

Fidelio: not opening the doors to rebellious teens parliamentarians

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ABSTRACT

In politics, the phenomenon of sharpshooting can be common. The treason within the ranks, with renegades voting against the political agenda of their own party, is quite common in Italy, along with widespread practice of party hopping. Using a dataset of 34,630 votes in the Italian Chamber of the Deputies between 2008 and 2013, we test whether more loyal members of the parliament are more or less inclined to rebel votes in floor voting sessions. Using historical insights to instrument transformistic tendencies among parliamentarians, the manuscript uncovers the fact that parliamentarians crossing the floor are much more rebellious than their peers. Policy-making perspectives and implications are then suggested.

Preliminary version: extended abstract

1. Framework and conclusions of the paper

Among teenagers, a rebellious state of mind and desire for change is quite common (Bonvalet et al., 2015). Rebellious behavior is clinically described as “any persistent patterns of behavior” being “in direct opposition to the rules, values, and mores of a [...] community, culture, and the society” (Greydanus et al., 1997).

In the context of Italy, parliamentary discussions register similar rebellious behaviors, with members of the parliament (MPs) shouting and booing at each other (Romanini, 2017) when peers are voting in contrast to the political line and opinion expressed by the parliamentary group of the MPs (Rombi & Seddone, 2017). This phenomenon of “rebel votes” echoes that of “transformism”, which is the longstanding phenomenon (Graziano, 2010) of party switching (Bull, 2021), i.e., parliamentarians crossing the floor.

Both phenomena represent a wound to political accountability (Pasquino, 2020) and a principal-agent issue (Strøm, 2000). The wide diffusion of such practices in Italy is due to an heterogeneity among interests and institutional arrangements producing systematic low-quality representatives (Caselli & Morelli, 2004) and bad representation of citizens interests (Rosset & Stecker, 2019).

Culture plays an important role in the ever-changing interactions (Tardi, 2007) characterizing Italian politics, which is dependent on institutional tensions and constraints (Baumgartner et al., 2014) affecting the problem-solving activity (Adler & Wilkerson, 2012) of lawmaking, which is dependent on religious and moral backgrounds (Peach, 2002) and “driving” laws (Casas et al., 2019).

Party are normally not willing to disclose internal rebellion because it signals responsiveness, representativeness, integrity, and transparency of the party (Fink-Hafner & Krašovec,

2013). Nonetheless, thanks to the data provided by the Openpolis Foundation – an independent data journalism association promoting transparency and open-data government – we are able to track all parliamentary mutinies registered in the XVI legislature (2008-2013).

In light of the information provided by the Italian Chamber of the deputies, we are also able to control for important MPs’ characteristics that are said to affect the legislative agenda, such as: political spectrum (Chiou & Rothenberg, 2006), conservatism (Russel et al., 2020), gender (Gavoille & Vershelde, 2017), schooling level (Besley, Montalvo & Reynal-Querol, 2011), socio-economic background (Hayo & Neumeier, 2014), political (Galasso & Nannicini, 2011) and individual experience (Braendle & Stutzer, 2013).

Given that the XVI legislature was marked by an important sexual scandal (Praino & Stockemer, 2021), allegedly involving the Prime Minister (PM) in bacchanalia (Palmer, 2011) we also control for technocratic pressures (Marangoni & Verzhicelli, 2015). However, it must be said that, despite the PM resignation, scandals had no echo on the parliamentary composition (Orsini, 2014).

To deal with potential omitted variable bias related to party switching, we exploit the fact that the Italian cultural capital (Bourdieu, 2007) is peculiar. Italian customary beliefs and values are transmitted “fairly unchanged from generation to generation” (Guiso et al., 2006) and there is strong evidence supporting the fact that many current values are inherited from the remote past (Tabellini, 2008).

To instrument the endogenous “transformism” regressor we use a well known measure of social capital (Crescenzi et al., 2013), which consist of the results of the 1946 Institutional Referendum (IR), which estimates long-term institutional traits (Uleri, 2012). The referendum was asking Italians, voting for the time after the Second World War, whether to give Italy a Republican or Monarchic form to the nation.

The IR represented a cesura in Italian history and a big fracture between those conservatives intended to give continuity to the former Kingdom of the Two Sicilies (Mastropaolo, 2016) and its “purely clientelistic” traditions (Fonzo, 2019) and those willing to give a new republican tradition to the country (Aimo, 2021).

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The referendum is a good measure of the division between conservatism and progressivism (Corbetta & Piretti, 2009) and, according to the hypothesis of the paper, is symbol of fidelity and intimate bond between the sovereign party (Aterrano, 2020). This phenomenon is reinforced by the fact that such values are “capable of crossing the deepest political caesuras in national history” (Adorno, 2020).

Eventually, the “social capital” of the referendum sedimented specific cultural, political, and social practices across centuries (Morese, 2020a) that generated veritable static positions even at the cost of obvious contradictions (Cristina, 2020). Therefore, in this sense, the monarchic votes represent a strong stance in favor of the status quo.

This intuition appears to hold also from a statistical point of view. The first stage regressions suggest a negative correlation between a unitary increase in the votes for the monarchy at the IR and party hopping (see ??). Indeed, former monarchic areas have probably developed a specific and localized cultural response (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2021) that see politicians unpunished when they are pursuing vested interests (Alesina & Giuliano, 2015)

On the contrary, party switching produces a 7.3 unit change in the rate of rebel votes (see ??), showing that most loyal MPs are also less inclined in publicly criticize the party line. These MPs, sticking firmly to their party’s policy direction the auspicated “pillars of programmatic coherence” (Massari, 2009) that the literature wishes to be the vehicle for government control and guidance (Franchino, 2006).

Combined, these results confirm that culture develops slowly (Gorodnichenko & Roland, 2021) and that institutional structures shape the organizational design of politics (Besley & Persson, 2019) in the long run (Besley, 2020).

To conclude, it can be said that, while in the “stylistically and thematically disturbing” (Ransom, 2010) movie *Eyes Wide Shut*, the word “Fidelio” is used as utmost representation of fidelity and deep loyalty (Whitinger & Ingram, 2003), in the case of parliamentarians, it appears that fidelity is important for the party to close ranks, team up and act in unison at parliamentary level.

2. Data, methodology, and results summary

The so-called “transformism” – meaning a migration from the party of election to another one (Donovan & Newell, 2008) – has been demonstrated to be extremely harmful (Currier, 2004), but there are few studies exploring the reasons behind its cultural values (Miles, 2014).

This paper tests empirically the hypothesis that transformist deputies are less trustworthy and more willing to give space to public criticism rebelling to the instructions of the party. To do so, the paper exploits a panel dataset of 33,970 observations, equal to the votes registered by 678 deputies (substitutes included) of the XVI legislature (29 April 2008–14 March 2013).

The institutional website of the Chamber of Deputies provides a registry of MPs (e.g., age, sex, educational titles, electoral district) and detailed information related to their

Table 1
Descriptive statistics

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Rate of rebel votes	34,630	2.542336	6.428265	0	100
Rate of favorable vote	34,630	84.13695	27.83531	0	100
Rate of official missions	34,630	8.799276	24.52655	0	100
Monarchy votes 1946 IR	33,970	47.4892	16.78739	15	76.5
No party change	34,630	.9138031	.2806587	0	1
Center-right parties	34,630	.5049668	.4999825	0	1
Mixed group	34,630	.0504765	.2189292	0	1
Center-left parties	34,630	.3703436	.4829037	0	1
Schooling level indicator	34,630	2.398008	.9344088	1	4
No previous parliamentary	34,630	.3896621	.4876807	0	1
Female MP	34,630	.1972278	.3979115	0	1
Age under35 y.o.	34,630	.0563962	.2306885	0	1
35>Age<45 y.o.	34,630	.2282414	.4197051	0	1
45>Age<55 y.o.	34,630	.4486284	.4973611	0	1
55>Age<65 y.o.	34,630	.2551834	.4359705	0	1
Age>65 y.o.	34,630	.0846087	.2783026	0	1
Gov. Berlusconi IV	34,630	.7453942	.4356457	0	1
Gov. Monti	34,630	.2364424	.424903	0	1

Note: The table provides descriptive statistics of the XVI legislature votes (2008–2013) and composed of a total sample of 33,970 observations, based on the data of MPs provided by the OpenPolis Foundation, the Chamber of Deputies and the Ministry of Interior.

parliamentary functions (e.g., secretariat of the Presidency; sub-secretariat of the government; the number of parliamentary mandates; previous senatorial seat). The share of rebel votes, favorable votes, and missions is gently provided by the Openpolis Foundation. Information regarding the IV comes from the Eligendo website of the Ministry of Interior.

The model parameters used to test the impact of parliamentary turnout on rebel votes are the following:

$$rebel_{mp} = \beta_1(traitor)_{mp} + \beta_2 X_{mp} + \epsilon_{mp} \quad (1)$$

The dependent variable – $rebel_{mp}$ – represents the share of rebel votes registered monthly for each MP. Rebel votes are described as votes against the line of the MPs’ parliamentary group, with the exclusion of abstention votes (contrary to what was done in Russo et al., 2014). The variable of interest is a dummy variable – $(traitor)_{mp}$ – that assumes the value of 1 if the MP has not changed political party or parliamentary group during his term of office and zero in case of transformism. This variable is instrumented with the IR monarchic results (see below, Figure 1)

The model also incorporates a vector X_{mp} of control variables, including: the sex; age; level of schooling of the MP; affiliation to the center-left, center-right, or mixed group (“gruppo misto”); the rate of favorable vote in floor voting sessions; the rate of missions (i.e., justified absences) to floor voting sessions; finally, a dummy for the Berlusconi IV government and a dummy for the Monti government.

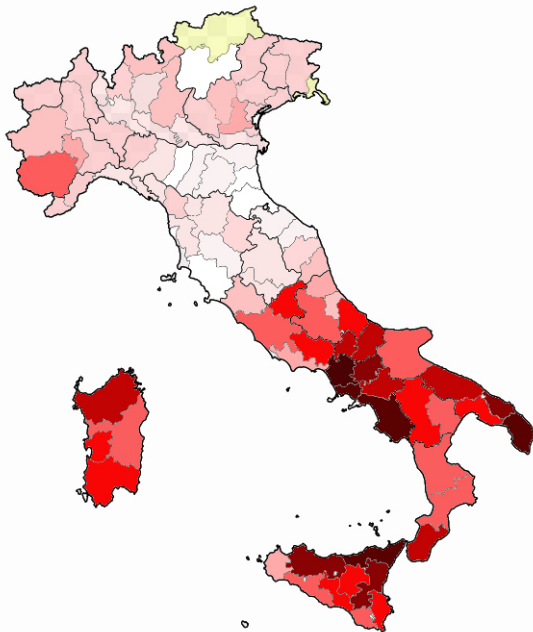
The standard unobserved random term is represented by ϵ_{mp} and errors are double clustered at the MP and month level.

Descriptive statistics of the dataset are provided in Table 1.

The instrumental variable catches the rate of votes for the monarchy at the IR, according to which Italians were asked to decide whether to give the nation a Republican or Monarchic form after the Second World War. The final result was a win for the Republican form, but with an evident prevalence of monarchic preferences in some areas voting for the institutional form to give to postwar Italy (Schininà, 2020).

A visual representation of the distribution of votes for the monarchy at the referendum is provided in Figure 1. The data is available from the historical archive of the Ministry of Interior (“*Archivio Storico delle Elezioni*”).

Figure 1: The rate of votes for the monarchy in the 1946 referendum



Note: The figure highlight, from white to dark red, the proportion of votes for the monarchy in the 1946 institutional referendum. Yellow regions were subject to international contention and Allied/Yugoslavian occupation. These observations were dropped from regressions.

The referendum offered an image of an Italian peninsula neatly divided between North and South (Corbetta & Piretti, 2009), symptomatic of a fracture between the republican ideas of a new “Risorgimento” (Aimo, 2021), and the intention to give continuity to the former monarchic interest (Mastropaolo, 2016), opportunistic preferences and contingencies (Morese, 2020b).

The intention to give continuity to the monarchs (the Piedmontese) that conquered by force the southern territories (former Kingdom of the Two Sicilies) is called by historians “new institutional transformism” (Gheda, 2020), in light of persistent cultural values formalizing institutional immobility in the rules of the political game (Persson & Tabellini, 2021) and closed client networks (Blando, 2019).

In the end, monarchic territories were always been marked by closed privileges in public positions (Rocco, 1837), fear of “shameless betrayal” from authorities (De’ Sivo, 1868) corrupted and corrupting officials (Bruno Guerri, 2020), poor institutions (Brosio, 2018) and a “vertical patron-client rela-

Table 2
2SLS regressions - I

VARIABLES	(1) No party change	(2) No party change	(3) Rebel votes	(4) Rebel votes
Monarchy votes	-0.00236*** (9.30e-05)	-0.000978*** (7.80e-05)		
No party change			-4.101*** (0.871)	-7.344*** (2.014)
Center-right coalition		0.256*** (0.00930)		1.054* (0.540)
Mixed group		-0.304*** (0.0145)		-6.306*** (0.676)
Center-left coalition		0.310*** (0.00912)		0.509 (0.642)
Ph.D degree		-0.0511*** (0.00947)		-0.194 (0.198)
Univ. Degree		-0.0370*** (0.00263)		-0.303*** (0.116)
12grade Sch.Lev.		-0.0197*** (0.00702)		-0.364 (0.236)
No previous experience		0.0170*** (0.00286)		0.244*** (0.0815)
Female MP		-0.0178*** (0.00281)		-0.325*** (0.0821)
Rate of favorable votes		0.000693*** (0.000107)		-0.123*** (0.00650)
Rate of official missions		0.00117*** (0.000112)		-0.138*** (0.00666)
Age under35 years old		0.0408*** (0.00454)		-0.169 (0.199)
35>Age<45 years old		0.0195*** (0.00323)		0.197 (0.147)
45>Age<55 years old		0.00512** (0.00253)		0.166 (0.125)
55>Age<65 years old		0.0245*** (0.00337)		-0.0155 (0.138)
Age>65 years old		0.0313*** (0.00588)		0.553*** (0.198)
Berlusconi IV government		-0.0450*** (0.00472)		-0.237 (0.246)
Monti government		-0.111*** (0.00564)		2.169*** (0.334)
Observations	33,970	33,970	33,970	33,970
Adjusted R-squared	0.020	0.320	-0.011	0.130
Centered R-squared	0.0203	0.320	-0.0107	0.130
Montiel-Pflueger critical values		37.418	37.418	
Montiel-Pflueger F statistics		645.44***	157.02***	

Double clustered standard errors, at month and MP level, in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Note: The table reports the coefficients of the 2SLS regressions of 678 MPs of the Italian Chamber of Deputies during the XVI legislature (2008-2013).

tions of dependence” to the feudal monarchy (Putnam, 1993).

Regarding empirical results, a summary of the first and second stage of the 2SLS regressions are summarized in Table 2 while specifications are reported, extended, in Table 3.

3. Conclusions summary

Parliamentary rebellion is an aspect that was not given much attention in the economic literature. The incentives that drive our MPs to be more or less involved in the legislative activity are far from clear and empirical studies in this area are still incomplete.

Using historical insights, the manuscript shows that there are radicated privileges and conservatory traits that have been shaped, across centuries, anchoring cultural values (Miles, 2014) creaing a marked propensity for particularism in managing relationships. Overall, the results confirm that party switching, clientelism, and patronage politics are a severe plague in Italy (Ginsborg, 2010).

Should I stay or should I go?

Table 3
2SLS regressions - I

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
1 st stage									
VARIABLES	NoChange	NoChange	NoChange	NoChange	NoChange	NoChange	NoChange	NoChange	NoChange
Monarchy votes	-0.00236*** (9.30e-05)	-0.00106*** (7.70e-05)	-0.000914*** (7.86e-05)	-0.000943*** (7.87e-05)	-0.000961*** (7.88e-05)	-0.000959*** (7.88e-05)	-0.000917*** (7.85e-05)	-0.000945*** (7.85e-05)	-0.000978*** (7.80e-05)
Center-right		0.270*** (0.00944)	0.270*** (0.00939)	0.268*** (0.00945)	0.269*** (0.00945)	0.268*** (0.00949)	0.262*** (0.00944)	0.262*** (0.00944)	0.256*** (0.00930)
Mixed group		-0.307*** (0.0148)	-0.305*** (0.0148)	-0.305*** (0.0148)	-0.306*** (0.0147)	-0.307*** (0.0148)	-0.313*** (0.0146)	-0.311*** (0.0147)	-0.304*** (0.0145)
Center-left		0.316*** (0.00930)	0.317*** (0.00927)	0.315*** (0.00931)	0.317*** (0.00932)	0.317*** (0.00932)	0.313*** (0.00926)	0.314*** (0.00926)	0.310*** (0.00912)
Ph.D degree			-0.0472*** (0.00951)	-0.0481*** (0.00953)	-0.0454*** (0.00939)	-0.0457*** (0.00941)	-0.0487*** (0.00943)	-0.0499*** (0.00956)	-0.0511*** (0.00947)
Univ. Degree			-0.0359*** (0.00263)	-0.0353*** (0.00262)	-0.0348*** (0.00263)	-0.0352*** (0.00265)	-0.0365*** (0.00264)	-0.0367*** (0.00265)	-0.0370*** (0.00263)
12grade Sch.Lev.			-0.0154** (0.00701)	-0.0173** (0.00698)	-0.0162** (0.00699)	-0.0166** (0.00699)	-0.0174** (0.00695)	-0.0216*** (0.00697)	-0.0197*** (0.00702)
No previous exp.				0.0101*** (0.00252)	0.0115*** (0.00259)	0.0126*** (0.00272)	0.0164*** (0.00273)	0.0159*** (0.00288)	0.0170*** (0.00286)
Female MP					-0.0156*** (0.00282)	-0.0158*** (0.00282)	-0.0170*** (0.00283)	-0.0183*** (0.00283)	-0.0178*** (0.00281)
Favorable votes						-0.000103** (5.17e-05)	0.000926*** (0.000105)	0.000940*** (0.000105)	0.000693*** (0.000107)
Official mission							0.00145*** (0.000111)	0.00144*** (0.000111)	0.00117*** (0.000112)
Age under35 y.o.								0.0395*** (0.00449)	0.0408*** (0.00454)
35>Age<45 y.o.								0.0186*** (0.00321)	0.0195*** (0.00323)
45>Age<55 y.o.								0.00519** (0.00249)	0.00512** (0.00253)
55>Age<65 y.o.								0.0246*** (0.00336)	0.0245*** (0.00337)
Age>65 y.o.								0.0321*** (0.00589)	0.0313*** (0.00588)
Berlusconi IV gov.									-0.0450*** (0.00472)
Monti government									-0.111*** (0.00564)
Observations	33,970	33,970	33,970	33,970	33,970	33,970	33,970	33,970	33,970
Adjusted R-squared	0.020	0.298	0.301	0.302	0.302	0.302	0.307	0.309	0.320
Centered R-squared	0.0203	0.298	0.301	0.302	0.302	0.302	0.308	0.309	0.320
2 nd stage									
No party change	-4.101*** (0.871)	-9.420*** (1.962)	-11.33*** (2.370)	-10.19*** (2.297)	-9.634*** (2.241)	-10.34*** (2.256)	-5.912*** (2.142)	-6.168*** (2.099)	-7.344*** (2.014)
Center-right		1.068* (0.553)	1.581** (0.659)	1.211* (0.643)	1.084* (0.630)	1.072* (0.631)	0.491 (0.585)	0.561 (0.569)	1.054* (0.540)
Mixed group		-7.070*** (0.679)	-7.631*** (0.795)	-7.284*** (0.768)	-7.137*** (0.752)	-7.611*** (0.762)	-5.607*** (0.727)	-5.701*** (0.712)	-6.306*** (0.676)
Center-left		0.413 (0.636)	1.029 (0.764)	0.601 (0.744)	0.474 (0.730)	0.837 (0.735)	-0.105 (0.688)	-0.00710 (0.674)	0.509 (0.642)
Ph.D degree			-0.662*** (0.224)	-0.642*** (0.219)	-0.538** (0.211)	-0.657*** (0.216)	-0.143 (0.190)	-0.176 (0.197)	-0.194 (0.198)
Univ. Degree			-0.508*** (0.129)	-0.448*** (0.127)	-0.413*** (0.125)	-0.546*** (0.127)	-0.257** (0.120)	-0.269** (0.119)	-0.303*** (0.116)
12grade Sch.Lev.			-0.246 (0.257)	-0.298 (0.254)	-0.256 (0.253)	-0.379 (0.252)	-0.222 (0.236)	-0.272 (0.236)	-0.364 (0.236)
No previous exp.				0.365*** (0.0773)	0.399*** (0.0781)	0.698*** (0.0847)	0.258*** (0.0777)	0.264*** (0.0820)	0.244*** (0.0815)
Female MP					-0.439*** (0.0884)	-0.489*** (0.0892)	-0.297*** (0.0814)	-0.287*** (0.0833)	-0.325*** (0.0821)
Favorable votes						-0.0269*** (0.00198)	-0.133*** (0.00681)	-0.132*** (0.00680)	-0.123*** (0.00650)
Official mission							-0.149*** (0.00710)	-0.149*** (0.00708)	-0.138*** (0.00666)
Age under35 y.o.								-0.171 (0.203)	-0.169 (0.199)
35>Age<45 y.o.								0.208 (0.150)	0.197 (0.147)
45>Age<55 y.o.								0.157 (0.128)	0.166 (0.125)
55>Age<65 y.o.								-0.0508 (0.141)	-0.0155 (0.138)
Age>65 y.o.								0.488** (0.201)	0.553*** (0.198)
Berlusconi IV gov.									-0.237 (0.246)
Monti government									2.169*** (0.334)
Observations	33,970	33,970	33,970	33,970	33,970	33,970	33,970	33,970	33,970
Adjusted R-squared	-0.011	-0.044	-0.085	-0.058	-0.046	-0.048	0.124	0.122	0.130
Centered R-squared	-0.0107	-0.0444	-0.0844	-0.0580	-0.0461	-0.0481	0.125	0.122	0.130
Kleibergen-Paap Wald F stat.	645.4	188.5	134.9	143.4	148.9	147.8	136.5	145	157
Cragg-Donald Wald F stat.	705	192.3	140	147.7	153.3	152.5	140.6	148.9	161.7
Kleibergen-Paap LM stat.	617.5***	184***	132.7***	141.1***	146.5***	145.4***	134.4***	142.8***	154.5***

Double clustered standard errors, at month and MP level, in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Note: The table reports the 2SLS regressions of 678 MPs of the Italian Chamber of Deputies during the XVI legislature (2008-2013).

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