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Corresponding Author:	Moreno Mancosu Universita degli Studi di Torino Turin, ITALY
Corresponding Author Secondary Information:	
Corresponding Author's Institution:	Universita degli Studi di Torino
Corresponding Author's Secondary Institution:	
First Author:	Moreno Mancosu
First Author Secondary Information:	
Order of Authors:	Moreno Mancosu
	Riccardo Ladini
	Salvatore Vassallo
Order of Authors Secondary Information:	
Author Comments:	19/11/2019 Dear Editor and Associate Editors, Please accept our revised manuscript and answer to reviewers attached to this submission. Kind regards, Moreno Mancosu*, Riccardo Ladini** and Salvatore Vassallo*** * Post-doctoral Fellow, University of Turin (Italy) moreno.mancosu@unito.it ** Post-doctoral Fellow, University of Milan (Italy) riccardo.ladini@unimi.it *** Professor, University of Bologna (Italy) salvatore.vassallo@unibo.it

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	because of the richness of your comments, please find the answer to your reviews and the revised manuscript attached to this submission.
	Kind regards,
	the authors

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Authors

Moreno Mancosu (*corresponding author*),
University of Turin, Lungo Dora Siena 100, Turin (Italy),
moreno.mancosu@unito.it
Phone: +39 320 89 30 103

Riccardo Ladini,
University of Milan, via Conservatorio 7, Milan (Italy),
riccardo.ladini@unimi.it

Salvatore Vassallo,
University of Bologna, Strada Maggiore 45, Bologna (Italy)
salvatore.vassallo@unibo.it

Biographical notes

Moreno Mancosu is a post-doctoral fellow at the University of Turin. His articles appeared in European Journal of Political Research, Communication Research, Political Psychology, International Journal of Press/Politics.

Riccardo Ladini is postdoctoral fellow at the Department of Social and Political Sciences— University of Milan (Italy). His main research interests include electoral participation and experimental methods in survey research.

Salvatore Vassallo is Professor of Political Science at the University of Bologna. Recent publications include: 'Parliament' in The Oxford Handbook of Italian Politics, Oxford University Press (2015); and Sistemi politici comparati, Il Mulino (2016).

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Abstract

Recently, the literature has devoted increasing attention to beliefs in conspiracy theories. Among various aspects of the phenomenon, it was found that conspiratorial attitudes are associated with political behaviour. In Italy, previous research found that Five Stars Movement and right-wing parties voters tend to show higher levels of conspiratorial thinking than other voters. However, the relationship between conspiracism and vote choice remains obscure. By analysing an Italian panel survey data collected before and after 2016 constitutional referendum, we show that the belief in conspiracy theories is associated with referendum vote choices, even when controlling for partisan opinions, leaders' evaluations, and perceived economic wealth. Moreover, the effect of conspiracism on referendum vote choice proves to be stronger among the supporters of the government, which promoted the referendum. This paper aims at shedding light on the processes of opinion formation and how these are affected by external attitudes, such as conspiratorial ones.

Keywords: conspiracy theories; political behaviour; referendum; constitutional reforms; Italian politics

Introduction

Conspiracy theories, defined as explanations of social facts by means of "secret arrangement[s] between a small group of actors to usurp political or economic power, violate established rights, hide vital secrets or illicitly cause widespread harm" (Uscinski et al. 2016, p. 58), have been spread throughout the history of every culture. The growing academic literature on conspiracism - the attitude of believing in conspiracy theories - has outlined that the presence of conspiracist attitudes among the public is not a new phenomenon. Nonetheless, the more pronounced attention among pundits and scholars can be explained by two fundamental reasons. First, the diffusion of conspiracist ideation appears in contrast with the diffusion of education and generalised scientific knowledge: the ease with which individuals can access information - usually uncontrolled by the communities of experts - aids the propensity of people to elaborate and assimilate alternative epistemologies - which are usually consistent with their previous stereotypes and prejudices (Plencner, 2014). Second, the diffusion of conspiracy theories - or, at least, the fact that these theories are still present nowadays - is gaining growing interest since it appears associated with anti-establishment rhetoric and success of populist parties (Castanho-Silva et al., 2017; Mancosu et al., 2017).

Recent research has shown the extent to which believing in conspiracy theories is common in contemporary Western democracies and tried to identify the factors explaining the propensity to endorse these theories. In particular, we can identify two main research lines. The first one belongs to psychological studies, which analyse the relationship between conspiracism and more or less severe forms of psychopathology (Darwin et al., 2011; Barron et al., 2014). A second line of research, on the other side, has investigated conspiracism from a sociological/political science perspective, aiming at finding associations between conspiracy beliefs and other attitudinal or socio-demographic variables (Oliver and Wood, 2014; Van Proojien, 2017). Nonetheless, in the literature conspiracism has mainly been intended as a

dependent variable, namely, the phenomenon that has to be explained by other elements taken as drivers. In other words, to date, the literature has mainly focused on assessing whether believing in conspiracy theories could be explained by political attitudes and behaviors concerning divisive issues (e.g., Uscinski and Parent, 2014; Castanho-Silva et al., 2017), but little research has focused on assessing whether conspirational attitudes are able to *predict* certain political behaviors.

Our paper aims at addressing this issue, by employing as a case study the decision that Italian voters were called to take for the constitutional referendum of December 4, 2016. The referendum aimed at confirming a radical reform of the institutional structure of the state (Ceccarini and Bordignon, 2017; Tsebelis, 2017), which included the reduction of powers of the Senate, the replacement of its direct elected members with representatives of regional and local authorities, and a series of other changes aimed at speeding the legislative process.

In particular, two elements related to the context in which the referendum was held must be stressed. First, the referendum was promoted by the government in office, and government parties have been the main, and most important subjects having campaigned actively for Yes vote; on the other side, all the opposition parties campaigned for No vote. In the context of top-down national referenda, and especially when the issues at stake are complex, it has been shown that partisanship might represent a powerful cue, allowing people to vote without having to understand every detail of the issue at stake, by merely aligning to the decision suggested by the party they support and trust in (Hobolt, 2007; Quaranta et al., 2019). After 2016 Italian constitutional referendum various studies showed that the vast majority of voters aligned to the decision of the parties they supported (Di Mauro and Memoli, 2018; Negri and Rebessi, 2018). The second element to be stressed is represented by an interesting feature of the referendum campaign: one of the main arguments of the No supporters was that the reform would have produced an authoritarian drift, by altering the checks and balances of the original Constitution,

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sometimes suggesting that this reform might have been consistent with what desired by obscure powers to weaken Italian democracy (Zagrebelsky and Pallante, 2016). As we will show in detail, these conspiracy theories have not been spread by marginal and peripheral outsiders or only occasionally included in the public conversation on constitutional reform. They have been a key element in framing constitutional reform by important political actors in the campaign for voting No. This phenomenon has been asymmetrical, since nothing similar happened on the opposite side. We will argue that similar arguments might be particularly appealing for people more prone to believe in conspiracies, irrespective from their political predispositions. The paper shows that conspiracist ideation is associated with lower propensies of voting Yes in the referendum and that this also holds when controlling for the other significant predictor of the referendum vote, party support. Also, we show that voters who support the government present a dramatic decrease in their likelihood to vote Yes in the referendum when they score high on the conspiracism scale. This evidence sheds new light on the nature of conspiratorial attitudes, showing that conspiracism in Italy represents an independent and strong predictor of political choices, and is somewhat a separated concept from the simple party choice. Our analysis also suggests that conspiratorial attitudes can be exploited by campaign strategies purposely aimed to activate those predispositions.

Determinants and Consequences of Conspiratorial Thinking

Counter-intuitively with respect to the growing relevance of scientific thinking, average level of education in the population, and access to official and reliable information, conspiracist ideation is still present in public opinion of contemporary democracies. A recent national representative survey has shown that 50% of Americans believe in at least one conspiracy theories among the most spread in the U.S, such as the government's complicity in 9/11 attacks as a justification for declaring war to the Middle East or the Wall Street's premeditation of

eliciting the financial crisis to increase its control over the world economy (Oliver and Wood, 2014). Analogously, Mancosu et al. (2017) found that 47% of the Italian respondents to an opt-in web survey declare to believe in at least one out of four conspiracy theories. As a matter of fact, conspiracism is not a marginal phenomenon.

As stressed above, the academic literature dealing with conspiracist ideation can be roughly subdivided into two main lines of research. The first and the older one is the psychological literature. Most of this research focused on the factors aimed at predicting belief in conspiracy theories, by outlining that conspiracism is more spread among people suffering from psychopathologies like paranoia and schizotypy (Darwin et al., 2011; Barron et al., 2014). Since this perspective appears too narrow to explain belief in conspiracy theories, others argued that conspiracism is not only related to clinical paranoia, but to a paranoid style of thinking according to which an individual "sees the hostile and conspiratorial world in which he feels himself to be living as directed […] against a nation, a culture, a way of life whose fate does not affect himself alone but millions of others." (Hofstadter, 1996, p. 4). According to the latter interpretation, people believing in conspiracy theories are expected to adopt a Manichean perspective where few conspirators are identified with the Evil and millions of individuals with the Good. Moreover, social psychology found out that lower levels of self-esteem and agreeableness, as well as high levels of anomie, powerlessness, and authoritarianism, are associated to higher levels of conspiracism (Abalakina et al., 1999; Swami et al., 2011).

Other studies investigated whether conspiracism is socially patterned, regardless of personality and psychological traits. Education proves to be negatively related to conspiracism since it is expected that more educated people are more used to adopt rational thinking, and then to avoid obscure interpretation of facts (Oliver and Wood, 2014, Van Proojien, 2017, in Italy Mancosu et al., 2017). Moreover, Makarovs and Achterberg (2017) found that highly educated people are more likely to be anti-vaccine in high-advanced than in low-advanced

societies, giving some room to the recent signals of scepticism toward scientific thought in post-industrial societies. By arguing that religiosity shares with conspiracism a predisposition in providing a supernatural explanation of events, Mancosu and colleagues (2017) even show that more religious people are more likely to believe in conspiracy theories.

Since conspiracies are rooted in the world of politics, the renewed interest in conspiracy theories has inevitably involved also political scientists, aimed at studying whether believing in those theories is politically patterned, namely, associated to some political attitudes and characteristics. Previous studies have shown that conspiracism is negatively associated with political trust (Einstein and Glick, 2015, Miller et al., 2016, Mancosu et al., 2017) and political engagement (Jolley and Douglas, 2014). Moreover, Miller et al. (2016) found that among individuals with low levels of trust conspiracism is more spread when the level of political sophistication is high.

When looking at partisanship or ideology as determinants of conspiracy ideation, it is relevant to distinguish between ideological and general conspiracy theories. The former identifies the conspirators with specific partisan actors and is ideologically oriented (Oliver and Wood, 2014). When dealing with such theories partisanship and ideology prove to be strong predictors of their belief. For instance, Republicans and conservatives are more likely to believe that Barack Obama was not born in the U.S. (Pasek et al., 2015) and that his administration manipulated official statistics on the labour market (Einstein and Glick, 2015) than Democrats and liberals. On the contrary, Democrats are more prone to believe that George Bush Jr. was complicit in 9/11 attacks (Cassino and Jenkins, 2013).

Contrary to ideological conspiracy theories, general conspiracy theories do not identify the conspirator with a specific political actor, but more generally with individuals or organisations not associated with a particular ideological position. While in the US no relevant differences in conspiracy theories beliefs are detected between liberals and conservatives (Oliver and

Wood, 2014), previous research coming from the European context found a positive relationship between (left and right) political extremism and belief in such general conspiracies (Van Proojien et al., 2015). In particular, it was argued that political extremists tend to have a structured style of thinking aimed at explaining every event; thus, conspiracy theories help them in providing straightforward solutions. Italian data partially confirmed those findings, by reporting higher belief in conspiracy theories among the far-right individuals but not among the far-left ones (Mancosu et al., 2017). Moreover, differently from the U.S. where no relationship between general conspiracism and partisanship was detected, in Italy conspiracism proves to be more spread among supporters of populist parties, like the Five Star Movement and the Northern League (Mancosu et al., 2017). This result, consistent with Hofstadter's (1996) argument, indirectly suggests a shared trait between the concepts of conspiracism and populism, as long as they both imply a worldview where people are the victims of very few individuals (Castanho-Silva et al., 2017).

In previous literature, as stressed above, conspiracism is usually the dependent variable, that is, it is intended as an individual characteristic that is explained by other, exogenous, characteristics. Conspiracism is thus associated with partisanship (Enders and Smallpage, 2019), left-right self-placement (van Proojien et al., 2015), populist attitudes (Mancosu et al., 2017), and vote choice (Uscinski and Parent, 2014). However, when considering elections where individuals do not have to vote for parties or candidates, but for specific issues like in referenda, conspiracism could play a role even in predicting voting behavior, whenever one of the options might be somehow interpreted by voters within the framework of conspiracy theories. 2016 Italian constitutional referendum represents an exceptional case study because during the electoral campaign the No option was also advocated based on conspiracy narratives.

The Italian Constitutional Referendum: Context and Hypotheses

In recent years, referenda have been rapidly gaining importance in European politics: the Italian constitutional referendum of December 4, 2016 shares various similarities with other relevant referenda held in the same period, such as the British referendum on Brexit (June 23, 2016) and the one on the independence of Catalonia (October 1, 2017), although they dealt with different subjects and took place on the basis of different legal assumptions. First, the result of the popular consultation had or might have had a significant impact on the domestic and European political stability. Second, the clash between those who were favourable and those opposing to the proposal has been very hard. Third, in all three cases it has been hypothesized that one or both parties in competition have spread conspiracy theories in support of their position and doubts have been advanced that foreign powers might have attempted to influence the outcome fueling conspiracy theories and fake news through the social media (Aro, 2016; Persily, 2017; Biden and Carpenter, 2017; Burgess, 2018). Indeed, the employment of referenda as tests for conspiracy ideation influence on voters' choice is not unique to the 2016 Italian constitutional referendum. For instance, Swami and colleagues (2018) show that belief in Islamophobic conspiracy theories is positively associated with voting for the Brexit in the 2016 UK referendum. According to their argument, conspiratorial thinking on the Islamization of European Union implies negative attitudes toward European integration, then leading to voting for Leave. However, the study employs a measure of ideological conspiracism which is ideologically associated with one of the two voting options.

As far as the Italian case is concerned, the promoters and supporters of the constitutional reform quite exclusively used pragmatic arguments. According to them, by abolishing the almost unique form of perfectly symmetrical bicameralism unintentionally designed by the Constituent Assembly members (Vassallo, 2015), as already unsuccessfully tried several times in recent Italian political history (Vassallo, 1998, 2005), and transforming the Senate into a

chamber representative of the local authorities, the reform would have led to a more straightforward, faster and more effective legislative process. The government would have had a timely response from the Parliament on its legislative proposals and would have had to submit itself to more stringent limitations on the use of the emergency decrees. Also, the reform would have clarified the respective responsibilities of the State and the Regions, by limiting unnecessary complications for citizens or economic actors and reducing litigation at the Constitutional Court. Finally, the reform would have substantially reduced the number of MPs and abolished, or made not anymore compulsory, institutions unanimously considered useless, such as the provinces or the Cnel, a body conceived by the constituent fathers as the seat of the dialogue between trade unions, employers and government (Rubechi, 2016).

It is worth mention that the reform was considered by the then Prime Minister and Democratic Party leader, Matteo Renzi, as a crucial element of his plan for the modernisation of Italy. In an early stage of the referendum campaign, he stated that in case of defeat he would have resigned. His opponents were keen in exploiting this statement accusing him to treat the constitution as a personal matter, by spreading the perception that the reform was designed for securing a disciplined parliamentary majority in his hand, and twisting the meaning of the popular consultation into a referendum about Renzi himself, his policy and his temperament (Ceccarini and Bordignon, 2017).

According to critics of the reform, it would have led to an unjustified re-centralisation of some of the powers partially transferred to the Regions by a reform approved in 2001. The constitutional reform was criticised for being bungled, confused, poorly written, and unlawfully proposed by the Government rather than by the Members of Parliament (Pasquino, 2016). The most penetrating criticism concerned the combination of the reform of the Senate contained in the constitutional reform with the new electoral law proposed for the Chamber of Deputies. The combination of the two reforms would have allowed the most voted party to

obtain with absolute certainty the absolute majority of the seats and, as a consequence, its leader to constitute and guide the Government. This was considered a virtue by the proponents, according to recurrent claims in the Italian public discourse in favour of a majority-assuring system, which means institutional and electoral systems able to favour the formation of a durable and cohesive government around the most voted party or coalition and make the elections decisive (D'Alimonte, 2015). On the contrary, several politicians and eminent academics accused the project of preluding to an "authoritarian turn", which would have undermined the system of check and balances of the original, post-war constitution (Zagrebelsky and Pallante, 2016).

Alongside this non-veiled criticism of an authoritarian risk, some supporters of the No option also spread explicit conspiracy theories, that is narratives where an evil elite/small power group aimed at subverting the previous order to gain power, conceiving the harmful strategy in the darkness and having the complicity of subordinate politicians to implement it. In some cases, such theories were spread by active influencers able to reach specific niches of the public trough the social and/or traditional broadcast media. For instance, according to Antonio Ingroia, a former public prosecutor, founder and leader of the far-left party Civil Revolution dissolved in 2013, the reform followed the program of the secret Masonic lodge P2 which was active under the lead of Licio Gelli in the '70s (Ingroia, 2016). According to Diego Fusaro, a well-known young pundit, the reform would have been written based on indications contained in a report by the multinational investment bank J. P. Morgan (Fusaro, 2016). It is worth mention that both Fusaro and Ingroia have been recurrent collaborators for the newspaper 'Il Fatto Quotidiano' and its online blog, that is the one of the most influential source of information for the 5 Stars Movement's activists.

During the referendum campaign, the same kind of arguments were also expressed by notorious intellectual personalities. For instance, Gustavo Zagrebelsky, Professor Emeritus of

Constitutional Law, former President of the Constitutional Court, and one of the leading figures in the referendum campaign for No vote[1], in a document jointly signed with other famous intellectuals and academics claimed that the reform "servilely implements the explicit indications of the most important American business bank, JP Morgan, who wrote in a 2013 document that Italy should have got rid of some 'problems' deriving from to the fact that its Constitution is too 'socialist'"[2].

These positions were also spread by several politicians. Alessandro Di Battista, one of the few national leading figures in the Five Star Movement and one of the most active in the campaign for No vote, repeatedly and intensively stressed that "ECB, European Commission, J.P.Morgan, Goldman Sachs, Rating Agencies [...] agree[...] to amend a Constitution that in its principles actually fights precisely the primacy of finance over politics and the supremacy of the market over rights."[3]. Furthermore, the Five Stars Movement's spokespersons in the Chamber of Deputies, together with the Five Stars Movement's MP Elio Lannutti, made a formal request for a judicial inquiry on the alleged conspiracy. As reported by the official blog of the party (Il Blog delle Stelle - The Stars' Blog) on November 17, 2016,[4] "Adusbef[5] and the Five Stars Movement spokespersons, who filed a complaint with the Rome Prosecutor's Office on 12 October 2016 also suggesting the crime of high treason, have traced at least 10 very solid clues, to substantiate and testify the JP Morgan's hand in amending the Constitution, which being 'too socialist', hinders the economic action of business bankers, who would like to impose the hegemony of paper finance and money out of nothing, on democratic systems based on popular sovereignty, conditioning the Renzi government to pass liberticide laws against workers' rights and achievements, beginning with the Jobs Act ."

The conspiratorial framework has thus been a key element in the campaign for No vote of several figures on the far left, of leading intellectuals, and of the main political force opposing the reform.

The referendum results were pretty clear, with a solid loss of Yes, which obtained about 40% of votes and was followed as expected by the resignation of the main sponsor of the reform. As pointed out above, the government parties campaigned for Yes vote at the referendum, while all the other political forces (the radical left, the centre-right and right parties, and the Five Stars Movement) campaigned for No vote. This sharp differentiation between a government supporting Yes vote and an opposition supporting No vote to the reform led to a strong politicisation of the positions toward the referendum also among the electoral body. Survey data by the Italian National Election Studies (Itanes) confirm this quite clear trend since most of the respondents expressed a vote consistent with the position officially held by the party they declared to support (Di Mauro and Memoli, 2018). However, as pointed out above, in addition to partisan cues the argument of the "authoritarian turn" and the concerns about the reform as consistent with the desires of mysterious powers and even of subversive organisations could have affected the final result.

Hypotheses

We have pointed out that in Italy there is a sharp difference between believers and non-believers in conspiracy theories in term of party preferences, with people supporting right-wing parties and the Five Stars Movement having significantly higher likelihoods of believing in conspiracy theories than government supporters. Moreover, we have stressed that political entrepreneurs of right-wing/populist parties have employed a conspiracist style of communication over the last decades (see Mancosu et al. 2017). Therefore, one might argue that in the Italian context conspiracism and support for right-wing/populist parties are two endogenous concepts, which cannot be analytically subdivided and analysed independently. 2016 Italian constitutional referendum, thus, gives us an exceptional opportunity of testing this

issue, by empirically assessing also vote choice of people presenting inconsistent characteristics (such as conspiracists supporting government parties and vice versa).

First, however, we must assess whether people more favourable to accept conspiratorial thinking (and thus to accept more easily a narrative in which small, influential groups aim at gaining benefits at the detriment of the collective through obscure actions) are actually more prone to try to oppose the reform. The first hypothesis will thus read as follows.

Hp1. The higher the level of conspiracism, the lower the likelihood of Yes voting.

Since in Italy conspiracism is more spread among people supporting those parties that were in opposition at the time of the referendum, we might see an effect of conspiracism on referendum vote just because a specific type of voter is both a conspiracist and a supporter of opposition parties. According to our expectations, thus, the second hypothesis will read as follow.

Hp2. As long as conspiracism increases, the likelihood of Yes voting decreases, independently from the party one supports.

Finally, we might ask ourselves whether there is some form of asymmetry between political camps in the effect exerted by conspiracism on the referendum vote choice. In other words, we might ask ourselves whether the effect of conspiracism is stronger in the government or in the opposition camp. In this case, we do not have a clear expectation about the possible differences that might arise in conspiracism effect according to the exogenous political affiliation of voters. Research question 1, thus, reads as follows:

RQ1. Is the effect of conspiracism on referendum choice stronger among the government or opposition supporters?

RQ1 allows us to testing whether conspiratorial thinking interacts with party support when explaining vote choice at 2016 constitutional referendum, having further evidence that conspiracism represents an analytically separated concept with respect to partisanship or party support.

Empirical Analysis: Methods and Results

Data

We test our hypotheses on data coming from the Italian National Election Study (ITANES) pre-post Referendum panel. Interviews were collected shortly before (between October 26-31, 2016, N = 3,007) and after (December 7-13, 2016, N = 3,027) the referendum of December 4, 2016, employing the Computer Assisted Web Interview (CAWI) mode. Respondents were collected from an opt-in community of a private research company (SWG) and are stratified by gender, age, and macro-regional distribution of the Italian population. Overall, 2,843 citizens were interviewed both in the pre- and in the post-referendum waves.

Variables and Models

The dependent variable is represented by self-reported voting behaviour in the referendum measured in the post-electoral wave (classified as 1 "Voted yes", 0 "Voted no"). People who did not declare their vote in the referendum were not included in the analysis. Concerning vote choice in the constitutional referendum, sample data pretty resemble official data: among respondents who declared to have voted, 39% choose the Yes option, while the other 61% opted for No (41% vs 59% according to official voting data)

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To avoid issues of endogeneity, all the independent variables were collected in the pre-referendum wave. The main independent variable is represented by the individual strength of belief in conspiracy theories. Respondents were asked to assess the plausibility of different conspiracy theories or ideas, using a 0–10 scale where 0 means "Not plausible at all" and 10 means "Completely plausible." In particular, the interview included an assessment of four statements referring to conspiracy theories that have featured in public debate in recent years (see Mancosu et al., 2017) plus two more attitudinal items measuring conspiracist ideation, inspired by the generic conspiracist beliefs scale (Brotherton et al., 2013). The statements read as follows:

1) 'Moon landings never happened, and the proofs have been fabricated by NASA and the US government.' (mean = 3.03, % answers from 6 to 10 = 24.6, n = 2,622) [6]

2) 'Vapor trails left by aircraft are actually chemical agents deliberately sprayed in a clandestine program directed by government officials.' (mean = 2.95, % answers from 6 to 10 = 25.0, n = 2,587)

3) 'Vaccines harm the immune system and expose it to diseases.' (mean = 3.39, % answers from 6 to 10 = 29.3, n = 2,609)

4) 'The Stamina method invented by Davide Vannoni for curing neurodegenerative diseases has been obstructed by big pharmaceutical groups.' (mean = 4.93, % answers from 6 to 10 = 48.6, n = 2,527)

5) 'A relevant part of our lives is controlled by conspiracies organised by major powers.' (mean = 5.45, % answers from 6 to 10 = 54.8, n = 2,663)

6) 'Election results are made up in order not to let people against major powers to win.' (mean = 5.10, % answers from 6 to 10 = 48.8, n = 2,634)

The six conspiracist items present a high internal consistency. The average inter-item correlation is 0.55, and the Cronbach alpha is 0.88 (further, none of the items displays

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anomalies compared to the others). An additional factor analysis was carried out and shows the same results, with loadings of the first factor extracted on the six items of comparable and substantial size (all above .70). This suggests, as in other works on similar data (see Mancosu et al., 2017), that the items contribute to form a latent trait expressing a general propensity to believe in conspiracy theories (Swami et al., 2017). It is thus possible to combine the items to compute a 0-10 conspiracism scale by summing each score of the items employed and then dividing by the number of items. Descriptive statistics further show that conspiracism is not a marginal phenomenon since both the mean and the median of the scale computed on 2,343 respondents who gave valid answers to all the six items prove to be around 4.

The second relevant independent predictor that we take into account is the individual party preference (voting intention if a National election would have taken place soon). According to previous studies, indeed, believing in conspiracy theories is a prerogative of people supporting certain parties (mainly the Northern League, the Five Stars Movement and Forza Italia), which are the same parties that campaigned for voting No in the referendum. As a result, one might argue that the relation between conspiracism and vote choice in the referendum could represent a composition effect, being a significant share of right-wing or Five Stars Movement supporters those who are more likely to be conspiracists and to vote No in the referendum. The variable has been coded in such a way that 0 "Other parties/Don't know/No answer/Undecided" 1 "Government parties" (Democratic Party - PD and New Centre-Right - NCD) 2 "Main opposition parties" (Five Stars Movement, Forza Italia, Northern League, Brothers of Italy, Italian Left).

A number of control variables representing possible confounders have been added to the models: educational level (subdivided into "Low", "Medium" and "High"), age, gender, geopolitical zone (subdivided into "North-west", "North-east", "Red zone" and "Center/South and islands"), trust in the democratic procedures (3-items on a 0-10 scale where 0 indicates the

lowest level of trust, inspired from the stealth democracy scale, see Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 2002[7]), retrospective familiar economic evaluation (0-4 scale where 0 means "much worsened" and 4 "much improved"), and evaluation of Renzi's government performance in improving individuals' home area conditions (0-10 scale where 0 means "totally negative" and 10 means "totally positive").

We will test our hypotheses using a set of logistic regression models. Model 1 will include only the control variables specified above, and Model 2 will introduce the conspiracism scale to test Hp1 systematically. Model 3 will insert in the model party preferences, by testing systematically whether the possible effect of conspiracism also holds when we take into account vote choice in a hypothetical election (Hp2). Finally, to answer RQ1, model 4 will investigate the asymmetries of the effect of conspiracism on vote choice, separately in the opposition and government camps: the model will thus be fitted by interacting the party preference and the conspiracism scale.

Results

Table 1 presents the models employed to test our hypotheses.

TABLE 1 HERE

As it is possible to see in Model 1, many control variables contribute to predicting the likelihood of having voted Yes in the referendum (the pseudo-R-squared, only considering controls, is equal to 0.27). In particular, being middle- and high-educated increases the likelihood of supporting the constitutional reform, as well as being older and coming from the north-west of the country. Furthermore, retrospective economic evaluations and the perceived

performance of Renzi's government in the home area are positively correlated with Yes support, consistent with Di Mauro and Memoli (2018)

Model 2 taps the first hypothesis of our paper. By adding the conspiracist scale among the independent variables the pseudo-R-squared moves from 0.27 to 0.31. Moreover, the regression coefficient of the conspiracism scale is negative and significant. By calculating average marginal effects, we can say that every additional point of the conspiracist scale is associated with a decrease in the likelihood of voting Yes of 3.9 percentage points. This confirms our Hp1.

Hypothesis 2 aims at assessing whether this relationship also holds if we take into account the party preferences. As shown in Model 3, the effect of party preference is highly significant and consistent with what expected: people supporting government parties (PD and NCD) are more likely to vote Yes with respect to the reference category ("Other parties/Don't know/No answer/Undecided") whilst people supporting opposition parties have dramatically lower likelihoods to vote Yes (the predicted probabilities of voting Yes for Government and opposition parties supporters are respectively of 71% and 27%, with nonvoters/undecided around 38%). The model, however, shows that conspiracism effect is still negative and significant, although reduced in magnitude (using average marginal effect calculation, at every additional point of the conspiracist scale, we see a decrease the likelihood of voting Yes by 2.6 percentage points). This confirms our Hp2.

Interactions Between Party Support and Conspiracism

We have stressed so far, and confirmed by testing Hp2, that although related (see Mancosu et al., 2017), conspiracism and support for right-wing parties and Five Stars Movement are two different dimensions of political behaviour: first, because right-wing/Five Stars Movement voters present only an enhanced likelihood to endorse conspiracies, but there are also

conspiracists among the left of the political spectrum; second, because when confronted with a political decision such in the 2016 constitutional referendum, both conspiracism and party preferences contribute significantly in predicting individual vote choice (see Model 3). Model 3, however, does not show us how the two variables interact. In other words, we do not know whether the effect of conspiracism on referendum vote choice varies depending on the party one supports. To overcome this issue, we have fitted a two-way interaction between the conspiracism scale and party preference (see Model 4). Interaction effects in logistic regression models cannot be interpreted by merely looking at the coefficient of the interaction term, but they can be better assessed by reporting the average marginal effects (Ai and Norton, 2003). Figure 1 shows the predicted probabilities of voting Yes in the referendum by support for government/opposition parties and conspiracism.

FIGURE 1 HERE

In the left part of the graph, namely for lower scores of the conspiracism scale, the difference between government and opposition supporters is significant, with about 9 out of 10 government parties' supporters voting Yes against about less than 40% of opposition supporters voting No. As long as conspiracism increases, however, both the curves drop rapidly, until the difference between conspiracists supporting the government and the opposition becomes substantially smaller, although still significant. This massive drop, especially for what concerns government supporters, suggests to us that the role of conspiratorial attitudes has been crucial in shaping the referendum results, especially for what concerns government supporters. People who were expected to support the constitutional reform because of their party attachment, indeed, defected massively from voting Yes in the case they scored high on the conspiracism scale, arguably expecting that the referendum could represent a way in which the democracy

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Two counter-arguments can be made against this evidence. The first is that the variable measuring party preference includes very different political actors within the category "opposition parties"; therefore, the employment of a more refined measure might lead to different results. In Appendix, we account for this possible drawback by employing a variable where the "opposition parties" category is split into the three following categories: left opposition parties (Italian Left), Five Stars Movement, and right opposition parties (Forza Italia, Northern League, and Brothers of Italy). Figure A1 (see full models in Table A1) shows that for individuals supporting the Five Star Movement and right opposition parties the predicted probabilities of voting Yes is pretty similar at every level of conspiracism; among supporters of left opposition parties a more noticeable gap in the likelihood of voting Yes is detected between respondents with higher and lower levels of conspiracism. Nonetheless, overall patterns of predicted probabilities at different levels of conspiracism prove not to be significantly different depending on the opposition party one supports. This finding allows giving more leverage to the empirical evidence shown in Figure 1.

The second possible drawback comes from the crucial role played by the former Prime Minister Matteo Renzi in the referendum campaign, as stressed above. Besides party support, Renzi's evaluation was supposed to affect the referendum choice, although previous research found that when controlling for government's evaluation and party closeness Renzi's evaluation was not significantly associated with vote choice (Di Mauro and Memoli, 2018). When looking at the significant negative effect of conspiracism on Yes vote among supporters of government parties (Figure 1), one could hypothetically argue that individuals with conspiratorial attitudes supporting the government parties are more likely to evaluate the Prime Minister negatively,

and consequently to vote No. Moving from Model 3, we have run a further logistic regression model (see Table 1, Model 5) by adding an interaction term between Renzi's evaluation (dichotomized measure from an original 0-10 scale, where negative evaluation is associated with 0 to 5 scores, and positive evaluation to 6 to 10 ones) and conspiracism. As Figure 2 shows, the negative effect of conspiracism on voting Yes is far higher among individuals who provide a positive evaluation of Matteo Renzi. Among respondents presenting positive attitudes towards the Prime Minister, the predicted probability of voting Yes is 83% when the level of conspiracism is equal to 0, while it dramatically lowers to 17% when the level of conspiracism is equal to 10. The pattern is similar to the one identified in the interaction between conspiracism and party support and shows the strong effect of conspiracism in determining the vote in the referendum even when supporting the leader promoting the reform, net of party preference.

To sum, robustness checks confirm our finding: even when supporting a party endorsing the Yes vote in the referendum, on average, conspiratorial attitudes have pushed individuals away from the vote choice suggested by the party they are closest to, and this happened in particular for supporters of the government.

Conclusion

In this paper, we exploited the case of December 4, 2016 Italian constitutional referendum to assess whether the relationship between conspiracism and vote choice in this case is fully mediated by party preference, or whether conspiracism represents an independent predictor of voting behaviour.

Conspiracism is an important element of the cognitive structure underlying people's attitudes and behaviours. Previous literature has shown that it is correlated with psychological, socio-demographic and attitudinal characteristics. It has also been shown that conspiracism is

associated with political orientations, party identifications and party support. In the latter respect, a comparative analysis of the literature shows big differences across countries: if in the US there are no large differences in believing in generic conspiracy theories between liberal and conservatives (Oliver and Wood, 2014), in the Netherlands conspiracists are more likely to be found in both the left and right extremes of the ideological spectrum (Van Prooijen et al., 2015). In Italy, the situation is further different, featuring more conspiracist people as those who declare to vote for right-wing parties and the Five Stars Movement (Mancosu et al., 2017).

Such a strict relationship between voting for populist/right-wing parties and high level of conspiracism - together with the fact that recently right-wing and populist parties in Italy have exploited in their communication the spread of a conspiracist mentality - might suggest that, in such a context, the two concepts are somewhat overlapping, or, at least, that the conspiracist mentality is a concept inherent in support of certain parties.

We showed that the referendum was a highly politicised vote which contrasted the government parties (supporting Yes vote to the reform) and the centre-right parties and the Five Stars Movement (supporting No vote). We also argued that one of the most crucial argument for No vote was that the reform would have led to an "authoritarian turn", stressing that part of the reform was similar to what desired several decades ago by the Masonic Lodge P2 - leading us to imagine that people more favourable to adopt conspiratorial thinking might be more prone to vote against the reform because of this argument. The combination of these two elements (the political and the conspiracist ones) gives us the exceptional opportunity of evaluating what are the characteristics of a highly politicised behaviour that also presents a conspiratorial aspect.

The set of logistic regression models presented in Table 1 shows quite clearly that conspiracism has a negative and significant effect on the likelihood of voting Yes in the referendum. This effect also holds if we take into account other socio-demographic variables

and voters' party preference - meaning that the effect of conspiracism is somewhat distinct from that of partisan attachment.

One, however, might ask whether a conspiracist supporting the government parties will follow its partisan cues only, and conspiracism does not have any role in shaping the voting behaviour of such individuals. Using a two-way interaction, we show that ==conspiracism is a stronger predictor== among government supporters, who witness a lowering in their propensity to vote Yes of about 50 percentage points from the lowest to the highest level of the conspiracism scale. The effect is lower for supporters of the opposition parties (a drop of about 25 points). This evidence does not erase the higher likelihood to endorse conspiracy theories among right-wing parties and Five Stars Movement supporters. More simply, we show that conspiracist individuals who are supporters of both government and opposition parties present much similar voting behaviour with respect to non-conspiracist people.

Conspiracy theories are playing a relevant role within the public opinion, and the opportunity for individuals to get in touch with them is becoming increasingly higher. Therefore, since those theories are strictly connected with the political sphere, conspiratorial attitudes and beliefs could have political consequences and affect vote choice. Our findings suggest that conspiratorial attitudes could be successfully exploited by communication strategies or electoral campaigns aimed at activating them, regardless of the individual political orientations. However, new research in other contexts is needed to provide further evidence towards the role played by conspiracism in determining voting behaviour when the election does not involve the choice for a specific party, but for specific issues like in referenda. Our suggestion for scholars is to look beyond the standard predictors of voting behaviour and to provide more attention to other candidates, such as conspiratorial beliefs, to give a broader explanatory framework. More in general, the electoral turmoil that has been taking place in

several Western countries in recent years probably necessitates new explanatory instruments from the ones having characterised the study of voting behaviour by now.

Word count: <mark>7,798</mark> words

Manuscript date: 15<mark>/11/2019</mark>

Notes

[1] During the referendum campaign, Gustavo Zagrebelsky was even involved in a tv-debate against Matteo Renzi, the leading figure in the campaign for Yes vote. The debate, broadcast on September 30, 2016, by the private channel La7, represented one of the most relevant media-events of the campaign.

[2] http://www.libertaegiustizia.it/2016/10/15/ancora-cinquanta-giorni-di-lotta-per-dire-no-ai-nemici-della-costituzione-piu-bella-del-mondo/

[3] https://www.facebook.com/960162547429143

[4] http://www.ilblogdellestelle.it/2016/11/_la_riforma_la_vuole_la_jp_morgan_10_indizi_iodicono.html

[5] Adusbef is an association for consumers' protection whose president was the MP Elio Lannutti.

[6] Descriptives are computed on the 2,843 individuals interviewed both in the pre- and in the post-referendum surveys.

[7] The three items are: parties are necessary to defend special interests of groups and social classes; parties guarantee that people can participate to politics in Italy; without parties there cannot be democracy.

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TABLES

Table 1. Five logistic regression models with referendum vote as dependent variable (1: yes; 0: no)

Independent variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Educ. level: Middle (ref. Low)	0.42***	0.24	0.41**	0.38**	0.35*
	(0.16)	(0.17)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.20)
Educ. level: High	0.44**	0.08	0.11	0.09	-0.07
	(0.17)	(0.18)	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.21)
Age	0.02***	0.02***	0.01***	0.01***	0.01**
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Gender: Female (ref. Male)	-0.16	0.04	-0.07	-0.08	-0.08
	(0.11)	(0.12)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.14)
Geopolitical area: Red zone (ref. Center/South)	0.03	-0.21	-0.20	-0.22	-0.25
	(0.17)	(0.18)	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.21)
Geopolitical area: North-west	0.39***	0.22	0.26*	0.27*	0.23
	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.16)
Geopolitical area: North-east	0.15	-0.12	0.01	0.02	-0.03
	(0.17)	(0.18)	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.21)
Retrospective familiar economic evaluation (0-4)	0.48***	0.41***	0.35***	0.37***	0.37***
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)
Government's evaluation on contextual economy (0-10)	0.47***	0.49***	0.37***	0.38***	0.30***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Stealth democracy scale (0-10)	0.01	-0.00	-0.06**	-0.06**	-0.09***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Conspiracism scale (0-10)		-0.26***	-0.20***	-0.11**	-0.10**
		(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.05)	(0.04)
Party preference: Government parties (ref. Others/NV/DK)			1.93***	2.91***	1.50***
			(0.20)	(0.37)	(0.21)
Party preference: Opposition parties			-0.68***	-0.39	-0.63***
			(0.14)	(0.28)	(0.15)
Party preference: Goverment parties * Conspiracism				-0.26***	
				(0.08)	
Party preference: Opposition parties * Conspiracism				-0.09	
				(0.06)	
Renzi's evaluation: Positive (ref: Negative)					2.94***
					(0.31)
Renzi's positive evaluation * Conspiracism					-0.35***
					(0.06)
Constant	-4.73***	-3.18***	-2.48***	-2.84***	-2.62***
	(0.34)	(0.38)	(0.41)	(0.45)	(0.44)
Pseudo R^2	0.27	0.31	0.40	0.40	0.47
Observations	1,952	1,952	1,952	1,952	1,937

Standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

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FIGURES

Figure 1. Predicted probabilities of voting Yes, by party support (lines only plotted for government and opposition parties) and conspiracism level, estimated by model 4 (95% confidence intervals).
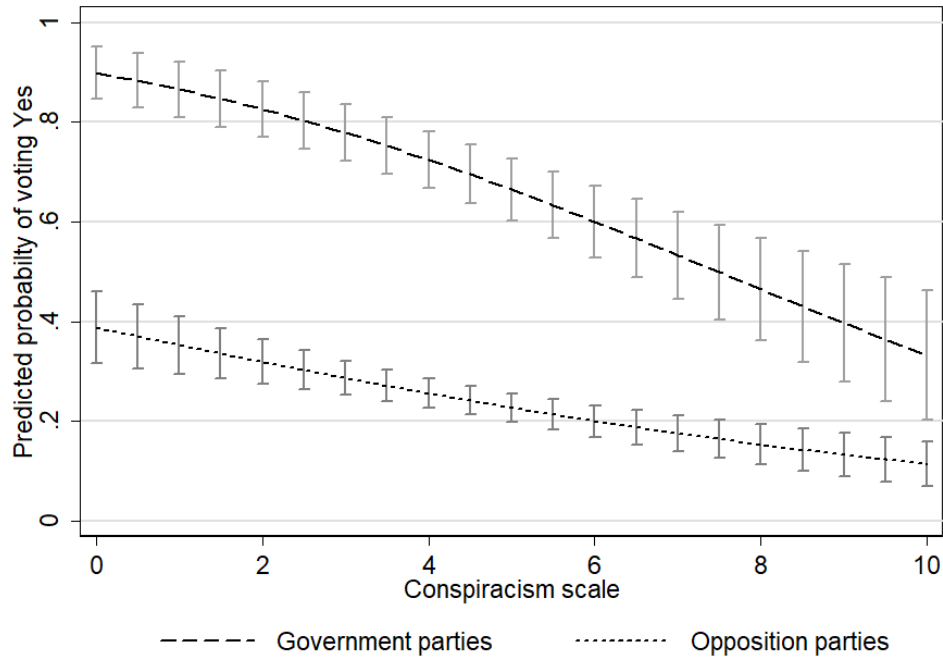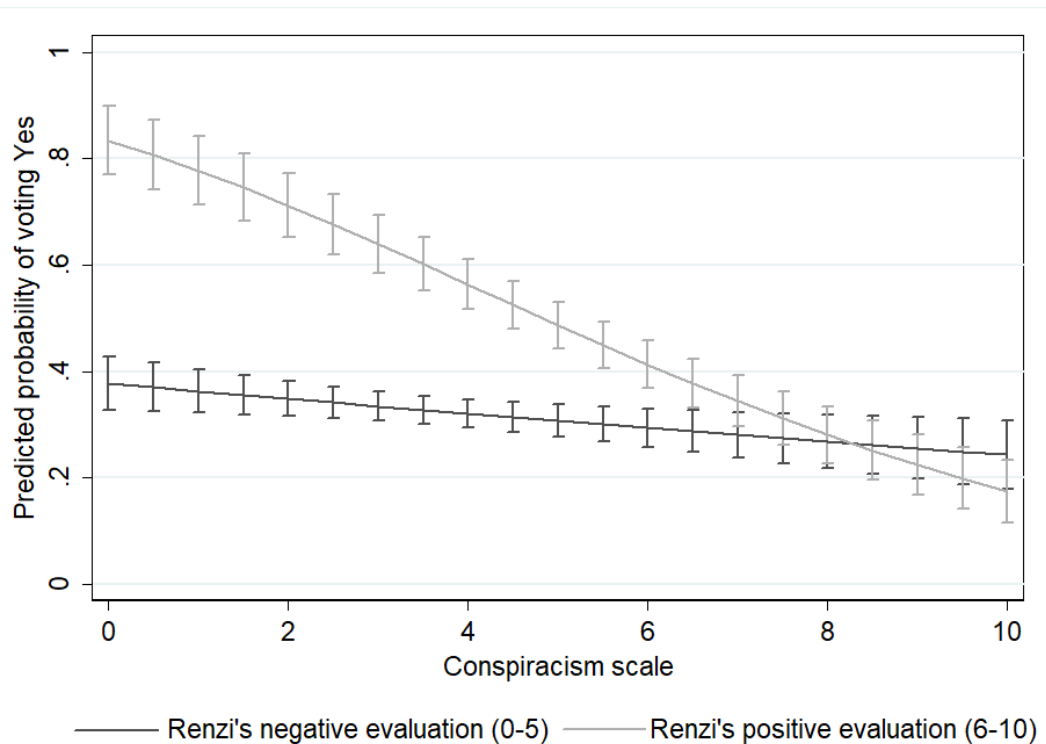

Figure 2. Predicted probabilities of voting Yes by Renzi's evaluation and conspiracism level, estimated by model 5 (95% confidence intervals).

APPENDIX - ONLINE SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

Table A1. Logistic regression models 3 and 4 with five-categories party preference variable.

Independent variables	Model 3A	Model 4A
Educ. level: Middle (ref. Low)	0.39**	0.38**
	(0.19)	(0.19)
Educ. level: High	0.10	0.08
	(0.20)	(0.20)
Age	0.01***	0.01***
	(0.00)	(0.00)
Gender: Female (ref. Male)	-0.08	-0.08
	(0.13)	(0.13)
Geopolitical area: Red zone (ref. Center/South)	-0.18	-0.20
	(0.20)	(0.20)
Geopolitical area: North-west	0.27*	0.29*
	(0.16)	(0.16)
Geopolitical area: North-east	0.02	0.04
	(0.20)	(0.20)
Retrospective familiar economic evaluation (0-4)	0.36***	0.37***
	(0.11)	(0.11)
Government's evaluation on contextual economy (0-10)	0.37***	0.38***
	(0.03)	(0.03)
Stealth democracy scale (0-10)	-0.07**	-0.07**
	(0.03)	(0.03)
Conspiracism scale (0-10)	-0.20***	-0.11**
	(0.03)	(0.05)
Party preference: Government parties (ref. Others/NV/DK)	1.93***	2.92***
	(0.20)	(0.37)
Party preference: Left opposition parties	-0.39	0.61
	(0.27)	(0.49)
Party preference: Five Stars Movement	-0.73***	-0.77**
	(0.17)	(0.36)
Party preference: Right opposition parties	-0.74***	-0.43
	(0.19)	(0.38)
Party preference: Goverment parties * Conspiracism		-0.26***
		(0.08)
Party preference: Left Opposition parties * Conspiracism		-0.33**
		(0.14)
Party preference: Five Stars Movement * Conspiracism		-0.01
		(0.08)
Party preference: Right Opposition parties * Conspiracism		-0.09
		(0.08)
Constant	-2.47***	-2.83***
	(0.42)	(0.45)
Pseudo R^2	0.40	0.41
Observations	1,952	1,952

Standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Figure A1. Predicted probabilities of voting Yes by party support (lines only plotted for government and opposition parties, split into three categories) and conspiracism level, estimated by model 4A (95% confidence intervals).
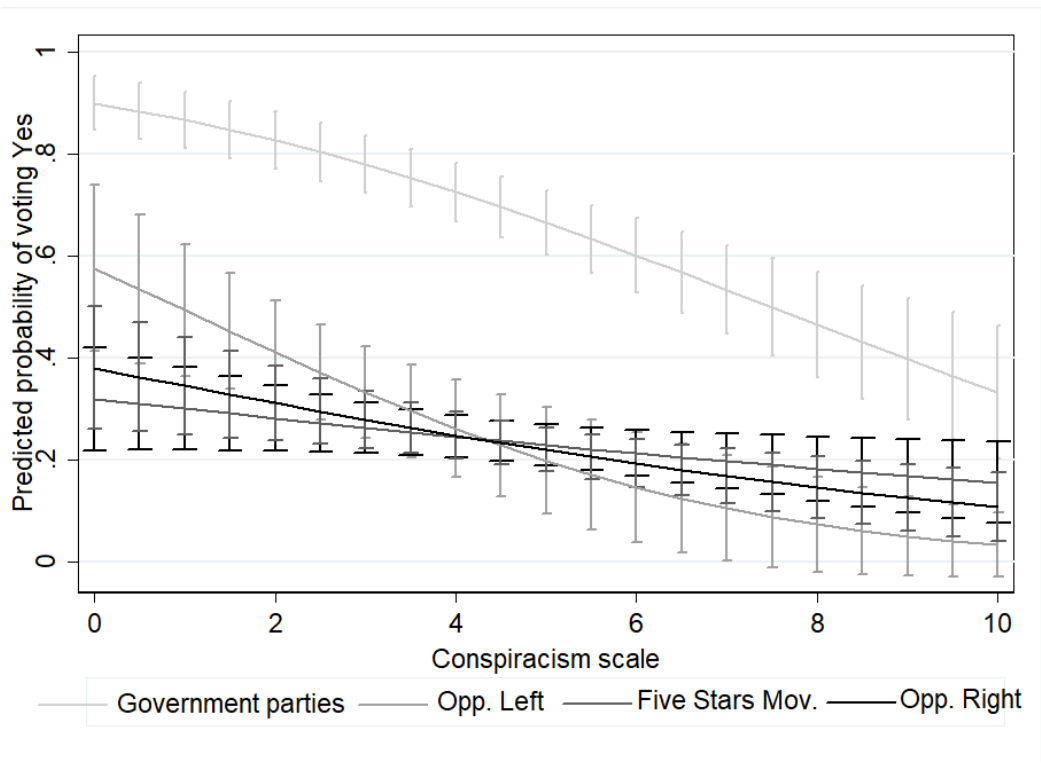
Authors' answer to Reviewers' comments on the manuscript ACPO-D-19-00087 "Political Consequences of Conspiratorial Thinking: Evidence from 2016 Italian Constitutional Referendum" for consideration on Acta Politica

Dear Editors,

We would like to thank you and the reviewers for your careful reading of our article and for the richness of your comments that allowed improving the quality of the manuscript.

Overall, the reviewers raised some relevant questions and suggestions that have been considered carefully.

In the re-submitted version, the most substantial amendments to the original text in reply to reviewers' requests are marked in <mark>yellow</mark>, to make them easily traceable.

Below, reviewer's comments are reported within a frame and answered right below the comment.

Best regards,

The Authors

Reviewer 1

> A- First, although the authors never use the magic work "cause", there is some causal language in the paper (e.g. page 4, "conspiracy ideation leads to lower propensity..."; page 20 "driver of voting behavior"). Given that this is an observational study, and given the high potential for endogeneity (which the authors claim to solve by including controls and interactions, but this is unfortunately not the case, otherwise there would be no need for causal inference models) I would urge the authors to avoid all causal language and talk in terms of associations.

ANSWER: We thank Reviewer 1 for the comment. Although the variables measuring conspiracism were collected before the referendum to partially avoid endogeneity issues, we have revised the manuscript by toning down the causal language (revised text yellow-highlighted on pages 1, 18, 21, 22).

B - Second, I think the authors should delve a bit more into the reason why conspiracism should be independently related to vote choice. In other words, I wish the discussion on pages 9-10 was more detailed, with some more examples and a clearer rationale linking the arguments used in the campaign with a generic conspiracist mentality. Was it really a campaign where mentioning conspiracy theories was extraordinarily common? I think this is important in order to justify an association between conspiracism and the vote which is independent from partisanship.

ANSWER: We thank the reviewer for the comment, and we agree with him/her on the fact that the link between conspiracism, partisan attachment and 2016 referendum vote is not crystal clear. To clarify the argument, we added some more examples on the communication strategy that several opposition parties carried out during the campaign (see pages 10-11 of the manuscript and the answer to comment A of reviewer 2) and we specified better our most relevant expectation at page 12-13. In particular, in this additional part, we contest that 1) conspiracy theories are diffused in the Italian public opinion, and more prevalent among M5s and center-right voters; 2) that, however, also people who support the 2016 government present, to a lesser extent, high level of conspiracism. 3) that this inconsistency between the likelihood to believe in conspiracies and being exposed to a campaign that argues a conspiracy might lead conspiracists, pro-government people to be shifted toward the No vote (the same might hold for right-wing non-conspiracist voters). We think that restructuring this subsection dramatically increased the clarity of our argument.

C- Minor point: In Table 1, Model 5, there must be a mistake in the table, because the main effect of Renzi's positive evaluation is negative, which makes no sense.

ANSWER: We re-ran the regression model and we found that the main effect of Renzi's evaluation has the same absolute value as before but it is positive, as suggested by Reviewer 1. We thank Reviewer 1 and, accordingly, corrected the mistake in Table 1.

Reviewer 2

A - The description of the case does not indicate exactly how widespread was the conspiracist framing of the "No" campaign. Without knowing much about this specific case, it reads more like a typical government v. opposition referendum, where narratives around the two sides might be eclipsed by the actors sponsoring it, and where voters mostly understand it as a confidence vote on the ruling parties. This is important because, in the absence of conspiracy narratives as the main discourse of the "No" campaign, there would be no theoretical expectation as to why conspiracism in itself should be a driver of vote choice, except for its correlation with other attitudes that predispose individuals against governments, such as anti-establishment and anti-government views and low political trust. In this scenario, conspiracism would play no theoretical role in explaining the vote. Therefore, the authors should expand more, perhaps with quotes and examples, on the specific conspiracy narratives used and how widespread they were in the overall campaign.

ANSWER: The thank R2 for the comment. We followed R2 suggestion by largley restructuring the Background section. We added several examples from pundits, academics, and prominent political figures of parties supporting the No front (text yellow-highlighted on page 10-11). We believe that this restructuring largely increased the clarity of our argument.

B - The paper should be restructured a bit, so that the research question appear before the hypotheses. Hypotheses are supposed to be potential answers to the RQ.

ANSWER: We thank R2 for the suggestion. We have totally restructured the hypothesis section in order to make it sharper. We basically put the research question

at the beginning of the section, and restructured the RQ, so that it clarifies better the sense of the two-way interaction between party support and conspiracism.

C - People who didn't report their vote were dropped out: how many are those? Isn't this likely related to conspiracy beliefs? From Table 1 we see that there are fewer than 2000 respondents in the final analysis, while the Data section says that more than 2900 completed both waves. What happened to this ⅓ of the sample? Do the results hold if a more appropriate treatment of missing data is used (e.g., multiple imputation?)

ANSWER: We thank Reviewer 2 for the comment, which allows explaining more in detail the procedure of data analysis. As reported in the Data section, 2,843 respondents were interviewed both in the pre- and in the post-referendum survey. Therefore, since our research design aims at measuring all the independent variables before the vote in 2016 constitutional referendum, the sample employed to empirically test our hypotheses is made of these 2,843 individuals.

The reason why the number of cases in regression analyses in equal to 1,952 is cases is only partially explained by the amount of missing cases for vote choice in the constitutional referendum (among the 2,843 pre-post panel respondents, 2,530 declared to have voted yes or no at the referendum, while the remaining 313 declared not to have voted). As shown in Table R1, in which we report the number of valid cases for all the variables included in at least one of the regression models (see Table 1 in the manuscript), there are some independent variables which present a relevant number of missing values, especially the conspiracism scale with 500 missing cases. The construction of the indexes of conspiracism and stealth employed in the regression models is based on a listwise deletion. To increase the number of cases in the regression models we could compute the two indexes by employing a pairwise deletion and imputing the mean of a certain item among the valid cases for those individuals presenting a missing value for that item. We used this procedure for both the scale of conspiracism and stealth, by imputing the mean of the item for missing values only for those individuals who provided a valid answer to at least one item for each scale. To provide a comparison between the model shown in the manuscript (with the two scales constructed by means of a listwise deletion) and a new model

where the computation of the two scales followed the above described procedure, in Table R2 we estimated the same model for the different samples to test Hypothesis 1. Model 2 is the same shown in Table 1 in the manuscript. Model 2R is the same model estimated on a higher number of respondents (2,314) because in the construction of the two scales of conspiracism and stealth we employed a pairwise deletion and then an imputation of the missing values. As Table R2 shows, there are no substantial differences between the outputs of the two model, both in the values of the regression coefficients and in R-squared. To provide a more detailed comparison between the models, we need to compare the average marginal effects. An increase of 1 point in the conspiracism scale is associated with a decrease of 3.9 percentage points in Model 2 and of 3.8 percentage points in Model 2R in the probability of having voted 'yes' at the constitutional referendum. Namely, the association between conspiracism and vote in 2016 referendum does not change between the two models. Similarly, increase of one-point in the scale of stealth democracy scale is associated to no decrease in the likelihood of voting 'yes' both in Model 2 and 2R. Also the other models (1, 3, 4, and 5) substantially provide similar results between the two procedure (analyses available under request). Since we prefer to estimate the regression models only on those individuals who provided valid answers to all the variables, to avoid imputation of values which were not provided by the survey respondents, in the revised version of the manuscript we decided to keep the same models of the.first version.

Table R1. Dependent variable and independent variables by valid cases.

Variables	Valid cases
DV: Vote choice in 2016 referendum	2,530
Educational level	2,843
Age	2,843
Gender	2,843
Geopolitical area	2,843
Retrospective familiar economic evaluation	2,820
Government's evaluation on contextual economy	2,680
Stealth democracy scale	2,624
Conspiracism scale	2,343
Party preference	2,843
Renzi's evaluation	2,718
Total sample	2,843

Table R2. Logistic regression models with referendum vote as dependent variable (1: yes; 0: no) to test hypothesis 1. Model 2 is the one estimated in Table 1 in the manuscript, Model 2R employs pairwise deletion and imputation of missing values for the scales of conspiracism and stealth.

Independent variables	Model 2	Model 2R
Educ. level: Middle (ref. Low)	0.24	0.22
	(0.17)	(0.15)
Educ. level: High	0.08	0.15
	(0.18)	(0.17)
Age	0.02***	0.02***
	(0.00)	(0.00)
Gender: Female (ref. Male)	0.04	0.04
	(0.12)	(0.11)
Geopolitical area: Red zone (ref. Center/South)	-0.21	-0.17
	(0.18)	(0.16)
Geopolitical area: North-west	0.22	0.21
	(0.14)	(0.13)
Geopolitical area: North-east	-0.12	-0.12
	(0.18)	(0.16)
Retrospective familiar economic evaluation (0-4)	0.41***	0.28***
	(0.10)	(0.09)
Government's evaluation on contextual economy (0-10)	0.49***	0.52***
	(0.03)	(0.03)
Stealth democracy scale (0-10)	-0.00	0.00
	(0.02)	(0.02)
Conspiracism scale (0-10)	-0.26***	-0.25***
	(0.03)	(0.03)
Constant	-3.18***	-3.09***
	(0.38)	(0.34)
Pseudo R^2	0.31	0.31
Observations	1,952	2,314

D - What items are used for the variable on liberal democratic support? It says it is inspired by the Hibbing/Theiss-Morse Stealth Democracy battery, but so what exactly are the questions?

ANSWER: The items employed to measure liberal democratic support are the following:

- Parties are necessary to defend special interests of groups and social classes.
- Parties guarantee that people can participate to politics in Italy

-   Without parties there cannot be democracy

The three items belong to the same battery and are measured on a 0-10 scale. We added a note in the manuscript (note 6) in which we report the text of the three items

E - The controls for government evaluation and stealth democracy are good and help the case. I was wondering if the survey also has the traditional trust items (parties/parliament/government/…), which is a concept highly correlated with conspiracism but which seems a very plausible explanation for voting "No" in this referendum. If available, political trust should be controlled for.

ANSWER: We agree with Reviewer 2, but unfortunately the ITANES pre-post Referendum panel does not include the traditional trust items. Therefore, we cannot estimate the relationship between conspiracism and vote choice in 2016 constitutional referendum by controlling for political trust.

F - It would be good to see some more descriptives, especially of the conspiracy questions. What are the means and distributions of each item?

ANSWER: As Reviewer 2 suggests, descriptives for any single item allow providing further evidence on the non-marginality of conspiracism. Descriptives are computed on the 2,843 individuals interviewed both in the pre- and in the post-referendum surveys (see note 5). On pages 15-16, after the text of every conspiracy question we reported the value of the mean, the percentage of respondents who provide answer from 6 to 10 (namely, percentage of believers in that conspiracy theory), and the number of valid cases. For any conspiracy item, the proportion of respondents who tend to believe is equal to at least one out of four. The range of the means of the answers to the six conspiracy items is between 2.95 ('Vapor trails left by aircraft are actually chemical agents deliberately sprayed in a clandestine program directed by government officials') and 5.45 ('A relevant part of our lives is controlled by conspiracies organised by major powers').