Mainstream Party Strategizing On Corruption Issues –

The Case Of Italy

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Abstract: Research on niche parties have not thoroughly explored dynamics between niche and mainstream parties. The model for mainstream party strategy provided by Meguid is complemented by research on the influence of far-right parties on their party systems. What strategy a mainstream party chooses towards a niche party is likely to be influenced by the type of niche party. Anti-corruption parties are of particular interest due to their massive electoral successes in Eastern Europé. Italy is identified as the critical case for Western Europe and the hypothesis that anti-corruption parties are not successful in long-existing party systems. The study shows that Italian mainstream parties have politicized corruption to a surprisingly large extent given the widespread pessimism over their capabilities in fighting corruption, but the evidence is inconclusive with regard to how exact strategy choices are affected by the level of niche party threat. The cases not in line with the predictions of Meguid's model are most likely explained by that dealing with corruption is toxic for a party that is under corruption-allegations.

Table of content

Introduction

European party politics have changed throughout the last decades. Moving from a very clear dominance of the right-left dimension, new issues and new parties are now on the table, and party competition largely reflects that new issues. Yet, this trend is countered with a broad discourse that emphasizes the failure of mainstream parties to provide solutions to the major problems in society. The study of new parties is largely motivated by these big issues of how well representative democracy is working and what the prospects are of making it work better by bringing in new issues. Also, politics is a dynamic process and to fully understand what is happening we need to not only study parties separated from one another, but also look at the interaction between parties. Much is already known about the interaction between mainstream parties rotating between being in office and opposition, while much less is known about the interaction between mainstream parties and new parties.

Research Puzzle

Researchers of European party politics have devoted much interest to the rise of so-called *niche parties*, a subset of new parties with special characteristics. The seminal study by Meguid (2005) says they are parties that "politicize sets of issues which were previously outside the dimensions of party competition". The concept of niche party largely overlaps with the concept of *single-issue parties*, which is used much more frequently in the public discussion. Meguid found that mainstream party explains the electoral success of niche parties, and it has a bigger effect than alternative explanations like institutional and sociological factors. The relationship between mainstream party strategy and niche party success has been studied by many scholars (see for example Bale et al. 2010 and Van Spanje, 2010), but most attention has so far been devoted to the understanding of those cases involving far-right parties, and to a more limited extent green and regionalist parties.

Another type of niche party has also been very successful over the last decade, namely *anti-corruption parties* (ACPs). Bågenholm (2013) sees ACPs as those who "focus on fighting corruption and stress a self-image of honesty, integrity and competence." The limited attention devoted to this type of party is surprising, since they have been very successful in electoral terms, and in several cases been the biggest parties in government coalitions. ACPs can mainly

be found in Central and Eastern Europe, which is thought to be explained by the relatively high levels of corruption as well as the weakly institutionalized party systems. Politicization of corruption as an electoral strategy is a good way to achieve electoral success, especially in countries with high levels of corruption (Bågenholm 2013, Bågenholm & Charron 2014). The success of ACPs can also be seen as part of a broader trend in European politics where party competition is explained to a lesser degree by right-left differences, and more by so-called *valence issues*, those relating to the competence and credibility of politicians. When corruption allegations are present, you could say that some extreme form of *valence politics* is taking place (Green, 2007).

Even though ACPs are uncommon in Western Europe, there are some notable examples. Taking into account that high levels of corruption and an unstable party system are seen as explanations for the politicization of corruption and emergence of ACPs, Italy can be seen as the critical case for Western and Southern Europe. The presence of the minor Italia dei Valori (Italy of Values- IdV) and the fast upsurge of Movimento 5 Stelle (Five-Star Movement - M5S) also show that this type of niche party exists in Italy.

The central research question of this study is whether mainstream parties shift their attention to anti-corruption issues as a result of competition from an anti-corruption party. Dealing with ACPs as a cohesive category of parties has been done by rather few scholars, and therefore it is of great interest to piece the study of these together with what we already know about other categories of niche parties. The previous studies show rather broad explanations of why parties choose to politicize corruption, how this has affected electoral outcome, how the ACPs have performed once in office, and whether they continue to highlight anti-corruption issues over the course of several elections. Much knowledge is still lacking as to mechanisms that explain why parties politicize corruption, but foremost knowledge is lacking of how the politicization of corruption by niche parties affects the ideological positions of mainstream parties. Politics is not only about winning office, there is also a potential indirect effect on the policy outcome that can be attained through a successful opposition strategy. If it is found that there is a correlation between the emergence of an ACP and the mainstream party changing their policies on anti-corruption issues in a positive direction, casting your vote for the ACP becomes an attractive option if you want corruption to be fought (Bågenholm 2009, Bågenholm 2013, Bågenhom & Charron 2014).

Disposition

I start by an overview of the niche party research that has focused on interaction between niche and mainstream parties. I then provide an overview of the research that exists on ACPs and politicization of corruption. I take all this into account when formulating the theoretical starting points and hypotheses An overview of the corruption issue in Italian politics is then followed, as well as a brief introduction to the party system. I then present an overview of the main themes and policies regarding anti-corruption of the Italian ACPs, and discuss advantages and limitations of the operationalization chosen. I then investigate to what extent the themes are found in the election manifestos of the mainstream parties. The results will be analyzed and contextualized with regard to the theoretical background as well as to what we already know about Italian politics. In the final part I present some thoughts about the contribution made by the study, as well as some suggestions for future studies.

Previous research

What are niche parties and anti-corruption parties?

The definition of a niche party offered by Meguid (2005) consists of three steps: 1) they reject class-based politics 2) attempt to create new conflict dimensions 3) mobilize on a limited number of issues. The most established categories of niche parties are far-right parties, green parties, and regionalist parties. The definition of an ACP offered by Bågenholm (2013) is a party that "focuses on fighting corruption in the election campaign, either by addressing the issue in general terms, i.e. that corruption is a serious problem that needs to be combated, or more specifically by accusing the opponents, i.e. the established parties of being corrupt."[1] Relative newness is also a precondition. We use the concept of ACPs for practical purposes, since having anti-corruption as a main issue is the common denominator for all parties in this category. Admittedly, this category includes parties that have very different opinions on other issues, and they are not at all part of a cohesive movement like for example the green parties. However, I

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[1] Other researchers have used the terms "centrist populists" and "anti establishment reform parties" for the same category of parties.

find that using the concept of ACPs is likely the best way to capture this set of new parties that arguably does not fit into the previously existing categorizations. That anti-corruption is one of the ideological cornerstones of the Italian cases IdV and M5S is however evident (Bordignon & Ceccarini 2013; Vannucci, 2009).

Most research on niche parties has its starting point in the already identified party families. Meyer and Wagner (2013) take a slightly different approach in investigating the phenomenon, in that niche parties according to their definition are those parties who emphasize issues other parties ignore. Their definition provides space for more flexibility and understanding of contrasts between different parties within the same family, and their method also shows that the niche identity is not permanent, and that it is not uncommon for a party to switch between the niche and mainstream identity depending on the electoral incentives. This is largely consistent with Bågenholm's (2013) findings that ACPs tend to abandon their corruption allegations strategy after the first election.

Do niche parties change the conflict dimensions of the political landscape?
Once a niche party becomes fairly successful, it seems reasonable for a mainstream party to adopt some form of strategy towards them. Depending on the context however, different strategies are chosen. The strategies of all major mainstream parties have significant effects on niche party electoral success, not just those of the mainstream parties ideologically closest to the niche parties. In some settings however, it is thought that one mainstream party is more threatened than the other by the niche party. Here, it becomes rational for the other mainstream party to emphasize in an adversarial manner the issue owned by the niche party, leading to its support being bolstered at the expense of mainly the rival mainstream party. Broadly speaking, dismissive or accommodative tactics correlate with a limitation of niche success, while adversarial tactics correlate with an increasing vote for the niche party. If a mainstream party pursues either an adversarial or accommodative strategy, the conflict dimensions of the political landscape have by definition changed (Meguid, 2008).

The research on mainstream party response to niche parties suffer from a major bias in that it tends to primarily analyze the niche parties that have been the most successful, and we must be careful in drawing conclusions about the general patterns of response without fully considering the cases where niche parties have emerged with significant levels of support, before

returning into obscurity. Large N studies do not tend to find any general pattern of whether niche party success tends to make mainstream parties move in a certain direction on the new issue dimension (Otjes 2012). Mainstream parties tend to abandon the dismissive strategy however once it is beyond doubt that the niche party has become an established part of the party system. This is especially true when it comes to the cases involving far-right parties. Many European mainstream parties, of both left and right, have eventually chosen accommodative tactics in response to far-right success (Bale et al. 2010).

Which mainstream parties react to niche parties and when do they do it?
Parties in the main opposition adapt more to niche competition than parties in government (Van de Wardt, 2014). This goes in line both with an intuitive logic and traditional theories of party competition. When a mainstream party goes into opposition following an election, it is very likely to perceive its electoral performance as a failure, and is therefore likely to rethink its policies. The opposite logic holds for government parties. Choosing to politicize a new issue, becoming what has been called an "issue entrepreneur", also correlates which better electoral outcomes in subsequent elections (De Vries & Hobalt, 2012).

Another important question is whether mainstream party reactions tend to happen in anticipation of niche party success, or after it has actually happened. In a study of all new parties in the postwar era in Holland, more of the reaction tended to happen in anticipation, but the general patterns are not very significant.[2] In those cases where a significant reaction is taking place, the reaction tends to go in line with the specific electoral incentives, and in some cases the rise of a niche party is very hard to anticipate. Mainstream party reactions are also more significant in the parliamentary arena than in the electoral arena (Otjes, 2012).

The level of the threat from the niche party is also likely to shape the mainstream party reaction. In her theory of strategic choice, Meguid (2008) argues that whether the niche party is a) no threat b) an unequal threat or c) an equal threat makes different strategies the most rational. Central in the mainstream strategy choice is the *relative threat* the niche party poses to the mainstream party. The attractiveness of an accommodative strategy increases the bigger a threat the niche party becomes. Parties do not only seek to maximize their own vote share, but also

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[2] Much of the relevant literature use the concepts *new parties* or *challenger parties*. These are arguably broader categories than niche parties, but they overlap to a large extent and therefore the results of these studies are useful for this study.

seek to undermine the support of their main competitors. If mostly the mainstream competitor party is to lose if the niche party gains support, it can be attractive for the mainstream party to challenge the niche party in an adversarial manner on their own issue, even though this does not result in themselves increasing their vote share. Meguid's case studies, which focus on countries with majoritarian electoral systems, offer support for her model of strategic choice. Given that a majoritarian system does not reward small parties, the model is assumed to work the best in a completely proportional system. Meguid offers two main explanations for why some mainstream parties deviate from the hypotheses implicated by her strategic choice theory. Firstly, the reaction should be slower the more fragmentation there is within the party. Secondly, parties want to avoid accusations of taking contradictory stances.

Why, to what extent and by who is corruption politicized?

Very unsurprisingly, cross-national data show that corruption is politicized more in countries where corruption is a bigger problem.[3] Since there is also a very clear difference in prevalence between Western and Eastern Europe, it seems that there is also an additional effect relating to the newness and volatility of the Eastern European party systems, working somewhat independently from corruption-levels (Bågenholm, 2013). However, as argued by Hanley and Sikk (2013) "unstable party systems [...] might provide opportunities to [sic.] for new populist-type parties, stable party systems [...] might in some contexts do the same
so [sic.] if they had become rigid, unresponsive or oligarchical." In Eastern Europe, there was a sharp increase of corruption allegations during the first decade of democracy, before the value stabilized at high levels at around 70 percent. In Western Europe however, corruption allegations have been found in only around 20 percent of the elections. The figure in the early 1990s was around 35 percent however (Bågenholm & Charron, 2014).

Parties either being challenger parties or part of the mainstream opposition are much more likely to politicize corruption than government parties (De Vries & Hobalt, 2012). Perhaps more interestingly, politicization of corruption is more likely to be made by a party being right-of-centre than left-of-centre. This also goes in line with the ideological profiles of those parties even described as ACPs (Bågenholm, 2013; Bågenholm & Charron, 2014).

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[3] Defined as presence of corruption allegations in an election campaign.

How does politicization of corruption influence politics?

Looking at the aforementioned cross-national data, we can see that corruption is not a marginal electoral issue. However, given the major emphasis put on corruption as an explanation for lacking human welfare, corruption might after all be under-politicized. What also adds to this position is the pattern that emerges when adding electoral outcome to the equation. In the cases where corruption scandals have been revealed, and they have been politicized by opposition parties, these parties have to a large degree won government power in the election. Therefore, from a very simple electoral perspective, it would be rational for parties to politicize corruption more (Bågenholm, 2009). The more corrupt a country is, the stronger the correlation between corruption politicization and government fall becomes (Bågenholm & Charron, 2014). A study of corruption allegations toward individual parliamentarians in the American congress has shown that corruption allegations affect reelection chances negatively, while a similar study in Italy has shown similar results, but a weaker correlation (Chang & Golden, 2004; Welch & Hibbing, 1997).

Two things stand out with the ACPs in Eastern Europe compared to other niche parties. Firstly, they are much more electorally successful than the average niche party, and it is actually more common that they become part of the government than not. Secondly, almost no ACP in Eastern Europe repeated the anti-corruption electoral strategy in its second election, clearly indicating that ACP is not a stable identity. The main conclusion of the periods in office for the ACPs is that they were relatively successful in fighting corruption. That ACPs have struggled to win reelection however makes this conclusion somewhat puzzling (Bågenholm, 2013). Niche parties becoming mainstream parties is not uncommon. Electoral defeat is the main explanation for why this happens. The most reasonable explanation for why they change their identities despite this is that newness gives them the opportunity to do so without being punished, since voters are less likely to have clear expectations on a new party than an established party (Meyer & Wagner, 2013).

While not being polemic towards Bågenholm's categorization, a case study by Sikk (2012) suggests that the success of some of the parties described by Bågenholm as ACP is largely explained by them emphasizing newness in itself. Obviously, establishing a new party with newness as the central theme does not imply that newness is the only relevant variable in the project, only that standard models have tended to overstate the necessity of a new party to

politicize an entirely new issue. Hanley and Sikk (2013) argue that there is a significant coherence between the ACPs and that it is motivated to treat them as a unified category in the absence of further research.

Mainstream parties should be wary of an ACP breakthrough as it makes forming and retaining government coalitions more difficult, and creates what could be a permanent space for anti-establishment forces to take advantage of. There is however only marginal support for the hypothesis that ACP success in one election leads to ACP success in subsequent elections (Hanley & Sikk, 2013).

Research on far-right parties in government offer an explanation of why almost all ACPs abandoned their anti-corruption strategy in their second elections. On average, there is a significant *taming effect* of the far-right parties in government (Minkenburg, 2001). Other scholars have however questioned how significant the taming effect is. In a study of the Italian far-right Lega Nord's presence in the centre-right government 2001-2005, Albertazzi and McDonnell (2005) show that the taming effect on Lega Nord was very small, and that both they and their mainstream partners Forza Italia benefitted from Lega Nord retaining their extreme views, even though this seems paradoxical. When it comes to ACPs, the dynamics should be similar but not identical. If you are in the government, you are also most likely to be considered a part of the political establishment, and therefore continuing to run on an agenda that accuses the same establishment of being corrupt seems ill-advised.

<u>Starting points and purpose</u>

The purpose of this study is to link together the young research field on parties politicizing corruption with the more established field of mainstream party strategy interaction niche parties. The central research question is as already mentioned whether mainstream parties shift their attention to anti-corruption issues as a result of competition from ACPs. Since the studies of Bågenholm (2009, 2013) of ACPs have already looked at the electoral performances of these parties and also their direct policy impact - I find it of great interest to study also the indirect policy impact of ACPs - as done by for example Otjes (2012) for new parties in Holland. It must be assumed that interactions between mainstream parties and niche parties look different depending on the type of niche party. Since so little is known about ACPs, and increasing attention is being put on corruption as an explanation of low human welfare levels - ACPs are a

particularly interesting category of niche parties. The purpose of the study is mainly descriptive, attempting to assess what strategies mainstream parties use in different contexts. Some primary conclusions will however also be made as to whether it is ACP emergence or some other factors explaining why mainstream parties accept the new issue dimension, if it is happening at all that is.

What is special with corruption as a political issue?

Bågenholm (2013) puts it this way: "In contrast to other issues, anti-corruption is as much about credibility, morality, ethics, honesty, and transparency as it is about the substance of the policy as such, i.e. not about what but about how to make policies." As already mentioned, the politicization of corruption makes way for *valence politics* (Green, 2007), in which undermining the trust for your political rivals is the prime target.

I however agree with Bågenholm (2013) that anti-corruption discourse can be as much about classical policy debates as valence politics. Despite this, the previous studies of ACPs have not exactly provided deeper examinations of precisely what politicization of corruption looks like. Rather than just looking at the strict prevalence of corruption allegations, I find it useful to conceptualize what an anti-corruption discourse looks like. Therefore, and also because the political issues in one country are not the same as those in another country, I have mainly looked at the specific case of Italy to conceptualize what this politicization looks like, while keeping in mind the central definition of corruption: "the abuse of entrusted power for private gain," (Transparency International, 2014a) . According to Transparency International, corruption can be seen through three different levels, namely grand, political and petty corruption. While the two first are about top or medium level politicians or civil servants, petty corruption constitutes acts involving regular citizens. Without underplaying the severity of problems with petty corruption, I choose not to focus on these issues as I am primarily interested in how mainstream parties handle criticism in which their own exercise of power is questioned.

Key concepts

The basic definition and discussion about the niche party concept has already been covered. While I admit that the operationalization of Wagner (2011) is the best, in which niche identity is not seen as stable but instead varies between elections, the scope of this study is not to

investigate the variation within the ACP family. Therefore, the results will be assumed to be indicative of the dynamics arising when there is an ACP in place.

Politicization of corruption is another frequently used concept in this study. As already mentioned, I conceptualize this through originating from the definition of actual corruption and then supplementing this with thematic conclusions of close readings of the manifestos of the Italian ACPs. When there are direct corruption allegations present, there is no doubt that politicization of corruption is taking place. To get a broader grip on corruption as an issue, I have however chosen to measure politicization of it through the presence of certain themes. It is my assessment after scrutinizing the ACP manifestos and taking into account other assessments of these parties - that politicization of corruption can be seen through these themes. Issues more connected to typically populist or liberal discourses fall outside of the working definition.

Issue ownership simply refers to the party that is seen as the most credible on an issue by the voters. Meguid (2005) and others' (for example Otjes, 2012) models say that parties want issues that they hold ownership over to be in the public debate, while they want to divert attention from issues that rivals hold ownership over. Niche parties are assumed to be the owners of their main issues.

Interconnected to the concept of issue ownership are the strategic reaction typologies provided by Meguid (2008), namely dismissive, adversarial and accommodative. Adversarial and accommodative strategies are seen as attempts by the mainstream parties to compete over ownership of the issue. When it comes to corruption, it is not obvious what constitutes adversarial and accommodative tactics however. I argue that an adversarial strategy implies really taking opposing stances, emphasizing that the ACP description of events is not accurate and explaining the benefits of the status quo. An accommodative strategy on the other hand obviously takes place when the positions of the niche party are imitated, but also when the mainstream party admits to the problem but presents vague or weak proposals I see it as an accommodative strategy. A useful way to differentiate between different accommodative strategies is to see some as *strong* and some as *weak*.

Hypotheses

H1: The higher the level of ACP threat, the more there will be of an accommodative shift from the mainstream parties.

Depending on specific electoral incentives, the more successful the niche party becomes, the more rational it becomes for the mainstream party to counter it by imitating its positions on the issue owned by the niche party (Meguid 2008). This relationship is expected to be weaker than for other types of niche parties however, due to that corruption issues are so interconnected with the credibility of mainstream parties (Bågenholm, 2013).

H2: Mainstream parties in opposition will politicize corruption more than mainstream parties in government.

Mainstream parties will be reluctant to politicize a new issue unless it is obviously electorally rational for them. Mainstream parties in opposition are more likely to reevaluate their policies than mainstream parties in government. There is strong empirical support for the claim that incumbents don't renew their ideologies, while it will be interesting to see how prone mainstream opposition parties are to pick up on newly politicized anti-corruption themes (De Vries & Hobalt, 2012; Van de Wardt, 2014).

H3: Mainstream parties will deviate from choosing the electorally most rational strategy if a) they are internally fragmented b) risk taking standpoints contradictory to standpoints previously taken.

Party leaderships are likely to see what will play well with the voters and act accordingly. Life within the party however complicates this. If a party has a decentralized organizational structure, or if the party elite is divided - it is anticipated that these parties move much slower in the direction that is electorally most rational. Parties do not want to come off as contradictory, which is a major explanation for why the dismissive strategy is attractive for tackling an issue that is

new in the public debate. If a party has once chosen an adversarial strategy on the issue however, they should be unlikely to shift to an accommodative position (Meguid, 2008).

H4: Since corruption-allegations an attack on the mainstream parties themselves, they will attempt to pursue a dismissive strategy. An adversarial strategy is the least likely to be pursued.

This hypothesis goes against hypothesis 1. Corruption is special from most other political issues in that it is the parties themselves that are likely seen as the problem (Bågenholm, 2013). It seems intuitively rational that mainstream parties would try to dismiss the issue until an ACP becomes so popular that it is no longer a viable strategy. To go out with the plain message that corruption is not a problem seems senseless even if the ACP only has moderate support. A possibility is to provide vague or weak solutions to problems with corruption, and hope that this limits the appeal of the ACP.

Alternative explanations: political or societal crises puts an independent pressure on the mainstream parties to deal with corruption and unreasonable costs of the state apparatus.

It would be simplistic to think that mainstream parties only formulate their policies as a strategic reaction to niche party success on the issue. Parties attempt to do objective analyses of society and accordingly try to come up with solutions to its problems. In the study by Hanley and Sikk (2013), the state of the economy and corruption perceptions are hypothesised as being causes of ACP success. Even though little support is found to strengthen these hypotheses, it would not be reasonable to exclude it as possible explanation for politicization of corruption.

Corruption in Italy

The Italian Party System

In the early 1990s, all major political parties in Italy either collapsed as a result of the revelation of the *Bribesville* system (The Christian Democrats, The Socialist Party) or went through a major change of direction as a result of the end of the Cold War (The Communist Party). The post cold war system has been characterized by electoral bipolarism, with electoral systems that have premiered the forming of electoral alliances. The centre-right have mobilised around the party of the media-mogul Silvio Berlusconi - Forza Italia with the support of the far-right Northern League, the post-fascist National Alliance and in some elections also the Union of the Centre. The centre-left have also managed to mobilize into alliances. The biggest party in the earlier alliances were the ex-communists Democratici di Sinistra, while the most recent alliances have been dominated by the Partito Democratico which is a merger of the two biggest parties in the previous alliances. Elections have often been very tight, and the fragility of most of these alliances have meant that no government has survived an entire five-year (Bartolini & Chiaramonte & D'Alimonte, 2004).

There are two parties identified as ACPs in Italy. Firstly, there is the minor Italy of Values (IdV) who has mainly been part of the alliances of the centre-left. Secondly, there is the Five-Star Movement (M5S) led by activist and comedian Beppe Grillo. M5S was hugely successful in the 2013 elections, reaching 25 percent of the vote, and making them the most successful first election party in post war Europe. Through their refusal to cooperate with any of the mainstream parties, the party system has since been characterized by tri-polarism (Garzia, 2013).

How has corruption been politicized in Italy?

Given the huge magnitude of the corruption revelations in the early 90s, it was not possible for the remaining political class to ignore the corruption issues. Significant reforms were accomplished in the period from 1992 to 1994, but ever since, the pace of anti-corruption reform has been very slow (Della Porta & Vannucci, 2007). This has to be seen in the light of that Italy's corruption perceptions scores were very poor in the years after the Bribesville revelations,

before increasing until the early 00s and then continuously decreasing (Transparency International, 2014b). Transparency International (2014c) note however that some positive reforms were passed during the last Berlusconi government and the Monti government.

In the way corruption has been politicized, 3 main themes can be identified: 1) illegal or illicit funding of political parties 2) public contracts corruption 3) Berlusconi's exercise of power. Della Porta & Vannucci (2007) argue that there was a "revolution of the judges" when *Bribesville* was revealed, but that there then was a "counterrevolution of the political class", which slowed down the pace of anti-corruption reform and made the work of the judges more difficult.

Given also the centre-left has retained some credibility as the protector of the judiciary, it is no surprise that IdV two times have entered into electoral alliances with the centre-left. From this perspective, IdV has displayed strong characteristics of what Otjes (2012) describes as a new party whose main goal is to influence the established parties in a certain direction (Della Porta & Vannucci, 2007).

M5S and Grillo, on the other hand, while sharing much of the platform of IdV have a different background. With their message of direct democracy and replacement of the political class, the M5S base and to some degree leadership have been found among those not previously drawn to party politics. As already mentioned, entering into coalitions or compromising on issues with other parties is not at all on the table. In contrast with their Eastern European counterparts, the Italian ACPs are slightly to the left of centre- and it looks unlikely that M5S, despite becoming very electorally successful, will abandon the anti-corruption rhetoric like the Eastern European ACPs (Bordignon & Ceccarini, 2013).

Method, data and operationalization

The study will be performed using qualitative text analysis of election manifestos. We are looking at what parties are politicizing since we are interested in it in itself, but we are also looking at it since it is thought to be a proxy for actual policy output if the party under study gets elected into office. That this study is not looking at the policy output directly is an obvious

limitation, but it is motivated by time constraints. The study could also have had a qualitative case study approach to the election campaigns. The limitation with looking at manifestos is that we can't see which parts of them parties choose to emphasize more to the voters, and if something happens in the campaign that the parties are forced to consider, we cannot see anything of it in the manifesto.

An advantage of working with a quantitative tool like coded manifesto data would have been that a wider number of cases could be analyzed, and that the human error factor involved in qualitative research is minimized. In doing some basic comparisons of those parties categorized as ACP by Bågenholm (2013) with the manifesto data variables connected with anti-corruption, I found that there was a surprisingly weak correlation between being defined as ACP and the amount of attention put on the anti-corruption variables. Hence I concluded that the research question was unlikely to be well captured by the manifesto data, and a qualitative method was chosen to strengthen the validity of the results. It might seem paradoxical that I come to this conclusion and then choose to work with manifestos in a qualitative way, but I argue in this case that there is a fundamental difference in that the qualitative method enables us to see the anti-corruption discourse. Looking at differences in space devoted to variables adjacent to anti-corruption becomes too crude as these variables are not at all constructed with anti-corruption specifically in mind.

The independent variable is the level of threat posed by the ACPs. The main determinant of this is their electoral strength, but which of the mainstream parties that risks losing the most votes to the ACP also matters. Alternative explanations for why mainstream parties would choose to politicize corruption are a) higher corruption perceptions b) bad economic outlook. It is assumed that the patience with illicit behaviour is bigger in good times than in bad times, and for this reason mainstream parties should be more inclined to act on corruption in bad times (Hanley & Sikk, 2014). As already mentioned, the themes and main solutions promoted by the ACPs are assumed to be constant, even though this is probably not entirely the case. A qualitative method that aims to systematize rather than to deconstruct is used.

The dependent variable of the study is mainstream party strategy measured through which issues mainstream parties choose to politicize and how they choose to politicize these. Therefore the manifesto of the main centre-right alliance and that of the main centre-left alliance

will be studied for each election between 1994 and 2013.[4] The resources for this study are limited, and therefore it is not possible nor very useful given the purpose to also study elections before 1994. This election is frequently described as first in the "second republic" era, and it would be complicated to have to take the very different institutional system that was in place before into account. The 1994 election was also the first Berlusconi competed in, and his entry is arguably the single biggest factor that contributed to the establishment of the new party system (Bartolini & Chiaramonte & D'Alimonte, 2004) .

The case selection of only focusing on one country in a limited time period is motivated by the limited time available for the study. A further perhaps more significant limitation is that the reactions of only the biggest electoral alliances are studied. This is also motivated by the limited time for the study, but also by that it has been argued that the post cold war party system is in effect bi-polar (Bartolini & Chiaramonte & D'Alimonte, 2004).

9 themes with type-solutions will be presented as indicative of how corruption is politicized in the Italian context. The presece of these themes and solutions in the mainstream party manifestos for each election will then form the basis of conclusions. A score for each theme of each manifesto will be presented. If a theme is not mentioned a score of 0 is attributed. If a theme is mentioned vaguely or to a very minor extent like a part of a sentence, a score of 1 is attributed. If the theme has a significant mention in the manifesto, a score of 2 is attributed. Admittedly, this operationalization is rather generous towards the parties. I have found it important to look very strictly at only the texts in the basic analysis, to make sure that knowledge of actual anti-corruption performances of the parties does not have an influence. For this reason, working with a rather low threshold is the best way to ensure the reliability. The obvious limitation with this approach is that it fails to differentiate between a manifesto that would be entirely devoted to the specific theme and one that only mentions a concrete policy proposal dealing with the theme. In any case, the advantage of a qualitative method is that if the results would show a skewed version of reality, the researcher is most likely aware of what the explanation for this is.

If something in the mainstream party manifestos is found that arguably is anti-corruption but falls outside of these themes, it will not be ignored. A score for to what extent direct

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[4] In those cases where there was no pre-electoral alliance or common manifesto, the manifesto of the biggest party in the alliance will be used.

corruption allegations toward opponents were made will also be presented. In controlling for alternative explanations, Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index will be used for alternative explanation a. Even though this measure is often criticized for not accurately measuring actual corruption, I agree with Hanley and Sikk (2013) that corruption perceptions are the relevant measure in the context of politicization of corruption. Controlling for alternative explanation b, I look at the unemployment level and GDP growth. All these three measures will be the means for the two years prior to the election.

I have read the election manifestos for IdV in their first general election in 2001, and for M5S in their first general election in 2013. Those issues brought up considered anti-corruption will be organized thematically. Since M5S have only been active for such a short time, it would be unreasonable to think that any major ideological shifts have taken place within the party. It must however be noted that some major issues that have been politicized by Beppe Grillo are absent from the election manifesto. This leads us to the discussion within research of party ideology and strategy of how good of a proxy election manifestos really are for what parties are *actually* talking about. The general opinion is that election manifestos most often capture what is brought up in the election campaign. If the election manifestos deviate from the actual reform agenda, that is an interesting result in itself. A study has shown that election promises are broken by Italian governments to a higher degree than in other countries (Moury, 2011). In the case of M5S, a finger of precaution must however be lifted, as several observers have argued that the internal democratic structure is weak, and most of the policy direction is decided by Grillo himself. This is also true for the centre-right (McDonnell, 2013). The combination of somewhat authoritarian party leadership, and a strong emphasis of grassroots direct democracy is not necessarily contradictory. Rather it is unusual in that the power of the representatives is so limited compared to other parties. All these deviations from normal party behaviour are indications that M5S would be more inclined to not follow their election manifestos to the same degree as other parties (Ceccarini & Bordignon, 2013).

How ACPs have politicized corruption in Italy are summarized in 9 main themes. More or less all of these are found in the manifesto by IdV studied, while most of them are are found in the manifesto by M5S studied. As already mentioned, election manifestoes in Italy do not at all follow a standardized format, ranging between 5 and 281 pages. As the IdV manifesto is about three times longer than the M5S manifesto, there is space for more issues. In practice, it is

difficult to to control for the varying length of manifestos. That the manifestos of the centre-left are on average so much longer than those of the centre-right is a major problem for the validity of the results however. All themes presented are assumed to be things M5S also stand for to some degree, since there are no obvious indications in evaluations of their party ideology that they would be against any of these things.

Main themes:

1) "Partitocrazia". Increase direct influence of citizens. Increasing role for popular initiatives. Emphasis on transparency of party work in various forms.
2) Reduce costs of politics. Through abolition of provincial administrative level, reduction of number of representatives, abolition of special privileges for politicians, reduction of pay, abolish public financing of electoral expenses and party newspapers.
3) Prevent careers in politics. 2-3 legislatures limit.
4) Prevent conflicts-of-interest. Ban on exercising other profession during period in office, ban on holding several public offices at the same time. Abolish "ad personam" laws.
5) Non-electability and harsher general conditions for convicts trying to get influence in the public sphere.
6) Breaking up oligopolies in societally vital sectors of the economy, especially media.
7) Emphasize civic-mindedness. Necessity for public employees to follow code of conduct. Spread knowledge to citizens what rights they have vis-à-vis public administration and corporations.
8) Application of meritocracy in the public sphere. Combat public contracts corruption.
9) Better checks-and-balances between different poles of government

Some of the themes presented are clearly about anti-corruption, while some are more ambiguous. I argue however that they are all part of the Italian anti-corruption discourse.
As seen, many of the themes are not about combating what is the essence of corruption, since much is about altering systemic dimensions like the level of pay for parliamentarians. In some countries, saying that parliamentarians are paid too much does not imply corruption accusations, but in Italy it does since many people believe the political system to be corrupt to its core.

Admittedly, the way the results will be presented somewhat makes the impression that this is a quantitative study. This is primarily because of the limited space. I chose to include six different elections to present a picture of the overreaching trend, but this also means that a qualitative evaluation of what is happening between each election is not possible. It must be made clear however that no claims of statistical significance are being made due to the limited number of elections analysed.

Results

Table 1. Causes of politicization of corruption

	Corruption perceptions (CPI)	Politicization	Manifesto lenght (pages)	GDP growth (+- %)	Umemployment level (%)	ACP support (%)
CR 94	-	8	67	0,0	9,8	0
CL 94	-	5	18	0,0	9,8	0
CR 96	3,0	2	5	2,6	11,4	0
CL 96	3,0	9	178	2,6	11,4	0
CR 01	4,7	1	6	2,6	11,3	3,9
CL 01	4,7	3	125	2,6	11,3	3,9
CR 06	4,9	4	23	1,3	7,8	2,3*
CL 06	4,9	17	281	1,3	7,8	2,3*
CR 08	5,1	1	12	2,0	6,5	4,4*
CL 08	5,1	9	18	2,0	6,5	4,4*
CR 13	4,1	6	36	-1,0	9,6	27,8**
CL 13	4,1	10	5	-1,0	9,6	27,8**

* IdV In alliance with Centre-left. ** IdV in alliance with other parties, but not M5S.
Vote for entire IdV alliance counted. CPI scores found through the website of Transparency
International. Unemployment level and GDP figures through the World Bank. Election results
through the Italian interior ministry. Most manifestos were found at the Comparative Manifesto

Project website. The manifestos for the CR in 2006 and 2008 as well as the CL manifesto in 2008 were emailed to me by the manifesto project staff. CL 1996 was found at perlulivo.it while CL 2006 was found at digilander.libero.it .

No anti-corruption themes were detected in the manifestos of the mainstream parties that could not be placed into one of the pre-existing categories. It should be noted however that combating fiscal evasion has been a major theme in a majority of the manifestoes studied, and this was particularly prevalent in those of the centre-right. This I consider only a politicization of petty corruption however, unless there is an indication that they are talking about it as a public administration phenomenon. The most politicized themes were the costs of politics and emphasis of civic-mindedness within public administration and politics. The least politicized themes were the prevention of careers in politics, prevention of convicts gaining political influence and better checks-and-balances between different poles of government.

The first hypothesis was that mainstream parties would politicize corruption more the bigger threat the ACPs are As to this, the evidence is inconclusive. The 2013 elections which is the one that stands out when it comes to ACP support was the election with the second highest politicization by mainstream parties. At the same time, the 2001 elections which stands out as the election where corruption was the most absent, had IdV at moderately successful levels, indicating that mainstream parties should have prepared for them entering parliament, even though they narrowly failed to do so. Even in the elections without ACP participation, anti-corruption has a place. Hence, a completely causal link between ACP success and mainstream party politicization of corruption can be excluded. There seems to be a weak relationship, but further research on other countries as well as follow-up research on the Italian case is needed to make a firm judgment on this dynamic.

Regarding mainstream party strategies, the assumed reaction by either mainstream party according to Meguid's (2008) model depends on how many voters each party risks losing to the niche party. The ideological profiles of the ACPs are as previously mentioned slightly left of centre, which means they should primarily take votes from the centre-left. Previous voting choices of M5S voters have been studied (Bartlett et al., 2013; Ceccarini & Bordignon, 2013;) and beside offering an explanation for why IdV support was diminished in 2013, they also show that M5S to a greater extent voted for the centre-left than the centre-right previously. The

difference is however surprisingly small, and the centre-right had reasons to believe that they risked losing their voters to M5S. The closer to the election, the bigger the group of M5S voters who previously voted centre-right became. This could have had implications for the strategy of the centre-right, since the time lag involved means that the centre-right leadership can have seen M5S as mainly a threat to the centre-left.

For IdV voters on the other hand, less is known about whom they have benefitted at the expense of. However, since they have policy positions slightly to the left of the centre, have entered into alliances with the centre-left, and vehemently opposes Berlusconi – we must assume that they have not been a very attractive option for centre-right voters. Therefore, they are only competing over the voters of the centre-left. The reason for why previous centre-right voters are somewhat appealed by M5S is assumed to be the populist element of their politics, which bears resemblance to what has made Berlusconi so poplular.

In the elections prior to IdV emerging in 2001, we obviously cannot talk about mainstream party strategies toward niche parties since there was none. In these contexts, there is no incentive for mainstream parties to politicize anti-corruption issues just based on niche competition. In the elections of 2001, 2006 and 2008 we can talk in terms of an unequal ACP threat, using the terminology of Meguid (2008). According to her model, the most rational option for the centre-left would be to pursue an accommodative strategy, while the most rational for the centre-right would be an adversarial one. In the 2001 elections, the centre-left pursues a dismissive strategy, while it is clear that they shift to an accommodative one in the subsequent elections. That they form electoral alliances with IdV in 2006 and 2008 also strengthens that they were pursuing accommodative tactics. For the centre-right, dismissive strategies are pursued in all elections between 2001 and 2008. This means that we have to reject Meguids general hypothesis about mainstream party behaviour when it comes to the dynamics between the mainstream centre-right and an unequal ACP threat. These results however confirm hypothesis 4 in that adversarial strategies are likely to be avoided.

For the 2013 elections, we have to talk about an equal ACP threat. It must be noted however that polls failed to accurately predict the upsurge of M5S, and few of the polls had them at over 20 % (Grazia, 2013). Some caution must therefore be taken for that the mainstream parties are likely to have underestimated the threat of M5S, and for good reasons. In any case, the centre-left continue with their accommodative strategy, while the centre-right continue with

their dismissive one. The manifesto of the centre-right in 2013 is however at the borderline between an accommodative strategy and a dismissive one. I have chosen to see a major mention of two themes as the lower limit for something to be and accommodative or adversarial strategy. In this manifesto, the centre-right make a major mention of reducing the costs of politics through proposing the abolition of public financing of parties. They however fail at mentioning another theme, other than in a vague way, or too minor way. Taking a broader look at the election campaign of the centre-right would most likely provide us with a definitive answer of whether their strategy on anti-corruption issues was dismissive or accommodative.

Table 2. Politicization of corruption in government and opposition

	Average politicization
CRG	4
CRO	3,3
CLG	6
CLO	10,25

Hypothesis 2 was that mainstream parties in opposition would on average politicize corruption more than mainstream parties in government. The results for this are presented in table 2. For the centre-right, there is actually a weak negative relationship, while for the centre-left there is a strong relationship. We therefore find support for hypothesis 2, even though the results for the centre-right must be discussed.

Hypothesis 3 states that mainstream parties will deviate from the electorally most rational strategy if they have previously taken standpoints that would appear contradictory with those associated with the now most rational strategy. However since this refers to shifts between accommodative and adversarial tactics and vice versa, this does not apply for this study since there are no such examples. More importantly, this hypothesis states that mainstream parties will also deviate from the electorally most rational strategy if the party elite is divided or the party decision-making is decentralized. While both of these things are have been true for the centre-left throughout the period of study (Newell, 2006), they also act like Meguid's model anticipates,

except for in the 2001 election when they pursue a dismissive strategy even though IdV emerge as a threat. The party culture can then be seen as an explanation for why there was a delayed reaction and that the accommodative shift did not happen until 2006.

For the centre-right, hypothesis 3 is unlikely to be the explanation for why they consistently pursue dismissive tactics instead of adversarial of accommodative ones. The parties of Berlusconi are extremely top-down managed, and they have even been described as "personal parties" (McDonnell, 2013). At the same time, even though the Berlusconi parties are always the dominant force within the centre-right alliances, there are also other parties. Conflicts with especially Lega Nord have not been uncommon, and during the period in office for the fourth Berlusconi cabinet, his party split after a very infected conflict with the former Alleanza Nazionale leader Gianfranco Fini. Even though Berlusconi's control over his alliance partners has perhaps not always been extensive, it does not make sense to argue that they would have a greater incentive than Berlusconi to pursue a dismissive strategy. This is mainly because a major part of the anti-corruption themes tend to draw attention to Berlusconi in one way or another.

As for alternative explanations, that increasing perceptions of actual corruption and a bad economic situation can also cause mainstream party politicization of corruption. As for corruption perceptions, there is essentially no relationship. In the two elections when corruption perceptions were significantly higher, the level of politicization is higher than the total average. Unfortunately, the first CPI is from 1995, so there are no data for the 1994 elections. However, since this is the closest in time we come to the Bribesville revelations we can assume that the corruption perceptions must have been as high as for the 1996 elections. The election in 2006 is the one with the highest degree of politicization, but also the one where there were the second lowest corruption perceptions. The results suggest that overall public perceptions of corruption can help explain why mainstream parties choose to politicize the issues, but only to a minor extent.

Looking at the relationship between GDP growth and the level of politicization, we find a clearer relationship than for corruption perceptions. The three elections when growth was the weakest were those three elections when corruption politicization was the highest. Looking at the other economic variable, namely the unemployment level - there is yet again no relationship with politicization. The two elections that stand out here in that there was double-digit unemployment are the ones with the lowest and third lowest degrees of politicization. One would think that the

unemployment level is *felt* more by ordinary people than the growth level, so the unemployment level is considered the more important economic variable here. Hence, the results show that a bad economic situation can help explaining why mainstream parties choose to politicize corruption, but only to a minor extent.

The relationship between a particular mainstream strategy and the vote share is also rather diffuse. These have been the main independent and dependent variables for most of the cited studies about mainstream-niche interaction. For the four elections where ACPs contested, the results for the first three indicate that an accommodative strategy by the centre-left coincides with contained ACP support, since the very dismissive strategy in 2001 corresponded with the breakthrough of IdV. In contrast, the very accommodative strategy in 2006 coincides with IdV support diminishing, before increasing again in 2008 when the centre-left had a weaker accommodative strategy. For 2013, the centre-right move in an accommodative direction, while the centre-left strategy is very similar to in the previous election. Obviously then, the explanation for the enormous breakthrough of M5S must lie in something else than mainstream party strategy.

<u>Discussion</u>

The most striking thing about the results are that the model presented by Meguid (2008) fails to predict the choice of strategy by the centre-right. At the same time, it must be noted that this model has not undergone extensive empirical testing, and more research is definitely needed to better understand why mainstream parties would choose dismissive tactics over adversarial ones and vice versa. As the work of Meguid (2005) have also shown, dismissive tactics are on average associated with containment of the niche party support, while adversarial tactics on average are associated with increasing niche party support. It is likely to be true that the centre-right could have effectively undermined the support of the centre-left through pursuing adversarial tactics against IdV. They are likely to have viewed this as too risky however, as it would impede their chances of pursuing an accommodative strategy at a later stage. The results for the 2013 elections offer some support for that they are moving in this direction, and with ACP support seeming to remain intact, pursuing anything other than an accommodative strategy seems ill-advised in the long-run for the centre-right.

It is also important to note that the centre-left have pursued an accommodative strategy over the course of several elections, and therefore engaged in a competition with the ACPs over the ownership of the anti-corruption issues. Echoing Wagner's way of measuring niche identity, there might perhaps be reasons to suspect that the centre-left would have been identified as niche in that particular election. However, it would be absurd to seriously argue that an alliance issuing a 281 page manifesto has a niche identity. That IdV never gained over five percent of the votes offers some support for the assertion that the centre-left were relatively successful in competing over ownership. Obviously then, something happened after 2008 that changed the dynamics completely. The theory of Meguid asserts that parties do not want to emphasise issues that their main rivals have ownership over, and if the centre-left managed to at least gain partial ownership over the anti-corruption issues, it would explain why the centre-right have stuck to their dismissive tactics.

I argue that the special nature of corruption as an issue is the main reason for why the centre-right do not choose adversarial tactics. Both in the rhetoric of the ACPs and the centre-left, Berlusconi's position of power or his policies are often the target of the criticism. It is likely the case with a different issue like immigration that a mainstream party can rather easily act on the issue without it turning into a questioning of their credibility. For corruption however, there are different dynamics. Berlusconi has a very weak record of combating corruption (Della Porta & Vannucci, 2007; Vannucci 2009) and it is likely to have been perceived as dishonest and unserious if the centre-right would have argued that corruption has not been a problem.

Electoral rationality is by nature difficult to modelize. That a party does not act exactly according to a standard model in this research field is therefore not very surprising. The rationality of a dismissive strategy when a niche party poses no threat, and that of an accommodative strategy when they are an equal threat should not be doubted. Where the breaking point in level of threat is when an adversarial strategy becomes the most rational over a dismissive one remains to be accurately understood. The types of issues and types of parties are likely to influence this. For example, if a green party reaches 5 percent support, there are only the issue ownership dynamics the mainstream parties should take into account, and therefore they should act according to Meguid's model. When an ACP is present however, the corresponding threshold could be 10 percent since there are then also the challenged credibility dynamics. Mainstream party strategies should on average explain niche party support to a large extent.

What they cannot do however is to accurately predict the development of support of every example of a niche party. In explaining the momentous success of M5S, some combination of long-term economic decline, the oligarchical character of the party system, failure to effectively deal with corruption, as well as intrinsic attractiveness of the new party - must be assumed to be the explanation.

Due to the high methodological innovation and issues with validity, the method also needs to be discussed. As seen in Table 1, the manifestos of the centre-left are on average much longer. A few of the manifestoes are more or less ridiculously long, resembling party programmes more than manifestos. Given the length of and level of detail in some manifestoes, the brevity of some other manifestos in the set then also become ridiculous in comparison. There is a relationship between length of the manifesto and the degree of corruption politicization, but it is not a unitary pattern. If my method were to be improved at a later stage, I assume some way of controlling for the manifesto length should be built in. For this study however, it just has to be admitted that the problems with manifesto lengths have affected the validity negatively.

A more sophisticated measure of corruption perceptions should also be used in future studies. The CPI index indicates a general picture of the business climate in a country, but it is unlikely to be heavily affected in the short-term by political scandals, which on the other hand is likely to have a major effect on why parties would choose to politicize corruption. Moreover, Vannucci (2009) finds that there seems to have been an indifference effect for the corruption issue in Italy. In 1996, 90 percent of people found corruption to be an important problem, and 30 percent considered it one of the two most important issues. In 2001, 90 percent still considered it an important problem, but only five percent thought it was one of the two most important issues. Vannucci argues that it has been the case that everyone more or less agrees that corruption is a problem, but few people bother to make it a top priority, possibly because corruption has become a "natural" part of public life, or because people consider corruption very difficult to fight. Vannucci argues that neither the media nor the parties have prioritized scrutiny of corruption. The evidence from Italy strongly indicate that people's expectations of how much corruption it is reasonable to expect matters. People were outraged in the immediate aftermath of the Bribesville revelations, but even though the intensity of the revelations decreased with time, people seem to have got used to corruption scandals. The immense success of M5S in the 2013 elections

however suggests that people will not be indifferent to corruption forever, and that many years of problems provide a space for political forces to exploit.

<u>Conclusions</u>

The central research question of this study has been whether mainstream parties shift their attention to anti corruption issues as a result of competition from an anti-corruption party. This was applied studying six elections in post cold war Italy. The results give an inconclusive picture of this central question, since there are examples with high degree of politicization by mainstream parties despite no ACP threat, as well as insignificant politicization despite a significant threat, and also the combination of a high threat and high politicization.

As for Meguid's (2008) model on strategic mainstream party behaviour, the behaviour of the centre-left is largely predicted, while the model fails to predict the chosen strategies of the centre-right. The conclusion is that the special nature of corruption and the vulnerability of the centre-right leader Berlusconi is the main explanation for this. When the credibility of a party is under threat, the attractiveness of a dismissive strategy over others increases.

It is still assumed that real problems with corruption and the economy have an independent effect on mainstream strategy choice, even though the results are inconclusive also in this regard. There are several examples of when the scores of these factors should correspond with a different degree of politicization of corruption if there were to be a clear positive relationship. I suggest however that primarily corruption perceptions need to be measured in a more sophisticate way to accurately capture how this variable relates to corruption in a party political context. After corruption has become an all too apparent problem like in Italy, there seems to be a high degree of politicization in the immediate aftermath, before a period when the electorate is more indifferent. The results indicate however if the problems aren't resolved in the long-run, a large space to exploit is opened up for ACPs.

The study had the purpose of being innovative both when it comes to joining together overall research on niche parties with research on ACPs and when it comes to methodology. Some theories on mainstream-niche interactions would suggest mainstream parties should deal with these new issues under the electoral conditions in the study, while intuition and looking at some previous writing on ACPs would indicate that mainstream parties should not deal with corruption at all. The conclusion on Italy is that the truth lies somewhere in between, and

corruption has been politicized by mainstream parties in several elections, even though our understanding is still limited of why this varies between elections..The limitations when measuring changes in politicization associated with using a quantitative method like coded manifesto data have been attempted to be bridged. While it was successful in singling out the actual anti-corruption discourse enabling us to consistently apply it throughout the study, there arose new problems with validity that needs to be addressed by future studies.

Future Studies

Both qualitative and quantitative studies would make valuable contributions in building on these results. As mentioned, there would be a point in moving away from the mixed qualitative and quantitative character of this study to focus on election campaigns with a pure qualitative case study approach. Validity would be improved, and we can both test the assumed discrepancy between what is written in the manifestos and what becomes highlighted in the media, and have the mainstream-niche dynamics as a unitary object of study. Taking an even more comprehensive grip using process tracing would also be beneficial. To fully understand why M5S went from no support to 25 percent in a couple of years would for example be an excellent case to study. Mainstream strategy on ant-corruption could then be compared with more nuanced alternative explanations than just hard statistics.

Also a purer quantitative approach would be a useful way to continue exploring this field. The conceptualization of what politicization of corruption means as well as some of the methodological limitations need to be improved first, but aside from this there is nothing hindering the research question of this study to be put under a cross-country comparison test. Given the limitations of existing manifesto coding in capturing the anti-corruption discourse, there is obviously little quantitative data ready to work with at this point, and there can obviously be no cross-country comparisons without a unitary and precise definition of what constitutes politicization of corruption. When this is in place, we should be able to get the answers of how well Meguid's (2008) strategic choice model explains dynamics with ACP presence, as well as questions relating to how dynamics differ depending on the type of niche party present.

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