



# THE POLITICAL SALIENCE OF SOCIAL CLEAVAGES IN ITALY, 1963-2006

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## The Political Salience of Social Cleavages in Italy, 1963-2006

### Introduction

According to research on ‘the end of cleavage politics’ (REF) parties and their electorates have changed in contemporary democracies. Mass based parties have been replaced by electoral/cartel parties while voters have become more independent from traditional forms of group allegiances. This revisionist interpretation challenges a longstanding tradition which regards class, religion and territory as the basis for the ‘insulation’ (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967) of voters in opposing camps brought about by parties, through a kind of social closure (Bartolini and Mair, 1990) which, mainly in Western Europe, eventually led to the “encapsulation’ (Bartolini, 2000) of voters in distinct political enclaves and sub-cultures.

To be sure, the empirical veracity of this diagnosis on the decline of cleavage politics is still a matter of debate (Evans, 1999) but, more importantly, no shared consensus exists on the causal mechanisms underpinning and conditioning this process. Previous research on the decline of social cleavages in western party systems has tended to fall into one of two camps: those that privilege social structural factors and those that emphasise political issues. The former - which have dominated the literature - highlights the primacy of changes in the social composition of the electorate, and can be considered a ‘bottom-up’ approach to the structuring of political divisions. The latter, by contrast argues that cleavage allegiances derives from the strategies of parties themselves, and can be characterized as ‘top-down’ in nature. The bottom up approach argues that changes that have occurred within the electorate, such as rising living standards and the spread of affluence (Kitschelt 1994) and the expansion of higher education have increased the cognitive capacity of voters and undermined the salience of group identities, making voters more individualistic, secular and rational (Franklin 1985, 1992). This ‘modernisation thesis’ therefore posits that there has been gradual erosion in the political salience of social cleavages over time (much like social change itself has been gradual). By contrast, the top down approach has tended to focus on elite mobilisation strategies, and according to this approach the electoral salience of traditional cleavages is a response to changes in the supply side of party policies (Sartori, 1969).

With respect to social class, there is a substantial literature relating class voting to left-right policy preferences (Lipset 1954). The working class prefer redistribution and so vote for parties on the left, whereas the middle class try to resist these claims and so vote for parties on the right. Accordingly, the degree to which parties differ in their economic policies in this regard is thought to

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influence the degree to which different classes support them. This assumption provides the backbone for studies which seek to explain class voting in relation to party positions. Accordingly if parties differ in their policy outlook along dimensions strongly related to the cleavages we would expect the salience, or strength of these cleavages to be stronger than if the parties stand for much the same policy outlook (Oskarson 2005: 103). This perspective recognises the autonomous role of parties as main players in attenuating or reinforcing traditional cleavages. Although empirical tests of this hypothesis have provided mixed results (see Niewbeerta) evidence that class voting is higher when there is a clear policy difference between the parties has been found in the UK (Evans, Heath, Payne, 1999), Italy (Bellucci, 2001, 2002) and Northern Europe (Oskarson, 2005).

With respect to religion – which has received somewhat less attention in the comparative research literature –, its ostensibly diminishing impact on voting seems to impinge not so much upon the increasing secularization at the mass level, as on the relevance of political agency, that is the role played by religious secondary organization in society and its links to party politics (Broughton and ten Napel, 2000; Bellucci, Maraffi, Segatti, 2007).

Although these top-down and bottom-up approaches are often considered to be competing, this is largely because there has been a considerable amount of controversy over whether the impact of social cleavages has in fact declined or not (see Evans, 1999 for a summary). Accordingly, those that argue that there has been a gradual long term decline in class voting emphasise sociological explanations of change (which have also been gradual), while those who argue that there have been trendless fluctuations emphasise political explanations to do with the polarisation of the policy space (which also goes up and down). At a theoretical level both approaches tap into important aspects of social cleavage theory (group identity and political articulation), and potentially can have independent effects on the strength of social cleaves in party systems.

However, a crucial aspect of social cleavage theory has hitherto been ignored. By far, and surprisingly, the least attention has been devoted to the third element in the notion of a cleavage, which refers to the linkage between parties and organized society, or ‘segmentation’. The capability of parties to penetrate organizations, or to create parallel organizations, has been a key factor in reinforcing group identity and interest representation, so as to strengthen and perpetuate cleavage segmentation (REF). Indeed, Mair (REF) argues that there is nothing ‘natural’ or predetermined about the working class supporting parties of the left, but rather it is a historical result of Union penetration in leftist parties, thus creating a link between group identity and political support.

According to Rokkan (1977: 565), segmentation is the ‘degree of interlocking between cleavage specific organisations active in the corporate channel and party organisations mobilising for electoral support’. Research addressing this aspect has, however, focussed on the organisational

density of union or religious associations in society at large rather than in political parties in particular (Bartolini and Mair 1990: 231; Nieuwbeerta and Ultee 1999). These accounts are, again, more society driven, and are of the bottom up variety, thus failing to adequately address the core concept. Indeed, as examples from Latin America show, high levels of unionisation need not necessarily translate in to high levels of class voting. What is important, is the penetration of these organisation in political parties rather than just in society.

We argue that the linkage between parties and social organisations constitutes a critical part of the process in translating membership in a social group into support for a political party. This implies that models which fail to take this into account are seriously underspecified. Moreover, the structure of these linkages, in particular whether they create reinforcing or cross-cutting pressures on voters, also conditions the impact of party attempts to mobilise social groups through policy platforms.

By modelling the structure of linkages between parties and organisations we build on Sniderman and Bullock's (2004: 338) notion of consistency theory and argue that the impact of policy polarisation is conditional not only on the characteristics of the chooser (the voter) but also on the characteristics of the choice (the parties). When the characteristics of individual voters are consistent with the characteristics of the choice (political parties) then party efforts to mobilise issues re-inforce voter preferences, making them more likely to select the policy alternative that is congruent with their general view of the matter (Sniderman and Theriault 2004: 347). By contrast, when the characteristics of the choosers are inconsistent with the characteristics of the choice (that is voters face cross-cutting pressures at the organisational level) party efforts to mobilise issues face resistance, and are therefore not so successful. Failure to take these linkages into account in the specification of prior models may explain why previous research has provided only mixed results in support of the polarisation hypothesis.

The Italian dual cleavage system offers a clear opportunity to test these hypotheses, since voters – as Table 1 shows – are exposed to different possible influences of cleavages. The impact of cleavages on voting depends then both on voters's location in the dual cleavage system and on the configuration of party-association linkages. Cleavages may therefore either reinforce each other in channelling voting or their impact be attenuated by their crosscutting. The extent to which also parties' links with organized society show an overlapping or a cross-cutting structure becomes then the crucial variable explaining cleavage voting and an intervening variable conditioning the impact of party mobilisation of issues.

Table 1. Impact of cleavages on voters in Italian dual cleavage system

Class cleavage	Religious cleavage	
Middle class	Secular Cross-cutting	Religious Reinforcing
Working class	Reinforcing	Cross-cutting

### Research strategy

The Italian case provides a particularly instructive natural experiment to test these claims since following the demise of the Christian Democrats and the rise of Forza Italia in the early 1990s we are able to model the impact of changing structural alternatives at the party-organisational level, holding the social characteristics of the electorate relatively constant. (most studies over time have held constant the political factors and examined change in society). This allows us to test a number of hypothesis that build upon and extend previous research.

Firstly, previous research has only found mixed evidence in support of the relationship between cleavage voting and the polarisation of the policy space. Building on this finding we argue that the polarisation of the policy space conditions only the short-term variation in strength of social cleavages, but not its underlying level.

- *H1. Party polarisation. The impact of cleavages responds to party policy platforms: when parties do not emphasise religion or class issues, voters do not vote along these lines.*

Secondly, in order to shed light on why some cleavages are stronger than others, we argue that it is the structure of the linkage between parties and organisations that conditions the underlying strength of cleavage voting.

- *H2. Organisational linkages: Bonds between associations and parties condition relationship with vote: when linkage is high then group voting is strong; when linkage is low group voting is weak.*

Thirdly, we argue that these two elements combine and there is an interaction effect in which polarisation has greater impact on voters who face re-inforcing pressures at the party-organisational level than on voters who face cross-cutting pressures.

- *H3. Interaction effect: When organisational linkages are reinforcing, the impact of mobilisation is greater*

### *Data and methods*

To test these hypotheses we analyse a merged data set which combines information on voters, party-organisation linkages, and policy polarisation. Firstly, to examine the social characteristics and voting behaviour of individuals over time we use pooled cross-sectional data from national population surveys of the Italian electorate from 1963 to 2006.<sup>1</sup> (see Appendix for details). This is the longest time series data on political behaviour available in Italy and covers 12 elections and consists of 27,009 interviews. Secondly to examine the policy platforms of the political parties over time we use Party Manifesto Data from the Manifesto Research Group (MRG) (see Budge et al 2001), supplemented by 2006 data which have been generously provided by Nicolò Conti (CIRCaP-Università di Siena) who is the author of the content analysis of the 2006 coalitions' manifestoes. Thirdly, to examine the links between MPs and organisations affiliated to the major social cleavages over time we use what we believe to be a unique dataset on the associational memberships of MPs (using data from the CIRCaP- Italian Political Elite Study from 1963 to 2006).<sup>2</sup>

### *Measurement*

The structure of political competition in Italy has undergone a number of changes over the last 50 years, and some simplifying assumptions are obviously necessary in order to carry out comparative research over time. To this end we focus on competition between party blocs (Bartolini and Mair 1990). From 1968 to 1992 the principal political conflict was between the leftist PCI bloc (in which we include PCI, PSI and the other minor left lists) and the centrist DC bloc (in which we include DC, PSDI, and PRI). Following the corruption scandals of the early 1990s many of these parties disappeared and new parties also entered the political stage. From 1994 onwards then the structure of electoral competition was somewhat different, and the principal opposition has been between the leftist PDS bloc (Margherita, Verdi, etc.) and the centre-right Forza Italia bloc (AN, Lega, CCD, CDU). This change in the party system allows us to examine the impact of changing structural alternatives, holding social change more or less constant. The main dependent variable that we use is whether respondents voted for the PCI-PDS bloc or the DC-FI bloc.<sup>3</sup> The main independent

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<sup>1</sup> The surveys used are Doxa 1963, Mass Election Study 1968 and 1972, Political Action Study 1975, Eurobarometer (11) 1979, Four Nation Study 1985, Italian National Election Study (ITANES) 1990, 1992, 1994, 1996, 2001, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> This continuous study was originally directed by Giovanni Sartori, and later by Maurizio Cotta and Luca Verzichelli at CIRCaP-Università di Siena. Sample of representatives from each legislature have overtime been surveyed to collect data on political careers and political attitudes. We thank CIRCaP for having made available this unique data source. The usual disclaimer for responsibility of analysis and interpretation applies.

<sup>3</sup> The exact question wordings for the vote have changed somewhat over time. When a vote question was not available (1963, 1975) we relied on party closeness.

variables that we consider at the individual level are class and religion. To measure class we adopt a simple manual / non manual dichotomy, while to measure religion we employ a measure of church attendance: attend church every week/ other.

### *Policy space*

To measure the polarization of the policy space we follow previous research by drawing on party manifesto data. This data provides a useful indication of party positions since they represent the choices that the electorate faces before each election. We employ a slightly modified version of the traditional Lever/Budge methodology, and compute the left-right scores on economic issues of the various parties by summing up the percentages of all the sentences in the left category, and subtracting their total from the sum of the percentages of the sentences in the right category (see Table 2). We focus purely on economic variables since these are the ones that prior theory considers to have greatest impact on class voting (Lipset 1954)<sup>4</sup>.

There are a number of ways in which these party positions can be summarized, and following previous research (Evans et al 1999....) we employ a simple measure of policy difference between the two main political groups, where the policy position of each bloc is calculated as the mean policy position of each of its' constituent members.

*Table 2. Additive index of Left-Right score on economic issues, from coding of manifesto sentences.*

<i>Right Emphases: Sum of sentences belonging to the following categories:</i>	<i>Left Emphasis: Sum of sentences belonging to the following categories:</i>
401 Free Enterprise	403 Market Regulation
402 Incentives	404 Economic Planning
407 Protectionism	406 Protectionism
414 Economic orthodoxy	412 Controlled Economy
	413 Nationalisation

A similar approach is used to describe the emphasis of religious issues, based on the two available items from the party manifesto data. The first refers to Positive Mentions of Traditional Morality (603) and the second refers to negative mentions (604). The measures are computed in the same way as above.

### *Party-organisation linkage*

To measure the linkage between social cleavage group organisations and political parties we use the MP study to examine the associational affiliations of the MPs in each party bloc. In order to

<sup>4</sup> For a full description of the variables used see Budge et al (2001).

operationalise the strength of the links between political parties and organisations we have computed two variables: whether MPs have held an official position in Trade Unions or in the Catholic Church affiliated organizations, such as parish councils or church sponsored cultural or leisure organisations. It is important to underline that, since Italy has a dual cleavage system based on religion and class, it is necessary to take into account how the organisational structure of the parties overlap along these different social dimensions. In this way it is possible to relate the structure of the choice at the party-organisational level to the characteristics of the chooser at the individual level, depending on the nature of their identity (i.e., whether voters are catholic middle class, secular middle class, catholic working class, secular working class).

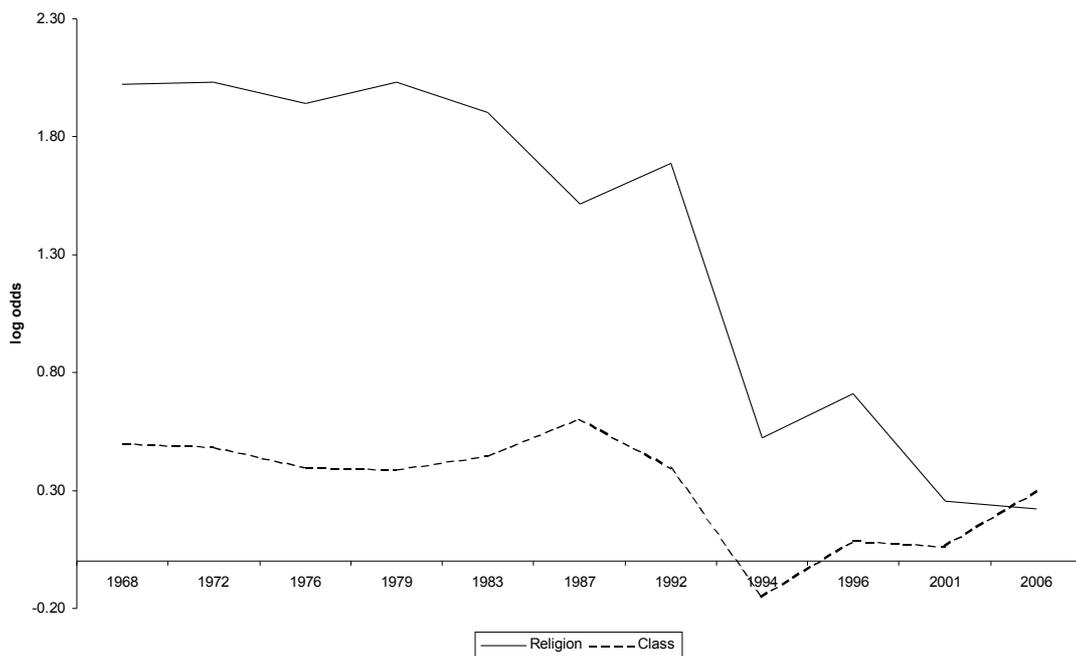
To this end we examine whether MPs are associated with the church or the unions or whether they have overlapping associational affiliations – that is whether they belong to both church and union organisations. The density of these associational involvements provides a measure of the level of segmentation between organisations and parties in each bloc.

## **Findings**

### *Voting behaviour over time*

We begin, in Figure 1, by reporting the trends in religious voting and class voting since the 1960s. In each year we use logistic regression with a binary-dependent variable contrasting vote for the centre-right DC-FI bloc (coded 1) and the left PCI-DS bloc (coded 0). The independent variables are class (coded 1 for middle class; 0 for working class) and religion (coded 1 for regular church-goer; 0 for irregular/never). A number of patterns are immediately evident. Firstly, there is a sudden rupture in the relationship between both religion and vote and class and vote in 1994 with the transition to the second republic, with the level of religious voting in 1994 very much lower than previously, and the level of class voting somewhat lower than previously. Secondly, since 1994 there has been an increase in the level of class voting, and in 2006 it is now at similar levels to the first republic. However, there has been no such re-constitution of the religious cleavage.

Figure 1. Social cleavages and vote choice (log odds of voting centre compared to left), 1963-2006



The sudden nature of the rupture in the relationship between social cleavages and votes makes us sceptical about modernisation thesis claims, since changes in the social characteristics of the electorate cannot explain the sudden change in the determinants of electoral choice that we observe. This suggests that the structure of the political alternatives is the driving force behind the observed pattern, and for this reason it is on these political explanations that we now focus.

### *Policy polarisation over time*

Figure 2 and 3 plot the policy positions of the left bloc and centre bloc over time on each of the policy dimensions. Two noteworthy trends appear. First, Left-right issues are consistently much more salient than religious-secular issues, as the absolute values of the indexes show<sup>5</sup>. Second, party distances over economic issues were small during the First republic (particularly from 1976-79 during the period of the historic compromise) because of the ideologically polarized nature of Italian party politics based on the West-East international divide<sup>6</sup>. Once this over, we observe an increased polarisation in Second republic on left-right issues. Third, there is not much change over time in religious-secular issues (with some convergence during the period of controversial legislation of abortion and divorce in the 1970s).

<sup>5</sup> The party block positions on Secular-Religious Index range between +/- 4, while those on the Economic index range between -10/+20. These values describe the different emphases that parties placed on the two issue dimensions.

<sup>6</sup> Bartolini and Mair (1991) show that parties' economic differences correlate inversely with their ideological polarization. See also Bellucci (2002).

Figure 2. Party bloc positions on left-right economic issues, 1963-2006

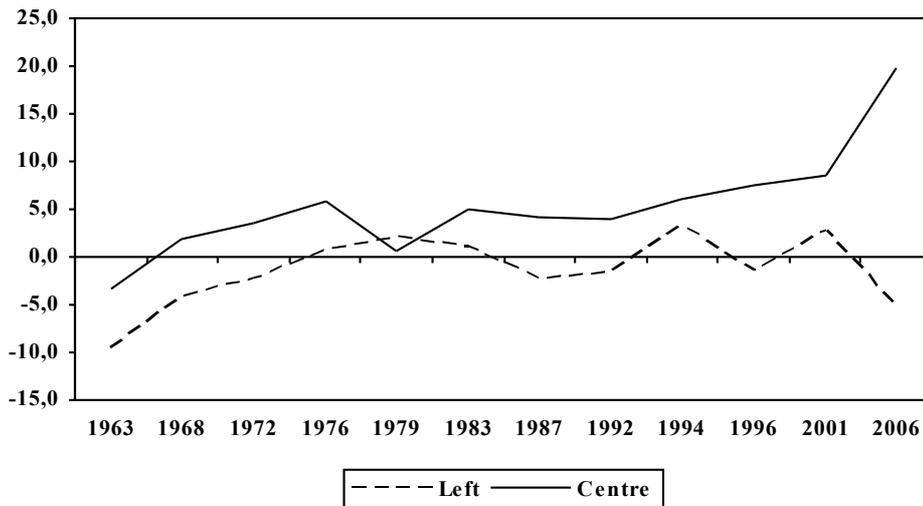
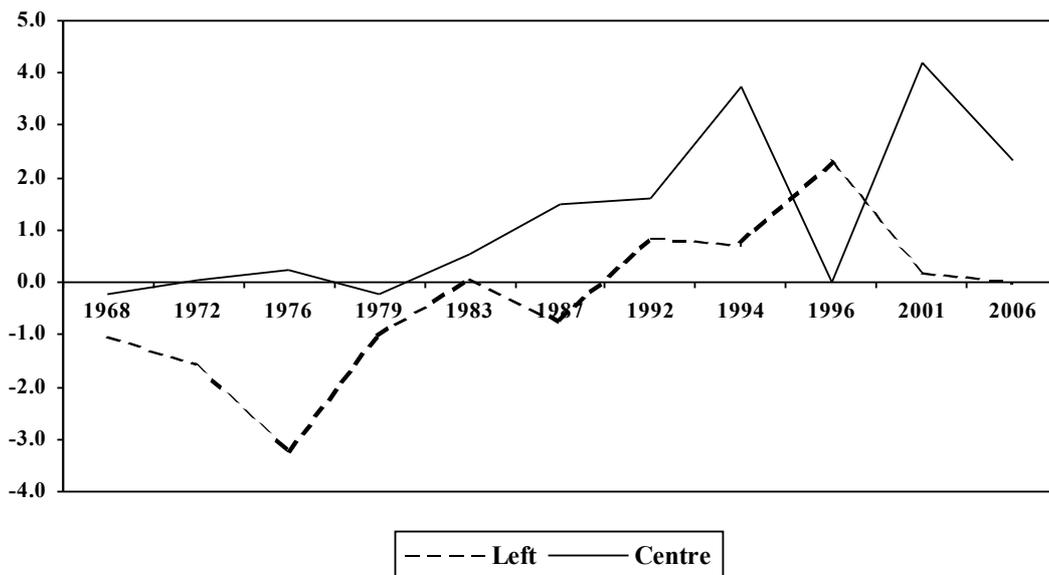


Figure 3. Party bloc positions on secular-religious issues, 1968-2006



Next we turn to examine the impact of these parties' mobilisation strategies on the politicisation of social cleavages.

#### *Class voting and policy polarisation*

Figure 4 depicts the trends over time for the association between class and vote compared to the policy difference between the two main blocs on economic Left-right issues. On first inspection there appears to be a relatively strong association between the two time trends, particularly within each republic. When the policy difference between the blocs decreases the level of class voting also

tends to decrease, and similarly when the policy difference between the parties increases the level of class voting also tends to increase. However there is one important exception to this trend, and the polarisation of the policy space is unable to account for the sharp decline in class voting in 1994, nor its historically low level thereafter. Over the entire period polarisation therefore is not significant.

Figure 4. Class voting and polarisation of left-right issues, 1963-2006

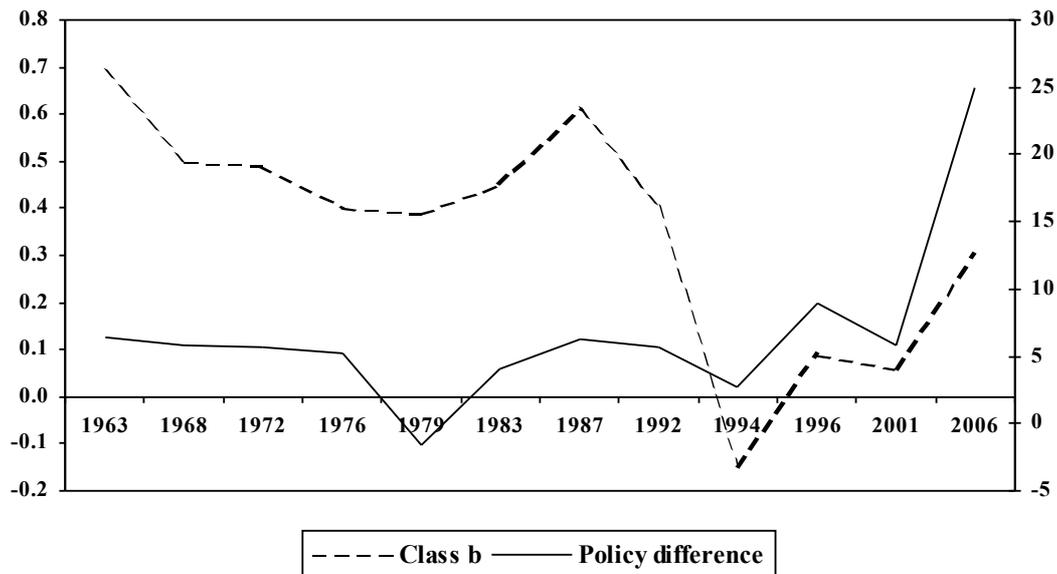


Table 2 formally tests the association by regressing the strength of the class coefficients on polarisation (measured as the difference between the positions of the party blocks on the Left-right dimension). From Model 1 we can see that policy polarisation is not significant for the entire time period. There is then evidence that parties' changing emphases do not explain the long-term trend of class voting. However, when we include a dummy for the transition to the second republic we can see (in Model 2) that policy polarisation explains variation within each republic - but just not the sudden rupture in class voting in 1994. Therefore in terms of explaining the sharp decline in class voting that we observe between 1992 and 1994 the policy difference between the parties is not able to shed much light on this process.

Table 2. Impact of policy difference on strength of class voting,  
OLS Regression

		<i>b.</i>	<i>s.e.</i>
Model 1	Constant	0.36	0.109
	Left-right difference	-0.00	0.012
Model 2	Constant	0.93	0.080
	Left-right difference	0.02**	0.005
	2 <sup>nd</sup> Republic	-0.52***	0.063

N=11

\* = significant at 0.05 level

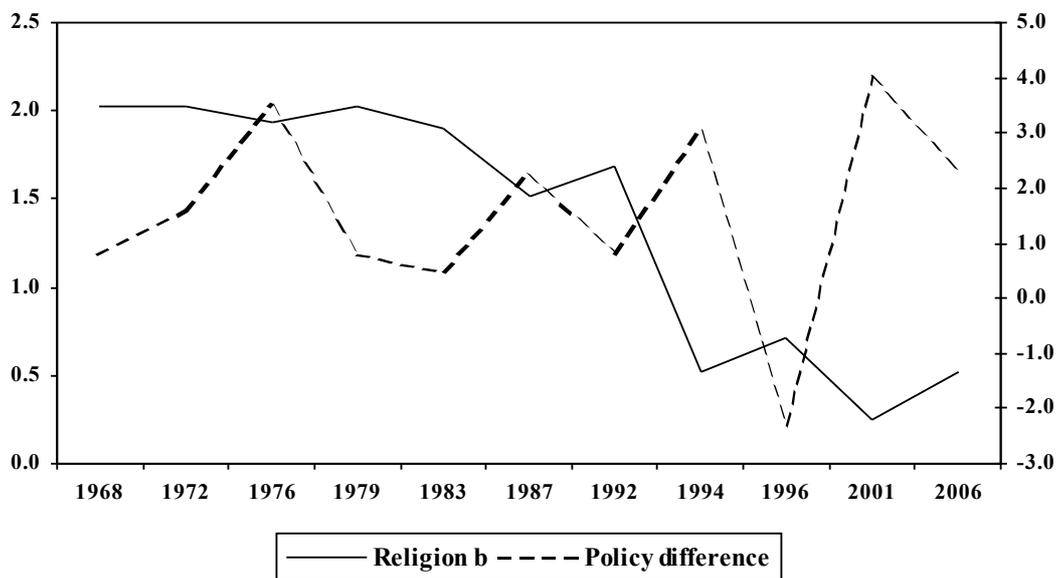
\*\* = 0.01

\*\*\* = 0.001

#### *Religious voting and policy polarisation*

Next we turn to inspect the relationship over time between religion and vote (church attendance) compared to the level of religious-secular policy polarisation. Figure 5 depicts the trends over time for the association between religiosity and vote compared to the policy difference between the two main blocs on religious-secular issues. There is very little sign of any correlation. But we must recall that, as we have already observed, the salience of religious issues in the party manifestos has tended to be very weak. Our expectation that the DC's move towards secularism during the late 1970s may have weakened religious voting is clearly not fulfilled, and despite this mobilisation the religious cleavage was in fact if anything slightly stronger during this period. Similarly, even though the policy difference on moral issues between the blocs was much the same in 1994 as it was in 1992 (even a little higher), there was a pronounced drop in religious voting. This is confirmed by the lack of statistical significance of the overall association between religious voting and religious polarisation (Pearson correlation = -0.22). And this holds also in the first republic and the second republic. Religious cleavage does not therefore appear to respond to political polarisation. It is neither able to explain residual variation or underlying level.

Figure 5. Religious voting and polarisation of religious issues, 1968-2006



So, although we find some evidence that policy polarisation influences the level of cleavage voting, there remain a number of important questions that previous approaches have been unable to answer. The dramatic decline in class and religious voting in 1994 can not be attributed to changes in the mobilisation strategies of the parties – both class and religious issues were expressed in the electoral arena to more or less the same level as previously, but none the less the level of cleavage voting sharply declined. Neither can this sudden decline be attributed to social change, since between 1992 and 1994 the social characteristics of the electorate are held more or less constant. Moreover, policy polarisation cannot explain why levels of religious voting have historically been much higher than class voting. This suggests that the variables that we have so far considered are missing a crucial part of the story.

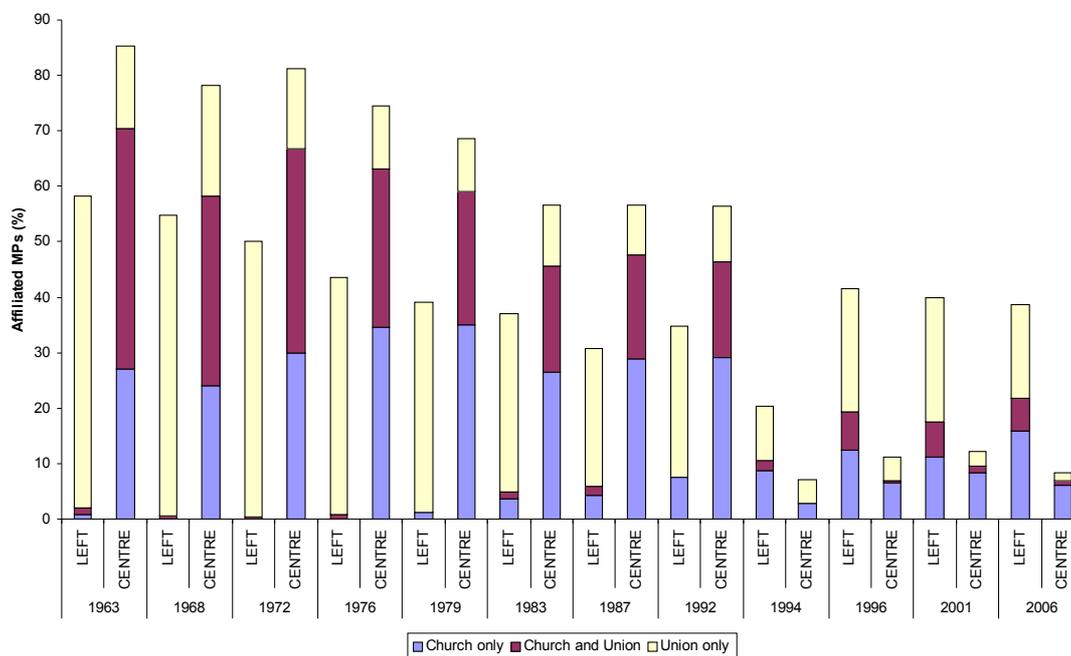
#### *Party associational linkages*

To shed light on this process we consider the organizational links between the political parties and their social constituents. This provides a measure of the long-standing links between associational organizations affiliated to the historical social cleavages on the one hand and the political parties which represent these groups on the other. This can be thought of as describing the ‘closure’ of the cleavage, and the level of party segmentation. Accordingly, the stronger the penetration of organized groups in the parties, the stronger voters perceive parties as committed to the representation of their social interests and the higher would cleavage voting be. The MP data provides a unique way of examining how these linkages have changed over time, and whether these

correlate with the strength of cleavages. We consider the proportion of MPs of the different party blocs holding membership in union or church associations or both. This dual cleavage system creates either cross-cutting pressures or re-inforcing pressures on different groups of voters depending upon the identities that they hold.

From Figure 6 we can clearly see that the level of church penetration in the centre has historically been very high. In 1963 71% of the MPs from the Centre had affiliation with the church, compared to just 1% from the Left. By contrast, levels of union penetration have been somewhat lower. In 1963, 55% of MPs in the left bloc had affiliation with the Unions, and in the centre bloc 58% had affiliation with Unions. However, even though there is relatively high levels of union penetration in both the centre bloc and left bloc in the 1960s, there is considerable overlap between the union penetration and church penetration in the centre – that is MPs who hold dual affiliations (see Figure 6). We might reasonably expect the patterns of these overlaps to have different impact on different types of voters. So whereas secular working class might be more drawn to Union penetration that is isolated from the church, the catholic working class might be more drawn to the union penetration that overlaps with the church.

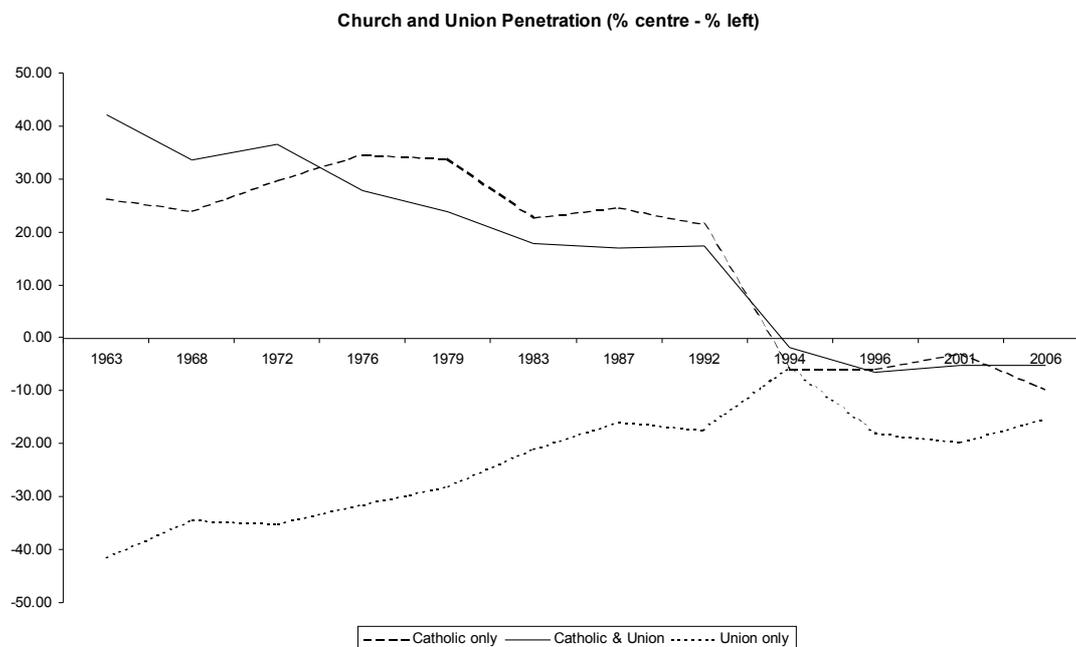
Figure 6. MPs associated to social cleavage group organisation 1963-2006



Conceptualising the structure of penetration in this way, we can now consider how the structure of alternatives has changed over time. Figure 7 plots the difference in levels of penetration between the left bloc and the centre according to the different types of cleavage associations that their MPs belong to (e.g. church only, church and union, union only). Positive values indicate that

there are higher levels of penetration in the centre, negative values indicate higher levels of penetration in the left.

*Figure 7. Differences in MPs associated to social cleavage group organisation 1963-2006  
(% MPs Centre - % MPs Left)*

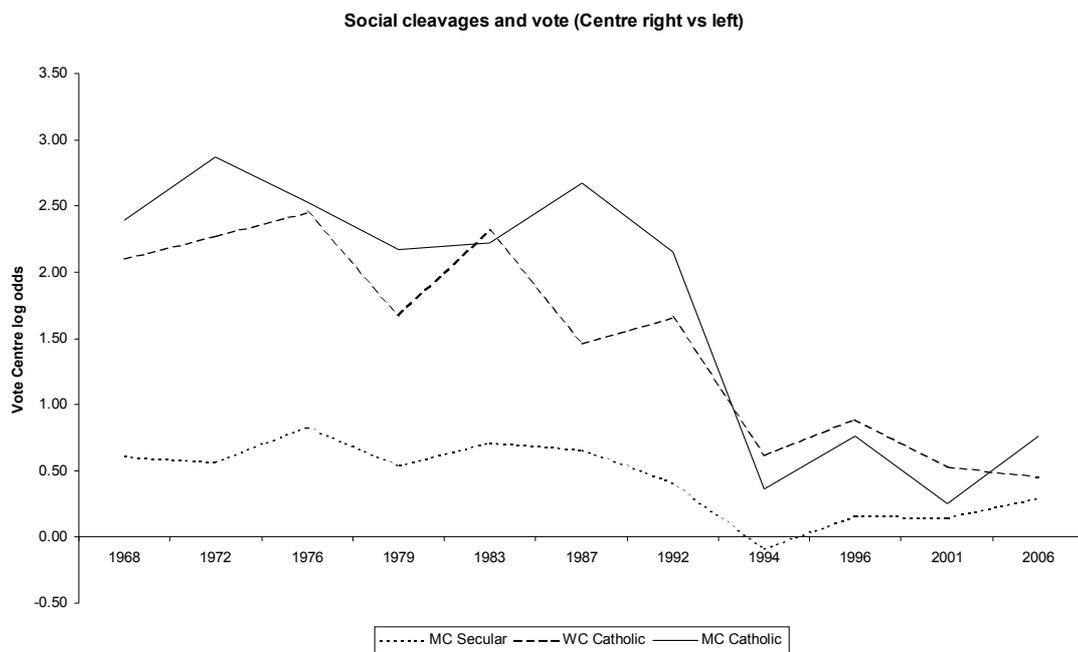


From the transition to the second republic we see a clear change in the organisational base of the political parties. In 1994 there is a sharp drop in the catholic only penetration and combined catholic and union penetration in the centre, and also a sharp drop in the union penetration in the left. Whereas the old DC bloc was characterised by close ties with the church, and to a lesser extent the unions, the Forza Italia bloc that emerged in its wake does not have this organisational base. It is made up of businessmen and professionals who do not have these links with organised society. Post 1994 we see a strengthening of the union only penetration in the left (but still at somewhat lower levels than the historical average of the first republic). But we also see a collapse of the catholic only and catholic\_union penetration on the centre, and it has in fact switched sides so there is now higher penetration on the left (but at very low levels).

In order to differentiate between the cross-cutting and reinforcing pressures that voters face, we need to consider the multiple identities that voters hold. So rather than considering two binary variables for class and religion we now consider their joint distribution and have one variable with four categories – 1) secular working class 2) secular middle class 3) catholic working class 4) catholic middle class (with working class secular as the reference category).

Our expectation for secular middle class voters (vs secular working class voters as the base category) is that in line with trends over time in the distribution of union penetration in the parties, the log odds of voting centre/right will drop in 1994 but then pick up again. Similarly with the rapid decline of church penetration in the centre in 1994 we would also expect to see a substantial decline in the log odds of religious (both middle class and working class) voting centre, and also maybe a convergence between the classes (i.e. middle class secular and middle class catholic, and working class secular and working class catholic) as close links with religious organization ceases to be such an important dividing line between the parties.

*Figure 8. Social cleavages and vote choice, 1963-2006*  
*(log odds of voting centre compared to left of Middle Class Secular,*  
*Middle Class Catholic, Working Class Catholic vs Working Class Secular)*



This is almost exactly what we observe in Figure 8. Moreover, it shows also that there are not very big class differences between practicing catholics (as we had hypothesized) but somewhat large class differences between secular voters.

A preliminary test of the overtime association between the party segmentation and voting show encouraging results. In all three cases the correlation coefficients between the parties' differences in organization penetration are significant and in the expected direction, as it appears below:

Middle class secular and Union only penetration,  $R = 0.70$

Working class catholic and Catholic\_Union penetration,  $R = 0.92$

Middle class catholic and Catholic only penetration,  $R = 0.94$

We can conclude that party-organization linkages not only condition the relative strength of different cleavages, but also accurately predicts the trend over time, particularly the drop in 1994.

### *Interaction effect*

As we have already seen, the party-association linkage has undergone a major transformation overtime in Italy. This not only conditions the overall extent of cleavage voting that we observe, but also conditions the impact of party mobilisation strategies (policy polarisation) depending upon the voters' location in the dual cleavage system. According to the consistency theory, we hypothesise that the structure of alternatives in the party-association linkages creates reinforcing pressures for some voters, such as Catholic Middle class and Secular Working class, but also cross-cutting pressures for others, such as Secular Middle class and, to a lesser extent, Catholic Working Class. We expect voters who are exposed to reinforcing pressures to be more responsive to policy platforms that are mutually consistent, than voters who are exposed to cross-cutting pressures. Left penetration by unions and Centre penetration by religious organisations coupled by issue mobilization signal voters a clear interests' representation, while joint union and religious party penetration attenuate voters' response to issue mobilization due to possible cognitive dissonance originating from contrasting allegiances.

We can test these associations more formally by regressing the strength of the cleavage voting on the party bloc difference in penetration and policy polarization for each of our three contrasts (middle class secular vs working class secular; working class catholic vs working class secular; middle class catholic vs working class secular). The expectation is the impact of policy polarization will be stronger when voters face reinforcing pressures (middle class catholic vs working class secular).

We can estimate these models in a number of ways but we are somewhat restricted by the number of time points that we have. Therefore we cannot overload the models by simultaneously including too many independent variables. Ideally we would like to control for all penetration variables simultaneously, but because of the problem of multicollinearity we therefore focus on the theoretically most important variables.

First we consider the strength of the secular class cleavage – that is the log odds of the secular middle class voting center compared to the secular working class (reference category)(see Table 3). In order to discriminate between secular voters the relevant organization linkage is union only penetration (both secular working class and secular middle class react in the same way against church penetration but may be expected to have different responses to union penetration).

*Table 3. Cross-cutting pressures: Middle class secular vs Secular working class, OLS Regression*

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error			
(Constant)	-.015	.215		-.072	.945
Union_ only penetration	.021	.008	.692	2.659	.029
LR diff	-.001	.011	-.027	-.105	.919

Dependent Variable: b Middle Class Secular  
Adjusted R2 - 0.360

Union only party-association linkage exerts a significant effect, while policy polarization is not significant. This finding confirms our expectation since secular middle class voters face cross-cutting pressures from their location in the dual cleavage system. So even if Center parties' moving to the right might appeal to the secular middle class, they faces resistance because of these voters' aversion to religious association penetration in the parties.

Next we consider the strength of the religious cleavage controlling for class – that is the log odds of the catholic working class voting center compared to the secular working class (reference category) (see Table 4). In this instance the relevant organization linkage is church-union penetration (this linkage is the decider for the catholic working class who are otherwise cross-pressured – drawn to religious penetration on center and union penetration on left).

Table 4. Cross-cutting pressures: Working class catholic vs Secular Working class,  
*OLS Regression*

Model 1	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	.944	.215		4.402	.002
Catholic and union penetration	.042	.007	.893	5.732	.000
LR diff	-.006	.018	-.055	-.351	.735

Dependent Variable: b Working Class Catholic

Adjusted R2 – 0.804 (if we alternatively include the Catholic only penetration the Adj. R2 lowers to 0.784 and Left-Right mobilization is wrongly signed)

The Catholic working class are slightly cross-pressured, but less so than the secular middle class. Nevertheless we observe a stronger effect of penetration and although policy polarization is not significant, it is in the expected direction. This model provides a better fit to the data than an alternative specification which includes catholic only penetration.

Finally we consider the case of reinforcing pressures, by examining the log odds of the catholic middle class voting center compared to the secular working class (reference category) (Table 4). In this instance the relevant organization linkage is church penetration since this is the dominant cleavage. (we could include union only penetration as well but we are a bit restricted by the number of cases, and if we do so it does not improve the fit to the data).

Table 4. Re-inforcing cleavages: Middle class catholic vs Secular Working class,  
OLS Regression

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	
	B	Std. Error	Beta	
(Constant)	.535	.210		2.549 .034
Catholic penetration	.062	.007	1.085	9.418 .000
LR diff	.040	.017	.269	2.339 .048

Dependent Variable: b Middle Class Catholic

Adjusted R2 - 0.908 (If we alternatively include the Catholic and Union penetration the Adj. R2 lowers to 0.831, and it lowers further 0.356 if we include Union only penetration)

Findings are fully in line with our expectations. The coefficient for Catholic penetration is significant and its magnitude strong. Also polarization is significant and in the expected direction. This means that the likelihood of a middle class catholic voter to cast a ballot for the Centre rather than for the Left (compared to that of a secular working class voter) increases the stronger the association between Centre parties and catholic organizations is. The same voter is also responsive to parties' polarization on Economic Left-Right issues: the more parties diverge and emphasize class issues, the higher the level of cleavage voting. So for voters who are exposed to the impact of reinforcing cleavages we see that the extent of cleavage voting depends both on the societal links of the parties and on their mobilising strategies.

Our main conclusion is that the declining trend of cleavage voting is explained by parties' links with cleavage organized groups. Cross-pressured voters respond to the societal segmentation of their parties, and the decline of cleavage voting depends primarily on the diminishing capacity of secondary organization to be represented in the party elite. For cleavage reinforcing voters, this process is supplemented by their greater response to parties' mobilising strategies, whose impact is stronger among these voters because of the greater consistency between voter's allegiances and parties' policy movements<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> We speculate that while cross-pressured voters are somehow 'trapped' in their dual belonging and with more difficulties are able to receive and interpret party messages, cleavage reinforced ones face an easier task, and therefore constitute an electoral target more sensitive and responsive to parties' mobilising efforts.

## **Conclusion**

Previous research on the decline of social cleavages has tended to emphasize two main factors – social change within the electorate, and political change in terms of the mobilising strategies of parties to alter the salience of cleavage-related issues. We have argued that neither of these factors is able to adequately explain the dynamics of cleavage voting in Italy (and we would argue elsewhere as well) without taking into account a third factor which conditions the relationship between mobilization and cleavage voting: the linkage between parties and secondary societal organizations, a factor capable to reinforce group identity and interest representation and a key element in the notion of cleavage.

Our research shows that the ups and downs of cleavage voting in Italy cannot be attributed to societal change or to direct party programmatic polarization. As to the first, the sharp drop in the early 90s in class and religious voting happened during too short a period for any societal change to take place. As to the second, while there is evidence of the class cleavage responding to party polarization, this is lacking in the case of religion voting. By introducing party segmentation – the interlocking of parties and cleavage specific social organizations - as an explanatory variable we are able to account for trends of cleavage voting. Moreover, by modeling the Italian dual cleavage systems in terms of cross-cutting and reinforcing pressures upon voters we find supportive evidence – according to consistency theory – that the menu of choice voters face can account for their responsiveness to parties' mobilizing strategies.

We would finally further argue, moving to some forecasting, that in Italy, and elsewhere in Europe, the erosion of cleavage voting (both religious and class based) is neither a forced scenario (driven by societal change) nor a process immune to changes in the role parties play in the political and social environments.

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