



# Ideological proximity and valence competition. Negative campaigning through allegation of corruption in the Italian legislative arena from 1946 to 1994

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## ABSTRACT

We consider the possibility for the parties to invest in negative campaigning – a behavior that, in our framework, involves blaming alleged insufficiencies of the rival concerning commonly shared values. Within a simple one-dimensional model, we deduce the hypothesis that the parties' incentive to “attack” each other increases with the parties' proximity on the left–right space. We test our hypothesis on an Italian case, focusing on the emphasis placed by the Communist Party on political corruption issues during the government investiture debates that spanned from the postwar period until 1994, when the traditional party system abruptly collapsed. The statistical results are largely consistent with our theoretical insights.

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## 1. Introduction

Negative political campaigning, broadly defined as the attempt to gain some electoral advantage by attacking an opponent rather than emphasizing one's own positive attributes or policies, has received increasing attention in the literature in recent years. Considered for a long time as a peculiar feature of the American electoral context, it is, in reality, a phenomenon that manifests itself in several other democracies (Sigelman and Shiraev, 2002; Hansen and Pedersen, 2008).

Numerous attempts have been made to explain the conditions under which the parties or candidates may have incentives “to go negative” (see Damore, 2002; Theilmann and Wilhite, 1998). Skaperdas and Grofman (1995), e.g., have speculated that candidates with lower level of support are more likely to attack. Furthermore, Harrington and Hess

(1996) have underlined the role of the public's perception of a candidate's personal characteristics, while Doron and On (1983) have stressed the importance of where the candidates stand in policy space.

From these earlier works, we are drawn to consider the more extensive matter of the issues and motives that shape and affect party competition. To begin with, we recognize the possibility for the parties to invest in negative campaigning – a behavior that, in our framework, involves blaming alleged insufficiencies of the rival in relation to commonly shared values. This allows us to treat negative campaigning as a particular case of competition on valence issues (Stokes, 1963). Moreover, within a simple one-dimensional model, we deduce that the parties' incentive to “attack” each other on shared values increases with the parties' proximity on the left–right space. This hypothesis of an inverse relation between ideological distance and valence struggle is here derived from an analytical reasoning, putting together party competition and valence issues in the framework of the spatial theory of voting.

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We test our hypothesis on the Italian case, by considering the incentive of the Communist Party to emphasize a particular topic related to negative campaigning, i.e. political corruption, during the government investiture debates from the beginning of the Italian Republic in 1946 to the downfall of the traditional party system in 1994. The status of the perennial opposition undergone by the Communist party during the period considered makes the Italian political system particularly apt to test our hypothesis. To our knowledge, this is the first attempt to carry out an enquiry aimed at uncovering the *spatial motive* of blaming the rival party for its moral insufficiencies in a longitudinal setting that involves a parliamentary democracy. Some more general implications of our findings are discussed in the conclusion.

## 2. Negative campaigning and ideological distance: an intuitive model

Let us consider two parties in a left–right space, where a party location represents an outline of its policy positions that – following Downs (1957), and many others since then – we call party *ideology*. Let us suppose that, in this ideological space, the electors have symmetrical single-picked utility functions that are all identical apart from their ideal point, and linearly decreasing with the distance from it. In this situation, each party gets a share of votes that depends on its ideology, on the ideology of the other party, and on the distribution of voters' preferences over the ideological space. Fig. 1 illustrates a possible situation: in this case, party *L* gets all votes from the extreme left to the midpoint between *L* and *R*, while party *R* gets all those between that midpoint and the extreme right.

This applies in a basic world where voters care *only* about ideologies. Although important, parties' ideologies (which summarize their policy choices) do not exhaust all the aspects relevant in electoral competition. This has been acknowledged by Stokes, who proposed a distinction between 'position issues' as "those that involve advocacy of government actions from a set of alternatives over which a distribution of voter preferences is defined," and 'valence issues' as "those that merely involve the linking of the parties with some condition that is positively or negatively valued by the electorate" (Stokes, 1963, p. 373). Enelow and Hinich have elaborated Stokes' point in a more analytic

way, and have defined valence issues as those candidate or party characteristics that all electors value in the same way, although they may have different perceptions as to how different candidates and/or parties are equipped with (Enelow and Hinich, 1982, p. 117). An example of valence supremacy is the acknowledged aptitude (i.e., reputation) of a party's staff and activists to hold characteristics such as honesty or competence in a larger measure than competitors.

In recent years, a growing number of contributions on spatial voting have started to incorporate valence issues into the analysis. Their aim is to explore the implications that valence considerations may have on parties' strategies (see Ansolabehere and Snyder, 2000; Groseclose, 2001; Schofield, 2003; Adams et al., 2005). Still, in the aforementioned models the "valence endowment" that parties enjoy is considered as exogenously fixed, which means that parties or candidates cannot act strategically in order to win valence competition. It is precisely this assumption that we relax here, presenting a quite intuitive model that allows us to link the debate on valence issues with the literature on negative campaigning in a spatial framework.

To begin with, if a given party enjoys a valence advantage, then the utility of voting for it can be considered to arise uniformly. And when this happens, the party with valence superiority gains a number of votes that depends on the amount of its moral advantage, as shown in Fig. 2 for the case of party *R*. Thus parties are not only distinguished *horizontally* in relation to their ideology, but also *vertically*, considering their pledge to sustaining some relevant valence issues (for a similar spatial representation, see Groseclose, 2001). We shall consider the voter's perception of party attitudes toward valence issues in the spatial framework through this vertical "position" of a party, which does not correspond to any ideology.

This speculation on the possible role of valence issues in party competition has recently received an empirical corroboration among the others in Clarke et al. (2009), where it has been shown that vote behavior in Britain and United States strongly depends on valence issues such as economic growth, crime deterrence, national defence, and leaders' image (pp. 636–639, see also Clarke et al., 2004).

Moving from the acknowledgment that electors are motivated by position as well as valence issues, we assume that parties may compete both by moving their locations in the left–right space *and* by determining their level of

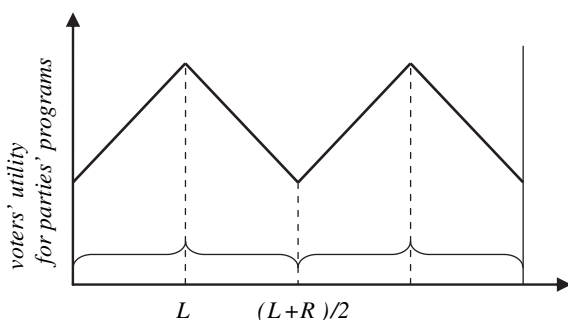


Fig. 1. Electors' utility and parties' votes in a left to right policy space.

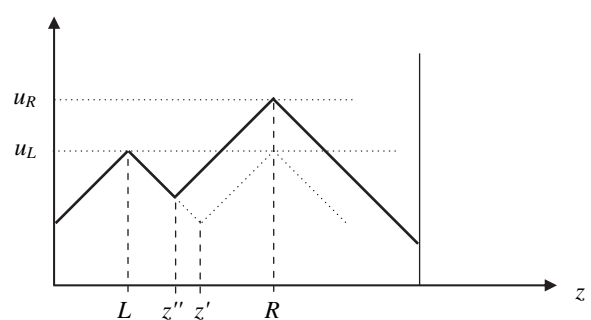


Fig. 2. Valence superiority of party *R* ( $u_R - u_L$ ) is responsible for its increased support ( $z'' - z'$ ).

vertical position in a valence competition. However, both kinds of moves may be costly for a party: on one side various aspects such as activists' tie to established ideology (Aldrich, 1983), concern for party reputation whenever voters 'remember' a party's past positions (Cox, 1990; Plümper and Martin, 2008) and uncertainty about popular preferences (Budge, 1994) can make difficult any spatial displacement; on the other detecting the opponent's failures on shared values and organizing negative campaigns increases the costs of valence competition, letting alone the fear of retaliation. Then we simply assume that, in a given competitive setting, parties adopt the kind more promising in terms of votes.

Focusing on valence competition, the nomination of popular candidates is one of the strategies that the parties can undertake in this regard, stemming the candidates' popularity either from previous political activities or from some other sources of social renown (for example, a war hero or a movie star). More generally, the deliberate exploitation of a valence issue as a competitive strategy includes all the actions aimed at impressing the electorate as a whole. Therefore, negative campaigning on valence issues can be considered as a particular case of valence competition, a case where a party claims that the rival is somehow unfit to hold the office, thus being, in a sense, an illegitimate competitor. In this regard, what is really at stake is harming or discrediting the reputation of the opponent, and blaming its alleged insufficiencies concerning a cause universally supported.<sup>1</sup> In other words, the notion of negative campaigning we are dealing with is not viewed as affecting voters' perceptions of candidates' ideologies (policy programs), but voters' perceptions of parties' score in valence issues. Our definition does not include therefore acts such as attacking the policy program that the other party would do, if in office (as in Riker, 1986, p. 50).

In this respect, a question that deserves investigation is under which spatial conditions parties have the largest incentives to invest in negative campaigning. Indeed, if we acknowledge that detecting the opponent's misuse of political power and arranging a negative campaign is costly for a party – also in terms of opportunity costs deducted from other profitably competitive activities (see Damore, 2002, pp. 672, 673) – then we can conclude that parties will have more incentives to adopt this kind of strategies when their marginal benefit is higher in terms of expected vote-gains.

Fig. 3 presents an illustration of the influence that the ideological distance between the parties may have on their incentive to spend resources for negative campaigning aimed at decreasing the utility of voting for the rival. Both

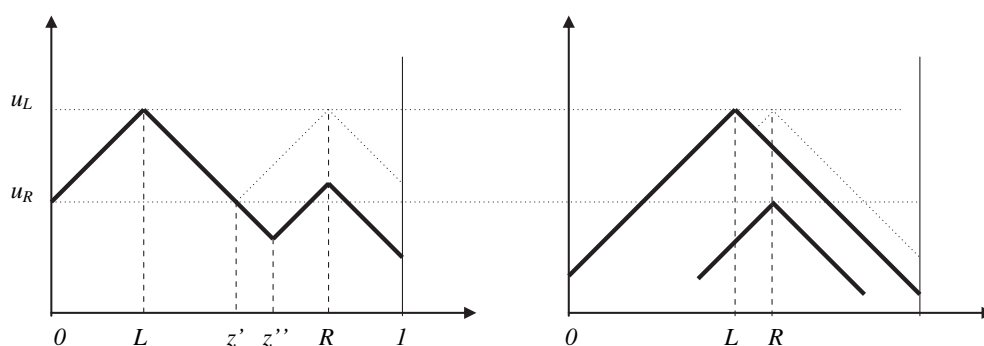
sides of the figure show the same reputational advantage of party L concerning valence issues, owing to a successful negative campaigning. However, on the left, a large distance between parties' locations can be observed, while on the right, the same situation is illustrated with a much smaller ideological distance. A further examination of the figure reveals that the consequences in vote competition are very different: for the larger distance, the valence superiority gives a modest advantage in votes to party L, while for the smaller distance, the advantage is enormous, as the party gets all the votes, leaving the opponent with no votes at all.

This simple analysis suggests some interesting deductions. As long as parties' ideologies are sufficiently apart (Fig. 3, left), a competitive move concerning values cannot be very profitable, because accusations must be numerous and relevant to bring some significant benefits in votes, which would seriously increase the opportunity cost of negative campaigning. A possible conclusion of this situation is that both parties may find an agreement implying a low level of mutual negative campaigning, to free resources for winning activists' resistance, for example, and trying more promising competitive moves on the left–right space, aimed at improving their capacity to get votes from the large electorate between them.<sup>2</sup>

On the contrary, when the party policy programs are very close (Fig. 3, right), and consequently, when quite a few electors are present between the parties' locations on the ideological space, fighting on the left–right dimension may not be very profitable, while even a limited valence prevalence can give all the votes to a party. Thus, this is a situation where parties are strongly induced to discredit each other's moral reputation, publicly denouncing any characteristic of the opponent that the electors might perceive as a disvalue. Putting all this more intuitively: the more the parties look alike each other in terms of ideological position, the more they need to find a different way to distinguish themselves in front of the electorate. And moreover, the more they are close on the ideological space, the more they are induced to avoid any denigration of the

<sup>1</sup> We can consider the nomination of popular candidates as belonging to the positive side of valence competition (what is at stake is *improving* the party's own image) while discrediting the opponent's value reputation belongs to its negative side (what is at stake is *worsening* the opponent's image). However, social psychology provides several reasons for why negative information ought to be more persuasive than comparable positive information (see Damore, 2002). Then one may argue that the latter strategy is more promising and, therefore, more usually undertaken.

<sup>2</sup> To be sure, the number of voters between the parties depends not only on the distance but also on the voters' distribution in the ideological space. Therefore, to properly test the relationship between ideological distance and the incentives to invest in negative campaigning, one should also need to control for this latter distribution. Accomplish this aim, however, is quite problematic in our case study. As we will see, we analyze the political situation in Italy since 1946 till 1994. However, no electoral surveys are available before 1968 election – and even after that year the electoral surveys are relatively few. Still, by relying on the Italian electoral surveys currently available (1968, 1972, 1985, 1990. Source: Italian National Election Studies) we can infer that the distribution of the Italian voters remains pretty stable across surveys, with a large share of voters that keeps locating in the central part of the ideological scale. The ratio of voters that self-locate between a center-left position and a moderate center-right position (i.e., between 3 and 6 on a 0 to 10 left–right scale) exceeds always the 60% of the electorate. Given the position of the parties involved in our empirical test, this is a situation that fits reasonably well our theoretical model and the hypotheses that we draw from it. Indeed, the Italian Communist Party assumes a pretty clear left ideological position that tends to moderate over the years, while the Christian Democratic Party barely moves from a moderate centrist position.



**Fig. 3.** For the same amount of success in negative campaigning ( $u_L - u_R$ ), party L gains a few votes ( $z'' - z'$ ) if party distance is large (left in the figure) while gets all votes ( $1 - 0$ ) if party distance is small (right in the figure).

policy program of the rival, which is so similar to its own. This is precisely what negative campaigning on valence issues allows them to do.<sup>3</sup> According to the above-mentioned discussion, we can therefore state the following hypothesis:

*The Spatial “Mudslinging” (SM) hypothesis: Parties’ incentive to negative campaigning on valence issues grows up with parties’ proximity on the ideological space.*

Although drawn from a bipartisan model, we think that the validity of this hypothesis can be cautiously applied to multiparty systems. As to its dependent variable (i.e., negative campaigning on valence issues) parties belonging to the government coalition cannot attack each other on moral reputation (which implies that the attacked ally is declared unfit to govern), as this would quickly tear down the alliance. To a lesser extent this is true also for opposition parties, because an open contrast among them on that matter would lessen their action against the government, in terms of public reputation as well as opportunity costs. Then negative campaigning on valence issues can effectively exist only between government coalition and opposition parties. As to the independent variable (i.e., proximity) government parties, while presenting the same program, may actually preserve somehow their ideological identity, and even more so for opposition parties. However, when both government coalition and opposition parties are dominated by a single large party, the proximity between these dominant parties may be a reasonable substitute for our independent variable. Moreover, if one or more parties effectively challenge the supremacy of the dominant party of their bloc, a reasonable substitute for proximity could be that between the weighted means of the two competing sides, where the means should take into account dominant and challenging parties. Therefore, in alike cases, adequate measures can be set up to control the SM hypothesis also for multiparty systems.

### 3. The choice of the test

In order to control the SM hypothesis we decided to make use of an appropriate case study and, as anticipated in the Introduction, we chose the Italian party system from 1946 to 1994. To justify this choice a preliminary step is to see whether this case, which is popularly addressed as the First Italian Republic, belongs to the set of multiparty systems to which the hypothesis (derived for a bipartisan model) can be applied. On this, historians and political scientists agree that the coalition governments of the Italian system were generally dominated by the largest party of the system, the Christian Democratic party (DC), while its opposition was invariably dominated by its second largest party, the Communist party (PCI). No government was practically possible without DC, and no significant opposition without PCI. The definition of the Italian system as “imperfect bipartisan system” (Galli, 1967; see also Bardi and Ignazi, 1998), although ascribed because of the lack of government alternation (more on this below), points out that the Italian party system may be considered a kind of bipartisan system. Moreover, it experienced a process of concentration around the two main parties that reached its peak during the 1970s, when the DC and PCI repeatedly obtained about 70% of the popular vote. Since the beginning of 1980s, however, the Italian party system witnessed a growing role played by the Socialist party within the government bloc. Following our previous discussion, this does not dismiss the possibility to employ and control for our SM hypothesis. Still it forces us to take care of this fact in an adequate way (as we do below).

Negative campaigning on valence issues may be directed toward various parties’ alleged value failures, such as economic incompetence, weakness against crime or terrorism, leaders’ lack of charisma. Having chosen the Italian 1946–1994 case, we have decided to draw our attention to the incentives of the parties to invest in a particular aspect of negative campaigning, i.e., political corruption. Two different reasons, although possibly related to each other, suggest that this value item should be important for the case we have chosen. First, media chronicles as well as scholarly literature affirm that corruption scandals involving political parties and their representatives were of great importance in shaping the

<sup>3</sup> Of course parties may also adopt moves related to the positive side of valence competition, spending resources in advertising and trying to present popular candidates (when available). However, in the short run of an electoral campaign, it is arguable that they will rather count on the most profitable moves, which are related to negative information (see also no. 1).

party's competition during that period of Italian political history (Della Porta and Vannucci, 1999; Golden and Chang, 2001). Moreover, the abrupt collapse of the traditional Italian party system in the two-year period from 1992 to 1994 has been connected, among other factors, to the exposure of corruption scandals highlighted by the judicial investigations (see Bardi and Ignazi, 1998; Morlino, 1996). Second, as already mentioned, from 1946 till 1994 the Italian politics recorded the lowest turnover ratio of cabinet parties among all the Western European Democracies (Mershon, 2001). In particular, the fact that DC was always the most important member of the government, while PCI was almost always at the opposition, largely simplifies our empirical test. We suppose, in fact, that the incentive to invest in negative campaigning focused on blaming other parties for corruption motivates the opposition parties the most, because cabinet parties are much more besieged with offers of corruption, and encounter more occasions to become corrupt. Consequently, while in a democratic system in which alternation in government is normal the incentives to invest in negative campaigning are sometimes higher for one party and sometimes for the other, in the case of the Italian First Republic we should conclude that the emphasis on the political corruption is a competitive strategy that is attractive mostly to the PCI. Based on this *unidirectional* meaning – which recognizes in the Communist party the actor systematically more motivated to invest resources in negative campaigning centered on corruption – we tried to control our *SM* hypothesis.<sup>4</sup>

In any case, it is important to emphasize that our attempt is not to explain the reasons behind such widespread political corruption in Italy.<sup>5</sup> Instead, we want to examine the incentives that push parties to invest in negative campaigning centered on political corruption. It is precisely the existence of an underlying, and almost constant, flow of corruption scandals that makes the case under scrutiny into a fertile ground for our aim, as it gives us the opportunity of searching for an explanation of any relevant variation in the rate of allegations that political actors make about such issues.

Finally the appropriateness of the Italian First Republic case as a test for the *SM* hypothesis stems from a major characteristics of its party system. Due to the presence of a very strong Communist party which, after being lengthily tied to Soviet Union, experienced substantial ideological

changes showing a trend toward west-European socialist parties, the spatial polarization of the system, although constantly significant, undergoes with time important variations. On one side this implies that our case study can be a crucial test for measuring the importance of valence issues, as its ideological divide should instead emphasize the spatial competition on policy issues. On the other it gives us the opportunity of controlling the functional relation between these variations and the amount of allegation of corruption, which is exactly the task of the empirical side of this work.

#### 4. Spatial distance and political corruption over 50 years of Italian politics

All this being established, we test the validity of our finding on the party competition in the Italian legislative arena. To this purpose we use a new data set that we have built on the basis of a codification of all the investiture debates of the Italian governments from 1946 to 1994 (see Table 1 for the list of cabinets and for their party composition). According to the Italian Constitution, the power to nominate the Prime Minister is given to the President of the Republic. Usually, some days after this formal investiture, the newly formed government goes to the Parliament to ask and (possibly) receive the investiture through a positive roll-call vote of confidence. In particular, the Prime Minister, nominated but not yet incumbent, has to deliver two official speeches in the Lower House (Camera dei Deputati) and the Upper House (Senato della Repubblica) of the Italian Parliament,<sup>6</sup> where he should expound the government's policy intentions. Subsequently, the parliamentary debate is opened and various party representatives are allowed to speak, discussing the same wide range of issues covered by the Prime Minister, and concluding with a vote declaration on behalf of the respective parties. Not differently from parties' manifestos, we can therefore treat the investiture debates as a set of typically comprehensive speeches addressing a wide range of policy issues that disclose policy options and expectations of the government and opposition parties (see also Ieraci, 2006).

For each vote of investiture (from the second De Gasperi's cabinet in 1946 during the Constituent Assembly to the Ciampi's cabinet in 1993 during the Eleventh Legislature), we selected and codified one speech from each party, collecting a total of more than 420 texts.<sup>7</sup> Whenever

<sup>4</sup> This interpretation is consistent with one of the main conclusions of the literature on negative campaigning, that stresses that parties and candidates tend to go negative when they are in opposition (see Lau and Pomper, 2001, 2002; Benoit et al., 2000). This happens because the incumbents are in the conditions to emphasize their former performance – for instance, they can put into evidence their past work to pass popular bills or their efforts to decrease unemployment. On the contrary, the challenger(s) can only stresses future (and therefore rather abstract) promises. As a result, the incentives of the opposition parties to invest in negative campaign tend to be always higher, *ceteris paribus* (Elmelund-Præstekær, 2010; Hansen and Pedersen, 2008). This is especially true for a party such as the PCI that was permanently out of the government.

<sup>5</sup> For excellent works on the political reasons that favored the diffusion of corruption in Italy (see: Golden and Chang, 2001; Golden, 2003; Chang, 2005; Della Porta and Vannucci, 1997). For a comparative study: Montinola and Jackman (2002), Gerring and Thacker (2004).

<sup>6</sup> The estimation of the parties' policy positions according to their legislative speeches would generate biased results whenever the linkage between the government and the majority in the Parliament influences what the parties say during a vote of investiture. The weak cohesion in the Italian coalitions during the period here considered (Verzichelli and Cotta, 2000), together with the fact that our codification concerns verbal expressions of appreciation or dislike, rather than specific behaviors, makes the aforementioned risk less relevant in our case.

<sup>7</sup> We focused our analysis on the investiture debate in the Camera dei Deputati, with the exception of two Andreotti's governments (the first and the fifth), which delivered just an official speech in the Senato, before failing the investiture. The list of the speeches coded, the categories employed, and the codebook are available at the following URL <http://www.sociol.unimi.it/docenti/curini/papers>. The codification procedure was made by two trained coders. The inter-coder reliability was R-Pearson 0.83.



**Table 1**  
Italian Governments 1946–1994 (composition and external support).

Legislature	Cabinet	Data formed	Parties in cabinet	External support parties
Constituent Assembly	De Gasperi II	7/46	DC, PCI, PSI, PRI	–
Constituent Assembly	De Gasperi III	2/47	DC, PCI, PSI	–
Constituent Assembly	De Gasperi IV	5/47	DC, PLI	FUQ, PSDI
First	De Gasperi V	5/48	DC, PLI, PSDI, PRI	–
First	De Gasperi VI	1/50	DC, PSDI, PRI	–
First	De Gasperi VII	7/51	DC, PRI	–
Second	De Gasperi VIII	7/53	DC	–
Second	Pella	8/53	DC	PLI, PNM, PRI
Second	Fanfani I	1/54	DC	PRI
Second	Scelba	2/54	DC, PSDI, PLI	PRI
Second	Segni I	7/55	DC, PSDI, PLI	PRI
Second	Zoli	5/57	DC	MSI, PNM
Third	Fanfani II	7/58	DC, PSDI	–
Third	Segni II	2/59	DC	MSI, PLI, PMP, PNM
Third	Tambroni	3/60	DC	MSI
Third	Fanfani III	7/60	DC	–
Third	Fanfani IV	2/62	DC, PSDI, PRI	–
Fourth	Leone I	6/63	DC	–
Fourth	Moro I	12/63	DC, PSI, PSDI, PRI	–
Fourth	Moro II	7/64	DC, PSI, PSDI, PRI	–
Fourth	Moro III	2/66	DC, PSI, PSDI, PRI	–
Fifth	Leone II	6/68	DC	–
Fifth	Rumor I	12/68	DC, PSU, PRI	–
Fifth	Rumor II	8/69	DC	–
Fifth	Rumor III	2/70	DC, PSI, PSDI, PRI	–
Fifth	Colombo	8/70	DC, PSI, PSDI, PRI	–
Fifth	Andreotti I	2/72	DC	PLI
Sixth	Andreotti II	6/72	DC, PSDI, PLI	PRI
Sixth	Rumor IV	7/73	DC, PSI, PSDI, PRI	–
Sixth	Rumor V	3/74	DC, PSI, PSDI	PRI
Sixth	Moro IV	11/74	DC, PRI	PSDI, PSI
Sixth	Moro V	2/76	DC	PSDI
Seventh	Andreotti III	7/76	DC	–
Seventh	Andreotti IV	3/78	DC	PCI, PRI, PSDI, PSI
Seventh	Andreotti V	3/79	DC, PSDI, PRI	–
Eighth	Cossiga I	8/79	DC, PSDI, PLI	–
Eighth	Cossiga II	4/80	DC, PSI, PRI	–
Eighth	Forlani	10/80	DC, PSI, PSDI, PRI	–
Eighth	Spadolini I	6/81	DC, PSI, PSDI, PRI, PLI	–
Eighth	Spadolini II	8/82	DC, PSI, PSDI, PRI, PLI	–
Eighth	Fanfani V	12/82	DC, PSI, PSDI, PLI	–
Ninth	Craxi I	8/83	DC, PSI, PSDI, PRI, PLI	–
Ninth	Craxi II	8/86	DC, PSI, PSDI, PRI, PLI	–
Ninth	Fanfani VI	4/87	DC	PR, PSDI, PSI
Tenth	Goria	7/87	DC, PSI, PSDI, PRI, PLI	–
Tenth	De Mita	4/88	DC, PSI, PSDI, PRI, PLI	–
Tenth	Andreotti VI	7/89	DC, PSI, PSDI, PRI, PLI	–
Tenth	Andreotti VII	4/91	DC, PSI, PSDI, PLI	–
Eleventh	Amato	6/92	DC, PSI, PSDI, PLI	–
Eleventh	Ciampi	4/93	DC, PSI, PSDI, PLI	PR

We define a government as any administration that is formed after an election and that continues in the absence of a resignation in an inter-election period. The abbreviations for party names are the following: DC, Christian Democracy Party; FUQ, Front of the Ordinary Man; MSI, Italian Social Movement; PCI, Italian Communist Party; PLI, Italian Liberal Party; PMP, Popular Monarchist Party; PNM, National Monarchist Party; PR, Radical Party; PRI, Italian Republican Party; PSDI, Italian Social-Democratic Party; PSI, Italian Socialist Party; PSU, Unified Socialist Party; PSI, Italian Socialist Party.

possible, we chose the speech of the party leader. Otherwise, we selected the most relevant MP for each party among those who participated in the parliamentary debate. To codify the legislative speeches, we followed the same method adopted by the well-known Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) to analyze the content of the party electoral programs of various democracies (including Italy) (see Budge et al., 2001 for a detailed description). However we extended the original 56 categories of the CMP data set to 68, to take account of the Italian political context. For

example, we included extra-categories to capture all positive and negative references made by the parties to Catholic Church as well as to Soviet Union.

This coding scheme allows us to extract the information that we need to control our *SM* hypothesis. On the one hand, among the 68 categories mentioned, one is explicitly devoted to record the emphasis placed by the parties on political corruption issues during each investiture debate. Accordingly, the emphasis placed by the Communist party on the above-mentioned topic constitutes our dependent

variable (termed as CORRUPTION).<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, from our database we are able to estimate the party policy positions on a general left–right scale. We need this as a preliminary step to assess the spatial distance between the PCI and its government counterpart that represents our principal independent variable (termed as DISTANCE).

In particular, till the end of the Eighth Legislature (April 1983), DISTANCE is estimated as the absolute distance between the left–right placements of PCI and DC (i.e., between the main opposition party and its main government competitor) in each investiture debate. However, since the beginning of the Ninth Legislature, we consider the distance between the Communist party and the mean position of the dyad formed by the Christian democrats and the Socialist party, weighted by their respective share of seats. This reflects the already mentioned increasing role achieved by the Socialist party that, owing to a new leadership, not only moved toward a harsher confrontation with the PCI as well as toward a strengthened relationship with the DC (Bull and Newell, 2005),<sup>9</sup> but also challenged the Christian Democrats as the government rulers, succeeding in taking the office of Prime Minister for its leader Bettino Craxi for quite a long period of cabinet stability (August 1983–April 1987). Finally, since the second half of the Tenth Legislature, i.e., since the transformation of the PCI into the Democratic Party of the Left (PDS) following the collapse of the Soviet Union and East-European communist world at the end of 1980s, we consider the distance between the weighted position of DC and PSI and the position of PDS.

To estimate the placements of parties on the left–right scale, we have first selected the categories considered as the most effective indicators of “left” and “right” policy positions, according to a-priori grounds (see: Budge et al., 2001; Benoit and Laver, 2006; for the Italian case: Farneti, 1980; Mastropaolo and Slater, 1992). Subsequently, we have constructed the left–right position for each party in each investiture debate by subtracting the sum of its left statements from the sum of its right statements. As a result, the range of this scale is between –100 (i.e., the score of a party devoting its entire speech to the Left-wing issues) and +100 (i.e., the score of a party that dedicates its speech entirely to the Right-wing issues). This method of estimating left–right party scores clearly resembles the

standard method employed in the CMP literature (see Laver and Budge 1992).<sup>10</sup> The scale generally opposes a pro-State, anti-Western, progressive, and consensual attitude on the Left, to a pro-market, pro-Western, traditional, and majoritarian attitude on the Right.<sup>11</sup> To assess the external validity of our left–right scale, we have compared it with measures of the Italian party positions deriving from the available sets of mass and expert-surveys covering the period since the 1968 general election till 1992 (this is a common practice in the literature: see Gabel and Huber, 2000; Laver et al., 2003). In this regard it can be observed that the average correlation of our left–right scores is quite high for each set of surveys (respectively .86 and .85: data available upon requests from the authors). Thus, our methodology seems to adequately capture the Italian parties’ left–right positions (and their evolution).

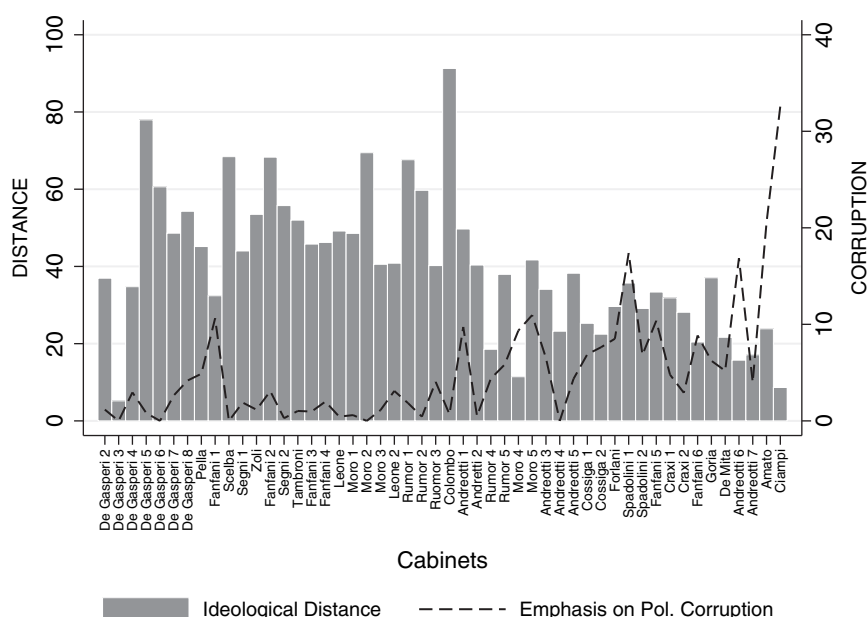
Using the data set based on investiture debates presents a peculiar advantage. In fact, it allows to better capture the *continuous dynamics* of the relationship implied in our hypothesis, given that it takes into account the impact of events affecting the parties’ policy positions and their emphasis on political corruption that can happen in the inter-election period. Such events are likely to occur. Consider, for instance, the case of a new party leader imposing a new policy agenda, or that of a new equilibrium among different factions within a party stemming from a party convention, or the impact of international events on the party’s position regarding particular topics (e.g., with regard to the Italian case, the consequences of the Warsaw Pact invasion of Hungary in 1956 or of Czechoslovakia in 1968). Moreover, political scandals may arise during the life of a legislature. Finally, electoral competition is not merely linked to national elections, but also to local, regional, and, since the end of 1970s, to European elections. On the other hand, under favorable conditions, parties may invest in negative campaigning, anticipating its likely effects on the

<sup>8</sup> In principle, references to political corruption may indicate this subject as a social problem that any government need to face once in office through the policy schemes, such as more spending in fiscal detection, etc. However, we assume that all occurrences of CORRUPTION in PCI’s confidence speeches imply negative campaigning against cabinet’s (and in particular, DC’s) attitude on corruption. Thus, we take for granted that in a highly symbolic contest, such as the process of confidence vote, no significant room is to be given to the scholarly examination of political corruption (possibly implying the analysis of its historical causes and its feasible therapies).

<sup>9</sup> This is reflected by the shortened distance between the DC and PSI placements on our left–right scale (see below), which decreases by threefold on an average, when compared with the previous period. On the other hand, estimating the variable DISTANCE since the Ninth Legislature as done in the previous legislatures (i.e., as the distance between PCI and DC only) does not affect our results. Indeed, the magnitude of the relationship between DISTANCE and CORRUPTION increases slightly in this second case. Data available upon request.

<sup>10</sup> One possible problem with our scale is that both the corruption measure (that is, our dependent variable) and the left–right measure (i.e., our main independent variable) are extrapolated from the same data set that, as explained, capture the emphasis (saliency) given by parties to different issues during their speeches. This could imply a risk of endogeneity in how we estimate the left–right position of parties. In order to control for it, we have also estimated two alternative left–right scales. The first one follows the “vanilla” method proposed by Gabel and Huber (2000), which consists of extracting the first dimension that best accounts for the observed covariation across the parties among all the categories comprising our dataset, and treating it as the underlying left–right dimension. Of course, in this case, we have dropped from this data-reduction analysis the category related to political corruption. In the second case, we have used the ratio measure proposed by Kim and Fording (1998): that is, we have normalized the left–right scores as explained in the paper with the saliency each party assigns to the sum of the categories comprising the left–right scale. Note that, by construction, in both cases the fact that the saliency of the corruption issue goes up or down does not affect the left–right scores. The two scales are strongly correlated with the left–right scale that we employ. Moreover, the substantial conclusions of our analysis do not change based on the variant of the left–right scale which is applied to estimate the variable DISTANCE.

<sup>11</sup> We have assessed the internal coherence of the categories forming our left–right scale through a principal component analysis (as done by Laver and Budge, 1992). This supplementary analysis confirms that the categories that make up the scale “fit together”, i.e., shows that they measure the same underlying dimension.



**Fig. 4.** Emphasis on political corruption by PCI/PDS and the evolution of the spatial distance between PCI/PDS and DC (DC-PSI since 1983) over the Italian post-war period – using legislative speeches.

next general election. Therefore, incentives to invest in negative campaigning can be considered as a constant feature of party competition. With an average of 4.2 votes of investiture for Legislature, the Italian case provides us with an important opportunity, given that it allows us to codify and thus estimate the parties' policy positions (and their emphasis on political corruption) approximately every year (on the evolving nature of the policy space between elections, see Laver and Shepsle, 1998; Laver and Benoit, 2003).

Fig. 4 presents the evolution of CORRUPTION against DISTANCE along the 50 investiture debates that we have coded. The figure illustrates that a decreasing trend in DISTANCE is associated with an opposite increasing trend of CORRUPTION, and that the latter variable reaches its highest value in the last investiture debate (during Ciampi's cabinet), in which around one-third of the entire speech of the PCI/PDS was dedicated to political corruption issues.<sup>12</sup>

## 5. Control variables

According to our SM hypothesis, we expect a negative relationship between CORRUPTION and our principal explanatory variable, i.e. DISTANCE. However, we are

inclined to think that the incentive of a party to invest in negative campaigning can be influenced by other factors. To begin with, it can be a function of the opportunities that arise from the external environment (e.g., scandals reported in the press or highlighted by other parties and then debated publicly). Once these opportunities increase, the same should happen with the aforementioned incentive. As a proxy for these opportunities, we have considered the average emphasis given by the Italian parties (*others* than the Communist party) to political corruption issues. In particular, we have differentiated between the behaviors of cabinet (CABINET CORRUPTION) and non-cabinet parties (NOCABINET CORRUPTION) to control the possible existence of a different political "sensitiveness" of the Communist party toward the blame on corruption reported by the former or by the latter. In general, we expect that both the variables are positively related to CORRUPTION.

Moreover, to assess the impact of possible external environment events on the incentive to invest in negative (corruption) campaigning we have also introduced a dummy (named EXTERNAL SHOCKS) that takes value 1 for each investiture debate that temporally coincides with a major scandal about political corruption highlighted by the media. This allows us to rely on an exogenous variable, other than the parliamentary speeches, to capture such environmental changes. In addition to the enquiry popularly known as "mani pulite" ('clean hands') (Morlino, 1996), we have considered the two Oil scandals in the 1973 and 1980 (Rhodes, 1997), and the Lockheed affair in 1976–1979 (Teodori, 1999; Galli, 1983). In each of these occasions important members of the cabinet parties were involved in the scandals and therefore we can consider

<sup>12</sup> We also note that the correlation between the values of CORRUPTION according to our data and the values that this variable assumes according to the CMP data (i.e., by considering PCI's electoral manifestos rather than its parliamentary speeches as done here: see Budge et al., 2001) is an impressive 0.94. Moreover, our SM hypothesis finds an empirical support even if we replicate our analysis using the CMP data only. The results of this further analysis are available upon request from the authors.



them as relevant exogenous shocks that could have affected the incentives of the Communist party to go negative (besides and beyond its ideological proximity with DC).<sup>13</sup>

The literature on negative campaigning repeatedly stresses that candidates and parties would be inclined to apply negative campaigning to a greater degree when they are behind in the polls (see Hansen and Pedersen, 2008; Skaperdas and Grofman, 1995; Harrington and Hess, 1996). Several studies have empirically confirmed this thesis (see Damore, 2002). The reasoning behind this assumption is that negative campaigning is used to reduce the support of the opponent. In this regard, the party lagging behind in the polls, having not succeeded in attracting enough undecided voters, seeks to dishearten the opponent's voters (see Elmelund-Præstekær, 2010). Given that no temporal series of polls are available in the Italian case, we have therefore decided to take as a proxy the difference in terms of votes recorded in each election between the PCI and the DC (and between the PCI and the sum of votes of DC and PSI since 1983). We have labeled this variable VOTE DIFFERENCE.

We have added three further control variables to our model. First, we have introduced a variable identifying the cabinets openly supported by the Communist party (PCI SUPPORT), which are the first two De Gasperi's cabinets during the Constituent Assembly and the fourth Andreotti's cabinet during the Sixth Legislature (see Table 1). The rationale for this choice is that a party involved in supporting the government has a lower incentive to denounce its corruption.

Second, we have added a dummy that assumes value 1 for the cabinets that failed to obtain a positive vote of investitures after the parliamentary debate, and 0 if otherwise (we termed it as FAILURE). In this case, we expect that whenever a cabinet is perceived as politically weak since its nomination, the incentives by the Communist party to emphasize political corruption issues will increase as a way to point out its weakness, and therefore, to accelerate its demise. Thus, the expected relationship with CORRUPTION is positive.

Finally, we have included as the last variable the percentage of electoral votes gained by the DC (and by the dyad DC-PSI since 1983), named INCUMBENT STRENGTH. We take this value as a proxy of DC's capacity to resist negative campaigning. Indeed, it could be argued that the vulnerability of a party to negative campaigning increases as its support declines.<sup>14</sup>

## 6. The statistical analysis

Our dependent variable CORRUPTION, i.e., the relative emphasis given to the political corruption issues by the Communist party during each investiture debate, is a typical fractional response data, bounded between 0 (the Communist party does not provide any reference at all to this category) and 1 (its entire speech is dedicated to this topic). Under these conditions, standard linear models may not provide an accurate picture of the effects of DISTANCE on CORRUPTION throughout the entire distribution of DISTANCE. In particular, if CORRUPTION depends on DISTANCE, as our SM hypothesis suggests, the relationship must be bounded – otherwise, CORRUPTION is eventually predicted to be greater than one. Moreover, a linear functional form for the conditional mean might miss important nonlinearities, creating problem of heteroscedasticity (see Papke and Wooldridge, 1996, 2008). On the other hand, the traditional solution of using the log-odds transformation of the dependent variable obviously fails when we observe responses at the corners, 0 and 1, as it happens in our case, with 5 observations out of 50 that record exactly a value of 0 for CORRUPTION. Papke and Wooldridge (1996) propose to direct models for the conditional mean of the fractional response through a logistic form that allows to keep the predicted values in the unit interval. They also applied the method of quasi-maximum likelihood estimation to obtain robust estimators of the conditional mean parameters with satisfactory efficiency properties. This model, called 'fractional logit', can be easily implemented through Stata software and it is precisely the model we fit for our analysis. The results are reported in Table 2.<sup>15</sup>

The first model reported in the table is the main one. Our SM hypothesis finds a sound empirical confirmation in the data. Indeed, DISTANCE is highly significant and presents, as expected, a negative sign. In other words, the emphasis on CORRUPTION by the PCI/PDS over 50 years of the Italian Republic appears to increase when it gets closer to DC (and later on, to DC-PSI). Fig. 5 plots the expected value of CORRUPTION as DISTANCE changes holding all the other variables constant at their mean. We also superimpose a histogram portraying the frequency distribution of observations for DISTANCE (scale on the right-hand side of the vertical axis). As can be seen, the impact of DISTANCE is far from being trivial. Indeed, the expected value of CORRUPTION decreases rapidly as DISTANCE increases, becoming approximately 0 for values higher than 80. On the contrary, for values of DISTANCE lower than 10, the Italian communist party is expected to devote on average around 10% of its legislative speech to emphasize political

<sup>13</sup> More in details, the 'clean hands' scandal coincides temporally with the cabinet of Amato (June 1992) and Ciampi (April 1993), the first Oil scandal with the fourth and fifth Rumor cabinet (July 1973 and March 1974), while the second Oil scandal with the Forlani cabinet (October 1980) as well as with the first Spadolini cabinet (June 1981). Finally, the Lockheed affair coincides (mainly) with the fifth Moro cabinet (February 1976) as well as with the third, fourth and fifth Andreotti cabinet (from July 1976 till March 1979) (see Table 1).

<sup>14</sup> Once again, estimating both the VOTE DIFFERENCE as well as the INCUMBENT STRENGTH variables using only the percentage of votes obtained by the DC (even after 1983), instead of the dyad DC-PSI, does not alter our findings.

<sup>15</sup> Given the longitudinal structure of our dataset, we have also controlled for serial correlation. First, we have plotted the residual of our model against the lagged residual, finding the absence of any systematic pattern. Second, we have also plotted the AC graph of the residual series, finding once again that the residuals can be considered random. Third, we have estimated a model with a lagged dependent variable. In this case the coefficient of the lagged variable is not significant ( $p = 0.360$ ) while the coefficients of the other independent variables remain pretty stable. Finally note that in Table 2 we report standard errors clustered on each Legislature that are heteroscedasticity and autocorrelation consistent.

**Table 2**

Explaining the incentive of the PCI/PDS to emphasize political corruption issues (1946–1994) – fractional logit estimations.

Variables	Model 1	Model 2
<i>DISTANCE</i>	−0.034 (0.005)**	−0.037 (0.008)**
<i>CABINET CORRUPTION</i>	0.016 (0.027)	0.005 (0.035)
<i>NOCABINET CORRUPTION</i>	0.058 (0.010)**	0.060 (0.013)**
<i>EXTERNAL SHOCKS</i>	0.565 (0.158)**	0.144 (0.718)
<i>DISTANCE* EXTERNAL SCHOCKS</i>	–	0.015 (0.025)
<i>VOTE DIFFERENCE</i>	0.025 (0.012)*	0.038 (0.025)
<i>PCI SUPPORT</i>	−3.05 (0.545)**	−3.15 (0.519)**
<i>FAILURE</i>	0.655 (0.283)*	0.635 (0.290)*
<i>INCUMBENT STRENGTH</i>	−.054 (0.022)*	−.068 (0.030)*
<i>Constant</i>	−.545 (0.814)	−.024 (1.08)
<i>N</i>	50	50
Log-pseudo likelihood	−6.799	−6.795

Significance (two tailed): \* $<0.05$ ; \*\* $<0.01$ . Standard errors clustered on Legislature in parentheses.

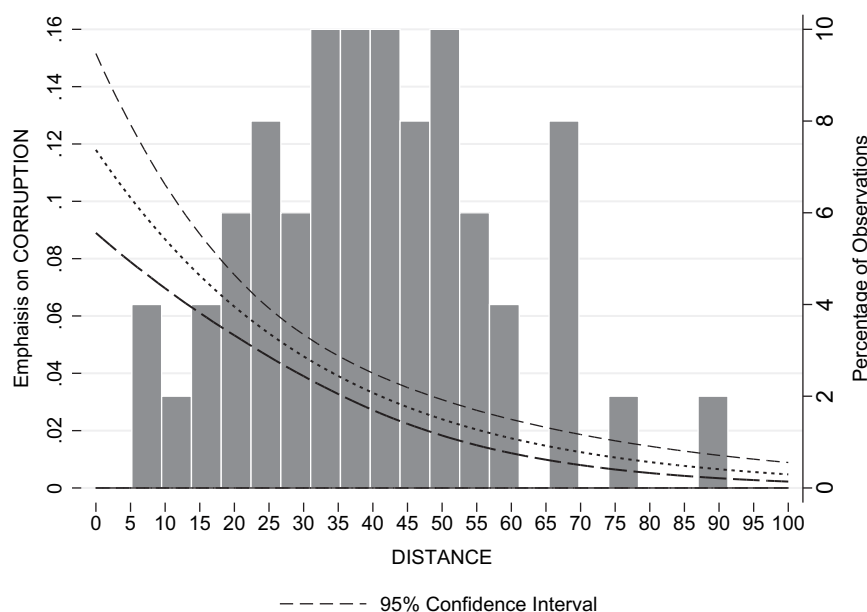
corruption issues, i.e., one possible instance of negative campaigning.

With respect to the control variables, all of them present the expected sign, and, with the exception of *CABINET CORRUPTION*, are always significant. That is, the emphasis on political corruption by the PCI increases as the opportunities arising in the external environment are more favorable (as can be seen by the both positive and significant signs for *NOCABINET CORRUPTION* and *EXTERNAL SHOCKS*), when the electoral support for DC decreases, when the PCI does not support the cabinet and when the cabinet is politically weak. Finally, confirming the previous findings in the literature, the incentives by the PCI to invest in negative campaigning (centered about corruption allegation) increases as it is lagging behind more in the pools, i.e., when *VOTE DIFFERENCE* gets larger.

In our second model we explore for the possibility of a conditional impact of *DISTANCE* on *CORRUPTION* according to the values assumed by *EXTERNAL SHOCK*. As can be seen from the results of Model 2, however, the interaction term is not significant ( $p$  value = 0.546), while the coefficient of *DISTANCE* is barely affected. Moreover, the introduction of the interaction does not improve the model (likelihood-ratio test: 0.924). In this sense, the relationship between the incentives to invest in negative campaigning and ideological proximity highlighted by our *SM* hypothesis refers to a durable and underlining feature of party-system competition that does not seem to be influenced by extemporaneous, although important, exogenous shocks.

In order to investigate more in depth this last point, we have considered the period of the Eleventh Legislature (1992–1994), that, as is well known, has been characterized by a sort of judicial “avalanche” that involved many leaders and cadres of the government majority with accusations of corruption. The enquiry delivered crime notifications in thousands and put hundreds of people in prison. To give only a few statistics: at the end of the legislature in 1994, 222 of a total of 630 deputies were under investigation for charges not related to personal opinion (Curini and Martelli, 2009). In this sense, it is difficult to imagine a more extraordinary exogenous shock.

Table 3 compares the real value of *CORRUPTION* with the value that we would expect according to our model in the historical case just mentioned. As can be seen from the first column of the table, the actual and the expected values are quite close to each other – a very reassuring result that confirms the goodness of fit of the model. Moreover, we have estimated three counterfactual scenarios to highlight the importance played by *DISTANCE*. In particular, we have examined which value of *CORRUPTION* could be expected if



**Fig. 5.** Expected value of *CORRUPTION* as *DISTANCE* changes.

**Table 3**

Comparison between actual and expected values according to Model 1 from Table 1 results (in brackets the 95% confidence interval): Clean Hands and three counterfactual scenarios.

	Eleventh Legislature ("Clean Hands")	Eleventh Legislature with DISTANCE as in the 1980s	Eleventh Legislature with DISTANCE as in the 1970s	Eleventh Legislature with DISTANCE as in the 1960s
Actual value	26.58	26.58	26.58	26.58
Expected value	26.73 <sup>a</sup> (25.19–28.38)	19.84 <sup>b</sup> (18.15–21.65)	17.29 <sup>c</sup> (15.26–19.53)	9.82 <sup>d</sup> (7.35–13.08)

Dependent variable: the emphasis of PDS on political corruption issues.

The reported expected values and their corresponding confidence intervals are based on 10,000 simulations using the estimations of Model 1 from Table 2. The values are estimated in the following ways: a: DISTANCE and control variables are fixed at their average values over the two cabinets of the Eleventh Legislature (Amato, Ciampi). b: DISTANCE is fixed at its average values over the 1980s, while control variables are fixed as in a. c: DISTANCE is fixed at its average values over the 1970s, while control variables are fixed as in a. d: DISTANCE is fixed at its average values over the 1960s, while control variables are fixed as in a.

DISTANCE increased from the low value arisen during the Eleventh Legislature (the lowest of the entire period considered, the post WWII years apart) to the average value that it recorded during 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, respectively. It must be noted that in these counterfactual scenarios, we have only changed the value of DISTANCE, while keeping all the control variables to the values they *actually* assume during the clean-hands period (e.g., during the Eleventh Legislature). The results are reported in the last three columns of the table and appear quite consistent with our model: as the ideological distance increases, the PDS's (the new name of the former Italian Communist Party) incentives to invest in a negative campaigning focused on political corruption decreases considerably. In particular, notwithstanding the (extraordinary) 'Clean Hands' effect in the press and in the public opinion, this external shock would have not been enough by its own to push the PDS to emphasize political corruption issues as much as it actually did, under different spatial conditions. For example, had DISTANCE assumed the values it recorded in the 1960s, the emphasis by the PDS on CORRUPTION would have not been remarkably different from the emphasis it gave to CORRUPTION in the 1980s or in the 1970s. This clearly confirms the robustness of our SM hypothesis even under this out-of-ordinary scenario.

## 7. Conclusion

In this paper, we have dealt with the Italian case as an example of competitive use of negative campaigning centered on political corruption blaming. Using purposely provided data from legislative debates, we have verified that PCI/PDS propensity to adopt the strategy of denouncing the corruption of rivals was inversely related to the ideological distance separating that party from its main government counterpart. Although dealing exclusively with a specific kind of valence issues, i.e. negative campaigning on corruption, this result corroborates our SM hypothesis – derived from a simple model of party competition in a spatial framework – which maintains that when ideological differences vanish parties make use of socially shared values as an alternative and/or supplementary competitive move.

Even though this study examines the scenario of a single country, a more general conclusion can be drawn from this result. Indeed, as long as the ideological polarization in modern democracies keeps decreasing as predicted by the

end-of-ideology hypothesis (see Bartolini and Mair, 1990), we can presume that negative campaigning (as well as competition on valence issues more broadly understood) would become more and more common as a strategy employed by the parties in their everyday confrontation. This crucial change in the pattern of party competition may also have possible effects on electoral issues such as personalization and populism in modern democracies, on which a large amount of evidence is already available (Mughan, 2000; Kaase, 1994; Mény and Surel, 2002; Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008). On this account, our findings may contribute to disclose a path toward a more comprehensive understanding and explanation of these momentous phenomena.

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