Bounded Oligarchy: How and When Factions Constrain Leaders in Party Position-taking

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Abstract

This work investigates the process of position-taking focusing on the factional bargaining within the party. Exploiting two recently built datasets that estimated the policy positions of Italian parties and factions from 1946 to 2010, we investigate if and to what extent factions bound the party leader in choosing the platform. We find confirmation for the idea that party positions are linked with the preferences of factions. Overall, the party works as a ‘bounded oligarchy’. Furthermore, the electoral payoff of party unity increases the impact of factional constraints when general elections approach. In line with the cartel party theory, however, autonomous leaders that are directly elected by a wider selectorate can get rid of factional ties, revitalizing Michels’ claims once again.
1. Introduction

Following the development of the spatial theory of voting (Downs, 1957) a large branch of literature started to address the question of how parties set their positions. In a two-party competition along a single dimension, Downs’ theory predicted the well-known result of convergence towards the median voter. This result, however, relies on strict assumptions that hardly ever occur in real politics (Grofman, 2004; Hinich, 1977). Relaxing some of these assumptions leads to a very different equilibrium, with parties moving away from the median voter’s ideal point. For instance, in the presence of phenomena like party identification, voters’ abstention, or mass parties bounded by their activists, the centripetal convergence no longer holds.

Nonetheless, recent developments of the theory of voting provide new models that foresee a centrifugal equilibrium, and they seem to find empirical confirmation (e.g., Adams et al., 2005). In a multiparty system parties are often bounded by the preferences of their activists, factions, and members (Aldrich, 1983; Strom, 1990; Ware, 1992); therefore, to avoid loss of votes, they should diverge from the median voter in the direction of the rank-and-file. Vote-maximizing position, however, rests on a more moderate point compared with those of party members.

The present paper addresses precisely the issue of how parties set their positions. Going beyond the assumption of party as unitary actor and focusing on intra-party politics, we assume that factions negotiate over party position according to the bargaining power of each subgroup. Furthermore, we will assess how party organization affects this bargaining, showing that different internal rules might alter the equilibrium between factions and leaders.

Modelling party placement as the result of inter-factional competition, we will highlight how and under what circumstances factions affect the party, bounding the leader in the choice of the platform. In addition, our results will provide new insights about the linkage between party leaders, members, and activists. It will be shown that, overall, the leadership is strictly bounded by party factions, particularly when the need to keep party unity is higher.
However, intra-party rules seem to affect this outcome. After the crisis of the mass party model, parties faced a decrease in membership. In an attempt to arrest such decline the new model of party, the cartel (Katz, 1997, 2001; Katz and Mair, 1995; Mair, 1997), experiments with new internal rules that increase the level of intra-party democracy. These rules provide a direct link between members and the leadership (e.g., increasing the inclusiveness of the party leader’s selectorate: Kenig, unpublished). As many authors suggest, however, a direct link between leaders and the rank-and-file might result in a greater autonomy of the former in the face of activists and factions (Katz, 2001; Mair, 1994; Marsh, 1993). Weakening the ability of factions to bound the leadership, these changes in party structure and organization revitalize the debate over Michels’ (1915) iron law of oligarchy. Intra-party direct democracy emerges as a way to defang minority factions (that usually retain more radical ideological positions) empowering the elite’s attempt to build vote-maximizing party platforms.

The present analysis will compare factions’ ideal points with the overall party position. This work is made possible thanks to two recently built datasets. Using the techniques of content analysis, both datasets draw the policy positions of Italian political actors (i.e., factions and parties) from 1946 to 2010. The first dataset provides information about Italian parties’ positions, almost year by year, through the analysis of parliamentary speeches released during confidence votes (Curini and Martelli, 2009). The second analyses motions presented during party congresses, overcoming a lack of data about factions.

Our results indicate that, overall, factions bargain over party platform following a kind of Gamson (1961) rule. Each faction affects party position proportionally to its strength (i.e., the share of votes gained during party congress). This pattern is enhanced when new general elections approach as party unity, fostered by a consensual bargaining, provides higher electoral payoffs (Snyder and Ting, 2002). To the contrary, when intra-party rules strengthen the leadership’s autonomy and legitimacy in the face of organized activists (factions), the party leader is more free to express a moderate platform, according to its wishes (i.e., maximizing party votes or the likelihood of being in office).
In the second section we summarize the literature on party position-taking, raising some hypotheses that will be tested later. In the third we describe the datasets employed to test our hypotheses and show some measures of reliability. In the fourth and fifth sections we discuss the results of our analysis and draw a conclusion.

2. Who Sets the Party Position: Literature and Hypotheses

The literature on party position-taking is vast, and it focuses mainly on two aspects. One is to analyse the interactive moving of actors involved in party competition to find the existence of equilibrium. Downs’ (1957) spatial theory shows that in a two-party system such equilibrium consists in a centripetal convergence of actors toward the median voter. This result, however, relies upon lots of assumptions about the motivations and individual features of political actors. Starting from this conclusion, scholars have tried to relax those assumptions. New models account for some aspects of ‘real world politics’, providing more realistic results that better fit empirical evidence. Among these models we focus on those concerning multiparty systems, given that our hypotheses will be tested looking at the Italian case. For instance, the ‘unified theory of party competition’ (Adams et al., 2005) provides some arguments to support the idea of centrifugal equilibrium. According to this model parties are pushed away from the centre, in the direction of those voters who feel identified with them. Although parties maintain a link with their partisans’ preferences, this model predicts that parties maximize votes, adopting a slightly moderate position with respect to their followers.¹

Another branch of the literature looks at the process of position-taking not as the product of exogenous strategic interactions between parties in the system, but as the endogenous result of an inward competition within the party (Budge et al., 2010; Levy, 2004). Starting from the idea that parties are somehow bounded by intra-party structure, scholars investigate the effect of organization and internal

¹ Other models predict similar results; see Budge et al. (2010) for a review.
rules, on one side, and divergent intra-party preferences on the other. Both elements affect party position and its changes across time. The present work is more centred on this second branch of studies, but will provide hypotheses and results that take both into account. In particular, we will raise and test hypotheses dealing with factional preferences, intra-party organization, and the pressure for a (partial) convergence due to party competition.

Parties are clearly not unitary actors (e.g., Laver, 1999; Laver and Benoit, 2003; Laver and Schofield, 1990; Strom, 1994). Recently many works have started to relax this assumption to investigate the role played by members and factions in shaping the party (Giannetti and Benoit, 2009; Harmel and Tan, 2003). Factionalism influences the likelihood of gaining access to cabinet spoils, and factions shape the distribution of these office payoffs (e.g., Bäck, 2009; Mershon, 2001). Besides office, factions, like any other political actor (Muller and Strom, 1999), are interested at least in part in policy payoffs. In fact, it has been shown that policy preferences tend to structure factional membership (Bernauer and Bräuninger, 2009; Giannetti and Laver, 2009) so that, despite some common traits shared by all party members (Aldrich, 1995; Krehbiel, 1993; Snyder and Ting, 2002), the policy positions of internal factions are not exactly the same. Our dataset will help to map their divergent preferences to analyse how this impacts the process of position-taking.

It has been argued that the party’s ideal point depends on how internal organizational structure aggregates the preferences of members. Among divided parties the internal equilibrium is the result of a factional strife (Giannetti and Mulé, 2006: 462; Levy, 2004). Factions bargain to influence party strategy according to their power (Laver and Shepsle, 1990: 504). Depending on the party decision-making process, this strife might follow different paths leading to different potential outcomes (new party platforms). The decision-making process in turn is affected by intra-party rules and organization, and by the model of party that we take into account.

We might hypothesize that parties are (wholly or partially) bounded by their factions, or alternatively, they are absolutely free to set their platform. In the first case party position should lie somewhere inside the
Pareto set of factions’ positions. According to Levy (2004: 251): ‘parties can offer to voters any policy in the Pareto set of their members. Parties cannot commit to offer any policy outside the Pareto set but the party members can find mechanisms (such as bargaining) that allow them to choose policies within the Pareto set’ (then this agreement will be enforceable). A stable agreement could be reached only inside it. ² If this is the case any point inside this range should be related with the actual party position. However, the actual location of party along the continuum depends on the bargaining power of each faction. This varies according to factions’ size, measured as the share of votes gained during the congress (or the share of seats inside party body). As Budge et al. (2010: 793) point out: ‘The stronger one faction is relative to the others the more it overcomes resistance and carries its preferred policy further’. Among the points inside the Pareto set, two carry a theoretically substantial meaning that depends on the structure of intra-party dynamics. For the sake of preserving unity, inter-factional competition may build a consensual environment where all faction preferences are somehow taken into account (Budge et al., 2010; Giannetti and Laver, 2009). At the level of legislative party group Heller and Mershon (2009) hypothesized that the party ideal point should be close to the average ideal point of legislative members. Extending this idea to party body, we observe that ‘indeed the mechanisms in which Western European parties reach internal compromise do mimic some form of a weighted average of the ideal policies of their factions’ (Levy 2004: 251). Hence, we would expect that party platform is set with a strong degree of proportionality. This idea refers to a kind of Gamson (1961) rule in the distribution of internal policy payoffs (i.e., party position). ³ As far as each faction is able to affect party position according to its strength in party body (due to the results of party congress/convention) we would expect that a factional agreement could be reached considering the weighted mean of the factions’ ideal points. Then such equilibrium will be the best predictor of party position and will bound the leader in the choice of platform and strategy.

² Moreover, both voters and rival parties believe that only positions inside the Pareto set can be stable.
³ As is well known, the Gamson (1961) hypothesis is essentially a proportionality rule stating that cabinet portfolios are allocated to each party proportionally to their contribution to the ruling coalition (i.e., their share of seats). Warwick (2001) extended this reasoning to policy payoffs showing that ‘coalition policy corresponds with the weighted mean position of the parties in government, with the parties’ seat share constituting the weights’ (Warwick, 2001: 1215).
**Hypothesis 1A (H1A):** The factions’ preferences affect party position so that a ‘Gamsonian agreement’ position is strongly related to the party’s ideal point.

It has been argued that when the electoral system provides incentives for inter-factional competition, the common interests in partisan unity are insufficient to prevent internal dissension so that factions divide during the electoral campaign (Morgenstern, 2001). To the contrary we claim that, to keep their unity, parties cater to all factions according to the latter’s share of votes in the congress body. We stress the importance of party unity, which is a key source for party strength, particularly in the electoral arena. Then we hypothesize that its importance increases as general elections approach. Indeed, many scholars have stated that party manifestos take into consideration the concerns of both mainstream and minority factions precisely to boost party unity (and credibility) before elections (e.g., Levy, 2004). If this is the case, the impact of factional agreement on party position should increase as the legislative term comes to an end.

**Hypothesis 1B (H1B):** As time passes and the new general elections approach, the effect of the ‘Gamsonian agreement’ on party position should be greater.

Alternatively, inter-factional conflict may assume the traits of a winner-take-all competition, with the median faction (mainstream) free to set its ideal point as the overall party position.\(^4\) Although occasionally the median faction could suddenly change party platform for strategic or contingent reasons, we expect

\(^4\) It is worth remembering that the median is not a ‘dictator’ because its peculiar position depends on the preferences of all other factions (Black, 1958).
that on average the party will be located inside the Pareto set, closer to the mainstream’s ideal point. This is true for several reasons: the median faction still has a commitment with party members, due to the result of the party congress; strong deviations of its position from the ideological position of the bulk of party members could result in a loss of internal consensus (for the mainstream) and in a change of the dominant faction in the following party congress; minority factions could feel dissatisfied if the party is ruled only according to the will of the mainstream, and hence could exploit their bargaining power by threatening to defect and to leave the party (Boucek, unpublished). Finally, as far as we deal with a unidimensional policy space, the median voter theorem applies and the median faction’s position emerges as the party position. This path actually bears a resemblance to the previous one. The median faction is not a ‘dictator’; it competes during the party congress for members’ votes. Hence, its position emerges as a kind of consensual equilibrium of all members’ preference. Therefore, compared with the previous hypothesis, we just want to check whether party position is pushed away from that point in the direction of the median faction.

**Hypothesis 2 (H2): Party position is biased towards the ideal point of the median faction.**

We will measure the influence of the median faction above and beyond its contribution to the Gamsonian agreement through a variable that records the deviation of the median faction from the weighted mean. If our second hypothesis is true we would expect a positive significant value of the coefficient of such variable.

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5 Their bargaining power will be higher if the threat is credible and could harm the party (resulting in a loss of votes, seats, or strategic position).

6 This makes it possible to overcome any possible problem of correlation between the median and the Gamsonian agreement. Indeed these two positions are highly correlated (.987). See Warwick (2001: 1223) for an analogous argument.
A third possible pattern assumes that parties are bounded only in a limited way by factions. The increasing personalization of politics in modern democracies (Poguntke and Webb, 2005) boosts the party leaders’ power in spite of the strength of factions. Whether the party leader, due to her charisma or her ‘dominant position’ within the party, is able to set the new platform we would expect a deviation from the factional agreement in the direction of her interests. However, party leaders are democratically elected; hence, the rank-and-file retain an influence over party position (Heller and Mershon, 2009). The leader’s first purpose is to remain in charge; in addition, as the agent delegated by party members, she will have more discretion in setting party position, and she will exploit this feature provided she can keep the members’ approval.

When dealing with party leadership, however, we have to take into account different intra-party rules and organizational patterns that affect internal dynamics, providing the leader with greater or less power. This in turn affects the leadership’s ability to deviate from the inter-factional agreement in the direction of its preferred party position. According to the cartel party model (Katz and Mair, 1995), leaders want more autonomy from activists’ factions in order to be free to pursue the building of a cross-party cartel (Katz, 2001; Mair, 1997). Their purpose is to lower members’ stakes, pushing the party to a moderate position and thereby increasing both party votes and the likelihood of being involved in government coalitions (Mair, 1994; Marsh, 1993). One strategy to enhance the leader’s autonomy is to empower the ordinary party members (or supporters), thus increasing the nominal level of intra-party democracy. Recent trends attest to an increase in the inclusiveness of party leader selection mechanisms, and these trends are particularly evident among Italian parties. Historically based on a small committee (National Council or Central Committee), the selection procedure was extended to the whole audience of delegates at party congress, and, recently, the selectorate has tended to include all party members (and sometimes even unregistered supporters) through direct election of the leader (by means of closed or open ‘primaries’). Italian mass parties started to enlarge the selectorate at the end of the 1970s. In 1976 the election of the DC leader was demanded of congress delegates instead of members of the National Council; the PSI set the
same rule in 1981, strengthening Craxi’s personalized leadership. Noticeably, the expanded inclusiveness of the leader’s selectorate does not necessarily increase the rank-and-file’s control over the leadership but paradoxically can be a leader’s strategy to defang the base (Katz, 2001; Mair, 1994, 1997; Marsh, 1993; Poguntke and Webb, 2005; Rahat el al., 2008). Inclusiveness produced less tight contests and a decrease in competitiveness (Kenig, 2008), complicating the task of removing an unwanted leader. In addition, a directly elected party leader retains a higher legitimacy; thus, she can cut out middle-level activists, getting rid of party factions’ ties. As long as the leader’s power increases, the party should be less bounded by factions and will converge toward the centre of the policy space.

**Hypothesis 3 (H3):** When intra-party rules increase the inclusiveness of the leader’s selectorate the ‘Gamsonian agreement’ should be less (if at all) useful to predict party position, which instead will be attracted by the centre of policy space.

Finally, if parties behave as catch-all actors (Kirchheimer, 1966) we should observe a decline in factional constraints on party platform. Parties will appeal to a broader public, seeking the support of groups that lie outside the traditional party organization. If this holds we would expect parties to converge towards the centre, to gain more votes and more resources, independently of intra-party preferences and of the effect of party rules.

**Hypothesis 4 (H4):** Party position is independent from factions’ position and, overall, will be attracted by the centre of policy space no matter the shape of intra-party rules.

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7 See Fabbrini (1994) and Calise (2005) on the link between leaders’ personalized power and their direct election by party delegates. Moreover, Mershon (2001) shows the impact of such rule on portfolio allocation among DC factions: after direct election ministerial payoffs were no longer shared proportionally by all party subgroups.

8 With regard to candidate selection, inclusiveness also produces lower levels of representation (Rahat et al., 2008).
H1 (A and B), H3, and H4 represent three different models of party: mass, cartel, and catch-all. In some sense they express a fulfilment or a response to the others (see Katz, 2001). We will compare them to assess under what condition each one prevails. In our analysis H1 and H4 are the two true alternative hypotheses: we want to assess whether, overall, factions bound the party or they are instead free to move. H3 lies somewhere in the middle: we will test whether the rise of the cartel party (conditional on changes in party rules) actually impacts on H1 building a new party that bears a resemblance to H4, but only with strict conditions. Section three will present the datasets employed in the analysis.

3. The database related to the Italian case

The present analysis focuses on the Italian case. Many reasons make this case study suitable and theoretically promising for an in-depth examination of how factionalism shapes the party. Italy is universally identified as a benchmark of ‘the politics of faction’ (Zuckerman, 1979), and a large number of papers are devoted to this case. Recent studies have shown the impact of Italian factions on portfolio allocation (Mershon, 2001) and on the voting behaviour of MPs (Giannetti and Laver, 2009). Although several authors have pointed out the importance of collecting data about factions’ preferences (see Budge et al., 2010; Giannetti and Benoit, 2009; Laver and Benoit, unpublished), finding information about them is often a difficult task. So far only a few works have managed to measure factional preferences (Debus and Brauningner, 2009; Giannetti and Laver, 2009; Spirling and Quinn, 2010), but they do so only for a single party or for a limited lapse of time. This paper tries to fill the gap by providing a new dataset that contains information about factions’ policy positions among Italian parties from 1946 to 2010. Exploiting the large

Contrary to the mass and the catch-all models, the cartel party ‘whether understood as a synthesis/thesis in a dialectic process or as the next stage in a cyclical process [...] does not represent a steady state’ (Katz, 2001: 282).
documentation available about Italian party congresses, this dataset presents a first attempt to systematically gather data on party factions and intra-party struggles.\(^\text{10}\)

To analyse factional preferences we gathered motions presented by factions during party congresses, and we analyse them through a technique of quantitative text analysis.\(^\text{11}\) The party congress is an assembly of delegates elected by party members. It is the arena where ‘factions organize teams of candidates and appeal to people enjoying the right to vote for one team or another’ (Mershon, 2001: 561). Factions usually compete for members’ votes, presenting a policy motion attached to a list of candidates; congress’ motion is an omnibus policy document that aims to shape party strategy and ideology; it sets out the factions’ ‘opposing views on the ideological direction of the party’ (Giannetti and Laver, 2009: 154). After a public debate, party congress delegates vote on the policy principals and establish the new party line that the leadership should pursue (Levy, 2004). Delegates elect the party body (a committee in charge of running the party until the next congress) and, directly or indirectly, the party leader. In that sense, party congresses provide ‘hard data’ about the party’s factional structure (Giannetti and Laver, 2009), helping us determine the number and strength of each faction (Boucek, 2009), as well as their policy positions.

Overall we gathered 254 motions related to 83 congresses of 18 parties.\(^\text{12}\) Table 1 shows some details.

\[\text{Table 1}\]

\(^{10}\) Unfortunately, after the collapse of the Italian First Republic almost all the existing parties disappeared from the political arena (and their archives disappeared as well). Hence, the task of finding data is now even more complicated. Although there are some missing cases, our dataset contains information approximately about 50% of the whole population of contested congresses (i.e., those where factions competed presenting alternative motions).

\(^{11}\) Many authors suggest analysing intra-party politics focusing on party congress (e.g., Boucek, 2009; Giannetti and Benoit, 2009; Mershon, 2001).

\(^{12}\) This dataset is unbalanced because we have a lot of data about some parties and only few related to others (there are 38 motions nested in 12 congresses, with respect to PSI, but only two motions presented in the unique contested congresses held by PDCI and UDC). However this does not affect the analysis (see section four).
To assess the preferences of factions, these motions were analysed through Wordfish (Proksch and Slapin, 2009a; Slapin and Proksch, 2008), a quantitative technique of text analysis.\textsuperscript{13}

Wordfish is an automated scaling model developed to run with the statistical software R. It analyses textual documents comparing the frequencies of words contained in each text, under the assumption that, for each document, the words’ relative frequencies are informative of the policy position of that text.\textsuperscript{14} Then it arrays documents along a single latent dimension, providing estimates of their positions on the scale. This latent dimension catches the political meaning of texts submitted to the analysis; it has to be interpreted ex-post according to the content of documents analysed. For instance, if all documents refer to a peculiar policy dimension (i.e., environmental policy) the software will scale them along the environmental dimension. Our unit of analysis is the document (motion) presented during party congress by each actor (faction). As far as motions are comprehensive omnibus policy documents that map out the overall ideological orientation of the party (Giannetti and Laver, 2009: 153), the actors’ estimated positions will be arrayed along a dimension that should be interpreted as a left-right scale (see later). The main advantage of Wordfish is the ability to produce valid time-series estimates; in fact, the position of actor $i$ at time $t$ is estimated regardless of its position at time $t-1$. Therefore Wordfish allows the tracking of actual variations in actors’ preferences across time that are due to real changes in the documents’ content (these variations are not an artefact of the model). However, this is true only as long as word usage remains relatively constant over time (Proksch and Slapin, 2009a). Given the wide time extension of our analysis we want to make sure that our results are not biased by changes in the actual meaning of some political words. For this reason we split our data, analysing motions in two separate time periods.\textsuperscript{15} We choose 1989 as dividing

\textsuperscript{13}Wordfish has been already employed to study policy positions of parties and interest groups within the European Union and the German party system, providing reliable estimates of actors’ positions (Klüver, 2009; Proksch and Slapin, 2009b, 2010).

\textsuperscript{14}The main assumption of this technique is that words are distributed according to a Poisson distribution. This is false in the real world, but this model performs correctly to estimate positions, and its results are robust to this assumption. Wordfish estimates are also robust to text selection and reliable to other techniques of content analysis (Klüver, 2009; Slapin and Proksch, 2008).

\textsuperscript{15}Dividing the dataset might create some troubles because it reduces the number of documents and the number of words helpful to discriminate among documents. The problem involves, in particular, right-wing parties, whose number of documents is lower compared with centre-left actors. For this reason we include in the dataset few non-
line, assuming that political language has changed after the collapse of communism.\textsuperscript{16} Wordfish analyses documents providing two main parameters of interest: $\omega$ and $\beta$. The former, $\omega$, expresses the (normalized) factions’ position on the left-right scale. The latter, $\beta$, is the discrimination parameter and corresponds to the word’s placement along the policy scale. For each word a higher absolute value of $\beta$ indicates that the word is located on the extremes of the left-right scale and is more informative to discriminate among documents. Overall, $\beta$ values of words that appear only in a few documents will be greater. To the contrary, words that appear frequently in all documents have a discriminating power close to zero and will be placed at the centre of the scale. $\beta$ values are useful to carry a first diagnostic of the estimates. Figures 1 and 2 display the words’ $\beta$ parameters for the first and second time periods, respectively. Some words are highlighted as an example; we will compare the words’ placement on the left-right scale with their substantial meaning in Italian political language to make sure that the analysis caught the actual meaning of those word.

In the first period (Fig. 1) we find on the right side words like god, motherland, and family (‘dio’, ‘patria’, and ‘famiglia’, respectively), which are traditionally associated with conservative values, while on the left we have class (‘classe’), solidarity (‘solidarietà’), and nationalization (‘nazionalizzazione’). We can also distinguish words used by party members to refer to each other: comrades (‘compagni’) used within factional texts (e.g., party manifestos) related to centre-right parties. Had we excluded these additional documents the estimates would have been very similar.

\textsuperscript{16} The Fall of Berlin Wall was one of the elements that altered the Italian party system during the 1990s (e.g., Bull and Rhodes, 1997).
socialist and communist parties, stands on the left; *friends* (‘amici’), used among DC members, is located at the centre, while *companions* (‘camerati’), the epithet adopted by fascist movements, is on the right. In the second period (Fig. 2) *no-global, collective bargaining* (‘concertazione’), and *peace* (‘pace’) stand on the left, while *meritocratic* (‘meritocratici’), *soldiers* (‘soldati’), and *devolution* (‘devoluzione’) are recognized to be right-wing words and help us to detect right-wing parties. On both sides of the scale we find words that refer to different issues (e.g., economic, social, and foreign policies). For instance, concerns about *redistribution* (‘redistribuzione’), *laity* (‘laicità’), and *disarmament* (‘disarmo’) are attributed to left-wing parties, while on the right side the focus is on *privatization* (‘privatizzazioni’), *birth-rate* (‘natalità’), and *crime* (‘criminalità’). These examples confirm that $\beta$ values assigned to words are coherent with their actual meaning in the Italian political language; hence, words appear on the proper side of the left-right scale.

Finally, we provide other measures to assess the validity of factions’ estimates. For each congress we compared the ordinal array of factions along the scale and found our estimates to be significantly correlated (0.63) with the expected ordinal positions derived from literature (e.g., Giannetti and Laver, 2009; Mershon, 2001) or newspapers reports. In each party the wings are always located in a proper way. Through a Bonferroni test we found statistically significant differences between the mean position of party wings and party mainstream. Additionally, factions’ estimates are also able to catch the evolution of parties; they match the key changes occurring in party position across time, coherently with the main findings of the literature on Italian parties. For all these reasons we maintain that our estimates are a reliable measure of the factions’ positions.

To test the hypotheses raised in section two we want to compare the factions’ preferences with a measure of the parties’ ideal points. This confrontation is made possible thanks to a recently built dataset, the Curini and Martelli Dataset (CMD), which provides information about the party positions of Italian parties from

17 We ran the test considering the mean position of party wings that contested several congresses and we compared them with party mainstream mean position.

18 Our data caught the moderate shift of PSI factions in line with changes in PSI policy position started in the 1960s (Curini and Martelli, 2009). The same holds for the movement towards the centre made by the heirs of PCI (Giannetti and Mulé, 2006).
1946 to 2010 (Curini, 2011; Curini and Martelli, 2009, 2010). Those data are based on a codification of all the investiture debates of the Italian governments\(^{19}\). Compared with Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) data, CMD retains some advantages. First of all, CMP does not distinguish between positions of parties that run together in the election as a cartel but split afterwards; second, it does not assess the positions of new parties that form during the legislative term (i.e., due to party fission); finally, CMP provides only one value per legislature while CMD, given the high level of Italian governments’ instability, tracks parties’ positions almost year by year, increasing the number of cases included in our analysis. In fact, we can compare factions’ positions with the first known value of party position expressed after the congress (that for the same reasons discussed before is temporally connected to the congress). Furthermore, thanks to CMD, we can compare the factional equilibrium reached during congress at time \(t\) with all the values of policy positions held by the party until the new congress at time \(t+1\). This allows us to model changes in intra-party dynamics and bargaining over time: for instance, we can model the effect of party fissions (happened not immediately after the congress) over party position, and we can assess whether bargaining dynamics vary as time passes.\(^{20}\)

Using CMD we estimated party positions following the ‘vanilla method’ (Gabel and Huber, 2000). We ran a factor analysis on the percentage of quasi-sentences, and we extracted the first component; the standardized values of party positions have been located on the latent dimension that

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\(^{19}\) For each debate, the authors selected and codified the speech released by the party leader (or by a relevant MP) plus the Prime Minister’s programmatic speech. The method adopted to codify speeches is similar to that employed by the well-known Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) in order to analyse the contents of party electoral programs (see Budge et al., 2001 for a detailed description). In each legislative speech the authors identified the number of quasi-sentences and assigned each of them to a number of pre-established categories that form the classification scheme. To take account of the Italian political context the original 56 categories of the CMP dataset have been increased to 68. The dataset contains the percentage of the total text of legislative speech that deals with these categories. The dataset was constantly updated until December 2010 and includes information about a few additional debates over crucial votes of confidence (i.e., the debate related to Prodi I vote of no-confidence and two debates faced in 2010 by Berlusconi IV cabinet).

\(^{20}\) When one or more factions leave the party during the period between one congress and the next, we rearranged the result of factional agreement measuring the new balance of power among the remaining subgroups. We excluded those cases where, due to party fissions, there is only one faction left; however, had we included these data the main results would not have changed.
emerged from the analysis.\textsuperscript{21} Vanilla estimates are strongly correlated with the traditional RILE scale measured on CMD and with the results of the vanilla method applied to CMP data.\textsuperscript{22}

In the fourth section we will compare these two datasets. Despite differences these data share some traits. Both are related to Italy from 1946 to 2010 (though they have been divided in two time periods, before and after 1989, to estimate positions). Both are built through content analysis. Wordfish algorithm and factor analysis produce normalized estimates of positions extracted along a seemingly common latent dimension.\textsuperscript{23} The parties’ and factions’ positions are aligned along the left-right scale, and these data cover the entire length of the continuum.\textsuperscript{24} They come, however, from two completely different sources: factions’ positions are extracted from debates that took place in party body, while the data about parties are related to speeches delivered in the legislative arena. This can be an advantage because the two measures are independent and exogenous with respect to each other. One possible problem, however, is related to the idea that the legislative party branch might retain a different position compared with the party body. Anyway, given the strong control usually exerted by Italian party bodies over their elected representatives, we can reasonably retain that the position of the legislative party group will correspond to the actual party position.

\textsuperscript{21} Given that we divided motions in two time periods before running Wordfish, we did the same when dealing with factor analysis. We divided CMD in two subsamples and ran two separate analyses. The results of these two factor analyses are highly correlated (0.87), with parties’ positions as they emerge from the analysis run on the whole dataset.

\textsuperscript{22} The correlation between vanilla method estimates and the RILE scale measured on CMD is strong and significant ($r = 0.85$). Overall estimates of parties’ positions, determined by applying the vanilla method to CMD and CMP, are positively correlated (0.57); among data included in our analysis this coefficient increases to 0.61. Although we use CMD to test our hypothesis we assess their reliability using CMP data; this does not alter our main results.

\textsuperscript{23} It could be argued that intra-party politics involves more than one dimension. We know, however, that parties function as logrollers reducing complex issues into a low-dimensional space (Levy, 2004; Poole and Rosenthal, 1997). If parties reduce the complexity on a single dimensional space they need to compromise on that. In addition, both processes used to estimate positions (Wordfish and factor analysis) follow a similar logic that reduces many issues onto a single latent dimension.

\textsuperscript{24} More precisely, according to factor analysis in the first period the two most extreme parties are the PSIUP and the MSI. In factions’ dataset we have documents about PSIUP factions’ and about MSI, and they are on the extremes as well. Similarly, in the second period the two most radical parties are PRC and MSI-AN; indeed the dataset on factions contains information about subgroups belonging to these two parties and they are located on the wings. Hence, the left-right dimension is wholly covered by data. However, the range of the scales is different; then we divided all the values for the length of each continuum.
4. Analysis and Results

We can turn now to the analysis testing the five hypotheses presented in section two. Table 2 gives some details about their operationalization, along with an explanation of how to assess their effect.

Our dependent variable is PARTY POSITION (PP) estimated through vanilla method applied to CMD. Right-wing parties retain positive values while PP is negative for parties located on the extreme left of the scale.

Here we describe the independent variables. GAMSONIAN AGREEMENT POSITION (GAP) is the mean of the faction’s position weighted by their share of seats in party body, measured within each party congress; positive values indicate that the factions’ average is on the right and vice versa. The greater this values is, the greater PP should be (the more GAP is on the right the more we expect PP to be there). YEARS BEFORE ELECTIONS (YBE) is the number of years remaining before the next general elections. We analyse its interaction with GAP: as YBE shrinks, the marginal effect of GAP on PP should increase (and vice versa). DISTANCE MEDIAN - GAP, measured as the distance between the median faction and the factional agreement position, records the influence of the median faction above and beyond its contribution to GAP. The ability to attract PP towards its ideal point is caught by a positive significant value of this variable. DIRECTLY ELECTED LEADER is a dummy variable that accounts for the personalization of politics and for the party leader’s strength; it assumes the value 1 when the leader is directly elected (by delegates during party congress or by party members or supporters through ‘primary election’), and the value 0 when the party leader is nominated by a less inclusive selectorate (i.e., a small committee like the party’s National

25 The dataset will be available on line. Please contact the author for any detail.
Council or Central Committee).\textsuperscript{26} We analyse the interaction between GAP and this variable, and we expect that GAP’s effect on PP should be lower or not statistically different from zero in parties where the leader’s direct election has been established as the rule. Finally, PARLIAMENTARY CENTRE OF GRAVITY is the mean of the parties’ positions weighted by their share of seats in Parliament, used as a proxy for the centre of political space. The higher this value, the greater the value of PP (if the political centre attracts the parties we will find a positive significant value of this variable).

Figure 3 provides a first visual analysis of our main hypotheses. For each party congress we show the GAP value along with all the PP values measured before the next congress. We distinguished cases where the party leader was directly elected (grey) from parties that elect their leader in smoke-filled rooms (black). Accordingly, we plotted two dashed lines with the fitted value of the regression for the two contexts.

This first enquiry tells us that factions do matter: there is a positive relationship between GAP and PP, attesting that the parties’ ideal point is not independent from the factions’ preferences. However, we observe differences between parties whose leaders are stronger or weaker. The black line is steeper while the grey is smoother, indicating that when leaders retain direct legitimacy they gain autonomy and are able to get rid of the factions’ influence.

Now we investigate more in depth the contribution provided by our covariates to the dependent variable by testing several models. In model 1, our baseline model, we regress PARTY POSITION (taking the first

\textsuperscript{26} We do not distinguish between leaders elected by delegates or through open/closed primaries because the latter context concerns only one congress (PD 2009). In addition, even when leaders are elected by delegates, party members often know which leader is attached to each factional motion they vote for.
known value after the congress) on the factional agreements (GAP). In model 2 we add, as control variables, the DISTANCE MEDIAN - GAP and the PARLIAMENTARY CENTRE OF GRAVITY. In model 3 we include two interactions: between GAP and DIRECTLY ELECTED LEADER and between GAP and YBE. In the fourth model we replicate the third model, but increasing the number of cases: we take all the values of PP recorded until the next congress. We test these models by means of an OLS regression. Given that our observations are nested within parties they might not be independent. To assure unbiased results of our analysis we cluster observations by party, providing standard errors by cluster.\textsuperscript{27} Table 3 reports the results.

| Table 3 |

The GAP coefficient is always significant: factions exert an effect on their parties’ placement, and this is confirmed after including some control variables.\textsuperscript{28} To the contrary, DISTANCE MEDIAN - GAP is never significant; we did not register any disproportionate effect of the median faction. Within each party the median, like any other faction, affects the platform only to the extent of its strength in party body. The political centre seems to have no effect. PARLIAMENTARY CENTRE OF GRAVITY is not significant in model 2 and 3, while it appears to have an impact on party position only in model 4.\textsuperscript{29} Both interactions are significant and retain the expected sign. According to our hypothesis, a DIRECTLY ELECTED LEADER decreases the effect of GAP on PP, and this effect is quite strong. For instance, according to model 4, the

\textsuperscript{27} In model 4 we have repeated observations within each congress. Therefore, we change the cluster variable providing standard errors by congress. Clustered standard errors are heteroskedastic and autocorrelation consistent (Rogers, 1993).

\textsuperscript{28} Due to the limited number of cases we do not provide separate results for the First and the Second Republic, however this effect holds in both contexts.

\textsuperscript{29} Adding to model 4 an interaction between this variable and DIRECTLY ELECTED LEADER we found that this effect is significant only when the latter variable retains value 1.
impact of GAP ceased to be significant among parties that elect their leader through a wide selectorate. Finally, when general elections come closer, inter-factional bargaining becomes more consensual and indeed the impact of GAP on PP increases. However, we can better discuss the effect of these interactions by looking at Figs. 4 and 5 (based on model 4). They draw the marginal effect of GAP on PP as the new general elections approach.

When leaders are selected by party committees (Fig. 4) they are more bounded by the will of factions; factional preferences increasingly shape party position as new elections approach. To the contrary, when intra-party rules grant more autonomy to the leader (Fig. 5) the effect of GAP on PP is no longer significant, unless looming elections increase the need for party unity, pushing to leader to partially cater to the factions.

We turn now to interpret these results in the light of our hypotheses. We can reject H4: as long as GAP is always significant we reject the idea that party positions are independent from factional preferences. Similarly, we can discard H2; from the present analysis does not emerge any disproportionate advantage retained by the median faction above and beyond its share of votes. H1A finds partial confirmation; the hypothesis that parties are shaped by a consensual agreement seems true, but this feature interacts with intra-party rules and with the party system. In line with H1B we observe that as the elections come closer,

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The marginal effect of GAP on PP is equal to .406 (.061) and statistically significant at the 99% level when the DIRECTLY ELECTED LEADER dummy equals 0, while this effect is no longer significant when leaders are autonomous: .124 (.093). Standard errors in brackets.
parties tend to set their platform with an increasing degree of proportionality. Finally, we find some evidence for H3, confirming the ‘cartel party’ theory. Overall, factions do exert constraints on their parties. However, when internal organization promotes the leader’s autonomy the party is no longer bounded by activists and the leader retains more discretion in setting the platform. Comparing these results with the literature on party competition, we found that in a multiparty system with parties tied by activists there is no convergence towards the centre, in accordance with recent theories. The political centre exerts an attraction only when party leaders are free enough from factional blackmail to be able to set party position on their own. This aspect, in turn, is in line with the cartel party theory and stresses the ability of autonomous leadership to partially adopt moderate stakes, moving the party towards more convenient positions. This further explains why, in current politics, strong leaders are able to increase party votes, building their electoral fortunes.

5. Conclusion

Going beyond the assumption of party as unitary actor, this work investigated the process of position-taking within the party. Exploiting two recently built datasets that estimated the policy positions of Italian parties and factions from 1946 to 2010, the present analysis focused on how factions bound party leaders in choosing the platform. Overall, we find confirmation for the hypothesis that party positions are linked with factions’ preferences, discarding the idea of catch-all parties completely free to move in the policy space. Due to the pressure exerted by factions, the party seems to work as a ‘bounded oligarchy’. The impact of factional constraints is greater when general elections approach and the electoral payoff of party unity pushes to pursue a compromise among all party subgroups. In line with the cartel party theory, however, when leaders are directly elected by a wider selectorate their autonomy increases, in spite of

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31 This holds true no matter the changes in the electoral rule. We do not find differences between open-list proportional representation (PR), used until 1992, and mixed systems with closed-list PR (afterwards). Even when factions compete for preference votes (like during the First Republic) the appeal of party unity as a resource for inter-party competition holds and parties seek to foster internal cohesion when setting their position before the campaign.
factions’ desires. They can exploit such autonomy to set a more vote-maximizing position and indeed we registered a partial convergence towards the centre. Indeed, this work, although carried out in a non-strategic setting, finds confirmation for the most recent developments of Downsian theories that predict a centrifugal equilibrium with partial convergence. Finally, this paper shows that direct election of party leaders (e.g., through ‘primaries’) might defang the activists. Instead of promoting members’ control of party elites and the emergence of a widely shared platform, intra-party democracy seems to support leaders’ autonomy, leading the party to behave as a real oligarchy and revitalizing Michels’ claims once again.
References


### Table 1 – List of parties, number of congresses and motions included in the analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Total N° of Congresses Held</th>
<th>Congresses Included in Dataset</th>
<th>Missing Congresses (estimated)</th>
<th>N° of Motions</th>
<th>Motions per Congress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AN</td>
<td>National Alliance</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC</td>
<td>Christian Democratic</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>3.73</td>
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<tr>
<td>DS</td>
<td>Democrats of the Left</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>FV</td>
<td>Greens’ Federation</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSI</td>
<td>Italian Social Movement</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
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<td>NPSI</td>
<td>New Italian Socialist Party</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>PCI</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.67</td>
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<td>PD</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>PDA</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>PLI</td>
<td>Italian Liberal Party</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3.18</td>
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<tr>
<td>PRC</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3.33</td>
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<tr>
<td>PRI</td>
<td>Italian Republican Party</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2.27</td>
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<tr>
<td>PS</td>
<td>Socialist Party</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>PSDI</td>
<td>Italian Socialist Democratic Party</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>25</td>
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<td>PSIUP</td>
<td>Party of Proletarian Unity</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>UDC</td>
<td>Union of Centre and Christian Democratic</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>194</strong></td>
<td><strong>83</strong></td>
<td><strong>33</strong></td>
<td><strong>254</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.06</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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32 This column refers to the number of contested (or presumably contested) congresses, where more than one faction presented motions, for which we were not able to find data.

33 The Greens holds a National Assembly approximately once a year.
### Table 2 – Hypotheses and Operationalization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis and Context</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Operationalization</th>
<th>Expected Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependent variable</strong></td>
<td>PARTY POSITION (PP)</td>
<td>Vanilla estimate of party position on CMD</td>
<td>(n.a.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(1A) Mass party ruled by consensual dynamics</strong></td>
<td>GAMSONIAN AGREEMENT POSITION (GAP)</td>
<td>Mean of faction’s position weighted by their share of seats in party body</td>
<td>(+) GAP affects PP (e.g. the more GAP stands on the right the more the party should be)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(1B) Mass party ruled by consensual dynamics: proportionality increases as new elections approach</strong></td>
<td>GAP*YBE (Years Before the next general Elections)</td>
<td>Interaction between the GAP and the number of years remaining before the next general elections</td>
<td>(-) GAP marginal effect on PP increases when the YBE decreases, and vice versa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(2) Mass party ruled by winner-take-all dynamics</strong></td>
<td>DISTANCE MEDIAN – GAP</td>
<td>Distance between the median faction’s position and the GAP</td>
<td>(+) A positive coefficient highlights a deviation from GAP towards the median faction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(3) Cartel party</strong></td>
<td>GAP*DIRECTLY ELECTED LEADER</td>
<td>Interaction between the GAP and a dummy variable that assumes value 1 when party leader is elected directly by delegates (or through primaries) and 0 when elected by a small committee</td>
<td>(-/0) Among parties where the leader is elected by a wide selectorate the marginal effect of GAP should be lower (or not significant at all)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PARLIAMENTARY CENTRE OF GRAVITY</td>
<td>Mean of parties’ positions weighted by their share of seats in Parliament (proxy for the centre of policy space)</td>
<td>(+) Among parties where the leader is elected by a wide selectorate the policy centre should affect PP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(4) Catch-all party</strong></td>
<td>GAMSONIAN AGREEMENT POSITION (GAP)</td>
<td>Mean of faction’s position weighted by their share of seats in party body</td>
<td>(0) GAP effect on PP should never be significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PARLIAMENTARY CENTRE OF GRAVITY</td>
<td>Mean of parties’ positions weighted by their share of seats in Parliament (proxy for the centre of policy space)</td>
<td>(+) The centre of policy space should always affect PP</td>
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</tbody>
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### Table 3 – Results of the OLS Regression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OLS Regression. Dependent Variable: PARTY POSITION</th>
<th>(I)</th>
<th>(II)</th>
<th>(III)</th>
<th>(IV)</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>CONSTANT</td>
<td>.025</td>
<td>.023</td>
<td>-.008</td>
<td>.022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Standard Errors)</td>
<td>(.018)</td>
<td>(.017)</td>
<td>(.015)</td>
<td>(.017)</td>
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<tr>
<td>GAMSONIAN AGREEMENT POSITION</td>
<td>.392***</td>
<td>.410***</td>
<td>.678***</td>
<td>.544***</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Standard Errors)</td>
<td>(.106)</td>
<td>(.128)</td>
<td>(.134)</td>
<td>(.092)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DISTANCE MEDIAN – GAP</td>
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<td>-.191</td>
<td>-.131</td>
<td>-.257</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Standard Errors)</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>(.293)</td>
<td>(.176)</td>
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<tr>
<td>PARLIAMENTARY CENTRE OF GRAVITY</td>
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<td>.002</td>
<td>.306*</td>
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<td>(Standard Errors)</td>
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<td>(.324)</td>
<td>(.346)</td>
<td>(.155)</td>
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<tr>
<td>DIRECTLY ELECTED LEADER</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-.020</td>
<td>-.014</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Standard Errors)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>(.036)</td>
<td>(.031)</td>
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<tr>
<td>INTERACTION</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-.291**</td>
<td>-.282**</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Standard Errors)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>(.132)</td>
<td>(.109)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GAP * DIRECTLY ELECTED LEADER</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.019***</td>
<td>.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Standard Errors)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>(.005)</td>
<td>(.004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YBE</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-.072**</td>
<td>-.054***</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Standard Errors)</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>(.025)</td>
<td>(.020)</td>
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<tr>
<td>R²</td>
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<td>.51</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE:** Clustered Standard errors in brackets. Significance (two tailed): * .1; ** .05; *** .01
Figure 1 – Word beta coefficient (Left – Right scale) and fixed effect (first period)

Figure 2 – Word beta coefficient (Left – Right scale) and fixed effect (second period)
Figure 3 – Parties’ and Weighted mean of factions’ positions. The dashed lines express the fitted value when party leader is directly (grey) or indirectly (black) elect.
Figure 4 – Marginal impact (with the 95% c.i.) of Gamsonian Agreement Position (GAP) on Party Position as the new general elections approach, when leaders are indirectly elected.

Figure 5 – Marginal impact (with the 95% c.i.) of Gamsonian Agreement Position (GAP) on Party Position as the new general elections approach, when leaders are directly elected.