

# The Channelled Italian Voters

Valentino Larcinese\*

Department of Government and STICERD\*\*

London School of Economics and Political Science

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## Abstract

This paper examines the 2001 ITANES survey data and documents a number of empirical regularities in the media usage of the Italian electorate during the 2001 electoral campaign. Voters that expose themselves predominantly to Mediaset news programmes are much more prone to vote for the centre-right coalition and voters that are exposed to RAI news are substantially more likely to vote for the centre-left coalition. Many explanations can be provided for such correlations, which should be mainly interpreted as the consequence of an omitted variable problem. Multiple regression analysis shows that this polarization can only partially be explained by voters' ideological leaning and opinions on policy issues and has instead much to do with evaluation of the political leaders and trust in the television channels. Even when these variables are considered, an unexplained higher propensity of Mediaset viewers to vote for *Forza Italia* persists. This effect is non-monotonic in the extent of the exposure and therefore consistent with the hypothesis formulated by Converse in 1962. The results are used for a reflection on the quality of public deliberation in the Italian democracy.

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\*\* I will be based at MIT during the 2005-06 academic year. Address for correspondence: Department of Political Science, MIT, 77 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, 02139-4307, USA. Tel. +1 617 253 6619. Email: larcines@mit.edu.

## 1. Introduction

A famous Italian journalist from RAI, the public broadcasting corporation, once declared that his editor was the party with most seats in parliament<sup>1</sup>. He just made crudely explicit what Italians knew already very well: that their televisions were not independent. The public broadcaster RAI has a long tradition of political control and of alignment with the parties in government. When a third channel was added to RAI1 and RAI2 during the eighties, the equilibrium arrangement resulted in the so-called “*lottizzazione*”: the two main channels went to the government coalition (and were basically divided between the *Democrazia Cristiana* and the *Partito Socialista Italiano*), the third went to the communist opposition.

The introduction of commercial television could have changed this situation by providing more information space and competition. Things, however, went quite differently. In January 1994, only two years after his television channels started to broadcast national news, the Italian television tycoon Silvio Berlusconi decided to start a political career. He created a new party, Forza Italia, formed a coalition with the existing centre-right parties and presented himself as a candidate in the first national election after *Tangentopoli*, the corruption scandal that determined the collapse of all the parties of the governing coalition, including the *Democrazia Cristiana*, the party that had been central to the Italian political system for almost fifty years. The 1994 general election was also the first to be held with the so-called “*Mattarellum*”, the reformed quasi-majoritarian electoral system that substituted the previous proportional system with single member districts and first past the post<sup>2</sup>. In March 1994, just two months after the new party was created, Mr Berlusconi had won the general election and was ready to be sworn as prime minister. Needless to say, his television channels did not display much independence.

The unprecedented rapidity of Berlusconi’s progress on the political scene would have been impossible without vast financial resources. His case, however, has very peculiar characteristics when compared with analogous endeavours by billionaires. Differently from Ross Perot and Michael Bloomberg in the US, just to

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<sup>1</sup> The journalist, Bruno Vespa, made an explicit reference to the *Democrazia Cristiana* as his editor during an interview in 1993. He is currently one of the most popular television journalists in Italy.

<sup>2</sup> In reality, only 75% of members of parliament are elected in single member districts. The remaining 25% are still elected with a rather complex proportional rule.

cite two examples, Mr Berlusconi controlled most private broadcasters in Italy, as well as advertising and marketing agencies. This raises issues that go beyond that of the role of money in politics, which would also deserve a discussion in its own right.

Television channels are commonly believed to have high influence on public opinion and therefore, are often being credited with the capability to influence election outcomes. Candidates struggle for media attention and tend to complain when they do not receive enough space on newspapers or television. Bad electoral performances are sometimes blamed on unfavourable media coverage. In some countries access to television and electoral advertising during electoral campaigns are regulated and even publicly funded. All this must be based on the presumption that media are effective in influencing voters' behaviour and, of all the media, television is certainly the most far-reaching and pervasive of all.

Empirical studies on the effect of media on voters, however, have not delivered any conclusive evidence, mainly because of the difficulty to identify the effects of the media from those of other variables. Even in the very peculiar Italian situation, it is far from obvious that the intense campaign conducted on Italian television channels in many occasions has changed the political orientation of Italian voters. Nevertheless, Mr Berlusconi has won two of the three elections in which he has been candidate since 1994. The public debate on the effects of television on Italian democracy has consequently never been so lively; in comparison, scientific evidence is rather scant and certainly inconclusive.

In the meantime, new rules have been passed to create "*par condicio*", i.e. a fair coverage of parties and candidates during elections. This law imposes restrictions on the presence of politicians on television, on advertising and on most other forms of political communication during the electoral campaign. Both the legitimacy and the efficacy of this regulation have been contested, for different reasons, by politicians from most political groups. For some, this is an unfair restriction on free political competition, for others this is only the classical fig leaf.

In the end, the crucial issue faced by Italian democracy today is whether elections can be considered fair when one of the candidates has a vast advantage. If the accountability of elected officials and the fair representation of the voters rest on having an adequate level of political competition, then this is an issue that cannot easily be escaped. This is now particularly important since in the next general election

Mr Berlusconi will have for the first time direct or indirect control of both private and public television channels.

This paper uses data from the Italian National Election Study (ITANES) to inform this debate by documenting a number of correlations in the habits of Italian voters. In particular it will focus on a very interesting polarization of the Italian electorate, that in television viewing habits. Centre-right voters are disproportionately exposed to news coming from Mediaset channels, while centre-left voters are mainly RAI viewers. Providing an evaluation of what is the cause of such correlation is not easy. In particular, it would be wrong to claim that voters have been influenced by television news in their voting decisions. In general, assessing the impact of media exposure on voting behaviour is far from simple: the main reason is that information is not exogenous because voters select the news sources they trust. It is well documented, for example, that voters tend to read newspapers which are aligned with their political preferences. This is the case for most newspaper readers across democratic regimes.

Television, however, is often regarded as a medium that exposes its viewers to a less coherent electoral stance. Televisions devote far more time to entertainment than to information and politics and the viewers are often rather heterogeneous in ideological terms. Because of the peculiar arrangements of the “*lottizzazione*” and, more recently, for having the owner of a vast broadcasting corporation as the leader of one of the electoral coalitions (and the consequent identification between TV channels and political preferences), Italy is probably unique in having such extreme selective exposure to television news (see, for example, Sani, 2002). Thus, estimates of voting choices that use television news watching as an explanatory variable will probably suffer of an omitted variable bias. I will discuss this issue and provide regressions that include a number of non-standard control variables to mitigate this problem. This analysis will show that simple regression would certainly overestimate the impact of television. It also shows, however, that the strong correlation between viewing habits and voting decisions can hardly be explained completely by spurious correlation.

Although I will not enter into the delicate and sophisticated debate about why the media might affect voting behaviour, it is nevertheless important to understand what the data say and what they can't say at the moment. It should be clear that, by doing this, I do not intend to reduce the current debate on the concentration of media only to a matter of electoral effects: a more competitive television market could be

desirable for many other reasons, even if there was no sizeable effect on actual voting behaviour. The issue would certainly become more important, and even a matter of urgency, if such effects were found. These results, however, can also be used for a more general reflection on the poverty of the current Italian political debate. The picture that emerges from the data is that Italian voters are substantially “channelled”: trust in the leaders, trust in the televisions, viewing habits and voting choices reflect, on all sides, very coherent systems of values and beliefs that render the possibility of a televised rational debate on actual policies only a rare event. Whatever are its electoral implications, the current situation generates an excessive identification between televisions and political parties, with consequent problems of credibility that tend to reduce the political debate to mere ideological issues.

## **2. Related literature**

Evaluating the relationship that occurs between mass media and voters is very important for all democratic systems. As a matter of fact, most people seem to believe that mass media have a vast impact on citizens' electoral choices. Academic empirical research, however, delivers a more complex picture.

Research on this topic started in the period between the two World Wars, under a general presumption that mass communication was an extraordinarily powerful device: "it is no daring prophecy to say that the knowledge of how to create consent will alter every political calculation and modify every political premise" (Lippman, 1922). These theories go now under the name of "theories of mass propaganda": use of the media for political propaganda was quite common at the time both by authoritarian regimes and by the Allies during the war. However, the first systematic study conducted on survey data by a group of researchers at Columbia University seemed rather disappointing. Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet (1944) studied the Eire county during the 1940-44 American elections, finding little evidence in favour of the theories of mass propaganda:

"The people who did most of the reading and listening not only read and heard most of their own partisan propaganda but were also most resistant to conversion because of strong predisposition. And the people most opened to conversion - the ones the

campaign manager most wanted to reach - read and listened least" (Lazarsfeld *et al.*, 1944).

The influence of the Columbia school (also through a subsequent work by Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee, 1954) was such that, since then, the dominant view has been that campaigning and the media have only "minimal effects" on voters. Until quite recently, most studies continued to find little evidence of persuasion by mass media (see for example Finkel, 1993). Consequently, observed correlations between media exposure and voting choices were regarded as spurious. One hypothesis, well documented by psychological research, was that people tend to avoid information that contradicts their prior beliefs: this phenomenon generates a "confirmatory bias", i.e. a tendency to emphasize and believe information which supports one's views and to ignore or discredit that which does not<sup>3</sup>.

A radical shift in communication studies has been induced by a new cognitive theory that goes under the name of "uses and gratifications"<sup>4</sup>. Rather than studying media effects, this theory starts by asking why people use the media in the first place. The focus of attention is therefore shifted onto the motivations of the individuals: only understanding why and in which way individuals use the media we can be able to identify their possible effects. It is immediate that this theory should be of particular interest to rational choice theorists and economists as, in a sense, it starts from individual preferences.

This change in perspective produced new empirical evidence that seemed in contrast with the minimal effects found by the Columbia school. In particular

"the news can be expected to influence public opinion directly through three main avenues: enabling people to keep up with what is happening in the world and mobilizing them to vote (civic engagement), defining the priority of major political issues (agenda setting), and shaping people's political preferences (persuasion). In turn, these attitudes can be expected to influence reasoned voting choices"<sup>5</sup>.

Iyengar and Kinder (1987) examine evidence from electoral campaigns and television news and conclude that their effects have not much to do with persuasion

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<sup>3</sup> For examples of experimental research on confirmatory bias see Mahoney (1977) and Vallone, Ross & Lepper (1985).

<sup>4</sup> See Blumler and McQuail (1968).

<sup>5</sup> Norris et al.(1999).

but rather with "commanding the public's attention (agenda-setting) and defining criteria underlying the public's judgement (priming)"<sup>6</sup>.

Bartels (1993) shows how apparent "minimal effects" can be, at least partially, a consequence of measurement errors. Zaller (1992 and 1995) proposes another argument against the theories of "minimal effects" by arguing that tangible effects are only due to the "reception gap", the difference between the amounts of information received about different candidates. According to Zaller, the problem with most studies is that they were conducted on US presidential elections, where the campaign is very intense on both sides, with plenty of information on both candidates: this generates a minimal reception gap and therefore minimal effects, which is not the same as saying that the campaigns had no effect. In local elections, where the reception gap between incumbents and challengers is normally much larger, the impact of the media appears instead sizeable.

It is important to remember that only a small part of the media effects can be directly observed in voting behaviour: this is the case when a voter can be convinced to change her vote from one candidate to another (persuasion) or when she can be convinced to vote for a candidate and she would have otherwise abstained (activation). A number of other effects can lead to "reinforcement" of prior opinions or to variations that are not enough to induce a change in behaviour. The discreteness of the voting choice constitutes therefore a first obstacle towards an accurate observation of media effects. In this sense, behavioural changes are likely to underestimate the total effects of media on the political attitudes of voters.

An important hypothesis, and a relevant one for our study, as we will see, is that the impact of political communications is larger at intermediate levels of exposure (Converse, 1962). The reason for this non-monotonicity is that the probability of changing opinion is a function of two variables. On the one hand it is an increasing function of the exposure to media, because the viewer is exposed to more messages; on the other, only the messages that are accepted will determine a variation in the receiver's opinion. Voters with stronger priors will be less prone to accept messages that are not in tune with their opinions. These same voters are those who are generally more interested in politics and therefore more exposed to media influence. The result, according to Converse, is that voters with the highest exposure will not be

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<sup>6</sup> Similar results can be found in Bartels (1988), Zaller (1989), Popkin (1991) and Franklin (1991). The original formulation of the agenda-setting hypothesis is due to McCombs and Shaw (1972).

easily persuaded and voters with little exposure will not receive the messages. Hence, it is at intermediate levels of media exposure that the conversion effect should be stronger.

Recent studies on Italian voters tend to show a clear polarization in the viewers' habits (Sani & Legnante, 2001a; Legnante, 2002; Schadee & Segatti, 2002). Unfortunately this phenomenon is well documented only for the nineties, while we have far less knowledge of the habits of viewers in the old political system, where RAI channels were also clearly identified with specific political parties. All the studies, however, tend to agree on the difficulty of deriving any sort of conclusions for what concerns causal relationships. Moreover, by using mainly descriptive statistics, these studies do not make any attempt in the direction of determining which factors can potentially co-determine both television choices and voting decisions.

In recent years there has also been a stream of research on the content of media, thanks to television monitoring by the *Osservatorio di Pavia*. The data of the *Osservatorio* tend to show clear differences in the time allocated to the various parties by different networks. Sani & Legnante (2001a), for example, report the minutes of presence (in which a politician can directly address the public) by networks. In the two months before the 2001 election, Silvio Berlusconi obtains 1,427 minutes from Mediaset channels and 465 from RAI channels. The centre-left leader Francesco Rutelli receives instead 887 minutes from Mediaset and 441 from RAI. In general, their data also show that Mediaset was mainly focussing on the two coalition leaders, while RAI gave much more space to other politicians: Casini, the leader of a minor party (of the centre-right coalition), received 159 minutes from RAI and 23 from Mediaset. Sani and Legnante (2001b) also report aggregate data devoted to coalitions by television news in the period 1997-1999, clearly documenting the stark difference between the two major national broadcasters. For our purposes, this allows us to assume that networks have clear political leanings, at least in the context of the 2001 national election.

### **3. Data and methodology**

The National Election Study (ITANES) is a post election survey which has been conducted for the first time on Italian voters in 1990 (local elections) and

then in 1992-1994-1996-2001 (general elections). Unfortunately, only the last two studies asked precise questions about television usage, which means only the cross sections for the 1996 and 2001 elections can be used for our purposes. Given the prevalently descriptive purpose of this paper, I will mainly focus on the 2001 election. There are some obvious differences between the 1996 and the 2001 election: our purpose, however, is not to compare the two elections but rather to document some important correlations that can be found, with minor variations, in both cases.

For our purposes, the main questions regard voting choices and the usage of television. Following the electoral reform of 1993, the Italian electoral systems currently assigns 75% of the seats in the lower house of Parliament in single-member electoral districts with a first past the post rule. The remaining 25% is attributed through a complex mechanism which essentially tries to restore some proportionality. Parties therefore tend to present their own lists in the proportional system and to form coalitions in the uninominal colleges. The result is two large coalitions with some minor parties left out. This also means that Italian voters cast two votes: one within a plurality system, where candidates are supported by coalitions, and one within a proportional system, where parties run with their own list of candidates. Citizens above the age of 25 can also cast a vote for the upper house (*Senato*). We will focus on the lower chamber (*Camera dei Deputati*) as it is the largest and the most representative.

There are seven national television channels: three state-controlled RAI channels, three Berlusconi's Mediaset channels and one other national channel (called TMC in 2001) with a very small share of the audience. The 1996 and 2001 ITANES asked questions about the frequency of news-watching both on television in general and on specific channels<sup>7</sup>. I will indicate with *mediaset* and *rai* two dummy variables that are equal to 1 if the respondent indicates respectively a Mediaset or a RAI channel as the one most used for news.

It is immediate to observe that voters are polarized in their viewing habits, in the sense that Mediaset viewers are prevalently prone to vote for the centre-right coalition (*Casa delle Libertà*), while RAI viewers tend to favour the centre-left (*Ulivo*). To give an example, Table 1 reports the cross-tabulation frequencies

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<sup>7</sup> These questions have been used to derive various measures of exposure to television. Details on the questions and the way the variables have been constructed can be found in the Data Appendix.

of Mediaset news viewers (*mediaset=1*) by vote. In 2001 only 22% of *Ulivo* voters (6.8÷31.1) followed the news predominantly on a Mediaset channel, while 63% (24.7÷38.5) of *CdL* voters did. In 1996 (Table 2) the corresponding figures<sup>8</sup> were 16% and 54%. Putting it in another way, in 2001 75% of Mediaset news viewers voted for the centre-right coalition while only 35% of non-Mediaset viewers did (excluding abstentions and non-respondents from the count).

Tables 3 and 4 report the distribution of viewers by their vote in the proportional system. The general picture is very similar with one important difference: in 1996 Mediaset viewers were disproportionately more likely to vote for Forza Italia, but not as much for the other centre-right parties, while in 2001 there is no noticeable difference. It is immediate from these simple tables that there is a high correlation between voting for Berlusconi's party or coalitions and watching the news on one of his channels. It is far less clear what the direction of causality is.

Regression analysis will make use of control variables such as the voter's age, gender, level of education and location. This is, however, not sufficient. The main problem is unobserved heterogeneity: a preference for centre-right arguments and politicians would increase exposure to news that supported those arguments, thus generating an omitted variables problem. It can be useful to control for political preferences by using left-right self-placement, information on church attendance and a number of indicators of the respondent's opinions on relevant policy dimensions.

Another possibility is that trust (or, on the opposite side, distrust) in Mr Berlusconi himself drives both voting for his coalition and watching his channels. In this case I will use a 1-10 evaluation score to control for prior opinions on leaders. The association between the leader of the *Ulivo* Francesco Rutelli and RAI is less obvious. Hence, although including the same 1-10 score for Mr Rutelli, I also use an indicator of government evaluation, being RAI broadly associated with the governing coalition<sup>9</sup>.

It remains obvious that one of the channels through which the media can have an impact on voters' behaviour is by affecting their opinions about leaders

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<sup>8</sup> In 1996 the Northern League (*Lega*) was not part of the Berlusconi's coalition (called *Polo*). Hence, table 2 reports separate figures for *Polo* and *Lega*.

<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, evaluation of past government policies has been solicited only on economic matters.

and issues, which would, in turn, be reflected in our indicators. One risk in introducing such controls is to downplay the role of the news: the corresponding estimates could therefore be regarded as rather prudent estimates of the effect of television.

#### 4. A polarized electorate

In this section I focus on the relations between the two major coalitions and the networks that have allegedly supported them. I use data from single-member district vote for the lower house to separately analyse the decision to vote for the *CdL* and the decision to vote for the *Ulivo*. A separate subsection is also devoted to the decision to vote for *Forza Italia* in the proportional ballot for the lower house. Apart from the *mediaset* and *rai* dummies, I also make use of the question on the second favourite news channel to further subdivide the population. If both the first and the second favourite are Mediaset channels then the respondent is classified as a strong Mediaset viewer (*str\_mset*), if the first is a Mediaset channel and the second is not, then the viewer is classified as a moderate Mediaset viewer (*mod\_mset*); if, finally, only the second preferred channel is Mediaset then the viewer is classified as a weakly Mediaset viewer (*wk\_mset*). I proceed analogously for the RAI channels to derive *str\_rai*, *mod\_rai* and *weak\_rai*.

##### 4.1 Mediaset and the Cdl

Column 1 in Table 5 reports the marginal effects at the mean from a probit regression in which the dependent variable is the dichotomous choice between voting for the *CdL* or not<sup>10</sup>. As expected, the variable *mediaset* has a strongly positive and significant explanatory power. The probability of voting for the *CdL* increases by 26% if the voter is a Mediaset viewer. This specification only controls for some basic individual characteristics and for the location of voters. Education turns out to be significant and voters in the centre (excluding the so-called *zona rossa*) and in the south have a significantly higher probability to vote for the *CdL*.

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<sup>10</sup> In this, as in all subsequent regressions, I also included a lagged dependent variable (that indicates how the respondent voted in the previous general election of 1996). Thus, all effects should be interpreted as variations with respect to 1996.

Column 2 introduces a number of controls related to information acquisition and other relevant voters' habits. The Mediaset effect is substantially unaffected by the introduction of these controls. Education is now less significant, but its effect is probably absorbed by interest in politics. Less interested voters are significantly more likely to vote for the *CdL*, while reading a newspaper or watching TV news more often have little impact. Quite surprisingly, voters who spend more hours watching television are less prone to vote for the *CdL*. Hence, when we control for other variables, centre-right voters are not disproportionately TV-dependent; in fact, rather the opposite is true<sup>11</sup>. Hence, centre-right voters appear to be, on average and *ceteris paribus*, more exposed to Mediaset news but less exposed to television in general, less educated and less interested in politics.

Column 3 considers a different specification where the dummy *mediaset* has been substituted with the more refined measures *str\_mset*, *mod\_mset* and *weak\_mset*. The results show that weak Mediaset viewers are still more likely to vote *CdL* than non-Mediaset viewers. Moderate viewers display higher probability to vote *CdL* than weak viewers and strong Mediaset viewers have the highest probability. The increased probability with respect to non-Mediaset viewers is respectively 21%, 32% and 38%.

#### 4.2 Mediaset and Forza Italia

Table 6 reports probit estimates (marginal effects at the mean) when the dependent variable is voting *Forza Italia* in the proportional election of the lower house. Watching the news on Mediaset increases the probability to vote for *Forza Italia* by 17% in both the specification of column 1 and in that of column 2, with no substantial variation in the significance level. The results on interest and education previously found for the *CdL* are also confirmed. They, however, deserve more attention. Citizens who cast their vote for *Forza Italia* are less educated and less interested in politics if compared to other voters, but “others” now includes also voters of the other centre-right parties. The coefficients are now much larger and significant when compared with the *CdL* regressions. If we consider the decision to

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<sup>11</sup> Focussing only on descriptive statistics, it appears that *CdL* voters tend to watch more television than the *Ulivo* voters. Controlling for the type of exposure (i.e. Mediaset vs Rai), Sani (2002) also finds a negative coefficient for the number of hours, although not significant. Here the crucial control variable is education: less educated voters spend more time watching television and, at the same time, have a

vote for a centre-right party which is not *Forza Italia* we discover that voters are, in such case, more educated than average and not different from other voters for what concerns interest in politics (not reported). Thus, the negative coefficients of table 5 are driven totally by *Forza Italia*.

Column 3 shows that, non differently for what happens for *CdL* voting in single-member districts, increasing exposure to Mediaset news is positively linked with an increasing tendency to vote for *Forza Italia*.

### 4.3 RAI and Ulivo

Table 7 analyzes the decision to vote for the centre-left coalition *Ulivo* as a function of the *rai* dummy. The results show a robust and sizeable correlation between watching news on a RAI channel and voting for the centre-left. The increased probability of voting *Ulivo* explained by *rai* is the same in both specifications and equal to 21%. All the other variables do not display significant coefficients in this case, with the exception of past behaviour, as obvious, and age, with the younger generation being overall less prone to vote for the *Ulivo*.

Using the variables *str\_rai*, *mod\_rai* and *weak\_rai*, we find again that increasing exposure to RAI increases the probability to vote for the centre-left coalition. The respective coefficients are this time 10%, 20% and 36%.

### 4.4 The cross-impact

If we introduce both *rai* and *mediaset* in the regressions, we compare their explanatory power with the residual population, i.e. those that watch prevalently the other limited national news or otherwise the local news. Table 8 considers this possibility and shows that RAI viewers are quite homogeneous to the residual population while Mediaset viewers are not. In the *CdL* equation, the increased probability determined by *mediaset* when controlling for *rai* has now been reduced to 17%. This means that prevalently Mediaset viewers are 17% more likely to vote for the *CdL* than voters who watch their news prevalently on channels that are neither Mediaset nor RAI (or who simply do not watch television news). Being a RAI viewer, however, does not significantly reduce the probability of voting for the *CdL* (the coefficient is not significant at the 10% level). In the *Forza Italia* equation Mediaset

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higher probability of voting for the *CdL*. When we control for this, the hours of television watching becomes negative and significant.

has a 16% impact but the RAI coefficient is insignificant. Quite surprisingly, RAI is not even significant in the *Ulivo* regression while Mediaset displays a negative 13% coefficient which is significant at the 5% level. All this seems to suggest that, when compared to the residual population, Mediaset viewers have, on average, quite defined political preferences, voting significantly more for the centre-right and less for the centre-left. RAI viewers, instead, behave not differently from the residual population.

As a further check we now consider only the strong viewers, having therefore a residual population which is composed by all those that either have not included RAI and Mediaset among their preferences or watch a mix of various outlets. The picture is now very different: comparing the columns 4, 5 and 6 in tab. 8 it is clear that both Mediaset and RAI have significant coefficients but RAI has now a larger impact in all the three cases. The impact on the probability to vote for the *CdL* is -28%, on *Forza Italia* -14%, on the *Ulivo* +16%. Thus, when controlling for exposure to Mediaset, weak and moderate RAI viewers do not behave differently from the rest of the population, while strong RAI viewers are significantly more likely to vote for the *Ulivo*.

To summarize, the evidence provided in this section is suggestive of an electorate which is highly polarized in its viewing habits. Mediaset viewers tend to vote significantly more for centre-right parties, while RAI viewers tend to vote significantly more for centre-left parties. This effect is increasing in the degree of attachment and/or exposure to a given network. The correlation between centre-right voters and Mediaset seems stronger than that between *Ulivo* and centre-left voters. However, a subset of the RAI viewers displays a very high probability to vote for the *Ulivo*.

## **5. Political predispositions and policy issues**

This section introduces a number of control variables to take into account the potential effect of political preferences in driving both the exposure to the news and voting decisions. A prior inclination with respect to specific policy issues can make the voter more prone to listen to news which confirms such priors. For example, if a

voter believes that public services should be privatized then she can tend to expose herself more to news that confirms such belief.

It is probably needless to stress that, if general political inclinations can be considered relatively stable in the short span of an electoral campaign, opinions on specific issues can instead change more rapidly. Unfortunately our data do not allow any identification of such changes and therefore we can only be very cautious in interpreting the regression coefficients. However, most people have prior inclinations on many salient issues and a complete conversion during a campaign, even on specific issues, is probably a rare event<sup>12</sup>.

The ITANES dataset contains useful information to gauge the respondents' political predispositions and opinions. One measure is the very standard left-right self-placement (*left-right*). To this I add an indicator of how often the respondent goes to church (*church*). This variable has an important explanatory power in most countries and there are good reasons to expect the same for Italy. Religion has always played an important role in Italian politics and, in the old proportional system, the *Democrazia Cristiana* pursued the idea of unifying the Catholic electorate in one political party with a defined Catholic agenda. It is therefore rather interesting to see how the Catholic voters, in most cases moderate, have divided themselves among the two new coalitions, which have no claim to uniquely represent Catholics in politics. To this I also add another variable (*liberal*) that tries to gauge the disposition of the respondent with respect to a number of civil and social issues (abortion, gay rights and drug legalization).

By using the controls *church*, *liberal* and the *left-right* self-placement, covariates that can hardly be explained by short and medium term media exposure, important ideological components are removed from the media coefficients. Nevertheless, when these covariates are introduced in the regressions, the effect of the exposure to media is reduced, but remains sizeable and statistically significant in all cases. Weak, moderate and strong Mediaset viewers are respectively 15%, 20% and 25% more likely to vote for the *CdL* and 13%, 15% and 20% more likely to vote for *Forza Italia*. RAI viewers are respectively 9%, 11% and 20% more likely to vote for *Ulivo*.

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<sup>12</sup> Schadee and Segatti (2002), for example, show that it would be rather misleading to assume that undecided voters have no political inclinations to start from.

To the long term values and predispositions, I then add a number of indicators of the respondents' opinions on some key policy issues. I have aggregated these questions into three indices, one concerning government involvement in economic matters and the provision of public services (*issue\_economy*), one concerning democratic control and strong leadership (*issue\_leadership*), one concerning decentralization and interregional redistribution (*issue\_local*). These indices correspond to three important issues of recent electoral campaigns in Italy.

When these variables are introduced into the regressions (columns 4, 5 and 6 of Table 9), the magnitude of the media coefficients is reduced further but remains again sizeable and significant in all cases. In the *CdL* regression the marginal effects of *wk\_mset*, *mod\_mset* and *stg\_mset* go respectively from 15%, 20% and 25% to 14%, 17% and 21%. In the case of *FI* the corresponding values go from 13%, 15% and 20% to 12%, 12% and 17%. The RAI variables in the *Ulivo* regression go from 9%, 11% and 20% to 9%, 9% and 16%.

If compared with the estimates of the previous section, the changes are substantial, especially for the strong viewers of any network. Nevertheless, introducing long term values and even medium-term stances on issues do not wipe out the explanatory power of media exposure. At the same time one cannot exclude that the impact of the issue variables has been, at least in part, due to media exposure.

Coming to the specific values and issues coefficients, church attendance increases voting for both coalitions (as well as for *Forza Italia* in the proportional part) by approximately the same magnitude. The real difference here is between voters and non-voters: church attendance increases participation and the likelihood of voting for any of the two coalitions. It is interesting that, when we control for other factors, *Forza Italia* voters appear to be the most liberal. The variable is also significant at the 10% level for the *Ulivo* voters but is not significant for the *CdL* coalition. Other centre-right voters are, on average and *ceteris paribus*, less liberal than centre-left voters but also far less liberal than *Forza Italia* voters.

On the specific policy-related issues, centre-right and centre-left voters appear, as expected, neatly divided on their opinions on the degree of government intervention in the economy and on the provision of public services. The division is also clear in the leadership variable, with *CdL* and *FI* voters demanding less constraints on leadership. *Ulivo* and *CdL* voters are instead less clearly divided on the issue of decentralization giving more power to local administrations. Although

citizens more favourable to decentralization seem more likely to vote for the *CdL*, the variable *issue\_local* is never significant, not even at the 10% level. The platforms of various parties are not so clearly divided across coalitions on this issue, and this is probably the reason for the imprecise estimate. Analysing this issue further would therefore require subdividing the coalitions into parties, to render the effect clearer (it should be noted, for example, that the variable is totally insignificant in the *FI* equation). This, however, would clearly move us too far away from the main objectives of this paper.

## **6. Evaluation of the leadership and trust in the televisions**

Citizens vote not only on the basis of partisanship or evaluating policy stances but also according to their perception of the competence, reliability and honesty of the candidates. The columns 1-3 of Table 10 introduce three indicators that obviously affect voting decisions: these are a 1 to 10 evaluation (with 1 being the lowest, 10 the maximum and 6 the sufficiency level) of the leaders of the two coalitions (respectively *b\_factor* for Berlusconi and *r\_factor* for Rutelli) and a 1-16 score for the centre-left government (*g\_factor*).

These variables, however, can also affect the selection of televisions. RAI, although with some distinctions to be made between the various channels, was broadly identified with the governing coalition during the 2001 campaign. The case for selective exposure is even stronger when we come to the evaluation of the then opposition leader who is, at the same time, the owner of the Mediaset network. Having a good opinion of Silvio Berlusconi could lead not only, as obvious, to vote for him, but also to higher trust in his televisions. I add the *r\_factor* for completeness, although it is unlikely that opinions on Francesco Rutelli were as polarized before the electoral campaign started.

Finally, I also add two variables that capture trust in the networks themselves, respectively *fid\_mset* and *fid\_rai*. The negative correlation between *fid\_mset* and *fid\_rai* is striking, and certainly less obviously predictable than the negative correlation between the evaluation of the government and that of the opposition leader. At the same time, the regressions will show that trust in the channels cannot be simply identified with trust in the political leaders supported by these channels. Both

*fid\_mset* and *fid\_rai* turn out to be significant, showing that other elements can play a role in determining the trust in one channel above another<sup>13</sup>.

The *b\_factor* turns out to be a very strong predictor in all regressions and especially, as obvious, in the *CdL* and *FI* equations. This shows, once again, how polarized the electorate was on the figure of the *CdL* leader. All five variables are strongly significant in the *CdL* equation, where the magnitude of the estimates is also very large. More importantly for our purposes, the media usage variables are now insignificant in both the *CdL* and the *Ulivo* equations: all the effect has finally been absorbed by the other covariates we introduced. The situation is different in the *FI* equation where the *weak\_mset* dummy remains significant at the 5% level. At a first glance, this result may appear surprising: there is a positive effect only for the weakly Mediaset viewers. This is, however, perfectly compatible with the Converse's predictions discussed in Section 2. The trust in a given network is likely to be stronger for those voters that expose themselves predominantly to that network and express a clear preference for it. For these voters the correlation between voting and viewing has certainly a large spurious component. For voters that, instead, expose themselves less frequently to a given network, controlling for evaluations and trust has clearly less impact. When the television effect remains significant at intermediate levels of exposure, as it is the case in the *FI* regression, it can legitimately be regarded as evidence in support of the Converse hypothesis. A weak Mediaset viewer has approximately 7% higher probability of voting for *Forza Italia* than a non-Mediaset viewer; she is also more likely to be induced to vote for *Forza Italia* than a moderate or strong Mediaset viewer, for whom the estimated effect is hardly different from that of non-Mediaset viewers. Thus, even when we control for covariates that are sufficient to wipe out the television effect in the coalition equations, we are left with a positive and significant coefficient in the *Forza Italia* equation which is hard to interpret if not in terms of media effect.

Can we then make this step and interpret this result as evidence of an impact of Mediaset on voting behaviour? First, it is not easy to think of other covariates that could have systematically affected both voting and exposure to TV news. Also, the fact that the effect disappears for stronger viewers, makes it more likely that most unobserved heterogeneity has been captured by the vast array of control variables that

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<sup>13</sup> For example, and particularly in the case of RAI, habit formation.

have been introduced. At the same time, it is worth stressing that, if correct, these estimates would be extremely conservative: it is reasonable to expect that a substantial part of the effects of media passes through opinions on issues and leadership. It becomes then important to distinguish how much these opinions can be changed within the space of an electoral campaign, how much they constitute the outcome of long term exposure to certain type of news and, finally, how much they depend on other forms of socialization and on personal experiences. To be able to identify those effects would make a crucial difference and future research should try to address this issue with more detailed data.

## 7. Concluding remarks

Political choices and selective exposure to televisions makes the Italian electorate highly polarized. The correlation between exposure to *Mediaset* news and voting for *Casa delle Liberta'* and between exposure to *RAI* news and voting for *Ulivo* in the 2001 election is strong and quite robust to the introduction of a large number of control variables. Hence, distinguishing the effects of mass media from spurious correlation due to unobserved heterogeneity is not easy. By using survey data from the Italian National Election Study this paper studies this polarization and tries to disentangle its various components. Multiple regression analysis is used to obtain a clearer picture of the behaviour of Italian voters and to try to uncover the potential impact of the televisions on voting choices.

Some of the control variables that we have used capture long term predispositions that can hardly be attributed to the media in a strict sense. When we use such controls, the impact of television exposure on voting decisions remains sizeable. Controlling for opinions on key policy issues also leaves the overall picture substantially unaffected, although reducing the magnitude of the television coefficients. Only controlling for valence variables (leadership and government evaluation) and for trust in the television networks renders the media coefficients insignificant. Even in this case, *Forza Italia* appears to benefit from voters' exposure to *Mediaset* channels. In other words, there is an impact of exposure to *Mediaset* news on the probability of voting for *Forza Italia* that cannot be explained by none of long term political predispositions, opinions on policy proposals, evaluation of the centre-

left government and evaluation of the coalition leaders. The effect is non-monotonic and consistent with the hypothesis formulated by Converse (1962). Moreover, it has probably moved votes from other coalition partners rather than from the other coalition.

With this, however, I do not intend to conclude that this study identifies in a strict sense the impact of televisions. Opinions on policy issues and on leaders can, to a certain extent, be influenced by the information received, especially when the voter does not have strong prior views on political matters. Thus, the overall effect of televisions is potentially much larger and certainly deserves further investigation. Unfortunately the current data do not permit further elaborations on this point: more resources and much effort of future research should be devoted to improve the survey data on Italian elections.

Above all, an unquestionable conclusion of this work is that Italian voters are “channelled”: citizens are only rarely exposed to contrasting views. This means that much of the benefit of the public deliberation process is lost. Elections are important not only because they give to citizens the control over their representatives, but also because they provide an opportunity for rational debate and therefore the formation of better informed aggregate decisions. Selective exposure to like-minded mass media, whatever its determinants, is harmful for this process. Although this is certainly a common feature in many democracies, it seems arguable that this phenomenon has reached in Italy a pathological level.

## Data Appendix: description of variables and tables

Most of the variables used in the regressions are self-explanatory or have been defined in the paper. This Appendix is therefore mainly devoted to illustrate those control variables that have only briefly been described in the main text and that, in some cases, I have constructed by combining the answers to various questions. In the following I report first the variable names, then the ITANES questions and, when this was not enough, the exact variable definition.

- *Freq\_newspaper*. "In general, do you read a daily newspaper (not including sport newspapers)? If yes, how frequently?". If the answer is "no" then *Freq\_news*=0, if it is "yes", then *Freq\_news* is equal to the number of days per week indicated by the respondent (1-7).

- *Interest*. "In general, are you interested in politics?" Interest is equal to 0 if the answer is "not at all", to 1 if the answer is "little", to 2 if the answer is "fairly" and to 3 if the answer is "a lot". Non-respondents have been given a score of 1.5.

- *Hours\_tv*. "On average, how many hours per day do you watch television (including sport)?".

- The *Issue* variables have been derived from the following question: "I will now read some statements about politics and the economy. Could you please tell me, for each of them, if you agree a lot, little or not at all?"

1. Taxes should be reduced even if this might imply a reduction in public services.
2. Besides the public schools, also private schools should be entitled to receive public funds.
3. Health care services should be privatized.
4. Companies should be freer to hire and dismiss workers.
5. Today in politics it is better if decisions are taken by only one person rather than following all the parliamentary procedures.
6. Regions should be more autonomous.
7. Regions should keep their tax revenue and use it as they wish.
8. Today in Italy we need a strong leader".

Giving a score of 0 if the respondent agrees a lot, 1 if she agrees little and 2 if she totally disagrees, we can construct the variables *Issue\_economy* by averaging the answers to questions 1-4, *Issue\_leadership* by averaging questions 5 and 8 and *Issue\_local* by averaging questions 6 and 7.

- As above, *Liberal* has been constructed from the following question: "How much do you agree with the following statements?"

1. Personal use of drugs should not be punished.
2. The law on abortion should be stricter.
3. Gay couples should have the same rights as heterosexuals".

- *Church*. "Excluding ceremonies like weddings, funerals etc., how often do you attend religious services?". Church is equal to 4 if the answer is "every week", to 3 if the answer is "two-three time per month", 2 if it is "once per month", 1 if it is "two or three times per year", 0 if it is "never".

- *Left-Right*. "Many people use the words left and right when they talk about politics. Here you have a list of boxes going from left (1) to right (10). Thinking of your political opinions, where would you place yourself?"

- *G\_factor*. "Could you tell me if you think that the policies of the centre-left government has had results which are very positive, fairly positive, neither positive nor negative, fairly negative, very negative? For what concerns:

1. The Italian economic situation;
2. The economic situation in your area;
3. Unemployment;
4. Inflation".

- *B\_factor* and *r\_factor*. "Could you please tell me if you have ever heard about the following politicians? If yes, please tell me how do you evaluate him/her by giving a score from 1 (very negative) to 10 (very positive) and where 6 means sufficiency. Please evaluate these people as politicians and not for their personal characteristics".

- *Fid\_mset* and *fid\_rai*. "I will now read a list of institutions and, for each of them, please tell me how much you trust it (a lot, some, little, none)".

**Tab. 1: Vote (%) in the single-member ballot (2001)**

		voted 2001				
		Ulivo	other	CdL	none	total
Mediaset	0	24.28	2.65	14.21	15.71	56.84
	1	6.82	1.40	24.28	10.66	43.16
	total	31.10	4.05	38.49	26.36	100.00

**Tab. 2: Vote (%) in the single-member ballot (1996)**

		voted 1996						
		Ulivo	other	Polo	Lega	Polo+Leg	none	total
Mediaset	0	35.45	1.08	13.11	2.72	15.83	13.47	65.83
	1	6.79	0.68	16.87	1.96	18.82	7.87	34.17
	total	42.25	1.76	29.98	4.68	34.65	21.34	100.00

**Tab. 3: Vote (%) in the proportional ballot (2001)**

		voted 2001						
		Rifond.	Ulivo	other	FI	CdL	none	total
Mediaset	0	3.30	19.29	3.05	8.60	13.49	17.70	56.84
	1	1.22	4.83	1.50	16.17	24.18	11.44	43.16
	total	4.52	24.12	4.55	24.77	37.68	29.14	100.00

**Tab. 4: Vote (%) in the proportional ballot (1996)**

		votoprop 1996							
		Rifond.	Ulivo	other	FI	Lega	Polo	none	total
Mediaset	0	5.52	29.06	1.04	5.00	3.84	16.47	13.75	65.83
	1	1.64	5.12	0.88	9.31	2.48	19.46	7.07	34.17
	total	7.15	34.17	1.92	14.31	6.31	35.93	20.82	100.00

**Tab. 5. Probability of voting for the CdL in the single-member ballot**  
**Probit marginal effects at the mean**

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Dep. Variable	vote CdL	vote CdL	vote CdL
mediaset	0.26113 (10.42)***	0.26189 (10.24)***	
wk_mset			0.21550 (6.48)***
mod_mset			0.32559 (10.65)***
str_mset			0.37742 (9.66)***
voted centre-right in 96	0.58575 (22.12)***	0.59155 (22.22)***	0.58061 (21.41)***
age	-0.00034 (0.08)	0.00032 (0.08)	0.00229 (0.55)
age2	-0.00000 (0.06)	-0.00001 (0.14)	-0.00002 (0.48)
education	-0.02784 (2.96)***	-0.01932 (1.87)*	-0.01955 (1.87)*
gender	-0.01498 (0.63)	-0.00579 (0.23)	-0.01527 (0.60)
north-east	0.00017 (0.00)	0.00289 (0.07)	0.01244 (0.29)
red-zone	-0.03851 (1.03)	-0.02937 (0.79)	-0.02119 (0.56)
center	0.11515 (3.00)***	0.12545 (3.27)***	0.13397 (3.45)***
south	0.12978 (3.81)***	0.13544 (3.91)***	0.14435 (4.11)***
freq_TVnews		-0.00002 (0.00)	-0.00367 (0.51)
freq_newspaper		0.00171 (0.35)	0.00159 (0.32)
interest in politics		-0.05117 (3.09)***	-0.04446 (2.63)***
hours_tv		-0.01841 (1.98)**	-0.02337 (2.48)**
Observations	2622	2622	2622

Robust z statistics in parentheses

\* significant at 10%; \*\* significant at 5%; \*\*\* significant at 1%

**Tab. 6. Probability of voting for *Forza Italia* in the proportional ballot  
 Probit marginal effects at the mean**

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Dep. Variable	vote FI	vote FI	vote FI
mediaset	0.16911 (7.62)***	0.16522 (7.29)***	
wk_mset			0.18328 (5.56)***
mod_mset			0.22760 (7.64)***
str_mset			0.31338 (8.16)***
voted FI in 96	0.63332 (20.05)***	0.63624 (20.02)***	0.62717 (19.36)***
age	-0.00039 (0.11)	0.00060 (0.16)	0.00181 (0.50)
age2	-0.00001 (0.22)	-0.00001 (0.38)	-0.00002 (0.59)
education	-0.05723 (6.86)***	-0.04138 (4.52)***	-0.04191 (4.52)***
gender	-0.03949 (1.85)*	-0.01787 (0.80)	-0.02649 (1.18)
north-east	-0.00793 (0.21)	-0.00045 (0.01)	0.00531 (0.14)
red zone	-0.07998 (2.55)**	-0.07519 (2.39)**	-0.06951 (2.21)**
center	0.02091 (0.60)	0.02594 (0.74)	0.03640 (1.03)
south	0.05542 (1.87)*	0.05079 (1.68)*	0.06071 (2.01)**
freq_Tvnews		0.00512 (0.78)	0.00205 (0.31)
freq_newspaper		-0.00267 (0.61)	-0.00250 (0.57)
interest in politics		-0.06424 (4.43)***	-0.05856 (4.00)***
hours_tv		-0.00791 (0.97)	-0.01169 (1.42)
Observations	2530	2530	2530

Robust z statistics in parentheses

\* significant at 10%; \*\* significant at 5%; \*\*\* significant at 1%

**Tab. 7. Probability of voting for Ulivo in the proportional ballot****Probit marginal effects at the mean**

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	vote Ulivo	vote Ulivo	vote Ulivo
RAI	0.21354 (8.81)***	0.21348 (8.80)***	
wk_rai			0.10492 (2.82)***
mod_rai			0.19926 (4.93)***
str_rai			0.35938 (9.37)***
voted centre-left in 96	0.62367 (25.33)***	0.62069 (25.03)***	0.60968 (24.23)***
age	-0.00866 (2.17)**	-0.00878 (2.18)**	-0.00935 (2.28)**
age2	0.00005 (1.33)	0.00005 (1.33)	0.00006 (1.36)
education	0.00126 (0.14)	-0.00347 (0.34)	-0.0036 (0.34)
gender	-0.01224 (0.53)	-0.02033 (0.84)	-0.01047 (0.43)
north-east	-0.01777 (0.44)	-0.02027 (0.50)	-0.02131 (0.52)
red zone	0.00910 (0.26)	0.01000 (0.29)	0.00101 (0.03)
center	-0.02447 (0.65)	-0.02460 (0.65)	-0.03268 (0.86)
south	-0.04224 (1.33)	-0.03973 (1.22)	-0.04979 (1.51)
freq_Tvnews		-0.00545 (0.74)	-0.01035 (1.36)
freq_newspaper		0.00170 (0.37)	0.0016 (0.34)
interest in politics		0.02088 (1.28)	0.01725 (1.04)
hours_tv		0.00233 (0.27)	0.00499 (0.56)
Observations	2622	2622	2622

Robust z statistics in parentheses

\* significant at 10%; \*\* significant at 5%; \*\*\* significant at 1%

**Tab. 8. Cross-effects. Probit marginal effects at the mean**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	vote CdL	vote FI	vote Ulivo	vote CdL	vote FI	vote Ulivo
mediaset	0.16835 (2.48)**	0.15502 (2.42)**	-0.13400 (1.96)**			
RAI	-0.10420 (1.54)	-0.01089 (0.17)	0.09269 (1.36)			
str_mset				0.13148 (3.36)***	0.09835 (3.02)***	-0.16120 (4.59)***
str_rai				-0.28262 (10.23)***	-0.19076 (7.80)***	0.21702 (7.91)***
voted CR in 96	0.59079 (22.16)***			0.58687 (21.79)***		
voted CL in 96			0.61963 (24.94)***			0.61596 (24.72)***
voted FI in 96		0.63607 (19.99)***			0.63070 (19.68)***	
age	0.00041 (0.10)	0.00061 (0.17)	-0.00898 (2.24)**	0.00108 (0.26)	0.00139 (0.38)	-0.00932 (2.28)**
age2	-0.00001 (0.17)	-0.00001 (0.38)	0.00005 (1.35)	-0.00001 (0.31)	-0.00002 (0.55)	0.00005 (1.33)
education	-0.01889 (1.82)*	-0.04135 (4.52)***	-0.00326 (0.32)	-0.02059 (1.95)*	-0.04280 (4.59)***	-0.00306 (0.29)
gender	-0.00549 (0.22)	-0.01783 (0.80)	-0.01898 (0.79)	-0.01778 (0.70)	-0.02720 (1.21)	-0.00810 (0.33)
freq_Tvnews	0.00557 (0.67)	0.00566 (0.73)	0.00135 (0.17)	0.01285 (1.76)*	0.01270 (1.93)*	-0.00339 (0.47)
freq_newspape	0.00153 (0.31)	-0.00268 (0.61)	0.00161 (0.35)	0.00142 (0.28)	-0.00255 (0.58)	0.00109 (0.23)
int. in politics	-0.05020 (3.03)***	-0.06415 (4.42)***	0.02050 (1.26)	-0.04570 (2.69)***	-0.05759 (3.93)***	0.01887 (1.13)
hours_tv	-0.01806 (1.94)*	-0.00786 (0.97)	0.00400 (0.46)	-0.02091 (2.26)**	-0.01059 (1.30)	0.00625 (0.71)
north-east	0.00155 (0.04)	-0.00064 (0.02)	-0.02330 (0.58)	-0.00648 (0.15)	-0.00366 (0.09)	-0.02059 (0.51)
red zone	-0.02608 (0.70)	-0.07484 (2.37)**	0.01083 (0.31)	-0.01918 (0.51)	-0.06688 (2.11)**	0.00070 (0.02)
center	0.12777 (3.32)***	0.02616 (0.74)	-0.02556 (0.67)	0.12984 (3.33)***	0.03698 (1.04)	-0.03078 (0.81)
south	0.13697 (3.95)***	0.05103 (1.69)*	-0.04407 (1.37)	0.13676 (3.90)***	0.06016 (1.99)**	-0.05083 (1.55)
Observations	2622	2530	2622	2622	2530	2622

Robust z statistics in parentheses

\* significant at 10%; \*\* significant at 5%; \*\*\* significant at 1%

**Tab. 9. Predispositions and issues. Probit marginal effects at the mean**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	vote CdL	vote FI	vote Ulivo	vote CdL	vote FI	vote Ulivo
wk_mset	0.14728 (4.04)***	0.12809 (3.84)***		0.14383 (3.85)***	0.12244 (3.69)***	
mod_mset	0.19803 (5.73)***	0.13796 (4.42)***		0.17108 (4.87)***	0.11517 (3.71)***	
str_mset	0.24913 (5.40)***	0.20060 (5.02)***		0.21424 (4.56)***	0.16318 (4.08)***	
wk_rai			0.09122 (2.17)**			0.08784 (2.13)**
mod_rai			0.11125 (2.53)**			0.08616 (1.98)**
str_rai			0.19568 (4.66)***			0.15607 (3.70)***
votadx96	0.43357 (13.42)***			0.41360 (12.53)***		
votasx96			0.40421 (13.64)***			0.38097 (12.64)***
votafi96		0.57584 (17.18)***			0.56805 (17.05)***	
age	0.00437 (1.01)	0.00158 (0.44)	0.00117 (0.26)	0.00479 (1.10)	0.00127 (0.36)	0.00103 (0.23)
age2	-0.00004 (1.02)	-0.00002 (0.64)	-0.00004 (0.84)	-0.00005 (1.13)	-0.00002 (0.59)	-0.00004 (0.81)
education	-0.02518 (2.14)**	-0.04619 (4.87)***	-0.00096 (0.09)	-0.02000 (1.65)*	-0.04313 (4.51)***	-0.00883 (0.79)
gender	-0.02705 (0.95)	-0.02173 (0.94)	0.01511 (0.56)	-0.03794 (1.31)	-0.02899 (1.26)	0.02261 (0.83)
freq_Tvnews	-0.00274 (0.33)	0.00252 (0.38)	0.00336 (0.44)	0.00074 (0.09)	0.00437 (0.67)	0.00301 (0.39)
freq_newspaper	0.00395 (0.71)	-0.00252 (0.58)	0.00122 (0.23)	0.00274 (0.49)	-0.00337 (0.78)	0.00269 (0.51)
hours_tv	-0.02150 (2.11)**	-0.01114 (1.38)	0.00392 (0.42)	-0.02540 (2.53)**	-0.01285 (1.65)*	0.00732 (0.76)
issue_economy				-0.08264 (5.14)***	-0.04896 (3.96)***	0.07818 (5.10)***
issue_leadership				-0.03416 (2.66)***	-0.02424 (2.33)**	0.03211 (2.63)***
issue_local				-0.02448 (1.64)	-0.01483 (1.27)	0.02049 (1.56)
int. in politics	-0.01361 (0.72)	-0.05834 (3.90)***	-0.00846 (0.44)	-0.00127 (0.07)	-0.05310 (3.58)***	-0.01878 (0.95)
liberal	0.00670 (1.01)	0.01098 (2.09)**	0.01076 (1.76)*	0.00818 (1.23)	0.01187 (2.30)**	0.01024 (1.65)*
church	0.02691 (2.80)***	0.02380 (3.05)***	0.01708 (1.87)*	0.02651 (2.69)***	0.02297 (2.92)***	0.01971 (2.10)**
left-right	0.13767 (16.32)***	0.05497 (10.87)***	-0.14261 (15.09)***	0.12679 (14.75)***	0.04588 (8.73)***	-0.13156 (13.88)***
north-east	-0.02708 (0.60)	-0.01313 (0.34)	-0.00818 (0.19)	-0.04369 (0.98)	-0.02053 (0.55)	-0.00565 (0.13)
red zone	-0.01653 (0.41)	-0.05403 (1.70)*	0.03416 (0.91)	-0.00848 (0.20)	-0.04940 (1.53)	0.02783 (0.72)
center	0.08400 (1.88)*	0.01223 (0.34)	-0.02056 (0.48)	0.09792 (2.11)**	0.02342 (0.64)	-0.03440 (0.82)
south	0.06770 (1.76)*	0.02700 (0.90)	0.00341 (0.10)	0.05957 (1.52)	0.02765 (0.92)	0.01471 (0.41)
Observations	2622	2530	2622	2622	2530	2622

Robust z statistics in parentheses. \* significant at 10%; \*\* significant at 5%; \*\*\* significant at 1%

**Tab. 10. Leadership and trust in the televisions. Probit marginal effects at the mean**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	vote CdL	vote FI	vote Ulivo	vote CdL	vote FI	vote Ulivo
wk_mset	0.07644 (1.92)*	0.07094 (2.28)**		0.06191 (1.53)	0.06701 (2.15)**	
mod_mset	0.04818 (1.27)	0.03298 (1.15)		0.01763 (0.46)	0.02382 (0.83)	
str_mset	0.04535 (0.87)	0.03957 (1.11)		0.00775 (0.15)	0.02861 (0.79)	
wk_rai			0.05574 (1.32)			0.05221 (1.23)
mod_rai			0.01453 (0.33)			-0.00162 (0.04)
str_rai			0.00856 (0.2)			-0.02155 (0.50)
voted CR in 96	0.32280 (8.95)***			0.32266 (8.92)***		
voted FI in 96		0.45039 (13.38)***			0.44768 (13.31)***	
voted CL in 96			0.29481 (9.29)***			0.29178 (9.23)***
b_factor	0.10181 (13.38)***	0.07824 (13.39)***	-0.04954 (8.45)***	0.09810 (12.75)***	0.07696 (13.15)***	-0.04615 (7.72)***
r_factor	-0.05619 (6.75)***	-0.01482 (2.91)***	0.06639 (8.04)***	-0.05362 (6.44)***	-0.01411 (2.78)***	0.06420 (7.87)***
g_factor	-0.01737 (2.86)***	-0.00911 (2.31)**	0.01746 (3.44)***	-0.01647 (2.62)***	-0.00925 (2.29)**	0.01560 (2.99)***
fid_mset				0.08873 (3.61)***	0.02508 (1.52)	-0.06109 (2.84)***
fid_rai				-0.04589 (1.90)*	-0.00578 (0.36)	0.04527 (2.12)**
issue_economy	-0.04689 (2.71)***	-0.02651 (2.33)**	0.04397 (2.79)***	-0.04374 (2.52)**	-0.02479 (2.18)**	0.04150 (2.63)***
issue_leader	0.00159 (0.11)	0.00314 (0.32)	0.01862 (1.55)	0.00682 (0.48)	0.00429 (0.43)	0.01523 (1.26)
issue_local	-0.03244 (2.01)**	-0.01748 (1.64)	0.02202 (1.64)	-0.03103 (1.90)*	-0.01696 (1.60)	0.02158 (1.61)
int. in politics	-0.00111 (0.06)	-0.05849 (4.09)***	-0.02668 (1.35)	-0.00392 (0.20)	-0.05966 (4.18)***	-0.02715 (1.37)
liberal	0.01404 (1.99)**	0.01443 (3.04)***	0.00891 (1.48)	0.01379 (1.93)*	0.01427 (3.01)***	0.00964 (1.60)
church	0.02673 (2.54)**	0.01907 (2.65)***	0.02333 (2.43)**	0.02735 (2.59)***	0.01898 (2.64)***	0.02351 (2.45)**
left-right	0.06853 (7.56)***	0.00152 (0.27)	-0.08508 (9.01)***	0.06764 (7.36)***	0.00078 (0.14)	-0.08500 (9.02)***
Observations	2622	2530	2622	2622	2530	2622

Regressions include all the other controls previously used. Robust z statistics in parentheses

\* significant at 10%; \*\* significant at 5%; \*\*\* significant at 1%

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