%**
Spec 5	**59.02%**	40.29%

D) Visual references for temporal breakdown across clusters







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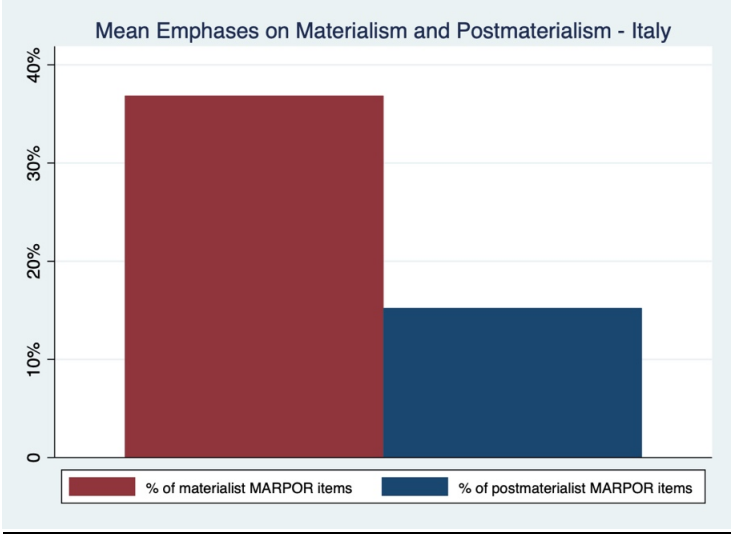

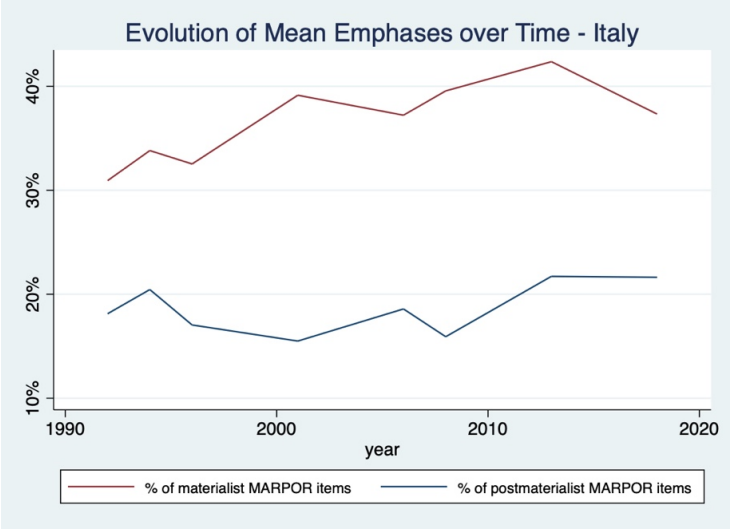

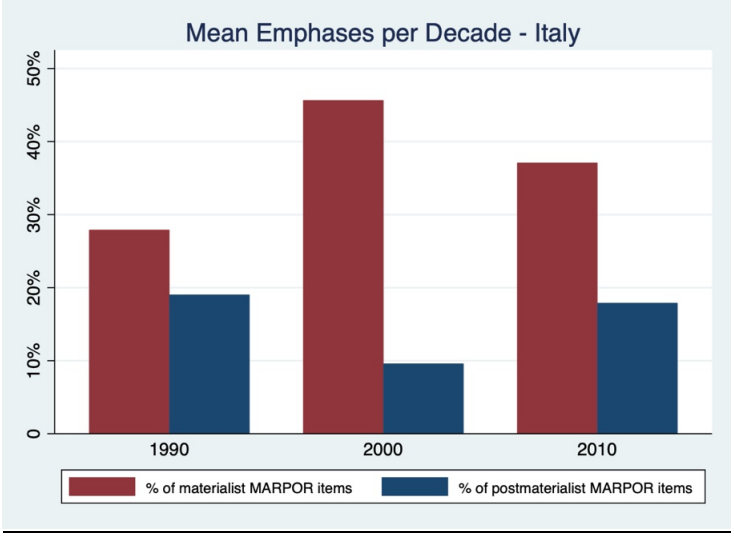

F) Robustness checks in full

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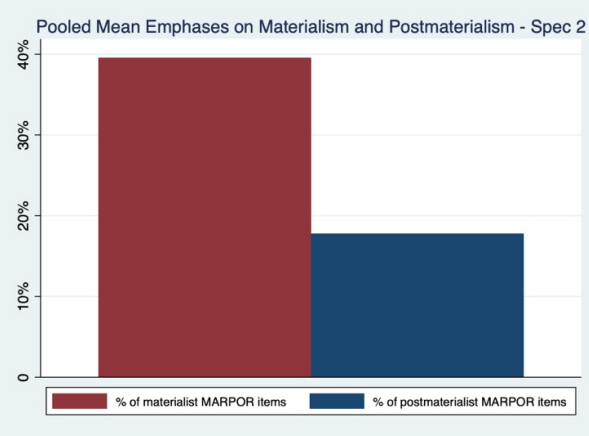

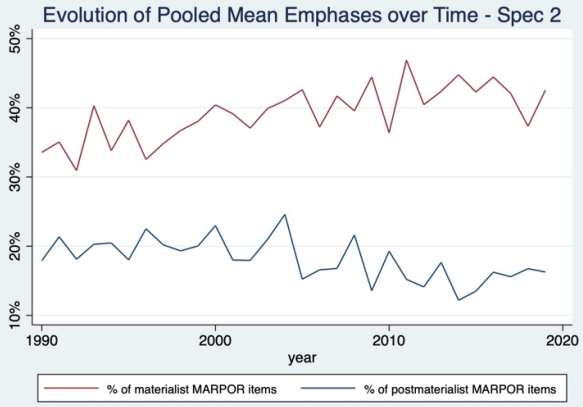

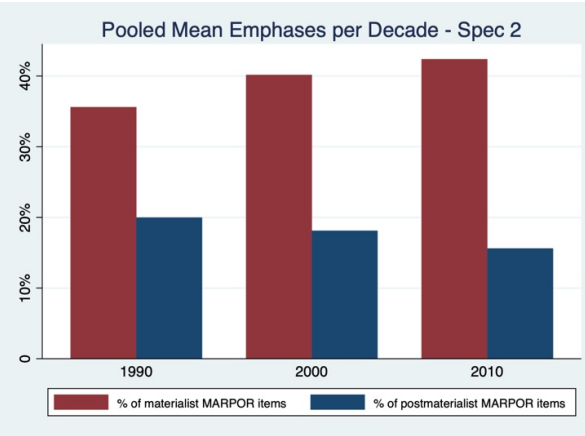

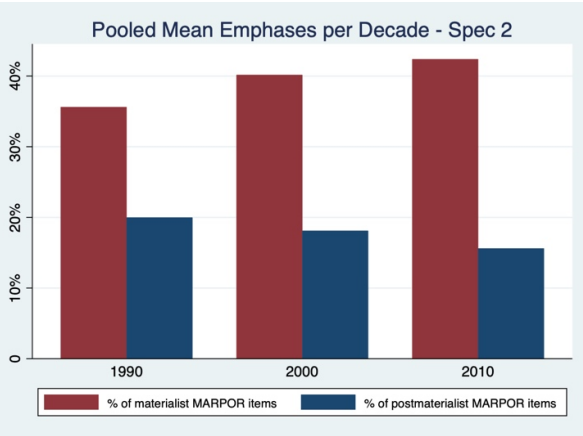

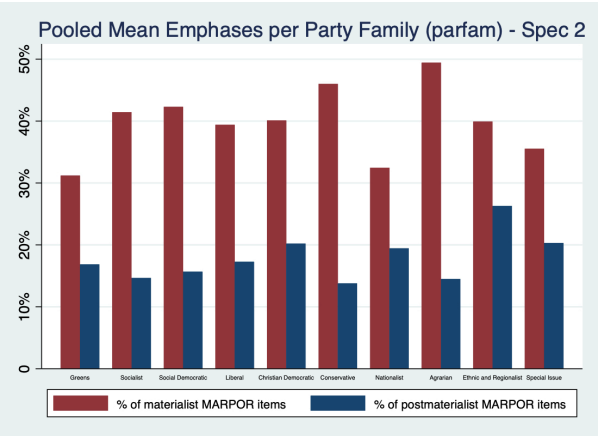

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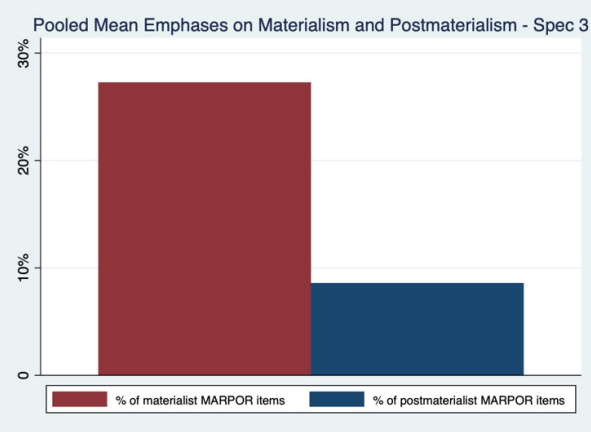
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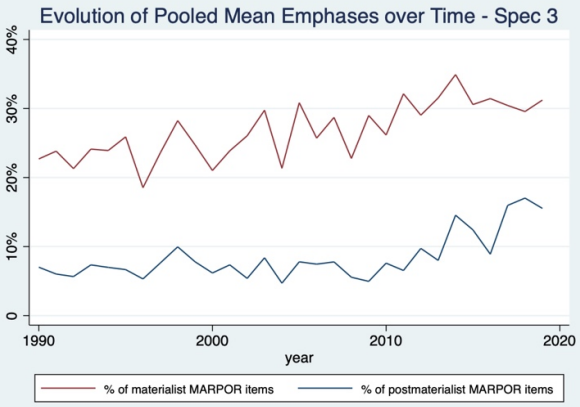
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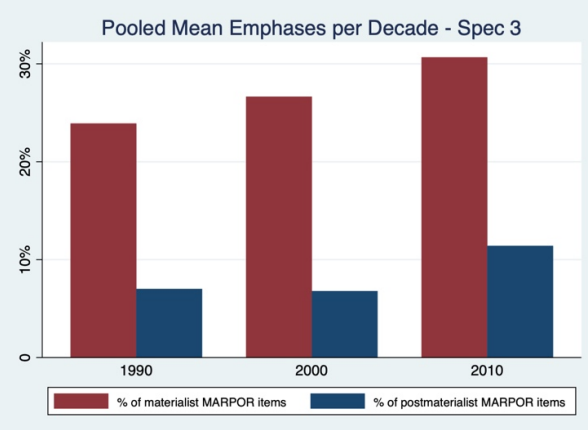
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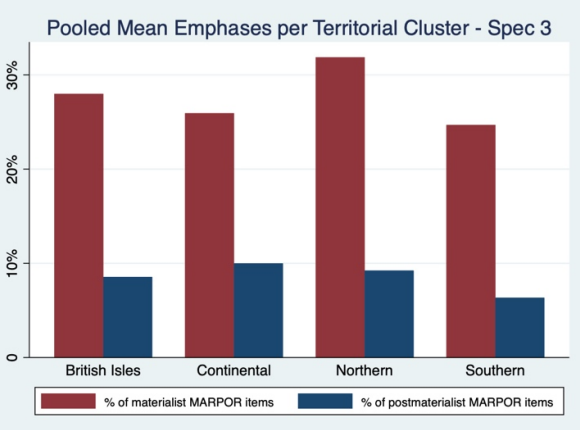
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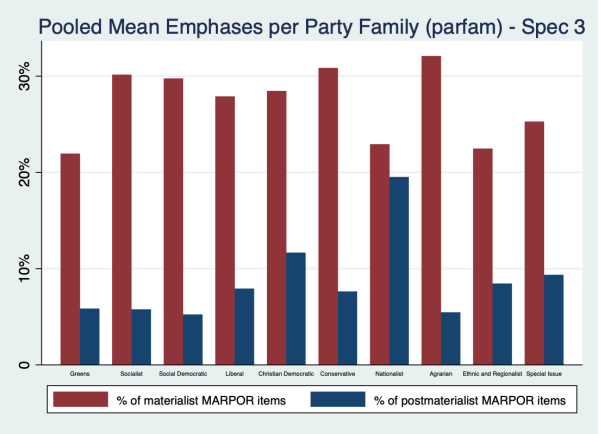
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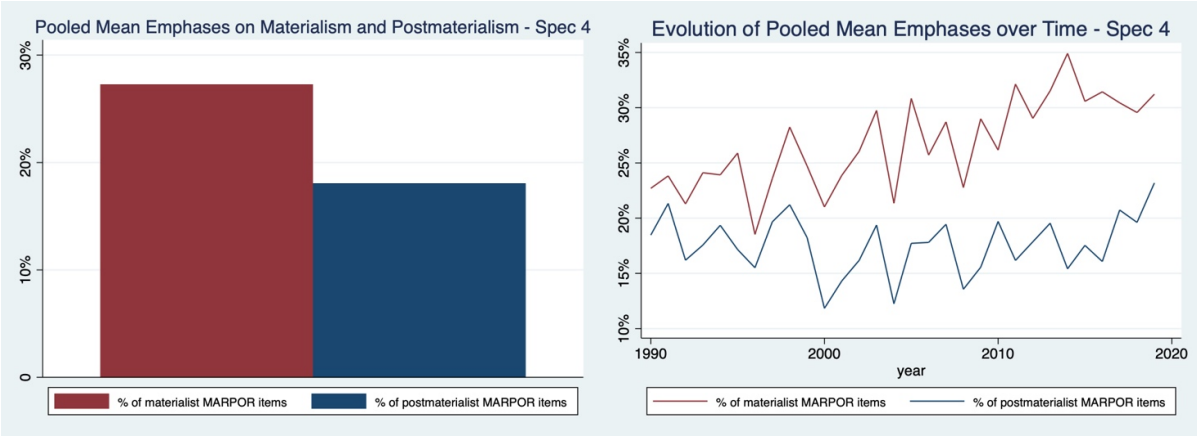
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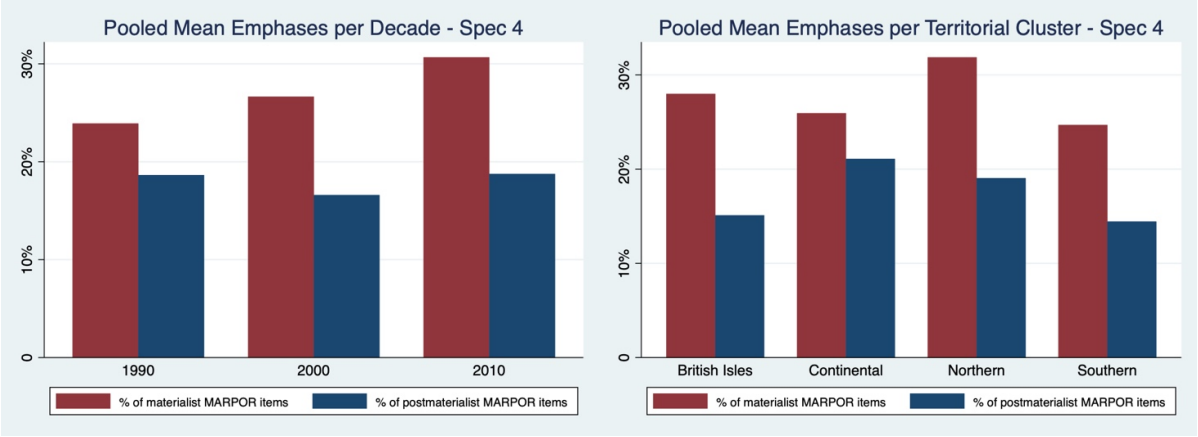
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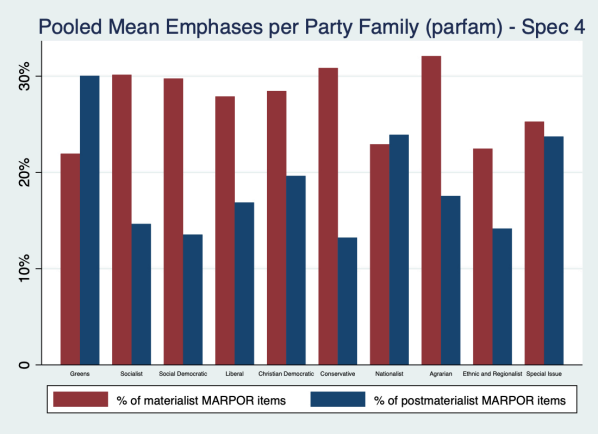
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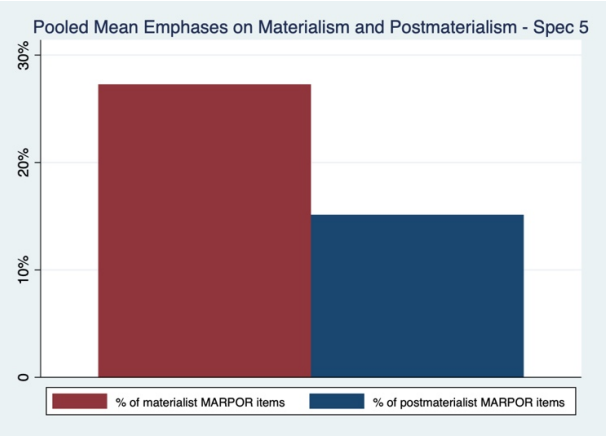
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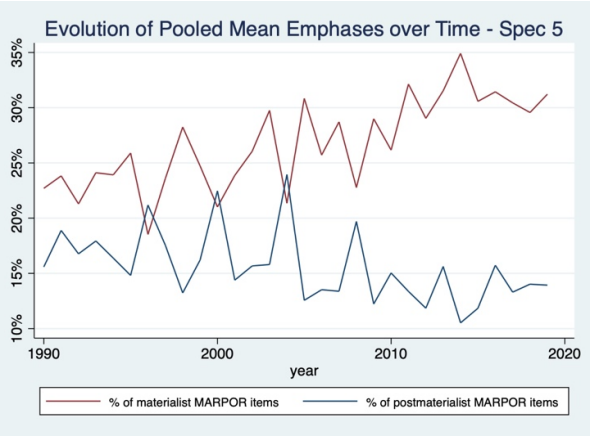
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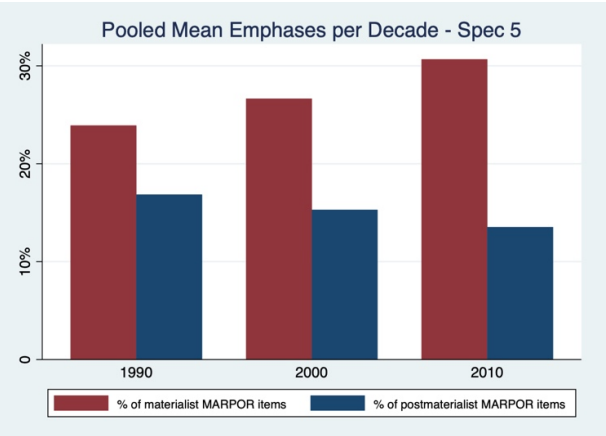
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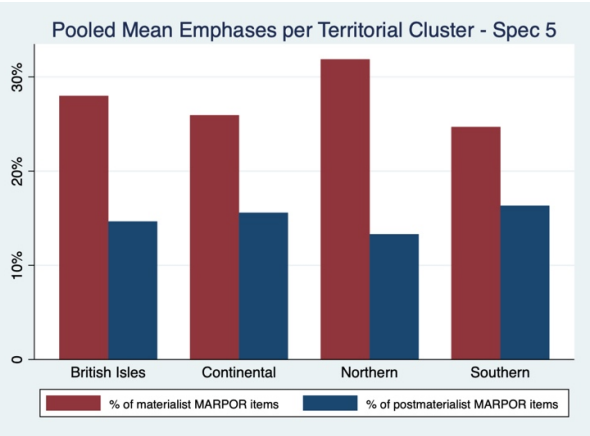
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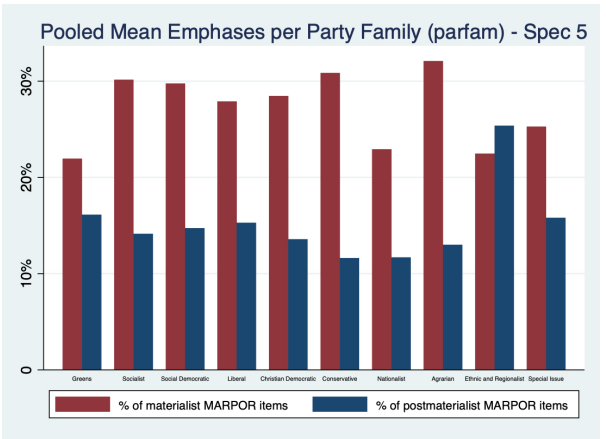
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Italian Political Science, VOLUME 15 ISSUE 3

A paper in [THE PROFESSION] series

We did well enough. Systemic reforms, changes in recruitment procedures and the evolution of Italian political science

Giliberto Capano
UNIVERSITY OF BOLOGNA

Abstract

Italian political science has evolved over time, dealing with various reforms and changes in the structure of academic careers and procedures for recruitment that have characterised the recent decades of the Italian university system. This paper reflects on how these changes have challenged the foundational identity of Italian political science and how they have influenced its development as a community of scholars. Three relevant dynamics emerge: the shift from a national and centralised community to a set of local networks of scholars, the capacity to perform well in terms of professional standards, and the risk that the capacity to reproduce the discipline's identity, or at least its foundational core, could be significantly weakened.

1. Introduction

The institutionalisation of political science in Italy has been the subject of a complex diachronic path whose different drivers and results have already been convincingly dealt with. We know a lot about the process of autonomisation from other disciplines (Graziano 1986; Morlino 1989; 1991), about the different drivers that have led to the asymmetric distribution of political science in Italian universities and thus a significant concentration of political scientists in only a few of them (Capano 20005; Capano and Verzichelli 2010), and about the level of internationalisation and social impact of the discipline (Capano and Verzichelli 2016). But while there is enough convincing research on various dimensions of the evolution and reality of Italian political science, there is an analytical gap in grasping how the discipline has been reproducing itself and whether and how its foundational identity has been able to survive external challenges and changes.

To embark on this kind of analysis it is important to remember that academic 'disciplines are reservoirs of ways of knowing which, in dynamic combination with other structural phenomena, can condition behavioural practices, sets of discourses, ways of thinking, procedures, emotional responses and motivations. Together this constellation of factors results in structured dispositions for disciplinary practitioners who, in conjunction with external forces, reshape them in different practice clusters into localised

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repertoires' (Trowler 2014, p. 24). Thus, it has to be assumed that the evolution of Italian political science, intended as a set of knowledge territories and common practices, has been embedded, constrained and influenced by external factors; of these, the characteristics of the higher education system are unavoidable drivers.

According to the comparative literature on higher education policy, two factors are specifically relevant to understand the evolution of Italian political science: systemic governance arrangements and the design of academic career structures. Systemic governance arrangements design the field of action of universities and thus the set of constraints and incentives that structure their autonomous strategies regarding the development of academic disciplines (including hiring and promoting academics). The characteristics of the academic career structure directly influence both the choices of universities as well as individual strategies (Bleikliem and Michelsen 2013; Fumasoli, Goastellec and Kehm 2015).

Thus, what Italian political science actually is can be seen by understanding how its foundational identity has been touched or modified in practice by the changes that occur over time in university systems, in the rules structuring academic careers and in the practices of recruitment.

By assuming this analytical perspective, in this short piece I analyse how changes in systemic governance arrangements, as well as in the rules structuring career paths, have impacted how Italian political science originally defined itself and how it has had the opportunity to reproduce over time.

The analysis is based on applying what we know about the evolution of the Italian university system and some qualitative and quantitative data with my personal experience in a more-than-30-year career as a political scientist (with some experience in institutional positions and in recruitment committees at national and local levels).

The analysis shows how many changes, at both the systemic governance level and in the rules on careers, have had some interesting implications for Italian political science: first, the shift from a national, hierarchical but cohesive community with a mentionable propensity to internationalisation to a set of local networks of scholars in which there are some highly internationalised people; second, the capacity to perform relatively well, from a qualitative point of view, in each of the stages of the diachronic reforms; third, the risk that the decentralised structure of the community of political scientists could weaken the capacity to reproduce the discipline's identity, or at least its foundational core.

The paper is structured as follows: in the second section I will sketch out the foundational identity of Italian political science. In the third section I will summarise changes at the systemic level and their effects on political science; in the fourth section I will reconstruct the diachronic evolution of the rules on academic hiring and career together with some considerations on its impact on political science. In the fifth section I will assess what have we done, where we are and what we should do.

2. The foundational identity of Italian political science

Italian political science developed and was institutionalised between the 1960s and 1980s. It was a long and complex process of community-building and delimiting the borders of the disciplinary territory of knowledge by a group of masters (the founding father, Giovanni Sartori, together with Alberto Spreafico, Domenico Fisichella, Giacomo Sani,

Giorgio Freddi, Giuseppe di Federico, Paolo Farneti and Giuliano Urbani) who invested intellectual resources and time in making political science an autonomous field of study and embedding it in the university system (Graziano 1986). There were two pillars in this community and disciplinary building: a deliberate empirical approach and 'Americanization' (due to the close relationship that most of the masters had with the US in terms of training) (Morlino 1991). This group of people and the following generation (Stefano Bartolini, Luigi Bonanate, Mauro Calise, Maurizio Cotta, Roberto D'Alimonte, Carlo Guarnieri, Alfio Mastropaolo, Leonardo Morlino, Gianfranco Pasquino,) built the national community (the Rivista Italiana di Scienza Politica being founded in 1971 and, in 1981, the Italian Association of Political Science).

Since the beginning, the founding community of Italian political scientists has shared the idea of belonging to the international community of political scientists. Thus, an international attitude has always been a constitutive part of the discipline. Giovanni Sartori accumulated a strong international reputation; the first chair-holder in public administration, Giorgio Freddi, earned his PhD at Berkeley, as did Giacomo Sani. The following generation of scholars, who are now retired (for example, Stefano Bartolini, Maurizio Cotta, Bruno Dente, Carlo Guarnieri, Alfio Mastropaolo, Leonardo Morlino and Gianfranco Pasquino), cannot be considered a parochial group: they have extensively published in international venues and were part of international research networks.

Furthermore, it was a strong community that decided to maintain its unity (notwithstanding a natural fragmentation due to different theoretical approaches and topics of research) on the basis of its foundational identity (empiricism, the sharing of basic common epistemological and methodological choices that can be applied to the various forms of the political phenomenon). What was being studied (international relations, bureaucracy, political parties, public policies, etc.) was not important; what was important was to be part of a community sharing the same way of knowing and professional practices.

So, we could say that notwithstanding the characteristics of university systems and career structure, Italian political science from the 1970s to the turn of the century was anchored to the international community. Thus, publishing in international venues was not unusual (as it was in other disciplines among the so-called 'political and social sciences') (Morlino 1989; 1991), and this helped maintain a common sense of belonging to a community bigger than the various subdisciplines and research topics. The high propensity for internationalisation is also demonstrated by the attachment and the persistent involvement of the founding fathers and the following generation in the activities and steering of the International Political Science Association and of the European Consortium of Political Research.

The sense of community was so relevant that it pushed political scientists against their own interests in terms of expansion of the discipline in the university system. Notwithstanding the university system's prized division of disciplines, formally recognised by the Ministry of Education as scientific disciplinary sectors (the basic units for assigning academic positions and distinguishing the courses to be taught), Italian political scientists have always been willing to maintain their unity and thus stay together in only one scientific sector. For example, in 2004, during the annual conference of the Italian Political Science Association, a proposal to divide into two scientific sectors was rejected by the assembly. If that choice had been made, it can be estimated that the academic

positions in political science could be 25-30% more than they are. But Italian political scientists preferred to stay united.

3. Systemic reforms and Italian political science

The Italian university system has undergone various reforms in the last three decades (Capano 1998; Donina, Meoli and Paleari 2015; Capano, Regini and Turri 2016). Since the end of the 1980s, everything has changed in the main systemic arrangements. Here it is relevant to focus on those systemic changes that have directly affected the evolution of political science in terms of a 'reservoir' of way of knowing and professional practices, among which the most relevant are the following: 1. the concession of institutional autonomy to universities; 2. the establishment and subsequent reforms of the PhD programmes; 3. the introduction of a national research exercise. These changes contributed on the one hand to weakening the institutional incentives to maintain a cohesive community at the national level while, on the other hand, showed how the discipline has been capable of maintaining its original attitude towards internationalisation.

Institutional autonomy was introduced in 1989 and started to be fully operationalised in 1994 (Capano 2010; Capano, Regini and Turri 2016). This meant a significant change in how the university system works, especially in terms of increasing the freedom of universities to choose how to spend their resources and to be responsible for them. This has had a relevant impact in terms of the development of academic disciplines because its quantitative development has been completely dependent on local choices. Without this change, we could not explain, for example, the incredible expansion of the discipline at the State University of Milano (from three political scientists at the end of the 1980s to 24 today), or the decrease in Florence (from 17 in 1999 to 10 today). Institutional autonomy drastically changed the rules of the game in many dimensions of the dynamics of Italian higher education, and, above all, it has weakened the role that academic guilds have played at the national level (Clark 1983; Capano 2008). One of the consequences of institutional autonomy has been, as we shall see, to give the power of recruiting to universities, thus softening the previous vertical coordination existing in political science that influenced the processes and choices in academic recruitment and promotions.

The PhD degree was established at the national level in 1980 and first implemented in 1985. This represented a watershed in the Italian university system because it had been the only country in the Western world that did not offer PhD degrees. The PhD level was established according to a highly centralised architecture: the number of positions (around 2,000-2,200 per year for all disciplines) was established and funded by the Ministry of Education, and they were distributed to a consortium of universities. In this centralised arrangement, the universities in which there was a significant presence of political scientists joined together to offer a unique national PhD programme. It has to be underlined that during its existence, this national programme in political science offered between four and seven positions per year (fully covered by scholarships). This innovation was important for the institutionalisation and reproduction of political science. The programme had a three-year duration, and the students had to attend compulsory courses, mainly in Florence (but also in Bologna and Pavia). This programme was designed to train a small number of prospective political scientists

according to a unified vision of the discipline. Starting from 1999, a new national regulation, along with the autonomistic policy begun ten years before, changed the system by shifting from national to local PhD programmes. The consequence was the establishment of various PhD programmes in political science in Pavia, Milan, Turin, Siena, Bologna (for a few years) and Florence, which enrolled more than 25 students each year. This development significantly enlarged the number of younger political scientists (in a context of an increasing number of positions in the university system) while pushing towards a kind of partial specialisation of the offered programmes (which had an average of three to four positions each) (Tronconi 2007).

A new reform was introduced in 2013, and it completely changed the institutional framework by imposing very constraining rules that made it almost impossible to offer PhD programmes purely in political science (above all, the requirement that each programme must offer at least six scholarships per year). Thus, there is no PhD which is fully devoted to political science in Italy (except for one in Milan), while there are many PhD programmes in political and social sciences. These are offered by departments of political and social sciences that are composed of scholars belonging to various disciplines (law, history, sociology, political thought and philosophy, political science, and others). Thus, due to the asymmetric distribution of political scientists within the university system (Capano and Verzichelli 2016), these PhD programmes can offer very few positions in the discipline nationwide. The evolution of the institutional arrangement of PhD degrees has thus contributed to softening the original national cohesion of the community of Italian political scientists

The establishment of the national research exercise (VQR) represented a watershed in the governance arrangements of Italian higher education. Inspired by the UK experience, it impacted how universities are funded, as well as how the academic community publishes. The reaction of Italian political science is noteworthy. In fact, in both rounds of VQR (which assessed the research outputs of the periods 2004-2010 and 2011-2014), the discipline showed itself to be a forerunner in the field of social and political sciences when assessed in terms of internationalisation (measured as the percentage of submitted outputs published in international venues, mostly international journals). These data are interesting because they show the tendency of the discipline to overcome national borders and to consider internationalisation as a constitutive asset that predates (Verzichelli 2014) the reform of 2010 and the recruitment system itself, as underlined above.

4. Changes in recruitment procedures and their effects on Italian political scientists

The design of an academic career system can be seen from three different points of view (Olsen, Kyvik and Hovdhaugen 2005):

- From the systemic side, it is a tool for increasing the performance of the higher education system (the better professors are, the more probable it is that the systemic performance will increase in teaching and research).
- From the institutional side, it is a tool to increase the quality of staff and to cover new, specialised fields.

- From the individual side, it is a tool that should be competitive and meritocratic and capable of motivating in terms of career recognition.

These characteristics have been mixed together in different ways and have produced various paths; in many countries, especially in recent decades, these characteristics have been reformed to find a better equilibrium, especially in Europe (Fumasoli, Goastellec and Kehm 2015).

The Italian university system has changed the rules regarding the careers of academics various times since the unification of the country in a continuous attempt to find an equilibrium between systemic, institutional and individual interests. However, the adopted solutions have been characterised by a recurrent pendulum movement between the centralisation and decentralisation of choices and by the cyclical use of the same tools (for example, members of national or local selection committees are elected, drawn or both in various combinations; the need to obtain a qualification as a necessary condition to apply for a post vs free ability to apply for a post). This is done in a context in which, since the beginning, the pillar of the system has been the so-called 'concorso pubblico', a type of formal competition that is based on the selection of the best candidates without any specific reference to the strategic plan or mission of the hiring institution, and based on apparently strict formal procedures.

However, what is interesting in this diachronic evolution is that it has been characterised by a never-ending process of changes to the rules (Moretti and Porciani 1997). This is due to the fact that the system has always been considered unsatisfactory because it is characterised by particularism, nepotism, favouritism and patronage due to the prevalence of the interests of academic guilds (Giglioli 1979; Moscati 2001; Palermo 2010). It has been underlined that these characteristics have been a favourable condition for a high rate of academic inbreeding, especially after the reforms to recruitment in 1998 (see below).

The major relevant changes for political science in Italy are those starting from the 1970s. However, it is relevant that in 1970 the old system of recruitment, established in 1933, was abolished. One of the pillars of that system was the so called 'libera docenza', a national qualification (similar to the German Privatdozent) granted in a national contest by a committee composed of full professors. Earning this qualification was a prerequisite for applying for the position of professor, as well as being granted tenure in the position of 'assistente ordinario' (a mix of the assistant and associate professor positions). When this qualification was abolished, there were in Italy around 3,200 professors in the university system, while the number of those qualified to be professors ('liberi docenti') was around 17,000, even though only 6,114 were actually giving courses in the university system (Martinotti 1972).

During the 1970s there were various innovations in the recruitment system, and there was also an increase in the number of professorial positions. Therefore, there were chances to appoint new professors in political science, and the positions were more numerous than the candidates. In 1980, a structural reform to career paths and the process of recruitment was approved, providing for a tripartition of academic careers and for a recruitment process based on national competitions for a fixed number of posts established by the Ministry of Education, which were assigned by committees of professors chosen through a mixed procedure (elections and draw). This system has been highly

criticised because it was considered a way to reproduce the power of academic guilds, schools and networks, while it left little choice to the universities. However, it has to be observed that if we focus on how this system impacted the development of Italian political science, these cons were partially counterbalanced by two pros. First, the system was obliged to have some level of mobility (very often, the posts of associate and full professor were at different universities from those to which the winners belonged). Second, in the case of political science, unlike many other disciplines, this centralised procedure and the related power in the hands of the national 'barons' did not produce significantly negative outputs as seen from an aggregate and diachronic perspective.[1] This system was abandoned in 1998 with law 210 (the so-called Berlinguer reform) that deeply re-decentralised the recruitment system. This law provided for a system in which the competition for posts became local and universities could decide in which disciplines to activate positions. For each competition, the elected committees should choose the two best candidates (three for the first two years following approval of the law) who thus obtained the qualification to be appointed. Those qualified could be directly appointed by the universities. This new system was in force until 2007 when, under the pressure of Italian rectors, who could not resist the pressure of those who were qualified and who wanted to be appointed, it was established that there could be only one qualified candidate per each local competition.

The 1998 reform was highly impactful for the university system because it delegated all powers locally. This implied a significant decrease in mobility as well as a dramatic asymmetry in the chances of being promoted because the possibility of being appointed at a higher rank was dependent only on the financial capabilities of single universities and local academic logics and games of power. These general effects also applied to political science. First of all, the decentralisation of the recruitment system deeply weakened the previous national coordination dynamics. On the one hand, this could be considered positive because the new local-centred processes favoured the possibility of developing local strategies based on specific choices of specialisation and development. On the other hand, there has been a negative effect, which is the easing of the requirements to earn a professorial promotion/position. Under centralised coordination, the criteria of assessment were negotiated between all the major 'barons', while in the decentralised system, all the decisional powers are in the hands of the local 'barons'. The consequence was a mix of local practices that have fragmented standards and weakened disciplinary identity. Political scientists also experienced the asymmetric distribution of chances for promotion and a dramatic freezing of mobility.

Finally, the 1998 reform has been highly criticised because it is considered coherent with the historical vices of the Italian system. While it was designed to escape from the logics of power of national academic guilds and give more power to institutions, its implementation produced a triumph of local patronage and institutionalised a high level of academic inbreeding. This paradoxical effect was not unexpected: in the absence of any rule to avoid inbreeding (by law as in France or by institutionalised practices as in the Anglo-Saxon systems) there is a structural incentive to promote scholars belonging

[1]Anyone can view the lists of the winners of the national competitions for associate and full professors held from 1980 to 1998 (there were three rounds for associates and three rounds for full professor); unlike in other disciplines, there are very few questionable cases.

to the same institution (this is also due to the fact that internal promotions cost much less than external recruitments).

After 2010, the pendulum swung again, with the new system designed by the Gelmini reform attempting to contrast localism. It was decided to establish a national system for earning the qualification for associate or full professor which became a requirement to apply for local competitions. Furthermore, the 2010 law changed the career structure: from the three tenured positions introduced by the 1980 reform to a system based on two tenured positions (associate and full professor) and with the establishment of the assistant professor tenure track position (after three years, associate tenure is substantially guaranteed if the assistant professor has the national qualification to be an associate).

Regarding the qualification procedure (Abilitazione Scientifica Nazionale, or ASN), the new rules substantially propose a new systemic application of the 'qualification' procedure, mixing together the previous system of the 'libera docenza' and the local procedure established with the 1998 reform. The logic behind this choice was to impose some minimal standards for potential candidates applying for local competitions and thus to limit the discretion of committees and universities. This new system did not change the prevalence of localistic interests or the asymmetric chances of being promoted. At the systemic level, 83% of the competitions for associate or full professor posts have been won by scholars belonging to the institutions that launched the calls. Substantially, the new system works mostly to promote internal candidates (Abramo and D'Angelo 2020). The results at the systemic level are confirmed for political science: out of 21 positions open from 2010 to December 2020, 13 were won by internal candidates and the other eight by external ones, but in the latter cases there were no internal candidates with the right qualifications to be full professors.[2] The same dynamics are seen in the competitions for associate professor posts (only those without internal candidates with qualifications were won by external candidates). The new system significantly limited any kind of mobility and further increased the inbreeding dynamics. It appears that the new procedure has developed like the 'libera docenza' system, in which many obtained qualifications without any real chance of attaining positions. For example, at this time, there are around 50 scholars (mostly associate professors) working in Italy with the qualifications for full professor: without some extraordinary national funding, very few of them will have the chance of promotion. The chances of being promoted in the same institution depend on its financial wealth, while the chances of being promoted in another institution depend on the eventuality that the competition is not constrained by the presence of internal candidates.

All in all, the new career system, together with the new recruitment and promotion procedure, may allow some real room to recruit only at the level of assistant professor, while at the levels of associate and full professor, the institutional constraints drive universities to use the local competition to upgrade their internal members when they possess the national qualifications.

[2] These data refer to open contests, while the law provides also for another procedure allowing also for internal calls where only internal candidates can apply (in effect a promotion procedure). This type of internal call has been used only four times in three universities since 2012.

It has to be remembered that the ASN has also provided for the establishment of a national list of scientific journals in which scholars (including political scientists) are incentivised to publish in order to reach the minimal standards required to apply for the national qualification for a professorship. This institutional provision has further pushed Italian political scientists to reach for international publishing targets for the results of their research. As is shown by the VQR data, Italian political scientists have been forerunners in social sciences in the country regarding the internationalisation of their publications. So, the effect of this new rule has been to boost one of the constitutive elements of foundational identity (a strong propensity to internationalisation): indeed, in the last rounds of the ASN the candidates presented a massive number of international publications. This is surely a positive effect because it shows a full inclusion of the discipline in the international debate. On the other hand, however, this would call for a change in methods of assessing the scientific profiles of new generations of political scientists. In other words, if most people publish their research outputs in international venues, the added value of being internationalised, which was rewarding until a decade ago, is nullified. Therefore, there should be a collective reflection on what quality is and how to assess it to become a tenured political scientist.

5. We did well enough, but we should not forget the core of our foundational identity

Contemporary Italian political science has the luck of having been founded by a group of highly distinguished scholars who had a strong vision of what the discipline should be. The original imprinting based on empiricism and internationalisation imposed a demanding standard for becoming a political scientist and has contributed to institutionalising the discipline as a clearly distinct way of knowing that has persisted across different systemic contexts and maintained a relevant, shared sense of belonging to a national community. This is because at every age of the diachronic development of the university system, political science has been capable of performing well enough in terms of training, recruiting and promoting and internationalisation. The standard was always above average until the centralisation of the recruitment system.

With the full working of the autonomistic policy and with recruitment and PhD systems being decentralised, the situation has become more complex. The national community of political scientists has been weakened by these changes, and now it is more fragmented not only in terms of hierarchy but also in terms of standards and disciplinary practices. It is more local. However, to counterbalance these dynamics, political science's constitutive propensity for internationalisation has increased the number of Italian political scientists involved in international networks and research groups. Thus, the hegemony of the national dimension has been substituted by a plurality of differentiated local networks and practices (with a general individual propensity to internationalisation in publishing and a few scholars being highly internationalised) that sometimes are in competition or conflict with each other. This result is indicative of the richness of Italian political science: varieties of perspectives and research practices can reinforce the scientific progress of a discipline and make it more competitive and reputed in an international environment (Balietti, Maas and Helbing 2015). At the same time, this fragmentation can originate too many differences in standards of assessment

and in career paths that can undermine the persistence of the original identity of the discipline. These dynamics of localisation are common in other disciplines and are reinforced by the pressure for interdisciplinarity. These phenomena are unavoidable, but this does not mean that they should structurally determine specific consequences for Italian political science.

All in all, we have done well enough, and we are still doing well, notwithstanding the structural conditions and dynamics in higher education policy. Contrary to the notion that the conditions of political scientists (in terms of quality and career chances) are better today compared to the past, I have tried to show that this judgement is misleading. Italian political science has been capable of performing well enough in the different systemic contexts that have characterised the university system in the last 50 years.

However, if we are not aware of where we come from, of what has been done and of what (and why) the situation is, we risk being unable to maintain a common way of knowing and developing an excessive amount of local practices. Thus, there is a high risk of losing that 'common background knowledge about key figures, conflicts and achievements' (Trowler, 2014, p. 25) that is fundamental to maintaining disciplinary identity and the capacity to preserve the foundational core of Italian political science.

This is something on which a community of scholars should reflect and try to determine if there is room for a collective attempt to influence the destiny of the discipline against structural and environmental changes.

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A paper in [THE PROFESSION] series

Italian Political Science today: Has the profession changed in the last ten years?

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Abstract

This contribution analyzes the opportunities that the 2010 reform of higher education (Gelmini reform) created for Italian political scientists to form departments centered on the social sciences that would encourage greater experimentation with degree programs more attuned to the needs of a changing society and better able to chart the evolving nature of contemporary politics. It underscores the difficulty of making this transition, but also highlights the attempts formally made in this direction. It further analyzes the positive impact that the same reform has had on the internationalization and professionalization of the younger generations of political scientists. It also warns, however, against the promotion of an understanding of academic career that may induce them to detach themselves from other aspects of the profession that have to do with the management of university structures and the broad promotion of political science, nationally and internationally.

1. Introduction

In this brief contribution I will analyze how Italian political science has adapted to the new opportunities that opened up following the university reform of 2010 (law 240/2010)[1] and how it tackled the new challenges that derived from it. My contribution is based on my personal experience as coordinator of a degree program in International Studies and on my exposure, in various capacities, to international experiences. It is therefore, to some extent, impressionistic in nature and based, if you will, upon privileged observations.

My argument is that the new liberty that ensued from the cancellation of the old *Facoltà* and the creation of the new *Dipartimenti* resulted in a *potentially* greater variety of educational offers in political science, which has only in part been exploited but has nevertheless posed a dilemma to departments as to whether to retain their traditional multi-disciplinarity or rather specialize in one of the many sub-fields of political science. In other words, the new departments were placed before a choice: whether to simply

[1] Law 30 December 2010, n. 240 available is commonly referred to as the "Gelmini law" from the name of the then Ministry of University and Research; available at: https://www.camera.it/parlam/leggi/10240l.htm.

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change their status and retain the same disciplinary configuration as before or (try to) acquire a more distinctive political science profile or even pursue innovative cross-fertilizations with other social science disciplines. I will suggest that some departments have pursued the latter strategy and that we begin to observe an interesting diversification of programs in political science.

The same reform also introduced the centralized *Abilitazione Scientifica Nazionale,* which replaced the old system of certification and promotion managed by the individual universities. This reform, too, has presented political science departments with interesting opportunities that may or may not be fully exploited. It has, on the one hand, caused an acceleration of careers in line with what happens abroad and in other disciplines and, on the other, created *expectations* of promotion (still dependent upon the availability of resources at the local level) that are bound to be disappointed and create frustration. As a consequence, the profession has somewhat changed, in part approaching international standards that bear the promise of a more dynamic academia, but in part still suffering from resource constraints that may choke this positive evolution. Therefore, the overall picture is a mixed one, full of great promises but also fraught with dangers with which the newer generations of political scientists will have to deal.

In the following sections, I will discuss whether Italian political science has taken advantage of these opportunities by innovating at least in the academic organization of its degree programs (Section 1); whether it has updated and streamlined the promotion and career progression of its members according to international standards (Section 2); and, finally, whether it has taken measures to help upcoming scholars adapt to the many requirements of their future academic profession (Section 3). Section 4 will assess whether together these changes have induced a new awareness in the younger generations of what is required of them in order to compete in today's academic world, but also of what is needed to carry forward the continuing upgrading of scientific standards in today's academia. The final section will briefly recap the main insights.

2. The transformation of *Facoltà* into *Dipartimenti*: the quest for innovation

In 2010 the so-called Gelmini reform abolished the old *Facoltà* that presided over the organization of teaching in universities, and created new *Dipartimenti*, which differed from the old ones in that they now coordinated both research and teaching. The innovations introduced by this reform to the centralized and hierarchical "continental model" (Regini 2020), were aimed at granting higher education institutions the flexibility to be more responsive to the needs of a changing society. Departments were encouraged to organize the production and dissemination of knowledge so as to adapt their educational supply to quickly changing societal demands, in turn due to transformations in technologies, problems and orientations. Many old *Facoltà di Scienze Politiche* – in the plural, to indicate the many disciplines that, according to the traditional understanding of politics as little more than the application of constitutional rules and procedures, supposedly equipped students with the tools to understand politics – changed their names to emphasize other, until then underplayed features. Several Departments inserted "culture", "communication" or "international studies" in their names and most of them more strongly signaled an underlying unity with the other social sciences as residing in their empirical and

applied nature, thus distancing the study of politics from that of mere formal norms and procedures.

Of the 52 university structures – mostly now called *Dipartimenti*, but some still quaintly called *Facoltà* or otherwise indicated as *Centri*, *Istituti* or *Scuole* – that today host teachings in political science (SPS/04),[2] 9 retain their original label "*Scienze Politiche*" and are characterized by a large prevalence of juridical studies; 27 are indicated as "*Scienze Politiche e Sociali*" or "*Scienze Sociali e Politiche*" or other similar locutions that stress the common roots of political science and the other social sciences (typically by adding "culture", "communication", "international studies" to the name); and 16 belong to departments and other types of structure that do not nominally relate to the social sciences but that still see the need to integrate their educational offer with teachings in political science (typically, departments of Architecture, Engineering, Planning, and Economics).[3] The transformation from the previous situation is indicative of a *new sensibility*: the departments in which political science is most central are now those in which interactions between the social sciences are *at least programmatically* most intense.

At the same time, the procedures for updating the degree programs through which knowledge is provided and certified still need to be approved by the Ministry of Higher Education (MIUR, now MUR), which significantly slows down and homogenizes the actual supply of new degree programs. In theory, departments could now pursue new developments in the social sciences deriving from relevant international dynamics, expanding communication technologies and the overabundant availability of data which in turn impact on the study of political behavior, political institutions and political methodology. Thanks to their new freedom, departments could in theory emphasize their relative specialization and pursue interesting experiments in the hybridization of knowledge with other (social) sciences or they could rather carve a distinctive profile, specializing in communication studies, public opinion analysis or in the study of international political phenomena, just to give a few examples. This change in strategy, however, was initially hampered by the rush with which it was implemented and is still taking place slowly as disciplinary factions and corporatist interests make adaptation particularly viscous (Giuliani, 2012).[4]

Moreover, the curricular formats used by MUR for the approval of new degree courses and the re-accreditation of existing ones, coupled with the existing classification of the disciplines (partially updated in 2016 through the introduction of new *settori scientifico-disciplinari* and the regrouping of existing ones), sometimes do not give sufficient latitude in experimenting with new course offers. One of the main innovations in the realm of the social sciences has lately been the creation of a degree program in Data

[2] Whether taught by political scientists or others remains to be seen.

[3] If Economics, as I think would be most appropriate, is also counted among the social sciences, the number of departments that at least in their names acknowledge their common roots in the social sciences would be 31 while those that do not are reduced to 21, representing respectively 60% and 40% of all departments. Own calculations on official MUR data.

[4] With regard to the university of Milan, Giuliani states: "Symbolically it could have represented a laboratory for interdisciplinary research and teaching, and partly it even managed to fulfill this ambition, but as a matter of fact it was mostly a very complex organization with clear disciplinary factions and constituencies, which were the dominant actors in each decision regarding the distribution of resources" (Giuliani 2012: 2). For a rounded assessment of the Gelmini reform, attention should be placed not only on BA degree programs but also on MA degree programs.

Sciences aimed at training scholars in mining and analyzing large pools of data. More frequently, however, despite their relative flexibility, ministerial formats are only blunt instruments of experimentation as they allow those disciplines that are already strongly rooted in existing degree programs to be largely present in many other curricula, thus limiting the room for innovation. The adaptation of knowledge to new political, social and technological developments has, therefore, been more difficult than was initially envisioned.

3. New career progression: changing expectations and increasing fragmentation of knowledge

The second major innovation introduced by the Gelmini reform was the introduction of a new mechanism of career progression. Before the reform, scholars could progress in their career by applying for jobs in the higher category only when advertised locally by universities. This system gave rise to negotiations between universities aimed at giving the possibility to their most promising scholars to obtain, if not an immediate external promotion, at least the reasonable hope of soon being promoted internally. Of the two statutory winners of the old *concorsi*, one would get the job while the other would acquire certification in the higher category (akin but not identical to today's habilitation) that could then be used by other universities to offer her/him a promotion in that category. Using an economic metaphor, we could say that, in addition to issuing an immediately cashable promotion, the system created a secondary market of promotions which could then be used to obtain a position in the higher category at other universities. Both before and after the reform, mobility between universities was very limited,[5] but what has significantly changed since then is that with the new system the number of habilitated scholars has significantly grown. Still, only a few of them will be able to obtain a promotion at their current or at another university.

This has created much frustration, but a second consequence also derived. The more open and frequent system of national habilitation (ASN) – every four months it is possible to apply for habilitation in the higher category provided that certain criteria and productivity thresholds are cleared – has induced many more scholars, once marginal to the inter-university web of negotiations, to try and obtain habilitation, thus further inflating the ranks of the hopeful. The current one is certainly a more equitable and open system, given that many scholars who left academia to pursue other careers or went abroad to find a job at some foreign university wish to obtain Italian habilitation in order to try and compete for a university position in Italy. To some extent this has favored a greater circulation of scholars and the importation of scholars, Italian and foreign, with interesting specializations, unusual career paths and significant language skills. It has also led to a certain homogenization of the Italian system with career progression systems more frequently present abroad. In sum, it has led to the creation of a veritable international market of political scientists.

[5] In fact, it might have been higher before the Gelmini reform at least as far as internal mobility is concerned. What has increased since then has been international mobility, particularly through incentives for attracting to the Italian university system international scholars and young Italians who had decided to begin their careers abroad. This is, in itself, no small feat.

The combined effect of a greater circulation of scholars and greater ease in comparing scholarly achievements has gone hand in hand with a certain homogenization of evaluative standards in Italy and abroad. Italian academia, at least as far as political science is concerned, is increasingly aware of the standards that are prevalent abroad even if these are domestically still rather unpopular. Two instances stand out. The first is the creeping use of bibliometric indicators (impact factor of the articles or journals in which they are published, h and g indices according to Google Scholar or Publish or Perish, number of publications in Scopus- or WoS-ranked journals) to evaluate the scientific production of Italian political scientists *even if* the use of these indicators is formally excluded by ministerial regulations. The second is the increasing acceptance of doctoral dissertations composed of three or four published (or accepted for publication) journal articles instead of the conventional monograph. This new practice is increasingly associated with the "modern", structured type of doctoral program now prevalent as opposed to the "traditional" one based on the exclusive relationship between student and supervisor (Ballarino et al 2021: 14).

These practices have been adopted by some social science departments in Italy – particularly in Economics and increasingly also in Sociology departments – while they are quickly becoming the rule abroad. A corollary of these practices is the increased relevance given to journal articles as opposed to book chapters and even edited or monographic volumes in the periodic assessment of the Italian scientific political science production. The Italian "research assessment exercise" (*Valutazione della Qualità della Ricerca*, VQR) has adopted a system for ranking academic journals similar (though not identical) to Scopus or WoS, known as "*classe A*" or first-rate journals, which supposedly guarantee higher standards of impartiality and a blind review of the articles published therein. Moreover, it is now inconceivable for an Italian political scientist not to have earned a PhD in political science at home or abroad and not to be a regular attendee and paper-giver at major international conferences.[6]

These developments were in their infancy ten years ago, when the reform was launched, and still only a hope two years later at the time of the roundtable, organized by IPS among senior scholars representing six major Italian universities where political science has a strong tradition, to assess the first consequences of the reform. At that time, Pierangelo Isernia illustrated the choice of the small but active group of political scientists of the then Facoltà di Scienze Politiche at the University of Siena to look for partners "whose methodological underpinnings were as homogeneous as possible (given the available options, of course) to ours. We did so for two reasons or, if you like, under a couple of working hypotheses" (Isernia, 2012: 8). These "working hypotheses" reflected, first, a precise methodological and scientific orientation aimed at bringing political science closer to the other empirical social sciences and the desire to make the study of politics in Siena attractive also for international students who would then need to compete in other academic systems. The second hypothesis was that, in the future, the results of the evaluation system for both teaching and research would "play a greater role in allocating resources, in influencing recruitment and in catalyzing projects and

[6] For a comparative analysis of these research assessment exercises, see the special issue published in this journal in 2017 with contributions on the UK, France, the Netherlands and Italy (Piattoni 2017, and the articles by Flinders, Andeweg, Paradeise and Checchi).

initiatives. Any future Department will actively compete in an environment in which … the results of the evaluation process will determine its growth" (Isernia, 2012: 8-9). It seems to me that both hypotheses have been, against all odds and despite much resistance from many quarters, borne out by facts and that Italian political science has managed to internationalize to a remarkable degree and become more competitive also thanks to the incentives inherent in the evaluation processes.

The upshot of all this is that Italian political scientists, particularly the younger ones, are now more internationally oriented and more "marketable", but also more specialized than their elders. Contrary to what was common an academic generation (or two) ago[7] – that a good political scientist was supposed to be able to orientate him/herself in all sub-fields of political science and to never stick to just one research question for too long – today's scholars are much more specialized, interact with smaller but more closely-knit communities of scholars pursuing similar research questions, and publish more in highly specialized peer-reviewed, high-impact factor journals. In other words, young political scientists are more "professional", more specialized and more internationalized than the older generations, but also a lot narrower in their interests and knowledge of the discipline.

A remarkable consequence follows. While a generation or two ago Italian political science covered all aspects of the discipline with some degree of competence, it now suffers from remarkable gaps just as it is increasingly present in a few remarkable areas of specialization. It is as if the scientific study of politics in Italy has fragmented into many different fields of expertise and research agendas and, while contributing to cover all areas of the discipline together with foreign political science communities through international networks, has ended up suffering from evident gaps domestically. In other words, the diagnosis of the state of political science offered by Gabriel Almond (1988) – that political scientists now sit at separate tables and are incapable of, or uninterested in, talking to one another – could be applied to Italian political science as well, where a greater degree of specialization and internationalization has been acquired at the cost of a loss of general relevance and domestic debates.

4. Future challenges: making political science more innovative, relevant and visible

I would like to conclude this contribution by pointing to some new challenges that face Italian political scientists today. We know that the three missions of higher education are teaching, researching and contributing to society. The first two are to some degree obvious, the third requires some elaboration. Yet even the first two pose challenges to political scientists that are often undervalued and hence require a little discussion.

TEACHING. It is normally presumed that, having earned a PhD, political scientists should for that reason know how to communicate to students the knowledge they have so laboriously accumulated. As we all know this is far from true. All subjects present distinctive difficulties, and so does political science. I will here highlight those that I have personally found more challenging (and to which – I must confess – I am not yet sure to

[7] There is nothing scientific in the following statement, but my impression is that a "generation of scholars" appears every 10 or so years.

have found a satisfactory answer). The first challenge connected with teaching regards being able to fine-tune the message to the audience. We sometimes take for granted that in our classrooms sit students eager to learn about our subject and who share our same enthusiasm for it. This is often not the case. Students today often expect to acquire through higher education immediately marketable skills that they can deploy in an ever more competitive labor market. What specific skills does political science develop in students that can be immediately put to use out there? More simply, how can we arouse the interest of our students in the intricacies of political science, that require a mix of formal knowledge and passion for the unfolding of day-to-day events? Political scientists obviously find politics exceedingly exciting and cultivate a nerdy interest in the minutest details of electoral systems, policy-making processes and institutional architectures, but they are sometimes surprisingly inept at sharing this interest with their students or at making them see how these abilities are assets that can be showcased to land good jobs. The rising field of (political) communication is one of the sub-fields of political science that promises to deliver such skills, and Italian political scientists need to be ready to cultivate this field which is increasingly occupied by scholars coming from other disciplines.

The second challenge stems from the fact that, while some of the main theories that characterize the study of politics remain fairly stable in time, the material to which they get applied constantly changes: no two elections, no two policy decisions, no two processes of democratization are the same. Rarely is the extent to which teaching politics implies a constant effort at updating one's knowledge fully appreciated. Nothing ages more rapidly than an electoral result (particularly in Italy)! Political scientists may appear to simply describe the latest electoral result or the last reconfiguration in the party system, not too differently from other political commentators, and they must be better able to defend the scientificity of their profession and to communicate better the value added of their discipline.

To make things worse, and this is the third challenge, Italian political scientists, like most Italian academics, are not required to learn how to teach (a certificate in education is not among the requirements for teaching at university level in Italy) and are not required to adapt their teaching methods to evolving technologies. This has become painfully evident during the Covid-19 pandemic, when most of us taught online as we would have taught in class, by delivering more or less well-crafted lectures that we hope were sufficiently clear and held the interest of the students. But even in normal times, the average lecturer hardly feels the need to innovate on his/her teaching technique other than perhaps sharing a picture or two or projecting a short video to bring a particular event to life. Trying to innovate in one's teaching techniques is a difficult, time-consuming and uncertain enterprise that would greatly benefit if professional training sessions were offered to university lecturers as part of their continuing education. The kind of teaching assessment that is performed in Italy hardly has an impact on the tools used by political scientists in their (virtual) classrooms and no specific reward (or penalty) is associated with their effort (or lack thereof) to innovate. What is still mostly measured in Italy is simply the number of hours taught and a generic satisfaction on the part of the students, but hardly the in-depth look into teaching methods that is

performed elsewhere (e.g., the English Teaching Excellence Framework, which, however, is still carried out on a voluntary basis).

Research. We all know that future academics are supposed to carry out research, which normally means more than just reading books and crafting nifty arguments. Research in political science is mostly empirical and requires holding interviews, running surveys, collecting and analyzing documents, elaborating existing statistics, reconstructing policy processes, observing or participating in decision-making events, and much more. These activities are time-consuming and costly, and this is why political scientists (like other social scientists) spend long hours drafting research projects that, if funded, allow them to carry out research and bring money and notoriety to their universities, in turn allowing the latter to climb some notches in the international rankings. Having won a competitive bid for research funds from some prestigious funding agency – particularly in the capacity of "principal investigator" (PI) – is now one of the criteria that contribute to defining the profile of an established political scientist. Younger scholars are learning that research matters and that it matters even more than teaching. It is becoming almost easier for younger scholars to achieve this milestone (winning a competitive bid as PI) than it is for older ones, not least because the funds dedicated to young scholars have lately appropriately multiplied. The amount of funds raised by a political scientist is increasingly becoming one of the indicators according to which scholars are assessed by university departments. Abroad, political scientists are hard pressed to bring a certain amount of funds to their university: indeed, some university positions give their occupants only a modest fixed salary, the understanding being that the complement to a standard university salary should be made up by funds won by the scholar in competitive bids. The piece-rate pay system is spreading quickly and, once again, I would not be surprised if it were to spread also to Italian academia.

Contribution to society. The third mission of universities consists in giving back to society by disseminating widely the knowledge produced and by making sure that the research activities carried out therein are socially useful. This kind of activity is also useful in alerting the rest of the world that political science has indeed something valuable to offer and improving its (traditionally still low) standing among the social sciences. This has introduced a whole new aspect in the academic profession. In addition to being good teachers and successful researchers, academics must now contribute to society by disseminating relevant knowledge that has immediate practical applications.

In itself, this quest has merits, as it forces academics to think hard about the social relevance of their research topics and to be able to present their findings in a manner accessible to the wider public. These goals, in themselves sacrosanct, have, however, the potential of diverting the attention of scholars from scientifically worthwhile (but in themselves dull) enterprises to topics that are more easily presented as useful and resonate more with the wider public. According to a recent study, academics, particularly those of the STEM disciplines, don't mind sharing their results; what is rather lacking is a sufficiently robust demand from society which has lately increased as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic (Regini, 2021: 22; Perulli et al, 2018). Basic research, which does not immediately lead to any applicable result but has the potential of opening up important avenues of study, may be discouraged. Typically, methodological research – that is research that aims at refining existing methods and developing new ones – is

extremely difficult to communicate to the wider public and may be discouraged, while communication studies or opinion pools lend themselves more easily to being publicized to the wider public.[8] Political science may rather run the opposite risk: in an attempt to simplify the message and reach the wider public, political scientists may end up being mixed up with others who also "talk about politics" (and for that reason are called *politologi*, literally "those who talk about politics"), such as journalists or mass-media experts. These, although often more informed about current events and in certain cases also very knowledgeable with regard to the political scientific literature, on average use commonsensical arguments in their comments rather than the theories, models and knowledge developed by political science. The real danger here is to perpetuate a certain image of political scientists as not real "scientists", but just as people who talk about things political.

5. The lingering challenges: governance, administration and service to the community

The changes in the composition and quality of Italian political scientists described above are certainly very promising but are also fraught with dangers for the continuing growth and consolidation of the discipline. Let us summarize the achievements. First of all, it is by now taken for granted that Italian political scientists should have earned a PhD in political science or in a cognate social science with a clear specialization in the study of politics (a PhD in Political Science is preferable). They should know the political science literature, broadly refer to its theoretical and analytical approaches, and use its methodological arsenal. They should have been trained to write, present and discuss their scientific works at national and international conferences and to disseminate their findings and reflections through national and international quality journals. They should demonstrate a certain continuity in the production of scientific works, slowing down possibly only during more intensive phases of data collection or in preparation of more complex scholarly products such as book manuscripts. They should command a number of methods, whether quantitative or qualitative, and be aware of the pros and cons of using the ones and the others. Provided they clear all these requirements and show a pertinent record, with the important proviso that a sufficient number of positions in political science (and correlated funds) are available, they can legitimately aim at a steady progression of their careers. All good, then?

In reality there are dangers inherent in this otherwise commendable mainstreaming of the profession that are worthy of mention. A career in political science, like that in many other disciplines in Italy, requires also being available to carry out a number of activities that objectively distract from the three missions described above and that can be indicated as participating in the governance of university departments, contributing to the administration that makes the above three missions possible, and offering a service to the community (such as reviewing journal articles and other types of submissions, serving on the board of scientific journals, participating in evaluation committees, serving on the executive committees of scientific associations, etc.). Young scholars, fresh

[8] For a fuller assessment of the potentials and constraints of the third mission of universities, see Compagnucci and Spigarelli (2020).

out of a PhD and perhaps enjoying the freedom afforded by a research grant, rightly worry about taking the first steps of their careers thinking that landing a position in a university department is the hardest part. In their minds, the uncertainties connected to their situation obviously outweigh the freedom of being able to shape one's research agenda and dedicate oneself full-time to studying, doing research and writing. Having interiorized the well-known injunction "publish or perish", this is what they single-mindedly pursue. Little do they know that those precarious years with little money and too much freedom may be the best of their lives! Once they finally land a job in academia and clear the first hurdle to a stable position – in the current Italian promotion system, when they become associate professors – their freedom and time begin to evaporate, and they are required to perform some of the many accessory activities (described above) that allow the system to function.

Unfortunately, some scholars never quite make the psychological transition and try to retain the best of both worlds: stability and freedom. This leads to situations in which departments are starved of people who are willing to help run them efficiently; evaluation committees (think of the various *concorsi*, but also of the VQR and the ASN) are deprived of brilliant scholars who would rightfully contribute to keeping up the standards of the profession; scholarly journals do not find competent editors who can secure a stream of high-level scientific publications; and disciplinary associations and other governance structures cannot find worthy candidates to fill their executive positions. "Service to the community" in various capacities is one of the hallmarks of an established scholar just as brilliant teaching, innovative research and captivating posts are. Many colleagues eventually understand the importance of also carrying out these activities but, particularly among those who have experienced a long period of precariousness or who have begun their careers abroad, a certain reluctance in sharing the burdens of a system that they do not yet feel is their own can be noted.

6. Conclusions

Italian political scientists have made momentous progress on many fronts, but particularly by upgrading upper tertiary education, mainstreaming career development and intensifying their presence in international scientific circles. A greater international mobility of Italian scholars studying and working abroad and, vice versa, foreign scholars studying and working in Italy can also be observed. These changes have been accompanied by a certain differentiation between (variously denominated) political science departments now trying to acquire a particular specialization and international standing in attractive research areas or in specific methodological approaches. A certain attempt at innovation and hybridization of political science with other social sciences is also observable, though perhaps not to the extent that seems to be required by the changing needs of current societies. More could be done in several areas: from the establishment of applied PhD programs in collaboration with private firms and public agencies to the constant upgrading of teaching and disseminating techniques through more investment in continuing education and life-long learning arrangements.

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