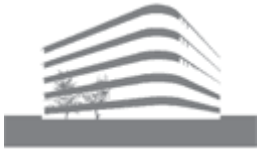

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Stable Voters in an Unstable Party Environment: Continuity and Change in Italian Electoral Behaviour

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Introduction*

At the beginning of the 1990s, Italy underwent a radical change in its political system. Several interwoven factors contributed to the decomposition of the political system established in the aftermath of World War II. In Milan, in February 1992, prosecutors arrested a local politician while he was collecting money from bribery. It was the first step of an anti-corruption campaign, called "Clean Hands", which brought about the collapse of a large part of the entire old political class. In 1993, a large majority of the members of parliament were under investigation and their refusal to allow the prosecution of Bettino Craxi in November 1993 finally paved the way for the 1994 election in which a fifty year old party system disappeared almost completely from the political scene. Earlier in September 1992, the lira was devalued by 7% and Italy was forced to get out of the EMS. The burden of the huge public debt became highly visible and was clearly perceived as a failure of an entire political class. Also, political leaders were increasingly convinced that after the fall of the Berlin Wall it was impossible to go on with the familiar habits of political competition and therefore the political system needed electoral and constitutional reforms. Old parties split and changed their names, did the PCI in 1990, the DC in 1993 and the MSI in 1994. More important, in August 1993 a new electoral law (a mixed system which allocates three quarters of the seats in single-member districts and the remaining quarter with a proportional formula) was approved by Parliament.

Last but not least, voters too contributed to the change. In the regional elections of 1990 the northern regionalist party, Lega Nord, fared quite well. In the 1992 general election it became apparent that the party system established after World War II was entering a phase of decomposition. The turning point, however, was in April 1993, when an overwhelming majority of electors (85%) voted in a referendum to repeal part of the old electoral rules. The referendum results "forced" Parliament to enact a new electoral system. Subsequently, in a spate of local elections, the candidates of old governing parties were defeated to the benefit of

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the candidates of the opposition forces. All these streams came together in the 1994 general election, when an almost entirely new political offering and new electoral rules opened the door to one of the most massive earthquakes of European electoral history.

But the electoral turmoil of the 1990s, which preceded the realignment of March 1994, can hardly be defined as surprising. In the elections of the 1980s, observers were able to discover patterns of electoral dealignment. On one side, abstentionism and electoral mobility were increasing. On the other side, several new parties were able to gain a growing portion of the vote. The first were the Greens and the second a group of regionalist parties, unified under the flag of Lega Nord.[1] Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to dismiss the signs of electoral stability and persistent continuity with the glorious old days when the parties established after World War II were at their zenith.

Table 1. *Electoral performance of three major Italian parties compared to their partners in Europe* [a]

	DC [c]	Europe	PSI+PSDI	Europe	PCI [b]	Europe
1950s	43.7	23.3	18.0	32.2	22.7	8.4
1960s	39.8	22.1	17.2	31.7	26.1	7.8
1970s	39.2	21.1	13.8	30.5	30.6	8.0
1980s	33.5	20.0	16.7	29.5	26.6	5.8
Ratio 1980s/1950s	0.8	0.9	0.9	0.9	1.2	0.7

[a] Italian data include the 1992 election
[b] Sum of PDS and Rifondazione Comunista electoral performance in 1992
[c] 1948 election is included
Sources: For the European data, M.Gallagher, M.Laver and P. Mair, *Representative Government in Modern Europe* 2nd Ed., New York: McGraw-Hill, 1995.

As can be seen in Table 1, until the beginning of the 1990s the performance of the three major Italian parties was not worse than the average electoral results of the parties belonging to a similar ideological family. Italian parties, as with other European parties,

[1] They did particularly well in the regions north of the Po river, thanks to electoral appeals in which anti-tax issues were spiced with the territorial claim that Rome was exploiting the North.

seemed to have been able to adapt themselves to a changing environment. Observers therefore were facing two contrasting signals. The first one pointed to a process of dealignment, while the second one indicated the resilience of the old parties. This contrast brings us to the central question addressed by this paper. Can we argue that the outcome of the 1994 election was produced by the same forces (social and political) which determined the electoral dealignment of the 1980s? Or should we argue that between the reshaping of the Italian party system in 1994 and the forces which operated as continuity constraints during the last decades there was more than one link?

Our main argument may be summarized in three points. First, until the beginning of the 1990s the voters' behaviour was characterized by a general but gradual dealignment, the driving forces of which were both social - an outcome of the impressive Italian social change of the postwar period – and political. Second, voters expressed themselves within the old political and ideological constraints, the subjective meaning of which had probably changed in some aspects over the years, but the echo of which still had on effect on voting behaviour. Third, the realignment of the 1994 election can be conceived as a consequence both of the dealignment of the 1980s and the political and ideological forces that constrained it.

Two qualifications to our argument are in order. First, the period covered by this paper is from 1968 to 1990-92 and then from 1994 to 1996. We present data which incorporate facts and processes located either prior to the beginning of the Italian transition, begun by the 1992 election (Sani 1993), or after the 1992-1993 turning point, when many of the premises (emotional, cognitive, attitudinal and in some cases behavioural) of the 1994 earthquake were (presumably) laid down at mass level. This perspective implies that our *explanandum* is not the process of the dissolution of partisan bonds between many voters and their old parties. On the contrary, our *explanandum* is how and in what direction voters made their choices in the 1994 and 1996 elections. In other words, we think that some features of the partisan change in 1994 could be explained by looking at the past prior to the 1992 election.

Second, we are using two concepts, dealignment and partisan realignment, proposed for the United States, the application of which to our case presents some problems, mainly for the second one. The concept of partisan realignment refers to a "significant shift in the group bases of party coalitions, and usually in the distribution of popular support among the parties as a result" (Dalton, Flanagan and Beck 1984, 13). Partisan realignment manifests itself in critical elections, which mark changes in American electoral history. In this perspective the 1994 election marked in a true sense a partisan realignment because, as we will see in the following pages, many former DC, PSI and other governmental parties voters became electors of Forza Italia and AN and, with their behaviour, paved the way for a different pattern of political competition. However, our hypothesis that the voting shift and the new electoral choices were undeniably oriented by past voting behaviour implies that the 1994 election could be considered a case of partisan realignment in which some attitudinal and emotional components of voting behaviour did not change, but survived. This therefore creates a case of partisan realignment with limited change, at least in some respects.

In the next pages we analyze the change/continuity relationship according to two different perspectives.[2] We chart, with a trend analysis from 1968 to 1996, four aspects of the attitudes and behaviour of Italian voters: some cultural orientations, the impact of religion on politics, class voting and the partisan and ideological constraints on voting choices. We then analyze the interplay of change and continuity, first with respect to the electoral mobility of the 1980s and of the 1994 and 1996 elections and, second, with respect to the forces which shaped the voting choices of the last two elections.

[2] Data used in this paper are drawn from several national surveys, if not otherwise indicated:
1968 Barnes survey
1975 Political Action Study
1981 World Values Survey
1985 Four Nation Study
1990 World Values Survey
1990,1992,1995 and 1996 Itanes surveys

A trend analysis (1968-1996) of four features of the Italian electorate

A well-known literature provides a view of Italian electors in the 1960s, which can be summarized in terms of three features, in order to have a comparative reference point. With respect to the electors' political culture, LaPalombara (1965) identified the main characteristics in terms of isolation, fragmentation and alienation. At the same time, their political views were strongly influenced by subcultural orientations. The major parties, the DC and PCI, were supported by electors who in large part were encapsulated in a web of familiar, social and organizational links. The stability of Italian parties for the two first decades was hold to be based on this social structure.

Adopting a different point of view, Sartori (1976), Sani (1974) and Barnes (1977) identified another source of party stability. In addition to the subcultural encapsulation of electors, ideological polarization and political segmentation made the pattern of electoral competition closed and therefore impervious to change. In the same years in which most of these analyses were conducted, the Italian social fabric was shattered by a large and deep change. As a consequence of rapid economic development, many Italians moved across the peninsula and across the social hierarchy.[3] Many of them became more educated than their parents. These phenomena were accompanied in the 1970s by several waves of social unrest, which eventually developed into open terrorism. In addition, social transformations and increasing levels of education were accompanied by a change in the way political information circulated among electors.[4] How did this impressive social change and its correlate aspects alter cultural attitudes towards politics and the social basis of the parties? How did the effects of social change interact with ideological and political constraints?

[3] In 1985, according to Cobalti and Schizzerotto (1994), 59% of Italians belonged to a class different from that of their fathers.

[4] According to the survey conducted by Barnes in 1968, television was the most important source of information during the electoral campaign for only 14% of electors. In 1994 this figure rose to 72%.

Cultural orientations

According to the literature, the political culture of Italians is characterized – in comparison with other democratic countries - by low involvement in politics, mistrust of politicians and parties, a poor sense of political efficacy and a high level of pragmatic disaffection towards the performance of the political system (Di Palma, 1970; Morlino and Tarchi, 1996; Sani and Segatti, forthcoming). Table 2 brings together some indicators of political efficacy over a period of almost thirty years. Firstly, leaving aside the tendency as such, the extremely high level of all indicators is notable. Secondly, the trends appear either stable or upward until 1990. The most recent year we take into account, 1996, shows a few signs of change, but they are of limited scope and could be easily reversed.

Since *The Civic Culture*, Italians are believed to have little interest in political matters. In fact, in 1968 only one Italian out of ten reported some interest in politics,[5] very much the same proportion as a decade earlier. This small group, however, grew steadily during the 1970s and the 1980s, reaching about a third of the Italian electorate; but then in 1990 it was down again to 16%. (See Figure 1.) In the last year we take into consideration in the analysis - 1996 (just after the general elections) - interest in politics reaches an all time high: 40% of voters report some interest. At the same time, more than 60% of them paid some attention to the electoral campaign. Such figures could signal a change of attitude by the electorate toward politics.

We consider the 1970s and the 1980s as a period of increasing *political dealignment* and *demobilization* of Italian voters, culminating at the beginning of the 1990s -a period of "system demobilization", as it has been aptly called (Corbetta et al. 1988). We see these processes as important cultural *pre-conditions* for the electoral "earthquake" of the next decade. It is important to stress that we do not see dealignment and demobilization as *independent factors* able to explain *per se* the changes and turmoil in voting behaviour of the 1990s, but only as the fertile soil for the new political offering of the 1990s. The new attitudes and orientations – in brief, the changed political culture - are the basis of the predisposition of

Italian voters to become mobile, switching parties and coalitions (see the section on electoral mobility below), in response to the new political proposals and opportunities of 1994 and 1996. In this sense, we consider the period from 1992 onwards as the end of two decades of dealignment and the beginning of a *realignment* and *remobilization* of voters; in other words, as the beginning of a process of consolidation of new patterns of relationships between society and politics, and therefore of new patterns of voting behaviour.

Table 2. *Personal political efficacy, 1968-1996* (Percentage of voters agreeing on selected statements)

Statements	1968	1975	1985	1990	1996
Politics is too complicated for people like me	80	83	79	89	
Deputies we elect quickly lose contact with the people	53	88		90	83
People like me do not have any say about what the government does	68	73		78	52
Politicians do not care much what people like me think		81	81	83	
Parties are only interested in people's votes		83		81	

At the aggregate level, an important indicator of dealignment is the decline of voters' turnout in elections. Italy was well known among western countries for the extremely high levels of electoral participation of its citizens. In the general elections of 1953 and 1958 abstentionism was at its lowest (both 6.2%). In 1968 abstentionism was at 7.2%; it decreased slightly in 1972 and 1976; but then started to rise steadily: 9.4% in 1979, 11% in 1983, 11.2% in 1987, 12.7% in 1992, 13.9% in 1994, and 17.1% in 1996. If we take into account also blank and spoiled ballots, the trend is similar, but at a higher level, reaching 17.3% in 1992, 19.8% in 1994 and 23.1% in 1996. Research on electoral abstentionism has shown that, until the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, non-participation can be explained mostly in terms of political alienation, rather than political protest, because of the organizational crisis of parties and hence of their mobilizing potential (Corbetta and Parisi 1987 and 1994).

[5] However, one in five reported some interest in the electoral campaign of that year.

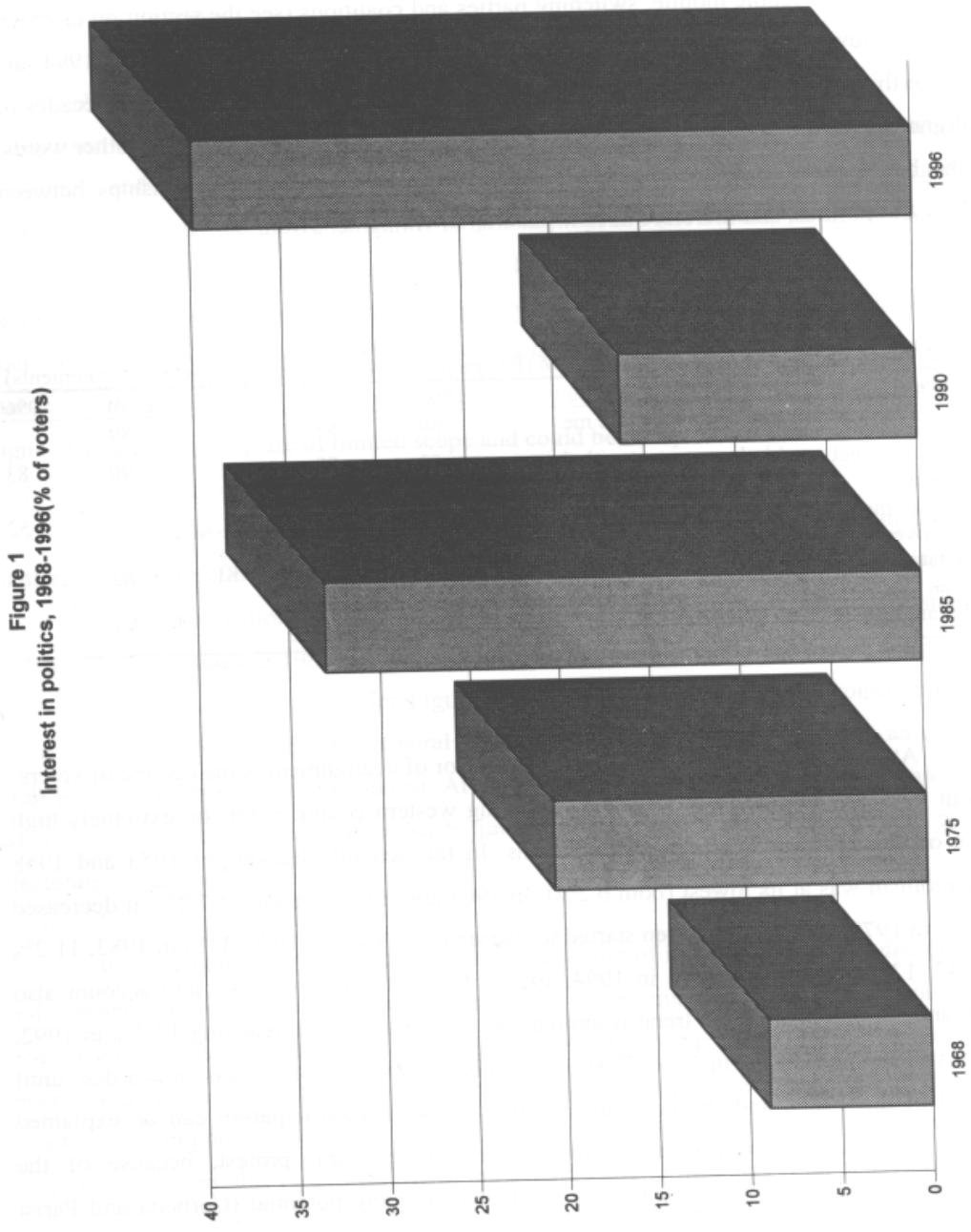


Figure 1
Interest in politics, 1968-1996(% of voters)

1. The decline of party identification

Turning now to individual level data, one prominent indicator of dealignment is the decline in partisan identification by voters. In little more than twenty years psychological attachment to parties has declined dramatically, both in its extent and its strength. The trend is unmistakable (see Figure 2). As a whole, in 1968 almost 90% of the population of voting age (21 years or more) declared that they felt – to some degree – to a political party; the corresponding figure for 1990 was about 55%, a drop of more than 30 percentage points. In addition, the *intensity* of party identification has changed substantially. At the end of the 1960s, one out of three voters felt "very close" to a party, at the end of the 1980s only one out of eight voters felt the same way toward parties. Correspondingly, the share of mere "sympathizers" increased from 6% to 26% of the electorate. It is apparent that in the span of two decades the feeling of attachment to political parties by Italian voters has weakened in a decisive way.[6] For the decade of the 1970s, Barnes (1984, 216) has speculated that "the lessening of mutual hostility as well as changes in leisure-time activities were at the root of the decline in attachment to party". This was reflected in a lower percentage of close identifiers among younger cohorts of voters.

In 1996, however, the trend changes direction. Party identification starts to point upward again. The overall figure is 75% of voters identifying themselves with a party to a varying degree. The intensity of attachment to a party is also markedly on the rise. In a short time span Italian voters – at least in the aggregate – seem to be getting psychologically closer to the organized political intermediaries, starting to close the gap of the late 1980s and early 1990s. The curvilinear trend in party identification from 1968 to 1996 is unequivocal. However, who are the party identifiers? Have they changed over time or are they always alike in sociological terms? Table 3 provides a few clues.

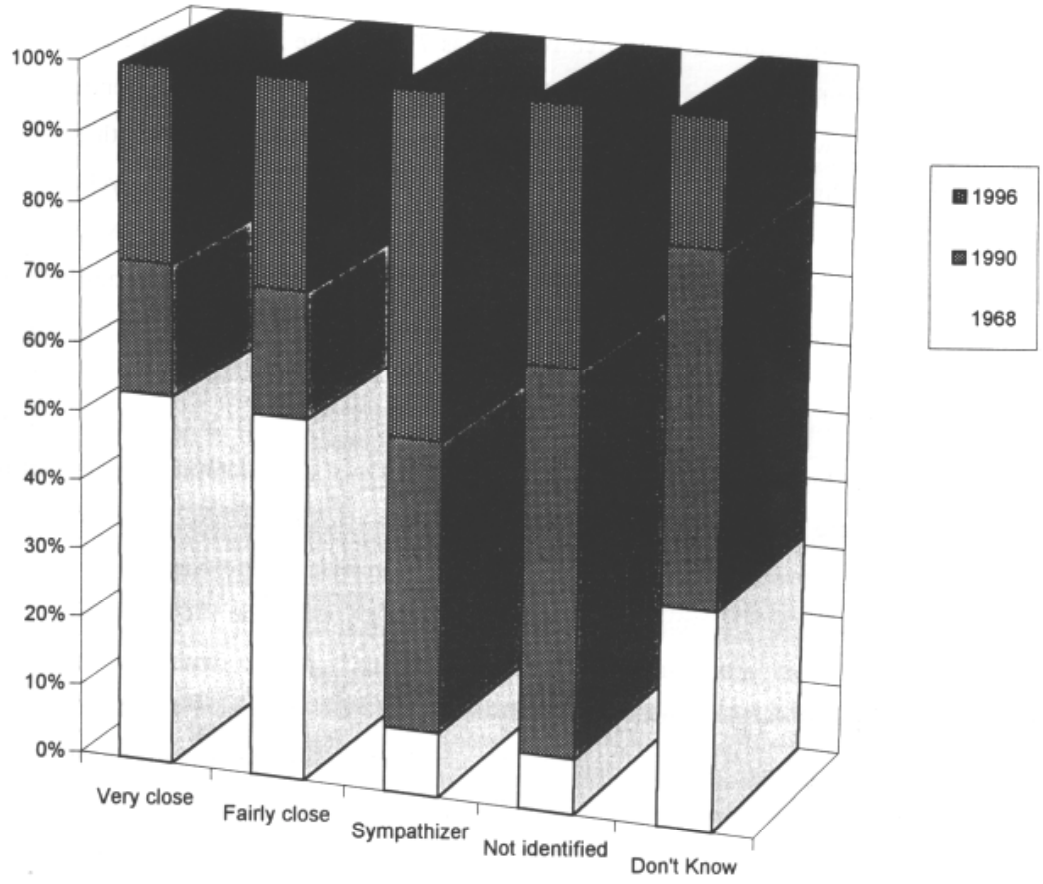
[6] This is not a peculiar Italian phenomenon; most democratic countries have experienced over the same period of time a decline in party identification; see Bellucci (1995) and Schmitt and Holmberg (1995).

Table 3. *Party identification by social-demographic characteristics, 1986-1996*

	1968		1990		1996	
	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)
Gender						
Male	90	(1191)	58	(681)	83	(1183)
Female	84	(1209)	51	(664)	67	(1301)
Age						
18-29	87	(434)	52	(324)	75	(467)
30-59	88	(1410)	56	(666)	75	(1520)
60 >	84	(543)	55	(355)	71	(497)
Education						
Elementary	86	(1796)	56	(551)	71	(1111)
Middle schooling	88	(274)	52	(361)	76	(553)
Secondary-University	92	(325)	56	(425)	79	(819)
Municipality Size						
> 100 000	86	(1761)	52	(939)	75	(1896)
< 100 000	87	(639)	61	(406)	72	(587)
Total	87	(2,400)	55	(1,345)	75	(2,484)

On the whole, party identification seems more usual among socially central segments of the population. Gender appears as a strong discriminating factor: women are always less attached to parties than men, and the gap is widening. Other important determinants are education and age (which are probably correlated): both in 1968 and 1996 better educated and relatively younger voters exhibited a higher level of party identification. The picture in 1990 is more blurred, as if the general decline in attachment to political parties had made voters more similar in this respect. Or, to put it differently, the dealignment that culminated in the early 1990s seems to have hit with more intensity the voters more centrally located in society; on the other hand, these same voters were also the first to resocialize themselves in the middle of the decade and to come closer to parties again.

Figure 2
Strength of party identification, 1968, 1990, and 1996



In addition to social characteristics, the ideological orientation of voters plays a large role in accounting for the change in attachment to party (see Figure 3). At the end of the 1960s, voters across the political space identified themselves with a political party to a very similar degree. At the beginning of the 1990s the crisis of identification between voters and parties appeared to be particularly acute among the centre and centre-right electorate.[7] In 1996 the curve displays a similar trend, although at a higher level of identification, with a slight increase for voters on the right of the scale. In 1990 only 60 % of those who had voted DC at

[7] In addition, identification is lowest among that increasing group of voters with no explicit positioning on the left-right scale

the previous general elections (1987) identified themselves with the party; the corresponding percentage was 81% for supporters of the PCI and 74% for supporters of the PSI. In 1996, the proportion of identifiers among respective voters was 77% for the Popolari and Forza Italia, but above 90% for the PDS and 86% for AN. Therefore, it is the voters at the centre of the political spectrum who have problems in re-establishing a solid relationship with political parties after the disappearance of Christian Democracy. The loosening of psychological attachment to and identification with the party among Christian Democratic voters was preparing the ***subjective*** pre-conditions for the decline of the DC's electoral fortunes in 1992 and, especially, for the electoral disaster of the Patto per l'Italia in 1994.

This is reflected in the territorial distribution of voters according to party identification: the lowest share of identifiers (less than 40% of the electorate) can in fact be found in the "white" areas whereas in 1968 in these very regions the highest proportion of voters attached to a party could be found. If we combine partisan identification and political interest, we obtain a good picture of what has changed. At the end of the 1960s the bulk of the Italian electorate was made up of "passive apartisans", people with low cognitive mobilization but who identified with a party. Twenty years later this group was down to 50% and in 1996 it formed 40% of the electorate. Moreover, while in 1990 a third of the Italian electorate could be said to be "alienated", with no interest in politics and no attachment to any party, in 1996 this group had shrunk to a fifth of the total electorate. At the same time, a new group of "interested partisans" was gaining prominence among voters on an unprecedented scale. The social segmentation of the Italian electorate into the four types appears generally stable over a period of almost thirty years. Gender – notwithstanding massive social changes – is always prominent: politics is not for Italian women. Education still plays an important role, though on a diminishing scale. Age was, until 1990, a discriminating factor, but was no longer so in 1996.

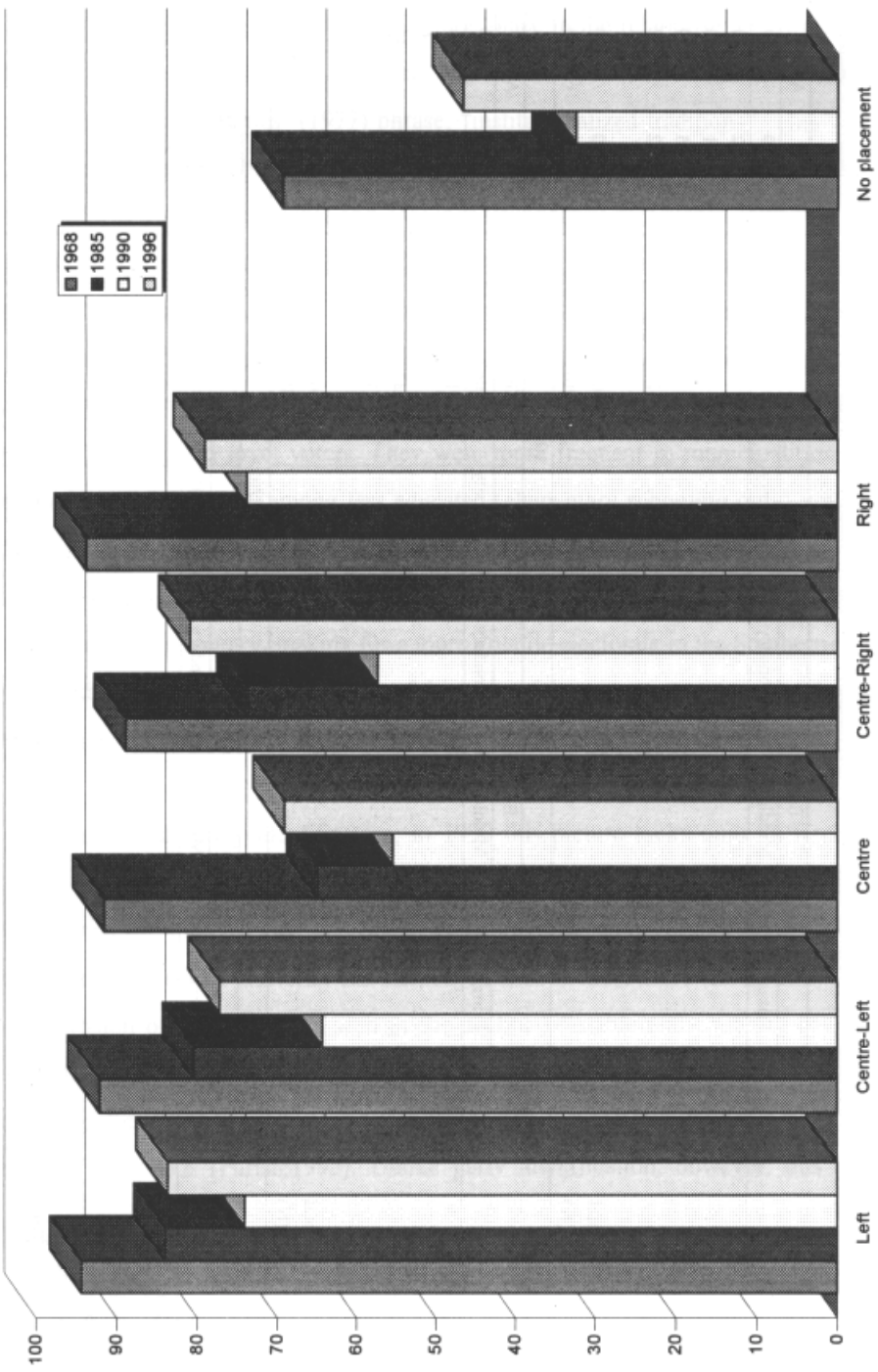


Figure 3 Party identification by self placement on left-right scale: 1968, 1990 and 1996

Table 4. *Typology of voters based on party identification and political interest, 1968, 1990, and 1996*

		1968							
		Education			Gender		Age		
	Total	Primary school	Middle school	Secondary school-University	Male	Female	21-29	30-59	60 >
Interested partisans	9	6	12	22	14	3	12	9	6
Interested apartisans	0	0	0	2	1	0	1	0	0
Passive partisans	78	80	76	70	75	81	75	79	78
Passive apartisans	13	14	12	6	10	16	12	12	16
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
(N)	(2,399)	(1,795)	(274)	(325)	(1,190)	(1,209)	(434)	(1,409)	(543)
		1990							
		Education			Gender		Age		
	Total	Primary school	Middle school	Secondary school-University	Male	Female	18-29	30-59	60 >
Interested partisans	11	6	10	20	15	8	11	14	6
Interested apartisans	5	2	4	10	7	3	7	6	3
Passive partisans	44	50	43	35	43	44	41	42	49
Passive apartisans	40	42	43	35	35	45	41	38	42
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
(N)	(1,341)	(548)	(360)	(425)	(680)	(661)	(324)	(663)	(354)
		1996							
		Education			Gender		Age		
	Total	Primary school	Middle school	Secondary school-University	Male	Female	18-29	30-59	60 >
Interested partisans	34	26	35	45	45	24	36	33	35
Interested apartisans	6	4	6	7	6	5	7	4	9
Passive partisans	40	45	41	34	38	43	39	43	36
Passive apartisans	20	25	18	14	11	28	18	20	20
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
(N)	(2,478)	(1,108)	(553)	(817)	(1,177)	(1,300)	(467)	(1,518)	(493)

*2. The decline of the v*oto di appartenenza

Over twenty years significant changes took place in the relationship between voters and parties. The behaviour of Italian voters has often been characterized in terms of subcultures or, to borrow Barnes' (1977) phrase, "institutionalized traditions". This was the reason for the remarkable stability of voting patterns in the heyday of the First Republic. In 1968 about 70% of voters were stable and convinced supporters of a single party.[8] This type of relationship of voters to the party of their "choice" can be broadly characterized in terms of "belonging" (Parisi-Pasquino 1977). As is well known, the share of "belonging voters" was significantly higher among supporters of the main ("cleavage") parties: 79% among Christian Democrats and 81% among Communists. Therefore, these parties could count on a solid and large block of faithful and loyal voters. They were more frequent in municipalities with a population of less than 50,000, among less educated (elementary schooling only) voters and regularly attending Catholics (gender and age made no significant difference). As to their territorial distribution, two remarks are in order: first, they were more numerous in the North than in the South of the country, making for a more volatile electorate in the Southern regions of Italy; second, within the North, the *locus* of this type of voter was – at the end of the 1960s -- the "white" area more than the "red" one.[9]

Again, as with party identification, in 1990 this picture looks quite different. The 1980's are a period of political crisis and voters' dealignment. Political parties continue to decline in terms of membership and their transformation from organizations of mass integration into professional-electoral, catchall, organizations accelerates (Rossi 1987; Scalisi 1996). The erosion of subcultures is seen in the decline of stable and enduring patterns of voting and orientations toward parties. As can be seen in Table 5, the share of voters close to the "belonging" type is about 55% of the total electorate, a substantial decrease with respect to the end of the 1960s (Parisi 1995). Unlike party identification, however, this type of

[8] This group is made up of those respondents who declares that they have ***always*** voted for the same party in the legislative elections and who at the same time feel attached to this party.

[9] This is explained by the orientation of Socialist supporters, who tended to identify with the party to a lesser degree than the Communist supporters.

orientation in 1996 shrinks again to 45%, reflecting a further loosening of established patterns of political preferences, especially those mediated by the family's political traditions. Conversely, "opinion" voting – that is mobile electors - goes up, in line with the increased volatility of voting behaviour in Italy. The combined influence of age and education indicates clearly that a relationship between voters and parties of the "appartenenza" type will decline further.

The 1990s mark a change of course and appear as a period of psychological remobilization of citizens. Citizens' interest in politics and their attachment to parties increase, although they remain deeply sceptical and suspicious toward representatives and the government's responsiveness to citizens. Perhaps the new decade marks the end of the dealignment period, which lasted for almost twenty years. However, we should mention that the process of realignment, from the cultural and attitudinal point of view, is neither homogeneous nor unilinear. In fact, the group of voters characterized by a relation of estrangement toward politics– though small – has increased from 1990.[10] Apparently, and understandably, within the electorate different groups coexist with different orientations and dispositions toward politics and voting.

[10] They appear to be socially more marginal than other types of voters (less educated, relatively older, less urban).

Table 5. *Types of relationships between parties and voters, 1990 and 1996*

	1990								
	Education			Gender		Age			
	Primary school	Middle school	Secondary school and University	Male	Female	18-29	30-59	60 >	Total
Estrangement	6	3	3	4	5	2	4	6	4
Exchange	11	9	8	8	10	8	10	9	9
Opinion	24	38	41	32	35	50	33	22	34
Familiar belonging	45	33	28	37	36	25	36	46	36
Individual belonging	14	17	20	19	14	15	17	17	17
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
(N)	(611)	(397)	(470)	(743)	(742)	(346)	(738)	(401)	(1,485)

	1996								
	Education			Gender		Age			
	Primary school	Middle school	Secondary school and University	Male	Female	18-29	30-59	60 >	Total
Estrangement	16	14	7	13	13	7	15	11	13
Exchange	5	5	5	4	7	9	5	5	5
Opinion	34	41	40	34	41	47	35	37	37
Familiar belonging	33	23	26	31	26	20	28	38	29
Individual belonging	10	17	22	19	13	17	17	9	16
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
(N)	(947)	(438)	(638)	(980)	(1042)	(316)	(1,277)	(428)	(2,022)

This process of the remobilization of voters can be explained with the emergence of new political actions and actors. We think that the electoral referendums of 1991 and 1993 were crucial in this respect: They attracted and raised the attention of citizens toward politics and channelled their dissatisfaction with the performance of political institutions into institutional roads. A second factor was the rise and success of the Lega, which stirred political passions and controversies. A third factor is the new electoral system, which voters seem not only to be learning quite rapidly, but also to prefer to the old one. Already in 1994 – just after the first trial - almost half of the respondents thought that the new system offered them more choice; in 1996, 45% of them said tthey identified more with the plurality vote, as against 39% preferring the proportional one.[11]

Apparently, this new mobilization has not yet been translated into stable political preferences. Moreover, it might well be only temporary and short-lived, especially if political institutions and parties are not able to live up to the demand – however confused and blurred - for significant changes in the rules of the political game and, above all, for a simplification of political competition. In this respect, the most recent events are not promising (especially the failure of the attempt to change the Constitution) and might well cause a reversal of attitudes among voters and another retreat into alienation and estrangement from political life.

Religion and politics

Social and economic change, with the induced effects of exposure to new ways of thinking and to less traditional life styles, are all considered forces with a powerful impact on the influence of the Church in society.[12] Secularization is a concept that refers to a multi-dimensional phenomenon and, besides, it is hard to translate into an operative definition. With this caveat in mind, if secularization is interpreted as low involvement in religious

[11] See also Zucchini (1997) on this point.

[12] For a useful comparison of European countries, see Dobbelaere and Jagodzinski (1995).

institutions, Italian society of the 1990s seems more secularized than it was 30 years before. As can be seen in Figure 4, weekly church attendance in the 1990s is 60% less than it was in 1968. The decline was not, however, constant across the period. The decrease of church - integrated Catholics was more acute in the first part of the 1970s[13] and, after that, there was a slight increase and a stabilisation around 30% of the population.[14] It would be erroneous, however, to assume that a smaller pool of weekly church attendants implies *per se* a loss of influence of church institutions on all aspects of social attitudes and behaviour. It is likely with respect, for example, to sexual and family behaviour, the church was affected by a loss of influence, but with respect to other attitudinal aspects, it was quite the contrary. In the last few decades, in comparison to other institutions, private and public, the Church was not only trusted by a significant segment of electors, but this segment has been slightly increasing. In 1968, 50% of Italian voters expressed confidence in the Church, in 1990 it was 60% and in 1996 it was 57%. [15]

We now present some data regarding the impact of religion on voting behaviour from 1968 to 1996. In this analysis we follow two approaches. First, the influence of religion can be estimated analyzing if religiousness, indexed as weekly church attendance, makes some difference in voting DC, and in the 1994 and 1996 elections the parties to be considered heirs of the former DC party. Second, the impact of religion is measured by looking at how homogeneous the DC electorate, in terms of religious behaviour, was during the period. As is well known, the two dimensions are not to be correlated.

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[13] One has to be reminded that in 1974 an attempt to abolish the new divorce law through a referendum was defeated by a large majority of electors and the same happened in 1981 on the abortion issue.

[14] We are not sure that all sample estimations are robust (in particular we think that the 1975 and 1981 figures underestimate and overestimate the population number of church going people because of sampling errors), but we are confident that they are able to describe the main tendency of the secularization process. In fact the same evidence is confirmed by different data; see Cartocci (1994); Dobbelaere and Jagodzinski (1995); and Segatti (1998).

[15] The 1996 data come from the Ispo Panel.

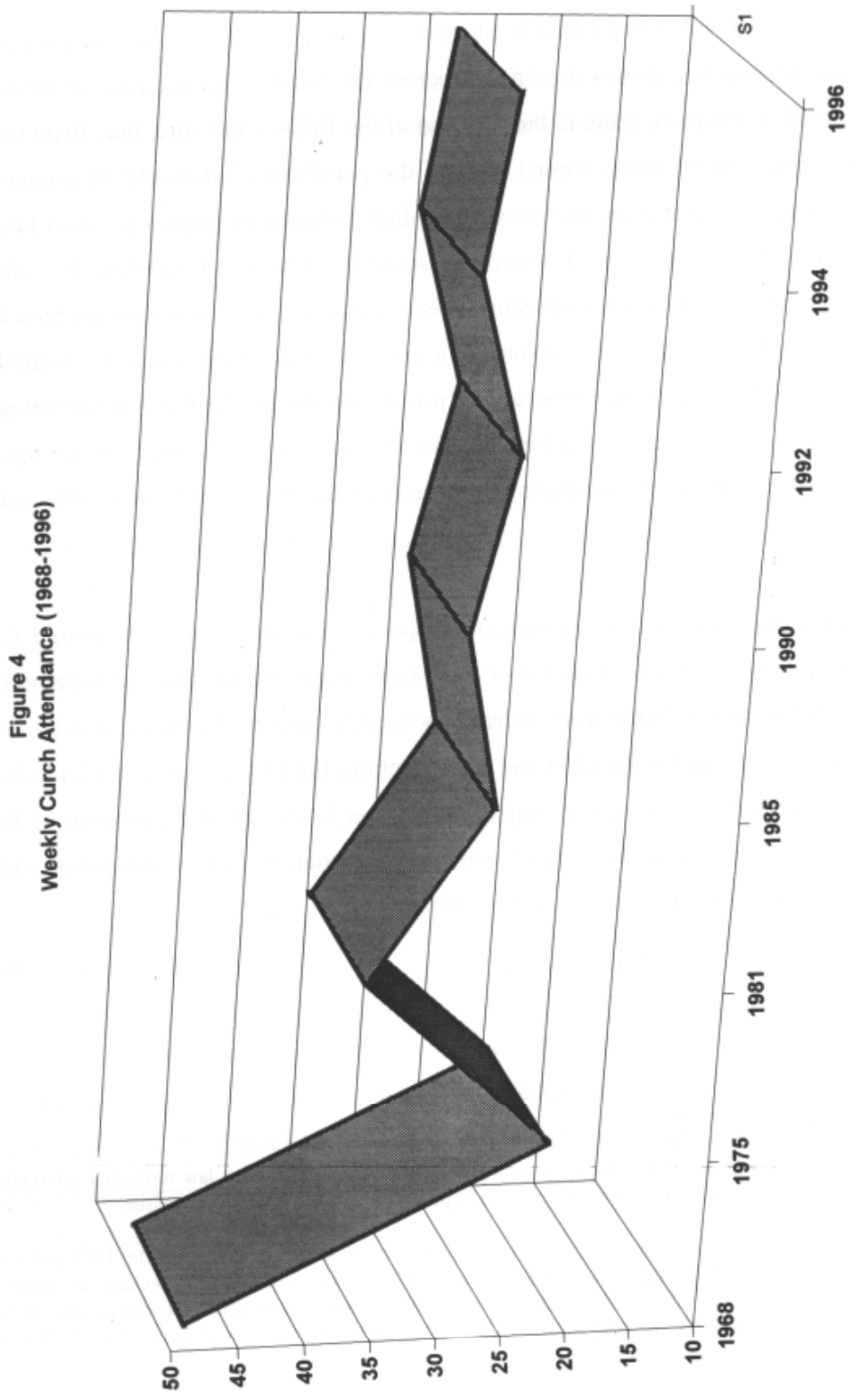


Figure 4
Weekly Curch Attendance (1968-1996)

Figure 5 shows a decreasing influence of religion on the DC vote. The decline is almost constant from the 1970s onwards, except for the 1992 election year.[16] Although declining, the impact is still significant as long as there was the Christian Democratic party. The 1994 and 1996 data indicate a change in the relationship between voting and religious behaviour, but one cannot argue that the influence has completely disappeared. It should be noted that the 1994 and 1996 data refer to the voting choices in the proportional arena of the competition and, more importantly, the figure relative to 1996 refers to the aggregate choices for the PPI and the CCD, both heirs of the DC party but located in different coalitions. If the uninominal part of the competition is taken into consideration, the picture is somewhat different. In this arena, religious impact is still evident in 1994 but it disappears in 1996, mostly because of the restructuring of the political offering. In 1994, the PPI, together with the Patto Segni, formed a coalition competing alone in the uninominal arena. Therefore, religious Catholics were able to find a sympathetic outlet. Even so, a large portion of them voted, however, for the centre-right coalition whose pillars were Forza Italia and Alleanza Nazionale, the former post-fascist MSI, while the overwhelming part of voters who joined the Progressive coalition, formed by the PDS and Rifondazione Comunista, was constituted by electors not involved in church institutions. In 1996, the PPI, after a split, decided to join other leftist parties, like the PDS, in the coalition called Ulivo. Because of the PPI's new location in the uninominal arena, the impact of religion in 1996 appeared less visible (Pisati 1997; Diamanti 1997). Looking at the level of homogeneity of the DC and its heirs, the impact of religion looks different, as Table 6 shows.

[16] We are in doubt that the 1992 figure might depend on some sampling errors affecting the estimate of religious behaviour.

Figure 5
Impact of religion on DC vote (1968-92), on PPI vote (1994) and on CCD/PPI vote (1996)

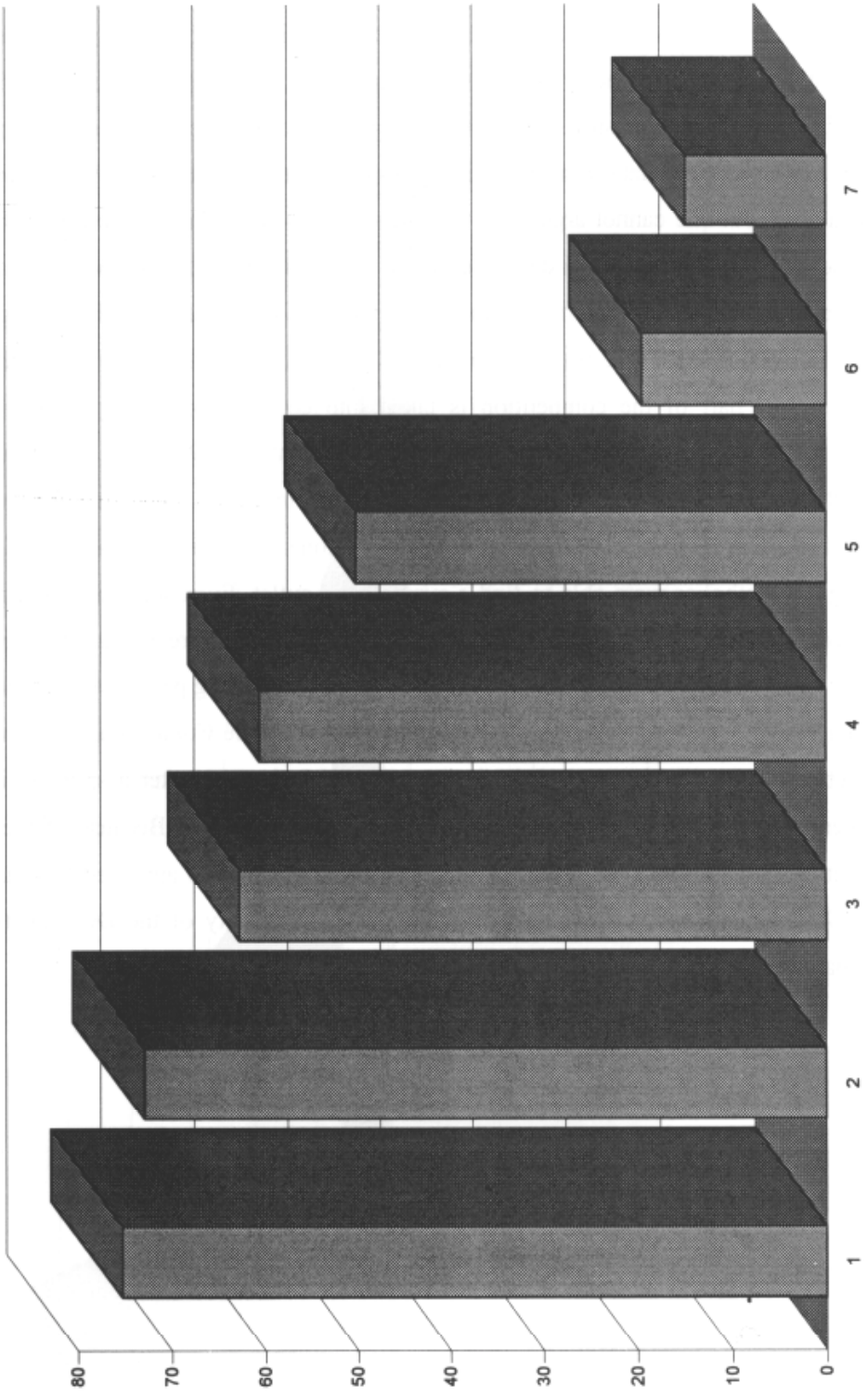


Table 6. *Level of heterogeneity in parties' vote in Italy and in two areas with respect to religious behaviour in selected years**

	1972	1983	1987	1992	1994	1996
Italy	0.178	0.177	0.122	0.111	0.090	0.062
North and Centre	0.242	0.257	0.207	0.177	0.134	0.086
South	0.120	0.109	0.044	0.057	0.053	0.034

*The number of parties is constant over the years; entries are Eta squared.

The first row of Table 6, relative to the country as a whole, indicates that even in 1968 the DC electorate was not totally homogenous in terms of church attendance. Secondly, it shows that the strength of the relationship between the DC vote and religion remains fairly constant over the years until 1992. It is in 1994 and 1996 that the decline becomes more apparent. These data suggest that church attendance was a declining but still powerful factor on voting behaviour as long as the Christian Democratic party was on the political scene. The significant decrease shown by the 1994 and 1996 data could then be attributed, at least in part, to the restructuring of the political offering and, more specifically, to the disappearance of the DC, more than to a dramatic change of attitudes of weekly church attendants. Church attendance, however, is only one dimension of the multifaceted relationship that Catholic voters have regarding their traditional party. Other dimensions include familiar traditions, party images, and the acceptance of reference group relevant to the electoral decision. Some of these dimensions may have changed over the years. Others might have almost been stable. Exploring in details all those dimensions is a difficult task because of lack of data and of limited comparability of the indicators. However, we are able to give some limited information on some of them. As to family tradition, in 1968, weekly church attendance of the respondent significantly increased the probability that he voted DC as his father did (86.6% among practising Catholics against 56% among non-church goings voters). In 1990, the impact of religion on continuity of the familiar DC vote was still relevant, but its strength had slightly declined (73% against 54%). In 1968, 83% of the practising Catholics for whom religious values were crucial in party choice were close to the DC and always voted for this party. In 1985, 64% of the weekly church attendant Catholics for whom ideals were central in choosing a party voted for the DC. Finally, in 1968, 87% of Catholics DC voters gave much

or some importance to the opinion of priests and nuns. In 1990, only 46% of Catholic DC voters thought that the Church had a right to intervene in Government matters, even if many of them were highly confident in the Church. These data, although partial, seem to suggest that in the past decades there has been a change in the way practising Catholics voted for the DC. Even if many of them continued to vote for this party, the influence of the religious component of the voting decision has weakened. We could argue that in the past years many practising Catholics voted DC less because they were Church attendants and more because they have become Christian Democrat, that is, socially conservative.[17]

Let us return back to the last two rows of Table 6. They indicate an important difference between the level of heterogeneity of parties to religious behaviour. The nation-wide figures conceal a significant gap between the Central and Northern regions and the Southern regions. In the first ones the concentration of weekly Church attendants in the DC party was higher than it was in the second ones. This implies that in Italy the religious cleavage was not located at the same depth all over the country. On the contrary, it was a cultural cleavage intertwined with a strong territorial peculiarity. In others words the DC party was anchored to religion more in the North than in the South where presumably party loyalty was based on something other than religion. We can also claim that this territorial peculiarity of the DC vote was already apparent in the 1959s, when the party system was consolidating and it was again surfacing from the 1979 election onwords when the party system was entering a period of change (Segatti, forthcoming). Since we know that the successes of the Lega North are correlated to the decline of the DC vote in many Northern areas (Biorcio 1997), we can argue that even the upsurge of territorial electoral politics in the 1980s, which is to be considered one of the major factors of the dissolution of loyalties to traditional parties, especially the DC, can be traced back to the past, at least to some extent.

[17] Our argument comes close to that of Richardson (1991, 754), who claimed that "cleavage-parties voters developed a partisanship based more on people's individual processing of political information than in the past". The traditional loyalties based on social identities could operate as an echo of the old social and cultural divide.

The class cleavage

For a long time, since the beginning of the 1970s, the mainstream interpretation of the relationship between social class and voting in Italy has portrayed a minor impact of social stratification on electoral behaviour. This was due to two reasons. First of all, on the one hand, since the early 1960s the social structure of the electoral bases of major parties appeared similar (Barnes 1984; Sani 1979), and notwithstanding the strong ideological polarization between the Christian Democratic and Communist parties, their economic policies in their electoral programs were alike (Corbetta et al. 1988; Bartolini and Mair 1990). Moreover, the transformation of the Italian social structure -that is, the declining weight of the manual working class and growing employment in the tertiary sector- was seen as a factor, as in other Western countries (Franklin et al, 1992), that further attenuated both the strength of class-based partisan loyalties as well as the class appeal of parties. On the other hand, the determinants of the vote were not to be found in social stratification, but rather in the ideological and cultural identification of the electorate with either the Catholic or the Socialist-Communist subcultures (Mannheimer and Sani 1987). Therefore, the social and economic interests of the classes did not constitute the basis of partisan identification. Quite the opposite, it was the party identification which would mould the electorate's perception of their class interests (Pizzorno 1983). In other words, the major parties were able, through the diffusion and strengthening of their subcultural and organizational channels of communication with the electorate, to structure collective identities that would comprise quite different social groupings. This explains why in the late 1960s only 22% of manual workers would vote for the Communist party, while the DC was able to capture the vote of both 53% of the workers and two thirds of that of the self-employed middle class, let alone over 50% of the upper-middle class vote. It is then fully appropriate what Mackie, Mannheimer and Sani (1992, 242) argued of the class-vote association in Italy in the 1968-1988 period: " …in Italy social structure has never had more than a limited ability to predict and explain voting choice. Indeed, there are good reasons to suppose that class differences would have only a limited impact upon partisanship. Appeals based upon religiousness and religious tradition by the Christian Democrats (a party which has always stressed its inter-class appeal) have undercut the potential of class politics. A sizeable proportion of the Italian working class has always

voted Christian Democrat. Conversely, the appeal of the PCI and the PSI has extended beyond the blue-collar population to include by the 1970s fairly large groups of white-collars workers and even professionals and managers"

Our hypothesis is that in the 1994-1996 elections this long-standing irrelevance of the social structure for voting has declined, thus counterbalancing the weakening of the religious cleavage that we have already observed. Before explaining why this happened, let us look at some data on class voting for the 1968-1996 period. The evolution of the Italian class structure[18] does not conform strictly to the post-industrial standard. On the one hand, Italy, like many countries, experienced a sharp decline of both workers in the primary sector and industrial manual workers. On the other hand, this has been counterbalanced by growing employment in small and medium sized industrial enterprises and, above all, in self-employed occupations. Moreover, the level of manual workers has not declined, since the erosion of industrial jobs has been offset by an increase in unskilled workers in the tertiary sector, both private and particularly public. Italy's pattern of economic development has thus brought about an increase of independent workers and of semi-skilled tertiary employment rather than a social structure based on skilled employment in large-scale firms.

If we now look at the voting choice of classes, we observe at first a general trend in the direction of the catch-all party type of evolution of electoral preferences (Table 7). In fact during the 1980s the Communist vote increased among all social strata (but the PCI increased also its working class vote) while the DC was able to maintain, up to 1990, its inter-class appeal. However, the comparison between the average 1968-1990 DC/PCI share of votes of non manual workers reveals still a ratio of over 2:1 in favour of the Christian Democrats. After 1990, the DC, and its heirs, had great trouble in keeping together these classes: in 1992, the DC lost a significant quota of the middle class vote (both self-employed and dependent)

[18] We employ the class definition proposed by de Lillo (1988), who distinguishes six classes, based on the head of the households occupation for those outside the labour force: Upper middle class (entrepreneurs, executives, top management, professionals, university teachers); Lower middle class (employees, technical workers, teachers); Urban (i.e., non agricultural) self-employed lower middle class (artisans, craftsmen, shopkeepers, self-employed businessmen of small business); Rural (i.e., agricultural) self-employed lower middle class (farm owners and tenants); Manual workers (blue collars and unskilled white-collars); and Rural manual workers.

which turned to the new Lega (Sani 1993; Mannheimer 1993), while in 1994 and 1996 it was Forza Italia (and to a lesser extent AN) that benefited from the vote of these strata. By contrast, in the 1990s, the PDS (the former PCI) decreased its working class share of the vote while it gained significant quotas of middle class preferences.

However, it is hard to tell from these data whether the class-vote association has changed over the years. To do so we need to compare the strength of the inter-class vote of the parties relative to each other, as well as of the party system as a whole. We have then computed a summary index of inter-class voting for the whole party system (that is, Rae and Taylor cross-cutting index, *interclassismo sistemico*) and a summary index of inter-class voting for the main parties (that is, Rae and Taylor fragmentation index, *interclassismo partitico*)[19] over the 1968-1996 period. The relevant data appear in Table 8 and Figure 6.

The party system inter-class voting index exhibits a downward trend between 1968 and 1996 (that is, an increase of class voting) with a reverse peak in 1990, the year which seems to separate two different patterns: in the first period, between the late 1960s and 1990, class voting appears lower (the index has an average value of 0.400) than in the 1992-1996 period when the average value of the index declines to 0.381. However, between 1968 and 1985, a period of assumed decline of class-based partisan loyalties, the impact of the social structure on the vote actually increased (a finding confirmed in the analysis of Mackie, Mannheimer and Sani [1992]) while it is in 1990 that the effect of the social structure blurs, approaching the 1968 level. In the second period of electoral turmoil and political change associated with the Italian transition, the trend of class voting changes direction, strengthening its impact: the 1996 index of class voting is the lowest ever (that is, the strongest association between class and vote) over the entire period.

[19] Both indexes vary between 0 (maximum of class voting) and 1(maximum of inter-class voting). For an earlier analysis which employs these indexes, see Corbetta et al. (1988).

Table 7. *Class voting in Italy, 1968-1996* (in percentages)

	1968	1975	1985	1990	1992	1994	1996	Average 1968-90	Average 1992-96
Manual workers voting PCI/PDS	22.3	37.9	39.4	31.8	32.6	28.3	31.6	32.9	30.8
Manual workers voting DC/Popolari	46.2	36.7	28.1	33.8	25.5	6.0	6.0	36.2	12.5
Manual workers voting Lega				2.7	18.4	6.6	11.7		12.2
Manual workers voting AN						10.7	13.3		12.0
Manual workers voting Forza Italia						36.7	17.4		27.1
Lower middle class voting PCI/PDS	7.0	18.8	18.8	20.3	26.1	28.3	29.1	16.2	27.8
Lower middle class voting DC/Popolari	53.4	42.0	35.7	37.2	31.5	9.5	10.9	42.1	17.3
Lower middle class voting Lega				1.5	9.1	4.9	8.6		7.5
Lower middle class voting AN						10.5	12.7		11.6
Lower middle class voting Forza Italia						25.4	16.0		20.7
Lower self-employed middle class voting PCI/PDS	10.2	22.5	26.5	13.6	27.5	23.1	28.1	18.2	26.2
Lower self-employed middle class voting DC/Popolari	63.7	42.2	34.0	46.4	25.3	6.7	5.0	46.6	12.3
Lower self-employed middle class voting Lega				4.5	18.7	5.9	10.7		11.8
Lower self-employed middle class voting AN						19.7	15.6		17.7
Lower self-employed middle class voting Forza Italia						34.1	22.2		28.2
Upper middle class voting PCI/PDS	2.1	19.0	10.8	17.5	25.3	25.2	24.9	12.4	25.1
Upper middle class voting DC/Popolari	47.9	42.0	30.1	38.6	37.9	8.0	3.5	39.7	16.5
Upper middle class voting Lega				3.5	5.3	4.7	5.6		5.2
Upper middle class voting AN						16.9	20.0		18.5
Upper middle class voting Forza Italia						33.3	24.5		28.9

Since the party system inter-class voting index takes into account all the 9 to 11 parties which contested the national elections between 1968 and 1996, it is useful to look at the trend of class voting for the single major parties. We first notice that between 1968 and 1992 the trends of DC and PCI class voting follow a similar pattern: both, after an increase of their inter-class appeal in the mid-1970s (which for the PCI was the phase of maximum electoral expansion, evidently across class lines), show a steady decline - more pronounced for the Communists - up to 1990, followed in 1992 by an expansion of the social heterogeneity of the vote. So the 1980 decade of stagnant Communist voting was accompanied by an entrenchment of the party in the traditional working class electorate, while the 1992 DC electoral losses – concentrated in those social strata which were over represented in the DC electoral base (for example, the self-employed, see Table 7) – resulted in the highest social heterogeneity of DC support. Turning to the 1994 elections, both the PDS and Popolari (heirs of the PCI and DC) decreased their inter-class appeal. Moreover, in the first majority role election the new Forza Italia appeared to be a party whose social base was as homogeneous as that of the PDS, and Lega appeared as the most clearly class-based party. In the following national elections Lega further increased its class-based vote, while both the PDS and Forza Italia social base became more heterogeneous, but still less than the new AN, which appears the most inter-class party among the major Italian political groups.

Table 8. *Indexes of class voting in Italy, 1968-1996*

	1968	1975	1985	1990	1992	1994	1996	Average 1968-90	Average 1992-96
Rae-Taylor cross-cutting index (interclassismo sistemico)	0.428	0.382	0.372	0.416	0.385	0.396	0.363	0.400	0.381
Rae-Taylor fragmentation index (interclassismo partitico)									
DC/PP	0.784	0.800	0.759	0.688	0.882	0.696	0.694	0.758	0.757
PCI/PDS	0.651	0.721	0.634	0.530	0.668	0.646	0.695	0.634	0.670
PSI	0.710	0.725	0.700	0.670	0.678			0.701	
MSI/AN	0.756	0.590	0.746	0.693	0.658	0.736	0.744	0.696	0.713
Lega				0.642	0.592	0.622	0.697		0.637
Forza Italia						0.653	0.710		0.682

How could it happen that the 1994 and 1996 national elections present the highest levels of class voting in thirty years? The explanation that follows takes into account the decline of both the traditional religious cleavage and partisan identification, but also singles out the impact of a short term factor: the economy, or, better, the impact of the policies implemented by the Amato and Ciampi governments in 1992 and 1993. In an effort to cut down on the huge public debt, both governments seriously increased the tax burden, a fact that ignited a potential for tax protest, later reinforced by the high visibility of economic issues in the 1994 and 1996 electoral campaigns.

Partisan and ideological constraints

As we have already pointed out, the continuity and relative stability of voting behaviour is affected not only by the persistence of social anchors, but also by the way electoral choices are shaped by the prevailing patterns of electoral competition between parties and subsequently by the level of ideological polarization in the political system. From the beginning, the traditional Italian party system was shaped by the Cold War factor and by the memory of the fascist past. This implied a party system in which two actors, one bigger (PCI) and the other one much smaller (MSI), were permanently excluded from the political game. The so-called negative vote or the preclusion manifested by many electors towards the PCI and the MSI was, over the period, the first criterion of segmentation of the electoral market (Mannheimer and Sani 1987). The DC's occupation of the centre of the ideological space was at the same time a consequence of this situation and a cause of the frozen pattern of electoral competition (Sartori 1976). Was this perception of the ideological space stable over the years or has it changed in connection with the collapse of the Berlin wall?

The proximity of the end of the Cold War and the decomposition of the Italian party system suggested that the two events were strictly connected and the first was a cause of the second. This hypothesis has now become a sort of popular wisdom. It needs, however, prudent evaluation. We think that this hypothesis can be applied more appropriately to the

role of the elite in the decomposition of the traditional party system at the beginning of the 1990s. If mass attitudes are taken into account, it is necessary to distinguish between the process of dissolution of old partisan bonds, which occurred mostly in 1993, and the realignment of the electorate in subsequent elections. As to the first step, it is possible that to some extent the end of the Cold War has had an effect. As to the second, the 1994 evidence regarding the PDS suggests a more cautious conclusion, especially when we compare it with the mass preclusion towards the PCI in the period prior to 1992, as Table 9 shows. Data indicate that from 1968 to 1990 there was a decline in the share of electors who would never vote for the PCI. In 1990, however, electors who would never vote for the PCI were still about 50%. In 1994 there was a marked increase. One could rightly suggest that this growth was the effect of the Berlusconi electoral campaign in which the anti-communism issue was central. In any case, one should acknowledge that this issue resonated easily with persistent mass attitudes.

Table 9. *Negative vote to PCI/PDS, MSI/AN (1968-1990) and to both, 1985-1994*

Negative vote to:	1968	1985	1990	1994
PCI/PDS	63.7	54.3	51.5	61.3
(N)	(1,451)	(1,477)	(1,329)	(2,387)
	1968	1985	1990	1994
MSI/AN	38.9	87.7	80.8	61.9
(N)	(1,451)	(1,453)	(1,336)	(2,381)
		1985	1990	1994
Both		31.6	44.9	42.5
(N)		(1,676)	(1,335)	(2,435)

Note : Percentages are on valid responses; 1968 data are based on different question format which does not allow the estimate of respondents who never would vote for both parties.

Table 9 also provides evidence on the preclusion of the MSI. In this case the story is different. Until 1990 the negative vote was growing, with a decline only in 1994. The decrease of almost 20% can probably be attributed to the same factor claimed by the PDS: the electoral campaign and the coalitional strategy enacted by Berlusconi in 1994. Looking at these data it would be misleading to conclude that the subjective meaning of the PCI/PDS and

MSI/AN party images had not changed during the period and anti-PDS voters had the same feelings as the anti-PCI voters in the 1960s. On the contrary, our hypothesis is that the content of the party's image has changed over the years. Evidence of this modification emerges by analyzing over the years the relation between PCI/PDS and MSI/AN preclusions, on one side, and the degree of religiousness and self-location on the left-right continuum on the other side. The PCI's negative image was perceived in the past as one of the components of the cultural divide which opposed the Catholics to the communism doctrine, a conflict not only between partisan identities, but identities with a religious overtone. In 1953, 67% of Italians deemed that a good catholic could not at the same time be a Communist. 87% of the DC voters shared the opinion (Luzzato Fegiz 1956). In 1985 only 27% of the sample rejected the possibility of combining the two identities. Among DC voters they were 46%. The same considerations are allowed by the first row of Table 10.

Table 10. *Religiosity and negative vote to PCI/PDS and MSI/AN**, 1968-1994

Negative vote	1968	1985	1990	1994
PCI/PDS	38,5	27,3	18,8	14,6
MSI/AN	-23,8	-0,2	-2,0	-0,7

*****Entries are differences between weekly Church attendants and respondents who attend Church less frequently

To sum up, we might argue that over the years religion per se has a diminishing effect on the PCI/PDS preclusions, maybe muting the religious overtone of the past. A partially different story comes from the second row of the table relative to the MSI/AN preclusions. From 1968 to 1994 religious influences on the MSI/AN negative vote had also declined. However, this happens because the non-practising electors were becoming more open to the MSI/AN, as were the practising electors. If the religious overtones of the negative party images were vanishing, the same was not occurring with the ideological orientations, as can be seen in Figures 7, 8 and 9. Data show that self-location on the ideological space was able to structure most of the preclusions towards the PCI/PDS and the MSI/AN from 1968 until 1994. However, it has to be noted that there were in the two last years an increase in the

negative vote on the left side against the PCI/PDS and on the right side against the MSI/AN. This effect can be attributed to the growth of self-located leftist and rightist voters who are not willing to vote PCI or PDS and on the other side MSI/AN.

We must note, however, that the relation between the PCI/PDS negative votes and the self-location on the left-right continuum does not seem to be affected by the end of the Cold War. Apparently, many electors still perceived an echo of this powerful ideological divide, even when the international causes were removed[20]. The most remarkable change regards the relation between the negative votes towards both parties, PCI/PDS and MSI/AN, and the left-right continuum. The disappearance of the Christian Democrats seems to have significantly altered the traditional impact of the ideological divide, which was still visible in the 1990 data through the bell-shaped curve.

Our analysis demonstrates that regarding political cultural aspects, there are two different trends: a lot of continuity in some basic attitudes of political efficacy, and a curvilinear change of political interest, which seems to increase in 1996. Party identification appears to decrease in 1990 and selectively increase in the last elections. Religion has a declining impact on voting behaviour over the years, but the DC was still able to attract many practising Catholics and in 1990 was no less homogenous than 20 years before. In the 1994 and 1996 elections, religion was less prominent although it oriented the choices towards the party heirs of the old DC party. Class voting over the years increased slightly until 1985, but in 1990 reverted to the level of 1968. After that, it increased in the 1994 and 1996 elections. Among the cleavages which shaped the Italian party system, partisan and ideological divides remain in the period the most stable, even if their subjective meanings could have changed.

[20] A SWG national survey conducted in November 1994 shows that a plurality of voters were convinced that the PDS and AN were ideologically similar to the PCI and the MSI. Some of them valued positively this similarity, others negatively.

Figure 6
Class voting in Italy: Rae and Taylor cross-cutting and fragmentation indexes, 1968-1996

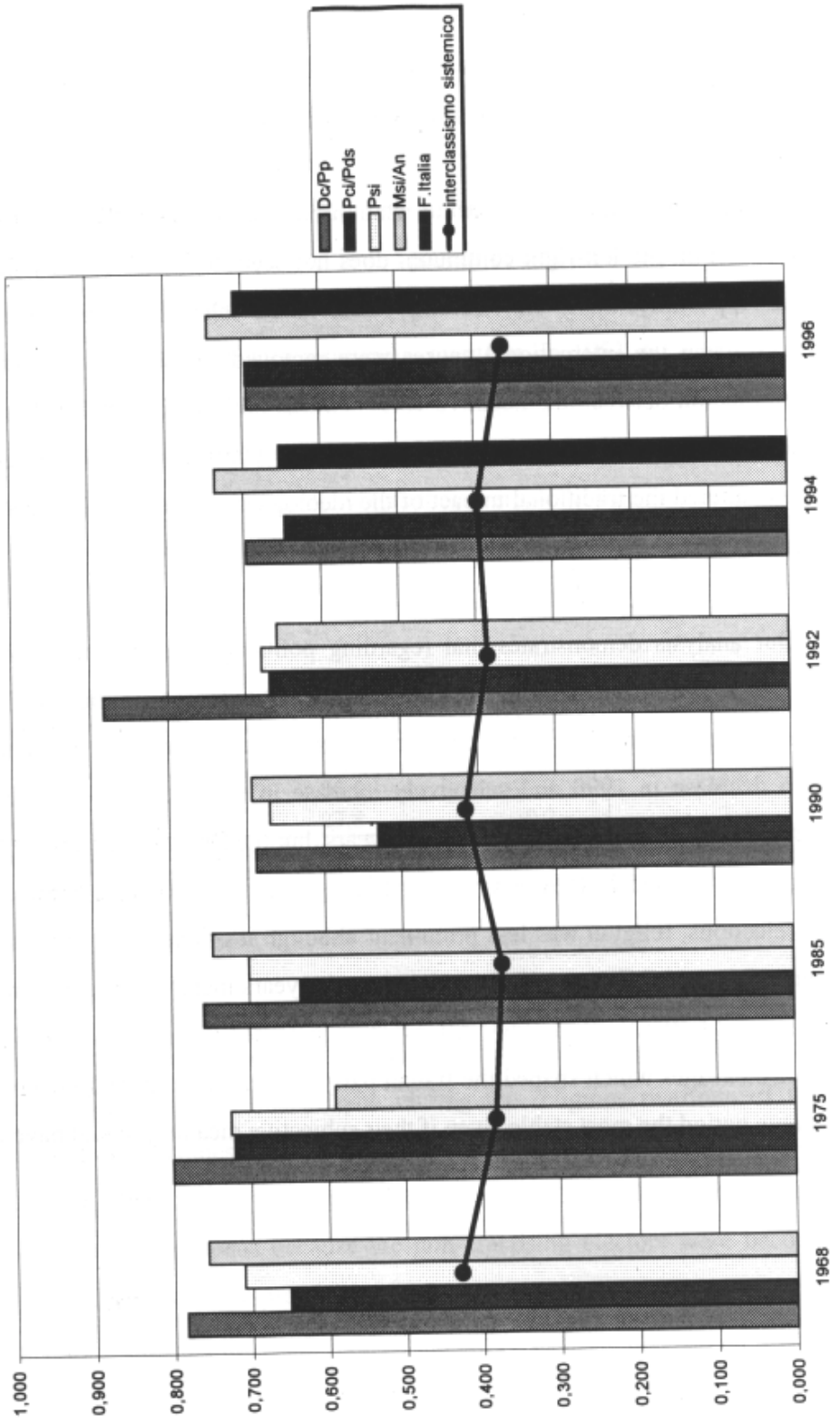


Figure 7
Negative vote for PCI/PDS (1968-1994)

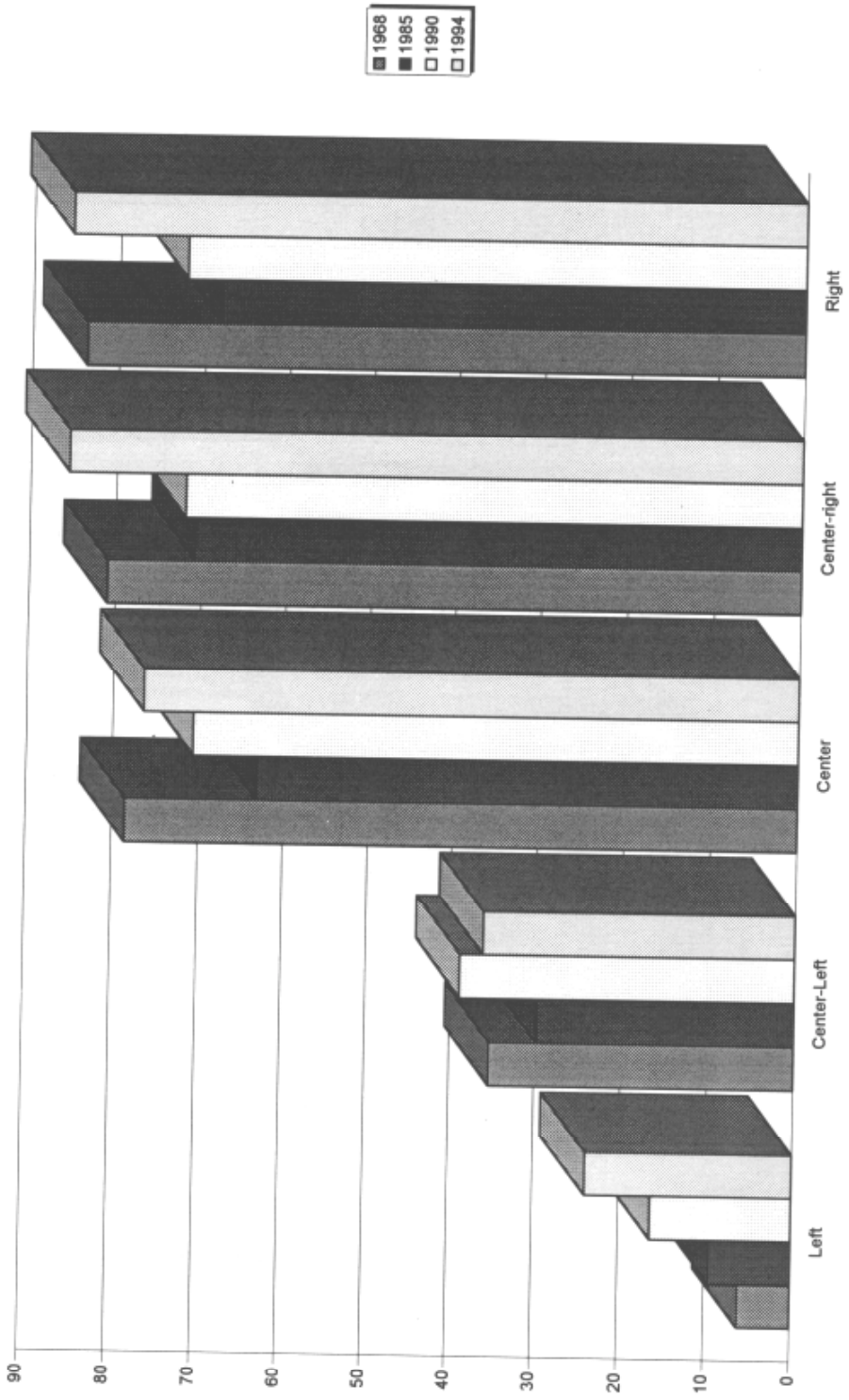


Figure 8
Negative vote for MSI/AN (1968/1994)

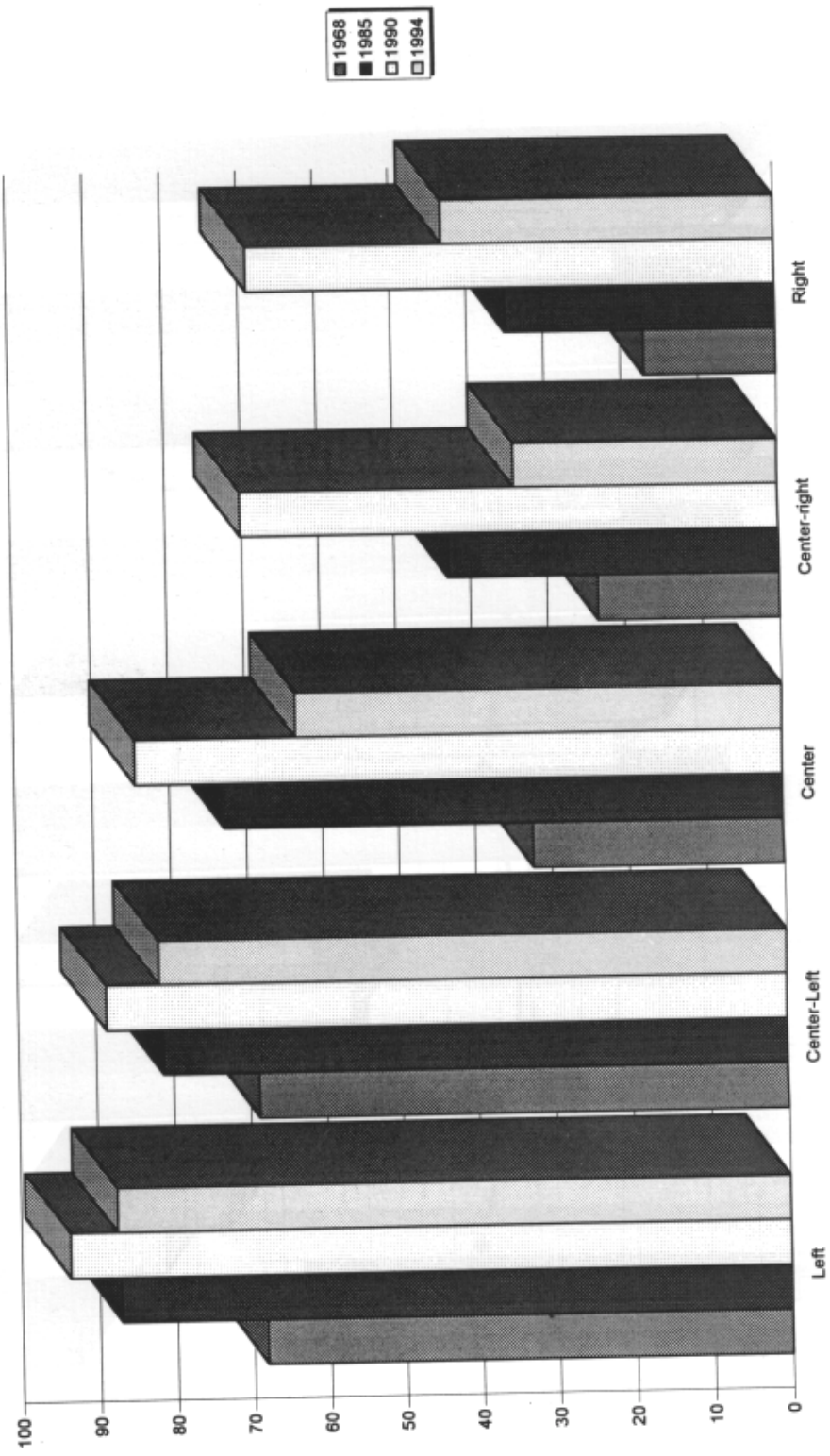
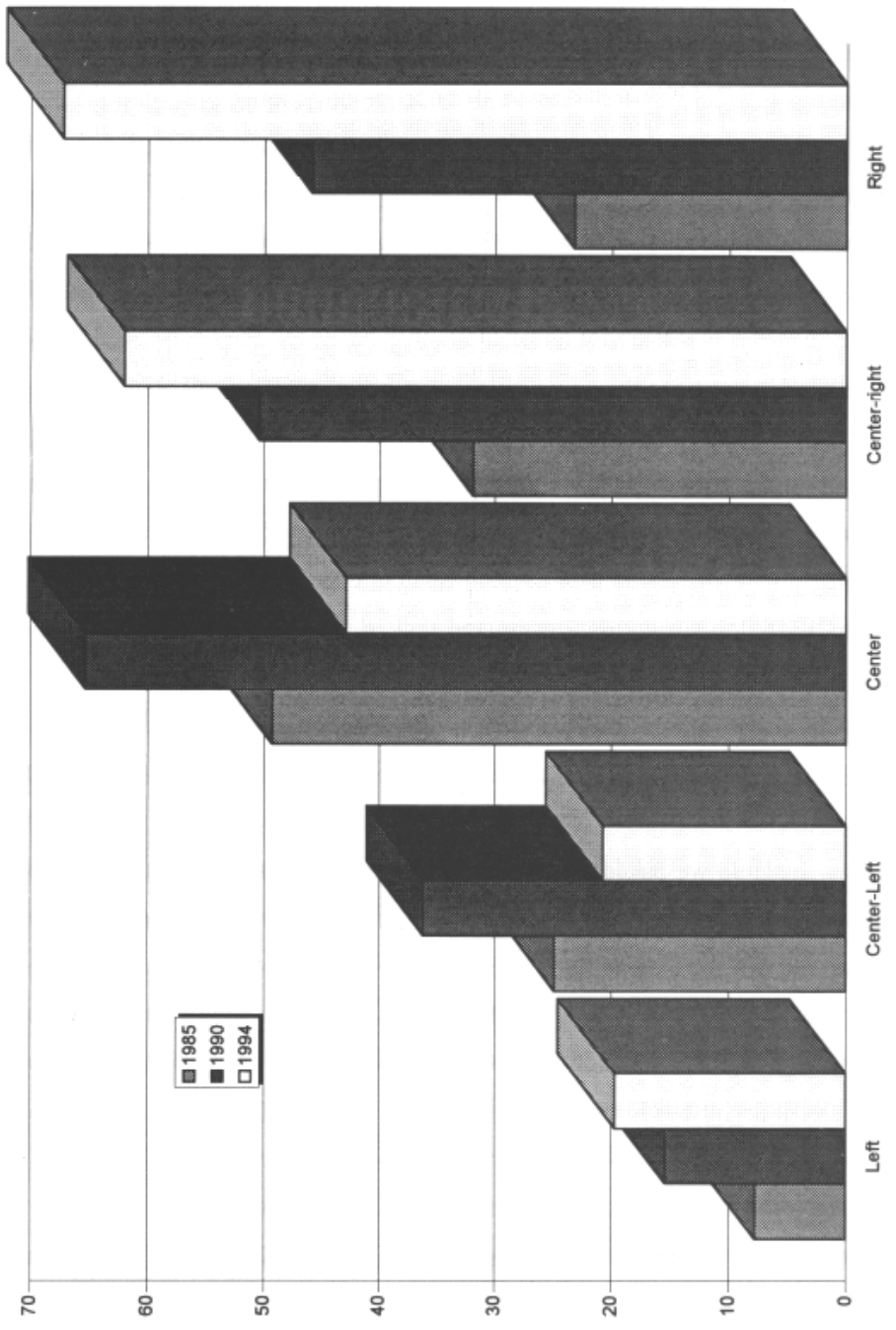


Figure 9
Negative vote for PCI/PDS and MSI/AN



The interplay of change and continuity

Electoral mobility in the 1980s and in the 1994-1996 elections

At the end of the 1960s the general awareness was that the electoral behaviour of Italians was becoming more stable after the fluctuations of the 1950s. At the time Italy appeared as a model of stable alignment and standing partisan commitments. Data collected at the individual level showed the large majority of voters were used to remaining loyal to their party. According to a survey in 1968, about 83% of the respondents declared that in the past they always voted for the same party. According to Barnes (1984, 219) "only 12% voted differently in 1972 from 1968". Even the earthquake of 1976, in which at aggregate level the volatility index rose to 7.6%, was more the result of population replacement than the effect of shifting votes (Sani 1977). In the 1980s, however, the picture changed somewhat. The volatility index increased to 8.6% in 1983. It was at 9.2% in 1987 and at 14.4% in 1992. Studies based on survey data estimated that in this period the share of voters who used to change their vote between two parliamentary elections was between 25% and 30% (Mannheimer and Sani 1987; Biorcio and Natale 1989). Other studies based on aggregate level data substantially confirmed this level of electoral movement (Corbetta et al. 1988).

In 1990 we asked a sample of electors how many parties they voted for in the past elections (parliamentary and subnational).[21] Only 44.2% of the respondents declared that they always voted for the same party, 36.4% for two or three parties, and the reminder for more than three parties. In the same period, several studies also showed also that it was quite a large share of electors who considered more than one party when asked how they would vote in the next election. In 1985, according to the Four-Nation study, only 27.9% of respondents declared that they considered only one party. Half of them indicated two or three parties. Although attitudes are different from actual behaviour, their diffusion shows that the electoral market was becoming more open than it used to be in the past (Mannheimer and Sani 1987) and the party anchors were losing their grip.

[21] The high percentage of fluid voters can be attributed to question format, which does not distinguish between different types of elections.

Several studies on electoral mobility showed that the fluid voters had a distinctive social background. Voters who actually shifted their votes between parties or declared their wish to do so at the forthoming election tended to be male, young, well educated, urban and upper class. On the contrary, old people, retired or housewives, whose social network largely coincided with family boundaries, were likely to vote for the same party. This profile was the same from the early 1970s until the end of the 1980s (Barnes 1984; Biorcio and Natale 1989; Mannheimer and Sani 1987). Our data, based on the 1990 survey, in large part bears out this picture, as can be seen in Figure 10. In addition, the 1990 data show that socially and residentially mobile respondents are more likely to have voted for two or more parties than respondents who have been living in the same province or whose occupational status was similar to their fathers'.

Taking into consideration the social profile of fluid voters, one could argue that it was the effect of electoral mobility on the electoral process and party system of powerful forces that were transforming Italian society. In the same perspective, writing at the beginning of the 1980s, Barnes (1984, 220) claimed that "as the percentage of the population with those characteristics grows, volatility may increase in the future". His hypothesis was in fact correct. Nevertheless, Barnes was also very careful to underline that the effect of those forces was countervailed by political forces which determined what he called a "partisan realignment". We think that this hypothesis was also correct, until 1992 and also, to some extent, as far as the new partisan realignment of the 1994 and 1996 election is concerned.

Until the beginning of the 1990s, electoral mobility was powerfully affected by at least three political factors. The impact of two of them was highly visible also in the 1994 and 1996 elections. First of all, small parties were affected by the phenomenon more than large parties, like the PCI and the DC, that could be called cleavage parties. Barnes (1984) reports that in the 1972 election, 17% of the PCI and 21 % of the DC electors voted differently from the 1968 election, against 62% of the PRI and 50% of the PLI voters. Adopting a different approach based on ecological analysis, Corbetta, Parisi and Schadee (1988) claim that during the 1968-1983 period the average of fluid voters was 15.5% for the PCI and 20.8% for the DC, against 44.2% for the PSI, 51.6% for the PRI and 59.7% for the PLI. According to our

1990 data, the differences between small and large parties remained visible, although both parties were equally affected by the impact of social change (indexed as education level), as can be seen in Table 11.

Table 11. *Electors who voted for two or more parties within the electorate of selected parties in 1990, by educational level*

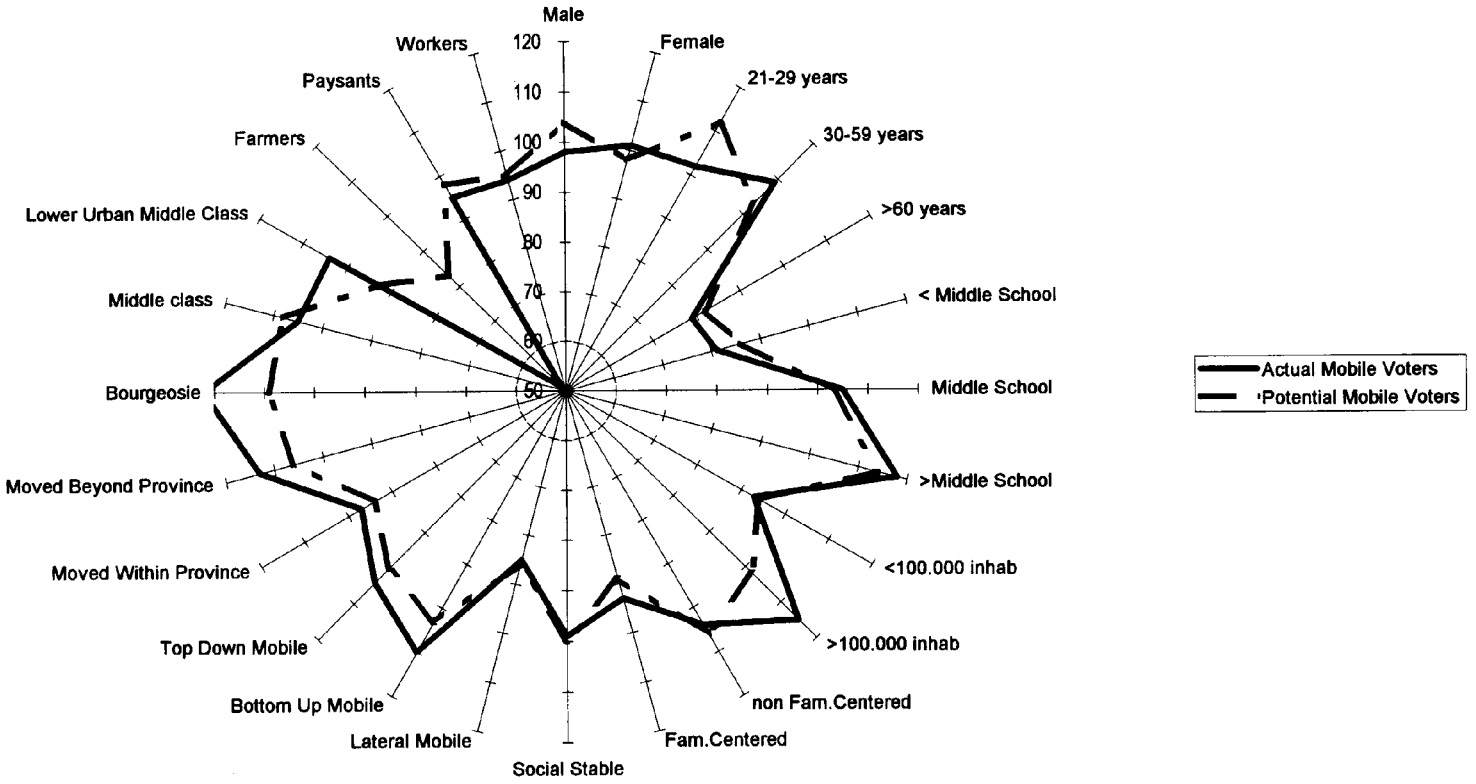
	Less than high school		More than high school		Total	
	%	(N)	%	(N)	%	(N)
DC	36.7	(300)	47.1	(121)	39.5	(423)
PCI	35.6	(194)	51.9	(77)	40.1	(272)
PSI	63.2	(125)	75.4	(61)	66.8	(187)
PSDI, PRI, PLI	69.0	(29)	79.4	(34)	75.0	(63)

The reason for the differences is that, in 1990, the DC and the PCI could still have benefited from a significant stock of electors strongly identifying with them or to use the more appropriate Italian definition of “appartenenza”. The two powerful factors that anchored DC and PCI voters to their party were weekly church attendance for the first and union membership for the second. It is interesting to see at the threshold of the restructuring of the party system how effective they were in shrinking the portion of mobile voters among DC and PCI voters.

Table 12. *Electors who voted for two or more parties within the DC and PCI electorate in 1990 by degree of religiosity and union membership*

	Non weekly church going Catholics	Weekly church going catholics	Total
DC voters	45.2	32.1	39.5
(N)	(222)	(190)	(423)
	Non union members	Union members	Total
PCI voters	42.0	37.0	40.1
(N)	(180)	(92)	(272)

Figure 10
Social Background of Floating Voters (Past and Potential) in 1990



Entries are Index Values
(Sample average=100)

Finally, let us consider the impact of a third constraining factor on electoral mobility: the voters' position in the ideological and political space. From the beginning, mobile voters never fluctuated in an open space. They moved between parties following an ideological yardstick. The overwhelming majority of them switched between parties close in the ideological spectrum, indexed as a left/right continuum (Barnes 1984; Mannheimer and Sani 1987; Biorcio and Natale 1989; Gasperoni 1995). The left-right continuum is not, however, the one and only dimension shaping the fluid voters' choices, even when it is the most important as in the Italian case. Another dimension could be the location of the party along the opposition/government divide.[22] We think that it is interesting to compare how voters (constant and fluid) were distributed in 1990 along the two dimensions. The data suggest a few considerations regarding the political and ideological space in which constant and fluid voters took their voting decision. We consider first the opposition/government divide. First, only less than 13% of mobile voters moved between left and right opposition parties. This implies that in 1990 the electoral market was powerfully structured by this dimension. Second, 34.3% of fluid voters remained confined to politically determined segments (Left-opposition, Government, and Right-opposition). Third, the majority of mobile voters moved between parties located in two segments, but contiguous, segments. On the left side we think that the connecting role was probably performed by the PSI, which collected votes from the PCI on one side and the government parties on the other. On the right side, the same function was probably performed by the PLI and DC. Fourth, 63.7% of the constant voters were government voters. However, the higher rate of loyal voters is likely to be found in the left opposition segment. Looking at the share of constant voters within the political segment one can see that in the left opposition parties segment they were 80%, against 64% of the voters in the government segment.

[22] Our indicator for the opposition/government divide dimension is a taxonomy based on the answers to the "Which parties did you vote for in the past?" question in the 1990 survey.

Table 13.. *Distribution of Constant and fluid voters by the voted parties' position in the opposition government divide and the self-location on the ideological continuum, 1990*

Opposition and Government Divide	Constant voters	Fluid voters	Left-Right	Constant voters	Fluid voters
Only left opposition Parties[a]	33.6	6.6	Left	19.5	15.4
Left opposition.-Gov. Parties[b]		42.1	Centre-Left	16.5	25.0
Only gov. Parties[c]	62.7	27.6	Centre	29.9	25.0
Right opp.-gov. Parties[d]		10.7	Centre-Right	6.1	11.8
Only Right opp. Parties[e]	3.7	0.2	Right	6.3	3.8
Left opp.-Right-opp parties[f]		12.8	Refuse	21.7	19.0
Total	100	100		100	100
(N)	(539)	(680)		(539)	(680)

Association Coefficients between Opposition and Government Divide and Left-Right Self Location within Constant and Fluid Voters		
	Constant Voters	Fluid Voters
Phi	.68	.49
Cramers'V	.48	.22
Gamma	.62	.33

[a]PCI, DP, and GREEN
[b]PCI ,DP, GREEN, PSI, PRI, PSDI, DC,PLI
[c]PSI, PRI, PSDI, DC, PLI
[d]MSI, LIGUES, PSI, PRI, PSDI, DC, PLI
[e]MSI and LIGUES
[f]PCI, DP, GREEN, MSI and LIGUES

We next consider the ideological dimension, indexed as self location on the left-right continuum. First, the share of constant and fluid voters who refused to locate themselves in the ideological space is higher in comparison to the other one. Second, a plurality of fluid voters (44.2%) located themselves in non-contiguous segments. Third, a little more that one out of three voters moved in ideologically contiguous segments. The last part of the table on mobility shows that the fit between the two dimensions is higher among constant voters than fluid voters. In other words, in 1990, within fluid voters, there was a mismatch between their movement across party lines identified by the opposition/government divide dimension and their self-location in the ideological space. In other words, the first dimension seems to become relatively independent in1990.

The voting choices of the 1994 and 1996 elections

At the end of the 1980s the interplay of change and continuity could be described as a game in which social change was eroding some of the party anchors and parties were trying to adjust, benefiting from the remaining constraining power of the old cleavages and its echoing influence on voting behaviour. As in other European countries, social change, determined by inter-generational change, urban life, education and social status, was promoting a change while religion and old partisan and ideological cleavages curtailed its impact. Does the 1994 and 1996 electoral mobility show the same pattern of interplay?

In 1994 the rate of volatility grew beyond the 36% level (Bartolini and D'Alimonte 1995; Cartocci 1997). At the individual level, from 1992 to 1994, 53.6% of the voters moved in the proportional part of the electoral competition and 46.6% in the uninominal one.[23]. In order to analyze the impact of change and continuity, we have broken down the voting shift of electors in the proportional part of the 1994 electoral campaign, according to the criterion based on the existence of continuity with the parties present in the 1992 election. The same criterion was followed for the 1994 and 1996 interval. The outcome is three segments. First, there are those who stayed loyal from 1992 to1994, that is, for instance, a 1992 Christian Democrat voter who voted in 1994 for the Popular party. Second, there are those who voted in 1994 for a party different from the 1992 one, but always a member of the same coalition, for example, a 1992 PDS voter who voted in 1994 for Rifondazione Comunista. Third, there are those who voted in 1994 not only for a party different from the 1992 one, but also for a party member of a coalition different from that chosen by his previous party; for example, a Christian Democrat voter who voted for Forza Italia in 1994.

The first row of Table 14 provides the total amount of constant and mobile voters (within and between coalitions) in 1994 and 1996. Between 1992-1994, 46.7% of the electorate did not follow the cue of their previous party or of its direct heir and voted for a

[23] Millions of voters changed their past voting habits. It is, however, difficult to estimate how many of them shifted their vote because they wanted to or because they were to some extent forced to do so by the large restructuring of the political offering.

party of a different coalition. In 1996 the mobile voters between coalitions decreased significantly. This shows that in 1996 there was a process of stabilization to which we will return at the end of this paper. Table 14 indicates that the social profile of fluid voters in the 1994 and 1996 elections was remarkably different from the social identities of mobile voters of the 1980s. In 1994, and in part also in 1996, old, low educated, family-centred (housewives and retired) electors, a social segment which can hardly be considered involved in social change, shifted their vote across coalition lines.

On the other hand, Table 15 shows that in 1994 and in 1996 the political and ideological forces' impact moved in the opposite direction to that of the 1980s. If we consider the impact of past electoral behaviour, prior to the 1992 election, we can see that the major contribution came from the government parties' electors. This occurred in 1994 but also in 1996. Taking into account now the ahurch attendance variable, one can see that an important contribution to long-range mobility came from good Catholics. In 1994, over half of them voted for a party which was outside his/her political tradition, as expressed by past record of electoral behaviour. In addition, the attraction of the coalition leaders, Berlusconi in 1994 and Prodi in 1996, had a significant impact on electoral mobility.

The result of this analysis seems paradoxical. The forces which in the past helped to shrink mobility, such as religion, or were conducive to preserving the political order of electoral mobility, such as past voting behaviour, became in 1994, and also partially in 1996, the driving forces of the earthquake, contributing to shaping the shifting voting decision. The forces which in the past were eroding the parties' anchors had a stabilizing impact. The paradox may be easily solved if we observe that the so-called Italian electoral revolution was more the outcome of a radical decomposition and restructuring of the political offering than the result of new mass orientations. To sum up, the electoral mobility of the 1980s can be described as socially-driven, while in 1994 and 1996 it was mostly determined by the collapse of the government parties.

Table 14.. *Constant , within coalition fluid, between coalitions fluid voters by gendera age, educational level and occupational class (1994-1996)*

	1994				1996			
	Constant voters	Within coalition voters	Between coalition voters	(N)	Constant voters	Within coalition voters	Between coalition voters	(N)
Total 1994	39,2	14,1	46,7	(844)				
Total 1996					69,6	16,6	13,8	(1855)
*Gender**								
Male	44,0	15,4	40,6	(488)	67,9	16,2	15,9	(1041)
Female	32,6	14,3	53,1	(356)	**71,4**	**17,1**	**11,0**	(814)
Age								
18-29	**40,6**	**18,3**	**40,9**	(186)	67,7	14,7	17,6	(387)
30-59	40,6	16,0	43,4	(463)	69,6	17,5	12,9	(1253)
60 or more	34,4	9,2	56,4	(195)	73,5	14,4	12,1	(215)
Education								
Primary school or less	37,2	8,5	54,3	(164)	75,8	9,5	14,7	(190)
Middle school	38,6	13,3	48,1	(293)	68,0	16,2	15,8	(594)
High School	38,8	19,4	41,8	(289)	70,5	16,3	13,2	(786)
College	46,4	16,5	37,1	(97)	66,4	22,3	11,3	(283)
Social relations								
Non family centred	42,0	17,8	40,2	(550)	68,5	17,0	14,5	(1413)
Family centred	33,7	9,6	56,7	(291)	73,3	15,2	11,5	(442)
Occupational Class								
Upper class	40,0	18,2	41,8	(110)	65,2	19,9	14,9	(302)
Middle class	44,4	16,8	38,8	(273)	69,7	18,3	12,0	(601)
Self-employed and Lower Middle class	26,4	20,9	52,7	(91)	71,0	13,9	15,1	(238)
Farmers	28,6		71,4	(28)	55,6	22,2	22,2	(36)
Working class	39,9	12,3	47,8	(316)	72,0	14,2	13,8	(651)
Paysants	38,8	5,6	55,6	(18)	64,7	11,8	23,5	(17)

Table 15. *Constant , within Coalition fluid, between coalition fluid voters by electoral behaviour, church attendance and evaluations on Berlusconi's and Prodi's leadership, 1994-1996*

	1994				1996			
	Constant Voters	Within Coalition Voters	Between Coalition Voters	(N)	Constant Voters	Within Coalition Voters	Between Coalition Voters	(N)
Total 1994	39.2	14.1	46.7	(844)				
Total 1996					69.6	16.6	13.8	(1855)
Past vote[a]								
Only Left-opposition parties	**66.0**	**20.6**	**13.5**	(141)	80.0	13.2	6.8	(425)
Left opposition.-gov. parties	34.7	19.0	46.3	(121)	71.4	16.0	12.6	(231)
Only gov. Parties	**31.4**	**6.6**	**61.9**	(331)	63.1	16.7	20.2	(401)
Right opposition.-gov. Parties	**30.4**	**19.9**	**50.0**	(102)	65.6	20.4	14.0	(372)
Only Right opposition Parties	58.2	23.6	18.2	(55)	79.5	7.2	13.3	(83)
Left Opposition.-Right opposition parties	24.2	18.2	57.6	(33)	61.4	23.3	15.3	(176)
Church Attendance								
Less than weekly or never	38.5	14.6	46.9	(506)	69.9	16.0	14.1	(1345)
Weekly	**36.8**	**11.0**	**52.3**	(247)	69.0	18.0	13.0	(501)
Evaluation of Berlusconi								
Better than other leaders	17.5	14.7	67.8	(251)	77.7	8.6	13.7	(139)
Equal or worse than other leaders	48.4	15.0	36.6	(593)	69.0	17.2	13.8	(1706)
Evaluation of Prodi								
Better than other leaders					56.7	24.8	18.5	(141)
Equal or worse than other leaders					70.6	16.0	13.4	(1681)

[a] Data based on recall question

- 1994 data exclude parties voted in 1992 election
- 1996 data include parties voted in 1992 election

As we have argued elsewhere (Bellucci 1997), the decline of partisan and subcultural identification may have interacted with the condition of the national economy, decreasing the inter-class appeal of the parties, letting the potential distributive conflict come afloat, and the problems associated with a difficult compromise between divergent class interests, inherent to a policy of economic stabilization made more severe by international constraints. This issue was indeed prominent in the 1994 and 1996 electoral campaigns. As we have already observed, while in the past the ideological polarization between the Christian Democratic and Communist parties was accompanied by a similarity of the parties' economic policies, in 1994 the economic programs of the three coalitions diverged sharply. The decisive move came from Berlusconi, who chose to radicalize the issue of an alternative economic policy both on substantive economic grounds and in an effort to stress the break with the past. So Forza Italia proposed a program of drastic reduction of state intervention in the economy and welfare and dramatic tax cuts in favour of market forces. It was a radical program, even if it was remarkably attenuated by the presence in the centre-right electoral coalition of the traditionally pro-etatist post-fascist MSI-AN. In contrast, both the Left (Progressisti) and the Centre (Patto per l'Italia) advocated only a rationalization of the functions of the state, which however was to keep full responsibility for welfare and a role, somewhat attenuated, in the economy.

However, the economy also became a kind of meta-issue capable of symbolizing a discontinuity from past economic policies. There were two dimensions to the economic issue: a retrospective one, that is the attribution of responsibility for past poor economic performance (inflation, state deficit, heavy tax burden, etc.), and a prospective one, the proposals for future policies. The centre-right coalition, especially Forza Italia, based its campaign on both dimensions: with respect to the retrospective component of the economic issue, the Right imputed to both the DC and the Left the responsibility for Italian economic and social problems, proposing then for the future, the prospective dimension, a "new economic miracle", to be brought about by market forces liberated by state controls. The Left and the Centre opposed such a program, and presented themselves as capable of reforming theItalian socio-economic structure without destroying the positive provisions of the welfare

state.[24] Also prominent in the 1996 campaign was the economic issue, showing a further polarization among coalitions. The Ulivo economic and social program favoured a system of mixed state regulation and market development, in which the reduction of the budget deficit was matched by a strong redistributive fiscal policy. The Polo program, strongly based on economic liberalism, anchored Italian development to the promotion of market forces and a reduction of the tax burden[25]. Against this background, the occupational classes' electoral preferences would show how in 1994 the Centre-Right was able to elicit a vote which, exploiting the anti-tax potential, would induce a new alignment between occupational status and party preferences (Table 16). This is quite clear in the voting in the uninominal ballot: self-employed electors voted mainly for the Right (63% among the urban and 72% among the rural self-employed), as did also 59% of the upper middle class electors. However, the coalition led by Berlusconi gained also the largest share of the lower middle class and of manual workers.[26] In 1996 we observe a redistribution of the vote towards the Ulivo: still the majority of upper middle class and self-employed chose Polo and Lega. As a further paradox, then, the political realignment of occupational classes seems then to have brought about in the 1990s a social stratification of the Italian vote which most European countries experienced decades ago.

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[24] The economy issue was highly visible in the television electoral campaign, which showed a remarkable change relative to how news was framed and conveyed to the electorate: for the first time policy issues predominated over political questions. While, for example, in the 1987 elections television debates revolved mainly around political issues (party relations, government coalitions, etc.), which represented 37.5% of the total issues discussed as compared to 21% of policy issues, in 1994, policy issues counted for as much as 39% of all issues covered in the debates. In addition, within the policy issues, those referring to the economy and welfare represented 56% of the total .

[25] For an analysis of the 1996 electoral campaign and party programs, see Sani and Segatti (1997).

[26] In order to ensure comparability with earlier surveys, our definition of classes does not distinguish between the private and public sector of employment. If we do so, it is clear that workers in the private sector divided themselves evenly between Left and Right, while public sector workers turned to the Centre and Left, which both promised not to cut back on public employment. In this analysis we have attributed to housewives and students the occupation of the household head, and to retirees their previous occupation. However, previous research shows that these groups did not always vote according to the occupational position of the household head, thus attenuating in Table 2 the class-vote relationship (see Bellucci 1997). The electoral choice of the voters active in the labour market appears, then, coherent with the economic program of parties, and class interests seem to have expressed themselves in the ballot box: the fiscal policy of the Right appealed to the self-employed and businessmen, while public sector workers turned to the parties of Centre and Left which promised not to cut back on public employment.

Table 16. *Voting in 1994 and 1996 election (plurality) by household head' social class, 1994 and 1996*

	Upper middle class		Lower middle class		Lower urban self-employed middle class		Lower rural self-employed middle class		Manual workers		Rural manual workers	
	1994	1996	1994	1996	1994	1996	1994	1996	1994	1996	1994	1996
Progressisti/Ulivo[a]	30.1	41.7	41.5	58.1	27.0	47.9	20.7	74.0	35.7	56.3	31.6	54,5
Patto	10,8		14.7		9.5		7.3		9.4		8.2	
Lega		6.0		7.0		9.1		1.0		9.3		
PDL-PBG/Polo*	59.1	49.0	43.8	33.2	63.5	40.2	72.0	16.2	54.8	31.9	60.2	44,1
Others		3.3		1.7		2.8		8.8		2.5		1.4
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
(N)	(136)	(196)	(357)	(383)	(213)	(376)	(63)	(92)	(840)	(1033)	(60)	(49)

[a] Coalition in 1996 elections

Table 17. *Multinomial logistic model of 1994 uninominal voting by religion, social class, type of social relations and past voting (MLE estimates and standard errors*)

	Progressisti Vs. Polo delle libertà/Buongoverno		Patto Vs. Polo delle libertà/Buongoverno	
	Parameters	standard error	parameters	standard error
Religion				
Not practicing (0)				
Weekly church attendance	-0.438	0.140[a]	0.544	0.217[a]
Social relations				
Outside household (0)				
Mainly within household	-0.347	0.143[a]	0.145	0.185
Social class				
Upper middle	0.074	0.267	0.192	0.339
Lower middle	0.453	0.177[a]	0.682	0.221[a]
Self-employed lower middle	-0.273	0.196[b]	-0.297	0.259
Manual workers (0)				
Past voting				
Left opposition parties	2.534	0.346[a]	0.011	0.755
Left opposition and Government parties	1.633	0.341[a]	1.200	0.597[a]
Only Government parties	0.328	0.979	1.593	0.564[a]
Right opposition and Government parties	-1.751	0.538[a]	-0.194	0.669
Right opposition parties	-1.177	0.561[a]	-1.804	1.356
Right and left opposition (0)				
Constant	-1.218	0.136[a]	-2.695	0.265[a]
Chi-square	164.09			
Degrees of freedom	162			
Probability	0.439			

[a] $p < 0,01$
[b] $p < 0,10$

The answer appears largely positive. If we look at the 1994 model results (Table 17), we see that both religion and class exert a significant net direct impact on the vote, as does the record of past voting. The question, then, is what most influenced the vote? We can answer this question by looking at the estimate of the parameters associated to the variables, and computing the probability of a vote by changing one parameter in time. Looking first at the choice between a vote for the Progressisti or for the Polo, we see that in the reference segment of the electorate[27] the probability of a Progressisti vote is only 0.29 (that is, only one third of

[27] Composed by electors who voted in the past both left and right opposition parties, whose family head is a manual worker, whose social relations are outside the household, who never go to church.

the probability of a vote for the Polo).[28] If we now pass to an electoral segment composed by electors who in the past voted for left opposition and government parties, the likelihood of a Progressisti vote is boosted, and it becomes 50% higher than a vote for the Polo [29]. By applying the same method, it is possible to see that the probability of a vote for the Progressisti falls to 0.19 among practising Catholics,[30] and rises to 0.46 among the lower middle-class voters.[31] In plain English, these numbers tell us a clear story. Past voting exerted the relatively highest influence on electoral choice in 1994, with a vote cast for a coalition politically close to the earlier choice. However, the two traditional cleavages constrained somehow this simple transition: religion attenuated a vote for the Left; belonging to the lower middle class increased it, while being self-employed decreased it. Moreover, it is interesting to note that the impact of religion was weaker, roughly half, than that of social class.

In order to assess the direct impact on the 1994-1996 vote of the social and political factors whose trends we have discussed in the previous parts of this paper, we have carried out a multinomial logistic analysis where the 1994 and 1996 voting choices have been regressed on religion, social class and past voting.[32] Our aim is not to advance a fully-fledged model of electoral choice (for which see Corbetta and Parisi 1997), but to verify whether the influence and direction of such variables – as it emerged in the bivariate analysis – would be confirmed once their inter-correlations have been controlled for.

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[28] This value results from taking the antilogarithm of the constant of the model , i.e. [exp (-1.218)=0,29]).

[29] Exp[-1.218 + 1.633]=1.514.

[30] Exp[-1.218 – 0.438]=0.19.

[31] Exp[-1.218 + 0.453]=0.46.

[32] We have also introduced a variable – social relations –which distinguished between those electors whose network of social relations is mainly within the household (which identifies housewives and retirees) from those who have wider interactions in the workplace.

Table 18. *Multinomial logistic model of 1996 uninominal voting by religion, social class, type of social relations and past voting (MLE estimates and standard errors)*

	Lega Vs. Polo per la libertà		Ulivo Vs. Polo per la libertà	
	parameters	Standard error	parameters	standard error
Religion				
Not practicing (0)				
Weekly church attendance	-0.076	0.212	-0.267	0.135[a]
Social relations				
Outside household (0)				
Mainly within household	0.122	0.196	0.346	0.128[a]
Social class				
Upper middle	-0.753	0.389[a]	-0.090	0.210
Lower middle	-0.093	0.260	0.474	0.164[a]
Self-employed lower middle	-0.101	0.230	0.168	0.151
Manual workers (0)				
Past voting				
Left opposition parties	0.595	0.400[b]	1.470	0.270[a]
Left opposition and Government parties	-0.189	0.385	0.027	0.242
Only Government parties	-0.958	0.341[a]	-1.602	0.217[a]
Right opposition and Government parties	-1.234	0.354[a]	-2.333	0.231[a]
Right opposition parties	-0.959	0.457[a]	-3.590	0.481[a]
Right and left opposition (0)				
Constant	-1.296	0.145[a]	0.422	0.106[a]
Chi-square	272.62			
Degrees of freedom	168			
Probability	0.000			

* p < 0,01
[b] p < 0,10

Analogous results emerge if we look at the choice between a vote for the heirs of DC, Patto per l'Italia, or for Polo. Having voted in the past for the government parties boosts the likelihood of a Patto vote (rising from 1/20th to 1/3),[33] weekly church attendance increases the vote for the Patto ,[34] as does being lower middle class.[35] Here, in the choice of a vote for

[33] In the electoral reference segment the likelihood of a Patto vote is [exp –2.695]= 0.067. For the government parties electors is: exp[-2.695+1.593]= 0.33.

[34] Exp[-2.695 + 0.544]=0.16.

either Patto or Polo, religion and class have the same impact on the vote. Lastly, in the final comparison between either a vote for the Left or for the Patto, past voting behaviour has again the strongest impact, followed by religion, while social class lowers significantly its explanatory power.

As we can see in Table 18, the overall picture does not significantly change in 1996. The legacy of past voting (until 1992) still shapes most of the electoral choice, but also social class and religion maintain their constraining strength. Focusing on the Ulivo/Polo choice, moreover, we can also see that the impact of social class is clearly stronger than that of religion: while passing from no religion to weekly church attendance decreases the likelihood of an Ulivo vote by 35%, moving from manual worker to lower middle class doubles the likelihood of a pro-Ulivo vote.[36]

A few final considerations

Our analysis allows for four considerations. First, in the last two decades prior to the 1992 election signs of dealignment were highly visible. Parties, however, were able to adapt to the changing environment. For instance, the impact of religious cleavage was declining, but the Christian Democratic party succeeded in getting a significant portion of the Catholic vote. Data suggest that the party images have changed over the years. In comparison to other social cleavages, partisan and ideological cleavages seem to have been more persistent, even after the old party system's collapse. During the period, cultural orientations towards politics and parties remained highly negative and political interest declined. However, we suspect that they influenced the subsequent realignment more as an intervening factor; maybe interacting with the way television and other mass media described the anti-corruption campaign.

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[35] Exp[-2.695 + 0.682]=0.13.

[36] In the electoral reference segment the likelihood of an Ulivo vote against. a Polo vote is : exp(0.422) = 1,5. For religious voters the likelihood declines to: exp (0.422-0,267) = 1.16. For lower middle class voters it increases to: exp (0.422+0,474) = 2.44.

Second, the 1994 electoral earthquake represents a reversion to the electoral mobility of the 1980s. Data indicate that the electoral mobility of 1994, and in part that also of 1996, was determined more by the decomposition and restructuring of the political offering and the new rules of the game than by new mass orientations. Leadership was also an important factor in the realignment. We agree with Barnes (1984, 206) when he claimed that " the major realignments of political power in Italy have been the results of changes in the rules of the game rather than changing electoral choices of mass publics". Therefore, the 1994 political change could be assimilated to other Italian political changes. Voters learned the new patterns of competition thanks to their past electoral experiences.

Third, although in 1994 the past vote was paramount in bringing about political change, new political offerings matter too. Data suggest that in the 1994 election the new political proposal was conducive to a social realignment according to the voters' occupational class. And finally, analysis of the 1996 election indicates that a process of mass stabilisation was occurring. It is an open question how fragile this consolidation is.

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