When responsibility is blurred: Italian national elections in times of economic crisis, technocratic government, and ever-growing populism

Monica Poletti
Università degli Studi di Milano
(monica.poletti@unimi.it)

Federico Vegetti
Universität Mannheim
(fede.vegetti@gmail.com)

Paolo Segatti
Università degli Studi di Milano
(paolo.segatti@unimi.it)

ECPR General Conference, Bordeaux, 4-7 September 2013
Panel: ‘The Consequences of Crisis for Southern Europe’.
Abstract

Succeeding a right-wing coalition, since November 2011 Italy has been led by a technocratic government, appointed to implement austerity measures in the context of the Eurozone debt crisis. While the two ideologically rival party coalition leaders formally supported the government, other old and new actors built their campaigns around anti-system themes. We argue that, in such a blurred situation, in which is dramatically harder to evaluate parties based on economic considerations, voters could not rely as strongly as they could in the past on ideological (left-right) labels. Using data from a repeated cross-sectional survey running from March 2011 to February 2013 and propensity-to-vote (PTV) scores, this study aims to investigate whether the macro context reduced the impact of ideology on support for the center-left Democratic Party (PD) and the center-right People of Freedom (PDL) party. Results show that our expectations are only in part corroborated by the data. First, we find that the effect of ideological labels on both parties' evaluations remains strong and persistent over time. Second, the existence of a technocratic government and worsening economic conditions had an effect only on the evaluation of the PDL, but not on the evaluation of the PD.

Keywords: Ideology; Technocratic Government; Economic vote; Voting Behaviour; Party Utility.
1. The Italian election of 2013: the end of bipolarism?

In the decades after the Second World War, electoral competition in Italy has been constantly organized along the lines of left-right ideological divisions (see Bellucci and Segatti 2011). However, the parliamentary election of 2013 seems to have broken this tradition. The greatest symptom of the left-right parties’ failure to provide citizens with guidance for their voting decisions is the significant and largely unexpected success of a new political subject that has deliberately positioned itself out of the traditional ideological dialectics: the Five Star Movement (M5S). Founded in 2009 by the comedian Beppe Grillo, the M5S is the political derivative of a grassroots movement mainly based on the web, which emphasizes in its program issues such as free access to the internet and on-line deliberation as an alternative to representative democracy (Biorcio and Natale, 2013; Corbetta and Gualmini, 2013).

The origins of the movement are generally set to mid-2005, when Grillo proposed, from his blog, to adopt the social-networking portal Meetup as a platform for organizing coordinated discussion groups, which would allow followers from the same city to meet and discuss local administrative issues. The movement reached full nation-wide visibility in September 2007, with a demonstration organized by Grillo on his blog that mobilized people in several Italian cities. On that occasion, the staff organizing the demonstration managed to collect some 332.000 signatures for a “popular initiative law” aimed to prevent the possibility for people convicted of a crime to be elected in parliament. A second demonstration, organized in April 2008, involved a collection of signatures for a referendum proposing the withdrawal of public funding to newspapers that Grillo had accused, on his blog, of being in collusion with the political parties. The same year, Grillo started organizing a number of “civil lists” to run for local elections, and eventually founded the Five Star Movement in October 2009.

Since its foundation, the M5S has been claiming to be “neither left nor right”, a position justified by the assumption that the ideological labels are just tools employed by the political parties to fool the electorate. In fact, this position came in conjunction with a straightforward accusation that the main parties are colluding with each other against the people's will, which has increasingly strengthened the movement's reputation as an “anti-politics” party. Previous local elections had signaled the growing electoral success of the M5S. In March 2010, at the regional elections in Piedmont, the party was accused of taking votes away from the left-wing, after the right-wing candidate won against the

---

1 The announcement, dated 16 July 2005, can be retrieved here: http://www.beppegrillo.it/2005/07/incontriamoci_m_1.html (retrieved 29/05/2013).
4 See http://www.beppegrillo.it/2008/01/liste_civiche_s/index.html (retrieved 29/05/2013).
incumbent governor with a margin of 0.4% of the votes. In 2011 and early 2012 the party ran for other second-order elections, eventually obtaining almost 15% of the votes at the regional elections in Sicily. Given these priors, a good performance of the M5S was widely expected at the national level too. However, the 25.6% of valid votes for the low chamber obtained by the party at the election in February 2013 represented an unprecedented event in Italian republican history. It was the first time a party admittedly extraneous to both “left” and “right” identifications had obtained such a significant electoral success. Thus, it is unsurprising that this has been interpreted by many as a collapse of the traditional political divisions.

In light of the impressive breakout of the M5S, pundits have argued that Italian politics has moved on from the strong emphasis on left-right distinctions that characterized its dialectics during the Second Republic. In particular, the elections of 2013 have shown a consistent decline in social-structural and territorial voting (Diamanti 2013, D'Alimonte and Maggini 2013, Maggini 2013), two quite common patterns of political behavior among Italian citizens (Bellucci and Segatti 2011, Galli and Prandi 1970). Other scholars have highlighted an increased tendency among survey respondents to refuse to place themselves on a left-right political continuum (Marini 2013; for a different view see Segatti 2013). To be sure, in Italian political discourse, the ideological labels “left” and “right” are not always employed to refer to actual policy or issue-based distinctions. For instance, Diamanti (2009) defined a communicative trait of the former PM Silvio Berlusconi as “anti-communism without communism”, referring to his habit of designating as communist every one who publicly criticizes him or threatens his position, such as left-wing politicians, journalists and judges. Yet evidence from political psychology points out that ideological labels do not actually need to have a strong policy content to effectively help citizens in making political decisions (Conover and Feldman 1981; Levitin and Miller 1979). Regardless of their content, ideological labels were a prominent heuristic used by Italian voters to orientate themselves among different party-blocks during the Second Republic. Thus, to claim their disappearance, or their relative dilution among other types of considerations, implies an assumption that the Italian voters have undergone important changes in their perception of the political space.

All in all, the idea that ideological considerations are losing importance is making its way as a brand-new narrative of Italian politics. This is due in part to the unprecedented success of a “third party” such as the M5S, and in part to a general weakening of the well-established ideologically-based party loyalties. Such a narrative implicitly assumes a change in the voters’ minds, so that ideological considerations have lost their relevance as a criterion to evaluate the political options. However, nothing is known about, first, the causes of this alleged change in people's minds and, second, whether
or not the observed electoral turmoil is due to a *top-down process* instead.

2. The macro-context of the elections

We argue in this study that the interplay between two characteristics of the macro context in which the election of 2013 was held can explain the electoral change. The first and most obvious factor is the deep *economic recession* that has been affecting Italy since the early months of the global financial crisis in 2008-2009. While economic hard times represent a threat to political institutions per se (e.g. Newton and Norris 2000), the current global crisis has had, in Italy, some additional political implications, due to the escalation of the European sovereign debt crisis. The impact of the recession on the Italian economy made the country's debt-to-GDP ratio grow to exceptionally high levels as of 2010.

In a similar fashion as with other Southern-European countries, such as Greece, Spain and Portugal, the high Italian debt increased investors' fear of a sovereign default, which in turn led to further growing bond yields. The growing severity of the situation was reflected by the differential between the Italian 10-years benchmark bonds (BTP) and the German Bund, the so-called “*spread*”, which has grown dramatically since July 2011 and reached alarming peaks in November 2011.

**FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE**

The two trends reported in Figure 1 show the escalation of the economic and financial crisis in Italy from early 2011 until the elections in late February 2013. The panel on the right shows the unemployment rate among the whole population\(^6\). This is an indicator of general economic performance that is expected to be perceived more directly by the public than others, such as e.g. GDP growth. The panel on the left shows the spread, i.e. the differential between the yield of the Italian 10-year bonds and the German ones multiplied by one-hundred\(^7\). The latter indicator is not tied to the actual economic performance of the country, but it rather depends on the investors' choices. In this sense, it is to be read as an indicator of the degree of *confidence* that the economic agents have in the capacity of the Italian state to pay back its debt, compared to a highly-reliable state (i.e. Germany) as a reference point. However, in spite of its “virtual” nature, the spread BTP/BUND was the indicator on which the media were most-heavily referring to in their narration of the crisis in the second half of

\(^6\) Data filtered from seasonal effects, obtained from Istat (see http://www.istat.it/it/lavoro).
\(^7\) This is a fairly standard way to report this type of indicator. Data obtained from Thomson-Reuters (see https://forms.thomsonreuters.com/dastream/)
The most evident information provided by the picture is, on the one hand, the constant growth of unemployment since early 2011 until the election, indicating an increasingly poor performance of the real economy, and on the other hand, a rather volatile attitude of the financial markets towards the Italian debt. In spite of the importance of the real economy, the latter indicator became the one responsible for important political choices.

Eventually, on November 12th 2011, the government led by the PM Silvio Berlusconi resigned from office, handing the lead to a technocratic government guided by the economist and former EU commissioner Mario Monti. The aim of substituting a government elected by the citizens with a government of technocrats was essentially to reassure investors about the trustworthiness of Italian politics, and to implement some fairly unpopular reforms. However, this was not possible without the support of the parliament. Thus, Monti’s cabinet came together with a “call for responsibility” among all the parties in parliament to support the government’s action, which had been accepted by all parties but two, the right-wing Northern League (LN) and the centrist Italy of Values (IDV).

This leads to the second peculiarity of the circumstances in which the election of 2013 was been held. From November 2011 to the Election Day in February 2013, the two main parties in the political system, the Democratic Party (PD) on the left and the People of Freedom (PDL) on the right, were both supporting the government. While coalition governments are rather common in Italian politics, a coalition between the two main opposing parties was an unprecedented event, especially after the attempts to establish bipolar competition between left and right poles after the end of the First Republic in the early 1990s. This created an anomalous situation in which two parties whose political identities had always been clearly divided from one another by ideological divergences and mutual hostility were standing together supporting the same executive. Moreover, the technocratic government implemented a number of highly unpopular reforms, such as a particularly tough pension cut and the introduction of a brand new property tax. Thus, to sum up, for about fourteen months, the two principal alternatives on the Italian political landscape were sharing the responsibility and both supporting an unpopular government in times of economic crisis.

3. Two mechanisms to explain the crisis of ideology

Given these premises, there are two mechanisms by which the political context may have reduced the

A weak indicator of the growing relevance of the spread for the Italian public opinion since mid-2011 is the tendency reported by Google Trends, which shows no activity before July and a great peak in November. See http://www.google.de/trends/explore?q=pread+bund+ptb#q=spread%20bund%20btp&geo=IT&date=1%2F2011%2027m&cmpt=q
importance of ideology distinctions, and particularly of the single left-right dimension, in the eyes of
the voters. The first refers to the effect of the joint support of the government by both the PD and the
PDL on voters' perceptions of ideological differences. As Fortunato and Stevenson (2013) show,
coalition partners are perceived by the general public as more ideologically similar than they actually
are. In the same way, the coalition between the PD and the PDL may have led citizens to perceive them
as ideologically close to each other. Because the two parties have traditionally been the coalition
leaders of the two ideological blocks, a perceived convergence between them could have led citizens to
discount ideological considerations as criteria to discern between the possible alternatives at the time of
the election. Such a mechanism is essentially the inverse of the salience effect of party polarization on
issue and ideological considerations that is well established in political science literature (Alvarez and
A second mechanism relates to the negative economic conditions in which elections were held.
Literature on economic voting has long since established the reward-punishing hypothesis: voters tend
to punish the government when economic conditions are bad (Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2007; Duch
and Stevenson 2008). Given the bipolar competition that characterized Italian politics in the Second
Republic, Italian voters in 2013 are generally used to a pattern of alternation between ideologically-
homogeneous left and right-wing governments. Thus, until the Monti government, both ideological and
economic considerations would pit one block against the other. This implied that, during economic hard
times, whoever was in opposition could use ideological arguments to blame the government for its
negative performance, and whoever was in government could use ideological arguments to argue that
the opposition would have done worse. However, in 2013 Italian voters were confronted for the first
time with a scenario where flaunted ideological differences were in fact contradicted by an actual
shared (negative) performance in office. For this reason, the bad economic performance registered in
Italy in the months before the election could have given Italian voters a “cold shower”, waking them up
from the widely-used narrative of the ideological conflict and showing them that, in fact, both
ideological sides are equally defenseless in front of the economic crisis.
Both mechanisms lead to the same prediction: a reduced importance of ideology in guiding Italian
voters' party evaluations. This is in a way different from what pundits have been claiming since just
after the election in February, namely that ideology would no longer be important at all for the Italian
public. In other words, what we contend here is that, if the Italian election of 2013 has been
characterized by a weakening of ideological orientations, that is because such considerations became

---

9 We use left-right as synonymous of ideology since in Western Europe left-right is usually considered as the most important
dimension of the broader concept of ideology (Benoit and Laver 2006; Inglehart and Klingemann 1976).
more fallible in helping people distinguish between the two most important Italian parties. This could have helped parties that have been able to distinguish themselves from the status quo by stating their extraneousness from ideological diatribes, such as the M5S. Moreover, this could have weakened some other well-established linkages between parties and voters, such as those based on left-right considerations. In the following sections of this paper we focus on the latter type of indicator, i.e. the role of ideology in influencing people's party preferences. A general theoretical framework to account for this is presented in the next section.

4. Ideology, economy, and the process of voting decision

The origin of the concept of “party utility” goes back to Downs' (1957) economic account of vote choice, which in turn builds on preference models developed in microeconomics. In this framework, utility can be defined as the degree of expected satisfaction that an individual attaches to the different options that he/she can choose from, and this determines the outcome of the choice itself. In literature on voting behavior, sources of utility are usually attributed to policy-related considerations (e.g. Downs 1957; Stokes 1963), evaluations of the past performance of the elites in government (Fiorina 1981), attachments to partisan groups (e.g. Campbell et al. 1960) and voters’ social-structural characteristics (e.g. Lazarsfeld et al. 1944; Lipset and Rokkan 1967). All in all, the vote has been conceptualized as the outcome of a complex process where different considerations enter into play at different steps, converging towards the final choice.

Particularly crucial for this type of conceptualization has been the work of Campbell and colleagues (1960) *The American Voter*, one of the early works of the Michigan school that provided a theoretical account of voting behavior by using the metaphor of a “funnel of causality”. The authors argued that voting was the endpoint of a series of causal determinants, in which some factors are closer both temporally and causally to the decision to vote, while others are more distant. This implies that proximate influences on voting behavior such as short-term factors could be explained, in part, in terms of more general prior forces (ibidem: 24-37). Short-term determinants generally consist of evaluations of candidates during the electoral campaign, opinions on issues that are salient in the political debate at the moment of the election, and, most importantly in our case, considerations regarding the economic performances of governments. These considerations involve who voters hold accountable for economic conditions, how blame is attributed to government or parties’ performance, and whether voters believe parties to be more or less competent in managing the economy. Long-term determinants of voting

---

10 For a discussion about the link between utility and choice in voting behavior, see Adams et al. (2005), chap 3.
behavior instead include social cleavages and the political predispositions of electors. While social cleavages refer to the social structural characteristics of people, political predispositions are understood as factors that find their main sources in parties and politics such as party identification, Left-Right self-placement or broader ideology, party sympathy, and the like. Where can party utility be placed in this funnel of causality? The attractiveness of the parties (i.e. their perceived utility) has been clearly distinguished in literature from vote choice. Yet, it has been shown how these are strongly connected as voters tend to choose the party that has the highest utility to them. In this sense, looking at the causal chain, party utility can be placed just prior to vote choice. Utility evaluations for specific parties therefore incorporate a mixture of both the manifestation of citizens’ long-term political predispositions and their short-term evaluations. (Tillie 1995; Van der Eijk et al. 2006; van der Brug et al. 2007).

As in other democratic countries, in Italy, politics and the economy have been intertwined since long ago. After the end of the Second World War and during the whole of the First Republic, however, Italian voting choice was mainly a function of social cleavage factors such as religious attendance and social class. This changed during the Second Republic, as the explanatory contribution of social structure on vote choice declined significantly. As a consequence of this, political predispositions have become a far more important predictor for vote choice than in the past, as have, at least partially, economic considerations (Sani and Segatti 2002; Bellucci 2012). As we illustrated, at the theoretical level it is expected that political predispositions are more stable than temporary considerations connected to the economy, because these temporary considerations are updated and can be changed more frequently than factors such as ideology. The state of the economy influences citizens’ opinions, since if people cannot find jobs or prices are rising they tend to blame the government. In fact, it is widely agreed by politicians and political analysts that if the economic conditions of a country are not satisfactory, the incumbent government is likely to fall (Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2000; 2007). It is in this sense that, in normal conditions, economic considerations are usually considered short-term factors. Yet, given the severity of the current economic crisis and the political crisis that it triggered, we can reasonably assume that, for these elections, not only was the economic performance one of the most important short-term factors for electors, but it is also likely that the impact of causally antecedent factors have been affected by it. More specifically, as we detailed in the previous section with the two mechanisms, we argue that the economic crisis, together with the unusual left-right coalition supporting the technocratic government, have led to a shrinkage in the perceived differences of the party coalition leaders of the two ideological blocks (PD and PDL). This, in turn, resulted in decreased importance given to ideological self-placement when explaining the utility attributed to these parties.
We seek to examine the influence of the economic conditions on party utility during the 2013 Italian national elections, with particular focus on the moderating effects of the economic crisis, in combination with a technocratic government, on the relationship between ideology (left-right) and the propensity to vote for a specific party. In the framework of the funnel of causality, the focus of our study can be graphically displayed as follows (see Figure 2). Our central question is whether or not this peculiar economic-political context affected the direction and/or strength of the relationship between Left-Right self-placement and party utility?

**Figure 2. Funnel of Causality and the Moderating Effect of the Macro Context**

Source: Own elaboration

In short, we expect that before the technocratic Monti cabinet, when the center-right government was ruling, ideology to have had strong effects in structuring the attractiveness of both parties. On the one hand, supporters of the left could blame the ideologically rival government for inadequate management of the looming crisis. Whilst people who position themselves on the right side of the ideology scale could blame the last center-left government, since it was in power just before the beginning of the crisis in 2008, or international actors. Yet, after the leader of the PDL Silvio Berlusconi resigned from office and a technocratic government supported in parliament by both PD and PDL replaced the right-wing government, we expect ideology to have had a weaker effect in explaining the utility of both parties. Indeed, citizens who situated themselves as ideologically closer to either the left or the right needed to deal cognitively with the fact that a) the state of the state of the economy was poor b) while the party they felt best represented their ideological stance was supporting a technocratic government that was implementing some unpopular economic reforms.

5. **Empirical Evidence**

In the following section we empirically investigate the mechanisms discussed in the previous sections by relying on public opinion data collected from March 2011 to the election month in February 2013,
i.e. since four months prior the moment when the “spread crisis” started capturing the attention of the media, and eight months prior the resignation of Silvio Berlusconi as Prime Minister and the subsequent handover of power to Mario Monti. Due to this wide time scope, our data allows us to observe the impact of ideology on Italians’ party evaluations prior to when the most dramatic developments in the economic situation took place, and all the consequences it had for Italian politics. Moreover, our data allows us to model the impact of the variation of some objective contextual characteristics, such as the presence of the technocratic government and the actual fluctuations of macro-economic indicators on individual considerations, while holding constant other socio-demographic characteristics. We expect that both the presence of a technocratic government and the worsening of the economic conditions reduce the impact of ideology on party preferences.

Given our interest in assessing the impact of ideology on the evaluation of the two major Italian parties, we model the effect of ideological self-perceptions on the party utilities that respondents associate to the PD and the PDL. Survey research has been looking for ways to empirically distinguish the observation of party utilities from the observation of vote choice for several decades. While random utility models are often tested on discrete choice data by relying on techniques such as conditional or multinomial logit models, scholars interested in party preferences have proposed several measures to directly observe party preferences. Among these, the most common are the “feeling thermometers” widely used by the American National Election Studies (ANES), the “like-dislike” scales used in the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) project, and the “propensity to vote” (PTV) scores, used, among others, by the European Election Studies (EES). Although these variables may seem to measure the same construct, it has been demonstrated that they perform differently. According to van der Eijk and Marsh (2007) PTV scores are the best predictors of the actual vote choice. This includes their ability to predict second-best choices in contexts where more than one preference is admitted. Thus, PTVs are generally regarded as a superior measure when the aim is to minimize the number of decisional steps between the observed party utility and the party choice (Tillie 1995, van der Eijk et al. 2006).

The first step is to establish an individual-level correlation between ideology and party evaluations. This correlation is then interacted with some properties of the context that are expected to moderate its magnitude. This requires two steps in the model specification. The first is to set the effect of ideology

---

11 Ideally, we would also model the interaction between the technocratic government and the economy, as the effect of the latter should change depending on whether a party is in government or not. Unfortunately the number of time points that we have before November 2011 is too small to grant us enough level-2 degrees of freedom to model properly the effect of economy before and after Monti’s government.
free to vary across time points. The second is to model this variation by interacting ideology with level-2 predictors, such as indicators for the technocratic government and of the economic situation. This task is accomplished by modeling the data in a hierarchical multilevel setting, with individual respondents nested within months. This type of modeling strategy allows us to specify a different intercept for each month, and to set the effects of the individual-level predictors free to vary across months. Thus, on the one hand we can control for idiosyncratic “month effects” due to the composition of the sample in the different survey waves, and on the other we can set the effect of economy on PTVs to vary over time.

For level-1 data, we rely on IPSOS data\textsuperscript{12}. A repeated cross-sectional survey was run from March 2011 to February 2013, providing us with a powerful instrument that allows us to monitor change over time. Data has been collected through Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI), using the technique of random digit dialing. During this time, each month\textsuperscript{13} similar questions were asked to representative samples of the Italian electorate with more than 5000 cases per week, for a total of 94,224 cases over 21 months. As mentioned, our dependent variable is party utility, expressed as PTV. We ran our analyses with the aim of predicting the party utility of the two main coalition parties before the elections: People of Freedom (PDL) and Democratic Party (PD). We define PTV with the standard question asking the respondent to indicate how likely is it that they will vote in the future for each of these parties. The variables are measured on a continuous scale that go from 1 (low) to 11 (high), that have been recoded in our models on a scale from 0 (low) to 1(high).

Our main independent variable at level 1 is people's ideological self-placement. We measure ideology by asking respondents to place themselves on the Left-Right scale, which is a continuous measure from 1 (Left) to 7 (Right), with an extra option for those who claim not to place themselves ideologically on this scale. In the models we center the 7-point scale on the value 4, so that 0 becomes the center, +1/2/3 the (center-) right, and -1/2/3 the (center-) left. People that do not place themselves on the scale have been recoded as 0. This was done for a substantive and a practical reason. The substantive reason is that studies indicate that citizens who deliberately do not place themselves on the left-right scale have similar characteristics to one of the two types of people that choose to place themselves exactly at the center of the scale. Indeed, only one group that populates the center of the scale is made up of people that prefer an equidistant position between the two extremes. The other group chooses the center because of a preference for a neutral position, outside of the left-right competition logic. In this sense,

\textsuperscript{12} Ipsos is a social research institute that collects citizens' public opinion. Data have been bought by the University of Milan thanks to a grant of the Fondazione Cariplo.

\textsuperscript{13} With the exception of August 2011, January 2012 and August 2012
people that do not place themselves on the ideology scale and those that position themselves in the middle could be identified as a group of people with similar characteristics (Inglehart and Klingemann 1976: 247; Catellani and Corbetta 2006). The practical reason is that including the “not placed” increases the N of our analysis, since they represent more than 15% of the sample each month. Since the role of ideology is the focus of this paper, however, we add a dummy variable that identifies them (1 = non-placed; 0 = everybody else)\textsuperscript{14} in order to investigate the influence of including these people in our analyses. The other independent variable we use at level 1 is a dummy able to identify when the technocratic cabinet (supported by a left-right coalition) was in place (code 1= from November 2011 to February 2013, when Mario Monti becomes PM) and, when the right-wing government was still ruling (code 0=from March 2011 until October 2011).

We also control for the following social structural characteristics: 1) age – continuous variable (18-99) centered around its mean; 2) gender – dummy variable coded 0 for males and 1 for females; 3) five standard geo-political areas, which historically vary on their political preferences – categorical variable: North-West (the reference category, including the regions of Piedmont, Val d’Aosta, Lombardy, and Liguria), North-East (the so called “white area”, including Trentino Alto Adige, Veneto, Friuli Venetia Giulia), Centre-North (the so called “red belt area”, including Emilia Romagna, Tuscany, Umbria, Marche), Centre-South (Lazio, Abruzzi, Molise, Campania), South and Islands (Apulia, Basilicata, Calabria, Sicily, Sardinia); 4) education - ordinal variable with five ascending categories: no education titles, primary school diploma, middle school diploma, 2-3 years professional diploma, 5-years high school diploma, university degree; 5) frequency of attendance to religious service – ordinal variables in four ascending categories: never/almost never, a few times per year, 1-2 times per month, weekly. Both education and church attendance have been centered on their median.

As for level-2 data, in order to measure economic recession, we use two independent (ascending) variables: unemployment rate and “spread”. Unemployment rate (Istat) is measured in percentage points for each month, while “spread” (Thomson-Reuters), the differential between the Italian 10-years benchmark bonds (BTP) and the German Bund, has been divided by one-hundred to simplify data elaboration. These measures have some advantages compared to other economic indicators. First, objective indicators provide a good picture of the economic situation of the country and of the degree of confidence of financial markets. Second, by using “objective” economic indicators instead of socio-tropic or ego-tropic evaluations of the economy, we can overcome endogeneity problems and ensure

\textsuperscript{14} All the models have been run both recoding the people that do not place themselves on the left-right scale as 0 and excluding them from the analysis (coding them as missing). No substantial change has been reported between the two versions of the model.
better comparability across time. Third, both the spread and unemployment rate have been frequently cited during the economic and financial crisis both by parties and media, making it likely for voters to be familiar with them. In the next section we present the multi-level models we ran and their results.

6. Results
The first piece of evidence that can inform our discussion regarding the allegedly declining importance of ideology for Italian voters comes from a simple observation of the variation, over time, of the tendency of respondents to place themselves on the left-right dimension. The claim that ideology has lost importance can imply many different things, including that citizens consider the ideological labels “left” and “right” less appropriate definitions of their own political identities. Thus, assessing whether and how people’s tendency to refuse to define themselves using such labels changes over time allows us to see whether or not Italian voters have changed their ideological self-identities in the first place.

FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE

Figure 3 shows the percentage of people who do not position themselves on the seven-point scale for every month in our study. As the picture shows, there are some fluctuations in our data, which stay within a relatively narrow range of 5%. However, from March 2011 to February 2013 there is no ascending or descending trend. This substantially means that there have been no systematic changes over time in the tendency of Italian voters to ideologically define themselves as left or right. This finding presents us with the first important conclusion: if ideology has become less important at all, the reasons for this relate to how citizens “pick” their party, not to the way in which they define themselves. In other words, the change must have occurred in the link between ideology and party preferences, not in the importance of the former.

The first three models we estimated are a basic assessment of the effect of ideology on the vote, and whether or not this effect was reduced during the Monti government supported by the left-right coalition. The results are shown in Table 1 (see Appendix I). As a general rule, the models associated to the letter “a” estimate the PTV for the PD, and the models associated to the letter “b” estimate the PTV for the PDL. The model specification is identical for both parties. Models 1a and 1b include only individual-level predictors, with the effect of ideology being left to vary across months. As ideology is modeled as the individual self-positioning on a scale going from left (lower values) to right (higher values), its effect is negative for the PD, and positive for the PDL. As the models show, to move one
step to the right reduces the propensity to vote for the PD by about 11% (on a scale from 0 to 1) and increases the propensity to vote for the PDL by about 12%. To have an idea of how the effect of ideology changes along the time span covered by our data, Figure 4 plots the random effects of ideology for each month from March 2011 to February 2013.

FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE

The figure plots some relevant events that happened during the time considered that may have had an impact on the association between ideology and party preferences. November 2011 (1) is when PM Berlusconi resigned and the Monti government supported by a PD-PDL coalition started. As the picture clearly shows, from that point in time the effect of ideology decreases significantly both for the PD and for the PDL. However, from mid-September 2012 (2), the effect starts becoming increasingly stronger for both parties, with a significant leap between September and October for the PD. This is the time during the campaign for the Primary elections when the left-wing coalition announced the start of the choice of its candidates to run for the position of Prime Minister at the 2013 election. The primaries seem to have in part “closed the ranks” of left-wing voters, increasing the connection between their ideological self-identification and their evaluation of the PD. Since the fall of 2012 the effect of ideology on the utilities for both parties increases, growing in a fairly constant fashion until the elections in February 2013 (5). Two other relevant events happened in November and December 2012, but these do not seem to exert a particular shock on the trend, namely the regional elections in Sicily (3), with the breakout success of the M5S, and the anticipated withdraw of the PDL support from the Monti government (4). While the latter event essentially marked the beginning of the electoral campaign, the growing effect of ideology on the vote for both parties seems to start rather with the primaries of the PD.

Models 3a and 3b in Table 1 show the moderating impact of the left-right support for the Monti government on the effect of ideology on party evaluations. For both parties the sign of the interaction (positive for PD and negative for PDL) is opposite to the sign of the main effect of ideology (negative for PD and positive for PDL), indicating a reduced impact of ideology during the grand coalition’s endorsement of the technocratic government, other things being equal. However, according to conventional standards, this effect is to be regarded as significant only for the PDL. The values of the marginal effect of ideology given the interaction are plotted in Figure 5. As the figure shows, the bipartisan support for the Monti government exerts a small but significant moderation on the impact of
ideology on the propensity to vote for the PDL. All in all, the propensity to vote for the PDL is reduced by almost 3% on average during the technocratic government in respect to the months before. On the other hand, the figure also shows that there is no real impact concerning the PD. Thus, our first expectation is only in part corroborated by the data: the fact of being a coalition partner with the major exponent of the rival ideological block in supporting the technocratic government, has had an effect on the impact of ideology in the evaluation of the PDL, but not in the evaluation of the PD.

FIGURE 5 ABOUT HERE

Moving to Table 2 (see Appendix I), we estimate three other models for each party, assessing the effect of ideology on the vote, taking into account not only the effect of the PD-PDL coalition supporting the technocratic government, but also the economic recession. Indeed, at level two we add the measures of spread (5a,b) and unemployment (6a,b), and we interact each of them with ideological self-positioning. We find that the story told by the coefficients in models 5a,b and 6a,b is very similar to the one told by the previous models. Concerning the PDL, both interactions between economic indicators and ideology are significant in the expected direction. In other words, the worse the economic conditions, as reflected by a higher spread BTP/BUND and a higher unemployment rate, the weaker the effect of ideology on the PTV of the center-right party. Conversely, the interaction effect is essentially null for the PD, indicating that the influence of ideological considerations among Italian voters as they evaluated the PD were not influenced by its bad performance in office during the months before the 2013 election. The four marginal effects are plotted in Figure 6. The two panels on the left represent how the effect of moving one step to the right on the PTV for the two parties changes with the spread going from the minimum (140) to the maximum value (488) in the period observed. The panels on the left show the same interaction this time with the unemployment rate, going from about 7.75% to about 11.66%. As the figure shows, both spread and unemployment going from their minimum to their maximum have the effect of reducing the impact of moving one step to the right on the propensity to vote for the PDL of about 4%. Once more, the effect is absent for the PD. Thus, if the importance of ideological considerations in guiding Italians’ vote in 2013 has been reduced at all, this happened only for their evaluations of the PDL.

FIGURE 6 ABOUT HERE
Some final remarks on the discussion of our results regarding the effect of some control variables and the main effect of economic indicators. The first thing to be noted is that very few socio-demographic indicators have opposite effects across the two parties. It rather seems that what distinguishes them from one another is the magnitude of the effect. For instance, education has no significant effect on the PTV for the PD, but it has a negative effect on the PTV for the PDL. Church attendance has a positive effect for both parties, but much stronger for the PDL than for the PD. Other indicators, such as age and female gender, have the same effect on the PTV for both parties. Among the traditional indicators that have been shown to provide strong social-structural influence on party preferences in the past, only the geographical area still holds for the most of the cases. Thus, to live in a region in the Center-North (the so-called “red belt regions”) still has a positive impact on the preference for the PD and negative for the PDL. And the South still largely prefers the PDL. A counterintuitive finding is, on the other hand, the negative effect of living in the North-East (the so-called “white regions”), a traditionally rich area, on preference for the PDL.

Moving on to explore the economic indicators, what really emerges from our models is the negative effect of unemployment on the PTV for the PDL. This suggests that the anomalous change of government in November 2011 was not fully acknowledged by many voters, leading to a general tendency to punish the PDL in spite of its being in the “supportive” position, without any of its members being in office. On the other hand, the spread BTP/BUND does not seem to have any real major effect on the two parties' evaluations.

5. Conclusions

The premises of our study were that the Italian parliamentary elections of February 2013 had been held in a context in which there was a dramatic lack of orientation for public opinion. The failure of the major parties to provide citizens with guidance for their voting decisions resulted in the unexpected success of a new political subject, the Five Star Movement (M5S), and this success has potentially led to the end of bipolarism in Italian politics. As a consequence, among pundits the new narrative of Italian politics is that ideological considerations are no longer important at all in voters mind. In this study we proposed a milder version of this claim, namely that ideology is losing some importance. Our considerations started by reflecting on the two factors of the macro context that have particularly characterized these elections: the economic recession that has been affecting Italy since the start of the global crisis in 2008-2009 and a political crisis, triggered by the economic crisis, which led to a technocratic government supported in parliament by both left and right parties. We hypothesized two
mechanisms by which the macro context may have had a negative influence on the ability of ideology to predict vote choice. The first refers to the fact that, since people tend to perceive coalition partners as more ideologically similar (Fortunato and Stevenson 2013), a joint support between the two opposite ideological blocks is likely to have led to a reduced importance of ideology in guiding Italian voters’ party evaluations. The second is connected to the reward-punishment hypothesis, which expects that voters tend to punish the government when economic conditions are bad (Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2007). Given the deep economic crisis that has characterized the recent Italian context and the fact that both left and right ideological blocks were supporting the technocratic government, we expected a reduction of the importance of ideology in predicting evaluations of PD and PDL since the responsibility for the negative performance was shared.

After framing our expectations in the “funnel of causality” of vote choice, using a repeated cross-sectional study constantly monitoring public opinion for two years (March 2011-February 2013), we modeled the data in a multi-level setting with individuals nested into months. We then investigated the moderating effect that a) a technocratic government supported by a grand coalition and b) the looming economic crisis (operationalized with unemployment rate and BTP/BUND spread) has had on the relationship between left-right ideology and the propensity to vote (PTV or party utility) for the party coalitions leaders of the two main rival blocks: PD and PDL.

We found, however, that our expectations were only partially supported by the results. First of all, we discovered that a) ideology is still strong and significantly able to predict party utility both for the PD and the PDL and b) the amount of people that choose not to place themselves on the left-right scale are constant over time and have a negative effect on the PTVs of both parties. Secondly, we found mixed results for the moderating effects of the macro context. While the effect size is not extremely strong, we found that the support for the technocratic government by a bipartisan coalition significantly moderated the effect of ideology on the party preferences of the right-wing PDL by reducing the importance of citizens’ left/right self-placement. Although the negative effect of the Monti government disappears when we introduce economic conditions into the model, it is substituted by a negative effect of bad economic conditions. Indeed, while we find that the main effects of left-right ideology are positive, the interactions between ideology and economic indicators are of opposite sign (i.e. negative). This means that the more the spread and unemployment rate grow, the weaker is the impact of ideology on the evaluations of PDL. On the contrary, neither the left-right support of the technocratic government nor the negative performance of the economy affected the relationship between ideology and the propensity
to vote PD. While the increasing of the BTP/BUND spread has a negative effect on the evaluations of PD, its effect remains relatively independent from ideology.

The fact that our expectations hold only for the evaluations of PDL and not for the PD is counter-intuitive. Given the premises, not only should these expectations work also for the PD, but they should work particularly well for the PD. The fact that this is not the case raises a puzzling scenario and here we propose some possible explanations. One explanation could relate to the origin of the left-right rhetoric in the current political landscape. As mentioned in the first section of this paper, the communicative rhetoric on the left-right ideology (i.e. anti-communism) has always been used a lot by former PM Silvio Berlusconi (Diamanti 2009) in order to find an identity for his party in terms of left-right ideology. Indeed, we could say that the democratic identity of the “center-right” became popular after his appearance in the Second Republic with the PDL. On the contrary, the “(center)-left” identity is much more stable since it existed long before the appearance of the PD. Indeed, the latter inherited the identity of the old PCI (Communist Party) that was the major leftist party of the First Republic. In times of economic crisis this could have led to the abandonment of the right-identity which was essentially tied to the party that was ruling when the economic crisis burst.

A second possible explanation relates to the blame for the crisis attributed by citizens on the left-side of the ideological scale. Indeed, the bipartisan coalition supporting the technocratic government might have been cognitively interiorized as the “bitter medicine” to take for the “good of the country”, as a consequence of the economic damage caused by the right-wing government. In this sense, also during the reign of the technocratic government supported by the PD together with its historical rival PDL, the blame for the negative performance of the economy was still directed towards the previous right-wing government led by Berlusconi whilst the PD were in opposition. This could somewhat be corroborated by the fact that this interpretation was, more or less, implicitly recognized by other European countries and also as the Monti government was supported, at least at the beginning, by the main referent newspaper for the center-left La Repubblica.

A third and a fourth possible explanation relate to citizens who position themselves on the right-side of the ideological scale. On the one hand we propose a sociological explanation; it could be that the economic and political crises were so deep that they had a major impact on the popular base of the PDL, or alternatively, that it had a disproportionate effect in the South, a part of the country that traditionally tends to support the PDL. On the other hand, we also propose a political explanation; it could be that, due to the depth of the crisis, most voters share a common distrust for the former Prime Minister Berlusconi. Trust in the right-wing government led by Berlusconi was eroded not only in left-
wing people, but also among right-wing people, who agreed that the technocratic government was the only solution to the crisis. It is true, indeed, that by the end of the Monti government at the end of 2011, citizens of both ideological poles were quite negative in their evaluations of the technocratic government, presumably because harsh austerity measures had been passed. Yet, if we compare government evaluations at the end of the Berlusconi government and at the end of the Monti government, we see that the former is much worse than the latter (IPSOS data).

All these, of course, are only speculations and need to be tested in further studies, in which other factors that have been left out of the picture here, will have to be taken into account. The current study was meant to be a first preliminary step in the direction of better understanding the role that ideology played during the parliamentary elections of February 2013. A second step will consist in accounting for a context that is more complex than how we have framed it up until now. First, in addition to studying evaluations of the two main party coalition leaders, we will need to include other political parties, possibly in one single model, using the technique of stacked data matrix. Second, it will be necessary to account for the moderating impact on the propensity to vote for a certain party of big political scandals such as a) the case of costs reimbursement in the Lazio Region related to the PDL coordinator Franco Fioritto or b) the big losses of one of the major Italian banks, *Monte dei Paschi di Siena*, and fraud investigations related to the PD, possibly looking at data disaggregated by weeks.

Third, we will need to look at the relationship between PTVs and vote choice (or intentions to vote), investigating how much PTVs were able to predict the real vote. Given the electoral results we expect that their predicting power will be low. In literature, when used as dependent variables, PTVs are usually considered as the functional equivalent of the vote (van der Eijk et al. 2006; van der Brug et al. 2007; Lachat 2008, 2011). Yet, it is known that, while the relationship between PTVs and vote choice is independent of factors included in the model, it can vary with different contextual (and individual) characteristics. In our case it is crucial to check the explanatory power that PTVs had on the vote. The relevant question to be asked, indeed, is how can we explain the fact that 25% of the people voted for a new party, the M5S, which deliberately placed itself outside of the traditional left-right scale, while the effect of left-right ideology remained stable and significant for the two coalition-leader parties? If PTVs should turn out to be poor predictors of vote choice as expected, then we are facing a problem that needs to be explained. Has there simply been an occasional deviation from the vote in the occasion of these elections? Or, using Michigan terms, are electoral results indicating that there are signs of de-alignment among the electorate (i.e. a process whereby a large portion of the electorate abandons its previous affiliation, without developing a new one to replace it) (Dalton, Scott and Beck 1984)? It is
likely that the current Italian scenario is in between these two extremes. In this respect, what we can think at this stage to be a crucial element that needs to be accounted for in future studies is, together with PTVs, the impact of anti-politics and “anti-chaste” orientations on the vote choice, a feeling that has been successfully utilized in the electoral campaign of the leader of the M5S, Beppe Grillo. This could be done in several ways, two of which could be by using leader evaluations index or constructing “anti-politics” indicators. The puzzle raised by this study and its indications for future studies point out that still much needs to be done in order to understand what role these elections had in the cycle of the Second Republic. We believe, however, that we were able to prove that ideology is still a relevant factor in vote choice, which is a first, but preliminary, step in this direction.
References


Van der Eijk, C., Marsh, M. (2007). Don’t expect me to vote for you just because I like you, even if you do make me feel warm inside. A comparison of the validity of non-ipsative measures of party support. Presented at the APSA Meeting, Chicago.


Appendix I. Tables

Table 1. Effect of Ideology on PTV for PD and PDL and interaction with Monti Government

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PTV PD (1a)</th>
<th>PTV PD (2a)</th>
<th>PTV PD (3a)</th>
<th>PTV PD (1b)</th>
<th>PTV PD (2b)</th>
<th>PTV PD (3b)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependent variable:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.001***</td>
<td>0.001***</td>
<td>0.001***</td>
<td>0.0003***</td>
<td>0.0003***</td>
<td>0.0003***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0001)</td>
<td>(0.0001)</td>
<td>(0.0001)</td>
<td>(0.0001)</td>
<td>(0.0001)</td>
<td>(0.0001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (Female)</td>
<td>0.015***</td>
<td>0.015***</td>
<td>0.015***</td>
<td>0.006***</td>
<td>0.006***</td>
<td>0.006***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>−0.002</td>
<td>−0.002</td>
<td>−0.002</td>
<td>−0.013***</td>
<td>−0.013***</td>
<td>−0.013***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church Attendance</td>
<td>0.006***</td>
<td>0.006***</td>
<td>0.006***</td>
<td>0.016***</td>
<td>0.016***</td>
<td>0.016***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North-East</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>−0.017***</td>
<td>−0.017***</td>
<td>−0.017***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.005)</td>
<td>(0.005)</td>
<td>(0.005)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center-North</td>
<td>0.015***</td>
<td>0.015***</td>
<td>0.015***</td>
<td>−0.010***</td>
<td>−0.010***</td>
<td>−0.010***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center-South</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.012***</td>
<td>0.012***</td>
<td>0.012***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South &amp; Islands</td>
<td>0.010***</td>
<td>0.010***</td>
<td>0.010***</td>
<td>0.015***</td>
<td>0.015***</td>
<td>0.015***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left-Right Position</td>
<td>−0.112***</td>
<td>−0.112***</td>
<td>−0.118***</td>
<td>0.123***</td>
<td>0.123***</td>
<td>0.140***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Positioned on L-R</td>
<td>−0.173***</td>
<td>−0.173***</td>
<td>−0.173***</td>
<td>−0.129***</td>
<td>−0.129***</td>
<td>−0.129***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monti Government</td>
<td>−0.002</td>
<td>−0.013</td>
<td>−0.025***</td>
<td>−0.053***</td>
<td>−0.025***</td>
<td>−0.025***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.008)</td>
<td>(0.010)</td>
<td>(0.006)</td>
<td>(0.006)</td>
<td>(0.006)</td>
<td>(0.007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L-R Position*Monti Gov.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.009*</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.009*</td>
<td></td>
<td>−0.025***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.005)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.005)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.007)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.393***</td>
<td>0.395***</td>
<td>0.402***</td>
<td>0.281***</td>
<td>0.298***</td>
<td>0.317***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.006)</td>
<td>(0.008)</td>
<td>(0.009)</td>
<td>(0.008)</td>
<td>(0.007)</td>
<td>(0.008)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Source: Own elaboration of IPSOS, Istat and Thomson-Reuters data.
Table 2. Effect of Macro-Economic Indicators on PTV for PD and PDL and interaction with Ideology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent variable:</th>
<th>PTV PD (4a)</th>
<th>PTV PD (5a)</th>
<th>PTV PD (6a)</th>
<th>PTV PD (4b)</th>
<th>PTV PD (5b)</th>
<th>PTV PD (6b)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.001***</td>
<td>0.001***</td>
<td>0.001***</td>
<td>0.0003***</td>
<td>0.0003***</td>
<td>0.0003***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0001)</td>
<td>(0.0001)</td>
<td>(0.0001)</td>
<td>(0.0001)</td>
<td>(0.0001)</td>
<td>(0.0001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (Female)</td>
<td>0.015***</td>
<td>0.015***</td>
<td>0.015***</td>
<td>0.006***</td>
<td>0.006***</td>
<td>0.006***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-0.002</td>
<td>-0.002</td>
<td>-0.002</td>
<td>-0.013***</td>
<td>-0.013***</td>
<td>-0.013***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church Attendance</td>
<td>0.006***</td>
<td>0.006***</td>
<td>0.006***</td>
<td>0.016***</td>
<td>0.016***</td>
<td>0.016***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North-East</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>-0.017***</td>
<td>-0.017***</td>
<td>-0.017***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.005)</td>
<td>(0.005)</td>
<td>(0.005)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center-North</td>
<td>0.015***</td>
<td>0.015***</td>
<td>0.015***</td>
<td>-0.010***</td>
<td>-0.010***</td>
<td>-0.010***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center-South</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.012***</td>
<td>0.012***</td>
<td>0.012***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South &amp; Islands</td>
<td>0.010***</td>
<td>0.010***</td>
<td>0.010***</td>
<td>0.015***</td>
<td>0.015***</td>
<td>0.015***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left-Right Position</td>
<td>-0.112***</td>
<td>-0.121***</td>
<td>-0.140***</td>
<td>0.123***</td>
<td>0.153***</td>
<td>0.226***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.009)</td>
<td>(0.020)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.012)</td>
<td>(0.021)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Positioned on L-R</td>
<td>-0.173***</td>
<td>-0.173***</td>
<td>-0.173***</td>
<td>-0.129***</td>
<td>-0.129***</td>
<td>-0.129***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monti Government</td>
<td>-0.008</td>
<td>-0.008</td>
<td>-0.007</td>
<td>0.013</td>
<td>0.013</td>
<td>0.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.019)</td>
<td>(0.019)</td>
<td>(0.019)</td>
<td>(0.013)</td>
<td>(0.013)</td>
<td>(0.013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spread BTP/BUND</td>
<td>-0.008*</td>
<td>-0.011**</td>
<td>-0.008*</td>
<td>-0.004</td>
<td>-0.010**</td>
<td>-0.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.005)</td>
<td>(0.005)</td>
<td>(0.005)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment Rate</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>-0.017***</td>
<td>-0.017***</td>
<td>-0.025***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.006)</td>
<td>(0.006)</td>
<td>(0.006)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L-R Position*Spread</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.009***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L-R Position*Unemployment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>-0.010***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.356***</td>
<td>0.366***</td>
<td>0.391***</td>
<td>0.452***</td>
<td>0.474***</td>
<td>0.532***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.052)</td>
<td>(0.052)</td>
<td>(0.057)</td>
<td>(0.036)</td>
<td>(0.037)</td>
<td>(0.040)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observations | 48,930 | 48,930 | 48,930 | 48,998 | 48,998 | 48,998 |
Akaike Inf. Crit. | 16,156 | 16,156 | 16,167 | 5,619 | 5,624 | 5,615 |
Bayesian Inf. Crit. | 16,315 | 16,334 | 16,334 | 5,777 | 5,791 | 5,782 |

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Source: Own elaboration of IPSOS, Istat and Thomson-Reuters data.
Appendix II. Figures

Figure 1. Spread BTP/BUND and Unemployment Rate (%) over Time

Source: Own elaboration of Istat (Unemployment Rate) and Thomson Reuters (BTP/BUND Spread) data.
Figure 3. Frequency of Respondent who do not position themselves on the Left-Right Scale over Time.

Source: Own elaboration of IPSOS data.
Figure 4. Random Effects of Ideology on PTVs over Time

Note: The red line indicates the average effect across the full time period.
(1) PM Berlusconi resigns and Monti government starts
(2) Beginning of the campaign for the primary elections of the left-wing coalition
(3) Regional elections in Sicily
(4) Beginning of the electoral campaign
(5) National elections
Source: Own elaboration of IPSOS, Istat and Thomson-Reuters data.
Figure 5. Marginal Effects of Ideology (Left-Right) in interaction with Technocratic Government on PTVs

Source: Own elaboration of IPSOS, Istat and Thomson-Reuters data.
Figure 6. Marginal Effects of Ideology (Left-Right) in interaction with Spread BTP/Bund and Unemployment Rate on PTVs

Source: Own elaboration of IPSOS, Istat and Thomson-Reuters data.