Party Direction: Italian Case in Comparative Perspective

Introduction

The Party Manifesto Data (PMD) have been used for almost three decades to estimate party positions in the political space. Recent studies (Klingemann et alii, 2006) have however pointed out that while the left-right scores estimated on the basis of the party manifestoes provide generally very precise estimates of where parties are located in the political space, there are some exceptions to this general trend. In view of these anomalies, the literature developed into different directions. Some scholars (Laver, Benoit and Garry, 2003; Benoit and Laver, 2007) went on to develop new methodologies for estimating party positions in the political space. Other scholars instead suggested, as Budge (2006) had also noted, that the left-right scores estimated on the basis of the party manifesto do not always indicate party positions, but indicate party direction (Pelizzo, 2003; Franzmann and Kaiser, 2006). The Left-Right scores reflect parties' attempt to modify their image, to seek the median mandate (McDonald and Budge, 2005), and to maximize electoral returns.

The purpose of the present paper is to further our understanding of the directional nature of the left-right scores. Some studies have in fact showed that some parties use their manifestoes to adjust to changes in the position of median voter (Pelizzo, 2003; Adams et alii, 2004). So we know from the literature that parties use party manifesto to dissimulate where they really stand or to simulate where they stand. What the literature has not addressed so far is whether parties are actually successful in modifying voters' perception of party positions—which is what we plan to investigate in this paper. We plan to do by so by analyzing whether and under what

conditions party perceived positions are affected by what party say in the manifestoes controlling for what parties do.

In the course of the paper we proceed in the following way. In the first section, in addition to discussing the importance of spatial analyses and the various applications of the spatial analytic framework, we discuss some of the methodologies and data that we have employed to locate parties in the political space. Building on this discussion we argue that Party Manifesto Data (PMD) that have successfully been used to estimate party positions in certain party systems, can also be used to estimate party movement or direction in other settings.

In the second section we discuss under what circumstances voters' perception of party positions is modified by PMD. In this respect we suggest that parties' ability to modify their perceived position depends on two conditions—namely whether parties want to modify how they are perceived and whether voters' perception is constrained by their knowledge of party history

In the third section, we present the results of our analyses. In this respect we find that party perceived positions are strongly determined by party previously perceived positions, that the perceived position of old parties is more stable than the perceived position of new parties, and that while knowledge of a party's history is a major determinant of where a party is perceived to be located in the political space, the perception of party position is not fixed over time. Hence, in the paper we test whether change in perceived party positions is explained by what parties say in their electoral manifestoes controlling for their legislative behavior. In the fourth and final section of the paper we draw some conclusions as to the possible implications of our work.

Part One: Spatial analyses: issues and methods

The development of spatial analyses, and the creation of new data and methodologies to estimate party positions in the political space, is important not only for the fact that they amount to technical improvements but also, and more interestingly, because they allow a wide ranging set of applications (Laver, 2001). Knowing where parties and voters are located in the political space enables the analyst to assess important issues such as how responsive parties are to voters' preferences (Miller et alii, 1999) or what is the polarization of the party system (Sartori, 1976).[1]

The importance of spatial analysis is not simply due to the fact that it can be applied to investigate a fairly wide range of political phenomena, nor is it simply due to the fact that the spatial analytic framework provides an explanation for various political outcomes, but it is above all due to the fact that it allows the scholar to make predictions. Knowing where parties are located enables the scholar to make more or less accurate predictions of which government coalition will be formed, which parties will be given which portfolios and so on. Given the wide range of topics that can be investigated within the spatial analytic framework, it is not surprising that scholars have devoted considerable attention to estimating party (and voters') positions in the policy space and to developing new techniques, methodologies and data for a more appropriate assessment of party (and voters') positions. Policy positions have been measured a priori (Taylor and Herman,1971; Sartori, 1976) but also on the basis of mass survey data (Sani and Sartori,1983), elite survey data (Katz and Wessels, 1999; Miller et alii,1999), expert judgments (Castles and Mair, 1984;

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[1] According to Sartori (1976:135) there is ideological polarization when the parties locates at the extreme ends of the ideological spectrum "are literally *two poles apart*, and the distance between them covers a maximum spread of opinion (…) Briefly put, we have polarization when we have *ideological distance* (in contrast to ideological proximity).

Huber and Inglehart,1995; Benoit and Laver; 2006), parliamentary speeches (Ieraci, 2006), computerized word frequencies (Laver, Benoit and Garry, 2003) and roll call voting (Poole and Rosenthal, 1997) and party manifestoes (Budge et alii, 2001; Klingemann et alii, 2006).

While the PMD-based left-right scores have generally provided reliable estimates of where parties are located, they have occasionally generated implausible estimate for some parties' positions (Marks, 2007; Volkens; 2007). Given the apparent inability of the PMD-based left-right scores to estimate party positions, some scholars went on to devise new methodologies that could be used for analyzing the content of political documents and estimate party positions. Other scholars (Franzmann and Kaiser, 2006; Pelizzo, 2003; Volkens, 2007) took instead a different approach and underlined that the reason why the PMD-based left-right scores were not providing seemingly plausible estimates of party positions in some party systems was simply that in those party systems, the party manifestoes were used to indicate change in party position or party direction[2]. Scholars have provided evidence supporting this directional interpretation of the left-right scores (Franzmann and Kaiser, 2006) and some studies went on to show that party manifestoes and the PMD-based left-right scores are used by political parties for strategic reasons. Some studies

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[2] In this respect Franzmann and Kaiser (2006:164) noted that the 'directional' interpretation of the PM-based left-right scores was "placed in the context of a directional theory of voting", as developed by Rabinowitz and MacDonald (1989). While it is certainly possible and possibly interesting to use the PMD left-right scores in the light of Rabinowitz's and MacDonald's directional theory, we have the impression that the 'directional' interpretation of the PMD proposed by Pelizzo (2003) was actually consistent with traditional proximity theory. That paper suggested that the parties use their electoral manifestoes to adjust their position or to take a position closer to that of the voter to maximize their chances to win that voter's support. This is exactly what one would expect parties to do within the proximity theory framework but not within the framework provided by directionality theory. Under the assumption of directionality theory the utility that a voters attaches to a party is not a function of the distance between the position of the voters and that of the party, but is due instead to whether the party and the voters are on the same side of the issue and to how strongly the voter and the party feel on that issue. Under these assumptions, if there are two parties that are on the same side of an issue of the voter, their winning strategy is not to move closer to the voter but to take a more radical stance on the issue- even if this means moving farther away from there the voter is located on the issue. This, we believe, is very different from what suggested by Pelizzo (2003).

have in fact shown that some parties use their manifestoes to adjust to changes in the position of the median voter (Adams et alii, 2004; Pelizzo, 2003).

Studies supporting this directional interpretation were able to show that parties use the manifestoes for strategic reasons, as they hope to be able to alter voters' perception of where they are actually located. Yet, previous studies have provided little evidence as to whether parties are actually successful in their attempt to use the manifestoes to modify their perceived position.

Part two. Party Manifesto Data and Party Direction

While other studies have focused on how parties' real positions can be best estimated, the purpose of the present study is to address instead what factors modify voters' perception of party positions. While parties' perceived positions reflect to some large extent long term factors, such voters' knowledge of parties' histories, the perception of party position can be modified in the light of parties' legislative behavior and of what parties say in their electoral manifestoes.

The perception of party positions, as we will show in the next section, is fairly stable over time. The reason why this is the case is that parties have histories, have identities, have a past and voters' perception of where parties stand reflects to some extent this historical knowledge (Erikson et alii, 2002; Adams and Somer-Topku, 2007). This historical knowledge or this historical memory of where parties come from affects or rather stabilizes the way in which voters perceive party positions. If a party has traditionally been the right-most (or the left-most) party on the political spectrum, when asked to locate this party on the political spectrum, voters will place this party to the right of any other party. The Italian case provides several examples that can be used to illustrate this point. From its foundation in 1946 until its

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transformation into the National Alliance, the Neo-Fascist Italian Social Movement was regarded as the right-most party in the Italian party system. After its transformation into the National Alliance, its centripetal convergence, its adoption of more moderate stances, the National Alliance was still regarded as the right-most party in 1994 and as the second right-most party in the 1996 elections---when a group of radical right-wing politicians, led by Rauti, broke away from the National Alliance to create the Social-Movement-Tricolor Flame, led by Rauti. This result is fairly interesting because the National Alliance, in 1996, was regarded to be located to the right of the Northern League that in the 1996 elections had taken much more radical stances than any other party. The Northern league, in that elections, in addition to rejecting the logic of bi-polar competition, to rejecting any alliance with either the center-left or the center-right coalition, to taking very harsh stances against illegal immigration, it advocated the secession of the Padania and yet it was considered to be a less radical or extreme party than the National Alliance.[3] If voters had based their judgment of the Northern League's and the National Alliance position exclusively on what these two parties were saying and/or doing, they should have placed the Northern league to the right of the AN. But they did not. And they did not do it because they knew these two parties' histories. They knew that, in spite of its centripetal convergence, the National Alliance was the party of the Neo-Fascists or that had been created from the ashes of the Neo-fascist MSI.[4] While the Lega was a protest party that had been joined and supported by many people who could be

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[3] Padania is the term used to refer to the Northern Italian regions such as Liguria, Piedmont, Lombardy, Veneto, Trentino-Alto Adige, Friuli, Emilia-Romagna and Tuscany.

[4] Piero Ignazi, *Il Polo Escluso*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1989; Piero Ignazi, *Postfascisti?*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1994; Marco Tarchi, *Cinquant'anni di nostalgia*, Milano, Rizzoli, 1995; Marco Tarchi, *Dal M.S.I. ad A.N.*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1997.

regarded as people of the Center and of the Left.[5] Hence, while experts (Benoit and

Laver, 2007:267) were assigning the AN and the LN the same position on the left-

right continuum, voters kept placing the AN to the right of the LN—which testifies to

the importance of historical factors in shaping voters' perception of party positions.

However, in spite of the role that historical knowledge plays in stabilizing the

perception of party positions, the perception of party positions is not fixed over time.

The fact that perceived party positions are not fixed over time is of great importance

for the purposes of the present analysis. In fact, it is precisely because there is some

change in perceived party position, that we can test whether and under what

circumstances, this change in party position is explained by parties' legislative

behavior and party manifestoes (PMD).

In the next section, we plan to test the relationship between PMD, Legislative

Behavior (LB) and changes in perceived party positions and we present our main

findings. Before performing our empirical analyses, however, there is an additional

question that has to be addressed, namely under what circumstances do PMD induce a

change in perceived party positions?

According to McDonald and Budge (2005:73) a party real position can be

estimated by measuring the average PMD-based left-right score over the whole period

of party history. This argument has an important implication, namely that the

positional nature of the PMD is inherently tied to a party history. If a party has a

history, it has an identity, its identity affects the content of the party electoral

manifesto, which, in its turn, provides a clear indication of a party position. But there

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[5] Early studies on the Northern League pointed out that the Northern League was in many respects a center party, see Diamanti, (1994; 1996); Mannheimer (1992); Leonardi and M. Kovacs (1993). More recent studies have however pointed out that the Northern League can no longer be regarded as a center party but that it now resembles in may respects the parties of the new extreme right, see Betz (2002) and Tarchi (2003). The Northern League's transformation from a catch-all party to a populist party was timely noticed by Ilvo Diamanti (1997).

is a corollary for this line of reasoning, namely that if a party has no history or identity, as is the case of new parties, the party manifesto may contribute to shaping the party's future identity (position) but it cannot be based on it or reflect it as a party, in its infancy, is still searching for its position in the political space. In this second case, it is legitimate to postulate that PMD do not indicate party position, but reflect instead a party' search for an identity or, in spatial terms, for a position in the political space — a search that can be defined as party movement or direction.

This point has a major implication, namely that while old parties can use their manifestoes to either modify or to reinforce voters' perception (by drafting identity-based PMD), only the second option is available to new parties. However, parties' ability to modify their perceived position on the basis of party manifestoes does not depend exclusively on parties' strategic moves, but it also depends on whether voters are persuaded by parties' attempts to relocate themselves in the political space. In this respect, the extent to which voters can modify their perception of party positions is constrained by voters' knowledge of parties' history. Voters are less likely to change their mind about parties with which they have long been familiar, while they are more likely to change their mind about new parties about which they know very little. The comparison between the AN, heir of the former neo-fascist MSI, and the LN, a new protest party, provides again a good case in point. In fact while the AN was able to change its perceived position by only 6.1% in the 1996-2001 period, the LN was able to modify its position by 10.4%. These results sustain the claim that voters' knowledge of parties' history has a major influence on the extent to which party perceived positions can be modified either in the light of what parties say in their electoral manifestoes or in the light of what parties do in parliament. Therefore we hypothesize that new parties have a greater ability to modify where they are perceived

to be located in the political space than old parties and that they can use their electoral manifestoes their perceived position.

To test whether our argument is supported by empirical evidence, we will test in the next section whether and to what extent changes in parties' perceived positions are due to parties' programmatic statements controlling for parties' legislative behaviour. In the course of our empirical analysis, we will compare the American, the Dutch, the German and the Italian case. The German, the Dutch and the American case were selected because they were most different system. The Dutch and the German cases differed from the American ones in term of party system format, party system mechanics, electoral system, and form of government. The only thing that these cases have in common is that their political parties are relatively old if compared with the Italian parties of the so called Second Republic, hence if changes in party perceived position were not affected by PMD, this evidence would support our claim that parties' age is a key determinant of whether parties are able to modify voters' perception. The Italian case was also included in the analysis because it is most similar to the German and the Dutch case in several respects with one exception: Italian parties in the so called Second Republic are relatively young. Therefore, if changes in party perceived positions were affected by PMD in the Italian case, but not in the other cases, this evidence would be consistent with the claim that parties' ability to modify their perceived positions is a function of their age.

In order to assess whether and to what extent short term factors, in the form of programmatic statements, we run three models:

$$PPP = a + b_1 \, PPPP + b_2 \, PMD + e \ (1)$$

$$PPP = a + b_1 \, PPPP + b_2 \, LB + + b_3 \, PMD + e \ (2)$$

$$Shift = a + b_1 \, PMD + e \ (3)$$

Where PPP indicated party perceived position at the time of an election, PPPP indicates instead to the party previously perceived position, PMD refers to the left-right scores estimated by Klingemann et alii (2006), LB refers to party positions estimated on the basis of the legislative behavior of their members and Shift refers to the difference between PPP and PPPP.

Party perceived positions were estimated on the basis of data collected by the American National Election Studies from 1972 to 2004, by the *Deutsche Nationale Wahlstudien* conducted in Germany from 1976 to 1990, by the Dutch Parliamentary Surveys conducted from 1981 to 1994, and, for Italy, by the Istituto Cattaneo from 1994 to 2001. PMD were taken from Budge et alii (2001) and Klingemann et alii (2006). The LB data were collected for the USA and Italy. The LB variable for the American case is constructed on the basis of W-Nominate. This methodology, devised by Poole (1998), is a scaling technique that can be employed to estimate latent variables, such ideological orientation, that underpin observable variable. This methodology was applied to roll call votes (observable variable) to estimate the position of legislators in the political space (latent variable). Party positions were then estimated by computing the average score for all the legislators belonging to a specific party in a given Congress. The LB variable for the Italian case refers to the party positions estimated by applying the Optimal Classification methodology (Poole, 2000; Poole, 2006) to the final votes in the Italian Chamber of Deputies in the Course of the XIII Legislature.[6] By performing this analysis Landi and Pelizzo (2006) estimated the

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[6] The OC methodology is also a scaling technique that can be used to detect latent variables, such as spatial positions, on the basis of observable variables. Specifically, this methods, just like the Nominate methodology, is used to estimate the positions of legislators on the basis of their voting record. The basic difference between Nominate and OC is that while Nominate maximizes "the likelihood of legislators' choices" (Poole, 2000:211), OC "*maximizes correct classification* of the legislators' choices" (Poole, 2000:211). Landi and Pelizzo (2006) interpreted the first dimension of the two-

positions of all the members of the Italian parliament in a two-dimensional space. By

computing the average positions of all the members belonging to a given party, they

estimated the positions of all the parties on both dimensions. These variables and data

will be used to test whether changes in perceived party positions are due to parties'

legislative behavior and electoral manifestoes.[7]

Part Three. Data, Methods and Empirical Results

The first finding of our analyses is that the perception of party positions is very stable

over time. When we correlate the positions of American parties (Democratic party and

Republican party) as perceived by the American voters in any election held from 1976

to 2004 with American parties' perceived positions in the previous elections, we find

a Pearson r of .979. When we correlate the positions of Dutch parties as perceived in

the 1982, 1986, 1989 and 1994 elections with their perceived position in the previous

elections, we find a correlation coefficient of .986. Correlating the perceived position

of German parties in the 1980, 1983, 1987 and 1990 elections with their perceived

position in the previous elections, yields a correlation coefficient of .974. The Italian

case is no exception in this respect. When we correlate the perceived positions of

Italian parties in 1996 with their perceived positions in the 1994 elections or when we

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dimensional space that they had identified as the Left-Right dimension. We provide external validation
of the OC-estimates by correlating it with other estimates of party positions. Namely we correlate both
party positions on the first dimension of the space estimated with the OC methodology with party
positions estimated on the basis of the experts surveys (Benoit and Laver, 2007) and with the party
positions estimated on the basis of the analysis of the parliamentary speeches delivered in the course of
the XIII Legislature for the investiture of the Prodi, D'Alema and Amato II governments (Ieraci, 2006).
By performing these correlations we find that the OC estimates are strongly and significantly correlated
with all the other estimates of party positions (r = .898, r = .791, r = .595, r = .863).
[7] The Liberal-conservative scale used in the US survey is a 7-point scale, the Dutch survey adoped
instead a 10 point scale, and the German surveys employ a 11-point scale. Parties' perceived positions
were indicated on a 5-point scale in the 1994 and 1996 Italian surveys, while they were expressed on a
ten-point scale in 2001. PMD range from -100 to +100. OC data range from -1 to +1. Given this
variation variables were standardized before performing statistical analyses.

correlate Italian parties perceived position in the 2001 elections with their perceived position in the 1996 elections, we find a Pearson r of respectively .991 and .976. When we correlate party positions in 1996 and 2001 with parties' previously perceived position, we find a correlation coefficient of .979. In other words, the perception of party positions is very stable over time. Data are reported in table 1.

Table 1. Correlation of Party Perceived Positions (sig.)

PPP	Germany	Italy	Netherlands	USA
PPPP	.974	.979	.986	.979
	(.000)	(.000)	(.000)	(.000)
N	15	15	18	16

This evidence indicates that knowledge of the history and origins of parties affects the way in which voters perceive party positions and, therefore, that it is appropriate to regard voters' historical knowledge as a key determinant of parties' perceived positions.

The fact that knowledge of parties' history may stabilize voters' perception of party positions has a major implication, namely that the changes in party perceived positions should be smaller for old, and well known, parties than they are for younger parties. This claim is supported both by within systems and between systems analyses. Looking at the German case, for example, we see that perceived party positions changed by 22.6 % for the Greens, by 5.6% for the SPD, by 0.35 for the CDU and by 1.85 % for the FDP. In other words, while the perceived position of old parties was fairly stable, the perceived position of the Greens, which were then Germany' youngest relevant party, was characterized by considerable fluctuation.

Table 2. Changes in perceived party positions

Country	Party	Period	Percent Change in Party Perceived Position	Average Change in Party Perceived Position By Country
Germany	Greens	1983-87	22.6	
Germany	SPD	1983-87	5.68	
Germany	FDP	1983-87	1.85	
Germany	CDU	1983-87	.35	
				7.62
Netherlands	PPR	1981-82	3.21	
Netherlands	PvdA	1981-82	3.11	
Netherlands	D66	1981-82	8.76	
Netherlands	CDA	1981-82	.78	
Netherlands	VVD	1981-82	1.26	
				3.42
USA	Democrats	1972	3.88	
USA	Republicans	1976	1.85	
				2.86

A similar trend between party age and fluctuations in party perceived positions can be detected between countries. A quick comparison of the data presented in tables 2 and 3 reveals that change in party perceived positions was greater for the Italian party system that had emerged in the wake of First Republic than it was in the other countries under study. In fact, from 1996 to 2001 the perceived position of Italian parties changed on average by almost 10%. This value was remarkably higher than the values recorded in the other countries.

Table 3. Changes in perceived party positions

Party	Period	Percent Change in Party Perceived Position	Average Change in Party Perceived Position
FI	1996-2001	3.27	
LN	1996-2001	10.37	
DS	1996-2001	6.09	
DEM	1996-2001	19.06	
PPI	1996-2001	17.99	
CCD	1996-2001	5.6	
RI	1996-2001	10.86	
RC	1996-2001	30.89	
AN	1996-2001	6.11	
			9.94

The evidence presented so far makes clear that party perceived positions are fairly stable over time and that the stability of party perceived positions is affected by parties' age. The perceived position of old parties is more stable than that of young

parties because voters' knowledge of parties' history constraints the extent to which old parties can modify how they are perceived.

This said, one should note that the perception of party positions is not just a function of voters' knowledge of party histories. Party positions are not fixed over time but they change to a more or less significant extent. The question then is: what factors are responsible for changes in perceived party positions? In order to answer this question, we run the three regression models presented in the previous section.

By running the first model we find that when we control for the effects of party previously perceived position, programmatic statements in the form of PMD do not induce any change in party perceived positions. The b-coefficients for the impact of PMD on change in party perceived positions are weak and statistically insignificant The only exception to this trend is possibly represented by the Italian case where the impact of the PMD on the perception of party position is relatively stronger and almost statistically significant.

Table 4. Determinants of party perceived position

	intercept	Party previously perceived position	Legislative Behavior	PMD-based left-right scores	R-squared	N
Germany	.055 (.367)	.861 (.000)		.138 (.204)	.955	14
Italy	.156 (.020)	.976 (.000)		.169 (.059)	.970	14
Netherlands	-.056 (.199)	.946 (.000)		.050 (.376)		17
USA	.020 (.723)	.995 (.000)		-.006 (.955)	.959	15

By running the second model with American and Italian data we find that in the USA, the perception of party positions can be modified by parties' legislative behavior but not by parties' programmatic statements — and that parties' legislative behavior is a stronger and more significant determinant of where parties are perceived to be located than parties' previously perceived position.

Table 5. Determinants of party perceived position

	intercept	Party previously perceived position	Legislative Behavior	PMD-based left-right scores	R-squared	N
Italy	.079 (.285)	.649 (.002)	.217 (.028)	.307 (.077)	.994	14
USA	.007 (.883)	.224 (.407)	.733 (.009)	.037 (668)	.977	15

The Italian case is substantially different from the American one. In fact, in the Italian case, even when we control for PPPP and LB, PMD exercise a strong, properly signed and substantially (though not statistically) significant influence of parties perceived position. Hence, while the perceived position of American parties is determined exclusively by what parties and legislators do in the legislative arena, the perceived position of Italian parties reflects long-term factors such as voters' knowledge of party history and short term factors such legislative behavior and programmatic statements.

Why is there such a difference between the Italian and the American case? Part of the answer is to be found in the fact that programmatic statements go always hand in hand with legislative behavior in the American case. The correlation between PMD data and previous legislative behavior yields a correlation coefficient of .773 , while the correlation between PMD and future behavior has a correlation of .799.[8] PMD reflect past behavior and determine future behavior and hence, which is why, when we control for the effects of parties' legislative behavior, PMD's ability to alter party perceived positions is fairly modest.

The Italian case presents substantial differences. The correlation between Italian party manifestoes in the 1996 elections and their behavior in the XIII Legislature (1996-2001) is a statistically insignificant (r = .404). The legislative

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[8] Both significant at the .000 level. The N is 18 and 16 respectively.

behavior of Italian MPs in the XIII Legislature correlates strongly ($r = .830$) and significantly with parties' programmatic statements for the 2001 election. In other words, the fact that PMD in Italy reflect past behavior is what makes them credible, but it is not necessarily a major determinant of future behavior.[9] This is why when LB and PMD are both used to predict change in party perceived positions, the coefficients for both variables are relatively strong and far from trivial.

The models 1 and 2 indicate that while changes in party perceived positions are affected by parties' legislative behavior in both the Italian and the American case, but that PMD are responsible for changes in party perceived positions only in the Italian case. Additional evidence in this respect is provided by running the third model described in the previous section. When we test whether changes in party perceived positions or shift are function of parties' programmatic statements, we find that the impact of PMD on changes in party perceived position (Shift) is weak and statistically insignificant in Germany, the Netherlands and the USA while it is strong and statistically significant in the Italian case.

Table 6. PMD and Shifts in Party Perceived Positions

Shift in party perceived position	Intercept	PMD	R-squared	N
Germany	.001 (.998)	.056 (.837)	.003	14
Italy	.046 (.839)	.641 (.018)	.385	13
Netherlands	.032) (.900)	-.126 (.638)	.014	17
USA	.011 (.964)	-.128 (.639)	.015	16

In the light of these findings, the question then becomes why is the Italian case an exception to the trend that we have detected in the other countries under study?

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[9] Which, in its turn, may erode the legitimacy of Italian parties. That Italian parties' inability or unwillingness to keep their promises is discussed by Panebianco as the major reason why Italian voters have little trust in Italian parties and that there is a second wave of anti-party sentiments in Italy. See Panebianco (2007). The first wave of anti-party sentiments in Italy was examined by Bardi (1996).

The answer is provided by comparative analysis. In Germany, the Netherlands and the USA parties had long histories, they had strong identities that had been consolidated over the years and their programmatic statements (as exemplified by the PMD) reflected parties' identities.[10] In other words, in these three countries parties had the option of campaigning on their identity and voters' perception of party positions was constrained by voters' knowledge of these parties. This was not at all the Italian case. In the wake of the 1993 electoral reform and the collapse of the so called First Republic, the legislative behaviour of Italian parties was loosely based on their programmatic statements, the PMD did not reflect parties' long history because most Italian parties, in the course of the transition, had very little history. Some parties, such as *Forza Italia* or the Northern League, were new, while other parties, such as the Democrats of the Left (Ignazi, 1992; Baccetti, 1997; Bellucci et alii, 2000) or the National Alliance (Ignazi, 1994; Tarchi, 1997), were trying to dissociate themselves from their past. Under these circumstances, parties could use their manifestoes to appeal to the electorate. But the manifestoes were prospective rather than retrospective (Fiorina, 1981; Lewis-Beck, 1990) and were used not only to maximize electoral returns but also to provide parties with the identity that they were looking for.[11] In other words, the Italian parties, unlike their Dutch, German and American counterparts, could not use their electoral manifestoes positionally and voters' perception of party positions was not constrained by what voters knew about these parties. The evidence generated by this comparison sustains the claim that programmatic statements reshape so significantly voters' perception of party positions

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[10] The fact that PMD of the American parties are strongly related to party identities can be illustrated by the fact that PMD are strongly correlated with party previously perceived position (r =.835) and party perceived positions (r = .790).

[11] As we have noted earlier, the legislative behaviour of Italian parties was inconsistent with their programmatic appeals, which is why, we believe, the parties that had emerged at the end of the first republic have failed to create and consolidate an identity that could be used to appeal to the electorate.

only under very specific conditions (parties with no history, parties with weak to no identity, non-identity based manifestoes, voters' limited knowledge of the new parties).

Conclusion

Previous studies noted that in some settings the left-right scores estimated on the basis of the PMD do not provide an adequate indication of where parties are located in the political space. Some studies suggested that the left-right scores' inability to put parties in the right space was due to the fact the left-right scores indicate party direction rather than party position (Pelizzo, 2003; Franzmann and Kaiser, 2006). It was shown that parties use their manifestoes to modify their position. Parties were shown to do so to adjust to changes in the position of the median voter (Adams et alii, 2004) and to modify where they are perceived to be located. What previous parties did not show was whether and to what extent parties are successful in modifying their perceived position.

The purpose of the present study was to address parties' ability to modify their perceived position on the basis of their electoral manifestoes. In the course of our analyses, we found that voters' perception of party positions are fairly stable over time, that the perceived positions of old parties are more stable than those of new parties, and that party age affects not only the stability of perceived party positions but also parties' ability to alter voters' perception on the basis of their electoral manifestoes.

In this respect we noted that parties' ability to change the way in which they are perceived depends on two conditions. The first condition is represented by parties'

willingness to use their electoral manifestoes directionally, while the second condition is represented by voters' willingness to change their views about party positions. We further argued that both conditions are related to party age. As older parties have longer histories and stronger identities than new parties they my adopt identity based manifestoes which are not designed to alter voters' perception of party positions. And even when older parties decide to use their electoral programs directionally, they may fail to alter their perceived position as voters' perception are anchored in their knowledge of party histories. The opposite is true for new parties. Because of the fact that they are new and little known, new parties are bound to finding a place in the political space and their ability to move in the political space and alter their perceived positions is not constrained by voters' knowledge.

The results of our data analysis sustain the claim that parties' ability to change their perceived position is related to party age. By doing so this paper not only showed whether parties are successful in modifying how they are perceived but also under what conditions (no party history, weak identity, limited voters' knowledge) they are able to do so. The data at our disposal and the analyses that we have conducted in this paper do not allow us to speculate as whether our conclusions will be corroborated by further analyses. But regardless of whether our conclusions will or will not be supported by further research, we have no doubt that why parties succeed in modifying their perceived positions is a question worth investigating as it may provide party politics experts of a better understanding of the relationship between parties and voters

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