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Political parties and corruption: Ten hypotheses on five vicious circles*

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Abstract. Strong political parties and genuine competition among them feature in many anti-corruption strategies, but in practice the relationships between corruption and political parties are much more complex than is generally recognized. This article explores and illustrates ten hypotheses about those connections, drawing in detail upon Italian, Japanese, and other cases for evidence. These connections extend well beyond amounts and trends of corruption to include the motivations of party members and supporters, internal problems of party organizations, and links between parties and state institutions. Major concerns included party bureaucratization, membership, and resources; electoral volatility; party fragmentation; collusion among parties; and party influence in public administration. These hypotheses will be best understood, and tested, comparatively, but in so doing we need to look not only at basic causes of corruption but also at ways in which parties and other institutions reproduce the conditions that sustain it.

Introduction

Social science explanations of political corruption have often looked at the individual characteristics of the actors involved in corrupt exchanges. Some stressed individual moral propensity to get involved in illegal behavior; others considered the individual interests (or need) for money or protection. In contemporary approaches to corruption, however, institutional assets have come back in: sociologists discuss the contextual determinants of moral costs (Pizzorno, 1992), and political economists address the influence of institutional designs on individual choices (della Porta and Rose-Ackerman, 2002). Explicitly or implicitly referring to this evolution, research started to focus on the characteristics of parties and party systems as influences upon the development of corruption.

While interest is growing, there is however little agreement on the characteristics of parties and party system that may indeed favor the spread of corruption. Especially in the study of the American party machines and developing countries, corruption was linked to party weakness during phases of

*Many ideas presented in this paper come from previous cooperation with Alberto Vannucci. Among others, see della Porta and Vannucci 1994, 1999a and 1999b. I presented some of the analysis on corruption and parties in Italy also in della Porta 1996 and 1997; on the evolution in political parties in contemporary democracy, in della Porta 2001.

growing political participation. According to Huntington, corruption spreads in those specific paths to modernization in which popular participation in political decision-making is not immediately accompanied by a strengthening of those institutions which should filter and direct collective demands: "the weaker and less accepted the political parties, the greater the likelihood of corruption" (Huntington, 1968, p. 71). Apparently in contradiction with this hypothesis is the widespread belief that corruption is favored by the ubiquity and omnipotence of the parties, powerful and well-organized political machines capable of controlling civil society and the market. In Italy, *partitocrazia*, a concept derived from the political science literature to stress strong and pathological party power, has been taken up in the press and in the political debate to stigmatize the ills of the "First Republic". Moreover, while in democratic regimes party competition is considered an important control on corruption – on the basis of the assumption that rational electors should penalize corrupt politicians – high competition also increases the amount of money to be invested in electoral campaigns and, in general, political activity. As is often the case in the analysis of complex macro-phenomena, doubts also emerge about the direction of the assumed causal relations (della Porta and Vannucci, 1999a): do weak parties collect bribes in order to overcome their weaknesses, or does corruption weaken the parties involved in it? Are parties forced to collect bribes because of increasing competition, or does corruption itself increases competition for spoils?

In this article I shall address some of these questions, presenting hypotheses deriving from research on the Italian case. A main advantage of the case study is the possibility to understand the linkages between political parties and corruption, through a thick description. A main disadvantage, however, is that it does not allow controls for the generalizability of hypotheses derived in a specific context. Thus, I shall attempt to go beyond the Italian case, introducing illustrations from other countries.[1] The cross-national comparison does not aim however at reaching global conclusions. I believe, in fact, that some of the disagreements in the social science literature are related to the presence of corruption, a concept usually defined at a very high level of abstraction as exchange of money for political favors, in very different political and social systems. As a universalistic concept, corruption has a very high denotation, defining a vast range of disparate empirical cases which are difficult to reduce under a unique explanation. In this discussion, I focus only on contemporary, established democracies, in particular discussing the potential effects of recent trends in the evolution of parties and party systems. In doing that, I do not imply that other types of parties or party systems are (or were) immune to corruption. Democracies are better equipped than authoritarian regimes to control deviations from general standards, but reflection on the

specific challenges that changes in party models present in terms of potential effects on corruption may still enhance the capacity of democratic regimes for self-reform.

Moreover, my hypotheses on the interactions between parties and corruption in contemporary democracies go beyond causal models that seem insufficient to account for the development of long-lasting phenomena. Corruption is sensitive to environmental conditions, but it also affects those same conditions. In a long series of interactions, corruption and party characteristics influence each other, bringing about via multiple vicious circles what economists would call high-corruption equilibria. Some of these vicious circles are discussed here in terms of characteristics of the political class, party structures, and party systems. Decline of party membership (part I), increasing electoral volatility (part II), fragmentation of the party system (part III), widespread party collusion (part IV) and reduced capacity to implement policy choices (part V) are all trends that interact with the spread of corruption in contemporary democracies. I shall conclude by singling out the active role the parties play in the development of corrupt exchanges (part VI).

The vicious circle between party bureaucratization and corruption

Research on political parties indicates a change in the relationships between the different circles of participants – from party voters, to members, to activists, to leaders. Although corruption may also develop within ideological mass parties, in advanced democracies it seems to be linked to more and more oligarchic parties, a declining membership, reduced roles for activists, and professionalized leadership.

Hypothesis 1. Political corruption is favored by the decline of party membership

Research on parties, in particular in Western Europe, indicates a steady decline in party memberships. The pessimistic hypothesis Robert Michels (1909) put forward at the beginning of the 20th century on the unavoidable bureaucratization of political parties (the "iron law of oligarchies"), seems helpful to account for some developments in parties almost one hundred years later. In fact, in EU countries, between 1950 and 1994, membership of parties dropped from an average of 8.1% of the electorate to 5.7%. The trend was particularly dramatic in Italy, France and the UK, where the parties have lost about half of their members in the last 10 years (Mair and van Biezen, 2001, p. 12 ff.). Moreover, scholars have pointed to qualitative changes such as a reduction in young members and a growth of opportunistic motivations (von Beyme,

1996). The role of the members has also changed from that of the *raison d'etre* of parties to mere sources of financing (Crouch, 2000). To sum up, "parties are more and more personal machines at the pleasure of a leader" (Calise, 2000, p. 5).

In fact, although corrupt politicians may attract clients into their parties, corruption will spread most easily when parties are no longer accountable to members and activists or sensitive to the ideological appeals for collective action. The Italian case suggests that corruption developed when parties lost a mass, ideological character. As a former activist of the Socialist Party (PSI) explained, corruption spread as "in the ranks of PSI, but not only, militants left and clients joined, people . . . who saw the Party as a shortcut to personal goals. In the space of a few years a genetic mutation took place: comrades willing to work gratis. . . were harder and harder to find" (in Andreoli, 1993, p. 33). When the scandals exploded in the nineties, the structure of the parties did not correspond any longer to a model of *partitocrazia*. As Pizzorno noted, "the term *partitocrazia* comes from a period in which the parties acted as collective subjects, guided by powerful leaderships responsible, if not to the membership as such, at least to elite circles composed of members. The leadership could answer for their members, parliamentary groups and mass associations before other actors within the political system, represented for their part by other parties" (1993, pp. 304–305).

In other countries too, recent research on corruption indicates its widespread presence exactly where mass parties are not present. Low levels of militancy and embeddedness in society, a high degree of personalization, and pragmatism have been cited to explain corruption in Spain. Although legalized in 1977, the political parties of the Spanish republic remained weak in organizational terms, with a very low 6% of the total population belonging to a party. In fact, the Spanish parties developed from parties of notables in the beginning of the century to the contemporary parties of electors, skipping the phase of the mass parties. Thus, they "have tended to become increasingly oligarchic, with a growing divorce between leaders and members and little effort expended on membership recruitment" (Heywood, 1999, p. 14). Notwithstanding their small memberships, Spanish parties have large (and expansive) organizational structures and many paid functionaries (Heywood, 1997, pp. 73–76). Lacking a grass-roots base of supporters, the political parties have to rely upon other sources: "The rate of public income in the treasury of Spanish political parties is probably the highest in Europe: 100 percent for the PSOE and 90 for the 'Partido Popular'. And. . . the income from membership is particularly low: one per million for the PSOE and 1.5% for the second" (Pujas, 1996, p. 4). Similar conditions have been recalled to explain the development of corruption in the other Southern European countries that

began in the mid-seventies their transition to democracy: Portugal and Greece (Magone, 1996, p. 16). In Portugal, for example, with the exception of the Communist party all others have been defined as "parties of notables," with weak organizational structures often consisting of personal clienteles both at the local and national levels (Pinto de Sousa, 1999).

Even in countries that had seen the development of mass parties, the spread of corruption coincided with a decline in the ideological attachments of party voters and activists. For instance, in an analysis of political scandals in Austria, Pelinka observed, "the political parties have lost much of their original ideological character. One of the consequences of this 'secularization process' has been the increase of various pragmatic 'machinations' and the quest for nonideological 'deals' which not only have led to a deideologization of the parties but also to a concomitant proliferation and legitimation of individual careerism. Often linked to schemes of personal enrichment, the loss of ideology has upon occasion also led to an increase in the temptation toward criminal deeds" (1988, p. 169). The spread of corruption has been related to the organizational weakness of political parties in such different contexts as Latin America (Zuluaga Nieto, 1996; Njaim, 1996) and France (Ruggiero, 1996).

Political corruption thus does not seem to be a side effect of ideological mass parties; it grows instead with their transformation into "activist-poor" organizations where "political entrepreneurs face serious financial problems. Not only are there no party members to voluntarily help with their campaigns, there are no party members paying their dues either. The party has to buy in services, but has no income, or projected income, with which to do it" (Hopkins, 1996, p. 15). Unable to mobilize a stable constituency, lacking a membership capable of paying for the party expenses, and confronting a political class who, lacking ideological motivations, see enrichment as the only selective incentive to politics, these political parties become more and more available to corrupt practices.

Hypothesis 2. Corruption produces hidden hierarchies within parties

If corruption develops when parties lose activists, it in turn strengthens a process of oligarchization. In a functioning democracy politicians must be capable of elaborating general programs, convincing citizens of their benefits and putting them into practice. The rewards will be public: appreciation, power and prestige should count for more than material advantage. With the development of political corruption, however, the characteristics of the political class are transformed. The parties begin then to select those individuals most proficient in the organization of illegal financing. In a public structure

where information circulates concerning the gains from bribery that can be made in certain positions, it is to be expected that certain politicians will try to influence the internal decision-making process in order to occupy these positions, investing both their own resources and, where possible, those of their organizations. In other words, the institutional mechanisms for selecting political and bureaucratic personnel are altered in favor of individuals with fewer scruples who are willing to "invest" in creating influence. In the research on the Italian case, these types of actors were defined as "business politicians" (see Pizzorno, 1992; della Porta and Vannucci, 1999a: Ch. 3). As Pizzorno has noted, "the sense of party membership is altered. One no longer joins to contribute voluntarily to the work of government, but in order to be admitted to the competition for positions of private interest... The various filtering processes, then, will be designed to ascertain whether the future business politician is a person willing to participate in illicit practices or who, at the least, will behave 'responsibly' and pose no moral objections should he become aware of them" (Pizzorno, 1992, p. 27).

Business politicians possess the special skills needed in order to operate in the illegal market of corruption. As the ex-Mayor of Reggio Calabria recalled, "Normally people think that corruption is just about money flitting from one pocket to another, a simple, uncomplicated matter like a vulgar theft. In fact, it is not. It's really difficult to explain the way the world of corruption works. You need a lot of patience to understand its different (and frequently complex) mechanisms. It's not like a series of burglaries: *there are rules and relations, fixed conventions; a whole language of nuances and accents which assume all the solemnity of a written contract*" (Licandro and Varano, 1993, p. 18, emphasis added). Not only in "vicious" Italy, business politicians substitute for the ideological politicians of the past. Even in the "virtuous" Great Britain, "Whilst the Conservative Party has a long history of 'business politicians' (in the sense of MPs with direct involvement in, or close association with, the business and financial worlds), similar accusations have recently been leveled at the Blair administration" (Heywood, 1999, p. 14).

Moreover, the various actors involved in corrupt exchanges are in fact connected, often across party lines, in an *invisible organizational structure*. As a result of the spread of political corruption the personal secretariats of individual bosses acquired a growing importance. According to the research on the Italian case, a fundamental step in the career of any business politician was the creation of a private "headquarters," a personal secretariat, often disguised as a research institute or some form of enterprise. The Milanese ex-administrator Mario Chiesa explains the function of these restricted spaces in the life of parties permeated by corruption:

> I had my private office as well. In the city-Center, in via Castelfidardo. A long way from Quarto Oggiaro. Two rooms on the ground floor of Number 11. A table for meetings, a telephone, an office for the secretary. The transformation of the PSI [Italian Socialist Party] from a party of militants to a party of clients made finding via Castelfidardo necessary. The section, even when normalized and run by loyal comrades, wasn't a suitable place for a certain kind of politics. For example, I couldn't call restricted meetings in the section. If a member of the rank and file, passing and seeing the lights on, were tempted to come in, I would have had to change subject ... *A visual control on your activity has heavy costs* (in Andreoli, 1993, p. 29, emphasis added).

As emerges clearly from this testimony, the reasons for creating personal secretariats lie precisely in the control (even if minimal) that the visible structures of the party imply. If the organization of the system of corruption required more discreet sites, the sections were not, however, shut down: on the contrary, they often grew in size. But they changed functions, becoming the sites for assembling "paper members" ["*falsi tesserati*"], "ready for making up the numbers at meetings and demonstrations and disciplined participation at section, ward or municipal congresses" (Mario Chiesa, in Andreoli, 1993, p. 35). Clubs and fake research institutes mushroomed around party bosses, responding to their need to escape any internal democratic control and to create flexible and less visible structures (della Porta, 1992, p. 202).

Systemic corruption leads to an ever-diminishing prestige of visible as opposed to invisible political positions, increasing the power of those who manage the collection and distribution of bribes. In Italy, secret structures were constituted within the parties, devoted to the gathering and administration of illegal funding. A fundamental role in organizing the business of corruption was in fact played by those whom, in the course of recent scandals, the press termed "*party cashiers*". Such individuals were described in the following terms to the Milanese magistrates: "Each party has referents responsible for controlling the allocation of contracts, maintaining the contacts with the different companies and collecting bribes, or having them collected. They also try to place trusted politicians on the boards of the various bodies, who then negotiate directly with businessmen... [thus] veiling what are really prearranged deals on bribery with formally legal agreements and legitimation" (*Panorama*, 12/7/1992, p. 27). The cashiers of the various parties had the task of co-coordinating the collection among themselves, reducing the amount of energy any one party needs to invest in occult exchange. The "municipal cashiers" in particular operated with each other in a coordinated way, taking it in turn to demand and collect bribes for all the parties and then

redistributing them according to precise (but unwritten) rules (della Porta, 1992). Within the structures that existed for the collection and distribution of illegal funds, the various party representatives even alternated in fulfilling the functions of cashier and redistributor. In complete consociational agreement, the "cashiers" of one party would occasionally carry out their activities in the headquarters of another or would meet together in order to redistribute the proceeds of bribery. Thus the figure of the "collective cashier" emerged. The "national cashiers" also met in order "to work out in agreement between themselves the best strategies for obtaining contributions from enterprises, even where this is in violation of the law on political financing" (Chamber of Deputies, 1993, p. 10).

The vicious circle between electoral volatility and corruption

If in the past voter behavior tended to be stable, with a high degree of identification of voters with party, in the last decade the reduction of "voters of belonging," with an increasing electoral volatility, helped spread corruption. Now, electoral studies indicate a trend towards the "refreezing" of the electorate.

Hypothesis 3. The decline of party identification favors political corruption

In a democracy, the parties are the principal actors in structuring the vote, creating electoral identifications that are frequently maintained over generations. Research on political parties indicated a tendency towards a reduction of loyal voters, and an increase instead in fluctuating voters. During the 1970s, research on the American voters pointed at a decline of party loyalties (Nie et al., 1976). Also in Europe, between 1975 and 1992, identification with political parties declined in most countries, especially in Italy (where the percentage of interviewees who said they feel "near" to a political party dropped from 46% in 1978 to 31% in 1992), France (from 26% to 16%), and the Netherlands (from 40% to 28%) (Schmitt and Holmberg, 1995, pp. 126–127). The average of European citizens who feel near to a party fell from 37 to 29% in the same period. According to recent research on advanced democracies, identification with party declined in all the 21 countries analyzed (Dalton, 2000). In Austria, Germany, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the UK the percentage of voters who changed party between one election and the next increased from 11% in 1950–1954 to 26% in 1990–1994 (Lane and Ersson, 1999, p. 127). Too much security of tenure may help corrupt arrangements to develop, but instability can also fuel corruption since it "can

induce both politicians and wealthy interests to get what private benefits they can in the short run" (Rose Ackerman, 1999, p. 132).

Research on the Italian case indicates that as the electoral system became more and more unstable the costs of electoral campaigns increased, fuelling corruption. One corrupt politician explained to judges that a good share of bribes were to be re-invested in his political career "to understand the reasons why I had exposed myself personally in the mechanism of bribery it is necessary to understand that I did not remain president of an organization like the Trivulzio simply because I was a good technician and a good health manager but also because in a certain way I was a force to be reckoned with in Milan, having a certain number of votes at my disposal. To acquire what amounted in the end to 7000 votes I had, during my political career, to sustain the cost of creating and maintaining a political organization which could amass votes right across Milan." These blocs of members and votes were then put at the service of influential party leaders in return for a new term of office. The decline of long-term loyalties to political subcultures and the rise of mass-media electoral campaigns contributed to the escalation of political costs, fuelling the demand for bribes. New laws on public financing of political parties were unable to solve the problems (Rhodes, 1996; della Porta and Vannucci, 1999b).

Japan too illustrates very well the way in which corruption interacts with the enormous costs of political activities when votes have to be pursued one by one in an unstable market. In Japan, where during the long reign of the Liberal Democratic Party (1955–1993) nine out of fifteen prime ministers were implicated in political scandals, the costs of politics are so high that political corruption has been defined as a "redistribution system" in which political bosses collect bribes and, at least in part, distribute them to their followers in the form of donations of various kinds (Bouissou, 1997).[2]

In unstable environments, electoral campaigns are more and more expensive. Comparative research indicates a strong, positive correlation between electoral campaign expenditures and corruption (Heidenheimer, 1999). An increase in the cost of campaigning has been observed, in recent times, as a consequence of the presence of new media of communication: "The 'media revolution' has clearly exacerbated this problem by allowing previously prohibited private broadcasts and pushing up information, propaganda, and campaign costs. At the same time, the 'office revolution' caused by the spread of new technology (personal computers, photocopying and fax machines), required large investments to provide party headquarters and party owned newspapers with new equipment. Finally, ... salary expenditures reveal real increases in the major parties' official budgets" (Rhodes, 1996, p. 10). In Italy,

as well as Spain and France, the increasing role of the media in campaigns influenced the characteristics of party competition: "Greater use of the media helps create new rules of party competition, based on leadership-focused contests, which weakens the traditional character of parties and increases the costs of politics" (Pujas and Rhodes, 1998, p. 5). Studies from a number of countries indicate that public financing *per se* does not thwart corruption. Incentives to raise bribes tend to increase "if electoral campaigns allocate individualized favors to voters – that is, if politicians bribe voters" (Rose Ackerman, 1999, p. 142).

Hypothesis 4. Corruption facilitates the building of electoral clienteles

If corruption develops with the decline of identification with political parties it also transforms the structure of electoral preferences: rather than the vote of identification or opinion, the cliental use of the vote as an object of exchange prevails – votes in exchange for favors. Political corruption produces, in fact, a value system oriented to the fulfillment of individual objectives through interactions based on extrinsic or instrumental benefits at the same time that it discourages "ideological" relations based on intrinsic or expressive benefits. Such corrupt practices reduce the capacity of the parties to mobilize ideological resources and distribute participatory incentives. We can say, therefore, that political corruption, by encouraging the diffusion of a structure of preferences oriented to individual mobilization, erodes the effective capacity of the parties to integrate, select and mediate citizens' interests.

Bribery money gives opportunities for creating a large electoral clientele in so far as it permits more effective organization of the political machine of individual bosses. Portrayals of public sector bosses commonly stress their "power to corrupt" – to grant favors to large numbers of individuals, privileging those sectors and groups that offer the greatest "compensation" in terms of support and connivance. They created personal support through the management of public resources thanks, as the judges of Savona remarked, "to small connections and favors (career promotions, transfers, allocation of housing or loans, assorted licenses and authorizations, small gratuities and prebends, etc.)" (Court of Savona, 1984, p. 148). The management of public bodies also allows corrupt relations to be formed with certain professional categories, often themselves possessing an autonomous capacity for constructing electoral clienteles. Doctors provide a typical example. As a corrupt politician recalled, "In via Castelfidardo I met with actual or aspiring heads of public health units, looking for my support in winning promotion or obtaining a transfer" (in Andreoli, 1993, p. 31). This political protection could be repaid in cash: "In the Fatebenefratelli hospital a system of bribery was in force.

A job as head of unit could cost as much as 100 million [*lire*], paid by the interested party to the right person" (Andreoli, 1993, p. 31). Alternatively, it might be repaid in clients: "There isn't a hospital head of unit who hasn't made a more or less public profession of political faith; even extremely able doctors. Merit counts very little on the career scale. You get on if you have party connections. *It isn't because you are a luminary of the profession that you become a head of unit, but because you can guarantee votes on the appropriate occasion*" (in Andreoli, 1993, p. 84, emphasis added). While political analyses, including those of the Italian case,[3] have normally underlined the negative consequences of the excessive use of ideological incentives by political parties, the recent scandals signal the risks attached to the opposite condition: the excessive availability of material incentives.[4]

The vicious circle between party fragmentation and corruption

Corruption spreads where political parties are internally fragmented into personalistic fractions; at the same time, corruption produces centrifugal tendencies inside parties.

Hypothesis 5. The fragmentation of political parties and, therefore, internal competition between candidates of the same party, favor corruption

Ideological mass parties tended to function according to "democratic centralism": at least in principle, decisions had to be discussed by party members, but once taken a certain degree of party discipline was enforced. This, however, is less and less the case. While apparently strengthening the role of *the* party leader, "personal parties" work as temporary coalitions of party leaders in strong competition with each other. The decline of party loyalties in the electorate facilitates party splits. In countries with widespread corruption, as in Italy for instance, members of parliament are less and less obedient to their party's decisions, with a dramatic increase in indicators of party indiscipline, such as floor-crossing (della Porta and Morlino, 2001). Not by chance, the number of parties present in Parliaments is increasing in many European countries, from an average of 6 in 1950–1954 to 9.2 in 1995–1997, with even more impressive jumps in Belgium (from 4.5 to 11), Ireland (from 5 to 8), Italy (from 9 to 16), the Netherlands (from 8 to 12), Norway (from 6 to 9), and Switzerland (from 9 to 15) (Lane and Ersson, 1999, p. 143).

In Italy, the fragmentation of parties into personalistic factions increased the blackmail capacity of corrupt politicians inside their parties. Especially before the reform of the electoral system, the possibility for the voters to choose the candidates within party lists (the so-called *voto di preferenza*)

fuelled harsh and expensive battles between candidates belonging to the same party, creating non-ideological, personalistic factions constantly at war with each other. In this situation, the corrupt politician gains complicity within his own party by offering, in return for connivance, the blocks of "delegates" required in inter-factional competition. The management of relations within the party on the part of corrupt politicians can be described as "pragmatic" or "cynical". The absence of "ideological preconceptions" in the management of alliances between different factions, for example, ensured the corrupt Savonese politicians the "protection" they needed in the national leadership of their party. One member of the group told the judges: "Practically...we transferred arms and baggage from one faction to another" (in *Il Secolo XIX*, 17/4/1985).

The instability of alliances between party factions also strengthened corrupt politicians who could approach the factions to whom they are indispensable at a given moment and obtain connivance and protection. As a corrupt Milanese administrator revealed, "With the proceeds of the bribes I paid the subscriptions of members of my section and when the various party offices had to be renewed, I controlled a block of party members and votes which I put at the disposition of the party and in particular of those candidates indicated by my principal referent. Likewise, I put my block of members and votes on the table when my own position was to be renewed or I was to move to a new one" (in Carlucci, 1992, pp. 118–119).

In Japan, an electoral system with preference votes for single candidates has brought about enormously expensive electoral campaigns, in particular those of conservative candidates who compete with each other in the same constituencies. The cost of an electoral campaign is in fact four times higher for a government candidate than for one of the opposition, because only the former has to face internal competition by other members of the party (Bouissou, 1997). The clients are organized in *Koenkai*, or support organizations, averaging 10–30,000 members for an MP of the conservative party. Each is formed by networks of small groups built around particular social categories or recreational activities.[5] To avoid to losing his *Koenkai* to rival party-colleagues, each candidate has to employ 10 to 15 secretaries whose task is to organize specific groups and distribute gifts (in particular at weddings or funerals) or invitations to parties or journeys (Bouissou, 1997, pp. 136–138). During electoral campaigns, aspiring conservative MPs offer concrete rewards to their supporters: "Apart from campaign literature, he or his staff will usually hand over a cash filled envelope ('for your trouble' – like posting his campaign poster at the wall of the residence) to his presumed supporters and voters during house calls in his district. Another "must" are regular organized all-expenses-paid trips to Tokyo, or wining and dining at regional spas for

members of the thousands of strong local support organizations (*KoenKai*), as well as any amount of charitable and individual donations" (Rothacher, 1996, p. 3).

Both in Italy and in Japan, the cost of electoral campaigns was therefore linked to the degree of *competition between candidates belonging to the same party*. Also in Belgium, "the expansion of the occult financing of political parties in the 1970s and 1980s coincided with a drastic increase of party fragmentation and government volatility" (de Winter, 1999, p. 12). As Jean Cartier-Bresson (1999) observed, the costs of corruption increase for parties with a decentralized structure; each faction forms its own network of corrupt exchange. In France since the 1970s, more and more decentralized forms of corruption spread the collection of bribes to the lower levels of the political and administrative hierarchy, with a shift from corruption as a means of party financing to corruption for personal enrichment. According to Johnston (1999, pp. 15–16), "where parties are internally divided along factional lines or cross-cut by other loyalties (ranging from ethnic divisions to ideological fights to the influences of localism in societies such as the United States), or where electoral systems encourage intra-party contention, the decisiveness of competition between parties can be reduced."

Hypothesis 6. Corruption triggers centrifugal tendencies in the parties

If corruption develops in fragmented party systems it then is likely to increase centrifugal tendencies. As happens in illegal systems, the degree of vertical centralization that corrupt networks are able to attain is relatively low. The evidence of Italian politicians involved in judicial investigations offers a picture of the system of corruption as a multicephalous network of networks gathered around individual bosses, with only a few points of coordination from above. The parties were fragmented into numerous groups based on blind, if temporary, obedience to a boss. The power of each boss rested on a nucleus of faithful followers, with a clan-like solidarity. The money coming from *tangenti* seems to have been indispensable for marginalizing the opposition, building *falangi* of followers, and competing with other bosses in the battle for the division of the spoils. This system, as a corrupt politician revealingly concludes, referring to the Milanese situation in the 1980s, is extremely inflationary:

> A nasty habit predominated: even a ward councilor or a candidate for the most modest public office knew not to spend a penny of their own money but to solicit the notable of the moment to finance their election campaign. In return they would promise absolute loyalty. The notable would accept

> without question for fear that, with a hundred thousand-lira note, some competitor might grab a contact and a packet of votes. Frequently money would be asked not for the party but for the individual. Sometimes a banal demand for cash to cover pointless expenses was hidden behind a request for a contribution to pay the rent of the section. But, and this is the point, it would have been dangerous to refuse these demands. Your nearest rival was always there, ready to close not one but both eyes in order to satisfy the most outlandish requests. The money circulated. Really circulated. A lot of it. Every leader was out for himself and saw his neighbor as an enemy. The gathering and administration of resources was strictly tied to increasing one's own political weight. *A network of parallel power centers, eternally at war with each other, was formed inside the PSI* (in Andreoli, 1993, pp. 35–36, emphasis added).

This led to a monetarization and parcellization of power, the decline of internal loyalty, and the transformation of the party into a series of clans in a permanent state of internecine war. According to one of the judges who led the "clean hands" investigation, Piercamillo Davigo, "A lot of the illicit funds were used by the politicians of the different factions to buy party membership cards ... These membership cards were used to establishe power relations inside the parties ... The parties were transformed into joint-stock companies, where bribes were used to buy shares in order to acquire the possibility to be re-elected" (Davigo, 1993, p. 11).

The vicious circle between party collusion and corruption

Political corruption is affected by and affects not only the individual parties, but also the characteristics of the party system, and in particular the competition between parties.

Hypothesis 7. The development of collusive agreements between parties favors corruption

In democratic theory, parties are supposed to compete for voters, and thus ensure the capacity of the citizens to control elected politicians. Recently, however, the concept of the "cartel party" was created to indicate, among other things, a tendency of parties to collude at least on an important issue: public party financing (Katz and Mair, 1995). Forced to replace their declining voluntary human resources with professional ones, parties tend to increase their dependence on public financing.

In general, political competition introduces controls on party activities, and these controls may jeopardize corruption. As Michael Johnston (1999, p. 13) observed, "Significant and institutionalized political competition creates opportunities for political forces to win *or lose* power through publicly visible processes. A very wide range of issues can drive such competition, but where corruption is a serious problem opposition parties can raise it, and voters can remove those in government who have abused their power. Strongly competitive parties have an interest in protecting independent arenas of appeal against corruption, both in the judiciary and in investigative agencies." Not all types of competition, however, jeopardize corruption. According to Johnston (1999, pp. 15–16), "good competition" "must be meaningful, but structured...The point is that the notion of political competition as a limit on corrupt activity presupposes a particular kind of competition: orderly, fair competition among a small-number of well-institutionalized parties with strong links to significant, lasting groups and interests in society. Where competition falls short of this ideal, it may not reduce corruption, but rather could even lead to more of it." Political competition moreover increases the risks of corruption only under specific conditions – such as media pluralism and independence of the judiciary. As Pujas and Rhodes (1999, p. 12) point out, "a strengthening of democratic checks and balances (with the emergence of a stronger and more independent judiciary and press) and greater political competition lie behind the proliferation of scandals in the 1990s."

One-party dominance, like collusion among parties, jeopardizes competition and reduces control of party involvement in corrupt exchanges. In Italy, the spread of corruption was facilitated by the long-term dominance of the Christian-Democratic party that governed Italy (although often in coalition with other small parties) for more than three decades. In this situation, both the governmental party and the opposition became, in a certain sense, "non-responsive" to the electorate (Sartori, 1970). In Japan too corruption seems to have been fuelled in one-party dominant systems. As Susan Pharr noticed for the Japanese system, "Long-term party rule makes systemic the distribution system by which supporters are rewarded at the expenses of non-supporters" (1999, p. 3). In fact, in Japan, one-party rule increased citizens' tolerance of corruption, with particularly "soft" attitudes between young and well-educated people (Ibid.). In Portugal corruption flourished during the long-lasting rule of the Social Democratic party (between 1985 and 1995) of Cavaco Silva, favored by the lack of a "politically feasible" opposition (Pinto de Sousa, 1999).

Beyond one-party dominance, competition may be constrained by a tradition of consociation. In Italy, the two largest parties, the Christian Democrats and the Communist Party, fiercely fought each other in the visible public

spheres while bargaining with each other in secret, creating the bases for the collusive agreements related to corruption. In particular, the Socialist Party developed a strong blackmail power, since in many local governments it was essential for the formation of coalition government. A "pragmatic" conception of politics increased the openness of corrupt politicians to different kinds of alliances. For example, the President of the Liguria Region implicated in the Savonese scandal was respected as a dependable ally. According to a leader of the Communist Party: "His concrete conception of politics gave him the possibility of being very open on the question of alliances. (...) If he did not have a direct interest himself, he gave way to the other parties" (Interview SV3, emphasis added).

Similarly, in Belgium corruption was facilitated by consociationalism (Frognier, 1986). In fact, "the more occult dealings between elites, the greater the chances for corruption. Also, in a consociational democracy, political elites have more means to 'manage' the reality of corruption and to minimize the harmful effects of the revelations of the scandals that involve them. They thus protect themselves from a 'chain of denunciation' which, from one particular scandal, may escalate and threaten to challenge in one way or another the political world as a whole. It is likely that a consociational democracy is more susceptible than other forms of government to develop this type of collective response, thanks to the 'cartelization of elites', their capacity to control leaders within one's own pillar and to avoid conflicts that could result in a chain of denunciations and ultimately political disaster" (de Winter, 1999, pp. 14–15). In general, the "cartelization" of parties increases their tendency to collude, reducing competition for membership and pushing instead towards agreement on the use of public funds.

Hypothesis 8. Political corruption favors the development of connivance in the party system

If traditions of party collusion help build cross-party protection for corrupt politicians, participation in illegal exchanges strengthens connivance based upon the possibility of blackmail. Political corruption is rarely a one-to-one exchange: especially in democracies, division of public power means that it is usually impossible for a single agent to offer the service demanded by a corrupter. When corruption is practiced by a number of politicians in collaboration, centralized power management and a consensual division of the proceeds become necessary. In order to avoid the risks of "free-riderism" or denunciations, hidden agreements are made between parties.

In the Italian party system, the concentration of single parties on gathering illegal income has favored the search for reciprocal connivance. In at least

one instance a secret non-belligerence treaty emerged out of fierce clandestine battles over the division of these funds, guaranteeing the non-denunciation of the system of corruption. While in the *visible* political arena the political groups tried to gain votes by distinguishing between themselves through open, more or less ideological competition (Pizzorno, 1993), in the *secret* political arena (including the market for corruption) there was a strong tendency towards inter-party collusion. Research on corruption in Italy indicates that such agreements were sometimes based on a fixed distribution of public contracts among firms based on the color of their political protection (or to consortia whose composition reflects the relative weight of the various power centers), or on distributing payoffs according to the electoral strength of the parties involved. In other cases, the agreement took place in an earlier phase and was based on the powers employed in attracting bribes rather than the proceeds. For example, the management board of the national electricity body, the ENEL, was composed of eight directors appointed by the political parties. According to one of them, "each director was responsible for procuring his own party money. A tacit understanding was reached: each looked after their own back yard and stayed out of the others' business" (*Panorama,* 14/2/1993, p. 46). The apportioning of offices among the various parties gave each political actor control over certain defined areas of public activity, areas that were negotiated or arranged at a higher level.

Such collusion between government and opposition parties is hardly limited to Italy. Another extreme case is Japan, where the silence of the opposition seems to have been bought through sums of money paid from the conservatives to their adversaries–sometimes behind the screen of a fake *mah-jongg* game between politicians of the government and the opposition (Bouissou, 1997, pp. 140–142). In general, cartel parties, characterized already by collusion with a massive use of public financing, manifest reciprocal solidarity when scandals related to party financing emerge.[6] In France, Becquart-Leclercq (1989, p. 205) has observed within the network of corruption a shared adherence to implicit codes which include "the conspiracy of silence: it operates particularly between leaders of various political parties, despite their sometimes bitter and violent conflicts; to survive, all must respect the rules of the game and maintain silence about the rules themselves." In Germany, resilience to scandals was connected to the organizational oligopoly on which parties could build. The stability of this system rests, above all, on a strong interparty consensus over basic rules of the game (including legal/illegal party financing), and on the common interest of the 'established' parties in retaining their *de facto* monopoly of public decision-making and guarding it against outside forces. This common interest has in large part suspended the functioning of the checks and balances and the institutional mechanisms of control usually

associated, at least in theory, with competitive party systems, replacing them with patterns of tacit agreement and mutual privilege enhancement (Blankenburg et al., 1989, p. 92).

The vicious circle between party power over the public administration and corruption

A function of political parties in a democracy is to define the direction of public policy and control its implementation. Political corruption is fuelled by, and fuels a decline in, the party capacity to pursue public goods.

Hypothesis 9. The party occupation of the public administration favors corruption

Party control over the public administration increases the resources that can be invested in corruption, reducing at the same time the possibility of reciprocal controls between elected and career administrators. In Italy, an overreaching presence of the political parties has been often stigmatized. However, as Alessandro Pizzorno (1971) argued many years ago, the strength or weakness of parties can be differently evaluated depending on whether one considers the power of reinforcing delegation, procuring advantages for the representatives (the party apparatus, in other words), or that of transmitting the demands of the represented.

Corrupt practices would seem to be negatively correlated with the second kind of party power, interacting with the lack of long-term programs, ideological resources, and participatory incentives. In the corrupted Italian parties, as in the American political machines, "the party organization did not play an important role in developing alternative courses of municipal governmental action. Indeed, since machine politicians drew their resources from the routine operation of government, they did not concern themselves with policy formulation" (Wolfinger, 1973, p. 104). More and more, research indicates parties' reduced steering capacity: if globalization jeopardizes the development of effective policy choices at the national level, hegemonic neoliberal doctrines reduce the resources available for a political governance of markets and the economy.

Faced with the reduced appeal of general programs and public goods, parties tend to rely more and more on the distribution of selective, material incentives, increasing the parties' power to reinforce delegation. In Italy, more or less official mechanisms of political control over the nomination of certain public-sector bureaucrats have led to the *partitizzazione* of the public administration, producing feuds which the parties and their representatives

have used for patronage and corruption. The influence of the parties in areas beyond the public administration – from banks to newspapers – has led to inroads into civil society, further lowering defenses against corruption and mismanagement. Electoral appeals rely more and more upon the building of loyal nets of clients. As a corrupt politician, highly skilled in using his position to build clientele, explained: "A nurse wanted her son taken on? Fine, we got to work on it. A comrade had been evicted and needed somewhere to live? OK, we would try and get him a council house. A hospital doctor wished a transfer to another unit? Right, we would put pressure on the hospital administration. I became very popular in this way. Years later I met an old comrade and was delighted to see that in his wallet he still had a santino, one of the little cards with my name we distributed at election time" (Andreoli, 1993, pp. 42–43).

In a way in the new Southern European democracies, emerging parties have found in the occupation of the state apparatus the resources they need to build their organizations. In Portugal, for instance, during the democratic transition and consolidation (in particular, between 1976 and 1982), parties became channels of individual upward mobility via the sharing of spoils (public sinecures, important positions in the public administration, etc.) between the various parties. Within a system of "*lottizzazione*," the electoral weight determined the proportion of spoils that went to each party. Parties then used their easy access to public resources to attract clientele of voters (Pinto de Sousa, 1999). In Spain, Heywood (1999, p. 11) observes, "the Socialist administrations of Felipe González (1982–1996) systematically used their control of the state machinery to reward party members and sympathizers by giving them jobs in the public administration." While this practice seems to have been less developed that in the Italian case, the PSOE "has been more concerned to establish links with business firms and entrepreneurs in order to secure party funding" (*Ibid.*, p. 11). In the UK, "there is no real evidence of party loyalty being rewarded with jobs in the public administration (which is widely seen as being virtually free of corruption). None the less, the resources of the state can be used to promote party interests, as appears to have been happening on an increasing scale since the 1980s" (*Ibid.*, p. 12).

Hypothesis 10. When political corruption becomes systemic, the political parties select demands in order to bring in more bribes

If the decline of appeal to the public good increases the need for personalized clienteles, corruption in turn further reduces the capacity of the parties to aggregate, articulate and filter collective interests. It radically alters the capacity of the parties "to identify and interpret the needs and desires of the

population; select and generalize those which can be expressed in political terms; propose, justify and criticize policies and measures to achieve these ends or, when necessary, to explain why they cannot be satisfied" (Pizzorno, 1992, p. 22), instead privileging the satisfaction of so-called "internal demand" (Chevallier and Loschak, 1983, p. 113). Parties pursue those decisions most "productive" in terms of bribes; the tendency is to spend most in those sectors where controls are weakest.

Research on Italy points to a fragmentation of public demand in order to satisfy particular interests while, at the same time, no wider vision of the problems develops among the various public officials involved. When political corruption is systemic, the parties' discretionary management of public spending often becomes an objective *in itself.* As the judges noticed in the case of the "Teardo Clan" of Savona, the actions of corrupt administrators can "radically and seriously distort administrative activity, works being contracted exclusively in function of exacting bribes more safely and easily and not on the basis of any actual technical requirement" (Court of Savona, 1985, p. 155). The aim of corrupt administrators is in fact to attract as many resources as possible to the areas where they have power, in order to pocket a fee for mediation in the form of a bribe and/or to gain support as a result of the effects of public investment on employment (treated as a sphere for clientelistic exchange). Public spending is therefore diverted to those sectors where gains from corruption are greatest and in which broad discretion reduces the risks involved. Little attention is paid to whether these works or services serve the needs of the collectivity. It is not even necessary that they be completed or brought into use, as demonstrated by the countless projects never finished or never actually used. Public demand may remain unsatisfied in this context if the politicians involved do not find the amount offered by way of bribes sufficient.

How political parties help the spreading of corruption: some concluding remarks

The vicious circles I have described are related to the active role political parties play in the development of corruption. Our hypotheses apply, in fact, not to occasional, petty corruption, but only to "systemic corruption," when "the illicit becomes the norm and . . . corruption is so common and institutionalized that those behaving illegally are rewarded and those continuing to accept the older norms penalized" (Caiden and Caiden, 1977, p. 306).

The Italian case shows that political parties have occupied civil society not in order to realize long-term political programs but with the aim of facilitating the extraction of a parasitic rent. The "occupation of the public

administration," in fact, allows the parties to secure continuity to the game of corruption through its diffusion in every geographical area, in the various public bodies and in the different sectors of the public administration. Whoever respects the unlawful agreements can continue to do business with the public administration; anyone who opts out on a given occasion will be permanently excluded from the market for public works. Controlling the nominations to public bodies, the parties can generalize the *kickback*, transforming corruption into an established practice with accepted norms, at the same time guaranteeing the continuity of the system over time despite changes in the political personnel of the public administration. The parties assume, that is to say, the *function of guarantors of the illegal bargain*, participating in those operations demanding a "certification of trust: in other words, the promises of others, requiring to be guaranteed in some way, are used to obtain a benefit" (Pizzorno, 1992, p. 31).

Parties are able to reward those who collaborate and to punish those who are not willing to play the corrupt game. Like all illegal transactions, the corrupt transaction is characterized by a particular deficit of trust: in fact, while in a legal transaction the law protects the contracting parties against possible transgressions, in illegal markets other actors must assume the role of guarantor. The political parties represent one of these actors whose function is to reduce the costs and risks of illegal business. The party presence in the public administration offers the various participants in occult transactions the possibility of *distributing sanctions*, such as exclusion from the corrupt game: "On the territory there is a network of political machines aimed at making widespread, continuous and reciprocally protected corrupt exchanges" (Belligni, 1995, p. 178). In the circumstances of illegality associated with occult transactions, the political parties can be likened to a credit agency managing trust between the various parties involved (Pizzorno, 1992, pp. 32–33). Given their widespread power of nominating the upper levels of public bodies, the parties can "sanction particular transactions thanks to their punitive power over political administrators and private individuals, guaranteeing the fulfillment of secret agreements and the overall functioning of the illegal market within distributive 'norms' created over time" (Vannucci, 1993, p. 85; also Vannucci, 1999).

Moreover, the corrupt parties provided socialization to the rules of the illegal game, permitting the system of occult transaction to expand. Parties facilitate corruption by reducing the moral barrier against illegal actions:

> Political party membership, and the experience of political life in general, also has secondary socializing effects which become constitutive of a person's identity and therefore of their moral principles. Someone belonging to a political association can receive recognition for: technical or cultural abilities; loyalty, or conformism, in ideological commitment; loyalty to a

> particular leader; astuteness, aggressivity or lack of scruples in "taking out" adversaries; capacity for forming links with the wider society and bringing in money for party funds or other kinds of contribution; or, naturally, some combination of these qualities. The "moral quality" of associated life will vary according to the prevailing criteria for recognition. The more an individual's activity and relations are restricted to the concerns of party life the more the identifications on which identity is modeled will reflect its "moral quality," and on this will depend the moral cost of corruption. The more corruption is diffuse the more political parties themselves function as agencies for socialization in illegality, reducing the moral cost paid by their members for participation in corrupt practices (Pizzorno, 1992, p. 47).

The aim of this paper has been to put forward some hypotheses on the development of corruption and its interaction with political parties and party systems. In particular, I have discussed some results emerging from research on the Italian case, comparing them to evidence from other countries. Although by no way systematic, the comparison with other cases helped to specify some hypotheses. As it is often the case with comparative politics, one of the most important result of the first attempt to go beyond the single case study is the emergence of a need for a more refined definition of the concept of corruption, and the development of typologies for the different forms of the phenomenon. This is a main task for future comparative research on corruption.

A second concluding remark is in order. The research on the Italian case indicated the insufficiency of causal explanations, in particular for long-lasting and complex phenomena such as corruption. This attempt to generalize beyond the Italian case also supports the view that we cannot understand systemic corruption without the combined analysis not only of preconditions for corruption, but also of the action of the corrupt institutions to reproduce the preconditions for their own development. The comparative analysis seems to confirm that some characteristics of the political parties and party systems – such as cost of politics, cartel parties, organizational fragmentation, occupation of the public administration, weak competition between government and opposition, and the like seem to favor corruption. We must add, however that corruption in turn transforms parties and party systems: it increases the cost of politics, reduces the capacity of political parties to form collective identities, introduces centrifugal tendencies inside the party, strengthens the party grasp on the public administrations, spreads clientelistic relationships, attracts business politicians, and enforces the power of the hidden party structures. When political corruption is systemic, political parties act as guarantors of the illegal exchanges, socialize their members to illegality, and sanction illegal transactions – all in order to reduce the risks involved in corrupt exchanges.

Notes

1. Among others, the contribution to the conference on political parties and corruption, that Arnold Heidenheimer and myself organized at the Robert Schuman Centre of the European University Institute in March 1999, covering countries such as France, Belgium, Portugal, Spain, Great Britain, Japan, Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Venezuela.
2. A strong relation between irregular campaign financing and political corruption was found also in Brazil (Fleisher, 1997). *Viceversa*, the low costs of electoral campaigns in Great Britain have been quoted to explain low level of corruption in that country (Adonis, 1997).
3. Italy has long been considered the paradigmatic case of polarised pluralism, characterised by a plurality of political parties, the existence of anti-system parties, a division into two hostile ideological camps and a dynamic of centrifugal competition (Sartori, 1970).
4. *Viceversa*, in Chile the presence of strong ideological cleavages may explain why "Chile stands out as a country in which corruption is not perceived as widespread as in the rest of Latin America" (Colazingari, 1998, p. 6).
5. In Japan, in fact, "The incredibly high cost of political campaigning and the blatant illegality of many campaign practices discourages voters from working actively in elections, thereby impelling Japanese political candidates to develop their personal support association, known as *koenkai*, which are manned by political pros, while providing services to mass constituencies much in the manner of traditional American urban machine politics" (Macdougall, 1988, p. 205).
6. For example, see Frognier (1986) on Belgium; Roth (1989) and Seibel (1997) on Germany; Jiménez Sanchez (1995, 1996a and 1996b) on Spain.

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