

THE POLITICS OF FISSION: AN ANALYSIS OF FACTION BREAKAWAYS
AMONG ITALIAN PARTIES (1946-2011)¹

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Parties are often treated as unitary actors, where individual members coalesce to reach common goals. However, individuals or larger factions in parties must overcome a variety of collective action problems in coordinating.² Many scholars have looked at these issues in the context of party formation, but few have considered how factional dynamics can make the unitary actor assumption untenable after the initial formation.

Factions impinge on the process of party position-taking. They bind the leader in the choice of party platform, which is not solely determined by the overall policy preferences of individual members. Recent research shows that factional preferences determine party position and influence party change and policy-making.³ Scholars have shown that factional affiliation and heterogeneous policy preferences generate party disunity in roll call votes and may explain differences in parliamentary voting behaviour.⁴ Relaxing the unitary actor assumption can also help analyzing coalition governments.⁵ On the one hand, factionalized parties may help overcome gridlock in decision-making or coalition formation,⁶ but on the other hand factional disputes over portfolio allocation may undermine cabinet stability and survival.⁷

² Aldrich 1995; Cox and McCubbins 1993; Kiewiet and McCubbins 1991.

³ Budge, Ezrow and McDonald 2010; Ceron 2012; Dewan and Squintani 2012; Harmel and Tan 2003.

⁴ Ceron 2013; Giannetti and Laver 2009.

⁵ Giannetti and Benoit 2009; Laver and Shepsle 1990; Mershon 2001; Meyer 2012.

⁶ König 2006.

⁷ Giannetti 2010.

Giannetti and Laver highlight how, ‘In the real political world … it is often difficult to discuss the making and breaking of parties without referring to factions or groupings of some shape and form’.⁸ Accordingly, this article analyzes the determinants of party fission, which potentially can alter the nature of party competition and even the party system.

In my theoretical framework, I consider factions to be rational actors coordinating their members’ behaviour in order to maximize their own share of payoffs. As a consequence, their decision to exit or adhere to the party is based on the estimated policy, office, and electoral payoffs, but also interaction with the party leader, who alters her responses to minority requests depending on her interest in either party unity (keeping the party together) or cohesion (enhancing agreement on the party line).

Factionalized parties may be found in several countries, and internal disputes are potential sources of party break-up worldwide.⁹ However, this article will focus on Italy, often seen as the prime example of ‘the politics of faction’.¹⁰ In both the First (1946-1993) and the Second Republic (1994-present), Italian parties faced bitter internal conflicts, often leading to splits and reshuffles of the party system. For instance, the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) experienced several fissions, as factions broke away to create new rival parties like the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and the Italian Socialist Democratic Party (PSDI). In 2011, the People of Freedom (PDL) party split in the wake of internal strife between its main

⁸ Giannetti and Laver 2009, 146.

⁹ According to Mair, thirty-four major party fissions occurred in Western European countries between 1945 and 1987. See Mair 1990.

¹⁰ Zuckerman 1979.

politicians, former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and the former Speaker of the Lower Chamber, Gianfranco Fini. The minority faction led by Fini broke away in response to sanctions imposed by the core of the party.

Beside the high frequency of party splits, the Italian case has some more advantages. The large number of parties in each Legislature (approximately ten) and the broad number of factions (on average, three within each divided party) make a large-N statistical analysis feasible. Moreover, the high instability rate of Italian cabinets (sixty governments in sixty-five years) allows tracking changes in alliances, party policy positions, and intra-party portfolio allocations on a nearly annual basis. Furthermore, the reforms implemented since 1993 allow assessing the effects of different electoral systems while holding country-level features constant. Thus, Italy provides a suitable political laboratory to test hypotheses based on the general theoretical model.¹¹

Quantitative text analysis of a large number of documents on the ‘internal life’ of Italian parties allows us to determine the policy preferences of intra-party actors. I create a dataset with information on the ideal points of 254 Italian party factions from 1946 to 2011, based on motions presented during party congresses. This dataset provides new data on intra-party politics,¹² and allows broadening the analysis of party fission beyond offices and electoral motives.¹³

My results support the argument that faction behaviour is driven by several motives and shaped by policy incentives in addition to office and electoral

¹¹ Giannetti and Grofman 2011.

¹² There have been few attempts to estimate the policy positions of party factions: Bernauer and Bräuninger 2009; Spirling and Quinn 2010.

¹³ Laver and Benoit 2003.

rewards. Strategic portfolio allocation, party loyalty, and disproportional electoral systems that increase the exit costs tend to preserve party unity. Conversely, leaders that focused on promoting cohesion over unity will be less prone to respond to internal dissent, increasing the likelihood of factional breakaways. In sum, inter-factional disputes and compromises are important sources of party unity and party fission, but internal rules or features of the political system such as the electoral law or party system competitiveness also shape intra-party competition.

A THEORY OF PARTY UNITY AND PARTY FISSION

Parties are voluntary associations composed of like-minded individuals joining together to solve collective action and coordination problems. Party members and party factions may extract greater payoffs both in the parliamentary arena (through log-rolling and coordinated voting behaviour) and in the electoral market, where enforced cohesion increases the value of party label and improves an MP's prospects for reelection.¹⁴

However, the party is not a monolithic actor as members may hold heterogeneous preferences. Members with similar views gather and give birth to factions within a party. From this perspective, a party can be seen as a coalition of factions.¹⁵

Factions compete against each other to take control of the party and maximise their share of payoffs while cooperating to produce public goods and party unity,

¹⁴ Snyder and Ting 2002.

¹⁵ Leiserson 1968.

which the leader is responsible for preserving.¹⁶ Intra-party politics swings between conflict and cooperation, with factions seeking a balance between the two. In the words of Laver and Kato, to the extent that ‘political parties are endogenous, then members of party factions may be seen to belong for as long as it is rational to do so’.¹⁷ Accordingly, inter-factional struggles and bargaining take place in the shadow of party fission.

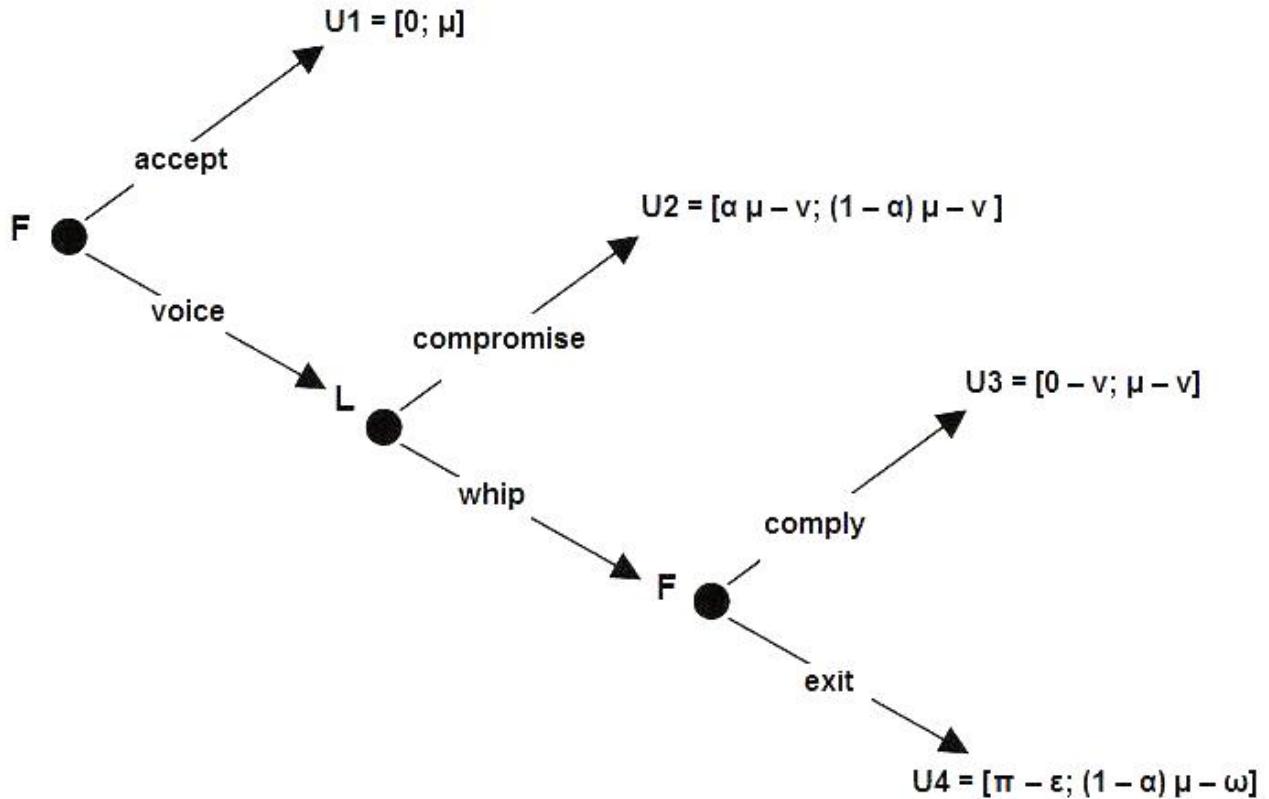
I propose a game-theoretic model based on the ‘Exit, Voice, and Loyalty’ framework to shed light on party splits and the determinants of factional breakaways.¹⁸ Figure 1 presents a game of party unity and party fission, describing factional disputes over payoff allocations under the threat of party break-up. For simplicity, I consider only two actors, the party leader, L , tied to the mainstream faction (composed of her followers) and a minority faction of dissenting members, F . The minority’s size α is the share of congress votes won by the faction (a positive value below 0.5). The total amount of office payoffs to be shared sum to μ , which is equal to one, and any strategy undermining party unity imposes costs on the actors. L is in charge of allocating scarce resources such as cabinet spoils (office payoffs), the party line (policy payoffs), and candidacies (electoral payoffs) between the two factions.

¹⁶ Kiewiet and McCubbins 1991.

¹⁷ Laver and Kato 2001, 510.

¹⁸ The ‘Exit, Voice, and Loyalty’ game has been applied to individual members facing the choice between remaining in and leaving a party, see Hirschman 1970. For specific applications to party fission: Gehlbach 2006; Kato 1998.

FIGURE 1 Party Unity and Party Fission Game



Note: μ = value of party unity; α = minority's size; v = damage due to public voice; ε = exit cost; π = minority payoffs after breakaway; ω = loss due to party fission. We assume that: $\mu = 1$; $0 < \alpha < 0.5$; $\varepsilon \in (0, 0.5)$; $\pi \in (0, 0.5)$; $\omega \in (0, 0.5)$ and $v < \alpha$. F = minority faction; L = party leader. Payoffs are indicated in square brackets and kept separated by a semicolon. Faction payoffs are indicated first, followed by leader payoffs.

The leader needs to reward her supporters to avoid being dismissed. She will exploit her dominant position to retain all of the benefits and propose an unfair deal to the minority. The minority may then accept or use voice. If the faction complies, the gain will be zero (as dissenters are excluded from the allocation of

rewards), and the leader's payoffs will be equal to μ (outcome U1). ¹⁹ If F uses voice, the entire party incurs costs v due to the public exposure of internal dissent. L can then propose a new deal. She can either reverse her choice, offering a compromise (where each faction will be rewarded on the basis of its strength), or use the whip to force the minority to accept her original position. A compromise will give the minority faction $F \alpha \mu - v$, and retain $(1 - \alpha) \mu - v$ for L (outcome U2). If L uses the whip option, the game reaches a final stage where the dissenters either comply or leave the party. If they toe the line (outcome U3), they in essence get the same payoffs as under the first stage outcome U1 (when F plays 'accept') reduced the cost v for displaying intra-party disagreement to the public.²⁰ Conversely, if the minority faction breaks away (outcome U4), F receives a payoff of $\pi - \varepsilon$, i.e., the benefit obtained when creating a new party minus the cost of leaving the current party. In case of a split, L receives all the benefits less the contribution of the minority faction leaving the party. The leader does not incur any cost for party disunity after a split, as the party becomes more cohesive, but suffers a cost ω for the loss in strength and image caused by the party break-up. Her final payoff will be $(1 - \alpha) \mu - \omega$.

A number of results can be shown using backward induction. In the final stage, F faces the choice between 'exit' and 'accept'. For values of ε larger than π the exit cost is too high if compared to the benefit of a breakaway. Unless the cost of

¹⁹ I assigned a zero payoff to the minority group. The experimental economics suggests that L may offer F a nonzero share of payoffs. This share, however, remains lower and unfair relative to F's strength, and the reasoning holds for any unfair payoff allocation.

²⁰ McGann 2002; Snyder and Ting 2002. See also Alesina and Cukierman 1990, 847.

party disunity v is high as well, the minority has a non-credible threat to split (i.e., F's payoffs are higher inside the party as $\pi - \varepsilon < 0 - v$) and will always accept the whip rather than leave the party. This is the second best outcome for L (who receives all of the payoffs minus the cost v). F knows that it would be better off by choosing 'accept' at the first stage (due to v) and agrees to the unfair deal U1. This pattern resembles that of the 'dictator game', where the responder has little choice but to accept the proposal.

On the other hand, when ε is larger than π but v is high (so that $\pi - \varepsilon > 0 - v$), F retains a credible weak threat (in case it splits, the faction can only minimize its loss).²¹ In this scenario, the outcome could be either U1 or U2 (Agreement). When the cost of party breakup ω is lower than the cost of party disunity v for the leader L, party fission will be less damaging than bargaining for a compromise. As a consequence, F will accept the unfair deal (U1) to avoid the negative payoff of a breakaway. Conversely, when ω is greater than v , L will focus on preserving unity at any cost to avoid the risk of party fission at the last stage. This induces a compromise and a final outcome U2.

Finally, when ε is relatively small and π is large, F chooses 'exit' at the last stage and threatens to leave to enhance its bargaining power and obtain a larger share. When ω is sufficiently large, L prefers to negotiate a compromise (U2). However, if ω is lower than v , L will seek cohesion even at the expense of party unity and refuse a new deal, using the whip against dissenters and generating a Breakaway outcome U4.

²¹ Since the cost of breaking away still outweighs the benefit, this scenario is weaker than cases where factions gain strictly positive payoffs after fission.

Table 1 summarizes the possible outcomes of the game based on the relationship between the four parameters π , representing the payoffs available to the minority faction after the breakaway; ε , which is the exit cost; v , is the cost due to public voice; ω , which expresses the loss due to party fission.

TABLE 1 Summary of the Possible Outcomes of the Game and the Strategies Played by the Two Actors Based on the Relationship Between the Parameters

Leadership attitude	Faction threat to break away		
	Non-credible ($\varepsilon > \pi$) and ($\pi - \varepsilon < 0 - v$)	Weak and credible ($\varepsilon > \pi$) and ($\pi - \varepsilon > 0 - v$)	Strong and credible ($\varepsilon < \pi$)
Focus on unity ($\omega > v$)	U1: Unfair deal (Accept)	U2: Agreement (Voice; Compromise)	U2: Agreement (Voice; Compromise)
Focus on cohesion ($\omega < v$)	U1: Unfair deal (Accept)	U1: Unfair deal (Accept)	U4: Breakaway (Voice, Exit; Whip)

This game highlights the relative power of the party leader L and the minority faction F and how these affect intra-party distributive dynamics (i.e., portfolio allocation and party change). The likelihood of party fission is determined by two key elements, 1) the bargaining power of the minority, given by its ability to make a credible threat, and 2) the party leader's relative interest in unity or cohesion.

When the minority has a non-credible threat, the party leader has no incentive to pursue a compromise as party unity is not threatened. Potential splinter groups can exploit their bargaining power to demand a fair deal only when they have a credible threat. In turn, the leader will accommodate the minority's requests only if a breakaway will damage the party more than internal dissent. The minority is more likely to split when the payoffs are greater outside the party than inside (because of the unfair distribution) and exit costs are low (for instance, if there is

no strong loyalty or the electoral system does not create barriers for new actors).

Conversely, the leader will pander to the minority when party unity is an issue at stake and fission would be a huge loss for the party, for example if a ruling party has a narrow margin over the opposition. A split is more likely when ideological disharmony and internal voice damage the image of the party. For example, dominant or ruling parties rarely tolerate dissent when they have a wide parliamentary margin. In such cases, party leaders will focus more on cohesion than unity.

These implications suggest a number of specific testable hypotheses related to the parameters in the game. I start by consider attributes that affect the balance between the cost of exit (ε) and the net benefit of a breakaway (π) for potential splinter groups to determine when a minority can gain from a breakaway and hence has a credible threat to split off from the party.

Any element increasing the share of policy, office, and electoral payoffs available to the splinter group after breaking away (π), will make a split more likely. Party members (and factions) incur a cost from party membership.²² The cost is large when factions have ideal points far from the bulk of party members and hence fewer payoffs from policy. A breakaway may thus allow fringe factions to minimize membership cost and establish a party platform with larger policy payoffs (higher π). Assuming that party position corresponds to the weighted mean of all factions,²³ I propose the following hypothesis.

²² Snyder and Ting 2002.

²³ Ceron 2012; Levy 2004.

Hypothesis 1: A breakaway by a faction i is more likely the greater the distance between i and the party position.²⁴

Factions are of course also interested in office payoffs and career rewards. They will consider their share of payoffs within the party and any potential gains after a breakaway. Hence, ‘overpaid’ factions with shares of office payoffs greater than their vote share should be less willing to split.²⁵ Conversely, ‘underpaid’ factions have larger expected payoffs (π) from defecting.

Hypothesis 2: Higher/lower office payoffs relative to faction size decreases/increases the likelihood of a split.

Factions also consider electoral rewards, e.g., the number of parliamentary seats they can win in future elections. More disproportional electoral rules preserve party systems and act as barriers to new parties. They increase the exit costs (ε) for dissidents²⁶ and limits their ability to extract additional policy and office payoffs in the long-run, thus decreasing π . These effects should be greater under single-member plurality systems, but can also apply under proportional representation (PR).

Hypothesis 3: A more disproportional electoral system decreases the likelihood of a breakaway.

²⁴ Using the median faction position as a proxy for party ideal point does not alter the results.

²⁵ Minority factions could be overpaid when their threat is credible and the party leader is concerned about party unity (see below). Once overpaid, however, the greater reward itself influences the likelihood of a breakaway.

²⁶ The splinter group will face high start-up costs for creating a new party and establish itself as a relevant actor.

Candidate selection (the way MPs are selected) is another distributional issue affecting party unity. The estimated costs and benefits of a split for potential splinter groups depend on their chances of gaining seats. The party leader tends to retain control over candidate selection under closed-list PR and centralized selection procedures,²⁷ and is thus able to exclude dissenting factions. Minority factions that defy the leader fear being excluded from the party list in retaliation. Thus, the limited room for dissent should decrease exit costs (ε). Conversely, open-list PR provides factions with access to parliamentary seats through preference voting. This institutionalises factionalism and decreases the likelihood of splits.

Hypothesis 4: Closed-list PR and centralized candidate selection increase the likelihood of a breakaway.

Party loyalty affects the balance between the costs (ε) and the benefits (π) of a breakaway. More specifically, partisan ties to symbols such as logos, labels, and the ‘logic of appropriateness’²⁸ internalized through participation might dissuade members from leaving.²⁹ This is particularly relevant for older parties where party loyalty is well established and increases the exit cost (ε).

Hypothesis 5: The loyalty effect decreases the likelihood of party fissions in older parties.

In addition to features that provide minority factions with incentives or disincentives to break away, the model also suggests that leaders can have

²⁷ Carey 2007; Cox, Rosenbluth and Thies 1999.

²⁸ Andeweg and Thomassen 2010.

²⁹ Gehlbach 2006; Hirschman 1970; Kato 1998.

different attitudes to party unity.³⁰ Leaders may seek to preserve unity at any cost (when $\omega > v$), or alternatively seek cohesion over a clear party line, with a willingness to eliminate internal challengers at any cost ($\omega < v$). The game illustrates how leaders will accommodate potential splinter group to decrease the likelihood of party fission. At the same time, if internal dissent is too damaging for the party, leaders will ignore the minority and make it more inclined to leave.

Leadership's attitude is related to internal democracy. Parties with intransigent rules, for instance parties organized according to 'democratic centralism' (e.g., Marxist parties) typically do not tolerate 'dissent'.³¹ Any public expression of internal disagreement could weaken the party in the eyes of its voters. Under 'democratic centralism', party members are free to discuss party strategy and ideology, but can only disagree within the party. Once the party has established a position, dissenting members must submit. In this context, the public expression of dissent is costly (higher v) and the benefits of party unity lower. Thus, the party leader would rather use the whip against the minority than seek a compromise.

Hypothesis 6: The likelihood of a breakup increases in parties ruled through 'democratic centralism'.³²

³⁰ I distinguish between unity, when factions support different views and strategies without leaving the party, and cohesion, when factions think and act in a cohesive manner, in agreement with the party line.

³¹ This is not only related to Marxist parties. For example, two relevant Italian parties such as the People of Freedom party and the Five Star Movement have strict internal rules.

³² The party leader may also expel dissenters from the party. My theory suggests that breakaways and expulsions stem from the same underlying process.

The cost of internal division (ν) is higher for ruling parties, which face greater public scrutiny than the opposition. The competitiveness of the party system and the margin of the ruling coalition affect the value of unity (ω) and shape the balance between the costs of dissent and splits. When ruling parties have narrow majorities, any split could jeopardize government stability. Leaders will be more concerned with party unity given the higher cost of a breakup when the party may lose office (large ω). A leader will tolerate internal divisions provided they do not threaten unity. This gives party minorities bargaining leverage to extract substantial shares within the party. Conversely, if the degree of competitiveness is low (small ω) and the dominant coalition has a safe parliamentary margin there is less need for party unity. Splits no longer threaten government stability and party leaders may be less concerned over party fission. As such, leaders will refuse to accommodate minorities, use the whipping, and pursue the intra-party game to the breaking point (as in U4). In other words, leaders trade unity for cohesion to improving government effectiveness and establish party authority.³³

*Hypothesis 7: Fission is less likely among ruling parties when the government has a narrow parliamentary margin and becomes more likely as the margin widens.*³⁴

³³ The cost of voice may also be higher when a faction position is far from the bulk of party members. The wide array of internal preferences blurs the party label (Snyder and Ting 2002) and the party will suffer credible commitments problems with voters and allies. In this context the leader will be more focused on internal cohesion than unity. A split may clarify a party label and enhance a party's image. This logic yields the same outcome suggested in H1.

³⁴ This hypothesis resembles the notion of minimum winning coalitions: Leiserson 1968; Riker 1962.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Party congresses are a competitive arena where ‘factions organize teams of candidates and appeal to people enjoying the right to vote for one team or another’.³⁵ They generally present a policy motion attached to a list of candidates. This motion is an omnibus policy document that aims to shape party strategy and ideology. ‘Hard data’ on party factional structure drawn from party congresses help us determine the size, strength and policy position of factions.³⁶

I will use a new dataset with information on the policy positions of Italian party factions, covering both the Italian First and Second Republics, from 1946 to 2011. Party heterogeneity is often measured by analysing roll call votes, but Benoit, Bräuninger and Debus argue that content analyses of ‘texts drafted by … intra-party groups seem to be the best choice to identify their respective preferences, in particular if the research question deals with changes of the positions of political actors over time’.³⁷ In addition, the effect of party discipline should be lower in intra-party debates than roll call votes or parliamentary speeches, which ‘may not reflect the true distribution of preferences’³⁸ and are less well suited for analysing intra-party politics. Conversely, party factions can theoretically express their sincere preferences in a congress motion.

³⁵ Mershon 2001, 561.

³⁶ Boucek 2009; Giannetti and Laver 2009.

³⁷ Benoit, Bräuninger and Debus 2009, 443.

³⁸ Proksch and Slapin 2012, 520.

I assess policy positions through the motions submitted by factions for voting in contested congresses.³⁹ Missing data prevented us from including a few congresses.⁴⁰ Table 2 summarizes the dataset, which covers 254 motions at eighty-three congresses for eighteen parties.⁴¹

TABLE 2 List of Parties, Number of Congresses, Motions, and Breakaways

Included in the Analysis

Party	Label	Congresses Held	Contested Congresses	Missing	Included in Dataset	Included (%)	Motions	Breakaways
AN	National Alliance	3	1	0	1	100	4	1
DC	Christian Democrats	18	13	2	11	85	41	0
DS	Democrats of the Left	4	4	0	4	100	12	2
FV	Federation of the Greens	18	16	14	2	13	6	1
MSI	Italian Social Movement	17	7	2	5	71	20	1

³⁹ Motions were collected by examining the official proceedings of national congresses and official party newspapers or reviews. Congresses where factions competed without presenting any motions are excluded.

⁴⁰ After the collapse of the Italian party system in 1992-1994, many archives disappeared when parties folded, complicating the task of finding data. I estimate that this database includes 50 per cent of the contested congresses of all Italian parties. The percentage of missing cases is approximately 30 per cent among the parties included in the dataset. This rate is higher for Democratic Party (PD), PSDI and the Greens. Excluding these from the analysis does not alter my findings.

⁴¹ The average length of the documents is 5,627 words. Only 14 per cent of texts contain fewer than 1,000 words. The lengths are large enough to ensure valid estimates. The dataset is unbalanced as there are more observations for some parties. I gathered thirty-eight motions nested in twelve PSI congresses, but only two motions for the Party of the Italian Communists (PDCI) and the Union of Christian and Centre Democrats (UDC). However, excluding parties with few observations does not alter the results.

NPSI	New Italian Socialist Party	6	2	0	2	100	4	2
PCI	Italian Communist Party	16	3	0	3	100	8	1
PD	Democratic Party	3	3	2	1	33	3	0
PDA	Action Party	3	2	1	1	50	3	1
PDCI	Party of the Italian Communists	5	1	0	1	100	2	1
PLI	Italian Liberal Party	19	11	0	11	100	35	0
PRC	Communist Refoundation Party	7	6	0	6	100	20	6
PRI	Italian Republican Party	22	15	4	11	73	25	0
PS	Socialist Party	2	1	0	1	100	3	0
PSDI	Italian Socialist Democratic Party	20	21	12	9	43	25	4
PSI	Italian Socialist Party	24	12	0	12	100	38	7
PSIUP	Italian Socialist Party of Proletarian Unity	4	1	0	1	100	3	2
UDC	Union of Christian and Centre Democrats	3	1	0	1	100	2	1
Total		194	120	37	83	69	254	30

The policy positions were extracted from the motions using Wordfish, an automated scaling model that analyzes the frequency of all of the words contained in a document.⁴² Wordfish assigns each word a value β and differentiates the texts according to the words used, thus allowing us to distinguish the policy positions of actors. These positions are estimated along a single dimension capturing the political content of the texts. Given the nature of the motions (as discussed above), this dimension can be interpreted as a left-right scale.⁴³

A key advantage of Wordfish here is the ability to produce time-series estimates. These allow analyzing motions from different points in time under the assumption that words usage remains constant. Given the large temporal span of the analysis

⁴² Wordfish has been used previously to assess the policy positions of political actors and provide reliable estimates: Proksch and Slapin 2009a; Proksch and Slapin 2009b; Proksch and Slapin 2010; Slapin and Proksch 2008.

⁴³ In the 84 per cent of cases (seventy congresses out of eighty-three), at least two factions have positions that are statistically different from each other.

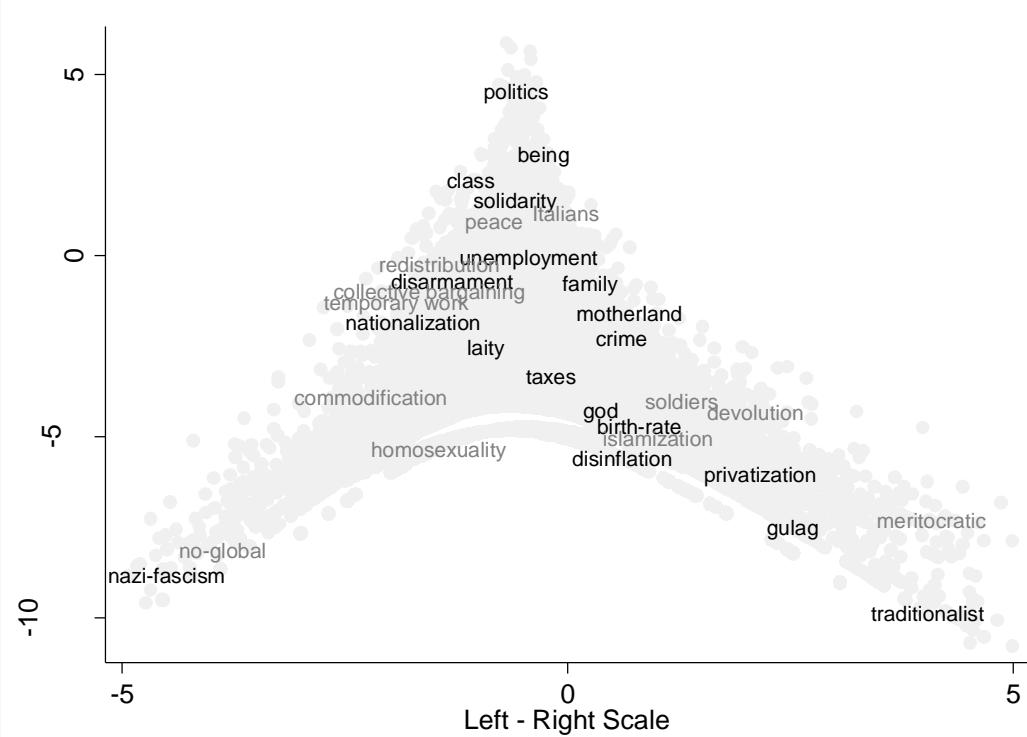
this assumption could be questioned. To ensure linguistic stability and reliable estimates, the motions were divided into two time periods, before and after 1989.⁴⁴

The face validity of the estimates was tested in various ways. The values of the discrimination parameter β provides an output diagnostic. Words with large β values are located at the extremes of the left-right scale. Figure 2 displays the frequency of each word across all documents on the vertical scale (fixed effect),⁴⁵ along with the values of β parameters on the horizontal axis, highlighting some selected words (translated to English).

FIGURE 2 Diagnostic of Words Estimates. Word Frequency (Fixed Effect) and β Values (Left-Right Scale) for the First (black) and the Second Period (grey)

⁴⁴ The downfall of Communism changed the political meaning of some words and contributed to the beginning of the Italian transition, altering the Italian party system in the early 1990s. In both periods, the number of unique words analyzed is approximately 35,000. Factions positions are correlated (0.7) with the same estimates measured on the whole dataset.

⁴⁵ The fixed effect is measured by the logged mean count of each word to capture how some words are used more often by all parties. Common words that appear with higher frequency across documents (e.g., prepositions) retain a higher fixed effect (frequency). However, they are not associated with political differences and their discriminating power (β) is close to zero. Conversely, the discriminating power of rare words used only by a few parties will be higher.



For the first period we find words (shown in black) traditionally associated with conservative values, such as *god*, *motherland*, and *family* on the right, and *class*, *solidarity*, and *nationalization* on the left. For the second, we observe words (shown in grey) such as *no-global* and *collective bargaining* on the left, and *meritocratic* and *devolution* on the right wing. Words refer to different issues (e.g., economic, social, and foreign policies). For instance, concerns about *unemployment* and *redistribution* are attributed to left-wing parties, while *disinflation* and *privatization* are associated with the right. For social policy, the left stresses *laity* while the right emphasizes *birth rate* and words related to law and order such as *crime*. In foreign policy, the left talks about *peace* and *disarmament* while the right expresses support to *soldiers*. The examples indicate that the β values assigned to words seem to correspond to how they are used in

Italian political discourse and that the words appear on the correct side of the left-right scale.

As a second test to demonstrate that faction positions are estimated correctly, Figure 3 plots the policy positions of all the factions in the analysis by congress, using different symbols for the political family. Post-fascist parties (MSI and AN, denoted by black dots) are located on the far-right. The liberal-democratic family (PLI, grey squares) is on the centre-right. Christian democrats (DC, grey pluses) are located in the centre during the first period, and shift to the centre-right in the second period (UDC). Social-democratic and non-Marxist left parties (PSDI, PDA, PRI, DS, PD, NPSI, Greens, denoted by black triangles) appear on the centre-left in the first period but shift towards the centre in the 1980s. Finally, socialist and communist parties (PCI, PSI, PSIUP, PRC, PDCI, denoted by an x) are located on the left wing.

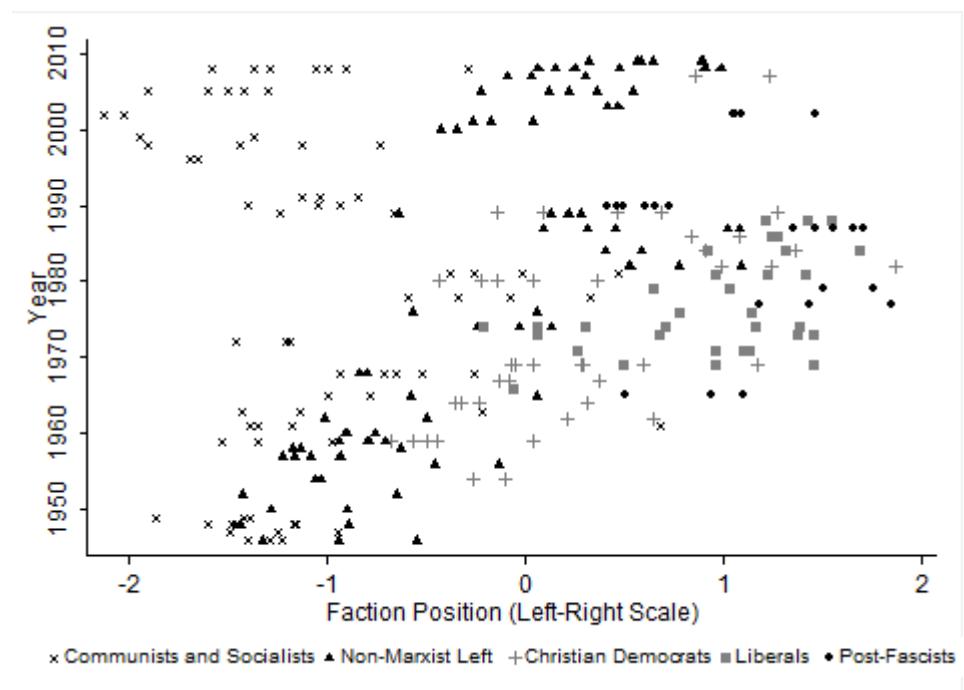
There is rarely much overlap among observations across different political families. The wings are properly arrayed; for example, left-wing factions are to the left side and hold notably different positions from the party mainstream.⁴⁶ The weighted means of factions positions, measured at each party congress, is positively correlated with other estimates of party position.⁴⁷ Moreover, the faction estimates also track the evolution of the party system, and the key changes

⁴⁶ Confidence intervals are available in an online appendix.

⁴⁷ The correlation with expert surveys is 0.8 and 0.7 with the Comparative Manifesto Project estimates. The results are available upon request.

in party positions over time. This suggests that the estimates are valid, reliable, and consistent with central findings in the literature on Italian parties.⁴⁸

FIGURE 3 Faction Positions on the Left-Right Scale (Clustered by Political Family)



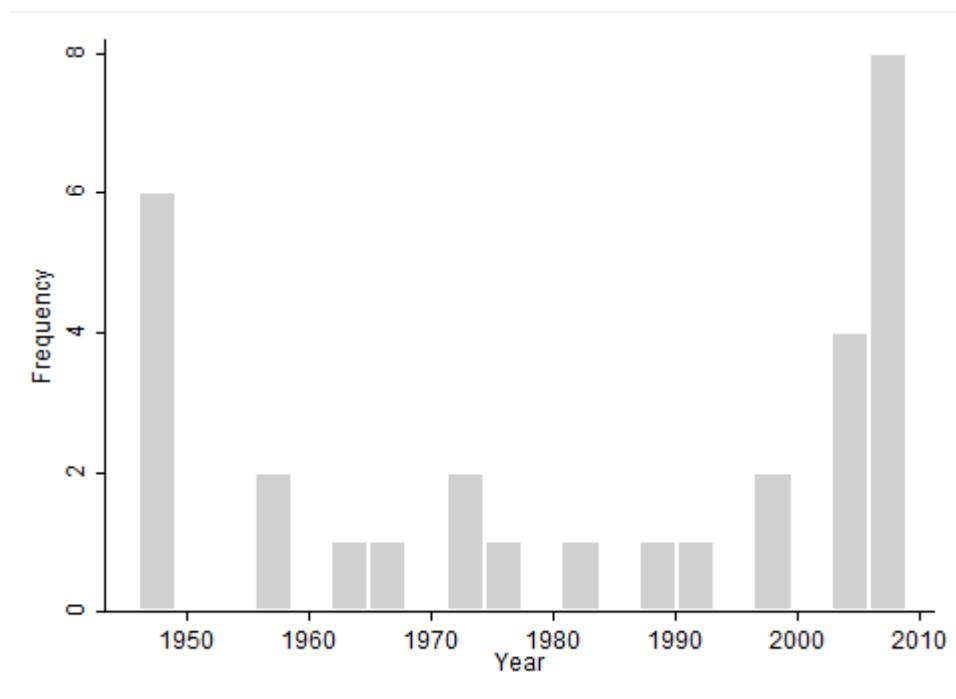
ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

I test the hypotheses through logit regression, using a binary dependent variable *Fission* indicating whether a faction *i* leaves the party.⁴⁹ Data encompasses 30 breakaways for the 254 factions identified over the period 1946-2011.

⁴⁸ The estimates are also reliable when compared to hand-coding techniques that follow the Comparative Manifesto Project coding scheme (I tested this feature within a subsample of DC motions).

Figure 4 illustrates two peaks in the distribution of *Fission* over time, one at the beginning of the First Italian Republic and another after the 2006 general elections when the party system was particularly fluid. Still, nearly one-third of the breakaways occurred from 1960 to 1989 even though the Italian party system is normally considered relatively more stable during this period.

FIGURE 4 Distribution of *Fission* over time during the First (1946-1993) and the Second Italian Republic (1994-present)



⁴⁹ I identify a breakaway in all cases where a faction, its leader, or the majority of its members split off from the party body after presenting a motion during a congress. I consider all party splits, irrespective of their size, as even minor splits may change the equilibrium between parties in Parliament and jeopardize the electoral performance of a party. Although I measure fissions in the ‘Party in Central Office’, most of them also have consequences within the ‘Party in Public Office’ and the ‘Party on the Ground’.

On average, we observe a split every two years. As such, party fissions and factional breakaways are not a rare event, but an ever-present threat posed to the party leadership and an opportunity for minority factions to negotiate a new distribution of payoffs.⁵⁰ The unit of analysis is the faction-per-cabinet. This allows to better assess the impact of office payoffs and parliamentary support, which might vary between party congresses.

Several independent variables were adopted. To test H1, I consider *Distance* the squared Euclidean distance between faction i 's ideal point and the weighted mean of all factions in each congress.⁵¹ To test H2 I consider the impact of office payoffs through the *Share of Ministers*, the difference between faction i 's share of ministers and size. I assigned a value of zero for all parties not in office. To test H3 and H4 on the role of the electoral system I consider *Disproportionality* (H3), measured through the Gallagher index, and *Closed List* (H4), a dummy variable flagging closed list PR or plurality systems with centralized candidate selection, as opposed to open list PR.⁵² I test H5 through *Party Age*, the number of years

⁵⁰ Giannetti 2010; Giannetti and Laver 2001; Laver and Kato 2001; Mershon 1996.

⁵¹ Assigning a value of zero to factions whose positions are not statistically different from the median faction does not affect the results.

⁵² Italy has adopted two different electoral rules since 1994, a mixed system (1994-2001) with 25 per cent of seats assigned through closed list PR and the remaining 75 per cent via ‘first-past-the-post’, and a closed list PR with thresholds and a majority prize (since 2006). Between 1994 and 2001, the selection of candidates in single-member districts was strongly centralized, making this system similar to a closed list with magnitude one. Thus, we can

elapsed since a party's founding, and H6 by a dummy variable for parties ruled by *Democratic Centralism*.⁵³ Finally, I test H7 through an interaction between *Ruling Party*, indicating parties in office, and *Parliamentary Support*, or the inter-electoral party system competitiveness measured by the size of the ruling coalition.

The data are encoded by cabinet. I report robust standard errors clustered by cabinet in each party congress since avoid possible problems from non-independent observations or non-constant variances.⁵⁴ Table 3 presents the results.

In model 1, I only include variables that affect the credibility of the minority faction threat (*faction side*). In model 2, I separately estimate the effect of elements concerning the leader's attitude towards internal dissent (*leader side*).

Model 3 includes all the variables. Considering the faction side as well the leader side improves the model fit.⁵⁵

compare open list PR systems in use until 1993 to subsequent systems: Carey and Shugart 1995.

⁵³ This applies to the PSI, in 1949, under the orthodox leadership of Rodolfo Morandi and to the PDCI in 2008.

⁵⁴ Clustered standard errors are heteroskedastic and autocorrelation consistent: Rogers 1993. Controlling for temporal dependence through temporal dummies or random effects does not alter the results. A rare events logistic regression model does not generate different results. Approximately 25 per cent of the observations are related to the Socialist family (PSDI and PSI) and one-third of the breakaways involve these two parties. A dummy variable for this political family does not alter the results. I also controlled for the impact of the electoral cycle and party left-right position, but these two variables were not significant and do not affect my findings.

⁵⁵ When dealing with rare events, the area under the receiver-operating characteristic (ROC) curve allows evaluating the model performance. This

TABLE 3 Logit Regression of Faction Breakaway

Parameters	DV: <i>Fission</i>		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Faction side			
<i>Distance</i>	2.168*** (0.701)	2.480*** (0.769)	
<i>Share of Ministers</i>	-4.678* (2.478)	-4.551* (2.664)	
<i>Disproportionality</i>	-0.398** (0.169)	-0.378* (0.200)	
<i>Closed List</i>	2.237*** (0.706)	2.584*** (0.739)	
<i>Party Age</i>	-0.079*** (0.028)	-0.071** (0.033)	
Leader side			
<i>Democratic Centralism</i>	2.680*** (0.628)	2.453*** (0.650)	
<i>Ruling Party</i>	-6.720** (3.201)	-7.732*** (2.875)	
<i>Parliamentary Support</i>	-2.927 (3.592)	-7.580* (4.584)	
<i>Ruling Party X Parliamentary Support</i>	11.931** (5.610)	14.580*** (5.490)	
<i>Constant</i>	-1.463* (0.877)	-1.813 (1.847)	1.823 (2.726)
Observations	766	766	766
McFadden's Pseudo R ²	0.202	0.049	0.242
Log pseudolikelihood	-98.44	-117.37	-93.57
Correctly predicted (percentage)	83.42	94.65	85.77
Sensitivity (percentage)	68.97	13.79	72.41
Area under the ROC curve	0.824 (0.046)	0.605 (0.056)	0.847 (0.042)

Note: Standard errors clustered by cabinet in each party congress are shown in parentheses. Significance (two tailed): * 0.1; ** 0.05; *** 0.01. The percentage of correctly predicted outcomes and sensitivity (percentage of correctly predicted positive outcomes) have been measured according to a 0.05 cut-off point, close to the actual outcome rate (0.04)

area represents the probability that a randomly selected positive outcome

(*Fission*) is correctly rated with a higher predicted probability than a

randomly selected negative observation. This statistics is higher in model 3

and indicates that both the credibility of the minority faction threat and the

leader's attitude towards internal dissent help in predicting party splits. Other

measures of the goodness of fit confirm this pattern, which is consistent with

my theoretical model.

The results provide strong support for my hypotheses that factions consider policy, office, as well as electoral payoffs. Higher *Distance* increases the likelihood of fission. As the cost of membership increases with distance from the core of party members, factions have incentive to leave to get larger policy payoffs after a split without suffering large exit costs.⁵⁶ A higher *Share of Ministers* helps preserve party unity. Overpaid factions with a share of office payoffs greater than their size are less likely to break away as they would hardly ever find better conditions outside the party (and vice versa). In this way, party leaders may use strategic portfolio allocation to avoid fissions and cater to potential splinter groups. Factions jointly weigh policy and office payoffs as substitutes. Then, a greater than proportional share of office payoffs could counterbalance a lower share of policy payoffs.⁵⁷

Electoral motivation also matters. *Disproportionality* and *Closed List* are both significant and in line with my theory suggesting that disproportional electoral systems decrease the likelihood of a breakaway by increasing exit costs and lowering the expected electoral payoffs of splinter groups.⁵⁸ If the electoral system does not guarantee reelection, dissenters prefer to remain within the party.

⁵⁶ The coefficient for an interaction term between *Distance* and *Ruling Party* is not significant. When testing the model on the subsample of parties in office, the effect of *Distance* remains the same. Given that in the Italian context the main reward for cabinet participation is linked to office payoffs (Mershon 1996), this result further support the notion that even potential ‘office seeking’ factions also consider policy motivations.

⁵⁷ For an analogous argument: Warwick 1998.

⁵⁸ This finding holds when using other measures of disproportionality and holds when the First and the Second Italian Republic are analysed separately.

Conversely, closed-list PR and centralized candidate selection methods give leaders more power over selecting MPs, restricting the access of minority factions to candidacies and thus reducing the cost of leaving.⁵⁹ Loyalty restrains minorities from breaking away. After controlling for *Share of Ministers*, which captures the cooperative patterns that might emerge over time, the coefficient of *Party Age* is significant. This positive effect of loyalty on unity is due to the ‘logic of appropriateness’ developed during party militancy, beyond the ‘logic of consequentiality’.⁶⁰ On the leader side, I find that *Democratic Centralism* strongly increases the risk of a split, consistent with my claim that ‘voice’ becomes more expensive than a break-up when parties do not tolerate internal dissent. Thus, the leader will not accommodate minority factions, forcing splinter groups to accept the party line or break away. Table 4 reports substantive interpretations of the results in terms of the change in probabilities of fission for a change on each variable from the minimum to the maximum value (first difference).

⁵⁹ I also tested H4 through a variable *Centralization*, which expresses the degree of centralization in candidate selection process according to the rules described in the party statute. This variable ranges from zero to ten, where zero indicates a decentralized selection process while the value of ten is assigned to parties that adopt centralized mechanisms. This variable displays a positive and significant coefficient proving that centralized candidate selection increases the likelihood of a breakaway, consistent with H4.

⁶⁰ This is supported when including a control variable for changes in party labels and symbols during the party congress (unconnected to policy adjustments that are captured by the variable *Distance*). When the party logo changes, the likelihood of a breakaway increases while the impact of *Party Age* still holds.

TABLE 4 Substantive Effects of Explanatory Variables: First Difference

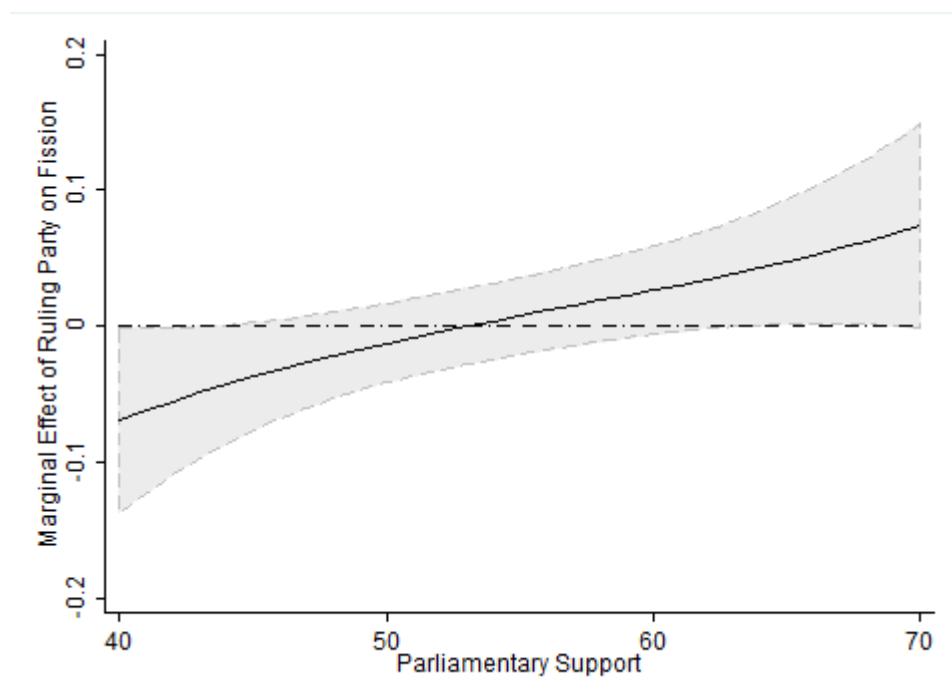
Parameters	Change in probability of <i>Fission</i>		
	Min	Max	First difference
<i>Distance</i>	0	1.1	0.113 (0.057)
<i>Share of Ministers</i>	-0.5	1	-0.176 (0.176)
<i>Disproportionality</i>	1.6	10.2	-0.028 (0.019)
<i>Closed List</i>	0	1	0.127 (0.080)
<i>Party Age</i>	1	51	-0.089 (0.059)
<i>Democratic Centralism</i>	0	1	0.148 (0.086)
<i>Ruling Party</i>	0	1	-0.423 (0.256)
<i>Parliamentary Support</i>	36	84	-0.062 (0.053)

Note: First differences indicate the change in probabilities of fission when an independent variable changes from its empirical minimum to its maximum, and all other variables are held at their means. When all variables are set at their means, the predicted probability of fission is 0.016 (0.007). Standard errors clustered by cabinet in each party congress are shown in parentheses.

Figure 5 displays the marginal effect of the interaction between *Ruling Party* and *Parliamentary Support*. When the margin of the ruling coalition is narrow, parties in office will be concerned about preserving unity insofar as any breakaway might threaten government stability. Thus, the leader will cater to potential splinter groups to keep the party together. Accordingly, the marginal effect is negative for ruling parties when *Parliamentary Support* is below 44 per cent of the seats. By contrast, party fissions are less damaging to parties in governments supported by wide majorities as leaders are more willing to accept the risk of fission for the sake of promoting government effectiveness through party cohesion. The

marginal effect on a breakaway becomes positive and significant for parties in office when *Parliamentary Support* exceeds 63 per cent of the seats.⁶¹

Figure 5 Marginal Effect of *Ruling Party* on *Fission* as *Parliamentary Support* changes (with 90% confidence interval)



CONCLUSION

This article has explored determinants of party fission. I provide a game-theoretic model of intra-party bargaining dynamics, focusing on the impact of payoff

⁶¹ The marginal effect of *Parliamentary Support* is positive and significant for any *Ruling Party*, but increasing *Parliamentary Support* implies lower party system competitiveness, which in turn reduces the leverage of potential splinter groups. This decreases the probability of splits in parties out of office as there are no incentives for defection when the ruling coalition has a safe margin. The marginal effect of *Parliamentary Support* is negative and significant for parties not in office.

allocations on faction breakaways from an ‘Exit, Voice, and Loyalty’ framework.

I create new data on intra-party factional structures of Italian parties through quantitative content analysis of motions presented during party congresses and test various implications of the theory. The analysis supports my claims that factions consider office, policy, as well as electoral payoffs. Policy motives seem to drive the breaking (and making) of parties. Subgroups sharing common preferences are more likely to join together and more likely to split when intra-party heterogeneity increases. Even factions often considered merely office-seeking seem to pay attention to policy payoffs. Conversely, the strategic allocation of portfolios can counterbalance a lower amount of policy payoffs, thus contributing to preserve party unity. In turn, other elements such as party loyalty, disproportional electoral systems and open access to candidacies increase the exit costs for dissenting factions and decrease the credibility of threats to split. Splinter groups, however, do not make choices in isolation, and must weigh the leadership’s attitude to party unity when threatening to defect. Under some conditions leaders may be willing to compromise to preserve party unity, under others they may use the whip against dissenters to enhance party cohesion. Consistent with my theory, the level of intra-party democracy and the inter-electoral level of party system competitiveness affect the leader’s attitude, even if these factors only have a slight impact on the predictive ability of the model. The cost of ‘voice’ is higher in parties ruled through democratic centralism where leaders do not tolerate dissent, making minorities inclined to break away. For ruling parties, the cost of a ‘breakup’ increases with a smaller margin over the opposition, raising the leader’s interest in a compromise to preserve party unity.

Conversely, leaders in ruling parties focus more on cohesion to enhance government effectiveness as the parliamentary support widens.⁶² The lower cost of a breakup declines below the cost of voice, and splits become more likely.⁶³ My findings demonstrate that parties can be considered as minimum winning coalitions of factions where all unnecessary subgroups are disregarded by the party leader and must face the choice between compliance and exit.

This article provides strong support for parties being a product of both intra-party competition and the party system. Both spheres of politics provide incentives for party unity as well threats to cohesion. When parties are internally polarized, party system fragmentation can be contained through consensual intra-party dynamics, disproportional electoral systems, and preference voting or decentralized candidate selection procedures that favour the institutionalization of party factions such as primary elections. These aspects are highly relevant for political elites that aim to simplify political supply through party mergers. When a party merger is merely a ‘cold fusion’ process based on instrumental and strategic concerns and without any policy basis, the internal wings will be more likely to break away to undermine elites efforts to decrease the fragmentation. My results highlight how any reform aiming to foster party system stability should include adjustments in the rules of the game to help keep factionalism under control and preserve party unity.

This article also demonstrates how quantitative text analysis techniques can be used to analyze intra-party politics and the policy preferences of factions. This

⁶² Several studies attest that they tend to be less divided: e.g., Carey 2007.

⁶³ The search for greater cohesion and the firm rejection of any internal dissent help explain the fission of the PDL in 2010.

could in turn be broadened to assess the effects of intra-party competition on other topics like portfolio allocation, government formation and stability, parliamentary behaviour, and the selection of a party platform. Moreover, the game-theoretic model also suggests additional implications for studies on party switching, party merger, and party unity in roll call votes.

Although this article evaluates the implications of the model on party fission empirically on a single country, the theoretical model is general and can be useful for understand intra-party dynamics in countries with factional politics such as Japan as well as other political systems characterized by heterogeneous intra-party preferences such as France, Germany, or the UK. Future research could pursue a comparative perspective on intra-party politics within different party systems.

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