

# The gospel truths of Italian media bias

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SAGGI

*Il dibattito italiano sulla parzialità politica nei media ci ha fornito una serie di ipotesi, che sono ampiamente condivise e possono essere messe alla prova, su (1) la direzione della parzialità di ciascuna rete, e (2) l'ingerenza politica nella Rai. I dati raccolti dall'Agcom mostrano che le opinioni correnti sulla direzione della parzialità di ciascuna rete, intesa come il divario tra la quantità di screen time affidata ad entrambe le coalizioni, risultano confermate. L'ingerenza governativa, però – che si manifesta attraverso le nomine del consiglio di amministrazione della Rai –, non ha alterato i modelli di parzialità già esistenti nelle reti pubbliche. Le polemiche sulle nomine Rai dunque possono essere un segno che il ceto politico sia più interessato alle conseguenze distributive di tali nomine che al loro impatto sull'imparzialità e la correttezza del giornalismo.*

**Keywords:** Political press parallelism, television news, screen time, public service broadcasting, bias

## 1. Introduction

The political role of the news media is an important topic in all advanced democracies. In Italy, it is also a source of repeated, ill-tempered and unproductive debate. Politicians routinely criticise journalists for not reporting or down-playing events which they judge to be important. Networks have also been criticised for “censuring” particular comedians accused of politically-motivated satire, or for attempting to promote social causes through their light entertainment programming<sup>2</sup>.

The salience of this debate can in part be explained by the consider-

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2 As examples of the first category, see Rai President Petruccioli's recent *mea culpa* for the lack of direct coverage of Romano Prodi's speech to the Senate of February 2007 (“In Rai niente diretta, Petruccioli si scusa”, *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 28<sup>th</sup> February 2007), or the controversy of the coverage of the twin manifestations of the centre-right in December 2006. As an example of the second, see any of the chapters in Travaglio and Gomez (2004). As an example of the third, see recent criticism in the *Osservatore Romano* of two Rai dramas – *Padre delle spose* and *Un medico in famiglia* – featuring a gay couple (*Osservatore Romano*, 10<sup>th</sup> February 2007).

able conflict of interest posed by having the owner of three of the seven main television networks as leader of the opposition and erstwhile prime minister (Hine, 2002). It is also, however, part of the process of re-adjustment which followed the end of the First Republic and which has been seen in so many other aspects of Italian politics. In the closing years of the First Republic (1987-92), the political orientation of the three Rai channels was a known quantity, fixed by an implicit agreement between the principal parties of the *arco costituzionale*. With the transition to a bipolar party system with majoritarian elements, the political orientation of these channels has been put into question. Politicians therefore have greater reason to question the orientation of these channels and, to the extent that it is effective, to criticise them. Consequently, even without Berlusconi's "discesa in campo", debate about patterns of bias in Rai – and *a fortiori* about the media in general – would probably still exist.

This debate has produced much heat but little light. This is despite the existence of monthly data giving detailed information on the screen-time given over to political parties and their representatives, data which is collected by the sectoral regulator Agcom, and which has so far only been used by scholars interested in the electoral effects of differences in coverage (Sani, 2001). Of course, to quote a director of one of Rai's news bulletins, "these data are not the Holy Gospels. They must be interpreted"<sup>3</sup>. This article is therefore an attempt to interpret these data in the light of certainly widely held beliefs about the patterns of partisan bias in Italian television news. Some of these beliefs are remnants of the First Republic; others are more recent. In general, I find that patterns of bias are structurally similar to those found in the First Republic: RaiTre continues to give a greater share of its screen-time to parties of the left, RaiUno remains the most "governmental" of the three networks, and RaiDue is most likely to reward the minor parties of the governing coalition. Contrary to received wisdom, the centre-right was not able to change Rai's news coverage to its benefit. This suggests that political parallelism, once established, cannot easily be altered within a single legislative term.

## 2. Conventional wisdom about Italian television news

The parallelism between the party system and the media system – at least within Rai – was comparatively strong, though it did vary over time. During the period of "iron-clad *lottizzazione*", the first channel was given over the Christian Democrats, the second channel to the secular parties of government, and the third channel to the Communist party (Murialdi, 1997). That

3 "La polemica sulla Rai", *Il Tempo*, 9th August 2006.

is, there was a tendency “for the career paths of journalists and other media personnel to be shaped by their political affiliations” (Hallin and Mancini, 2004: 28), such that (notionally) Christian Democratic journalists went to work for RaiUno, and (notionally) Communist journalists went to work for RaiTre. This process generated increasing returns. First, as the political complexion of one channel became more marked, journalists with competing political views were less likely to seek employment there. Second, should journalists with competing political views find employment in a particular channel, the influence of the *comitati di redazione* over the bulletin’s editorial line would mean that they would be less likely to succeed in changing the complexion of the bulletin.

Given the logic of increasing returns, we should expect that RaiTre and Tg3 are still full of left-wing journalists, and consequently are more likely to give screen-time to parties of the left than of the right compared to either RaiUno/Tg1 or RaiDue/Tg2. Since RaiDue was associated with an ideologically mixed group of parties (ranging from the Pli to the Psi and Psdi), we have no expectations about whether it will give more time to left-wing parties than Tg1. Let us call this the *political spectrum hypothesis*. Restated more formally, the political spectrum hypothesis states that:

- where  $l$  is the screen time given over to parties of the left, and  $r$  is the screen time given over to parties of the right,  $l/r$  will be greater for RaiTre and Tg3 than for either RaiUno and Tg1 or RaiDue and Tg2.

The role of Tg1 was more complex than that of Tg2. As the Christian Democratic telegiornale, it could be expected to give a disproportionate share of screen-time to that dominant governing party. Compatible with this positioning on the left-right spectrum was the ambition of the channel to maintain its position as the “telegiornale of record”, a strategy which led to its giving a disproportionate amount of time over to politicians in their role as representatives of the government. As the channel of the lesser parties of government, Tg2 could be expected to share the same orientation. Call the *governmentality hypothesis* the following:

- where  $g$  is the time given over to the Prime Minister, the Presidents of the two chambers of Parliament, and the Government,  $g / (l+r)$  will be greater for RaiUno and Tg1 than for RaiDue and Tg2, and greater for RaiDue and Tg2 than for RaiTre and Tg3.

Although RaiDue’s position was ambiguous from the point of view of ideology, its political function was clear: posts in it were used to reward the smaller parties of government. Again, we may expect that RaiDue now plays an analogous role to that which it played in the First Republic, by giving more screen-time to the minor parties of government. Certainly, this seems true for *Alleanza Nazionale*, who were able to count on Mauro Mazza, former director of party newspaper *Il Secolo d’Italia*, as director of Tg2; Paolo Murialdi went so far as to call them “the true bosses of the

company” (Murialdi, 2003: 18). Call this the *compensation hypothesis*. Formally,

- where *maj* is the time given over to the major party of government, and *min* the time given over to minor parties of government, *min / maj* will be greater for RaiDue and Tg2 than for RaiUno or Tg1, or for RaiTre or Tg3.

The *ideological spectrum*, *governmentality*, and *compensation hypotheses* are all derived from beliefs about the three Rai channel’s behaviour during the period of the First Republic. At the same time, new beliefs about the role of government influence cross-cut traditional beliefs about the relative bias of each channel. Although the formal role of government in Rai’s governance is limited to approval of certain commercial operations and decisions on the value of the licence fee, there is a widespread belief that the government enjoys extensive informal influence over the broadcaster through partisan ties with members of the governing board. Former President of Rai, Lucia Annunziata claimed “to know for sure that Berlusconi picks up the phone and calls board members to suggest names and influence nomination decisions” (Bruzzone, 2004). Leaders of both coalitions have claimed, when in opposition, that government parties turn Rai channels against them. Berlusconi, before, during, and after the 2001 election campaign, complained about the “militant occupation of Rai by the left”. Romani Prodi, prior to the 2006 election campaign, complained that “Tv was not adopting an impartial role”, and that both Mediaset and Rai were unfairly treating Prodi’s centre-left coalition (Bruzzone, 2005).

The most commonly cited means of government influence is the through the appointments made by the Rai board. Until 2004, all five members of the Rai board were appointed by the Presidents of the two chambers of Parliament. The Presidents, typically members of the governing majority, selected boards with a majority of members who could be described as close to the centre-right majority. For two years, the majority was 3-2, with one centre-right nominee (Antonio Baldassarre, a former Constitutional Court judge) holding the Presidency of the board. For one year, the Presidency was given to a nominee close to the left (Lucia Annunziata), with the remaining four nominees close to the right. Annunziata subsequently resigned in frustration with the other members of the Board, who she saw as too close to Berlusconi.

Given the limited tenure of board members (two years), the government is typically able – through the Presidents of the two Chambers – to work with a board with a similar majority. During periods of alternation in government, however, this is not the case. The Berlusconi government formed after the elections of 2001 had to wait until the end of the term of the left-appointed board, led by constitutional jurist Roberto Zaccaria, before they could nominate a board with a right-wing majority. We should therefore expect significant changes in coverage to follow the 2002 replacement of the

Zaccaria CdA, nominated under a centre-left government, with the Baldassarre CdA, nominated under a centre-right government; and we should expect these changes to benefit the parliamentary majority and the government. Let us call this the *take-over hypothesis*:

- during the period of right-wing government,  $(g + r)/l$  will be greater during the period of the Baldassarre board than during the period of the Zaccaria board

Expectations regarding patterns of bias in the Mediaset channels are not so well grounded in popular knowledge or in politicians' statements. There is, however, a general belief that the Mediaset channels, in virtue of their ownership by Silvio Berlusconi, erstwhile prime minister and leader of the centre-right coalition, will be biased towards Silvio Berlusconi in particular and his centre-right coalition in general. Beliefs about individual Mediaset channels are not systematic, but depend often on the individual directors, such as Tg4's Emilio Fede, who has made no secret of his friendship with Silvio Berlusconi, and who has been fined multiple times by Agcom. The two *ownership hypotheses* are therefore as follows:

- the ratio  $l:r$  will be smaller for any Mediaset channel than for any Rai channel

- the ratio  $l:r$  will be smaller for all Mediaset channels considered together than for all Rai channels considered together

### 3. Defending screen-time as an indicator of bias

So far, I have talked about patterns of bias, and have used patterns of distribution of screen-time as an indicator of bias. The concept is linked to the concept of political parallelism – the presence in a single channel of a large number of journalists of one particular party would be innocuous if it did not lead to a distinctive pattern of output – in this case, a distinctive pattern in the distribution of screen-time. Strictly speaking, the concept I use is the concept of *relative bias*. Relative bias is bias between two or more different news outlets, and exists when, for a given unit of measurement – column inches, screen time – there is a differential between news outlets in the percentage distribution of this unit between two or more specified social actors – in the case of Italian politics, between different parties or governmental actors (Klein and Macoby, 1954).

Bias need not occur through differential distribution of screen-time. There is also an ordinary language understanding of bias as “a deviation from an unattainable but theoretically conceivable condition of unbiased” (Williams, 1975), which, at times, shades into related concepts of fairness and neutrality. As an example of bias in this ordinary language sense: two parties may be allocated the same amount of screen-time; but a third por-

tion of screen-time may be given over to a civil society figure whose comments support the position of the first party; or the time dedicated to the first party may be dedicated to an exposition of the party's policies, whilst the time dedicated to the second party may be dedicated to investigating the party's financial difficulties.

In these examples, there is a mismatch between the amount of time each party receives, and the benefit it gains from it. In the first example, the division of screen-time between the two parties was equal, but the first party benefited from screen-time given over to a non-party actor. *Where a large percentage of screen-time is given over to non-party actors, relative bias between parties may be less useful.* In the second example, more coverage about one party's financial difficulties is actively worse for that party. Therefore, *where coverage of one party is often cast in a critical light*, through the use of strong direct questioning or voice-overs, *relative bias may not tell us much about patterns of bias in the broader, every-day sense.*

I argue that these two conditions are rarely met in the *telegiornali* due to two historical features of the practice and principle of Italian journalism – the centrality of parties, and the principle of pluralism.

#### *The centrality of parties*

I argue that Italian journalists are, in comparison to journalists elsewhere, disproportionately likely to emphasise the role of political parties in, first, their coverage of politics, but also, second, in their news coverage in general. This tendency may result from features external to journalism: parties were, and remain, central to the Italian polity to a greater degree than in many other advanced democracies. I argue, though, that there are reasons specific to the relationship between the parties and journalists which can explain the centrality of parties. These are largely due to the initially limited market for journalism in Italy. With low levels of literacy and newspaper readership, newspapers reported on a restricted elite, for a restricted elite. Links between journalists and the political elite were close, with deleterious consequences for journalistic independence. These links were often financial, with press subsidies to the largest newspapers abolished in 1987 (World Association of Newspapers, 1998:135), and subsidies to small and sometimes not-so-small newspapers affiliated with at least two parliamentarians abolished only in 2000<sup>4</sup>. The consequence of these links was that the journalist considered himself to be writing for a restricted audience of around 1,500 politicians (Forcella, 2004 [1959]), and so concentrated on the activities of the parties in order to target that limited audience.

4 Art. 153 of legge 388/2000.

Whilst the situation described by Forcella has perforce changed with the development of commercial and public television, the links between journalism and politics remain strong, with consequences for journalistic output. Because journalists are dominated by politicians, politicians, as a class, consequently dominate the news: one comparative study of the mid-eighties found that Rai's news output is focused on parties, rather than government, public administration, or civil society groups. Writing more recently, Mancini (2000: 320) notes the tendency for "other kinds of topics and issues [to be] dealt with primarily by positioning them within the political or ideological context". Consequently, it is less likely that a significant percentage of screen-time will be devoted to non-party actors; the concept of relative bias therefore remains useful.

### *The principle of pluralism*

Where screen-time for a given party is critical, the concept of relative bias is of little use. I argue that this condition is rarely met in the *telegiornale*. I do not necessarily mean that Italian journalism is not critical – though for a critique of lap-dog journalism, see Mazzoleni (2006) – rather, that journalists prefer to let others criticise.

When considering critical coverage, we must note that journalists – and particularly journalists working for public service broadcasters – must be seen to be impartial and fair, and not to invent unfavourable criticism or questioning *ex nihilo*. We can therefore say that they select potential questions or criticism from a stock of criticisms already existing in the public domain. In voicing that criticism or detailing that question, however, they face a choice between expressing the criticism or question in their own words, and showing original footage of the individual or organisation making that criticism.

I argue that the principle of pluralism explains why journalists do not re-express or re-interpret criticism, preferring instead to re-broadcast the original source. As Zaccaria (2004) notes, pluralism is the most important concept in Italian media law. It is the "obligation to give voice [*l'obbligo di dar voce*] to all or the largest possible number of opinions, tendencies or currents of political, social and cultural thought present in society". Other principles – objectivity, fairness, and impartiality – have been subordinated to this principle. The genesis of the principle lies in the Communist Party's repeated objections to Christian Democrat control. Their complaint was not that journalists talked about the Party in a negative fashion, but rather that journalists did not talk about the party at all. Repairing this imbalance came to mean, not that journalists should try harder in making syntheses that represent all sides equally, but that as many parties as reasonably possible should be shown when discussing a particular issue.

This tradition – as well as the difficulties inherent in representing a fragmented multi-party system – means that Italian broadcast journalism is “bitty”, with each political story (and some non-political stories) consisting of small slices of video of exponents of the several parties, “una jam-session fatta di dichiarazioni di una dozzina di leader” (Tonello, 2000: 269). Consequently, the percentage of time which is solely devoted to journalistic comment is low; and the concept of relative bias remains particularly applicable to the Italian case.

#### 4. Data

Data on the parties’ screen-time comes from the Italian communications regulatory, the *Autorità per il Garante nelle Comunicazioni* (Agcom), which is required by law<sup>5</sup> to monitor political broadcasting and ensure that broadcasters follow laws governing equality of access during election periods. Agcom has interpreted this requirement in expansive fashion. The authority publishes information on politicians’ television appearances on a monthly basis, except during electoral periods, where information is released fortnightly. Each monthly summary covers the news bulletins (*telegiornali*) of all free-to-air channels, and, where relevant, current-affairs programmes which feature politicians. Information on the *telegiornali* is disaggregated according to the type of coverage: *tempo di parola*, or time in which a particular politician is speaking; *tempo di notizia*, or time in which a particular politician is covered by the bulletin; and *tempo di antenna*, which is the sum of *tempo di parola* and *tempo di notizia*. Each monthly summary lists each party’s cumulative screen time. The screen time of certain office-holders – the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, the Presidents of the two houses of Parliament, government representatives, and European Union officials – is counted separately. This considerable body of data spans the periods January – October 2001 and May 2002 – 2006, and is published on Agcom’s website, [www.agcom.it](http://www.agcom.it). These monthly summaries were processed and turned into a single data-set.

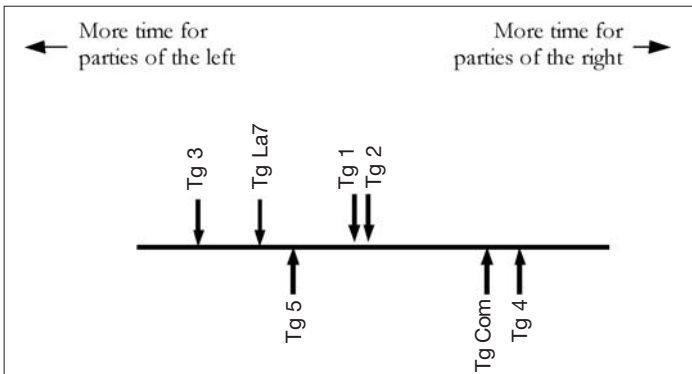
5 Legge 31 luglio 1997, no. 249, Art. 1, §6(b)(9).

Table 1- *Tempo di antenna* for the seven main news bulletins, outside of election periods, January 2001 to March 2006

	Left share (%)	Right share	Gov't share (%)
Tg1	40.66	30.87	28.47
Tg2	39.96	31.13	28.91
Tg3	49.53	28.68	21.78
Tg4	19.08	28.09	52.83
Tg5	39.14	29.69	31.17
TgCom, St. Aperto	19.79	32.71	47.50
Tg La7	42.24	28.15	29.61
Total	34.37	30.16	35.47

Note: figures exclude coverage during election periods.  
 Source: www.agcom.it/

Figure 1



Note: represents graphically the ratio between tempo di antenna given over to parties of the right and of the left.

## 5. Findings

Table 1 shows the monthly average shares of *tempo di antenna* across all Rai (Tg1, Tg2, and Tg3) and Mediaset (Tg4, Tg5, and TgCom/Studio Aperto) news bulletins. The first column gives the average share for parties of the left, the second and third columns for parties of the right and governmental actors respectively. The ratio between the first two columns is depicted graphically in Figure 1.

I first consider patterns of bias between left and right. The data tend to support the political spectrum hypothesis that Tg3 is more biased to the left than Tg1, and that Tg1 is more biased to the left than Tg2. On aver-

Table 2 - Multiple comparisons between Rai channels using Bonferroni test

Dependent Variable	(I) channel	(J) channel	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
<b>Left-wing share</b>	Tg1	Tg2	0.01	0.02	1.000
		Tg3	-.08877(*)	0.02	0.001
	Tg2	Tg1	-0.01	0.02	1.000
		Tg3	-.09574(*)	0.02	0.000
	Tg3	Tg1	.08877(*)	0.02	0.001
		Tg2	.09574(*)	0.02	0.000
<b>Right-wing share</b>	Tg1	Tg2	0	0.03	1.000
		Tg3	0.02	0.03	1.000
	Tg2	Tg1	0	0.03	1.000
		Tg3	0.02	0.03	1.000
	Tg3	Tg1	-0.02	0.03	1.000
		Tg2	-0.02	0.03	1.000
<b>Government share</b>	Tg1	Tg2	0	0.03	1.000
		Tg3	0.07	0.03	1.000
	Tg2	Tg1	0	0.03	1.000
		Tg3	0.07	0.03	0.766
	Tg3	Tg1	-0.07	0.03	1.000
		Tg2	-0.07	0.03	0.766

\* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

Note: differences between other channels not reported here.

age, Tg3 gave almost 9% more of its total screen-time to parties of the left than Tg1, and approximately 9.5% more than Tg2.

ANOVA and post-hoc *t*-tests reported in Table 2 confirmed that the difference between Tg3 and the other two Rai news bulletins was statistically significant at the 0.01 level, giving reason to believe that these differences are not artefactual. (Given that the data represent the entire population and not a sample thereof, statistical significance tests are used as an indicator of the reliability of the conclusion). Differences between Tg1 and Tg2, however, were not found to be statistically significant. Support for the political spectrum hypothesis comes entirely from variation in the left's share of screen-time. There was no statistically significant variation in the right's share of *tempo di antenna* across the three Rai news bulletins.

This finding is strengthened when we consider *tempo di parola*, or the

Table 3 - *Tempo di parola* for the seven main news bulletins, outside of election periods, January 2001 to March 2006

	Left share (%)	Right share	Gov't share (%)
Tg1	44.07	32.44	23.48
Tg2	43.27	33.69	23.04
Tg3	57.84	26.52	15.63
Tg4	14.80	31.60	53.61
Tg5	45.16	27.06	27.78
TgCom, St. Aperto	22.38	34.57	43.05
Tg La7	52.21	28.10	19.69
Total	39.62	30.64	29.74

Note: figures exclude coverage during election periods.  
Source: [www.agcom.it/](http://www.agcom.it/)

time for which politicians are actually speaking. Table 3 shows the average share of *tempo di parola* across all channels. Whilst differences between Tg1 and Tg2 are not significant, Tg3 gave significantly more time to the left; and this effect was stronger than when considering *tempo di antenna* alone. Interestingly, this finding did not extend to Rai current affairs programmes, which are produced by separate teams (data for which are not reported here).

Continuing with bias between left and right, the first ownership hypothesis – that all Mediaset channels would display a greater bias towards the right than any Rai channel – is not supported. Considering *tempo di notizia*, Mediaset’s Tg5 favoured the left relative to the right slightly more than Tg2. The same cannot be said for TgCom and Tg4, which gave significantly less time to the left than the Rai news bulletins. This picture is essentially the same when we look at *tempo di parola* (Table 3). The more general ownership hypothesis – that the Mediaset channels taken together are more biased towards the right – is confirmed.

When considering the “governmentality” of the news bulletins, the hypothesis that the percentage of screen time given over to the government will be higher on Tg1 than on Tg2, and higher on Tg2 than on Tg3 is not confirmed for *tempo di antenna*. Differences between Tg1 and Tg2 were in the opposite direction to that expected, and whilst Table 1 does show that Tg3 gave less time to governmental actors than either Tg1 or Tg2, this difference was not significant.<sup>6</sup> However, there was a difference in terms of *tempo di parola*, with Tg1 giving more time over to the government than

6 This may be a statistical artefact, since the variable for government share has a flatter distribution than the comparable variables for either left or right shares.

either Tg2 or Tg3. Differences between Tg2 and Tg3, although in the expected direction, were not statistically significant. Again, these differences did not reappear when considering screen time on other Rai programmes, which are made by different teams.

The *compensation hypothesis* – that Tg2 and, to a lesser extent, Tg3, would give more time over to junior members in the coalition – is not con-

Table 4 - *Tempo di antenna* for the seven main news bulletins, outside of election periods, May 2001 to March 2006

	Forza Italia share (%)	AN, UDC, LN share (%)
Tg1	7.96	8.9
Tg2	6.63	10.08
Tg3	6.53	10.49
Tg4	10.59	5.54
Tg5	6.32	9.39
TgCom, St. Aperto	10.6	7.69
Tg La7	5.79	10.4

Note: figures report data after formation of Berlusconi II government.  
Source: [www.agcom.it/](http://www.agcom.it/)

firmed. Although Tg2 and Tg3 do in fact give a higher percentage of screen time to the Alleanza Nazionale, Udc, Lega Nord, the differences between these two channels and Tg1 were not found to be statistically significant. More significant differences obtained when comparing Tg4 and TgCom with all other channels.

I turn finally to the issue of longitudinal changes in screen-time distribution: in particular, changes in distribution between the last administrative council selected by the left (that of Roberto Zaccaria), and the first administrative council selected by the right (led by Antonio Baldassarre)<sup>7</sup>. This comparison is made more difficult by changes in the data during the period 2001 – 2002, when Agcom extended the range of governmental actors whose screen-time was recorded. Consequently, all channels – including Mediaset ones – seem to give less screen time to governmental actors during the early months of the Berlusconi government. Nevertheless, the percentage shares of all screen time under the Zaccaria and Baldassarre

7 I choose this comparison because the two boards are closest together in time and therefore least subject to changes in the coding scheme or longer-term changes in the control group of telegiornale operated by Mediaset. However, the results obtained by comparing with the Zaccaria board with subsequent boards are not substantially different. In particular, there is no significant relationship between the interaction term and the ratio of screen-time between left and right

Table 5 - Comparison of *tempo di notizia* between Zaccaria and Baldassarre CdA during the Berlusconi government.

Channel	Period	Left share (%)	Right share (%)	
Tg1	Zaccaria CdA	51.78	29.42	18.80
	Baldassarre CdA	38.61	23.92	37.47
Tg2	Zaccaria CdA	58.62	23.66	17.72
	Baldassarre CdA	39.20	23.50	37.30
Tg3	Zaccaria CdA	68.37	19.87	11.75
	Baldassarre CdA	51.88	20.96	27.15
Tg4	(Zaccaria CdA)	27.05	23.85	49.10
	(Baldassarre CdA)	14.88	16.09	69.03
Tg5	(Zaccaria CdA)	58.96	25.18	15.86
	(Baldassarre CdA)	40.99	18.69	40.32
TGCom, St. Aperto	(Zaccaria CdA)	38.81	26.96	34.23
	(Baldassarre CdA)	18.95	30.79	50.25
Tg La7	(Zaccaria CdA)	64.61	24.83	10.56
	(Baldassarre CdA)	41.69	20.47	37.84
Total	Zaccaria	52.60	24.82	22.57
	Baldassarre	35.20	22.05	42.75

Source: [www.agcom.it](http://www.agcom.it)

Councils for the period June 2001 – March 2003 are reported in Table 5. This comparison enables us to compare coverage of the Berlusconi government under two different boards.

The ratio between the third and fourth columns – between the left's share and the right's – is greater for the period of the Zaccaria CdA, for all three Rai channels. However, this is less an effect of the appointment of the Baldassarre CdA, and more an effect of comparing two different time periods: the same effect was observed in three of the four *non-Rai* channels. In order to disaggregate the effects of changes in coverage from changes in management, a multiple regression analysis was carried out using three variables: a first dichotomous variable, *cda*, for the period under examination (either the period of the Zaccaria CdA or the period of the Baldassarre CdA); a second dichotomous variable (*rai*) which is set to one for all Rai channels, and zero for all other channels; and a final interaction term, which is equal to  $cda * rai$ . The effect of this interaction term will allow us to say whether the change in management, as opposed to the longitudinal changes in coverage, were responsible for the left's greater share of screen-time for the period of the Zaccaria CdA.

Table 6 reports the results of this regression analysis. The results show

Table 6 - Regression analysis of cda, rai and cda \* rai on the ratio l:r, all types of coverage

Model		df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	3	15.73	8.33	.000(a)
	Residual	522	1.89		
	Total	525			

a Predictors: (Constant), interterm, cda, rai

b Dependent Variable: Irratio

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	2.690	0.286		9.413	0.000
cda	-0.954	0.334	-0.354	-2.860	0.005
Rai	0.075	0.437	0.031	0.173	0.863
cda * rai	0.191	0.510	0.075	0.376	0.708

a Dependent Variable: Ratio between left and right

that the change from the period July 2001 to March 2002, to March 2002 – March 2003, was associated with a large drop in the ratio l:r; but that the separate effect of new Rai management (represented by the interaction term) had no statistically significant effect.

## 6. Discussion

The first key node of the analysis concerns the differences between channels. Taking Rai news bulletins, some vestigial traces of *lottizzazione* remain. The same TG3 that was baptised “TeleKabul” is still disproportionately likely to broadcast left-wing voices and remains unsurpassed in this respect. If the cession of RaiTre to the Pci was the compensation paid for losses in other arenas of Italian politics, then it seems that the compensation remains, even if the original losses – and indeed the rules under which they were incurred – have passed on.

It is harder to describe the patterns which distinguish Tg and Tg2, or RaiUno and RaiDue. This is partly to be expected: RaiTre had a clearer partisan profile than Tg2, which was a grab-bag of different parties. The link between RaiTre and the left-wing has also been better maintained than the link between RaiUno and Christian Democracy: the relationship be-

tween the old Pci and its successor parties is clearer than the relationship between the Dc and its successor parties, split as they are between centre-left and centre-right coalitions. Consequently, whatever made RaiUno and RaiDue distinct during the First Republic, it is less likely that it should have survived into the Second Republic.

There are some differences: RaiUno is more likely to feature government ministers on its current affairs programmes, and gives more screen-time to the largest government party, *Forza Italia*. These differences, however, might not be the persisting effects *lottizzazione*, but can be explained in a less sinister fashion by the tradition and audience of the two channels. Tg1 has always tried to be the “*telegiornale* of record”; it is therefore natural that they should try to seek more government spokespersons to feature on their bulletins. Additionally, RaiUno has a much higher audience share than RaiDue; government ministers (and, to a lesser extent, high-ranking members of *Forza Italia*), as valuable media commodities, are more likely to (a) seek out and (b) obtain spots on networks with higher audience shares.

The above suggests that there is some substantial continuity between the First and Second Republics in terms of the political parallelism between different political areas and their respective *telegiornali*. The same is not true for Rai’s current affairs programmes. This difference suggests that the old patterns of *lottizzazione* have been kept in play by the structure of the *telegiornali*: in particular, the *comitato di redazione*, which gives journalists a strong say over the editorial line of the *telegiornale*, may make reducing already-established political parallelism more difficult. If journalists on the news bulletins see managerial changes as political purges, as they did during the short-lived administrative councils of the early nineties (Murialdi, 1994), then they can exert pressure through the *comitati di redazione* to maintain their current political affiliation. Journalists with current affairs programmes, lacking such a structure, are less likely to retain a specific political affiliation.

Appropriately, the Mediaset channels form a mirror image to those operated by Rai. One outlier (ReteQuattro) flanks two channels closer to the overall mean, suggesting “l’importanza di avere Fede” (Grandi and Franceschetti, 2000).

As for longitudinal differences, the data show that the percentage of screen time given by Rai to the left and the right did not change significantly between the Zaccaria and Baldassarre boards. This finding is not particularly surprising in the light of the above discussion. The between-channel differences in the percentage distribution of screen time that I have demonstrated are the result of several years’ of relative consensus on the political orientation of the three Rai channels. Consequently, whether by self-selection or through the influence of recruitment mechanisms, left-

leaning journalists have gravitated towards Tg3, and more centrist journalists to Tg1 and Tg2. Given the extensive autonomy enjoyed by journalists' editorial committees, it would be surprising if the cumulative effect of several years' worth of recruitment decisions could be undone in the space of months by an incoming board.

Nevertheless, this finding seems to run contrary to the opinion, held by many, that Silvio Berlusconi enjoyed effective control over Rai through the period 2002 – 2006 (Stille, 2006). It is, of course, possible that Berlusconi did enjoy effective control, and that this control is not demonstrated by the available data. This may occur through one of two routes. First, Rai journalists, anticipating the appointment of a new board dominated by the centre-right, have altered their news coverage to favour the right, thereby hoping to gain favour from incoming right-wing board members. Consequently, although Rai, from the election of 2001 to the new appointments of 2002, was headed by an appointee of the centre-left, it behaved as if it was already under the effective control of the centre-right. We should not therefore expect significant differences between the dog days of the Zaccaria board and that which followed. A second possibility is that although Berlusconi did enjoy effective control, this control did not result in bias in the distribution of screen-time, but a more sophisticated form of bias which is not captured by my analysis.

The first route is unlikely. Acrimony between the centre-right and Rai grew between the election of 2001 and the replacement of the Zaccaria CdA in 2002. Centre-right politicians accused “biased” Rai employees of engaging in a “kamikaze” attack against the centre-right government, seeding the schedules with programmes which attacked the centre-right under the mask of satire (Travaglio and Gomez, 2004). This suggests that, if the centre-right enjoyed effective control over Rai, it did not know or believe that it did.

The second route – that Berlusconi's effective control was remarkably sophisticated – cannot be dismissed. Critics of Berlusconi's television empire have noted his remarkable ability to build television schedules which cultivate a market-oriented, anti-political discourse (Ginsborg, 2005). In the light of this discourse, Berlusconi's own populist discourse becomes more attractive. Thus, if Berlusconi managed to control Rai, it may have been precisely through this route of flooding television news with human interest stories.

I think there is good evidence to suggest that there has been an increase in human interest and crime stories in the telegiornale, and that this type of television news can only have increased in importance with the move of Clemente Mimun (its chief exponent) to Tg1 following the victory of the centre-right (Tonello). To quote from Murialdi again, there is “l'impressione che buona parte dei giornalisti Rai, anche quelli legati ai nuovi

padroni [...] preferiscano andare via leggeri, leggeri con la cronaca nera, piuttosto che prendersi la rogna di dovere fare un pezzo politico. Di politica interna” (Murialdi, 2003: 18). Yet I do not believe that this increase justifies a continued belief in Berlusconi’s effective control. Those who would argue in this way face a quandary if they believe, as many do, that RaiTre is (relatively speaking) biased to the left, or that ReteQuattro is (relatively speaking) biased to the right. They must maintain that bias in screen time is sufficient when it comes to distinguishing bias between channels, but not sufficient when it comes to distinguishing bias between different boards.

If the operationalisation of bias I have provided is satisfactory, how then are we to explain why Italian politicians place so much importance of appointments to posts in Rai if there is little evidence that such appointments change patterns of bias?

One possibility is that politicians do in fact believe that appointments confer short-run advantage in the distribution of screen-time. This may be because of selective interpretation: politicians who believe that Rai has been “occupied” by a government of a particular hue may interpret Rai journalism in this light, emphasising those elements which support this belief and deprecating those which run contrary to it. Or, it may result from selective attention: politicians may place disproportionate weight on the presence or absence from the screen of certain “causes célèbres”. If this is the case, politicians might renounce interference in Rai in the light of new beliefs about the relative stability of shares of screen-time.

A second possibility is that politicians do not expect changes in coverage in the short-run, but are aware that one party’s repeated success in appointment battles may confer upon it an advantage. Consequently, it is in their interests to compete, even when the short-term advantages are negligible. Only if a non-interference multi-player equilibrium could be found might interference cease.

A final possibility is that political battles over appointments are not, in fact, aimed at securing better coverage, but instead represent battles over the distribution of political spoils which are *per se* valuable as a means of rewarding supporters or as a means of demonstrating political strength. If this is the case, then political interference in Rai is likely to continue as long as Italian parties feel the need to reward their clientèle, and as long as it is structurally possible for them to do so.

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