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Changing political parties, persistent patronage: The Italian case in comparative perspective

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ABSTRACT

The politicization of the state is a relevant feature of contemporary democracies. At the analytical level, the article contributes to the study of patterns of politicization of the state, distinguishing the concept of patronage from other notions of political particularism often used synonymously in the literature. At the empirical level, the article examines patronage practices in contemporary Italy. It is part of a cross-national qualitative survey that allows the contextualization of the Italian case within a wider set of 15 European democracies for which aggregate comparative data will be presented. The empirical analysis identifies the causal mechanisms that explain why Italy still displays high, albeit decreasing, levels of politicization of the state.

KEYWORDS: Patronage; Clientelism; Political Parties; State Capture; Italy

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Introduction

This article explores the recent trends of patronage in Italy with the help of a dataset produced within a cross-national research project. Often, patronage is not distinguished from clientelism within the intricate galaxy referred to as “particularistic politics”. Although patronage and clientelism share common traits, they constitute distinct phenomena. To this end, the article proposes a more precise conceptualization of patronage, which also has the advantage of making the measurement of patronage practices – a notoriously complex affair – a little easier. The hypotheses on the evolution of patronage practices present in the literature will be tested against evidence that emerged from the investigation of the Italian case in a comparative perspective.

The paper is structured as follows. First, the concept of patronage will be disentangled from that of clientelism, with which it is frequently associated. The hypotheses arising from the comparative research on the extent, logic and mechanisms of patronage will then be reviewed. These hypotheses will guide the empirical analysis conducted in the following sections. The hypotheses are tested using the data collected in Italy through a wide-ranging survey of experts. In addition, a wider comparison will locate Italy within a pool of established European democracies. The empirical analysis reveals the persistence of patronage practices in Italy produced by the under-institutionalization of political parties. Patronage processes in Italy are dominated by the party leaders, who exploit the institutional legacy of a weak State in order to cement their own personal power bases.

Defining Patronage and Clientelism

Patronage has usually been conceptualized in the literature as one of the many particularistic exchanges by which parties mobilize activists and voters. As such, often the term patronage is

employed to refer to the “the distribution of favours to individuals in exchange for political advantage accruing – or expected to accrue – to those who give favours” (Blondel 2002:241). In this definition patronage comprises all manifestations of particularistic politics: any form of political support by clients (votes, money, work) is exchanged with any type of resources held by the patron. Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2007), on the other hand, adopt a more specific notion of patronage. Patronage, which is not distinguished from clientelism, is defined as a party-voter linkage, an accountability relationship between politicians and electors based on the direct and contingent exchange of material benefits for votes. Mainwaring (1999: 177), in defining patronage as “the use or distribution of state resources on a non meritocratic basis for political gain”, instead pays attention to the source of the resources that feed the exchange of favours between patrons and clients. Patronage only uses state resources controlled by office-holders as objects of exchange. An analogue concept is offered by Müller (2006), who defines patronage as a direct and particularistic exchange of public resources in exchange for some form of political support.

The definition of patronage employed by Mainwaring and Müller is probably the most common, and is often used interchangeably with clientelism to denote “the trade of votes and other types of partisan support in exchange for public decisions with divisible benefits” (Piattoni 2001: 4). This analytical confusion has been generated by the empirical transformation that modernization has imposed on clientelism. With the rise of the modern “party-directed patronage”, which replaced the traditional clientelism of notables, patronage has to a great extent become “the study of how political leaders seek to turn public institutions and public resources to their own ends, and how favours of various kinds are exchanged for votes” (Weingrod 1968:369). In modern clientelistic strategies, in fact, patronage as the selective distribution of public resources empirically constitutes “the primary glue that holds modern clientele networks together” (Mainwaring 1999:180).

In this article I adopt an alternative definition of patronage to that prevalent in the literature on comparative politics. I adopt a more specific notion of patronage as the power of political leaders to distribute public sector posts. This definition is employed by only a few scholars of comparative

politics, such as Piattoni (2001) and Kopecky and Scherlis (2008). The notion is however widely used in the literature on comparative public administration. In studies of public administration patronage is usually synonymous with the top down politicization of administrative bodies, understood as the substitution of political criteria for merit-based criteria in the selection, retention and promotion of members of the public service (Peters and Pierre 2004).

The definition employed here has the advantage of clarifying the analytical and empirical links between patronage and clientelism which I define as the direct and contingent exchange of votes for material benefits (Piattoni 2001; Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007; Stokes 2007). Patronage and clientelism are analytically connected. What binds patronage to clientelism is the shared reference to the relationship between dyadic partners that exchange resources to guarantee their reciprocal advantage. As noted by Bearfield (2009), to study patronage means to focus on supportive exchange dyads in which the patron offers resources in return for the loyalty of the client. To study patronage however, means considering only those supportive exchange dyads nested within the State, and formed by the offer of public positions to clients by political leaders. Compared to patronage, clientelistic supportive exchange dyads are much more widespread, since they penetrate society, distributing a wider variety of benefits.

The empirical connections between patronage and clientelism are effectively expressed in the distinction between “job patronage” and “resource patronage” as proposed by Gingerich (2004). “Job patronage” is a clientelistic exchange based on the offer of low-level administrative positions in exchange for votes. “Resource patronage”, on the other hand, regards “how the behavior of party sympathizers in the public administration may redound to the favor of the individuals or organizations which got them there” (Gingerich 2004:4). It is only thanks to the particularistic control of top positions that politicians succeed in manipulating the administrative process, pressuring managers who control State resources. Resource patronage is thus a necessary condition for the extraction of a huge quantity of resources from the State, then distributed as selective benefits by political machines (Piattoni 2001; Müller 2006).

To recap, patronage and clientelism have both been defined as exchanges between dyadic partners. They have been distinguished on the bases of: a) the location of exchange, where patronage only takes place within the State, while clientelism is an electoral linkage that connects state and society; b) the object of the exchange, where patronage distributes only administrative positions, while clientelism offers a vast range of benefits; c) the objective of the exchange, where clientelism aims to gather electoral support while patronage may fulfil a vast range of functions. The following section is dedicated to the discussion of the functions of patronage.

Traditional and Contemporary Accounts of Patronage

Patronage understood as the politically motivated distribution of public jobs may fulfil two different sets of functions: that of rewarding party supporters, on one hand, and that of placing trusted professionals in top administrative positions in order to acquire control over the design and implementation of policies, on the other (Kopecky and Scherlis 2008).

According to an influential account (Shefter 1977), the supply side is crucial for the development of patronage as reward. Patronage as reward has in fact only been widespread in those cases where democratization preceded bureaucratization. Where bureaucracies consolidated before the advent of mass politics, the latter have been able to build coalitions to support their autonomy which prevented the diffusion of patronage practices. However, a more recent strand of research has linked the diffusion of patronage as reward to the deficiencies in party system institutionalization. According to this perspective, the configuration of political competition that precedes administrative professionalization can contain pressures towards the politicization of the state.

Analysing post-communist democracies, O'Dwyer (2006) has specified the preconditions for the development of "robust competition" (Grzymala-Busse 2007), which constrains partisan exploitation of the state. Grzymala-Busse has conceptualized robust competition as party

competition which is *clear* (the government and opposition camps are clearly distinct and easily identifiable to electors), *critical* (the opposition monitors and denounces the misdeeds of those in government) and *plausible* (no parties are excluded *a priori* from governing coalitions, all parties are credible governing partners). For O'Dwyer robust competition can only develop in a bipolar party system characterized by low fragmentation and stability of government alternatives. Such a party system is capable of developing effective mechanisms of vertical accountability that voters can use to punish the excessive patronage practices of governing parties. Fragmentation and instability of competing governing coalitions instead shorten the time horizons of government coalition members. This uncertainty encourages opportunistic behaviour among party leaders, who capture organisational resources in order to survive within fluid systems. In addition, fragmentation and unpredictable governing formulae weaken the ability of the opposition parties to present themselves as a credible alternative government.

However, patronage can also be used to support the political control of administrative bodies, acting as a mechanism of functional integration between political and bureaucratic élites. As noted by Mayntz and Derlien (1989:384), "political patronage is often used not only to reward loyal followers, but quite consciously as a supplementary strategy of executive leadership". According to contemporary accounts, the political control of top positions tends to become the dominant motivation behind patronage practices (Kopecky and Scherlis 2008). The factors that lead to the prevalence of patronage as control are changes in party organizations and the managerial reshaping of the state. Processes of organizational adaptation have changed the relation between parties, society and the state (Katz and Mair 2009). Parties are no longer capable of transmitting the demands of society to the state nor of translating collective preferences into distinct policy alternatives. Parties have become agencies of government for coordinating elite activity within public institutions. It is not therefore surprising that parties as semi-public agencies are interested in appointing networks of professionals to reinforce their links with the state, rather than reward activists and members in order to halt the erosion of their links with society. The changes in the use

of patronage must also be understood in light of the weakening of traditional mechanisms of hierarchical control, caused by New Public Management reforms that have intensified problems of agency in recent decades. It has been highlighted that after the disaggregation of public organisations promoted by managerial and regulatory reforms, political appointments act as an alternative mechanism of control that facilitate information flows in contemporary fragmented systems of governance (Peters and Pierre 2004).

Finally, the prevalence of strategies of political control over top state posts is also due to the demise of clientelism in affluent societies (Kitschelt 2007). The crisis of patronage as reward in once highly clientelistic polities is a political-economic phenomenon owed to increasing dissatisfaction among large sections of the electorate with the inefficiency of the vast state-controlled economic sector in a context of economic globalization. The rigidity of clientelistic politicisation of the State hinders the continuous innovation and adaptation to competitive pressures needed to remain at the forefront of economic efficiency. When the realignment in the configuration of party system provides the opportunity to citizens to express their dissatisfaction with clientelistic practices, global economic transformations leads to the crisis of mass clientelism in affluent societies.

Patronage between consolidation and crisis of Italian democracy

Italy constitutes a particularly relevant case for the study of the transformation of patronage. There is no doubt that the Italian political system has been in a period of transition since at least 1992. This is a peculiar transition, triggered by the collapse of a democratic regime that has correctly been defined as a *partitocrazia*, that is a regime characterized by the excessive power of parties which acted as “unregulated regulators” (Pasquino 1989) and whose power expanded into every sphere of the economy and society.

The regime created after the Second World War was able to survive for nearly half a century despite the fact that the legitimacy of democracy was challenged by the presence of “anti-system” parties (Sartori 1976) such as the communist party (PCI) and the neo-fascist party (MSI). The extreme fragmentation and rigid ideological polarization of political competition led Sartori to define the Italian party system as a case of “polarized pluralism” characterized by tri-polar centrifugal competition. This pattern of competitive interaction made the Christian Democrats (DC) the dominant party within the system, occupying the centre and constituting an indispensable partner for the formation of governing coalitions.

The weakness of the Italian state offered the DC access to the public resources necessary to feed its “soft hegemony” (Tarrow 1990) based on a strategy of individual mobilization. The DC had inherited weak and delegitimized bureaucracies and an already vast public economic sector from the fascist regime. The occupation of top state posts by loyal personnel enabled the DC and its coalition partners to extract a huge quantity of public resources from the vast and heterogeneous universe of the disaggregated administration (public corporations, para-statal bodies and public agencies) to distribute as selective benefits. These benefits obviously included low-level administrative posts, massively distributed to reward loyal clients (Golden 2003).

Italian democracy succeeded in closing its legitimacy gap with the strong control of political parties over civil society through the penetration of public institutions, especially in the economic sector (Morlino 1998). The proportional electoral system, the dispersion of power in the parliamentary system and the limited decision-making capacities of the government combined to create the institutional conditions for a democracy that operated on a consensual logic. The fragmentation and polarization of the party system were thus accommodated by pragmatic and dense networks of political exchange.

The emergence of a new international context shook the pillars of the DC’s dominance: the collapse of the communist regimes in central and eastern Europe definitively eroded the ideological polarization of political competition; the fiscal crisis of the state and progress in European

integration posed limits to the exorbitant particularistic distribution of public resources by governing coalitions. The end of polarization and distributive strategies following these exogenous shocks accentuated internal turbulence. Various unconventional actors voiced the widely-shared demand for political change and administrative efficiency, provoking the destructuring of the party system and its constitutive units. Eventually, the legitimacy crisis of the political system caused by the pragmatic dissatisfaction of citizens with the low capacity of under-performing institutions generated the collapse of the old Italian party system (Morlino and Tarchi 1996).

The new Italian political system between bipolarism and State reform

In the crisis of the old party system a crucial role was played by the success of the popular referenda of the early 1990s, which launched the reform of the electoral systems. Mixed systems with low thresholds but a strong majoritarian bias, which is due to the award of a seat majority bonus to the largest coalition, were introduced at all levels of government in a context characterized by the atomization of the party system. A process of institutional learning developed among the new political elites that had chosen to gather their parties in catch-all blocs to adapt to the centripetal character of competition, created by the majoritarian logic of the post-1992 electoral reforms (Forestiere 2009). From 1994 onwards, the affirmation of the coalitions as new actors in the electoral competition consolidated the bipolar mechanics of the party system, producing frequent complete alternations of government.

The affirmation of bipolar patterns of competition has not however reduced the fragmentation generated by the destructuring of the old party system (Morlino 1996). The coalitions have in fact restructured the electoral competition, leaving party organizations under-institutionalized. As it happens in many new democracies, the party system has not been institutionalized on the supply side (Rose and Munro 2009). The fragmentation and the failed stabilization of the new party

organizations obstructed the institutionalization of competition. The new Italian party system thus operates as a “fragmented bipolarism”, a floating system in which catch-all coalitions of unstable parties alternate in government (D’Alimonte 2005).

The crisis of the old parties that had colonized the state also offered the opportunity to introduce changes in the administrative system (Lewanski 1999). In the years during which the old parties collapsed and the new parties struggled to restructure competition, the void of power was filled by governments made up of technocratic components (Pasquino 1997). These governments launched the transformation of state intervention in the economic sector, under pressure from budget obligations imposed by the process of European integration. The liberalisation of markets was begun through the creation of independent regulatory authorities and the process of privatisation that reduced and reorganized the galaxy of state-owned enterprises.

The arrival of new parties in government completed another two processes of reform launched by the technical governments, decentralization and the reorganization of the central bureaucracies. The sub-national executives had acquired far-reaching powers of regulation over administrative organization at the sub-national levels in order to manage the new competences and functions progressively transferred from the central government. The enhanced organizational autonomy produced significant growth in terms of disaggregated peripheral administrations. Moreover, in both the centre and the periphery reforms inspired by New Public Management have enlarged the powers and responsibilities of top officials. However, the discretion of the government in allocating fixed term contract posts to managers who have lost the security of tenure, has also increased.

The empirical analysis that follows proposes to ascertain how far the radical changes of the 1990s have affected the diffusion, logic and mechanisms of patronage in Italy. The analysis aims to fill a gap in the greater part of the literature which continues to associate Italy with the old patronage practices that developed in a political-administrative context overturned by the crisis of the 1990s.

Method

The systematic comparative study of dyadic relations is particularly difficult. Problems of observation such as *amorphousness*, *latency* and *elusiveness* of the dyadic combinations obstruct their identification within modern formal institutions (Landé 1983). This study is part of a cross-national investigation into patronage practices (Kopecky, Mair and Spirova Forthcoming) and data were collected following the steps described by Kopecky, Scherlis and Spirova (2008). A new method was developed to measure patronage in order to solve some of the shortcomings of previous research on the topic that lacked comparability, were restricted to the higher ranks of public organisations, or, in other cases, used proxies such as personnel spending that might not exactly catch the extent and nature of patronage.

As a first step in operationalizing patronage, public organizations are selected for study. The state is divided by policy sector. The use of policy sectors as the first criterion of distinction is based on the hypothesis that parties appoint with different motives and scope in different sectors. The investigation of the scope and rationale of political appointments in different sectors might highlight variances so far overlooked by studies that consider the state as an undifferentiated unit of analysis. For this study on Italy, ten policy sectors are selected: Economy, Finance, Media, Education & Culture, Judiciary, Welfare, Foreign Services, Healthcare, Military & Police, and Regional & Local administration, the latter being included in order to assess patronage at all levels of government. In order to obtain more detailed information, for each policy sector a number of organizations are selected, divided into three different types of institutions, namely Ministerial Units (*MIN*), Non Departmental Agencies (*NDAs*, i.e. regulatory and policy advising and devising agencies), and Executing Institution (*EXE*, institutions involved in delivering services and provision, and in production).

Expert interviews are the main source for examining patronage practices. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in 2008-2009 with experts knowledgeable about appointments to public institutions

in each of the selected policy sectors. For each policy sector five respondents were selected using the snowball technique, leading to a total of 50 face-to-face interviews. The experts hail from a variety of backgrounds: from politicians, high ranking civil servants and board members, to academics.

Experts were asked about the range of patronage – i.e. the number of institutions for every institutional type and policy sector that were subject to patronage – and answers were recorded on a scale of 0 (no appointments), 1 (in a few institutions), 2 (in most), and 3 (in all). To measure the depth of patronage, respondents were asked whether parties appoint only at the top managerial level (1), or if they also reach the middle level (2), or go down to the technical and service personnel (3). Based on all answers to these two questions, the median score was calculated for range and depth for every institutional type and policy sector. Other questions dealing with further aspects of patronage within each policy sector of expertise were open-ended and coded at a later stage. These included questions on the actors who control political appointments within parties, the motivations and criteria they follow when selecting appointees, and changes in patronage practices over time.

Empirical Analysis

The scope of patronage

As Figure 1 shows, patronage is still a distinctive characteristic of the Italian political-administrative system.

– FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE –

The high values for the range of patronage practices at both the national and peripheral levels reveal that only a very few public organizations escape political control. As far as depth is concerned, the permeability of local administrations emerges. The depth of patronage is high, particularly in Southern Italy, where the penetration of local disaggregated administrations allows parties to distribute low-level posts to their loyal supporters.

At the national level patronage practices are less common and tend to be concentrated at the ministerial level. The below Figures 2 and 3 highlight a very high level of range, and a fairly high level of depth of patronage, in the ministries.

– FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE –

– FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE -

Range is also very high in the NDAs where, however, political control only tends to affect the highest levels. The central executive institutions constitute the least politicised area of the Italian administration as highlighted by the lower range values. In addition, in a large number of policy sectors the depth of patronage is limited to the highest levels of the executive institutions.

The interviewees provided information on the evolution of patronage that allows us to identify the factors that impact on levels of politicization of the State. The effects of the administrative reform as a source of constraints and opportunities for politicization turned out to be particularly influential. Above all, privatisations notably reduced the perimeter of the economic public sector. The remaining state-owned companies were restructured to facilitate their integration into global markets and respect the prescriptions of EU law. Patronage at the lower levels has fallen drastically, since it is incompatible with constraints on public finances, made more stringent by the process of European integration.

The European Union and global markets, however, exert much less pressure at the local level, where patronage proliferates. The new political class operating at peripheral levels of government has drawn on the principles of public management reforms to build disaggregated institutions from scratch that allow the distribution of a vast number of posts with huge flexibility. The disaggregated arenas of subnational administrations have thus become the privileged site of patronage practices in contemporary Italy.

Fixed-term contracts for senior executives have become common in ministerial units in both the centre and the periphery. According to the principles of public management reforms the temporary nature of contracts would have ensured the accountability of public officials for the results of their management. Instead, managerial reforms have transformed the old “ossified world” (Cassese 1999) of Italian bureaucrats into a fluid collection of individuals that build relationships of trust with politicians in order to obtain fixed-term contracts. Thanks to NPM-inspired reforms bureaucratic patronage, which rewarded seniority, has been replaced by political patronage, which privileges the political loyalty of senior executives.

The mechanisms of patronage

As shown in the figure 4 below, professional quality is the criterion that prevails in processes of political appointment.

– FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE –

For a large section of appointees, at least an adequate level of expertise is thus a necessary condition for their selection by political leaders. Expertise is not, however, a sufficient condition. Professionals must in fact develop personal relations with party leaders placed at the intersection between the cabinet and the party executive. Bonds of trust built through personal contacts are

privileged by party leaders, as they guarantee the trustworthiness and the responsiveness of the professionals selected. The political link, on the other hand, plays a marginal role in selection processes because of the low involvement of party organizations.

Compared to the patronage practices of the old parties, the personalization of political control over the state today is extreme. In the old party system bonds of trust between political leaders and managers were created through the organizational infrastructure of the party, which selected personnel on the basis of political loyalty. Today, patronage is instead managed by leaders who draw appointees from their personal networks rooted in the professional world (private sector, consulting, public sector, and academia). The role of the party organization has been usurped by the personal entourages of leaders. Entourages are clusters of dyadic horizontal relations between political leaders and professionals that operate as mediators that build bonds of trust between leaders and nominees. Therefore, the politicization of the Italian State is now based on horizontal rather than vertical dyadic linkages. While the old parties produced elites through mass organizational networks, the entourages of the new leaders manage public appointments through personal elite networks.

The uses of patronage

Personalization of patronage in Italy is an indicator of the under-institutionalization of new parties subordinated to the personal power of the leaders. The organizational weakness of the new parties in government has placed them in a position of dependence with respect to members of the cabinet in the management of patronage. In personalizing patronage, governors not only reinforce the policy making capacity of the cabinet, but above all they consolidate their power base through access to material public resources that are manipulated in order to feed the private networks that support their political activity. As happens in new democracies, in Italy “political personalities make use of

parties for their own ends, rather than act as the leaders of collective organizations of political actions” (Webb and White 2007, 359).

The below Figure 5 highlights the pre-eminence of control of public bodies as the motivation behind nominations. Around a third of those interviewed retain that control is the only reason for patronage, while the others mentioned the coupling of control and reward.

– FIGURE 5 ABOUT HERE –

It is opportune to specify how the interviewees interpreted the notion of political control of public institutions. Two modes of control exist: a) “governing-oriented patronage”, aimed at coordinating the implementation of parties’ policy goals; b) the already mentioned “resource patronage” (Gingerich 2004), which is a strategy for extracting resources from the state. Both modalities were cited by the interviewees, but “resource patronage” was by far the most popular. In addition, resource patronage mostly sustains fund-raising efforts rather than clientelistic strategies of vote-gathering.

Patronage as control regulates the distribution of top strategic positions which are entrusted to professionals. Marginal positions are instead offered as rewards, and personal loyalty prevails as a selection criterion. Notwithstanding the prevalence of control, reward remains a relevant motivation because parties need to distribute jobs as selective incentives for maintaining a minimum organisational presence on the ground. Local office-holders in particular distribute jobs to activists, having taken advantage of the expansion of patronage in the periphery to reinforce their power vis-à-vis the central party leadership. Thanks to local powers of patronage, local bosses feed their personal committees that constitute the only party structures on the ground. The capacity for mobilization of local structures is offered by notables to national leaders in exchange for their lack of interference in local parties’ affairs. In Southern Italy, in addition, “job patronage” has not disappeared. Competition between candidates unleashed by electoral systems with preferential

voting pushes politicians to offer posts in sub-national administrations in exchange for votes in under-developed regions¹.

The Italian Case in Comparative Perspective

In this section the empirical evidence on the Italian case will be used to discuss the hypotheses on the diffusion of patronage in contemporary democracies presented in the introductory sections.

The hypothesis on the decline of clientelism in affluent societies (Kitschelt 2007) is confirmed². In the Italian case it was the crisis of the old patterns of political competition that allowed the competitive pressures of the global political economy to affect the State. In the early 1990s the pressures of global markets met with no resistance from the old governing parties in the process of disbanding. The exceptional break in the party system opened a window of opportunity for the technocratic elites that had guided the country's entry into Europe by restructuring the State. The new configuration of the economic public sector designed by the process of European integration constituted an exogenous constraint for the new parties, whose patronage practices had to be adapted to the culture of macro-economic stability institutionalized by membership of the European Union (Radaelli 2002).

Italy, then, no longer constitutes a case of "bureaucratic clientelism" (Lyrintzis 1984). However, the transformation of the Italian party system entailed the shift from the weak logic of governance under the DC dominance to the equally weak logic of governance of bipolar alternation between catch-all blocs of under-institutionalized parties. As hypothesised by O'Dwyer (2006), the uncertainty produced by the high fragmentation of the coalitions has encouraged the use of extractive strategies

¹ However, the persistence of patronage as a clientelistic exchange in Southern regions cannot compensate for the fall in the depth of party colonization within central disaggregated bodies.

² It must be noted that this hypothesis is confirmed only with respect to the distribution of public sector jobs as one of the most relevant clientelistic exchanges. Further research is needed to empirically assess the decline of clientelistic exchanges based on selective benefits other than public jobs.

by political elites. The organizational weakness of parties was further increased by the process of decentralization and the reorganization of subnational levels, which accentuated institutional fragmentation and offered local leaders access to new arenas of patronage that reinforced their power. As new organizations lacking social bases that emerged within a fragmented systemic context, the new Italian parties are fluid stratarchical collections of patrons who reward the informal power networks that sustain them with public resources.

The rapid pace of bipolar restructuring of the party system has privileged those political elites who participated in the initial stages of the transition. The rapidity of access to government for the new elites, and their frequent alternation in power, encouraged them to resort to old informal practices inherited from the old regime as a mechanism to stabilize their authority over policy-making. The use of patronage networks permitted the new elites to build their own autonomous power bases, obstructing the institutionalization of political competition. Thus, the persistent instability of the party system has been generated less by the appearance of genuinely new challenging actors than by the reconfiguration of competitive dynamics between already established political circles.

The theoretical implications of the study of the Italian case are enriched by the comparative perspective. Figure 6 reports the aggregate levels of patronage for 15 democracies investigated using the method presented in this article.

– FIGURE 6 ABOUT HERE –

The comparative study of patronage levels confirms Shefter's hypothesis on the association of weak stateness and politicization of the state. Democracies in Northern Europe, where bureaucratization preceded democratization, continue to display lower levels of patronage. In addition, in countries such as the UK the managerial disaggregation of public organizations has contributed to further depoliticize the state (Flinders 2009). Germany and Austria instead continue to display patronage levels above the European average. In Germany institutionalized patronage practices persist as a

strategy of political control of the administrative elite typical of the *ParteienStaat* (Mayntz and Derlien 1989), while the current levels of patronage in Austria are due to the decline of the deep partisan politicization of the past and the prevalence of control-oriented patronage strategies (Treib Forthcoming). Austria, like Italy, thus confirms Kitschelt's hypothesis on the decline of clientelism in affluent societies where the realignment of the party system in the 1990s (Muller and Fallend 2004) has facilitated the restructuring of the economic public sector to respond to the competitive pressures of global markets.

South European and post-communist democracies do cluster in the higher-patronage end of the sample. However, the levels of patronage differ across new democracies despite sharing the sequencing of party competition and administrative professionalization. In particular, data show that there is no "South European model" of bureaucracy characterized by the pervasiveness of patronage practices (Sotiropoulos 2004). In addition, the current emphasis on party system institutionalization to explain patronage appears misguided as highlighted by the Greek case which associates a stable two-party system with the highest level of patronage in Europe. Thus, stability and low fragmentation in the party system are not sufficient conditions to contain patronage practices in countries characterised by low administrative professionalization. When the institutionalization of the party system is achieved through the widespread and penetrating control of public resources which cements links between parties and society, as it happened in Greece (Pappas 2010), the highly competitive nature of two-party systems serves to make patronage flourish, rather than fade. The Greek case leads us to pay more attention to the choices made by political elites during democratic consolidation. The centrality of the elite choices is confirmed by the analysis of systems such as Hungary and Spain. These are new democracies in which, unlike Greece, bipolar patterns of competition have been institutionalized by party leaderships that have not solidified their organisational link with society through clientelistic mobilization (Hopkin 2001; Meyer-Sahling 2008). However, patronage practices are relevant and regard only the highest levels of the public organisations, which leaders control in order to strengthen their links with the State. In Hungary and

Spain we do not observe the growth of the State produced by deep politicization, and yet the politicisation of top positions is intense and encouraged precisely by the regular and total alternation that poses problems of trust for politicians vis-à-vis bureaucrats that have served previous opposition governments. Bipolar alternation between few stable parties thus creates pressures for the politicization of top levels through the substitution of inherited bureaucrats with trusted managers (Meyer-Sahling 2008).

The comparative study of patronage aggregate levels consequently suggests a reformulation of O'Dwyer's hypothesis. Stable bipolar party systems are not immune from patronage since they can be associated with medium or high levels of patronage. If elites choose to use clientelistic links with society to solidify their own organizations, bipolar alternation produces high levels of patronage as observed in Greece. If elites cement their organizations through control over policy making within the State, bipolar alternation produces medium levels of patronage as seen in Spain and Hungary. In addition, the pace of the consolidation of bipolar patterns of competition affects levels of patronage. In the Portuguese case with its delayed and painful consolidation of bipolarism (Jalali 2007), the protracted cooperation between the elites that built the democratic regime made problems of trust/control of the bureaucracy less intense, producing lower levels of patronage than those that characterize cases with a quick installation of regular and complete alternation between parties or stable party blocs.

Finally, deeper investigation is required to assess the influence of inherited institutions on patterns of politicization of the state. Drawing on the classification of communist regimes proposed by Kitschelt et al. (1999), Kopecky and Spirova (2010) pointed out that patronage is more extensive in Bulgaria, a system emerging from patrimonial communism, than in Czech Republic, which emerged from the more formal and professional bureaucratic-authoritarian communism. The different levels of patronage in the post-communist world highlight the need to refine Shefter's theory taking into account the different configurations of weak stateness. There are many, quite different institutional legacies which have to be carefully distinguished because they can affect patronage politics

Conclusions

This article proposed a definition of patronage as political influence over the allocation of jobs in public institutions. Recent hypotheses on the evolution of patronage in contemporary democracies were then reviewed. These hypotheses were tested using empirical information produced during a comparative investigation based on a new method for measuring patronage practices. The case investigated was the Italian one, characterized at the end of the twentieth century by the crisis of its democratic consolidation based on the partisan colonization of the State.

The empirical analysis revealed that the clientelistic style of patronage politics has diminished in importance as a mechanism of electoral linkage in Italy. Nonetheless, Italy continues to display patronage levels well above the European average. The rapid bipolar restructuring of a fragmented and unstable party system encouraged the use of patronage practices aimed at rent-seeking within a weak state, confirming the O'Dwyer hypothesis. The comparative analysis of patronage levels suggests, however, that we have to amend this hypothesis and pay more attention to the strategic choices of elites in processes of party system consolidation.

Further, how patronage as control differs in various political-administrative contexts remains to be studied. The empirical analysis of the Italian case proposed a distinction between two different functions of the control of patronage, governing-oriented and resource-based. The presence of dyadic relations between political leaders and administrative elites can either reinforce integration between parties and the state in the governing process, as seen in Germany, or further weaken the capacity of the state, as it happens in Italy. In fact, the fall of clientelism and the prevalence of patronage as control has not entailed the absence of links between the new Italian parties and society. With the resources extracted through the control of positions of power within the state, patronage has continued to fuel circuits of illicit political financing in Italy (Della Porta e Vannucci 2007). It remains to be empirically analyzed whether political parties in other countries rely on

strategies of control oriented to coordinating policy-making in the State, or establish informal links with society through corrupt practices.

Finally, the local dimension of patronage merits more detailed investigation. The study of the Italian case has highlighted the decline of party-directed patronage managed by national political machines. At the constituency level, contemporary Italian parties depend on local bosses who offer the national leadership organizational strength based on autonomous access to local powers of patronage. Further research is needed to clarify whether patronage managed by local notables has become a crucial resource for an effective presence on the ground of parties in other countries.

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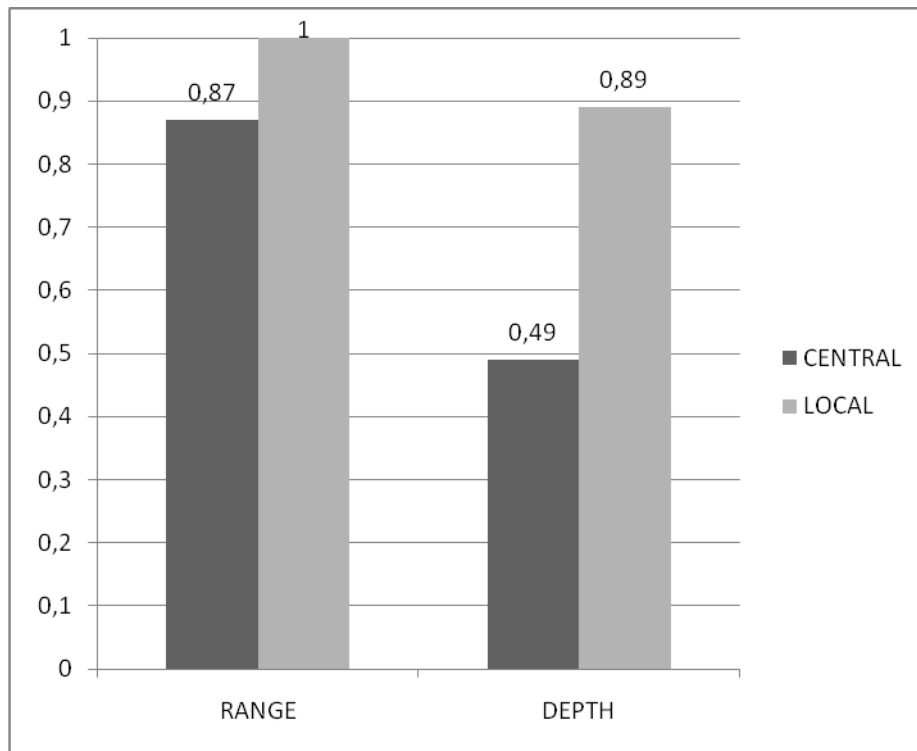
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FIGURES

Figure 1

The scope of patronage in Italy by level of government

Proportional scores based on median values



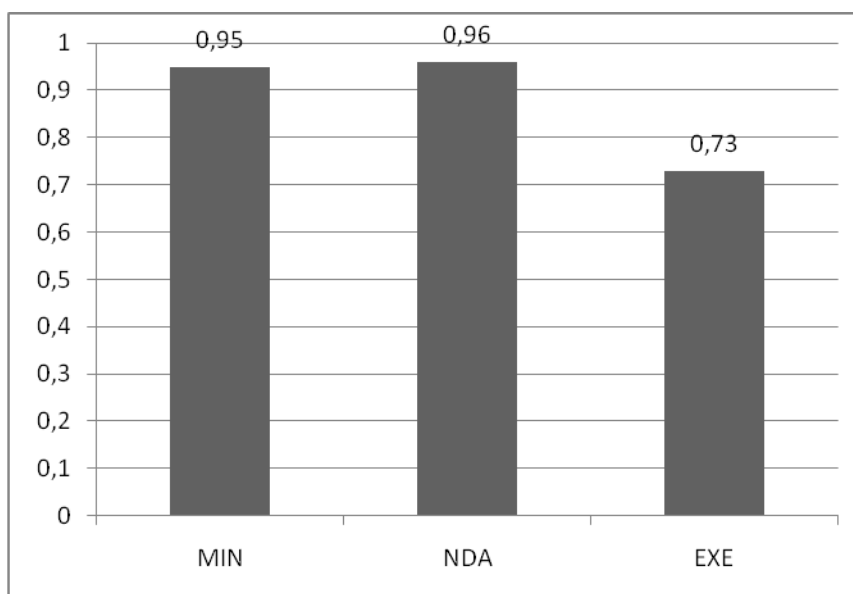
Note:

Median scores were calculated for each institutional category in each policy sector, added up for each institutional category, for the whole level of government, and then standardized in values with a range of 0 to 1.

Figure 2

The range of patronage in Italy by institutional type

Proportional scores based on median values



Notes:

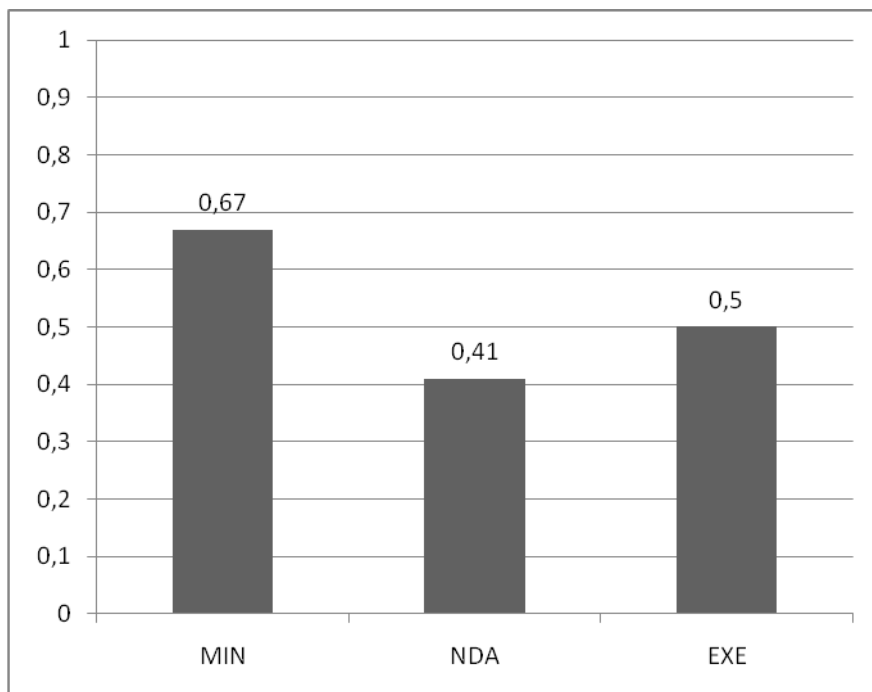
Median scores were calculated for each institutional category in each national policy sector, added up for each institutional category, and then standardized in values with a range of 0 to 1.

Min= Ministerial Units; NDA= Non Departmental Agencies; EXE= Executing Institutions

Figure 3

The depth of patronage in Italy by institutional type

Proportional scores based on median values



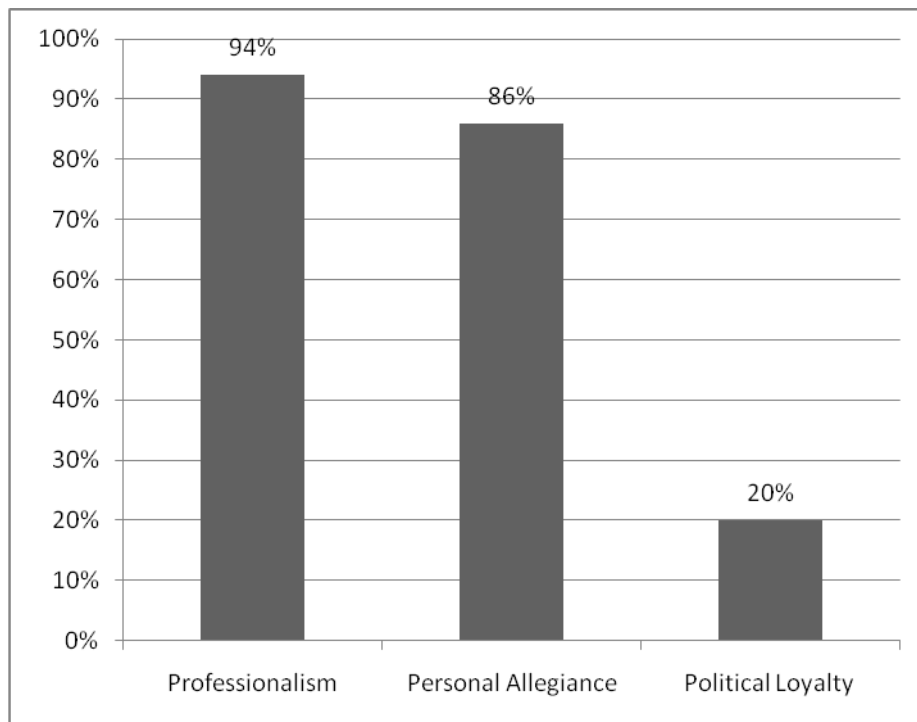
Notes:

Median scores were calculated for each institutional category in each national policy sector, added up for each institutional category, and then standardized in values with a range of 0 to 1.

MIN= Ministerial Units; NDA= Non Departmental Agencies; EXE= Executing Institutions

Figure 4

Qualifications of Appointees in Italy

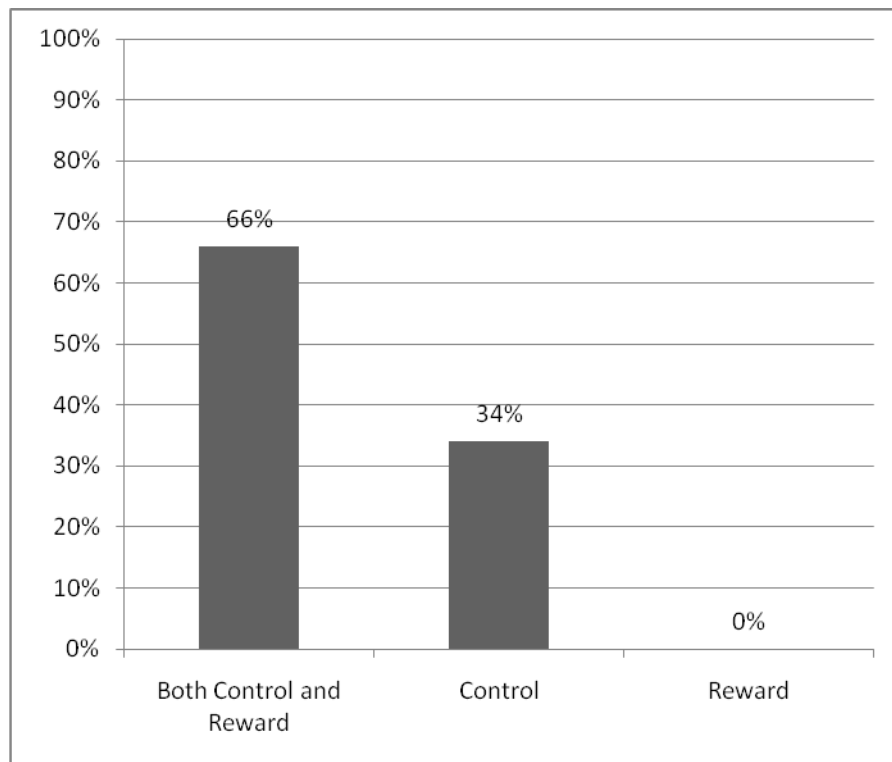


Note:

Proportion of experts who hold that professionalism, political link and personal allegiance matter for appointment. N=50.

Figure 5

Motivations for patronage in Italy

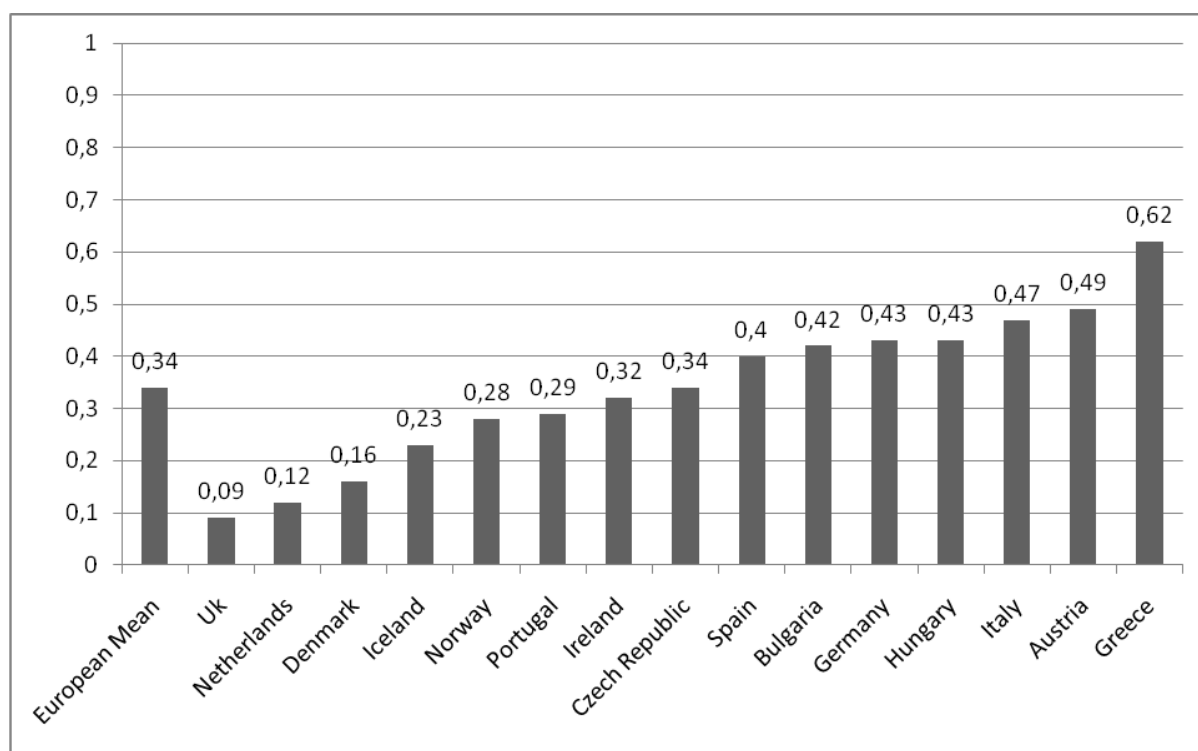


Note:

Proportion of experts who hold that reward, control or both reward and control matter for political appointment. N=50.

Figure 6

Index of Patronage, European Democracies



Source:

Own elaboration of comparative data reported in Kopecky, Mair and Spirova (Forthcoming)

Notes:

The Index of Patronage is the composite measure of range and depth of political appointments. It is calculated multiplying the two median values for range and depth in each institutional type in each of the policy sector; a total score for each country is calculated by adding the values across policy sectors and institutional types; as final output the index is presented in standardized values with a range of 0 to 1.

0=no party politicization of the state; 1=full overlap of parties and the state, every public institution is subject to patronage practices that reach all levels of the institutional hierarchy.

For each country 9 policy sectors have been selected: Foreign Services, Economy, Finance, Military & Police, Judiciary, Education & Culture, Healthcare, Media, Regional and Local Administration.