Media exposure and political accountability: evidence from migration policy

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Indice

1 Abstract

I investigate how media and constituents' preferences shape the voting behaviour of elected representatives on immigration bills.

2 Introduction

My analysis will focus on Italy, a country that has been playing an essential role in the Mediterranean area for migration flows for decades. I have been able to gather information about voters' preferences and decisions taken by elected representatives in 2008 and 2009. During these years, Berlusconi's government and its majority took several actions against illegal immigration and irregular stay with the so-called "Pacchetto Sicurezza", promoted by the Minister of Interior Roberto Maroni. Two pillars of this regulatory package are the decree-law n.92/2008, later converted in the law n.125/2008, and the bill n.94/2009. In particular, I have constructed measures of aggregate opinion towards immigration policies at a congressional district level, and I have matched them with data on the behavior of voters in each of the twenty-seven italian districts.

3 Data

The construction of my dataset draws on several sources. I collect information on legislative votes in migration policy bills of 2008 and 2017 from the House of Representative's historical online database, and I matched them with the representatives' electoral districts from which they came. I restrict my analysis to bills with a potential impact on the labor market, i.e., that either tackles illegal immigration or regulate legal immigration. In particular, I do not consider measures that had to do with the provision of public goods to unlawful immigrants or the state reimbursement of education and health costs.

Districts	Areas
Piemonte I	Torino
Piemonte II	Cuneo, Alessandria, Asti, Biella, Novara, Vercelli, Verbania
Lombardia I	Milano, Monza, Brianza
Lombardia III	Mantova, Cremona, Lodi, Pavia
Trentino Alto Adige	Trento, Bolzano
Veneto I	Verona, Padova, Vicenza, Rovigo
Veneto II	Venezia, Belluno, Treviso
Friuli Venezia Giulia	Udine, Pordenone, Gorizia, Trieste
Liguria	Imperia,Savona, Genova, La Spezia
Emilia Romagna	Piacenza, Parma, Reggio Emilia, Modena, Bologna, Ferrara,Ravenna, Forlì,Rimini
Toscana	Massa-Carrara,Prato,Firenze,Livorno,Pisa,Siena,Grosseto,Arezzo,Lucca,Pistoia
Umbria	Perugia,Terni
Marche	Pesaro-Urbino,Macerata,Ancona,Fermo,Ascoli
Lazio I	Roma
Lazio II	Viterbo,Frosinone,Latina,Rieti
Abruzzo	L'Aquila,Pescara,Chieti,Teramo
Molise	Campobasso, Isernia
Campania I	Napoli
Campania II	Salerno, Avellino, Benevento, Caserta
Puglia	Foggia, Barletta-Andria, Trani, Bari, Taranto, Brindisi, Lecce
Basilicata	Potenza, Matera
Calabria	Catanzaro, Cosenza, Crotone, Vibo Valentia, Reggio Calabria
Sicilia I	Palermo, Trapani, Agrigento,Caltanisetta
Sicilia II	Catania, Messina, Siracusa, Ragusa, Enna
Sardegna	Sassari, Nuoro, Sud Sardegna, Oristano, Cagliari

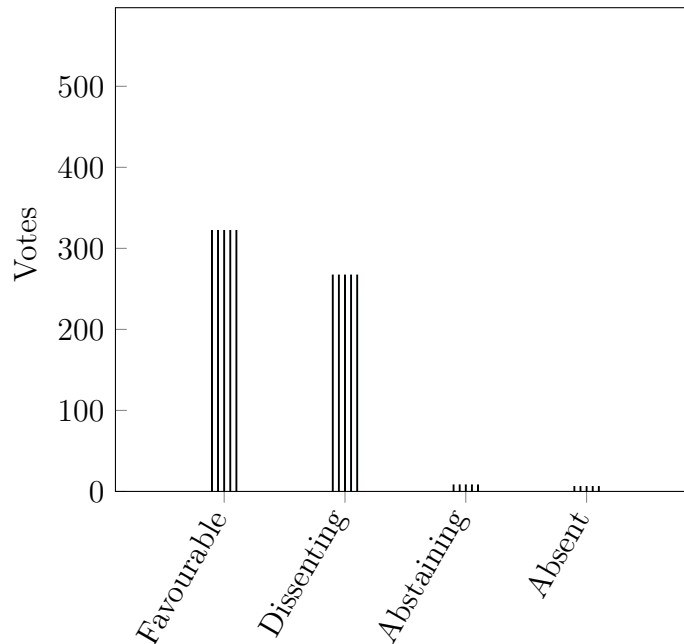Source: Italy's House of Representatives

Law n.192/2008

Figura 1: House of Representatives

3.1 Law n.125/2008

Legge n.125/2008 is the final result of the decree-law n.92/2008 conversion, containing urgent public safety measures. Among the main changes in the immigration field, the new law introduced the aggravating circumstance of clandestinity, providing one-third of additional penalties for those who commit offenses while illegally located in Italy; temporary stay centers became "Identification Centers and expulsion" (C.I.E.). Moreover, it established more severe penalties for those who declare false generality or alters parts of the body to avoid being identified. Furthermore, this bill provided for harsher penalties for the houses and other real estate property owners who rent their properties to foreigners without a residence permit: imprisonment from 6 months to 3 years as well as the properties confiscation unless it belongs to a person unrelated to the crime. It also hit employers who offer work to illegal immigrants with imprisonment from six months to three years.

3.2 Law n.94/2009

Legge n. 94/2009, containing provisions on public safety, is of particular interest because it introduced restrictive measures on immigration. In particular, it brought in the crime of immigration and illegal stay, which punishes with a fine the conduct of the foreigner who enters or stays in the State territory in violation of provisions coming from "Testo Unico sull' Immigrazione" or from law n. 68/2007 governing short-term stay. Moreover, it changed rule concerning the time spent in the C.P.Rs, now renamed C.I.Es (Centri di Identificazione ed Espulsione). In particular, while previously the detention was authorized by the competent police commissioner for 30 days, extendable for others 30 days in the case of difficulties in immigrants identification, law n.94/2009 confirmed the detention and extended the maximum time spent in the centers from two to six months.

3.3 Voters' preferences

As a measure for voters' preferences over immigration, I have taken into account a questionnaire proposed by Itanes in 2008 and used for the publication "Itanes, Il ritorno di Berlusconi, vincitori e vinti nelle elezioni politiche del 2008". This research was carried out through phone interviews over a sample of 3000 people (Figure 1).

	Men				Women	
Age	Population	Not weighted Pop.	Age	Population	Not weighted Pop.
18-24	4,5	5,6	18-24	4,3	4,4
25-34	8,5	6,9	25-34	8,3	7,6
35-44	9,9	8,0	35-44	9,7	7,6
45-54	8,1	8,7	45-54	8,2	9,0
55-64	7,1	8,3	55-64	7,5	9,0
65-74	5,8	7,4	65-74	6,8	9,5
75+	4,2	3,1	75+	7,2	5
Total	48	48	Total	52	52

Figure 2:Itanes 2008   Itanes 2008

Even if there is a small under-representation of people with an age in between 25 and 44, the corrispondence between distributions is satisfactory:as a consequence, it is not necessary to make use of any weights. I assess individual opinions towards immigration policies using a question that has been asked by Itanes pollsters: *"Gli immigrati sono un pericolo per l'occupazione?*, and the possible answers were *"Per niente d'accordo"*, *"Poco d'accordo"*,*"Abbastanza d'accordo*, and *"Molto d'accordo"*. I attached values $v=\{3,2,1,0\}$ to previous answers (*"Per niente d'accordo"= 3*,*"Poco d'accordo"=2*,*"Abbastanza d'accordo=1*,*"Molto d'accordo"=0*) to turn our qualitative answer in a quantitative ones. Then, I picked all the observations district by district and for each of them I split the answers in two groups: (*"Per niente d'accordo"= 3*,*"Poco d'accordo"=2*,are absorbed in a new variable *Immigration Open* (which will take a value $v=\{1\}$), while *"Abbastanza d'accordo=1*,*"Molto d'accordo"=0* in the variable *Not Open Immigration* (which will take the value $v=\{0\}$). Then, for every district d I pick the frequency with which I observe these two variables and I use them as a weight.

3.4   Measure of media exposure

Assessing the role of media exposure on political accountability presents several challenges. As Giovanni Facchini, Tommaso Frattini, and Cora Signorotto in "Mind what your voters read: media exposure and international economic policy making" explained, media coverage is endogenous vis-a-vis political accountability. Several studies suggested that even if proper political coverage leads to improvement in government structures, it is harsh to sustain that media coverage directly causes an increase in accountability as they are jointly determined. Indeed, it is likely to have more political responsibility whether media coverage is well defined, but also the vice versa holds as governments have strong incentives to silence the press. As an attempt to address the potential endogeneity of media coverage, I used the measure of "congruence" between electoral districts in which representatives are elected, and newspaper markets for the United States introduced by Snyder and Stromberg (2010). They considered a metropolitan area, including an inner-city district surrounded by several suburban ones. It is likely that many suburban constituents get local information from newspapers based in the inner city and sold all over the metropolitan area. Newspapers are likely to dedicate more attention to representatives elected in the inner city rather than those selected in peripheral districts. In such a case, if models of political accountability are correct, this leads to greater responsiveness to the electorate for the inner city representatives, closely scrutinized by the media, than for the representatives elected in the suburbs receiving only limited attention. The underlying assumption that must hold for media coverage to be exogenously determined is the difference in factors that shape media markets and congressional districts. This is likely to be the case, as from one hand districts are defined following geographical and demographical criteria, and on the other hand market for newspapers is driven by other factors, such as strong demand for advertising and news about the city's public affair. Snyder and Stromberg defined their measure as follow:

$$Congruence_{md} = \sum_m MarketShare_{md} \times ReaderShare_{md}$$

where $MarketShare_{md}$ indicates the market share of newspaper m in district d, and $ReaderShare_{md}$ the share of newspaper m's readers that live in the same district. This index varies according to the

number and size distribution of newspapers serving an electoral disctrict d and it ranges between zero and one: a value for $Congruence_{dt}$ equal to one respresents a situation in which there is only a newspaper sold in district d and all its readers live there.

The assumption behind this index is that the number of articles q_{md} contained in newspaper m that talks about the parlamentary work of a respresentative living in district d is increasing in the share of this newspaper's readers that lives in the same electoral district:

$q_{md} = \alpha ReaderShare_{md}.$

Strong evidence of this is contained in *Snyder and Stromberg,2008*

From the dataset proposed by ADS (Accertamenti Diffusione Stampa), I built up the *Congruence* index, considering daily national and local newspapers and I have computed *MarketShare* and *ReaderShare* as follow:

$$MarketShare_{md} = \frac{x_{md}}{\sum_m x_{md}} \quad ReaderShare_{md} = \frac{x_{md}}{x_m}$$

where x_{md} is the number of copies of the newspaper m sold in district d and x_m is the national aggregate value for the previus variable.

4 Model

4.1 Cross-section specification

In my empirical analysis, I assess the role of media exposure and voters' preferences on the probability of pro-immigration votes from italian representatives. In particular, I estimate the following probability model:

$$Vote_{dt} = \alpha Immigration_{dt} + \beta Congruence_{dt} + \gamma Immigration_{dt} \times Congruence_{dt} + u_{dt}$$

$Vote_{dt}$ is a dummy variable that takes values $v = \{0, 1\}$: 1 if representatives of district d at time t voted in favor of a pro-immigrants bill, 0 otherwise. $Immigration_{dt}$ is a variable that expresses the share of voters from district d at time t who are in favor of more open migration policy, and $Congruence_{dt}$ represents the extent to which a district's boundaries match those of newspaper markets. I also introduced an interaction variable, $Immigration_{dt} \times Congruence_{dt}$, to assess if a change in $Congruence_{dt}$ will make the behavior of representatives more or less in line with voters' preferences. A positive sign means that representatives are in line with the prevailing opinion of district constituents; viceversa, if negative. In my setup t will take values $d = \{2008, 2009\}$ while d will be one of the 27 italian districts.

5 Empirical results

5.1 Results from Facchini,Frattini, Signorotto

We have seen that the most interesting parameter to estimate is coefficient of the interaction between *Congruence* and *Immigration*. Giovanni Facchini, Tommaso Frattini, Cora Signorotto in *Mind what your voters read: media exposure and international economic policy making,(2013)* show that this parameter is positive and statistically significative, meaning that an higher congruence between market for newspapers and geographical boundaries for district make resprentantives behavior more in line with their voters' preferences. They showed that flows of informations in form of newspapers make congressmen more accountable to their respective voters. A critical issue of this reaserch consists in the empirical measure used to convey information to the electorate. Indeed, the congruence between the market for local newspapers and electoral boundaries does not take into account the decline of readers and the growth new media that have started to play an important role.

6   Conclusions

7   References

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