

# Political Patronage, Bureaucracy and Corruption in Postwar Italy<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between the legislature and the public administration in postwar Italy (understood as the period from about 1948 through 1994). Italian public administration is normally characterized as poorly designed and inefficient. A principal-agent framework would lead one to believe that political control of the bureaucracy was inadequate in Italy, and that extensive bureaucratic slippage must have existed. Drawing on an alternative model originally elaborated to study bureaucratic inefficiency in the United States, I argue instead that Italian legislators exercised adequate control over the bureaucracy, and that the characteristics of the system to elicit such severe public disapprobation were effects of practices — especially the extensive use of political patronage — that had been deliberately designed to enhance the reelection opportunities of parliamentary incumbents. I interpret political patronage as the individuization of benefits that are usually allocated collectively. I also discuss why bureaucratic inefficiency led to widespread political corruption in Italy, whereas it did not in the US. Finally, I speculate on how entrenched systems of political patronage and corruption can be overturned.

“For a country as prosperous as Italy,” reports a standard textbook on contemporary Italian politics, “the resulting quality of public services — education, health, social security, justice, transport — is exceptionally low” (Hine 1993, p. 255). Not surprisingly, public dissatisfaction with the national bureaucracy has traditionally run high in Italy, much higher than in other western European countries. Why has postwar Italian public administration performed so badly?

The dominant contemporary approach to understanding public administration is grounded in a principal-agent framework. This view contends that legislators seek to achieve policy goals, but that bureaucrats, given their greater access to specialized policy information, may not faithfully execute the goals of their principals. The perspective extends and builds on Max Weber’s original insight that the specialized expertise of bureaucrats pits them against the democratic ethos of the elected politician.

According to this view, if the behavior of those who work in the public administration fails to conform to the interests of their ultimate principal — the electorate — it must be because legislators have been hoodwinked by their bureaucratic agents. Bureaucratic slippage is endemic, but the job of the elected official is that of tinkering with the design of institutions so as to limit this slippage. While it may never be possible to eradicate it entirely, and the interests of bureaucrats and politicians may therefore require constant realignment, in a modern democratic setting persistent, massive bureaucratic indifference to the expressed desires of a majority of the electorate is largely inexplicable using a principal-agent framework. Instead, the strengths of this approach lie with its attention to the subtle ways in which legislators use “structure and process” (McCubbins, Noll, and Weingast 1987; McCubbins, Noll, and Weingast 1989) to shape bureaucratic behavior and outputs, even without directly intervening in or overseeing the daily operations of agencies.

This formulation contends that even ostensibly “independent” bureaucratic structures in fact largely execute the policy intentions of their principals. A particularly telling example is offered by Japan, whose bureaucracy is usually seen as highly autonomous of political interference. A principal-agent approach has been effectively used (Ramseyer and Rosenbluth 1993) to counter the standard interpretation of the Japanese bureaucracy as independent of elected officials in the formulation of public policy.

Such an approach has little to say about chronically “bad” bureaucracy;

bureaucracy, that is, that conspicuously fails to conform to the legislative intentions of elected officials or that massively undermines the public interest. In the hands of a clever analyst, a standard principal-agent approach could undoubtedly be modified to study such situations, but the fit is neither intuitive nor natural. Precisely because the positive political theory of bureaucracy was developed to counter older arguments that the US bureaucracy was out of control and that it substantially and regularly deviated from the goals set by elected officials (Lowi 1969; Niskanen 1971), it is awkward to adapt a principal-agent perspective to such situations. To analyze them, it may be better simply to begin with an alternative perspective.

That is what I do in what follows. I draw on a different underlying model of the interactions between voters, legislators and bureaucrats, one that naturally generates the result of excessive, or inefficient bureaucracy. Interestingly, this alternative, like the “structure and process” argument, was also developed with the US in mind. Unlike the “structure and process” argument, however, it displays a nice fit with settings that exhibit what for convenience I shall call “bad government.” I use this framework to reinterpret some characteristics of postwar Italian public administration.

I proceed in four basic steps. First, I present a verbal summary of a model of bad government. Second, I use this to gain analytic leverage over characteristics of the Italian bureaucracy and its relations with the legislature in the postwar period. I detail how civil service regulations were regularly evaded in order to construct a public bureaucracy in which appointments were based on partisan patronage rather than professional expertise. Third, I discuss why in Italy bad government generated widespread political corruption whereas bureaucratic inefficiency in the United States (and indeed in most comparable settings) does not. Finally, I speculate on how systems of persistent political corruption end, and I discuss implications for comparative research.

In the course of the presentation, the paper makes seven major claims. Briefly summarized, these are as follows:

1. Political patronage is a form of constituency service that serves the electoral needs of incumbent politicians;
2. Political patronage may be conceptualized as the individuization and personalization of what are elsewhere packaged as pork barrel allocations. Pork barrel allocations involve targeting collective benefits to a

specific electoral district. Political patronage involves the individuated delivery of the same benefit to specific, named clientele;

3. Political patronage and political corruption should be analyzed as different games, distinguished in the first instance by the relevant actors involved. Systems of political patronage involve legislators, bureaucrats, and voters whereas systems of political corruption involve legislators, bureaucrats and businesses, who are the actors paying the bribes;
4. The patronage game is a self-enforcing equilibrium;
5. Widespread political corruption can therefore emerge out of a patronage system only when some exogenous factor causes a change in the payoffs, affecting at least one of the following three:
  - (a) the extent to which businesses are willing to pay bribes as part of the cost of doing business with the public sector;
  - (b) the extent to which politicians have incentives to seek additional, illegal financial resources;
  - (c) the extent to which politicians enjoy a large collective incumbency advantage and do not fear exposure by a credible political rival;
6. It therefore follows that systems of systemic political corruption will collapse if businesses stop being willing to pay bribes;
7. Businesses will stop being willing when international economic competition changes the incentives facing them so that they can no longer afford to pay the excessive “taxes” represented by bribery.

In the current version of the paper, these arguments are explored but not modeled formally. Much of the relevant modeling would be either derivative or obvious; future work may model aspects of the problem that specifically require it. The main goal of the present study is to make conceptual headway, and in particular to offer a series of analytic distinctions that I do not believe have been presented in earlier studies.

# 1 How to Model Bad Government

I begin with a well-known model of voters, bureaucrats and legislators (Fiorina and Noll 1978a). Rather than reproduce the model here, I report some of its essential features (also summarized in (Fiorina and Noll 1978b)).

In this model, there are three actors: voters, legislators, and administrative agents. The electorate is divided into single-member electoral districts, and voters seek to maximize utility. Legislators seek to maximize the probability of reelection, and bureaucrats seek to maximize the size of their agencies.

The utility of voters can be affected in multiple ways. Legislators enact programs, which have effects on voters. Second, legislation may redistribute income. Third, policy implementation may involve citizens in unpleasant interactions with the public administration, especially as public programs become complex.

Legislators in turn engage in two types of activities. Collectively, they pass bills. Individually, however, they also provide quasi-monopolistic “facilitation” services to constituents from their electoral districts. These services involve assigning staff members to help citizens deal with the bureaucracy, with which voters increasingly come into contact as government services expand. At the same time, the bureaucracy itself can help (or hinder) legislators in their facilitation activities, by providing information easily (or reluctantly) to citizens, and by playing its part in justifying the allocation of distributive (“pork barrel”) policies to the district.

Although each actor is driven by rational and entirely understandable self-interest, the aggregate results are far from innocuous. Fiorina and Noll summarize them this way:

One consequence of the preceding argument is that legislators and bureaucrats have an incentive to produce government services in an excessively bureaucratized manner. To do so raises the demand for facilitation services. The electoral process does not check this tendency because voters face a prisoner’s dilemma in choosing among candidates. If voters disapprove of excessive bureaucratization, electing a legislator who attacks bureaucratic inefficiency will be unlikely to alter the outcome of a majority-rule legislature, but will produce a less effective facilitator.

As the public bureaucracy grows larger, the importance of the performance of facilitation will grow, and a legislator who is a good facilitator will be increasingly likely to be reelected (1978a, p. 257).

The model predicts an all-too-familiar world in which the pursuit of individual self-interest leads to a socially suboptimal outcome. Legislators come increasingly to devote resources to helping citizens negotiate the bureaucracy that the legislature itself has created, while at the same time attention to matters of general and national (rather than district-specific) public policy evaporates.

This produces “bad government” in at least two distinct but interconnected ways. First, legislators have an interest in generating excessive bureaucracy rather than acting to rein in expansionary ambitions on the part of agencies; second, voters act to reward rather than punish this behavior. As a result, not only do elected officials do the wrong thing, but the numbers of those doing the wrong thing grows over time. In fact, legislators who whether deliberately or inadvertently neglect ombudsman services are less likely to be reelected than those who devote considerable resources to such activities. Voters, because they are divided among electoral districts, are unable to rise up and “throw the rascals out.” Although collectively they may disapprove of the extent to which resources are devoted to bureaucratization, constituents in each district have an interest in retaining an experienced and able representative to deal effectively with the bureaucracy. This gives rise to an incumbency advantage, undermining the accountability that electoral competition should guarantee.

This model was devised to understand characteristics of the American political system that were evident in the 1970s, including the incumbency advantage apparently enjoyed by the Democrats, the proliferation of government services and bureaucratic interventions, and the increasing provision of direct services to constituents by congressional staff in helping the former manage interactions with the federal bureaucracy. The empirical characteristics are detailed in (Fiorina 1989).

Fiorina and Noll believe that their model is mainly applicable to settings whose electoral systems are characterized by single-member districts, because claiming credit for the provision of facilitation services depends on the near-monopoly control of such services that single member representation ensures

(Fiorina and Noll 1978a, p. 253). In fact, however, the model can useful be applied even in systems of multimember proportional representation (PR), given that some mechanism exists allowing voters to designate individual candidates on the electoral lists, and assuming that legislators are able to devise ways to claim individual credit for the facilitation services they provide. As a subsequent comparative study reports, where these institutional modifications to a PR system exist, they generate outcomes not unlike those observed in the United States (Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina 1987, ch. 9).

In Italy, the designation of individual candidates by voters was provided by the system of preference voting that obtained after World War II until the 1994 parliamentary elections. The provision of services by politicians to individual constituents was provided by the system of political patronage that legislators constructed. The ability of individual politicians to claim credit for such services was provided by the factional organization that characterized the ruling party, Italian Christian Democracy (DC).<sup>1</sup> Below, I reinterpret the provision of “facilitation” services as the provision of political patronage, and in particular the provision of jobs in the public bureaucracy itself.

## 2 Bad Government in Italy

Two essential features of the model just sketched are that voters designate individual candidates and that legislators provide specific benefits — both pork barrel allocations and individual services — to constituents in their districts. Third, the provision of these facilitation services improves with legislative experience. Finally, voters must be able to trace the provision of such services directly to the individual politician who secured them. In principle, none of these characteristics obtain in a strict party list system of proportional representation combined with parliamentary government. In such settings, the locus of political representation comes from nationally organized parties rather than geographically specified electoral districts that are represented by individual politicians. In fact, however, all four of these features, characteris-

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<sup>1</sup>For reasons of space, I will not discuss factionalism in the DC in what follows. In Italy, factions were the real political actors, not individual legislators. I treat factions, which were complex aggregations of actors, both local and national, simply as individual legislators. This formulation is unlikely to affect the analysis. For a related discussion of the importance of factionalism, see (Golden and Chang 2000).



tically associated with single-member districts, may obtain with apparently minor institutional modifications of PR and parliamentary government.

In a closed party list system of proportional representation, in which electors vote solely for a political party, and the party itself exercises control over which candidates are seated in parliament, voters are not able to reward and punish individual candidates for public office. Hence, legislators have few incentives to cultivate a personal following. However, many party list systems provide some way for electors to designate those specific individuals whom they wish to represent them in the legislature (Katz 1986). In Italy, until 1994, in addition to specifying a party, voters were allowed to choose up to three (or in larger districts four) individual candidates from off the party list by giving them their preference votes.<sup>2</sup> Voters were not required to use their preference votes, and usually most seem not to have. But they enjoyed the option of using all or some. In the 1970s, for instance, about a third of all possible preference votes were cast (Katz and Bardi 1980, p. 99).

Because the allocation of parliamentary seats to individual candidates depended strictly on the number of preference votes each collected, the system of preference voting provided an incentive for individual legislators to seek to claim credit for specific allocations to their districts, and to otherwise construct an individual political identity. Such allocations served to advertise the legislator's abilities, thereby protecting and enlarging his pool of preference votes. The preference vote system thus introduced a strong element of personalism into a political system in which parties, and party lists, otherwise dominated.

But how could politicians, once elected, actually provide specific services to their districts, and how could they get credit from voters for having done so? Two mechanisms were available for the provision of specific services: 1) pork barrel legislation and 2) political patronage.

First, legislators could take advantage of the Italian parliament's unusually strong committee system to elaborate district-specific allocative legislation. The committee system, and the resulting proliferation of precisely targeted allocative legislation, have been carefully studied (Di Palma 1977). Italy's committee system has been classed as the democratic world's strongest next to that of the United States (Di Palma 1977, p. 189n10). One of its unique characteristics, which strongly encouraged pork barrel allocations,

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<sup>2</sup>The number of preference votes was dropped to one in 1992.

was the assignment by the house chair of legislation to committee for final passage. That is, legislation could be referred to committee and never need return to the full floor for a final vote. This dampened partisan political conflict. Given the highly polarized nature of Italy's party system, legislation that came to the full floor was typically enmeshed in ideological controversy. Conversely, legislation that remained in committee, out of public view, was normally passed by large majorities, which acted as if the legislation was politically uncontroversial (Di Palma 1977, p. 55). Most legislation, as a result, was passed by committee (Di Palma 1977, p. 63).

A second characteristic of Italian parliamentary rules that encouraged specific allocations was that individual legislators had untrammelled authority to introduce private member's bills into parliament. While most of these failed to secure passage, a somewhat surprisingly proportion did pass, mainly those emanating from DC members of Parliament (Di Palma 1977, p. 41). And most of these were never debated on the full floor, but passed in committee.

These two factors — the strong committee system and the ability of individual MPs to write bills — interacted to engender the proliferation of what Giuseppe Di Palma classed as sectional and microsectional legislation (known in Italian as *leggini*). This legislation is what in the US is normally labeled pork barrel legislation. In Italy, such legislation was usually introduced by the government, referred to committee, and successfully enacted there. One reason pork barrel allocations appear so extensive in postwar Italy is because, whereas the US committee system encouraged the amendment of existing bills, thereby generating omnibus legislation, in Italy, by contrast, pork barrel allocations were typically made through single pieces of legislation. Hence, the Italian political system has often been classed as generating an unusually high number of bills, most of which concern minute, highly sectional allocations. But whether the extent of pork barrel legislative activity was actually greater in Italy than in other political systems, such as that of the United States, which rolled the pork into massive omnibus pieces of legislation, or whether such an interpretation rests largely on the different accounting rules used (*leggini* versus omnibus legislation) is an open question.

The introduction and passage of pork barrel allocations was a method that was not fully satisfactory for individual credit claiming. Of course, individual legislators could report to interested constituents that they had successfully introduced and then steered through parliament the legislation

that stood behind the construction of a new road, the installation of a power plant, or the introduction of indoor running water. Indeed, the government helped its deputies do just that, by firing off a ministerial telegram to the district announcing each new public works project — and identifying the individual legislator responsible (reported in (Tarrow 1967, p. 331). But since legislation had to be passed collectively, credit naturally had to be shared. Incentives thus existed for additional activities that would allow individual MPs to claim credit in order to enhance their prospects for obtaining preference votes, thereby gaining reelection.

The principal mechanism that legislators developed over the postwar period to provide specific services to their districts was Italy’s system of patronage appointments to the public administration. This technique was used especially in the South, where the absence of traditional collective and class identities made the “individualistic mobilization” of voters, as Alessandro Pizzorno (1964) labeled it, especially viable.<sup>3</sup> It entailed local political machines that individual legislators and their factions controlled making appointments to the public administration on the basis of partisan and factional loyalties, circumventing civil service regulations. Since some aspects of this system are not commonly known, I detail them.

## 2.1 Patronage Appointments: Jobs as Constituency Service

The provision of job in an economy in which employment opportunities were inadequate was a direct service to a constituent and his (extended) family. Moreover, if done properly — especially if done through the personal *raccomandazione* of the patron — the allocation could effectively bind the constituent to the patron. The *raccomandazione* allowed the patron to successfully claim credit for having provided the job. Thus, in Italy public service was allocated to those who “have relatively few other options for employment but the state” (Hine 1993, p. 238). This was a perfect mechanism for the individuation of credit claiming by politicians, while job provision was a service that was genuinely welcomed and deeply valued in an economy

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<sup>3</sup>Pizzorno used the term to refer to the growth of mass market consumer capitalism in postwar Europe, but it is perhaps not entirely inappropriate to include the Americanization (or individualization) of politics as well.

marked by deep pockets of underdevelopment.

Jobs can be provided as a collective good, by manipulating the macroeconomy to generate employment, for instance, or by enacting social legislation that expands public sector employment. The incentives emanating from Italy's electoral system militated against the provision of employment as a collective good, however, and for the provision of it as a series of individual benefits instead. Jobs can be provided as an individual benefit if each allocation is perceived by the recipient as a personal allocation, almost a kind of favor.

The DC did not begin its postwar rule destined to become a party of mass political patronage. But after the party's electoral decline in 1953, when its share of the vote slipped from the 48.5 percent it had won in 1948 to 40.1 percent, the DC as a whole was under pressure to improve its electoral showing. Individual legislators had incentives for the party to do so in ways that were compatible with their own needs to retain preference votes, that is, to individuate their services. The massive system of political patronage that the leaders of the DC constructed after 1953 was their aggregate answer to the problem of providing constituency service and claiming individual credit; to enlarging the party's aggregate vote share while protecting the incumbency advantage of individual legislators.

Here is a one description of the uses of political patronage by a local DC party boss in a Southern Italian town in the 1950s:

From 1954 to 1959 he [Rota, the local party boss] was ... town councillor in charge of public works and urban planning ...

A second crucial resource was also available to Rota for political patronage. At the beginning of the fifties three of four tobacco factories of the town were bought by a state-controlled agency. The party boss ... knew most of the directors of the factories and it was therefore easy for him to influence the placement policy of the industry; he claims that between 1954 and 1959 he placed more than 600 workers in these factories.

Rota could finally have recourse to a third fundamental resource, namely his Rome party connections. ... He claims, for instance, that he obtained the funds for a new elementary school directly from Mr. Emilio Columbo [one of the DC's national leaders]. In

general, his connections allowed him to intervene in all sorts of informal arrangements whereby local people could obtain through his mediation the intervention of powerful political figures in Rome for the solution of their personal problems.

The party boss used this resources to buy votes. ... [H]e was a politician who had to build electoral backing in an increasingly competitive political setting (Graziano 1977, p. 370).

Rota's strategy resulted in his successful win of the mayoralty in 1959 and, because such practices occurred throughout hundreds of localities in the South, in the transformation of the DC into a party of mass patronage, as it was commonly called. Especially useful for supplying patronage was the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno, a central government parastatal agency established with the ostensible goal of helping develop the South's lagging economy. The systematic use of patronage throughout much of the Italian South beginning in the 1950s and continuing thereafter paid off. In the elections of 1963, when the DC's share of the national vote slipped to 38 percent, the losses were concentrated in the North, while in the South the DC won 42 percent, for instance (reported in (Tarrow 1967, p. 315).

Note that the Rota example exhibits an interplay of all possible types of district-specific constituency service: collective pork barrel allocations (in this case, a school) and individual allocations of public sector jobs as well as help negotiating the national bureaucracy. There are, however, some important differences between the provision of patronage and the provision of the kind of ombudsman facilitation services that (Fiorina 1989), (Fiorina and Noll 1978a; Fiorina and Noll 1978b), and (Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina 1987) identify. The latter involves helping constituents negotiate the national government's bureaucracy, especially when it fails to perform in an appropriate and timely fashion. Facilitation services are politically neutral and nonpartisan, even if they are aimed at enlarging the incumbent's electoral advantage. As the example used above suggests, in postwar Italy the complexity of national administration allowed legislators and the local factions they controlled to perform facilitation services.

Political patronage, by contrast, is overtly partisan. It is typically offered exclusively to known or potential party loyalists, and it explicitly functions as one side of an exchange of public resources for votes. Usually when it is

distributed, it is explicitly identified not as a government resource (which it is) but as a party resource.

There are also differences in the types of benefits allocated through patronage and through constituency service. Patronage may be conceptualized as the individuization and personalization of pork barrel allocations. Whereas the typical pork barrel allocation involves the distribution of a collective benefit — the construction of a factory, for instance, that will offer employment, or the construction of a road, a school, or a harbor — targeted to a specific electoral district, political patronage involves the distribution of the same benefit but in an individuated fashion. Instead of a factory that enlarges employment opportunities, patronage offers a job to a specific individual; instead of a road improving transportation, it offers rides to the polls to party members; instead of a school, it offers a party member's teenage son entry to a specific educational establishment; instead of a harbor whose ships all firms can use for moving their goods elsewhere, it gives only some firms authorization to export goods. One observer reports:

Andreotti [an important DC politician] is said to organize summer camps for children of his constituency with secret funds from the Defense Ministry budget, while Sullo [another DC politician] has used his position as Minister of Public Works to put thousands of his *followers* to work on government projects (Tarrow 1967, p. 321, emphasis added).

In a patronage system, pork barrel allocations, which although targeted at specific electoral constituencies nonetheless involve public goods, are transformed into private goods, aimed at specific, named clientele.

## 2.2 Methods of Evasion of Civil Service Regulations

How could this occur in a democratic country? In principle, Italian public administration, like its counterpart in other liberal democracies, is a neutral, impartial, and non-partisan body entrusted with executing parliamentary instructions (Guarnieri 1988).<sup>4</sup> Civil service regulations guide the appointment process for positions in the public administration. In practice, however, as

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<sup>4</sup>This section draws in part on material originally presented in (Golden 1995).

the above examples illustrate, postwar Italian public administration and the state sector more generally served as vast reservoirs of political patronage, meaning that appointments were frequently made deliberately for partisan advantage rather than on professional and merit bases. In particular, the expansion of the parastatal sector — a agglomeration of public industry and non-ministerial state offices, including the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno — which occurred in the postwar era was aimed specifically and deliberately at expanding the bases for the DC's (and later the Socialist Party's) political patronage.

In his study of patronage appointments in US cities early in the twentieth century, V.O. Key enumerated five “methods of evasion of civil service laws” (Key 1935) that can equally well be used to classify the ways in which civil service regulations were violated in postwar Italy. Key's list was as follows:

1. limiting the scope of merit laws;
2. appointing the “right guys” to civil service commissions;
3. budgetary sabotage;
4. manipulating the selection process, including fixing examination results;
5. manipulating the movement and promotion of personnel.

While I have not identified any instances in which the Italian parliament deliberately reduced the budget of public agencies that proved resistant to patronage appointments (perhaps because I have not been able to identify any such politically troublesome agencies), the other four methods are applicable to and indeed appear exhaustive of the postwar Italian situation. The specific ways in which civil service laws were routinely violated in Italy were as follows:

1. limiting the scope of merit laws
  - <sup>2</sup> by open use of a spoils system within the parastatal and parallel administrative structures, where civil service procedures were not required and appointments were made directly by the government;

<sup>2</sup> within ordinary ministerial departments by legally bypassing the normal appointment procedures;

<sup>2</sup> within ordinary ministerial departments, by attaching non-civil servants who were selected on the basis of purely partisan criteria;

2. appointing the “right guys”

<sup>2</sup> by effectively appointing people to nominally elected positions, for instance in the local or national administrative councils responsible for overseeing public agencies;

3. manipulating the selection process

<sup>2</sup> within ordinary ministerial departments by fixing examination results;

4. manipulating the movement and promotion of personnel

<sup>2</sup> within ordinary ministerial departments by promoting persons on the basis of political, not professional, merits.

I now detail each in turn.

### 2.2.1 Patronage Appointments in the Parallel Administration

It is standard in Italy to distinguish the ordinary ministerial departments from the parallel administration, a complex and probably unique melange of parastatal bodies, public agencies, and public corporations (Cassese 1983). Until chunks of it were privatized in the 1990s, the latter included most the country’s banks, the large state industrial sector organized into the country’s state-holding corporations, the social security agency, and various administrations (including those regulating forestry, road building, telephone, post and until 1985 the railways) that were autonomous from the ministerial departments although their boards were headed by the appropriate minister. As a result of this heterogeneous and extensive parastatal sector, in 1990 the central ministries employed only about 2 million of Italy’s more than 4 million public sector employees (Arabia and Giammusso 1994, p. 277, table 3).



Some idea of the scope and complexity of the public sector is given by various attempts to census the number of national public agencies (*enti pubblici*) outside the ordinary ministerial departments. In 1947, some 841 were identified; in 1973, more than 3,300. Later in the decade, another study found nearly 55,000 national public agencies, excluding local government bodies (Cassese 1983, p. 17). The legal definitions of these various public bodies are highly variable: some fall under ministerial supervision, some are overseen by elected boards, some function as joint-stock societies with private investors involved. This organizational complexity, which necessarily hampered public oversight, was one factor that permitted Italian public administration (starting with the parastatal sector, but gradually spreading to the ministerial departments as well) to be so easily invaded by patronage appointments.

Italy's large parastatal sector is not covered by civil service regulations. Appointments occurred naturally through partisan affiliation, in a process known as "lottizzazione," or division of the spoils. Governing parties and party factions divided up appointments, typically in some rough proportion to their relative strength in government. The matter was so well known that certain bodies (for instance, each of the country's three national television networks as well as the social security administration, among others) were associated with one particular political party or DC faction. Eventually even the major opposition party became involved in this process.

### 2.2.2 Legally Bypassing Civil Service Examinations ("titolarizzazione")

Recruitment procedures to the public administration reflect the standard Italian regulatory pattern of specifying bureaucratic obligations in minute and often excruciating detail. Although recruitment in principle proceeds on the basis of merit examinations, the procedures are so lengthy and cumbersome that those required to make normal appointments average three years (Ferraresi 1980, p. 176). In this situation, ministries are often required to hire on a temporary basis, and they are permitted to do so. In principle, such appointments are valid only for six months. However, temporary appointments may be transformed into permanent ones through legislative initiative. This occurs quite commonly. Between 1956 and 1961, 41 percent of Italian civil servants were hired without having stood merit examinations (Ferraresi

1980, p. 177). The extent to which civil service examinations were bypassed increased subsequently. Between 1973 and 1990, about 350,000 civil servants were recruited without examinations. Twelve times Parliament passed special laws regularizing initially temporary appointments, often for hundreds of thousands of persons at a time. Over the same period, about 250,000 persons were recruited through normal civil service procedures (Cassese 1993, p. 325). As a result, between 1973 and 1990, nearly 60 percent of Italian civil servants were appointed outside normal procedures.

### 2.2.3 Attaching Outsiders to the Higher Echelons of the Public Administration

A 1972 piece of legislation permits non-civil servants to be “attached” to the higher echelons of the public administration. This allowed members of the cabinet to appoint, on the basis of partisan criteria, loyal followers to positions of public service (D’Auria 1994, pp. 30–31).

### 2.2.4 Patronage Appointments to Nominally Elected Positions

In Italy public agencies such as the local health authorities and local school boards are typically run by locally elected boards. In fact, however, in a variant on Key’s “right guys” method, it is common for candidates to be handpicked by political parties and effectively inserted into elected office on a patronage basis (della Porta and Vannucci 1994, p. 219). For this to occur, of course, turnout must be relatively low (which, not surprisingly, is usually the case) and the elections largely orchestrated by parties and party factions.

While it is impossible to estimate the number of patronage positions made available in this fashion, it was probably extensive. The local health authorities (*Unità Socio-Sanitarie Locali*, or USL), for instance, were plagued by patronage and poor administration since they were established in 1978. As one observer summarizes:

By universal consent they [the USL] proved to be profoundly unsatisfactory. They were immediately colonized by the political parties, who filled them with individuals with little managerial competence, expertise, or understanding of cost controls, but a

voracious appetite for the exercise of political patronage in purchasing and job-creation (Hine 1993, p. 249).

### 2.2.5 Fixing Civil Service Examinations

Even those purportedly appointed on the basis of merit examinations may not be. It is not unknown for civil service examination results to be fixed. It is of course impossible to know how widespread this practice is. It was apparently common for exam results to be tampered with for appointments to the public transportation agency in Milan, which was considered part of the DC's fief (della Porta and Vannucci 1994, p. 269). The practice has presumably been more widespread.

Appointment procedures can, especially at the local level, take on irregular forms even if examination results are not tampered with. The civil service competitions for appointments to various public bodies were often conducted improperly. In 1993, Italy's leading student of public administration, Sabino Cassese, estimated that virtually 100 percent of competitions for appointments to the local health authorities and 60 percent of those for regional and local administrative positions were conducted with procedural irregularities (reported in (D'Auria 1994, p. 32).

While practices such as these undoubtedly represent the most severe type of violations of the meritocratic procedures that should characterize bureaucratic appointments, they probably contributed the fewest numbers of bureaucrats of the various classes of behaviors itemized above. By and large, Italy's postwar patronage system probably functioned more on the margin of legality than completely beyond it. The outcome was nonetheless that by the 1980s, the bulk of appointments to the public sector was taking place in clear violation of the spirit of civil service regulations even if in nominal conformity to legal requirements.

### 2.2.6 Patronage Promotions within the Civil Service

Promotion within the ranks of the Italian civil service supposedly occurs almost exclusively on a seniority basis. In fact, however, there is room for some discretion since the number of appointments at each level is established by law and there are fewer senior management positions than qualified candidates (Ferraresi 1980, p. 169). Discretion is often exercised using partisan

and factional criteria. In the 1970s, research found that most Italian civil servants “did not believe that the most qualified had the possibility of reaching the highest positions in the public administration” (Ferraresi 1980, p. 179). A survey of highly placed bureaucrats in three departments — the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Artisans, and the Ministry of Labor and Social Security — reports that whereas in the Ministry of the Interior, top-level civil servants were highly experienced and quite senior, having moved up the ranks in orderly progression, their counterparts in the Ministry of Labor were considerably younger, less experienced, and often appointed after having held posts in other public agencies (Chiarini 1995).<sup>5</sup> The author reasons that, in light of the notorious lack of mobility of Italian bureaucrats among various ministries, appointments in the Ministry of Labor were often proceeding on a patronage basis; that is, thanks to external partisan and union experience and loyalty (Chiarini 1995). Donatella della Porta and Alberto Vannucci (1994) also report that although bureaucratic careers are formally autonomous in Italy, in fact promotion often takes place thanks to the “political merits” of the candidate (p. 277). The extent of patronage promotions within the civil service is unknown; others have maintained that the ministries themselves, as distinct from the parastatal sector (see above) are largely free of patronage appointments (Hine 1993, p. 230).

### 2.3 The Nationalization of Machine Politics in Postwar Italy

In 1935, Key reported that as of 1929, 40 percent of New York city employees had been appointed without regard for merit procedures; similarly, in 1922, two out of five civil service positions in Cleveland were occupied by “temporary” appointees who had received their jobs without civil service procedures having been invoked. In postwar Italy, by contrast, we observe the nationalization of machine-type politics. Patronage appointments were routine and extensive throughout the national public administration, not only in specific localities.

My argument is that this occurred because members of the Italian national parliament — and not just local politicians and party bosses — devel-

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<sup>5</sup>In the third department surveyed, the Ministry of Industry, a mixed profile on these characteristics was observed.

oped a system of patronage appointments as a form of constituency service, in order to enhance their prospects for reelection. While patronage appointments were heavily concentrated in the South, where electoral volatility was higher (Ascher and Tarrow 1975), and where the DC's factions were more heavily implanted, the system was ultimately national. It was led by national politicians — deputies and ministers — and relied heavily on resources provided by the central government and parliament.

The consequences were twofold. First, DC legislators above all (but also parliamentarians affiliated with the smaller governing parties) enjoyed such a strong incumbency advantage that by the end of their rule, the country was governed by a gerontocracy. Second, the efficiency of the public administration was catastrophically compromised. Staffed largely by southerners appointed for partisan purposes, many of whom lacked the requisite expertise or experience, the postwar Italian civil service was woefully inept. It is no wonder that it took more people to get the job done. Even if politicians had not had an interest in overstaffing simply to enlarge their opportunities for patronage appointments, the sheer incompetence of many appointees would have guaranteed that central government productivity was, as one study found, only 36 percent of that potentially attainable (reported in (Hine 1993, p. 241)). Postwar Italy represented “bad government” incarnate.

### 3 Patronage and Corruption

Thus far, I have described a system in which political patronage, mainly in the form of jobs, serves as constituency service. The underlying dynamics giving rise to the “personal vote” are the same in the United States and in Italy: electoral systems that give legislators incentives to deliver individualized services to voters. But a glaring difference between the two systems remains. In the United States, contemporary constituency service, even if it occasionally resembles a soft form of political patronage, does not entail widespread, massive political corruption. In Italy, however, the postwar individualization of services did, at least until the collapse of the DC-led regime after 1994. Why? Under what circumstances does the drive to offer individualized political services slide into corrupt exchanges; exchanges, that is, in which the provision of such services, rather than being effectively unpriced,

require the payment of a bribe or kickback?<sup>6</sup> What distinguishes corruption from constituency service?

Political patronage and political corruption are distinct interactions, distinguished in the first instance by the identities of the actors involved. In the language of game theory, they are different games. Widespread political corruption involves an actor other than the three we have encountered thus far; namely, business. It is businesses that pay the bribes and kickbacks and that in exchange receive the contracts for public works. It is politicians who orchestrate these exchanges, and bureaucrats who serve as the crucial intermediaries in them. (See the useful discussions in (Jain 1998; Gambetta 2001).) These activities provide the settings for political corruption. Voters, by and large, are uninvolved in political (as opposed to bureaucratic) corruption.

Fiorina and Noll's analysis of constituency service and bureaucratization clearly indicates that legislative systems characterized by high levels of constituency service come to comprise an equilibrium situation: voters have incentives to elect legislators who provide a lot of individual services, and legislators who do not provide such services are less likely to be elected. By extension, therefore, a political system relying heavily on political patronage also constitutes an equilibrium. What alters such a system, thereby allowing systemic political corruption to develop?

By definition, an equilibrium will be upset due to exogenous shocks. For a system of individuated vote getting to also involve systematic political corruption, an exogenous shock affecting at least one of three factors must occur:

1. Businesses must become willing to pay bribes as part of the cost of doing business with the public sector;
2. Politicians must develop incentives to seek additional, illegal financial resources;
3. The collective incumbency advantage of the politicians must have grown to such an extent that they do not fear the usual electoral repercussions of seeking such resources; namely, denunciations in the press,

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<sup>6</sup>I am indebted to some unpublished notes by Barry Weingast for the distinction between patronage/unpriced and corruption/priced.

the emergence of a political rival who seizes on the existence of corruption to promise to clean up government, and an electorate which is at once fed up with corruption and able to relinquish the personal and district-level benefits that come with patronage politics (see the relevant analyzes in (Reid and Kurth 1988; Reid and Kurth 1989)).

It is obviously difficult to evaluate the potentially relevant evidence empirically; for instance, we have few ways of knowing how willing Italian businesses were to pay bribes and whether there were substantial changes in their degree of willingness over time. I would nonetheless hazard that a legal change (forced on the legislature by a public referendum) that occurred in 1974 concerning the financing of political parties and electoral campaigns may well have constituted the main exogenous shock that shifted the Italian political system from one that relied extensively on political patronage to one that also relied extensively on political corruption. Let me offer some evidence in support of this interpretation.

Even in the 1950s, empirical research has found that patronage politics in southern Italy involved elements of overt political corruption (Graziano 1977). But the early postwar patronage system, although certainly exhibiting instances of illegality and corruption, does not appear to have been constructed around the payment and collection of bribes. Instead, the consensus in the literature seems to be that Italy's patronage system only lurched into becoming a fullscale system of corruption, one that ultimately involved staggering sums of money and virtually every public contract, sometime in the 1980s (Moss 1995). Corroborating this, it is only after the mid-1970s that we observe a significant statistical relationship between intraparty electoral competition within the DC and suspected malfeasance on the part of Christian Democratic members of parliament (Golden and Chang 2000). What changed?

Let us consider the incentives facing each actor, using the three points made above to organize the analysis.

**Business:** For many years, Italy's macroeconomy allowed businesses to be internationally competitive even while paying bribes to secure domestic contracts. Moreover, thanks to an unusually low degree of foreign direct investment in the country, Italian firms faced little foreign competition for government contracts. Hence, for an unusually long period — until

EMU, in fact, became a real possibility (see below) — Italian businesses were apparently prepared to pay the bribes expected of them. As far as we know, there were no sudden or substantial shifts in the degree of willingness before the early 1990s (see below).

**Politicians:** Passage of a law on the financing of political parties in 1974 prohibited public companies from donating monies to political parties or electoral campaigns.<sup>7</sup> Previously, such donations had been legal, and must have constituted a large part of the way that campaign finances were raised. By rendering such donations illegal, the law on public financing criminalize existing practices. Even if behavior had not changed at all, the 1974 law would have introduced substantially more political corruption into the system than previously existed.

At the same time, the empirical identity of the political actors underwent some modification, as the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) became a more crucial governmental ally. Although many Christian Democrats reportedly had been long involved in financial irregularities of one sort or another, studies contend that it was legislators affiliated with the Socialist Party who, for a variety of reasons, transformed Italy's political system in the 1980s into one characterized by massive political corruption. Among other reasons was the class background of Socialist leaders, many of whom lacked the family money and old boy ties that could have funded their political campaigns, and for whom politics served as a route of upward social mobility (della Porta and Pizzorno 1996; della Porta 1996).

**Incumbency:** Finally, the collective incumbency advantage of the DC had become by the late 1970s stronger than ever. In a curious twist of history, the period of “national solidarity,” as it was known, when in the late 1970s the DC government received the support of Italy's leading opposition party, the Italian Communist Party (PCI), even though the latter remained formally outside of government, actually served to enhance the incumbency advantage of the governing parties. The reason lies with the US “veto” of the PCI's entry into government that the period of national solidarity provoked, a veto which was understood to foreclose the possibility of the formation of a coalition government that would have included both the DC and the PCI. Because a grand

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<sup>7</sup>For details in English on the 1974 law, see (Ciaurro 1989).



coalition of this sort was at the time seen as a necessary first step towards a government of the left in Italy, the end of national solidarity represented the collapse of any immediate or medium term prospects for alternation of national power. This may well have triggered a belief — perhaps more notable among Socialist politicians — that Italy was without a genuine political opposition, or alternative government, and that the governing parties were invulnerable. As a result, facilitation services could now be priced, and priced in ever higher amounts.

As this brief review suggests — and as statistical evidence also corroborates (Golden and Chang 2000) — the 1974 change in party financing legislation may well have been a critical exogenous shock that catalyzed the emergence of largescale political corruption.

The existing literature on Italian political corruption is divided on the possible impact of legislation on campaign financing. Most studies seem to endorse the view put forward by Vittorio Bufacchi and Simon Burgess, for instance, that “notwithstanding the existing law on the financing of party politics, the principal beneficiaries of corruption were the political parties as a whole” (Bufacchi and Burgess 1998, p. 84). According to this account — which is also consistent with the interpretation offered in the present paper — Italian political corruption had as its central protagonists national politicians, and as its main goal the financing of political campaigns. The change in law regarding party financing affected the extent of corruption by criminalizing and possibly encouraging donations by public companies to politicians. An alternative account, explicitly supported for instance by (Colazingari and Rose-Ackerman 1998), is that the politicians who engaged in corrupt activities were seeking mainly to enrich themselves personally, and did so by taking advantage of their control over government resources to extract bribes. The current study cannot discriminate between these two interpretations, and direct evidence on the goals of those involved in corruption is difficult to obtain or interpret.

## 4 The Voters' Collective Action Problem: Why Change Must be Exogenous

The Fiorina and Noll model identifies a dilemma facing voters trapped in a patronage-based political system even when a majority become dissatisfied. Even when voters collectively come to disapprove of major policy stands endorsed by the dominant party, voters in each electoral district retain a strong incentive to continue to endorse their legislative incumbent because of the constituency service — the patronage — he provides. The system, in short, is self-enforcing even when a majority of citizens dislike it.<sup>8</sup>

In this situation, the collapse of the dominant party's political position can only be orchestrated through some kind of exogenous change, not because of dissatisfaction stemming from below. An electoral shift large enough to eject a party which has used the "personal vote" for decades to successfully construct a sizable incumbency advantage is unlikely to occur. The obstacles to achieving coordinated action among voters across electoral districts are formidable.<sup>9</sup>

Italian commentators have debated the role of the public in possibly colluding in the growth and preservation of the system of patronage and corruption that characterized the postwar era. Some have argued that such a system could not have endured without some measure of consent to it. The Fiorina-Noll model allows us to reinterpret the role of ordinary citizens. Citizens value both the collective benefits they receive from legislation and the individual benefits they collect through facilitation, or what in the Italian context manifests as patronage. Because the latter depends specifically on the retention of office on the part of the individual legislator, voters (and their extended families) who are recipients of patronage are effectively trapped into voting for the incumbent regardless of how they evaluate his party's performance nationally. Moreover, voters who oppose the system are unable to coordinate their actions effectively with others who are located in other electoral districts, and hence are largely powerless.

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<sup>8</sup>I am indebted again to some unpublished notes by Barry Weingast for this formulation.

<sup>9</sup>The parameters of the voter's dilemma differ between a system of representation based on single-member districts, in which two parties compete for power, and a multimember PR system in which power is typically exercised by a coalition government. This deserves further study.

What then are the possible sources of change? The most plausible is the international system, precisely because it lies beyond the confines of the domestic polity. The general hypothesis — which deserves to be examined with additional research — is that rent-seeking political regimes, based on widespread corruption, will collapse when international economic competition changes the incentives facing domestic businesses, such that they can no longer afford to pay the excesses “taxes” represented by bribery.

While more research needs to be done to substantiate thoroughly this line of argument, the broad outlines are clear. In Italy, it was the withdrawal of big business from the system of corruption and patronage that catalyzed the collapse of the postwar political regime. The Confindustria, Italy’s largest association of private firms, began openly criticizing the government in the fall of 1991, largely for the latter’s apparent inability to respond appropriately to the coming terms of European economic and monetary integration (Mammarella and Ciuffoletti 1996, p. 219). A break with the government, with the DC system of patronage and corruption, and with the levels of public spending the system had come to entail, had already occurred with the withdrawal of the Italian Republican Party (PRI), traditionally associated with business interests, into the opposition in April 1991. There are also reports that business interests, which until then had been apparently acting in complicity with largescale corruption, had begun to suffer financially by the early 1990s. The scale of the kickbacks had, during the course of the 1980s, expanded exponentially, so that the amounts involved became financially burdensome, especially as the demands of competition with non-Italian firms (which of course were not subject to such rents in their own homelands) increased with the Single European Act.

A commitment to profit-making on a European scale, then, shifted Italian businesses into a position of opposition to rather than collusion with the DC-led regime. This shift allowed the judiciary, which had long sought to prosecute the ever more flagrant corruption and illegal dealings of Italian politicians, to win the first crucial parliamentary votes lifting the immunity of a handful of deputies. This generated a cascade of confessions, investigations, removal of immunity, and prosecutions which toppled the postwar regime.

## 5 Conclusions: Comparative and Theoretical Implications

Italian political patronage has long been interpreted as a residue of backwardness and underdevelopment, or as part of the process of modernization. The framework adopted here offers an alternative reading of patronage politics. I have argued that they constituted the Italian variant of the entirely modern constituency service seen also in the Anglo-American democracies, or more generally in those democratic polities in which legislators have incentives to individuate their political appeal. Certainly there were distinctively Italian characteristics that promoted the construction of patronage politics there rather than the more neutral kinds of constituency services used to entice voters in the United States. Some of these characteristics were undoubtedly historically derived. The South of the country was vulnerable to the construction of patronage machines precisely because of a history of government that had prevented the emergence of the Catholic and Communist political subcultures seen in the center and northeast of the country, subcultures that provided a buffer against the construction of local patronage machines. In that sense, history contributed to the emergence of patronage politics in postwar Italy. But the underlying incentive that I have argued promoted the widespread adoption of patronage politics and partisan use of the public administration was the entirely modern incentive of retaining one's legislative seat.

The desire to retain one's seat only leads in some circumstances, however, to constructing an illegal system of campaign financing, one based on corruption. The Italian case, read in comparative context, suggests that political corruption arises when the need for individual credit claiming by politicians faces financial constraints in a context in which the economy is sheltered from fullscale international competition (making businesses willing and able to pay bribes) and the ruling party enjoys an unusual degree of security in office.

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