

The Personalisation of Partisan Attachments in the Second Italian Republic¹

Diego Garzia
University of Siena

Abstract: This paper investigates the individual-level determinants of partisan attachments in the Second Italian Republic. Based on the marked personalisation of the political supply in the last two decades, our hypothesis is that there has been a shift in the ground on which psychological feelings of closeness to parties are based from prior socio-ideological identities to individual attitudes towards party leaders. The hypothesis is tested through a number of statistical analyses of ITANES post-election survey data. Our findings highlight the constantly growing part played by leader evaluations in shaping individuals' feelings of closeness to parties, as compared to other potential determinants of partisan attachment.

Keywords: attitudes, partisanship, party leaders, personalisation of politics.

In recent decades political parties have undergone deep transformations which are at once cause and consequence of the personalisation of politics in advanced industrial democracies (Garzia, 2011a). The erosion of traditional social cleavages and the resulting weakening of long-established partisan alignments (Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000) has made it necessary for class-mass parties to adapt in order to extend their electoral reservoir beyond the social class for which they previously acted as a point of reference. This process of transformation into 'catch-all' parties (Kirchheimer, 1966) implies a declining role of ideology and a growing role for more appealing features such as the personality of party leaders (Farrell and Webb, 2000). At the same time, the changing structure of mass communications has been crucial in emphasising the role of political leaders *vis-à-vis* their own parties, making the latter more dependent on the personality-based medium of television (Mughan, 2000).

The Second Italian Republic represents in many respects the paradigmatic case of a personalised polity (Campus, 2010). The predominant position of Italian leaders with respect to their parties emerges clearly from a quick glance at ballot papers, where the great majority of party symbols feature the names of the respective leaders in the largest letters that will fit (see Appendix). The 'indistinguishable identity'

between the leader and the party (Poli, 2001) that always characterised Forza Italia (FI), paralleled by an increasing number of 'personal' parties (Calise, 2000) support the contention that in post-1994 Italy political leaders have become important in their own right by personifying their respective parties' platforms (McAllister, 2007).

In this article, we will attempt to assess the effects of these transformations on parties' relationships with the electorate. In particular, our attention will be devoted to the changing nature and content of individuals' partisan attachments. The erosion of stable sources of political orientation (e.g. social cleavages, ideologies), and the increasingly common tendency of the contemporary mass media to portray politics as a 'duel between leaders' (Cotta and Verzichelli, 2007), lead us to hypothesise that the ground on which political loyalties are based has shifted from prior social and ideological identities (Parisi and Pasquino, 1977) to individual attitudes towards more visible partisan objects (Garzia, 2011b). The aim of our analysis is to show the prominent part nowadays played by voters' attitudes towards one of these 'objects' – party leaders – in determining psychological attachments to Italian parties. We base our contention on the increasing influence of leaders in shaping the appeal of their parties (Barisione, 2006), as well as on the currently widespread practice of candidate-centred campaigning (Swanson and Mancini, 1996), and on the growing tendency among voters to evaluate politics in personal rather than partisan terms (Campus, 2000).

The next section of the article frames our research question within the existing literature on partisanship; then, our expectations will be tested empirically through a number of statistical analyses of ITANES data; finally, a brief discussion of our findings and their major implications for electoral politics in the Second Italian Republic is presented.

The changing determinants of partisanship in Italy

This study is based on a minimal definition of partisanship,² namely, the 'tendency of voters to repeatedly vote for the same party' (Bartle and Bellucci, 2009: 5). The literature provides us with two alternative types of explanation of this tendency: the identity and attitudinal approaches (ibid.). The identity approach describes partisanship as 'the individual's affective orientation to an important group-object in his environment' (Campbell et al., 1960: 121). This sense of 'we feeling' is based on primary group membership (e.g. race, religion, social class, territory) and it is mainly a product of early socialisation. The analytical usefulness of the concept lies in its relative stability and distance from the vote choice. Party identification is in fact conceived as an unmoved mover – that is, a non-political attitude, which is nonetheless able to shape the individual's political world-view in a way that accords with their partisan orientation.³

However, the social identity approach represents only one explanation of partisanship: the development of favourable attitudes towards a party as a result of ideological proximity (Downs, 1957), performance assessments (Fiorina, 1981), and leader evaluations (Page and Jones, 1979) represents another plausible explanation.

In drawing a sharp distinction between these two approaches, we do not imply that one perspective is correct at the expense of the other. We rather believe that, like all political attitudes, partisanship is responsive to the particular set of political alternatives available in the political system (Crewe, 1976), and therefore that the nature and shape of partisan ties depends to a substantial extent on the specific characteristics of parties themselves (Richardson, 1991).

In the First Italian Republic, the stability of partisan alignments was especially accentuated by the tight link between primary groups and the main parties of that time (the Christian Democrats (Democrazia Cristiana, DC) and the Italian Communist Party (Partito Comunista Italiano, PCI)). In such context, partisanship was regarded as

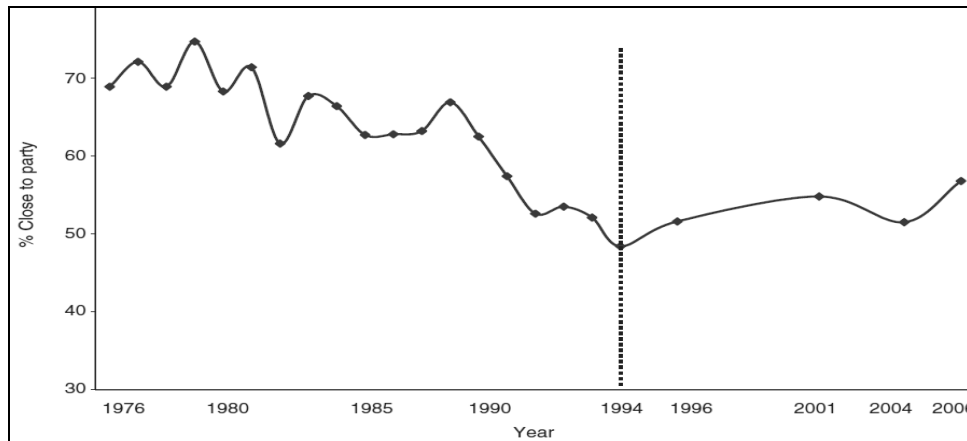
a social and political cleavage...the result of a sharing of cultural values, an objective location in the social structure, a membership (or closeness and trust) in secondary organisations, a territorial base. It was a form of social embeddedness, a closure in distinctive and separate political sub-cultures and enclaves which Italian mass parties were able to bring about (Bellucci, 2007: 57-58).

If the identity approach could provide a satisfactory explanation of the ties between voters and parties in pre-1994 Italy, the same approach does not seem suitable for an account of the nature of partisanship in the Second Republic. The disappearance of traditional mass-integration parties from the Italian political scene after Tangentopoli, and the intrinsically different nature of the parties that took their place after the election of 1994, make us doubtful of a reconstruction of mass partisanship based on social and political cleavages. Notwithstanding the clear lack of solid socio-ideological bases among contemporary Italian parties (Ignazi, 1997), these are in fact entities to which substantial parts of the electorate still 'feel close'.

Figure 1 plots the percentage of party identifiers among Italian voters in the period 1976-2006. There is an unequivocal downward movement, beginning in the mid-1980s, because of the growing disaffection with parties, and culminating with the fall of the First Republic. The trend eventually reverses after the first election of the Second Republic held in 1994. According to some, the birth of new parties (along with the entry of new protagonists on the political scene) has 'revitalised' the bonds between citizens and politics (Maraffi, 2002). This renewed strength of partisan attachments is however particularly impressive if we take into account the post-ideological, highly personalistic profile of the new parties (Calise,

2000). Therefore, it is reasonable to hypothesise that, as a consequence of party transformation, partisanship has become less a reflection of prior social and ideological identities (as postulated by the identity approach), and more the result of individual attitudes towards more visible partisan objects.⁴

Figure 1: Percentage of party identifiers in Italy, 1976-2006



Source: Bellucci (2007)

We have a number of reasons to believe that among all possible sources of attitudes toward the parties, those related to their leaders have become the strongest determinants of partisanship at the individual level. There is little doubt that in recent decades party leaders have, as compared to their parties, gained increasing importance for both political communication and electoral competition in almost every Western democracy (Bean and Mughan, 1989; McAllister, 1996; Dalton *et al.*, 2000). In light of this, it is not unreasonable to argue that political leaders have become important in their own right 'by personifying the policy platforms of their respective parties' (McAllister, 2007: 574).

This contention seems particularly appropriate as applied to contemporary Italian parties. Studies carried out in the late 1980s began considering the place and relative weight of party leaders in voters' attitudes and choices (Mannheimer and Sani, 1987) – however excluding in principle the possibility that favourable leader evaluations could produce shifts in longstanding partisan affiliations. The changing political environment of the mid-1990s, which made impossible the continuation of traditional identifications, led some scholars to investigate the independent role of individual attitudes towards leaders in shaping partisan attachments. In his analysis of the Italian election of 1996, Venturino (2000) finds that in two cases (FI, and the People's Party (i Popolari)) attitudes

toward leaders exerted a much stronger effect on attitudes toward parties than the other way around. This finding is however explained by the author in terms of the presidentialisation hypothesis (Poguntke and Webb, 2005). Therefore, the preeminent role of the two leaders in question (Silvio Berlusconi and Romano Prodi) as causal determinants of attachment to their respective parties is interpreted in the light of their extreme relevance in the 1996 campaign (both being candidates for the premiership).

In the following sections, we will provide a re-assessment of the role of party leaders as determinants of partisanship at the individual level based on a wider time-span of roughly twenty years, in order to verify whether leaders matter only under certain conditions - or if they have indeed grown in importance regardless of their relative popularity, visibility, and the type of party they lead.

Data and measurements

The data used in this study comes from the ITANES surveys conducted between 1990 and 2008.⁵ The dependent variable in our analysis is partisanship, as tapped by the following question: 'Is there any political party you feel closer to than others?' We have generated a number of dummy variables - one per party under analysis - assigning '1' to respondents declaring that they feel close to that specific party (regardless of the strength of their attachment) and '0' to all others. Table 1 summarises the percentage of respondents in the sample declaring that they feel close to one of the major parties in the period 1994-2006.

Table 1: Percentage of voters claiming to feel close to the main parties, 1994-2006

	1994	1996	2001	2004	2006
Rifondazione Comunista	3.0	6.1	4.3	4.3	6.7
PDS / DS	11.6	21.2	12.0	11.3	16.8
CCD / UDC	0.4	1.8	1.0	2.3	4.0
Forza Italia	20.7	10.0	14.3	10.5	13.0
Alleanza Nazionale	7.4	10.9	8.6	8.1	10.5
Lega Nord	2.7	5.9	1.2	2.1	2.5

The independent variables included in the analysis correspond to the indicators that are supposed to tap identity partisanship (respondents' frequency of church attendance, social class, region of residence, and

membership of trade unions) plus standard socio-demographic variables (gender, age, and education level). As for leader evaluations, we include the party leaders' thermometer score on a scale from '1' to '10' (mean scores for leaders of the main parties in the period 1994-2006 are presented in Table 2).

Table 2: Mean thermometer score for main parties' leaders, 1994-2006

	1994	1996	2001	2004	2006
<i>RC</i> : Fausto Bertinotti	4.3	5.7	4.6	4.6	5.3
<i>PDS/DS</i> :	4.3	-	-	-	-
Achille Occhetto	-	6.2	-	-	-
Massimo D'Alema	-	-	5.2	-	-
Walter Veltroni	-	-	-	4.6	5.4
Piero Fassino	-	-	-	-	-
<i>CCD/UDC</i> : Pierferdinando Casini	-	4.8	4.9	4.9	5.6
<i>FI</i> : Silvio Berlusconi	6.9	5.3	5.9	4.0	4.7
<i>AN</i> : Gianfranco Fini	5.5	5.9	5.9	5.5	5.7
<i>LN</i> : Umberto Bossi	3.6	3.3	3.0	2.9	3.4

Bivariate analysis

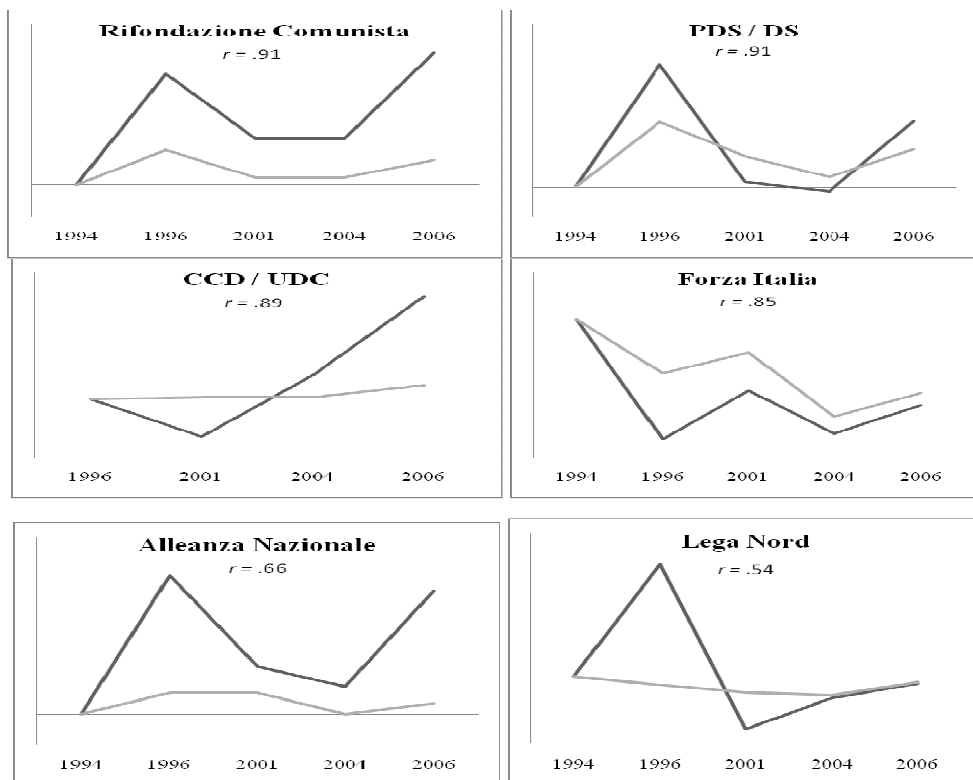
A first indication of the tight correspondence between party leader evaluations and partisan attachments in the Second Italian Republic comes from a re-analysis of the aggregate-level data presented in Tables 1 and 2.

In Figure 2 we plot the increase/decrease in the percentage of respondents saying that they feel close to each of the main parties between two election years (black line) and the corresponding evolution of the mean thermometer score for the party leader based on the entire sample (grey line). The first five graphs portray a rather univocal development: with very few deviations from the general trend (e.g., the National Alliance (Alleanza Nazionale, AN) and the Christian Democratic Centre (Centro Cristiano Democratico, CCD) in the period 1996-2001) we find that every increase/decrease in the percentage of respondents saying they feel close to one of the parties across two time points is accompanied by a parallel increase/decrease in the mean thermometer score assigned by the entire sample of respondents to the leader of that party. In other words, what seems to emerge is an evident correlation between aggregate partisanship and the popularity of leaders among the electorate (as testified by strength of the correlation coefficients). The relationship between aggregate partisanship and leader evaluation looks strongest in the case of FI, but it also holds for the centre-left parties. Of particular interest is the pattern

relative to the Democratic Party of the Left/the Left Democrats (Partito Democratico della Sinistra/Democratici di Sinistra, PDS/DS) a party that had four different leaders in the period under analysis. What we observe is an impressive correspondence between the popularity differential of each leader and the resulting percentage of (P)DS partisans, one that goes up under the widely popular leadership of Massimo D'Alema (mean thermometer score in 1996: 6.2), falls in 2001 with Walter Veltroni (mean score: 5.2) and rises again under Piero Fassino's leadership (mean score: 5.4 in 2006).

The case of the Northern League (LN), on the other hand, provides a sharply different pattern. Here aggregate partisanship and party-leader popularity do not seem to travel together. A tentative explanation could move from the widespread notion of LN as an ethno-regionalist party (Tronconi, 2005), and in this sense we might argue that partisanship is driven more by identity than by leader evaluations. This possibility will be tested through the multivariate analyses presented in the following section.

Figure 2: Evolution of aggregate partisanship and leaders' mean thermometer scores, 1994-2006



Note: percentage increase/decrease calculated with reference to the first year in each time-series; Black line: aggregate partisanship (%); Grey line: mean thermometer score for party leaders

Turning our attention from macro- to micro-level indicators, we can find further hints of the growing correspondence between individual respondents' evaluations of party leaders and partisan orientations by looking at the correlation coefficients (Pearson's r) reported in Table 3. The first column of the table presents the correlation coefficients relative to the main four parties of the First Republic, as measured in 1990. Their inclusion allows us to estimate whether the correlation between leader evaluations and partisanship has grown in magnitude throughout the period of institutional transition that began in 1994.

Table 3: Pearson's r correlations: leader evaluations and partisanship, 1990-2006

	1990	1996	2001	2006
Partito Comunista Italiano	.33	-	-	-
Partito Socialista Italiano	.22	-	-	-
Democrazia Cristiana	.24	-	-	-
Movimento Sociale Italiano	.27	-	-	-
Rifondazione Comunista	-	.29	.28	.35
PDS/DS	-	.44	.38	.45
CCD/UDC	-	.12	.13	.30
Forza Italia	-	.36	.39	.47
Alleanza Nazionale	-	.35	.33	.42
MEAN	.26	.31	.30	.40
Lega Nord	-	.44	.23	.30

At first, we note that all coefficients are statistically significant ($p < .01$) and positively signed - that is, partisanship is always significantly related to more favourable party-leader evaluations. With respect to the magnitude of the coefficients, Table 3 shows a fairly evident increase throughout time (once again, with the exception of LN, which is thus excluded from the calculation of the means). In 1990 the majority of coefficients does not rise above the threshold ($r = .30$) that separates a moderate from a strong association (Babbie et al., 2003: 258), and even in the case of the PCI the coefficient does not stand much higher ($r = .33$). Moving to the right-hand side of the table, coefficients tend to grow in a relatively uniform manner until 2006, when they all reach a peak. A comparison of the coefficients reported in the first and last columns (1990 and 2006 respectively) allows us to observe a rather clear and uniform increase. All coefficients relative to 2006 in fact exceed the .30 threshold, thus signalling the existence of a strong association (ibid.) between partisanship and leader evaluations for each and every party under analysis.

It would thus seem that in the Second Italian Republic individual feelings of closeness to a party are increasingly related with one's attitudes toward the leader of that party. To be sure, correlation does not prove causation, and even if we have theoretical reasons – at least, for the case at hand – to believe that the causal sequence between voters' attitudes toward party leaders and partisanship runs from the former to the latter, we still need to rule out other potential explanations. For this purpose, a multivariate analysis assessing the role of leader evaluations controlling for the effect of pre-existing social identities is in order.

Multivariate analysis

In this section of the analysis, the sources of partisanship across the First and Second Republic will be assessed through a comparison of the relative explanatory power of identity items *vis-à-vis* leader evaluations. The aim is to show that partisan loyalties have changed, as hypothesised, from being a mere reflection of previous social identities to being the result of individual attitudes towards party leaders.⁶ Twenty-seven different logistic regression analyses were performed on data for the period 1990-2008. In every instance, the dependent variable was a dummy coding '1' the respondents identifying with the party under analysis, and '0' non-partisans and identifiers with parties other than the one under scrutiny. Identity items (church attendance, union membership, social class, and region of residence, plus socio-demographic controls) are included in the first step of each regression analysis, while leader evaluations are added in the second step. Table 4 presents the variance explained (Nagelkerke's R-squared) by identity items, and the increase in explanatory power (added R-squared) once leader evaluations are included in the model.⁷

Moving again from the left-hand column relative to 1990, we find a substantial primacy of identity items in the cases of the DC and the PCI – that is, the main representatives of the Italian sub-cultures of the time. This is very much in line with the view of partisanship as an identity, which postulates that partisan attachments are caused by previous social identities, and at the same time are the cause of more favourable attitudes towards partisan objects. However, this view does not seem to hold for the other two parties analysed in 1990: the Italian Social Movement (Movimento Sociale Italiano, MSI) and the Italian Socialist Party (Partito Socialista Italiano, PSI). In both cases, we observe that identity items play only a negligible role in the explanation of individual partisan alignments (as signified by Nagelkerke's R-squared values below .10). This is however unsurprising, given the extremely ideological outlook of the former, and the substantially personalised and post-ideological profile of the latter (Pasquino, 1990).

Table 4: Determinants of partisanship: identity items (Nagelkerke R-squared) vs. leader evaluations (added R-squared)

	1990		1996		2001		2006		2008			
	Identity	Leader	Identity	Leader	Identity	Leader	Identity	Leader	Identity	Leader		
PCI	.23	.16	RC	.16	.22	.05	.22	.07	.34	SA	.11	.22
			PDS/DS	.19	.27	.07	.26	.05	.31	PD	.03	.30
DC	.13	.08	CCD/UDC	.16	.12	.13	.25	.06	.26	UDC	.08	.21
PSI	.04	.13	FI	.05	.37	.02	.36	.01	.47			
										PDL	.01	.40
MSI	.08	.22	AN	.04	.33	.07	.31	.02	.48			
Mean	.12	.15	Mean	.12	.26	.07	.28	.04	.37	Mean	.06	.28
			LN	.16	.33	.15	.28	.21	.27	LN	.18	.20
										IDV	.06	.18

The data relative to 1996 allow us to observe an interesting blend of continuity and change. Continuity is expressed by the figures relative to the new Christian Democrats (the CCD) on the one hand, and the two centre-right parties (FI and AN) on the other hand. As to the former, the explanatory power of identity items supersedes once again that of leader evaluations. With respect to the latter, they seem to follow the path traced by their historical (in the case of AN) or ascribed (in the case of FI) predecessors: the MSI and the PSI respectively. In both cases, identity items are only modestly associated with the dependent variable – which is indeed satisfactorily accounted for by leader evaluations alone. The 1996 data show however some significant changes, as in the case of the two left parties (Communist Refoundation (Rifondazione Comunista, RC) and the PDS) which, according to our estimates, began distinguishing their appeal to voters from that of the old PCI (as witnessed by the relative increase in the variance explained by leader evaluations with respect to identity items).

With the dawn of the twenty-first century, the picture becomes sharper and less unequivocal, with centre-left parties converging with those on the centre right. Looking in particular at the 2006 data, we can observe that by then identity items have become a negligible part of the explanation of individuals' partisan alignments for every party under analysis (Nagelkerke's R-squared always below .10) – with a significant exception: the LN, which, of all the parties shows the highest variance

explained by identity items in the whole period considered. This represents a finding of extreme interest, one that testifies to the significant effect still exerted by a particular kind of social (i.e. regional) identity in shaping partisanship (see section above).

Of particular interest for our purposes is the analysis of the data relative to the last Italian election held in 2008. As in 1994, this election took place in a political context that was significantly different from that of the previous election, although this time the restructuration of the political offer was ignited by a process of aggregation (rather than dissolution) undergone by several parties.⁸ In contrast to 1994, however, we have available data with which to explore and assess the basis on which voters developed their partisan ties with brand-new parties.⁹ The results of the regression analysis do not alter the conclusion we have drawn before with respect to those parties having 'longer' traditions (in this case, those already existing in 2006). The main driver of partisanship for the Union of the Centre (Unione di Centro, UDC) is still voters' evaluations of party leader Pier Ferdinando Casini. This is the case also for IdV, a party founded by Antonio Di Pietro in the late 1990s and still based largely on the personal appeal of its founder. Echoing what we have said already about the LN, this party emerges once again as the most rooted in society (identity items and leader evaluations having substantially the same explanatory power in this case).

However, the most interesting findings of this analysis come from the regression estimates for the 'new' parties. Moving from the centre right we observe that, as was the case with FI, individual feelings of closeness to the PdL are mostly determined by voters' evaluations of the founder of the party, Silvio Berlusconi. Even more interestingly, we find that this is also the case with respect to the Democratic Party (Partito Democratico, PD). To understand this finding, it is important to highlight the preeminent part played by Walter Veltroni in both the foundation of the PD and its election campaign. The personalisation of the political supply (usually a peculiarity of the Italian centre right) by the centre left represented to some the real innovation of the 2008 campaign (Barisione and Catellani, 2008). Our data seem to demonstrate the usefulness of this strategy – at least with regard to its ability to develop in a substantial proportion of voters (16.7 percent) in a pretty short time a feeling of closeness to a brand-new party.

This contention is strengthened if we look at the data relative to the leftist party, the Rainbow Left (La Sinistra-l'Arcobaleno, SA). This is in fact the only non-regionalist party (among the five under analysis) for which partisanship is still determined to a significant extent by identity items.¹⁰ This is also the only party not featuring the name of its leader as part of its symbol, and at the same time the only one (among those here analysed) unable to overcome the electoral threshold necessary to gain parliamentary representation (8 percent). This finding cannot possibly account alone for

the election defeat of the left in the election of 2008, but it surely reinforces the idea that nowadays the leadership factor has become a fundamental feature of a party's successful appeal to voters.¹¹

Party leaders and partisan dealignment: A dynamic analysis using panel data

Having established the primacy of leader evaluations as determinants of individual feelings of closeness to contemporary Italian parties, we dedicate this section to an assessment of the role played by such evaluations in the process of de-attachment from parties. The widespread decline in party identification that has occurred in all Western democracies in recent decades has been described as the most profound change in voting behaviour since the 1920s (Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000). Although Italy in the period 1994-2006 represented a partial exception to such international trends (see Figure 1), we must also note that in 2008 the trend moved downwards again (as it had done already between 2001 and 2004). If it is true, as we have seen, that leader evaluations have become crucial in shaping feelings of closeness to parties, it makes sense to focus our analysis on the (likely) relationship between popular perceptions of party leaders and the decline in the figure relative to aggregate partisanship.

According to Dalton (1984; 2000), the process of partisan dealignment is to be interpreted as a consequence of social modernisation (Inglehart, 1977). Building on a 'functional model' of party identification (Shively, 1979), he has shown how the dramatic spread of education along with a generalised information explosion in advanced industrial democracies has improved the average citizen's political and cognitive resources. This cognitive mobilisation entails that 'citizens possess the skills and resources necessary to become politically engaged with little dependence on external cues' (Dalton, 1984: 267), such as those provided by political parties. It follows that a pattern of partisan de-alignment should be accentuated among the young, the better educated and those more exposed to political information (that is, the more interested).

As mentioned, Italy has in recent years seen a renewed tendency towards a weakening of partisan ties, and this is in line with cognitive mobilisation theory. Yet, 'even if the development of the level of party identification is consistent with what the theory of modernization predicts, this does not necessarily prove that this development is caused by the mechanisms supposed in functional theory' (Berglund et al., 2005: 108). Other potential explanations have been advanced. Some contend that the intensity of people's party identification is related to the extent to which they perceive ideological differences between relevant political parties (Holmberg, 1994). Others have argued that the decline of partisan ties is a sign of growing disenchantment with political parties as agents of

representative democracy (Dalton, 2004). Alongside this hypothesis we place ours, which we deem consequential for the findings of this research: simply expressed, if partisanship is for the most part determined by favourable leader evaluations, then changing leader evaluations will also explain the weakening of partisan ties.

We assess these competing hypotheses using data from the first two waves of the 2001-2006 ITANES panel survey (i.e. the 2001 and 2004 waves).¹² The use of panel data is particularly appropriate in this case inasmuch it allows us to track the dynamics of partisanship at the individual level across time. The relative impact of changing perceptions of party leaders, party positions and trustworthiness on the (in)stability of partisan attachments will be assessed through logistic regression. This time the dependent variable is a dummy coding '1' all voters who changed party they identify with across the two time-points, as well as those who reported a sense of identification in 2001 but not in 2004, and '0' those whose party identification remained constant across the two waves. A number of independent variables are included: the model features those items related to cognitive mobilisation (age, education, and interest in politics); the individual differential ($t_2 - t_1$) in perceived polarisation of the party system (left-right distance between the main two parties: DS and FI) and party trust; the difference between leader evaluation at t_2 and (the same) leader evaluation at t_1 ; the difference, across the two time points, in the distance between self and the (same) party on the left-right scale. This model is peculiar with respect to the choice of cases under investigation. While the previous models involved analysing every respondent in each survey, this one concentrates on the respondents who declared themselves to be partisans in 2001 but who also took part in the second wave of the panel. Three different regression analyses are performed, this time including only identifiers with the three parties (one regression per group of partisans) featuring a sufficient number of respondents who were both partisan in 2001 and re-interviewed in 2004.¹³ Table 5 presents the logistic regression estimates computed with robust standard errors.

Moving from the parties on the centre right, we note that the strongest determinant of partisan instability is precisely a less positive evaluation of the leader. Other factors are significantly related to de-attachment from FI and AN (an increased distance between the self and the party in both cases; a low level of interest in politics and a decline in perceived polarisation of the political system in the latter case) but they are all outperformed in the model by leader evaluations (note that coefficients are comparable in magnitude). In the case of the DS we find that, consistently with modernisation theory, de-alignment is statistically related to the voter's age (the younger are more likely to undergo de-alignment). Most important, however, is the observation that the difference in leader evaluations is the only political covariate to reach statistical significance.

Table 5: Determinants of partisan dealignment, 2001-2004

	Democratici di Sinistra	Forza Italia	Alleanza Nazionale
Cognitive Mobilization			
Age	-.014 (.006)*	-.013 (.007)	.001 (.010)
Education	.203 (.158)	.016 (.198)	-.048 (.287)
Interest in Politics	-.099 (.080)	-.044 (.099)	-.285 (.125)*
Differentials (t ₂ - t ₁)			
Polarization	-.030 (.090)	-.010 (.075)	.231 (.102)*
Trust in Political Parties	-.040 (.229)	-.123 (.226)	-.315 (.245)
Issue Proximity	.291 (.149)	.294 (.111)**	.518 (.141)**
Leader Evaluation	-.303 (.083)**	-.444 (.086)**	-.648 (.152)**
Valid N	197	196	146
Wald Chi-Square	30.95	45.18	27.89

Note: Dependent variable: Partisanship instability across two time-points (dummy)
Robust standard errors in parentheses. ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05

Overall, these findings demonstrate that partisan de-alignment in the Second Italian Republic is best explained as a process where (changing) images of party leaders are central in provoking partisan instability. Since partisan alignment is mainly a function of one's evaluation of the party leader, by the same token de-alignment is caused, first and foremost, by a less positive evaluation of the leader.

Discussion and conclusions

Parties' abilities to develop ties of psychological identification with voters are still of the utmost importance for their electoral success – as the case of SA in 2008 should have made clear. Inasmuch as voters vote for parties, these will continue to have a significant role in orienting voting behaviour. Data from the Second Italian Republic demonstrate that partisanship plays a role of considerable relevance in this respect, with roughly four partisans

out of five voting according to their party identification¹⁴ (Maraffi, 2002; 2006). What matters most, contemporary partisanship derives its relevance from the strong propensity of partisans to vote the same way from one election to the next.¹⁵

In this article, we hope to have shown the dramatic changes in the origins and content of mass partisanship during the transition from the First to the Second Republic in Italy. What was once a mere reflection of pre-existing social identities has since become the product of individual attitudes towards political objects. As said, this is due to several factors including the decline of ideologies and cleavage politics; the concomitant dissolution of old parties and their replacement by 'de-ideological' – and to a varied extent 'personal' (Calise, 2000) – parties, as well as the changing patterns of political communication brought about by the peculiar role of television in Italian politics. The latter has been especially important in raising the profile of party leaders at the expense of their parties. As our analysis has made clear, what determines individuals' feelings of closeness to parties in the Second Republic is first and foremost their evaluation of party leaders.

In light of our evidence and analysis, we can conclude that the leadership factor is nowadays a fundamental feature of the appeal of a party. This contention seems to be vindicated by the strategies of parties themselves, exemplified by the increasingly widespread tendency of parties to include their leaders' names within their symbols – a practice to which even the 'identitarian' LN and the 'ideological' extreme left has had to surrender. Once again, we do not impute the changing content of partisanship merely to changes in party symbols; we rather interpret this as the most visible evidence of a wider strategy of a party to reshape its image by giving a higher profile to the image of the leader. According to our findings, such a strategy seems to have become ever more necessary for electoral success.

Notes

¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented at the ComPol/ITANES Workshop "Cicli elettorali e campagna permanente" (Electoral cycles and permanent campaigning) in Bologna, Italy, 17-18 June 2010. I wish to thank the organisers, Paolo Bellucci and Paolo Mancini, and the participants for their useful remarks and suggestions. I would also like to thank Jim Newell for his comments on a first draft of this paper.

² In the remainder of the article, we will as possible use the term 'partisanship' when referring to the dependent variable of our study – that is, a psychological tie linking the individual to a specific political party. The occasional use of expressions like 'party identification', 'partisan attachment', or 'partisan

alignment' – all of which refer to the same concept – should be read merely as a stylistic note.

³ On these bases, partisanship is thought to be a cause – but not consequence – of less stable attitudes and opinions about political objects (e.g., political events, issues and candidates).

⁴ According to the original Michigan conception of party identification, favourable attitudes towards partisan objects are caused by long-term loyalties based on group membership. But if it is true (as we expect) that individual feelings of partisan attachment are *not* any longer based on long-term social identities, then we can confidently assume that partisanship is caused exactly by those attitudes which the identity approach conceives as the consequence of previous identifications.

⁵ ITANES (Italian National Election Studies) is a research program conceived and promoted by the Istituto Cattaneo, in Bologna. Further information is available at <http://www.itanes.org/>. The analyses, interpretations, and conclusions in this paper are solely those of the author. Data for party identification in 1994 comes from the Eurobarometer 41.1 (the question not having been included in the ITANES survey in 1994).

⁶ If attitudes are to be interpreted as a consequence of partisan affiliation, this *must* be due to pre-existing social identities. However, a clear lack of explanatory power of identity items – that is, a substantial absence of long-term social ties between parties and partisans – looks to us like strong evidence in favour of an independent role of attitudes as drivers of partisan alignments.

⁷ Note that Nagelkerke's R-squared cannot be directly compared to an R-squared in OLS regression. However, it can be interpreted as an 'approximate variance' in the outcome accounted for by the predictor variables included in the model, with a value of '0' denoting that the model does not explain any variation and '1' denoting that it perfectly explains the observed variation in the dependent variable (Nagelkerke, 1991).

⁸ Most notably, the 2008 election saw the electoral debut of: the People of Freedom (Il Popolo della Libertà, PdL), a merger of Forza Italia and the National Alliance (Alleanza Nazionale, AN); the Democratic Party (Partito Democratico, PD) consisting of the parties already united in the electoral cartel, Uniti nell'Ulivo in 2006: the Left Democrats (Democratici di Sinistra, DS) and the Daisy (La Margherita); the Rainbow Left (la Sinistra-l'Arcobaleno) bringing together Communist Refoundation (Rifondazione Comunista, RC) and other minor extreme-left parties.

⁹ Rather impressively, 51.5 percent of the 2008 survey respondents said they felt close to one of the parties – this being almost the same as the figure for party identifiers in 2006.

¹⁰ At 1.7 percent, the proportion of voters feeling close to the SA in 2008 is rather modest and much lower than the proportion feeling close to RC in 2006 (6.7 percent: see Table 1).

¹¹ After 2008, the importance of the leadership factor was understood on the left too. At the subsequent regional elections, The Left and Freedom (Sinistra e Libertà), the larger of the spin-offs from the SA, decided to focus on its leader to a greater extent than had ever been done before by an Italian post-communist party

- with leader Nichi Vendola appearing on all electoral posters and his name eventually being included in the party symbol.

¹² Nationally representative multistage sample conducted through face-to-face interviews/CAPI; n=3209 (2001); n=1882 (2004). Our decision to focus on this time period relates to a simple observation of the data plotted in Table 1. If we are to understand the determinants of partisan dealignment, then it seems more appropriate to concentrate our analysis on a period in which aggregate partisanship moved downwards (2001-2004) rather than upwards (2001-2006).

¹³ AN: n=172; stable partisans (2001-2004) = 45.9 percent. DS: n=248; stable partisans (2001-2004) = 50.4 percent. FI: n=277; stable partisans (2001-2004) = 38.3 percent.

¹⁴ This proportion is pretty much in line with findings from other European countries for which party identification is considered 'meaningful' (Holmberg, 1994; Berglund et al., 2005).

¹⁵ In 2006 almost 80 percent of party identifiers said they had decided a long time before the elections which party to vote for - as against only 20 percent among non-identifiers (Maraffi, 2006). Again, these figures are in line with data relative to other European democracies (Richardson, 1991).

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Appendix

Evolution of Italian party/coalition symbols, 2001-2008



Source: Ministero dell'Interno - Archivio storico delle Elezioni
 (<<http://elezionistorico.interno.it/>>)