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Corruption Scandals and Political Crises: The “Free Press” and Democracy in Italy

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“The advancement and diffusion of knowledge is the only guardian of true liberty.”

James Madison

“Despite the variety and the differences, and however much we proclaim the contrary, what the media produce is neither spontaneous nor completely “free:” “news” does not just happen, pictures and ideas do not merely spring from reality into our eyes and minds, truth is not directly available, we do not have unrestrained variety at our disposal.”

Edward Said

Introduction

Corruption scandals are often associated with the demise of political parties or, in extreme cases, even whole party systems.¹ The logic runs that however tolerant people might be of corruption in private, once its extent has been fully exposed, the guilty are tarnished and have to be held to account. In this sense, it is the scandal more than the corruption per se that drives political change. As Madison argued, the media thus plays a key democratic role through its ability to lay bare the corrupt activities of the political class and act as an additional check on the abuse of power; hence Burke's subsequent characterization of the media as the "fourth estate."

Chang, Golden, and Hill have made precisely this argument in the case of the collapse of the Italian First Republic.² For over thirty years, the *Democrazia Cristiana* (DC) party governed Italy through the distribution of patronage. The DC doled out jobs and other state benefits in return for political support. Although the public seemed to be well aware of the generally corrupt nature of the political system, the system itself displayed remarkable continuity.³ However, the political system came crashing down in the early 1990s with the *Tangentopoli* crisis. Corruption scandals in the DC and its usual rival (but

1 J. Seawright, *Party-System Collapse: The Roots of Crisis in Peru and Venezuela* (Stanford University Press, 2012); Peter Flynn, "Collor, Corruption and Crisis: Time for Reflection," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 25, no. 2 (1993); Peter Flynn, "Brazil and Lula, 2005: Crisis, Corruption and Change in Political Perspective," *Third World Quarterly* 26, no. 8 (2005); Pérez Perdomo, "Corruption and Political Crisis," in *Lessons of the Venezuelan Experience*, ed. L.W. Goodman, et al. (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1995); Michael Johnston, "The Political Consequences of Corruption: A Reassessment," *Comparative politics* 18, no. 4 (1986); Angel Ricardo Oquendo, "Corruption and Legitimation Crises in Latin America," *Conn. J. Int'l L.* 14(1999).

2"Eric CC Chang, Miriam A Golden, and Seth J Hill, "Legislative Malfeasance and Political Accountability," *World Politics* 62, no. 02 (2010).

occasional coalition partner), the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) were exposed by the media beginning in 1992. A host of prosecutions and public trials followed.⁴ The DC and with it the Italian First Republic were erased from the political map by 1994. The interpretation given to these events by Chang et al. is that through its watchdog role the media constrained the abuse of power (even if temporarily).⁵

But how accurate is this interpretation, both in terms of the specifics of the Italian case and in terms of the general relationship between the media and democracy? In the Italian case, many details of the story are accurate. Certainly there was an enormous uptick in media coverage of corruption from 1992. However, we believe the current conclusion drawn from this raw data is somewhat misleading. Chang et al. treat the media's discovery and publicization of political corruption as exogenous to the dynamics of the Italian party system. In other words, they assume that the media, as a homogenous actor, exposes events as they happen. However, the Italian media's revelations of the *Tangentopoli* scandal cannot be treated in this way. The media is part of a broader arena of political competition. It is true that while for much of the 1970s and 1980s, the media's efforts to expose corruption were suppressed. However, the then-dominant DC's ability to curtail the media during this period is a critical feature of this story. The fact that the DC had lost its commanding political position by the late 1980s is an important determinant

3" Judith Chubb, *Patronage, Power, and Poverty in Southern Italy: A Tale of Two Cities* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

4" Stanton H. Burnett and Luca Mantovani, *The Italian Guillotine : Operation Clean Hands and the Overthrow of Italy's First Republic* (Lanham, Md. ; Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield in cooperation with the Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1998).

5" Eric CC Chang, Miriam A Golden, and Seth J Hill, "Legislative Malfeasance and Political Accountability," *World Politics* 62, no. 02 (2010). Esp. 212

of the media's greater freedom of action in the 1990s. As we'll show, the actions of particular media outlets reflect the interests of the political factions to which they are aligned. They are thus better seen as an endogenous part of the process by which competing political factions jockeyed for power in post-Cold War Italy. The crisis of the Italian party system, driven by the dual internal crisis of the DC and the Italian Communist Party (PCI) *preceded* the media's exposures of political corruption from 1992 onwards. The media's actions, themselves highly varied across the political spectrum of media outlets, were an endogenous component of this renting of the Italian party system. We agree with Chang et al's conclusion that "The media were crucial," but not, however, as some disinterested watchdog; rather the media mattered as agents in a complex political competition for power.⁶

This reinterpretation raises a problem for our understanding of the relationship between the media and democracy more generally. As Edward Said argued, it is simply naïve to assume that the media is an impartial purveyor of information. Rather, the media is better seen as the mouthpiece of other political agents. We suggest that the press is a venue through which competition between the power elite takes place rather than an independent check on the powerful or a power in its own right. Of course, the simple liberal defense to this argument would be that in a free market, the biases of one news agency can be countered by the alternative biases of another. There are at least two problems with this position. First, at the individual level, people have limited cognitive availability. People generally stick to one news source – typically the one that confirms their existing biases – rather than consult all available sources to determine the truth on

⁶ Esp. 212

their own.⁷ Second, if there is going to be some kind of societal-level averaging out of these biases, it follows that what matters is the reach of particular media outlets rather than the objective value of their content. Thus, marketing and sales strategies assume a greater role than the quality of actual media reporting. Ultimately, the news organizations – and hence their political allies – with most resources are going to win out. In this scenario, money counts rather than the truth.⁸ We can only conclude, in the manner of one of Italy's most famous sons, Antonio Gramsci, that liberal faith in the democratizing effect of the "free press" is misguided.⁹

In this paper we illustrate the politicized role of the media through an analysis of Italy's political crisis of the early 1990s. We show that the political affiliations of media outlets correlates with very different patterns of coverage of Italy's corruption scandal. Even predating media mogul Silvio Berlusconi's entry into politics, the politicization of the media was evident. We then look at some broader comparative evidence on the role of the media in democracy to suggest that media bias is systematic in democracies and that expectations of a balancing out of these biases is misplaced.

The paper proceeds in three sections. The first section provides a brief background to the Italian party system crisis and looks at how the media's role in the crisis has typically been portrayed. In a second section, we set out some new quantitative data on media

⁷ Matthew Gentzkow and Jesse Shapiro, "Media Bias and Reputation," *Journal of Political Economy* 114, no. 2 (2006).

⁸ Thomas Meyer and Lewis P. Hinchman, *Media Democracy : How the Media Colonize Politics* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press ; Malden Blackwell, 2002).

⁹ Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 3 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

coverage of the crisis that illustrates the biases of individual news outlets. The third section concludes with a broader discussion of the role of the media in democracy. Supporting evidence lends credence to the notion that the media is not an independent arbiter but an agent in the political system.

Tangentopoli: The Crisis that Brought down the Italian Party System

The Italian First Republic was dominated by two major political forces: The Christian Democratic Party (DC), which ran the country from 1946 to 1992 through 43 different governments and the Communist Party of Italy (PCI), which formed the primary opposition party in Parliament. The two parties were associated with diametrically opposed ideologies,¹⁰ the conservative Catholic tradition on one side and the Communists on the other. The relative dominance of the right over the left was largely down to its superior mobilization capacity. Already during the first years of the Italian Republic, the DC developed a capillary structure, typical of mass-based organizations, capable of penetrating each aspect of social organization and determining the emergence of a countrywide support network. Yet, the PCI was no organizational naïf. On the contrary, it used its local influence to develop a counter “red” subculture to the DC’s “white” subculture. At the political level, this attachment to the parties' ideology has been identified by Parisi and Pasquino as electoral support through *voto di appartenza* (vote based on loyalty and affection).¹¹

¹⁰ James L. Newell, *Parties and Democracy in Italy* (Ashgate Publishing Company, USA: 2000)

¹¹ Arturo Parisi and Gianfranco Pasquino, *Continuità e mutamento elettorale in Italia* (Bologna: il Mulino, 1977)

Yet, arguably a more important source of electoral support, particularly for the DC, was clientelism or *voto di scambio*. Deep roots in every aspect of civil society allowed local politicians to capture interest groups and establish a system of patronage. Both DC and PCI established support networks in which local party and local government were almost indistinguishable. This was the well-known “particracy” or *partitocrazia*. In exchange for political support, the main political parties were offering access to bureaucracy and privileged positions in the allocation of resources from the centre to the periphery.¹² As Golden argues, in order to “feed” this mechanism and legitimize political intervention in the bureaucracy, parties encouraged inefficiency in administration, consequently encouraging an additional increase in the demand for political intervention.¹³ This Italian clientelistic system had three main peculiarities: (1) it was self-generating,¹⁴ in the sense that demand and supply of exchanges and patronage increased spontaneously leading to the widespread of clientelistic networks; (2) corrupt revenues deriving from elite networks were used to consolidate the parties’ hegemonies rather than for personal gain;¹⁵

12" James L. Newell, *Parties and Democracy in Italy* (Ashgate Publishing Company, USA: 2000) Judith Chubb, *Patronage, Power, and Poverty in Southern Italy: A Tale of Two Cities* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

13" Miriam Golden, "Electoral Connections: The Effect of Personal Vote on Political Patronage, Bureacracy and Legislation in Postwar Italy," *British Journal of Political Science* 33 (2003)

14" James L. Newell, *Parties and Democracy in Italy* (Ashgate Publishing Company, USA: 2000)

15 Donatella della Porta, “Milan: Immoral Capital”, *Italian Politics: A Review*, Vol. 8 (1993); Michael Johnston, *Syndromes of Corruption: Wealth, Power, and Democracy* (Cambridge University Press, 2005)

(3) the spoils were distributed among all political parties according to their political weight in terms of votes, in order to buy complicity and keep electoral competition low.

This patronage system experienced rapid growth during the early postwar period, and reached a peak in the 1980s when a third actor emerged, namely the Socialist Party (PSI). The patronage system was broadly accepted by the vast majority of the political elite, the state-owned economic sector, made up by energy-production giants such as ENI and Enel, and parts of the private industrial sector (e.g. Montedison, Fiat). The scope of the *partitocrazia* included all sectors of economy including communications. The system was largely based on the payment of bribes to politicians by the private sector with the aim of receiving concessions for contracts in state-run enterprises. The money from the bribes was then delivered to the party organization, which split up the resources among the other political forces. However, over time increasing secularization, rising social mobility, and the diffusion of new forms of mass media were coming together to increase voter disaffection towards DC, if not the patronage system as a whole. In addition, by the 1980s, the perception that the PCI did not represent a threat to the stability of the democratic system became more popular, undercutting the appeal of the DC's right-leaning politics. Arguably, indeed, the left had already begun its redemption under the government of Aldo Moro in the mid-1960s. In any case, the secular decline in support for the DC and the crisis of identity of the PCI increased support for the PSI as a third party. As Bull and Rhodes correctly summarize, "the source of the PSI's power was not so much its vote but rather the pivotal role this increase allowed it to play at a time when the

DC's vote was declining.”¹⁶ The decreasing *voto di appartenenza* increased the demand for *voto di scambio* and patronage. The growing importance of the PSI in the process of government formation went hand in hand with its increasing role in the allocation of the spoils of clientelistic politics. By the mid 1980s, when the PSI obtained the premiership under the leadership of Benedetto Craxi, the mechanism of patronage reached its maximal size and diffusion, which made its survival less and less sustainable.

Despite its longevity, the party system of the Italian First Republic came undone with remarkable speed. In a little more than two years from 1992, the three main parties, the DC, the PSI, and the PCI had essentially disappeared. *Tangentopoli* (bribe city) first gained media attention in 1992 after the succession of corruption episodes involving local administrators in the northern region *Lombardia*. The first episode concerned a bribe of 7,000,000 lire (3,500 €) from a cleaning company to Mario Chiesa, mid-level PSI politician and president of the state-run clinic *Pio Albergo Trivulzio*, called *Baggina*. Initially Chiesa refused to cooperate with the investigation of *Mani Pulite* (Clean Hands), but once expelled by the PSI and identified by party-leader Craxi as a *mariuolo* (“con artist”), Chiesa started to talk. Soon enough revelations of a countrywide network of patronage and bribery emerged.

After the elections of April 1992, which registered a loss of support for the DC (from 35% in 1987 to 29% in 1992) and the “defeat” of the coalition of the *pentapartito* (DC, PSI, PSDI, PRI and PLI) which failed to gain an absolute majority, the judges' investigations crossed the border of Milan and the size of the network of bribes became

¹⁶ Martin Bull and Martin Rhodes, *Crisis and Transition in Italian Politics* (London: Frank Cass & Company Ltd, 1997); pp 67

evident. Judges requested 228 removals of parliamentary immunity in order to proceed with investigations, 111 of which were accepted. Party leaders and high ranking politicians such as Craxi (PSI), De Michelis (PSI), Andreotti (DC), Forlani (DC), De Mita (DC), Pomicino (DC), Altissimo (PLI), De Lorenzo (PLI) and La Malfa (PRI) were all involved in the investigations. Major bureaucrats, entrepreneurs and board members of industrial giants as ENI, Montedison and FIAT were similarly implicated in the scandals. The proceedings on *Tangentopoli* led to 1300 convictions, mainly for violations of the regulation on public financing of political parties, abuse of office and corruption.

The scandal, mostly involving politicians from the Christian Democrats and the Socialists, led to the disappearance of the DC and the PSI from the political arena by 1994. The disappearance of the main two governing parties of the First Republic has been identified as a conjunctural crisis by analysts of Italian politics. According to Chang et al. only 25.3% of the deputies of legislature XI (1992-1994) were reelected in legislature XII (1994-1996).¹⁷ The collapse of support for the traditional parties left a void in the political space that allowed the new political force led by Berlusconi to enter politics. The period after the disappearance of DC and PSI has been identified as second republic characterized by institutional reforms and a new party system contended by two main actors, namely the *Partito Democratico della Sinistra* (PDS) (a successor to the PCI), which was only marginally involved in *Tangentopoli*, and *Forza Italia*, Berlusconi's center-right political party.

¹⁷ Chang, Eric CC, Miriam A Golden, and Seth J Hill. "Legislative Malfeasance and Political Accountability." *World Politics* 62, no. 02 (2010)

Chang et. al have argued that while corruption was more or less ever-present in postwar Italy, it had only a minimal effect on the tenure of individual politicians until Legislature XI. It is only with this legislative period that the media seemingly takes up the cause of political corruption to publicize judicial investigations. We concur with Chang et al.'s observation that there was indeed an overall increase in media coverage of bribery from 1992 onwards.¹⁸ Yet, as we argue, it is not at all clear why this should be treated as an exogenous element of the story. Even their observation that those districts with greater newspaper circulation showed higher rates of turnover doesn't solve the issue of causality. While it is true that the media plays a role in the political crisis, we feel that the media's "decision" to suddenly ramp up publicity of corruption scandals merits a separate explanation in its own right. This reinterpretation doesn't invalidate Chang et al.'s main findings, but we believe it does add a crucial nuance to their conclusion regarding the role of the press in a liberal democracy.

Reinterpreting the Media's Role in the Scandal

Here we reassess these arguments through a novel analysis of Italian media coverage of the *Tangentopoli* crisis. More specifically, we examine the coverage of Italy's three main national newspapers at the time, *Il Corriere*, *La Stampa*, and *La Repubblica*.¹⁹ In their analysis of media coverage of *Tangentopoli*, Chang et al. analyze only *Il Corriere*. As we show, this choice has important consequences for the conclusions that they draw.

¹⁸ Chang, Eric CC, Miriam A Golden, and Seth J Hill. "Legislative Malfeasance and Political Accountability." *World Politics* 62, no. 02 (2010)

¹⁹ Ideally, we would have included more newspapers, including *l'Unita* and *il Giornale*, in our analysis, but were unable to access searchable archived records for the required period.

Although the data never exactly “speaks for itself,” here we try to present it as simply as possible with very little in the way of manipulation or complex statistical analysis. We compiled statistics on newspaper reports from 1990 to 1995, thus covering the period from about two years before the *Tangentopoli* crisis through the decisive 1994 national elections under the new constitution in which the DC was essentially eliminated from the Italian political map. Unlike previous studies that have analyzed the role of the media coverage of the political scandal we breakdown news reports by different media sources and by the political slant of the coverage in question. What this fairly raw data shows is that different media outlets cover the *Tangentopoli* crisis very differently. The best explanation for this differentiated coverage is the political bias of a given newspaper. *Il Corriere*, *La Stampa*, and *La Repubblica* represent the center, right, and left of the political spectrum. This bias is clearly evident in their behavior during the crisis.

Il Corriere della Sera is traditionally a centrist newspaper, in which the editorial board has a significant degree of autonomy from the paper’s ownership. After the involvement of *Il Corriere* in the P2 scandal of 1981, the paper temporarily lost its status as the newspaper with the highest circulation. However, the subsequent rearrangement in the structure of its ownership and in its political position helped it to regain credibility by the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the paper gained its dominant market share once again. This process of regaining credibility and prestige was complete by 1992, when Paolo Mieli replaced Ugo Stille as editor, assuming a relatively impartial position on the development of the *Tangentopoli* scandal. The position taken by Mieli was not opposed by the shareholders of *Il Corriere*, who have generally stayed aloof from the editorial

operations of the paper. The paper is owned by RCS media group, a holding listed on the Italian stock exchange. It is a mixed ownership, which includes Rizzoli editors, Gemina (a holding controlled by the Agnelli family), and Mediobanca. The somewhat conflicting interests between the two information editorial giants, Rizzoli publishing group and the Agnelli family (already owners of *La Stampa*), along with the diffuse nature of the remaining shareholders has probably facilitated editorial autonomy in a way not possible in some of the country's other media outlets. While it remains valid to characterize *Il Corriere* as Italy's newspaper of record, it doesn't represent the entirety of media coverage.

La Stampa is an example of clearly identifiable center-rightist editorial position. The ownership of the paper is *Editrice la Stampa* controlled by *FIAT* which is owned by the Agnelli family. As the ruling center-right party, the DC fiercely promoted the interests of *FIAT* as a national champion. The DC's support for the ownership over the autoworkers' unions in turn solidified the PCI's support among the latter. The episodes where the Agnelli family and even Fiat showed close relations to the politics of the DC are too numerous to document in full. A few examples will make the point. Gianni Agnelli became president of *Confindustria* (the Italian employer peak level association) in 1974, during which period he established close relations to the Government and trade unions. However, despite the close relationship to the center-led Governments, Gianni Agnelli decided to stay out of public institutions. In contrast, his brother Umberto became a DC Senator in 1976. In 1991 Gianni Agnelli was appointed life-long Senator by the head of the state Cossiga (DC). This represented his entrance into public institutions. By February

1993 his prestigious car company was experiencing trouble as well. Three managers of FIAT, including his right-hand man Romiti (1994), were involved in the investigations of *mani pulite*. These episodes of close relation to governmental politics confirm the editorial position of *La Stampa* towards the center-right of the political spectrum. The ownership represented the driving force in imposing a political line to the editors Paolo Mieli (1990-1992) and Ezio Mauro (1992-1996). This is also suggested by the fact that when Mauro left *la Stampa* in 1996 he became director of *La Repubblica*, a traditionally leftist paper.

Similar to *La Stampa*, but at the opposite end of the political spectrum, *La Repubblica* displays a clear editorial bias. *La Repubblica* was founded during the second half of the 1970s by the *Gruppo Editoriale l'Espresso* under the initiative of Eugenio Scalfari, who also became the editor in chief. Scalfari started his political career in the *Partito Radicale* during the 1950s. In 1963 he became member of the PSI and was elected as a Member of Parliament in 1968. Over time, however, he distanced himself from the Socialist Party. This became evident when Bettino Craxi became leader of the Socialists. Scalfari criticized Craxi regarding his position on the *Moro Affair* and the PSI's work at the head of the government from 1983 to 1987. *La Repubblica's* left-leaning editorial position became more evident after the transformation of the PCI into the more moderate center-left party PDS from 1991, although Scalfari never refrained from criticizing the intra-party factionalism of the social-democrats²⁰. As Scalfari himself described the editorial bias of *La Repubblica*, "This newspaper is a bit different from the others: it is a journal of information that doesn't pretend to follow an illusory political neutrality, but declares

20 Eugenio Scalfari, "La Farfalla che aveva Paura di volare" *La Repubblica* (02/05/1991)

explicitly that it has taken a side in the political battle. It is made by men who belong to the vast arc of the Italian left.”²¹

A significant example of how parties were able to exercise control over information is offered by the case of RAI (Italian Public Television Network). By the mid 1980s the three networks RAI 1, RAI 2 and RAI 3 were put under the control of respectively DC, PSI and PCI. As Gundel argues, journalists owed their positions to political recommendations²². This has been defined as *lottizzazione* (allocation of jobs divided up among parties). Information has been therefore undermined by partisan colonization of public TV-networks. In a less extreme way also the Press has been traditionally influenced by partisan politics. As the journalist Gianpaolo Pansa argued in 1977, the journalist in Italy is “cut in half” (*giornalista dimezzato*). This means that for one half, the journalists are independent, for the other half, they belong to external powers.²³ This consideration underlines the need to reinterpret the role of the media in Italia, in particular referring to *Tangentopoli*, as the main driving force towards the disclosure of corruption and the demise of political parties.

In sum, in this brief discussion we reconstructed the political affiliations of the main Italian newspapers. While *Il Corriere* established a reputation for impartiality following

21" Eugenio Scalfari (14/01/1976 *La Repubblica*) quoted in Daniel Hallin and Paolo Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics* (Cambridge University Press).

22 S. Gundel, “RAI e Fininvest nell'anno di Berlusconi”, *Politica in Italia: I Fatti dell'Anno e le Interpretazioni 1995* (Il Mulino, 1995)

23" Hallin, Daniel and Mancini, Paolo. *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics* (Cambridge University Press).

the P2 scandal of the 1980s, *La Stampa* and *La Repubblica* have shown a consistently biased editorial position which reflects the right-left political divide. Respectively, *La Stampa* leans more to the centre-right, due to the nature of its ownership, and *La Repubblica* leans left due to the ideological affiliation of its editor and founder Eugenio Scalfari. We wanted to see if this political affiliation of these various newspapers affected the way in which they covered the corruption scandal. Like Chang et al. we unfortunately lack the regional circulation numbers for these and other newspapers. Despite this, however, it is still possible to discern clear trends in the temporal coverage across the three outlets. The easiest way to examine the data is to look at the average number of bribery (*tangente*) stories in each newspaper over the period. While *La Stampa* published the greatest number of articles on bribery (16.4 per week), *Il Corriere* the next greatest (12.6 per week) and *La Repubblica* the least (9.1 per week) over the period 1992-1994, this conceals significant variation in the orientation of those articles. *La Stampa* published an average of just 0.6 articles per week on bribery pertaining to the DC, while *La Repubblica* published 3.6. Interestingly also, *La Repubblica* and *Il Corriere* were generally more balanced in their coverage of both left and right parties, while *La Stampa* was clearly more biased in its coverage, stressing the corruption scandals in the PSI and PDS disproportionately, and hardly mentioning corruption in the DC. In fact, this editorial bias comes out even more clearly when we look at articles written by the editorial staff itself. Table 2 shows that while *La Repubblica's* editor, Scalfari wrote some 19 articles on bribery in the DC between 1992 and 1994, Mauro of *La Stampa* didn't write a single one. Of the 12 articles Mauro did write on bribery, the only four that

specifically mention a particular party all refer to PSI or PDS politicians. Of course, this kind of aggregation conceals even greater inter-temporal variation. If we look first at all news reports mentioning the word *tangente*, or bribery, we end up with a picture very much like that portrayed by Chang et al. In each of the media sources, there is a sudden spike in the number of articles mentioning bribery from early 1992. Judge Antonio di Pietro had Mario Chiesa, a member of the PSI, arrested on 17 of February. Media coverage of the judicial investigations remained intense through mid-1992 before tapering off towards the end of the year. From this evidence, one could easily conclude that the press appears to respond quite similarly to events with no apparent indication of a political slant in the degree to which political corruption is covered.

Table 1. Average Weekly Number of Articles on "Bribery" in the National Press, 1992-1994

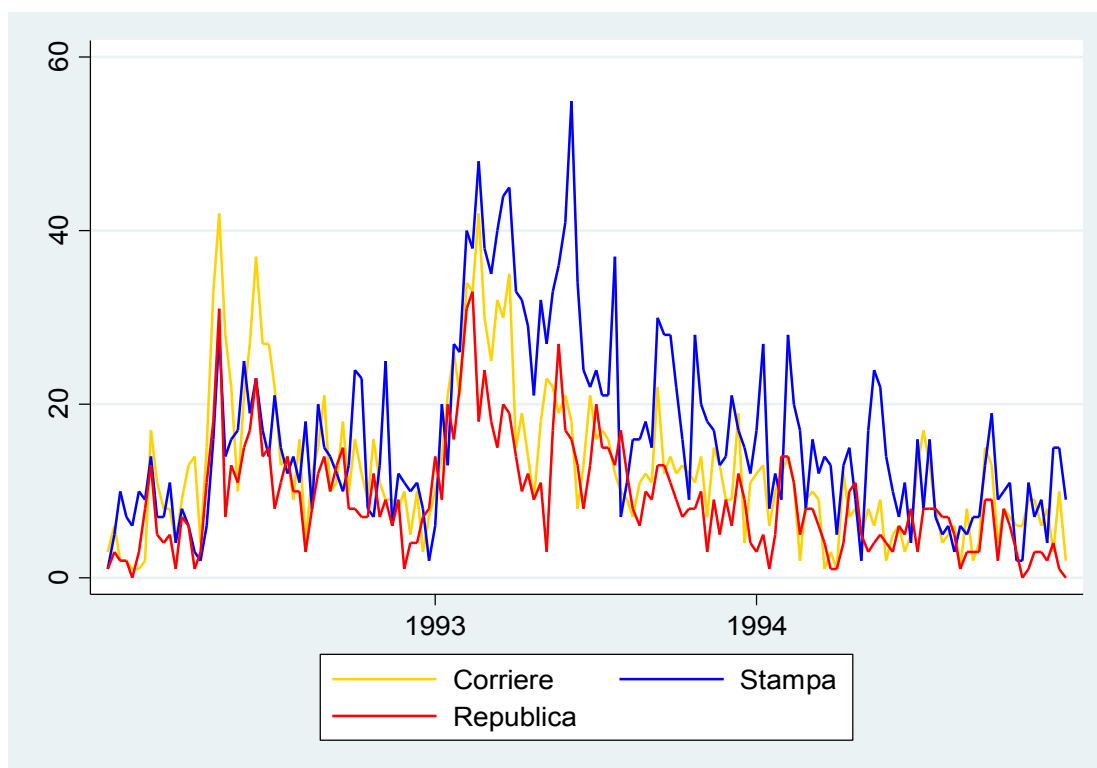
	Bribery	Bribery & DC	Bribery & PSI	Bribery & PDS
Il Corriere	12.6	4.9	4.1	2.3
La Stampa	16.4	0.6	5.1	2.3
La Repubblica	9.1	3.6	3.2	1.6

Table 2. Editorial Bias in the National Press

1992-1994

	E. Mauro (La Stampa)	E. Scalfari (La Repubblica)	Paolo Mieli (Il Corriere)
Tangentopoli		12	46
Tangentopoli DC		0	19
Tangentopoli PSI		3	11
Tangentopoli PDS		1	7
Number of articles		402	222
			64

Figure 1 Articles on "Bribery" in National Press, 1992-1994



However, when we distinguish by the parties mentioned in news articles on bribery a very different picture emerges. We counted articles mentioning both bribery and the main political parties of the left and right, the DC and PSI. This is illustrated in figures 2 and 3 respectively. A very quick look at these graphs reveals that *Il Corriere* and *La Repubblica* were more inclined to publish articles on bribery that related to DC, while *La Stampa* was much more inclined to publish articles on bribery that related to the PSI. Even though *La Stampa* published the most articles on bribery over the whole period, this only becomes evident after 1993. If we were to take *La Stampa's* coverage alone, 1992 barely registered any coverage of political corruption. This was a period in which the other main

newspapers were uncovering the illegal behavior of the DC in lascivious detail. *La Stampa*'s coverage of corruption takes off instead from 1993. With the DC already decimated in the December 1992 elections, *La Stampa* moved to the offensive against the Craxi-led PSI. It kept up this pursuit through mid-1993, while coverage in other outlets had begun to taper off. In contrast, *Il Corriere* and *La Repubblica* have much greater coverage of the 1992 crisis and less of the crisis in 1993. This conforms well to our expectations on the basis of the political leanings of these newspapers.

Figure 2 Articles on "Bribery" and "DC in National Press, 1992-1994

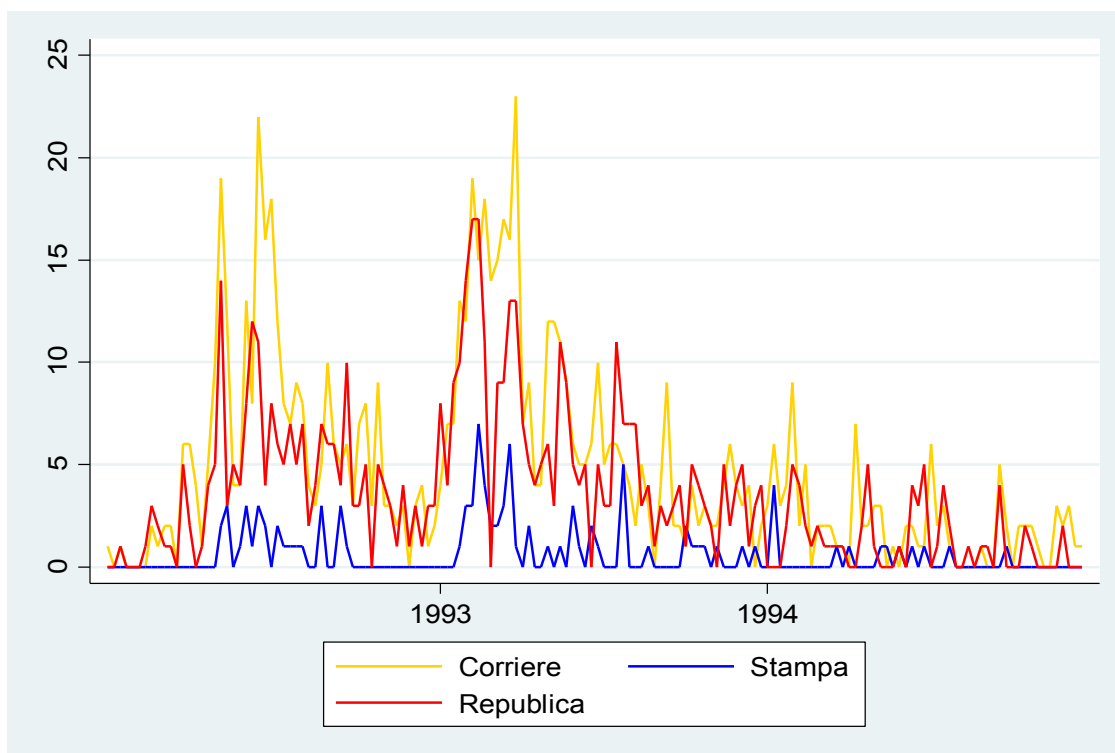
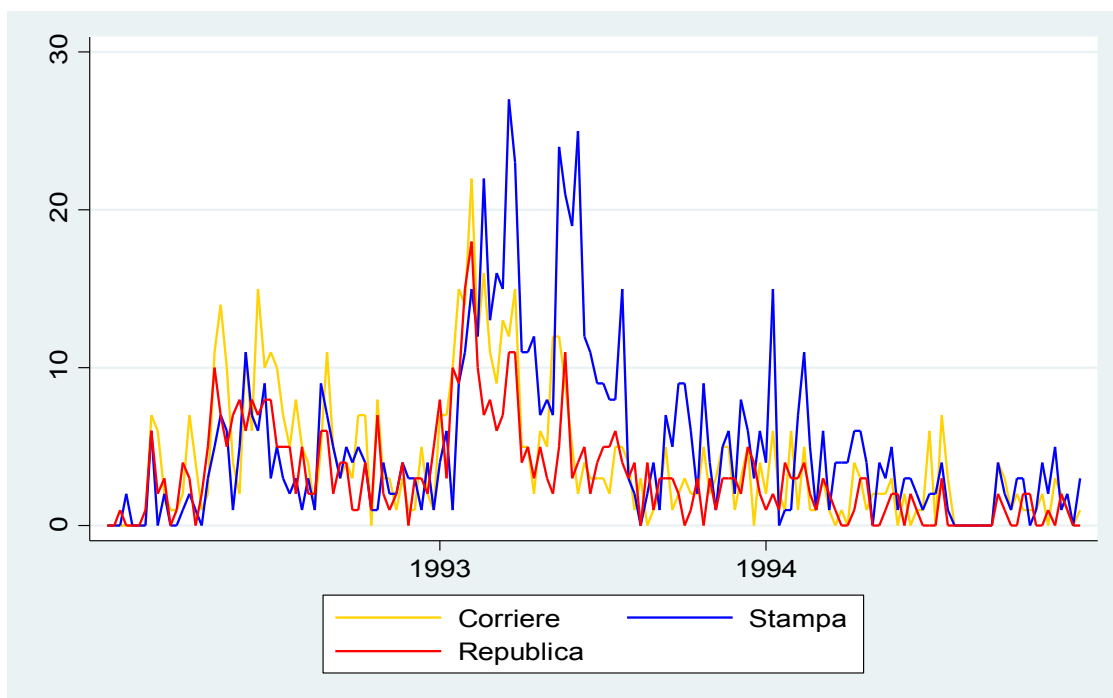
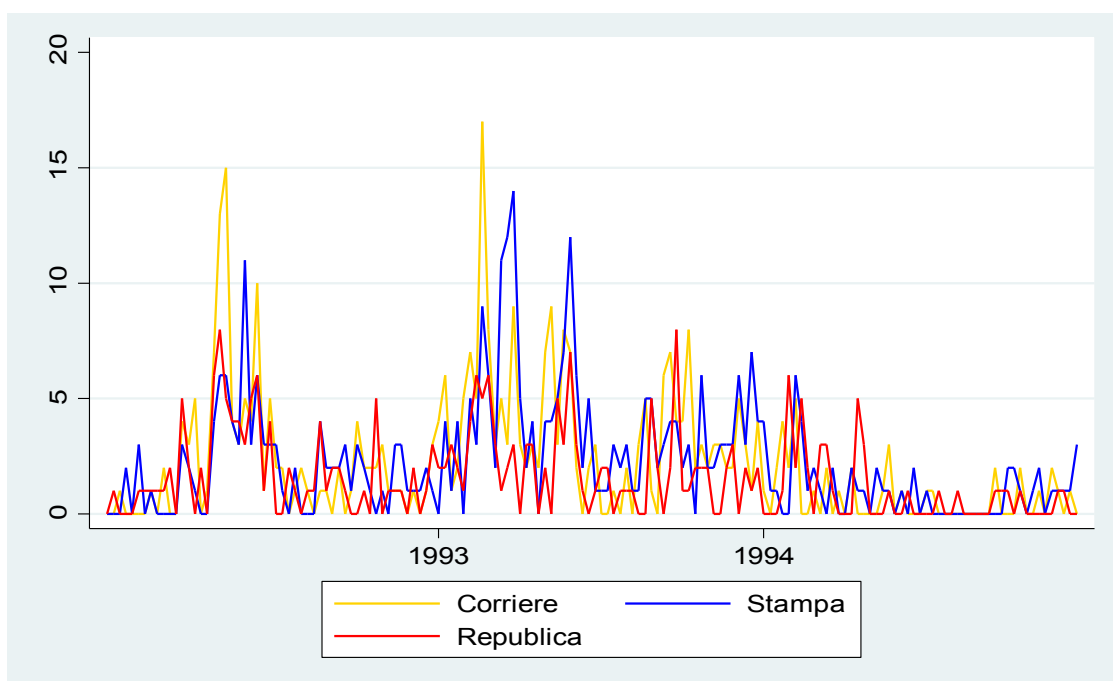


Figure 3 Articles on "Bribery" and "PSI in National Press, 1992-1994**Figure 4 Articles on "Bribery" and "PDS in National Press, 1992-1994**

Of course, we'd like to know whether these differences are really systematic in a statistical sense. To illustrate this, essentially we can run a fairly simple test to see if the temporal patterns of newspaper coverage of bribery relating to different political parties are statistically related to one another. The null hypothesis is that each newspaper has a similar trend in the publication of articles as they relate to each of the four main political parties covered here. That is, we should expect while newspapers will vary a little in terms of exactly when they will report on a particular bribery related event (e.g. a new arrest or trial), they should display similar trends when we allow for lags in how newspapers cover events. To do this, we use a granger causality test, in which we test whether each series of newspaper coverage of bribery in each party can predict any of the other series. The granger test is particularly appropriate here because we are not asserting "causality" in a strict sense; rather, we simply want to test whether each newspapers' coverage of bribery as it relates to individual parties follow the same trend. To capture this trend, we include 4 weekly lags of the data.

Table 3 Granger Causality Tests of Articles on Bribery by Party in National Press

Equation	Excluded	chi2	Df	Prob > chi2	Null = No diff
Corriere DC	Stampa DC	4.7982	4	0.309	-
Corriere DC	Repubblica DC	4.3960	4	0.355	-
Corriere PSI	Stampa PSI	5.6418	4	0.228	-
Corriere PSI	Repubblica PSI	13.679	4	0.008	Reject
Corriere PDS	Stampa PDS	17.259	4	0.002	Reject
Corriere PDS	Repubblica PDS	6.9318	4	0.140	-
Stampa DC	Corriere DC	6.1409	4	0.189	-
Stampa DC	Repubblica DC	17.612	4	0.001	Reject
Stampa PSI	Corriere PSI	6.2201	4	0.183	-

Stampa PSI	Repubblica PSI	2.4887	4	0.647	-
Stampa PDS	Corriere PDS	58.565	4	0.000	Reject
Stampa PDS	Repubblica PDS	11.803	4	0.019	Reject
Repubblica DC	Corriere DC	4.4231	4	0.352	-
Repubblica DC	Stampa DC	7.8342	4	0.098	-
Repubblica PSI	Corriere PSI	6.4547	4	0.168	-
Repubblica PSI	Stampa PSI	8.3188	4	0.081	-
Repubblica PDS	Corriere PDS	36.036	4	0.000	Reject
Repubblica PDS	Stampa PDS	15.306	4	0.004	Reject

The main finding that emerges is that the pattern of coverage of articles relating to bribery in the DC in *La Stampa* is not predicted by the pattern of coverage of articles relating to bribery in the DC in *La Repubblica*. However, we cannot distinguish between coverage of bribery in the DC between *La Stampa* and *Il Corriere* according to conventional levels of statistical significance. We also find that the trends in coverage of PDS differ by newspaper, while coverage of PSI is not statistically significantly different from one newspaper to the other.

What does all of this tell us? It is true, as Chang et al argue that there is an increase in media coverage of corruption from 1992. But they give no explanation as to why there is such an increase in coverage. That is, the question of what underlies the “media’s” decision to all of a sudden cover political corruption with such vigor remains external to their story.²⁴ Part of the problem with Chang et al’s otherwise informative account is the treatment of the media as a unitary actor. As we’ve shown, the media was actually quite divided on how it covered events from 1992. This is a crucial element in explaining how

²⁴ Chang, Golden, and Hill, "Legislative Malfeasance and Political Accountability."

events unfolded. In fact, the media became caught up in a competitive process in which factions of the left and the right of the Italian political spectrum jockeyed for power and influence in a political system that was *already* coming apart at the seams. Thus, increased information in the public domain cannot be treated as an exogenous cause of the coming apart of the Italian political system. We elaborate on this below.

A crucial backgrounder to the crisis of the center-right DC in the early 1990s was the prior crisis of the PCI, an element neglected in Chang et al.'s statistical account. Even as late as the mid-1980s, the PCI represented a real threat to the continued dominance of the DC. The PCI affinity with the biggest Italian trade union CGIL gave to the Communist Party the position of leading alternative to the Grand Coalition in Government (*Pentapartito*). The PCI's role of credible alternative started to totter in the mid 1980s during the Socialist-led Government. The Referendum held in 1985 in favor of the abolition of the system of "the escalator" (*scala mobile*) in order to reduce inflation (which reached two digits during this period) represents the main consensus-defeat of the PCI and its alliance with the trade union CGIL. The "No" campaign strongly promoted by the Communists was not successful; on the contrary it favors the PSI and confirms their role as alternative to the DC-led governments.

Despite the decreasing support, the PCI survives and tries to re-establish its bonds with voters. However, the end of Communism in Europe beginning in 1989 precipitated an existential crisis for the PCI. The fall of Communism invoked the need of restyling and renewal boosting factionalism and internal divisions.

In 1991, at the Congress in *la Bolognina*, the PCI was rolled up, with the major faction led by Achille Occhetto forming the center-left *Partito Democratico della Sinistra* (PDS) and the extremist faction led by Armando Cossutta forming the *Movimento per la Rifondazione Comunista*, later *Rifondazione Comunista*.

Ironically, the collapse of the PCI was felt with as much impact on the right as the left. With the decline of the main leftist party, the right-leaning factions within DC no longer had the same incentive to pool their political resources. Different factions within the DC now competed even more intensely for dominance of the political space. The DC, as noted above, was the governing center-right party for much of the post-War period. The DC was more an alliance of localized center of right political factions that were united by their collective opposition to the PCI than an ideologically coherent party in its own right. Factional competition for spoils within the party was intense.²⁵ A good example of the factional competition is evidenced in the election for the Presidency of the Republic in 1992, when the intra-party competition in the DC leads to the rejection of both main candidates of the DC, Forlani and Andreotti, favoring instead the election of Scalfari supported by PSI and PDS.

The Chang interpretation would suggest that DC should have been the first targets of the bribery investigations and of the media's attention. However, the DC was able to use its latent dominance over the media, its implicit influence among some judges, and general control over national industry and politics to direct the initial focus of the investigations. Already in May 1992 the main focus of the bribes scandal was on the PSI. Soon enough,

²⁵ Alan S. Zuckerman, *The Politics of Faction : Christian Democratic Rule in Italy* (New Haven Conn.: Yale University Press, 1979).

from the first episode of bribery of Mario Chiesa, other PSI members are involved and the scandal rapidly reached the top politicians of the party. Within a period of 12 months, all the major PSI politicians, such as Craxi, De Michelis, Pillitteri and Martelli were under investigation. The newspapers covered the scandals regarding the PSI from the very beginning with particular attention since it is evident how corruption was affecting the top management of the Socialist Party. On the contrary, during the first period of *Mani Pulite*, top-level politicians of the DC were able to stay out of major scandals, while only low and mid-level politicians being involved. During this period, the newspapers tended to cover corruption-stories differently. A significant event which reveals the extent of this different behavior of newspapers is given by the *Florindo D'Aimmo and Sandro Principe case*. D'Aimmo (DC) and Principe (PSI) are appointed respectively Undersecretary of Finance and Undersecretary of Labor in 1993 by the Amato Government. On the 7th of May, both, *La Repubblica* and *Il Corriere* published articles underlining the fact that the recently settled undersecretaries were being investigated for criminal wrongdoings²⁶. *La Stampa*, in contrast, did not dedicate one single article to the removal of parliamentary immunity for the DC Undersecretary, even though it dedicated attention to the trial for *Mafia* involving Sandro Principe (PSI) in July 1992.²⁷

Of course, attention did eventually shift to the DC. Part of the issue here is the need to appreciate how events unfolded over time. It was only after the success of initial investigations, mostly into the PSI, that the left-leaning papers shifted their attention to

26 Sandra Bonsanti, "Ecco il Governo nato ad Aprile" (*La Repubblica*, 07/05/1993); P.D.C., "D'Aimmo e Principe furiosi: macchè inquisiti..." (*Il Corriere della Sera*, 07/05/1993)

27 Francesco La Licata, "I Giudici: Il Sottosegretario eletto con i Voti dei Boss" (*La Stampa*, 11/07/1992)

the DC. Of major significance here is the way in which the DC turned in on itself. Over the course of the early 1990s, the DC rented along its factional lines with each faction attempting to secure its own survival, even at the expense of the party's overall survival. Successively to the election of the new DC-secretary Martinazzoli, invoked as honest and fair leader capable of renewal, members of the main factions of the DC, *forlaniani*, *andreottiani* and members of *La Base* start to be involved in the corruption scandals. Their involvement follows a timeline which affects each faction almost separately. The first to fall are members of the faction of Forlani starting from September 1992, starting with local politicians like Bassotti, to distinguished Members of Parliament like Gava (*Doroteo* collaborating with Forlani in *Alleanza popolare*). Between the end of 1992 and 1993 it's De Mita's (*La Base*) and Goria's turn. At the beginning of 1993, starting with local politicians of the faction of Andreotti ending with high ranking politicians, such as Pomicino, also the *andreottiani* are decimated.

This event underlines the propensity, in particular during the first period of *Tangentopoli*, of newspapers to differently cover corruption episodes according to their editorial position. Again, it might be countered that this is neither surprising nor that consequential for the health of the democratic system. Competition among media outlets with different political affiliations is a good thing. In theory, this argument can be sustained. However, it makes the implausible assumption that the market for information is a perfect one. In practice, the information market is not free or fair. The concentration of ownership has a major influence on the volume of coverage of a particular slant. While the DC was able to manage information in the closed period, little attention was paid to corruption. Even if

the early 1990s represented an unusual thaw in the concentration of media ownership, it has to be borne in mind that this was not an exogenous feature of the political system. On the contrary, the lack of media concentration was systemic to the lack of political concentration. With the introduction of new television rights, Berlusconi has again concentrated media ownership. Despite widespread suspicion of corruption, media coverage has been largely favorable to Berlusconi. After Berlusconi's failure in taking over *La Repubblica* (*La Guerra di Segrate 1989-1991*) and consequently silence leftist competition, Berlusconi decides to rely on his media empire rather than taking the difficult path of monopolization. His three largest private television stations, his ownership of *Panorama* and of the daily newspaper *Il Giornale* played a crucial role the electoral success of *Forza Italia* 1994.

The media market, even if it is difficult to monopolize, can still be dominated especially in traditional areas of print and television.

Conclusion: Media Bias in Democracy

A host of commentators, both classical and contemporary, have argued for the necessity of the media to a functioning democracy. In one of the major contemporary works on the role of the media in democracy, Keane argues that the media should be engaged in a public service through its exposure of the workings of politics.²⁸ Competition between news sources should in turn be good for democracy. With each side's affiliated journalists investigating the (mis)deeds of the other, the public as a whole is made aware of the

²⁸ John Keane, *The Media and Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991).

“true” state of affairs. In an abstract sense, it is easy to get to this conclusion. But it would be wrong. In the end, as the Italian case shows, the reality is less a Madisonian story of an autonomous media exposing political corruption when and where it saw it than it is one of competing news outlets acting as the agents of other political principals. In Italy, news outlets reported on the scandal in a way consistent with their political biases. The corruption scandal of the early 1990s as revealed by the press was an endogenous part of the crisis of the Italian political system rather than its cause. Understanding the endogenous relationship of the press to the political system has important implications for the role of the media in democracy.

The main problems with studies that stress the media’s arbitrating role in democracy is to treat the information market as a free one. That is, under perfectly competitive market conditions, consumers should be able to choose the “best” media sources. In such an ideal world, of course, “best” would be defined by its proximity to the “truth.” But this is essentially impossible. First, the idea of an objective “truth” is problematic. Two news sources reporting on the same set of facts will often portray them in a different light. Second, media outlets are subject to political suasion or even deception. Third, even if the biases or inaccuracies of one news source are countered by the alternative biases of others, this doesn’t lead to a clearing of the market around some kind of truthful median. At the individual level, the typical member of the public consults a single news source rather than multiple ones. Even in today’s world of digital media where it is incomparably easier and more economical to consult multiple sources, individuals tend to consult several sources of the same editorial slant rather than competing ones. For

example, there are relatively few people who systematically read both *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*, even if some of the former might also read *The New Yorker*, *The Nation*, or *The Washington Post*. Thus, the idea that at the individual level, the truth is approximated by a balancing out of competing news sources is not supported. Moreover, even at the societal level, the notion of a clearing free market for information is problematic. While a number of studies have found no systematic bias in the mainstream media,²⁹ a great deal of research elsewhere finds evidence supporting the importance of media dominance for political behavior.³⁰ For example, in the U.S., places in which the right-leaning Fox News was first made available showed a strong subsequent bias towards the Republican Party.³¹ Other research has found a more general correlation between editorial slant and voter choice.³² What this means is that media outlets with the greatest coverage and market share are able to exert a significant influence over voter behavior. Because circulation and viewer audience are as much determined by marketing as by quality, it is far from clear that truthful information will necessarily dominate the information landscape. In the Italian case, it was only because

29 Tawnya J Adkins Covert and Philo C Wasburn, "Measuring Media Bias: A Content Analysis of Time and Newsweek Coverage of Domestic Social Issues, 1975–2000*," *Social Science Quarterly* 88, no. 3 (2007); David Niven, "Objective Evidence on Media Bias: Newspaper Coverage of Congressional Party Switchers," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 80, no. 2 (2003).

30" Malcolm Dean, *Democracy under Attack : How the Media Distort Policy and Politics* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2012).

31"Stefano DellaVigna and Ethan Kaplan, "The Fox News Effect: Media Bias and Voting," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 112(2007).

32" James N Druckman and Michael Parkin, "The Impact of Media Bias: How Editorial Slant Affects Voters," *Journal of Politics* 67, no. 4 (2005)

of a coming apart of the party political system that the media obtained such a crucial role. Multiple factions within the Italian party system exploited the media for their own ends. As Berlusconi subsequently established his dominance over the mainstream media and the party system, reportage on political corruption tapered off despite widespread suspicions. In short, the market and ownership structures of the media are crucial variables in understanding their political role. Thus, whether the media functions as a positive or negative influence on the quality of government is a variable rather than a fixed property.

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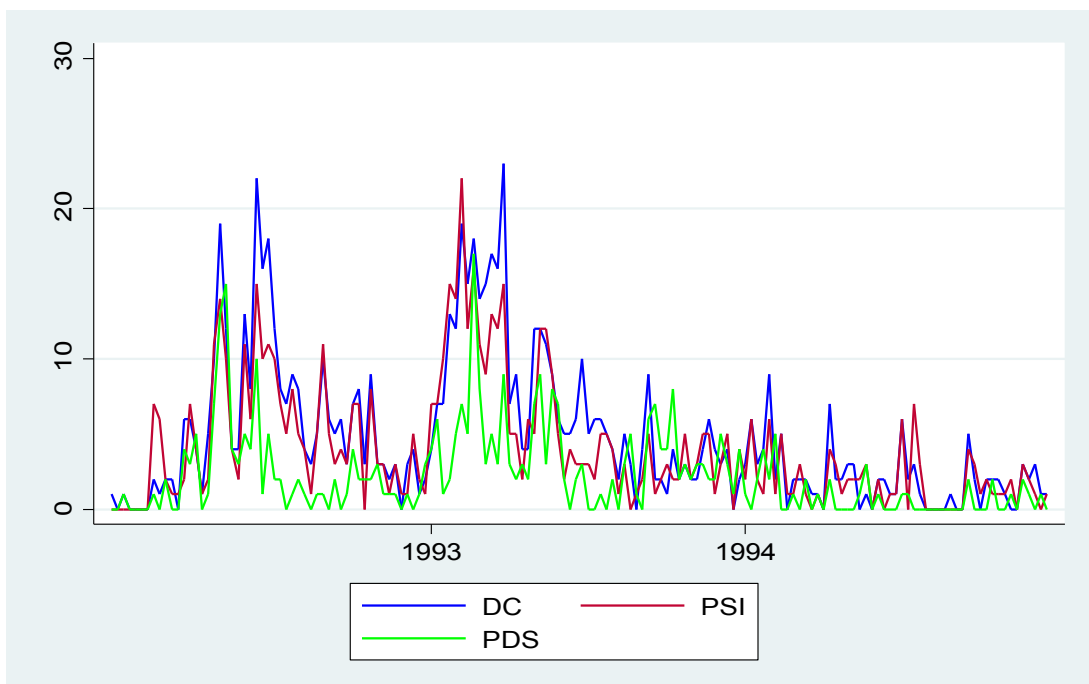
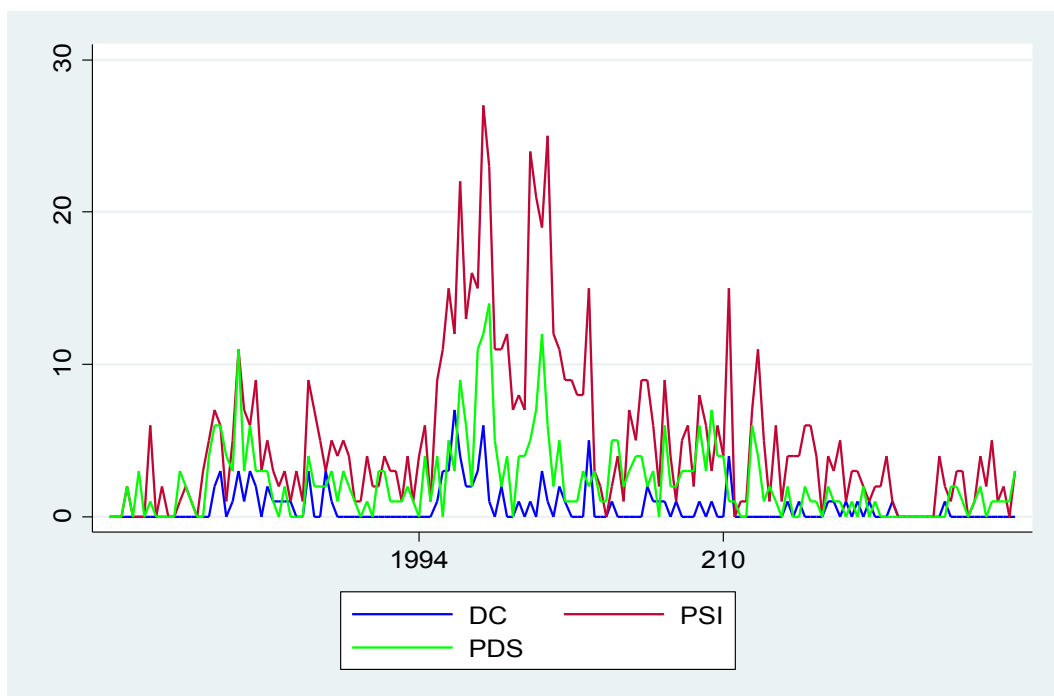
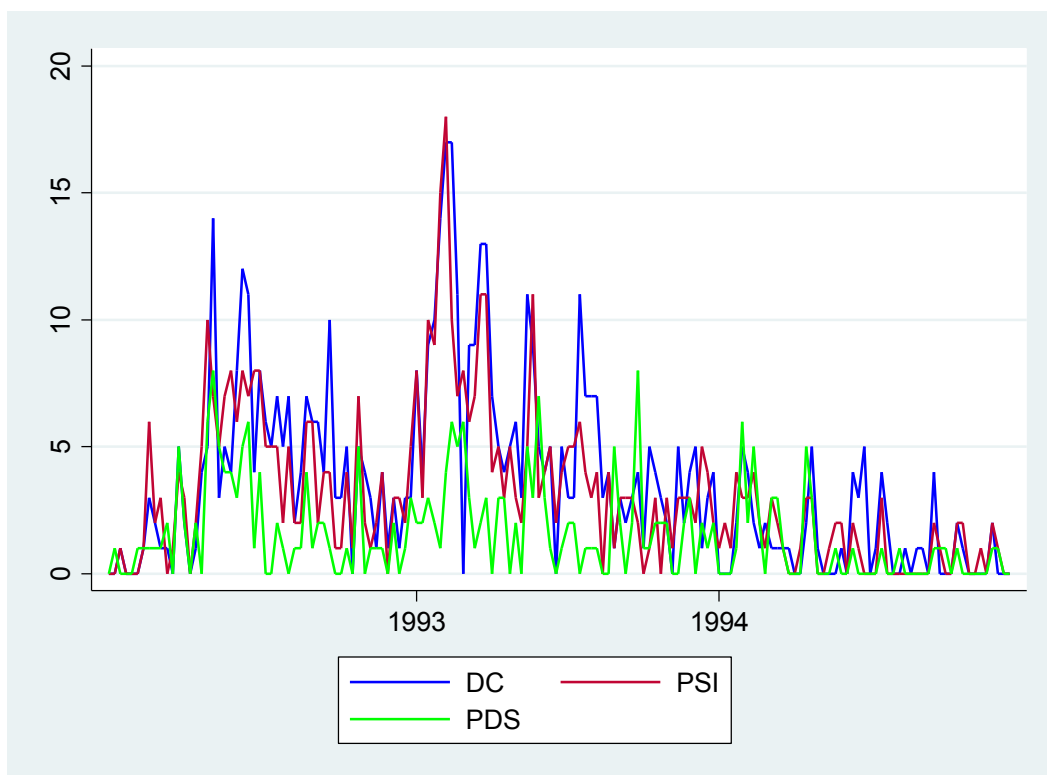
Appendix**Figure Articles on "Bribery" by Party in Il Corriere, 1992-1994****Figure Articles on "Bribery" by Party in La Stampa, 1992-1994**

Figure Articles on "Bribery" by Party in La Repubblica, 1992-1994



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