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The geographical dynamics of Italian electoral change, 1987–2001

Michael E. Shin*, John Agnew

University of California at Los Angeles, Department of Geography, 1255 Bunche Hall, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1524, USA

Abstract

Much has been written about why the old Italian party system collapsed in the early 1990s, and the various features of the one that replaced it, such as the mixed electoral system and the emergence of the regionalist party, the Northern League. Relatively little research attempts to show how old parties were replaced as the system collapsed from 1987 to 1994, and as the subsequent system emerged and consolidated between 1992 and 2001. This paper uses spatial analysis to examine the geographical pattern of support for the fading and rising parties to show how the old Italian party system was replaced. Instead of seeing the geography of voting as a reflection of underlying social cleavages, on the assumption that new parties would just slot into the electoral ‘‘spaces’’ of the old ones, we see it as a useful diagnostic that can inform how one set of parties is replaced by another.

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1. Introduction

Across elections there is always a flow of votes from one party to another, and into and out of the electorate. In voting studies there is a large literature that addresses this very question of electoral change from one election to the next (e.g., Burnham, 1970; Butler and Stokes, 1969; Caciagli and Spreafico, 1990; Katz, 1973; Key, 1955). For the most part, this body of work is premised upon two key assumptions. The first assumption is that political change usually occurs through the ideological mutation of political parties, and the second related assumption is that party representation remains constant between most elections. In other words, it is presumed that support for parties will ebb and flow as their positions on various issues change, and that existing parties that appear on the ballot in one election will also appear on the ballot in subsequent elections, *ad infinitum*. These assumptions may not be unreasonable in majoritarian electoral systems with two dominant parties, but it is certainly problematic theoretically and in relation to more complex electoral and party systems. For instance, what happens when there is a period of party-system change or in new democracies where party politics has yet to consolidate? Party systems usually disappear only with the onset of a period of dictatorship or as a result of dramatic shocks such as wars, and when they reemerge it is often in a new form as if they had been remade from scratch. After World War II countries such as Japan, France, Italy and West Germany all went through this process. Similarly, many central and eastern European countries recently

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* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 310 825 1071.

E-mail addresses: shinm@geog.ucla.edu (M.E. Shin), jagnew@geog.ucla.edu (J. Agnew).

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experienced the rebirth of party politics as part of their transitions from single-party rule (Kitschelt, 1992, 1995), and there are signs that fledgling party systems are developing in places like Afghanistan and Iraq.

As in central and eastern Europe so in Italy, the end of the cold war, which had divided post-World War II Italian politics between a dominant Christian Democratic party and the largest Communist party in the free world, combined with a corruption scandal involving the major parties of government, to precipitate the collapse of the Italian party system in the early 1990s. This collapse and the subsequent reemergence of the so-called 'second Italian republic' is well documented (e.g., Bartolini and D'Alimonte, 1995; D'Alimonte and Bartolini, 2002; Diamanti and Mannheimer, 1994; Gangemi and Riccamboni, 1997; Gundle and Parker, 1996). Most attention, however, has been given to either why the old system collapsed (the end of the Cold War, the activism of the judiciary in Milan in prosecuting corruption by the old parties, the breakdown of the system of sharing the spoils of government, etc.) or to specific features of what followed: the new electoral system of 1993 (e.g., D'Alimonte and Chiaramonte, 1995; Pappalardo, 1995); the role of Italy's wealthiest businessman, Silvio Berlusconi, in the new party system (e.g., McCarthy, 1996); the difficulty of creating a united left from left-Catholic and Communist fragments (e.g., Cartocci, 1994; Ignazi, 1992); the disruptive character of Umberto Bossi's Northern League (e.g., Diamanti, 1993, 1996); and the rehabilitation of the far right in Italian politics (e.g., Tarchi, 1997). Relatively little research shows how new political parties replaced old ones as the old system collapsed from 1987 to 1994 or how the new party system has consolidated since this dramatic period in Italian politics (but see Wellhofer, 2001).

This paper uses spatial analysis to examine the geographical patterning of support for the fading and rising parties in order to show how the Italian party system was replaced and/or reconsolidated between 1987 and 2001. Rather than seeing the geography of electoral support simply as a reflection or mapping of underlying social cleavages or transcendental issues (capital vs. labor, left vs. right, protectionist vs. free trade, etc.) in the electorate, on the assumption that the new parties would just slot into the electoral "spaces" of the old ones, the geography of voting is considered to be diagnostic of the several socio-spatial processes by which one set of parties replaced another. More precisely, we examine whether replacement is: (1) the straightforward substitution or *switching* of old parties with new ones; (2) the *splitting* of old parties among new parties; (3) the *colonizing* of areas by a new party from adjacent areas where the old one was weak; or (4) the *mobilizing* of new parties because they represent issues and ideologies that were not previously represented. The next section frames this question about how political change occurs within the existing body of work on the subject, and is followed by a brief review of the recent crisis of Italian politics. This sets the stage for the spatial analysis that serves to sharpen thinking about processes of political change and to illustrate the utility of a particular geographical framework of analysis for electoral studies.

2. Political change and party replacement, Italian style

Studies of electoral change tend to disregard how it occurs with different parties, different people and in different places, in favor of explaining why change occurred, often presuming that how it happens is geographically invariant. This presumption is often incorrect. For instance, Nardulli (1995) uses US presidential election data to illustrate clearly how the process of realignment in America was played out differently in different regions during the twentieth century. Other electoral studies also show that there are definite geographies to swing voting and ticket-splitting in places such as Germany (Gschwend et al., 2003), New Zealand (Johnston and Pattie, 1999) and Britain (Pattie and Johnston, 2003). By recognizing political change to be a geographically contingent process, further insights into both how and why such changes occur can arguably be obtained.

A period of party-system change, like that experienced by Italy in the early 1990s, is quite useful for empirically addressing how electoral change takes place because what might seem a reasonable assumption about the uniformity and spatial homogeneity of electoral swing in normal periods is now demonstrably open to doubt. The disruption of established partisan identifications allows for greater potential variance in the range of processes involved in how electoral change occurs. How votes flow from party-to-party and in and out of the electorate can no longer be presumed as geographically uniform and, analogously, as reflecting a single calculus across all voters. Answering the question why electoral change takes place, therefore, needs a more complex understanding of how it occurs that is aided by examining disruptive periods such as that in Italy between 1987 and 2001.

Periods of dramatic party system change make them ideal for examining how electoral change takes place for three reasons. First, the menu of political choice is no longer constant, so the ‘‘swing’’ from one party to another takes on a different meaning when the old party no longer exists or, even if still offering scattered candidates, is totally eclipsed by one or several new parties. Second, new parties may not necessarily represent the same cleavages, divisions, or issues upon which support for the old parties rested, so it cannot be presumed that replacement simply involves switching from a single old party to a single new one. Third and finally, new parties might concentrate their electoral efforts in different places from the old ones by ‘‘specializing’’ regionally or picking certain targeted demographic, social, and cultural constituencies for particular attention, including groups hitherto shunned or ignored.

Though there is a tradition of research on party organization and party change (e.g., Janda, 1980; Katz and Mair, 1994; Panebianco, 1988), relatively little has been written on the specific outcomes of transitions between party systems and, more specifically, on how such transitions are navigated in electoral terms. Such periods are relatively rare, particularly when wars and periods of dictatorship are excluded, but they occur and there are analogies between them and situations of dramatic electoral change involving third parties and large vote swings between previously dominant parties. The ‘remaking’ of existing major parties in the US and UK has also biased attention away from cases where new parties spring up to replace long established ones. Moreover, the cleavage and rational choice models of political behavior would both predict a tendency for replacement to be synonymous with substitution. Both perspectives see political expectations in terms of relatively fixed political-issue ‘‘spaces’’ in which the various dimensions of political choice (left/right, Catholic/anticlerical, etc.) are given. Consequently, new parties will tend to slot into electoral space more or less as substitutes for the ones that have left. This is a problematic presumption because party replacement is not exhausted by substitution.

2.1. Types of party replacement

The primary theoretical question of this paper concerns how the term ‘‘replacement’’ is understood in studies of political change. One party replacing another one in electoral competition can be thought of in terms of a number of understandings of the term replacement. In one meaning replacement is akin to *substitution* in which the new party takes over all or a large share of the votes of a previous one that has disappeared. This is the quantitative electoral sense in which the term is used by most commentators. In another related understanding, however, replacement involves a number of parties *splitting* the votes of an old one among them. In a third scenario the collapse or disappearance of one party draws attention to a crisis in the social world that the old party had long represented. This allows an existing, opportunistic party to move in and *colonize* that world, not necessarily by taking over the old vote so much as providing a voice for and *mobilizing* new voters and elements increasingly alienated from the old party even before its final disappearance.

This third understanding of the term ‘‘replacement’’ draws particular attention to three important theoretical premises when thinking about how new parties achieve support as old ones disappear. These premises are geographical. This is why understanding replacement means understanding its geographical forms. One premise is that electoral choices should be seen in relation to the discrete *social-territorial settings* or places in which such choices are exercised. Old parties do not simply disappear without reason even when they ‘‘rot from the head down’’, i.e., disintegrate organizationally before they disappear in electoral terms. They are often no longer in tune with local social mores, and their electoral persistence is more a matter of inertia than persisting enthusiasm from a popular base. New issues such as the environment, foreign immigration, globalization, and women’s rights create new constituencies and divide populations in new ways. But choices made also reflect the choices available. These are a function of candidate lists, the strength of party organization, campaign strategies, and local issues feeding into ones of wider relevance upon which parties run for election.

Second, parties are not simply electoral vehicles, although orthodox thinking in Anglo-American political science often regards them as such, perhaps because the American parties (as opposed to individual representatives) often seem unrelated to particular population or sectional interests. Parties can be more or less effective *intermediaries between state and society*, channeling resources from center to periphery and rewarding some social and territorial interests at the expense of others. In this sense the distinction between mass and patronage parties is a false dichotomy: all parties are patronage parties. Judgments are made about how effective the party is in ‘‘delivering the goods’’ and whether or not we (in our place) are being rewarded more or less than they (in their place). Much of the geography of party politics is a result of who gets what, when, and where more than a reflection of ‘‘underlying’’ or foundational social cleavages that have a geographical bias to them.

Third, new parties can have totally different *symbolic, interest and strategy repertoires* from the parties they replace. In particular, they can appeal to new *territorial formulations* of the dilemmas that the old party dealt with through allocations of public resources (Agnew, 1997). Ethnic and regionalist parties are the most obvious exponents of such a territorialized approach. Typically they focus on regional relative deprivation or a sense of resentment at the relative success of other regions in commanding state resources or acquiring more than an average per capita share of national revenues. But nationalist parties wanting to expel foreigners and put up protectionist barriers and liberal parties desiring to remove all limits on trade and investment are also engaged in territorial reframing.

Since party replacement is underpinned geographically, a spatial analytic approach is necessary to disentangle the types of replacement identified above. Votes are indeed channeled between parties from one election to the next, and though it may be convenient to view such electoral change as geographically invariant, such flows are seldom uniform across any democracy. Therefore, in order to completely understand electoral change it is necessary to elucidate how it occurs. Before examining this process in Italy, a brief overview of the recent Italian political crisis is provided and the parties of interest in this analysis are identified.

2.2. *Party crisis and party change in Italy*

The old regime of parties that had dominated Italy since 1947 collapsed between 1987 and 1996. During the old regime, the main parties of Italy campaigned nationally but each had regional bases in which their support was consistent and concentrated (e.g., Agnew, 1987b; Galli and Prandi, 1970; Shin, 2001; Trigilia, 1986). The Christian Democrats (DC) found support in the northeast (the 'white' zone) and the south, and support for the Italian Communist Party (PCI) was strongest in the center of Italy (the 'red' zone). Only during the period 1963–1976 did the DC and PCI, the two largest parties in Italy, achieve a significant degree of nationalization in their levels of popular support (Agnew, 2002). Other parties remained limited to particular regions (e.g., the fascist Social Movement for Italy (MSI) in the urban south) or switched regional bases in terms of their highest levels of support (e.g., the core base of support for the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) moved south from its original northwest base) (Agnew, 1988). Smaller parties that were situated along the center of the political spectrum tended to be clientelistic and relied on local 'notables' for their electoral success.

The end of communism across Europe served to accelerate and exacerbate the process of party change in Italy. In particular, shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the leadership of the PCI proposed self-reform in order for the party to advance within parliament (see Baccetti, 1997; Hellman, 1992; Ignazi, 1992; Kertzer, 1996). Support for the initiative to reform the PCI into the Democratic Party of the Left (PDS), however, was not unanimous. A small group opposed to discarding communist ideology, which also drew support from the radical Proletarian Democracy (DP) party among other left-wing groups, splintered off to form the Communist Refoundation party (RC) (Foot, 1996). Hence, in 1991, the left of the Italian political spectrum that was once largely occupied and dominated by the PCI, was now split between the RC and PDS.

The reconfiguration of the Italian left and the end of the cold war also removed the perceived 'red' threat that the PCI had come to embody during its four decades of exclusion from government. This was significant because the success of the ruling party, the Christian Democrats, was in large part based upon its anticommunist stance. The disappearance of the PCI effectively freed the Italian electorate to vote as it liked, and to express its disgust and frustration with the DC's underachievement and widespread corruption, the extent and beneficiaries of which were revealed publicly by the *Mani pulite* ('Clean Hands') and *Tangentopoli* ('Bribesville') investigations of the early-1990s (see McCarthy, 1997; Nelken, 1996). The disintegration of the DC in 1993 is viewed as an "anticipated reaction" to the negative fallout related to the investigations into government corruption, and also resulted in the disappearance of the DC's partner in crime, the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) (Morlino, 1996, 9). As notable party leaders, such as the PSI's Bettino Craxi, came under public scrutiny, others defected to create smaller parties, but a sizeable political vacuum nevertheless remained for the taking in the center of Italian politics.

The meteoric rise of Silvio Berlusconi's *Forza Italia* into this political void was unlike anything witnessed previously in Italian politics. Using the chant for the national soccer team as the party name, the success of *Forza Italia* can be attributed to it appearing with the right message at the right time, and to Berlusconi's use of his three privately owned television networks before the 1994 elections (McCarthy, 1996). Perhaps the most interesting political party to emerge during this period was the regionalist Northern League (LN). Comprised of various regional and local political organizations located in the northern regions of the peninsula, the Northern League and its outspoken leader, Umberto Bossi, has used particular territorial identities as their main rallying point. Over time, the language of the League has shifted to and fro between emphasizing social, economic and cultural differences between the prosperous north and public expenditure-hungry and corrupt south to the outright secession of the north which Bossi refers to as *Padania* (see Agnew, 1995; Diamanti, 1993, 1996). Also emerging out of the political turmoil of the early-1990s was the post-fascist National Alliance (AN) led by Gianfranco Fini. By strategically softening its fascist overtones, and joining forces with the more conservative elements of the defunct DC, the AN promoted a more democratic image and has since become an important component of Berlusconi's center-right coalition.

3. Spatial analysis of party replacement in Italy

In light of the crisis of parties in Italy, a technique that is sensitive to the processes underlying party replacement, and that recognizes that electoral change is not regulated by a singular logic that can be applied arbitrarily across all territorial units in the same fashion, is particularly useful. In certain circumstances, there may be no direct relationship between old and new parties, in other situations one or more parties may be the direct descendents of a disappeared party and still other cases may reveal that electoral flows to a new party tend to vary considerably across Italy. The ability to distinguish between different types of party replacement (i.e., colonization/mobilization, vote splitting and substitution) and levels of political change in Italy indicates the need to frame politics geographically.

In order to differentiate between the various types of party replacement, and to evaluate political change in Italy, a spatial analytic framework is used. Spatial analysis is premised upon the fact that spatially referenced data are "special" (Anselin, 1989; Haining, 2003; O'Sullivan and Unwin, 2003). Spatially or geographically referenced data refer to data that are collected on the basis of identifiable locations or places, such as census enumeration units, electoral precincts or in this case Italian provinces and *comuni* or municipalities. What makes spatial data special is that they tend to be biased by the locations and places whence data are collected, and frequently, values of individual observations are correlated with each other and are thus not independent as classical probability theory necessitates. The geographic concentration or local clustering of similar values in a data set is formally called spatial autocorrelation or spatial dependence. The presence of spatial dependence, for example in the dependent variable of a regression equation, may result in biased and inconsistent parameter estimates, and subsequent incorrect inferences (Anselin, 1988).

Within electoral studies, spatial analysis and geographic methodologies are gaining recognition as useful, if not always necessary, techniques (e.g., Calvo and Escolar, 2003; Kim et al., 2003). As more and more geo-referenced election data become available, researchers are increasingly aware of both the opportunities and implications that come with working with spatial data. For instance, theories of voting that consider socio-geographic processes (e.g., diffusion of politically relevant information, neighborhood effects) and place-based structures (e.g., social networks, institutions) that can bias political information and behavior can benefit from spatial analytic methods. O'Loughlin et al. (1994) used spatial analysis to show how Nazi support in Weimar Germany was geographically contingent, and similar procedures have been used to examine parliamentary elections in Russia (O'Loughlin et al., 1996). In the United States context, Cho (2003) has examined ethnic campaign contribution networks with spatial analysis, suggesting that processes of diffusion and contagion are likely to be at work. Such geographic perspectives on voting behavior are not without their critics (see King, 1996; McAllister, 1987), but the nature of georeferenced data and insights provided by spatial analytic methods illustrate the need at least to consider geography more than as a mere backdrop when examining electoral behavior (Agnew, 1996; Johnston, 1992). In addition to the detection and evaluation of spatial autocorrelation in Italian election data, we show how spatial analysis can be used to examine electoral change, and to disentangle and clarify how party replacement is played out across the country.

The following spatial analyses use election returns from the proportional representation (PR) component of the 1987, 1992, 1994, 1996 and 2001 Italian national elections. A mixed PR/majoritarian electoral system was introduced in 1993, and was subsequently abolished in October 2005 in favor of a return to a PR. Since our particular interest is in how old parties were replaced, and not necessarily voter transitions between concurrent elections (e.g., see Wellhofer, 2001), we are restricted to using the PR element because it permits comparability between the old (pre-1993) and new (post-1993) party systems. The data, provided by the Cattaneo Institute in Bologna and reported at the level of the Italian municipality ($N > 8000$), were aggregated up to the level of Italian provinces. Eight new provinces have been introduced over the course of the study period, but to facilitate consistent spatial and temporal comparisons, the 1987 Italian provincial configuration is maintained for the entire analysis. Note also that the region of Val d'Aosta is excluded from the analysis because it is a single member constituency and does not elect a deputy using PR.

The spatial analysis of party replacement in Italy concentrates on how old parties, and in particular the Christian Democrats (DC), the Italian Communists (PCI) and the neo-fascist Social Movement for Italy (MSI) were replaced. We focus on these parties for three reasons. First, the political parties that arguably have replaced the DC, PCI and MSI are among the most important post-crisis political actors in Italy. Though the Italian Socialists could be included in the old party list, the decision to include the MSI is based upon an attempt to cover the breadth of the Italian political spectrum. Table 1 provides a comparative overview of support for old and new parties between 1987 and 2001. The vertical arrangement of parties mimics the span of the Italian political spectrum with left-wing parties placed in the topmost rows, centrist parties in the middle and right-wing parties in the bottom rows. The 'Other' category aggregates the support for parties across the political spectrum that received less than 5% of the total vote.

The second reason we focus on these parties is because the respective motivations and circumstances surrounding the disappearance of the PCI, DC and MSI, respectively, were fundamentally different. Hence, there is reason to believe that the processes behind replacement were different for each party. Detailed examinations of how the PCI, DC and MSI were replaced illustrate whether the concept of replacement is equivalent to substitution or whether other understandings need to be considered. Finally, the geographies of support for the DC, PCI and MSI were regionally concentrated and more or less complemented one other. Fig. 1 maps provincial levels of support for each party at the last time each appeared on the ballot.

Table 1
Vote shares for Italian political parties, 1987–2001

	1987	1992	1994	1996	2001
Italian Communist Party (PCI)	26.6				
Communist Refoundation (RC)		5.6	6.0	8.6	5.0
Democratic Party of the Left (PDS)		16.1	20.4	21.1	16.3
The Daisy Party (MRG)					14.3
Italian Socialist Party (PSI)	14.3	13.6			
Christian Democrats (DC)	34.3	29.7			
Forza Italia (FI)			21.0	20.6	29.1
Northern League (LN)		8.7	8.4	10.1	4.1
National Alliance (AN)			13.5	15.7	11.9
Italian Social Movement (MSI)	5.9	5.4			
Other	18.9	21.0	30.7	24.0	19.2

Determining whether or not, and to what extent, the geography of support for the new replacement parties overlap these historical strongholds illustrates how the process of party replacement may be geographically contingent in certain cases. It is well established that levels of electoral support for the new and the old political parties in Italy exhibit varying degrees of local clustering as well as regional diversity (see Agnew et al., 2002; Cartocci, 1990; Diamanti and Mannheimer, 1994; Galli and Prandi, 1970; Shin and Agnew, 2002). These geographic clusters and variations are clearly evident in Fig. 1, and can in part be attributed to spatial processes that rely upon the interdependence of places (Haining, 2003). Spatial processes such as diffusion, exchange and transfer, interaction and dispersal are frequently manifested as spatial autocorrelation in quantitative data, which at the local scale may reflect information networks, the spatial (re)-organization of political parties or any number of social, economic, cultural and/or political interactions or exchanges. The processes that contribute to such local clustering also account for the geographic variation in electoral support and in changes at the regional and national levels (e.g., Johnston and Pattie, 1992; Pattie and Johnston, 1997). The theoretical argument underlying such regional variations is that voters mediate and respond to myriad social, economic and political processes that influence political attitudes and behavior differently in different places (Agnew, 1987a; Johnston, 1986, 1992).

Exploration of the spatial structure of party replacement in Italy begins with the formal detection of spatial autocorrelation of electoral support for the major parties in competition between 1987 and 2001. The classic indicator used to identify the presence of spatial autocorrelation is Moran's I (e.g., see Cliff and Ord, 1981; Griffith, 1987). Moran's I can be expressed as:

$$I = \frac{\sum_i \sum_j w_{ij}(x_i - \bar{x})(x_j - \bar{x})}{\sum_i (x_i - \bar{x})^2}$$

where w is an element in a row-standardized spatial weights matrix, $\mathbf{W}$, that summarizes the geographic linkages between observations (i.e., $1 = $ adjacency; $0 = $ separation), x is the vote share for the party of interest, and $\bar{x}$ is the average vote share for the party of

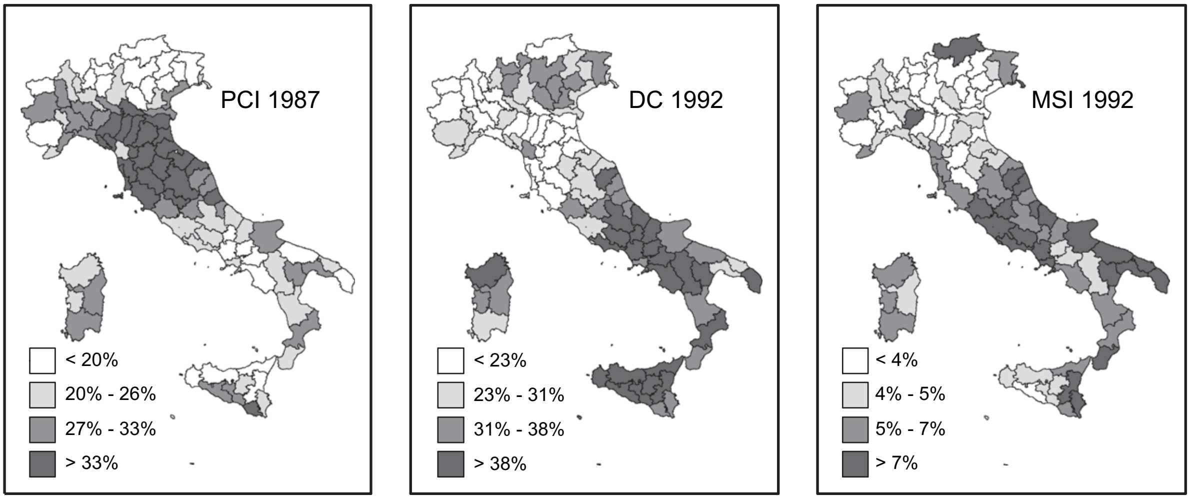

Fig. 1. Electoral support for the PCI in 1987, DC in 1992 and MSI in 1992.

interest. Contiguity or adjacency is used to capture the geographic relations between provinces in the spatial weights matrix **W**. Other methods exist to fill such weights matrixes (e.g., selection of a cut-off distance), but contiguity is useful here because it corresponds to the minimum distance between provinces, and serves as a good surrogate for local-level interdependencies.

Moran's I is a numeric index that describes the nature of the relationship between each observation and its neighbors. One way to compare the value of a location to its neighbors is to calculate a spatially lagged variable (Anselin, 1992). The spatial lag is in effect the weighted average of values that surround any given observation (i.e., $\sum_j w_{ij}(x_j - \bar{x})$). Used in many statistical indicators of spatial association, spatially lagged variables provide a simple way to capture and to summarize geographic relationships in quantitative data. A statistically significant, positive value of Moran's I indicates the presence of spatial dependence, and a significant negative value suggests a pattern of dissimilarity. To evaluate the significance of Moran's I the standard deviate or z-score of the index is used based upon the assumption that values of x are distributed randomly in space (for details, see Anselin, 1988; Cliff and Ord, 1981; Griffith, 1987). Moran's I values for the parties of interest in the new and old party system are reported in Table 2.

Values of Moran's I for all parties are positive and highly significant, indicating that electoral support for each party of interest is not distributed randomly across the Italian peninsula. When comparing levels of clustering between old and new parties, or over time, both continuities and variations are identifiable. For example, there is a certain degree of continuity, at least initially, in the value of Moran's I for parties of the left (i.e., PCI, [P]DS, RC and MRG), but with each subsequent election, values decrease and move further away from the value associated with the PCI. Similar trends exist for the Christian Democrats (DC) and what are considered its primary replacements, *Forza Italia* (FI) and the Northern League (LN). Finally, support for the post-fascist National Alliance (AN) appears to be more clustered than for its predecessor the Italian Social Movement (MSI). Notwithstanding assumptions, correct or incorrect, about which new parties replaced old ones, electoral support for all parties of interest is significantly clustered in each election.

To obtain more detailed insights into how party replacement was played out across Italy, a local indicator of spatial association (LISA), and in particular, the local

Table 2
Moran's I scores for selected old and new parties, 1987–2001

	1987	1992	1994	1996	2001
Old party system					
PCI	0.702				
DC	0.525	0.706			
MSI	0.425	0.496			
New party system					
(P)DS		0.730	0.721	0.720	0.690
RC		0.702	0.798	0.597	0.503
MRG					0.246
FI			0.743	0.577	0.374
LN		0.750	0.716	0.715	0.590
AN			0.796	0.692	0.583

All values are significant at the $p < 0.001$ level.

Moran statistic, is used. The equation for the local Moran's I index is:

$$I_i = \frac{z_i}{\sum z_i^2} \sum_j w_{ij} z_j$$

where z is measured in deviations from the mean and inference is based upon a conditional randomization method (see Anselin, 1995a,b). Unlike the global Moran's I index which returns a single value for an entire data set, local Moran values are calculated for each individual observation, or in this case, each Italian province. Local Moran's I statistics provide information about the degree and nature of clustering around each observation by determining the 'contribution' that each observation makes to the overall global statistic. In fact, the average of local Moran's I statistics is equivalent to the global Moran's I value. Since a local Moran's I index is calculated for each observation, significant values (i.e., $p < 0.05$) can be mapped to identify positive spatial dependence (i.e., high values surrounded by similarly high values, or low values surrounded by similarly low values), or spatial outliers (i.e., high values surrounded by low values, or low values surrounded by high values).

To complement the local Moran's I statistic, the bivariate version of the local Moran is invoked. The equation for the bivariate LISA is identical to the local Moran, but a different variable is used for the spatial lag component (e.g., $\sum_j w_{ij} y_j$). In this analysis, the spatial lag component is the respective mean deviated level of support for the old parties of interest (i.e., MSI, PCI, DC), the last time that each appeared on the ballot. Hence, the bivariate LISA serves as a diagnostic for evaluating the geography of party replacement. More precisely, the bivariate LISA permits the identification of four types of spatiotemporal correlation:

I. high levels of support for new party z surrounded by high levels of support for old party y; is consistent with switching and possibly the splitting of votes between two or more parties;
II. low levels of support for new party z surrounded by high levels of support for old party y; suggests the new party is unable to colonize areas where old party y once enjoyed success;
III. low levels of support for new party z surrounded by low levels of support for party y; is consistent with a certain degree of spatiotemporal stability, like type I above;
IV. high levels of support for party z surrounded by low levels of support for party y, suggests that the new party may be mobilizing a new segment of voters or colonizing areas where the old party was weak.

Given the overview of the recent crisis of the Italian party system, and the fact that electoral support for most parties in both the old and new Italian party system is spatially dependent (see Table 2), there is reason to expect that spatiotemporal relations exist between votes for the old and the new parties. Conversely, since replacement arguably is not a singular process, or one that is completely explained by direct substitution, an approach that can elucidate how replacement is played out across the Italian peninsula, in different locations, is constructive. Mapping and comparing LISA and bivariate LISA statistics between elections permits us to locate areas and regions of spatiotemporal stability and instability, which in turn reveal the possible sociogeographic processes that underlie party replacement in Italy. Such a technique is also quite useful, if not necessary, when calculating flow-of-vote estimates or when estimating voter transitions between parties. For instance, one of the assumptions underlying the implementation of Gary King's (1997) ecological inference approach, which can be used to estimate voter transitions, is the absence of spatial autocorrelation. Exploratory spatial data analyses, such as those described previously, can be used to evaluate whether or not spatial dependence exists within a dataset, and to identify areas where spatial dependence is relatively uniform and can be considered accordingly.

3.1. Replacement as substitution: from MSI to AN

As noted earlier, party replacement is most frequently viewed in terms of substitution, or when one party receives the lion's share of votes from a party that no longer appears on the ballot. This is what happened when the neo-fascist Italian Social Movement (MSI) was absorbed into the National Alliance (AN) on the right side of the Italian political spectrum in the mid-1990s. Marginalized for most of the post-World War II period, MSI support consisted of a broad mix of social groups, including the under and unemployed, civil servants and the urban- and petty-bourgeoisie, primarily located in the south, and in particular, in urban areas of the south (Ignazi, 1989; Tarchi, 1997).

As the Italian party crisis unfolded and left the MSI unscathed, the leadership of the far-right sought to temper and change the party's image from a neo-fascist, Mussolini-era holdover to a post-fascist, reformed and European-style party. In part a strategy to advance at the polls, especially since the disappearance of the Christian Democrats created a vacuum in the center of the Italian political spectrum, the MSI-AN was the only viable conservative party on the 1994 ballot throughout much of the center and south of Italy. Aligned with Berlusconi's center-right *Forza Italia*, the AN has consistently outperformed its predecessor in each election since 1992 (see Table 1). In this respect, the AN not only inherited the majority of MSI support, but it also appears to be mobilizing new voters and former supporters of the disappeared DC and Italian socialist party (Agnew, 1997).

Fig. 2 portrays how the AN replaced the MSI geographically. The 1992 panel (upper left) serves as a benchmark and maps significant local Moran's *I* values for the MSI the last time that it appeared on the ballot.

Statistically significant regional clusters of high support (solid black circles) are present around Rome and in the Puglia region (the heel of Italy), while a large cluster of low support (solid white circles) fans out across northern Italy. In northwest Italy there are a few spatial outliers, or provinces that contain high support for the MSI, but are surrounded by provinces with low MSI support (i.e., small black circles within larger white circles). Prior to comparing the 1992 map to the 1994, 1996 and 2001 maps, it is important to recall that the bivariate form of the local Moran's *I* index is invoked for the next three panels in Fig. 2 and thus requires a slightly different interpretation.

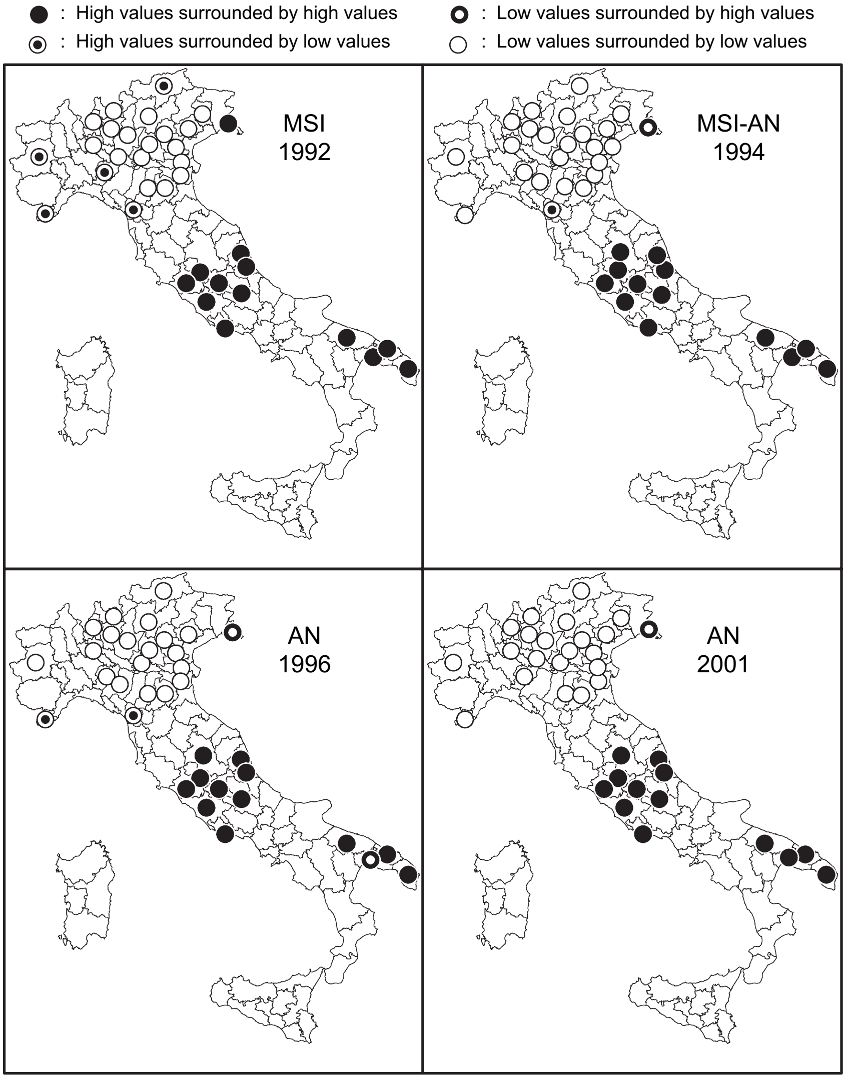
● : High values surrounded by high values
◉ : High values surrounded by low values
○ : Low values surrounded by high values
○ : Low values surrounded by low values
MSI 1992
MSI-AN 1994
AN 1996
AN 2001

Fig. 2. Substitution: MSI (1992), MSI-AN (1994) and AN (1996, 2001).

Regional clusters of high support around Rome and in Puglia (solid black circles) indicate that high levels of support for the AN in 1994, 1996 and 2001 are surrounded by similarly high levels of 1992 MSI support, thus suggesting a degree of spatiotemporal stability between the old MSI and new AN. The cluster of solid white circles in northern Italy denotes low levels of AN support in 1994, 1996 and 2001 are surrounded by similarly low levels of 1992 MSI support, suggesting that much of the north remains unreceptive to the post-fascist Italian right, despite its efforts to broaden its appeal. There are relatively few spatial outliers, or provinces with high AN support surrounded by low 1992 MSI support (i.e., small black circles within larger white circles) or conversely, low AN support surrounded by high 1992 MSI support (i.e., small white circles surrounded by large black circles). Overall, the continuity of clustering of MSI and AN support between 1992 and 2001, and the relative lack of spatial outliers, illustrates how in this case replacement may be analogous to substitution.

3.2. Replacement as splitting: from PCI to PDS + RC

As an extension of the previous example of substitution, the replacement of the Italian Communist Party in the early 1990s involved the splitting of votes, initially, between the Democratic Party of the Left (PDS) and the Communist Refoundation party (RC). The more moderate and progressive PDS inherited the majority of infrastructure and electoral base of the PCI, while the smaller RC appealed to former-PCI militants and other small, marginalized groups (Baccetti, 1997; Shin, 2001). One of the distinctive features of Italian communism is the geography of its support, and in particular, the bastion of leftist support in north-central Italy. In fact, the administrative regions of Tuscany, Emilia-Romagna and Umbria are collectively referred to as the ‘red belt’ or ‘red zone’. Fig. 3 reinforces this image, and illustrates party replacement as the splitting of votes between two or more parties. Again, the first panel (upper left) in Fig. 3 serves as the benchmark, and maps LISA statistics for the PCI the last time it appeared on the ballot in 1987.

The red belt of the PCI is clearly visible as a patch of solid black circles in the middle of the Italian peninsula, where high levels of support for the PCI are significantly clustered. The lone spatial outlier of low PCI support surrounded by high PCI support (i.e., small white circle within large black circle) in the red zone is the province of Lucca. Due in part to legacies of small landownership, and Lucca’s historical status as an independent republic, the Italian left has always had difficulties garnering support in this province (see Agnew, 1992; Dogan, 1967). A significant cluster of low PCI support is visible in the northeast of Italy, and coincides with an area referred to as the ‘white zone’ where the Christian Democrats (DC) fared particularly well in the post-World War II period.

The remaining bivariate LISA maps explore the relationship between aggregated support for the PDS and RC in 1992 and 1994, aggregated support for the DS, RC and center-left Margherita or Daisy party in 2001, and 1987 PCI support (results for 1996 are omitted due to space limitations). The purpose of aggregating support for parties of the new Italian left is to illustrate party replacement as the splitting of old PCI votes. Note that between 1996 and 2001, the PDS renamed itself the Democrats of the Left (DS), the RC splintered into two parties and that the Daisy party emerged as a promising option for many voters on the center-left of the Italian political spectrum. Notwithstanding such name changes, party splits and new additions to the Italian left, the map sequence in Fig. 3 is remarkably consistent. High levels of support for the parties of the left, namely the PDS and RC in 1992 and 1994, and the DC, RC and Daisy in 2001 are surrounded by similarly high 1987 PCI values in central Italy. The northeast remains an area of low support for the Italian left in spatiotemporal terms, though two significant spatial outliers of high support surrounded by low support emerge in 2001. The stability of clusters in Fig. 3 was expected, but the two outliers in northeast Italy may indicate that the new Italian left is making inroads into what was once a DC stronghold.

3.3. Replacement as colonization/mobilization: from DC to FI/LN

The previous examples of party replacement as substitution and replacement as the splitting of votes are relatively straightforward. A clear and definite lineage between old and new party or parties can be identified and is plausibly maintained in electoral terms in several areas of Italy. But what happens when there is no direct political descendant? This is what happened when the Christian Democrats (DC) disintegrated in the early 1990s. As the leading party in government from 1948 to 1993, the DC enjoyed and took advantage of the spoils of government until investigations publicized the scope and extent of its corruption. The fallout from the investigations precipitated the demise of the party and its partner in crime, the Italian socialists,

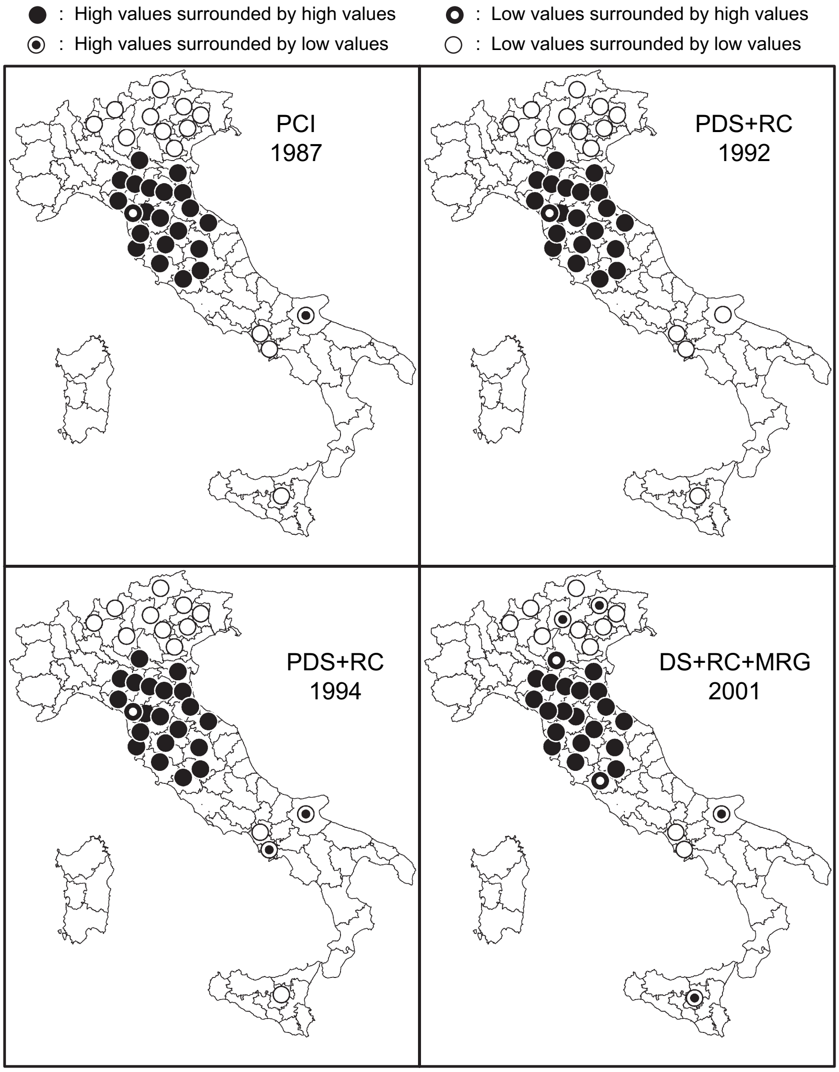
● : High values surrounded by high values
◉ : High values surrounded by low values
○ : Low values surrounded by high values
○ : Low values surrounded by low values
PCI
1987
PDS+RC
1992
PDS+RC
1994
DS+RC+MRG
2001

Fig. 3. Splitting: PCI (1987); PDS + RC (1992, 1994); DS + RC + MRG (2001).

and left a void in the middle of the Italian political spectrum (see Gundle and Parker, 1996; Katz and Ignazi, 1996).

Into this void and materializing out of nowhere only two months before the 1994 elections was Silvio Berlusconi's *Forza Italia*, which is considered by many to be the primary replacement for the DC. Using the national football chant as party name, Berlusconi effectively used his privately owned television stations during the short campaign, and shrewdly forged alliances with the AN and regionalist Northern League. More populist movement than political party, *Forza Italia*—rather Berlusconi—successfully campaigned on the promise of new jobs, prosperity, small government and the continued threat of communism reincarnated as the new Italian left. To determine whether or not and how *Forza Italia* replaced the DC, LISA and bivariate LISA maps are again utilized. The first panel (upper left) in Fig. 4 shows clusters of DC support in 1992, the last time that it appeared on the ballot.

Levels of support for the DC in Italy were clearly divided; strong support was clustered in the south and low support was concentrated in the center (red belt) and northwest. Note that northeast Italy was once renowned for its Catholic subculture, staunch DC support, and was frequently seen as equivalent to the communist subculture in central Italy (see Cartocci, 1990; Trigilia, 1986). The lack of significant DC clusters in the northeast in 1992 may suggest that its historic base became increasingly alienated from the

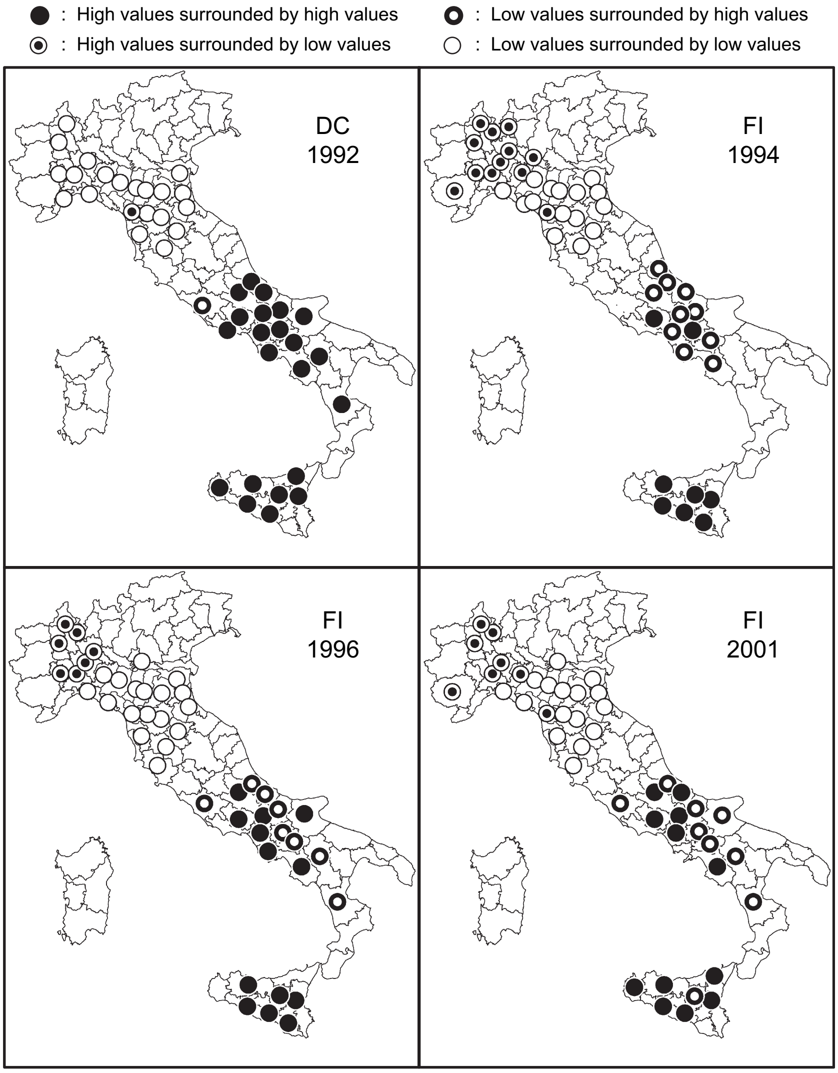
● : High values surrounded by high values
◉ : High values surrounded by low values
○ : Low values surrounded by high values
○ : Low values surrounded by low values
DC 1992
FI 1994
FI 1996
FI 2001

Fig. 4. Colonization/Mobilization: DC (1992); Forza Italia (1994, 1996, 2001).

party some time before it finally disappeared. Examination of the bivariate LISA maps between the DC and *Forza Italia* reveals significant clusters of spatiotemporal instability. In the northwest, where the DC performed relatively poorly, support for *Forza Italia* is relatively strong and significantly concentrated. Conversely, in the south, where high levels of DC support clustered in 1992, support for *Forza Italia* is below average, especially in 1994. The only region where high support for *Forza Italia* overlaps historic support for the DC is in Sicily. Though *Forza Italia* may have replaced the DC in some areas of Italy, replacement was not wholesale as indicated by the clusters of spatiotemporal instability.

3.4. Estimating party replacement in the Veneto, a worked example

The exploratory spatial data analyses illustrate how the process of party replacement varies geographically, and challenges the utility of national-level flow-of-vote or voter transition estimates. To assess the plausibility of the arguments made here regarding how the process of party replacement occurred in Italy, voter transitions from the DC to *Forza Italia* and the Northern League in the Veneto are estimated using Gary King's (King, 1997, 2002) method of ecological inference. Other methods, such as entropy maximization (see Johnston and Pattie, 2000), can be used to estimate such transitions, but King's method has a relatively low threshold in terms of data requirements and was used previously to examine national-level voter transitions in consecutive elections in Italy (see Benoit et al., 2004; Wellhofer, 2001), but not party replacement per se. Based upon constrained maximum likelihood analysis (see King, 1997), party replacement estimates are obtained from the identity $T_i = \beta_i^{\mathrm{b}} X_i + \beta_i^{\mathrm{w}} (1 - X)$ where the independent variable, X, is the vote share for the old party in the first or baseline election, and the dependent variable, T, is the vote share for the new party in a subsequent election. The quantity of particular interest is β_i^{b}, the percentage of voters who supported the old party in the baseline election and who also voted for the new party in a subsequent election.

Located in northeastern Italy, the Veneto was one of the strongholds for the DC, and is one of the regions where the regionalist Northern League finds its greatest support. Though no significant amounts of spatiotemporal clustering are visible in the northeast of Italy in Fig. 4, initial levels of League support more or less mirrored that of the former DC, and it is often presumed that the League is substituting for the DC in the Veneto and across northern Italy (e.g., Diamanti, 2003; Golden, 2004). Though divisions within the party and its base have recently marginalized what once was the largest party in northern Italy, its alliance with Berlusconi's *Forza Italia* gives the League continued political relevance. Using election data from the 582 municipalities of the Veneto, Table 3 reports provincial estimates of voter transitions from the DC in 1992 to the League and *Forza Italia* in 1994, 1996 and 2001, or in other words, the proportion of voters who supported the DC in 1992 and who also voted for the League or FI in 1994, 1996 or 2001. Note that 1992 is used as the baseline year for comparison because it is the last year the DC appeared on the ballot and we are specifically interested in how the DC was replaced.

Table 3
Party replacement estimates for the DC to LN/FI in the Veneto, 1992–2001

	Voter transitions from the DC, 1992					
	LN94	LN96	LN01	FI94	FI96	FI01
Belluno	0.37	0.57	0.12	0.18	0.28	0.31
	0.06	0.07	0.25	0.04	0.04	0.04
Padova	0.33	0.52	0.18	0.29	0.19	0.47
	0.02	0.03	0.00	0.02	0.02	0.03
Rovigo	0.13	0.32	0.11	0.24	0.22	0.35
	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.00	0.04	0.05
Treviso	0.32	0.57	0.21	0.28	0.18	0.51
	0.02	0.04	0.02	0.01	0.00	0.02
Venezia	0.37	0.66	0.19	0.28	0.14	0.46
	0.01	0.04	0.01	0.05	0.04	0.06
Verona	0.38	0.64	0.27	0.05	0.05	0.26
	0.04	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.03
Vicenza	0.22	0.47	0.30	0.25	0.14	0.51
	0.04	0.04	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.04
Veneto	0.28	0.41	0.21	0.22	0.11	0.47
	0.02	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01

Standard errors reported below each estimate.

Several interesting features emerge from the table of voter transitions. First, the regional transition estimates mask notable provincial (i.e., sub-regional) differences. For example, at the regional level it is estimated that 28% of former-DC voters voted for the League in 1994. In the province of Rovigo, however, the estimate is only 13%, but in Venice and Verona the estimate approaches 40%. Second, there are notable variations in the estimates over time. In most provinces, both the League and FI receive moderate levels of support from former-DC voters in 1994, in 1996 it appears that former-DC voters tended to favor the League, but in 2001 there was a reversal of electoral fortunes with former-DC voters supporting *Forza Italia* over the League. Closer inspection reveals some notable transitions, such as that from the DC to *Forza Italia* in Verona. In 1994 and 1996, it is estimated that only 5% of DC supporters voted for Berlusconi's party, but in 2001 this figure is 26%. Such a dramatic increase is consistent with the argument that *Forza Italia* is colonizing former-DC space and effectively mobilizing voters. The geographical instability and temporal volatility of voter transition estimates in Table 3 illustrates clearly that the process of party replacement and electoral change across the Veneto is far more complex than the simple and direct substitution of the DC with the Northern League, and more generally, that a geographic framework can provide useful insights into the process of electoral change.

4. Discussion and conclusion

Party replacement is not equivalent to substitution and arguably involves an array of diverse processes. Moreover, the electoral processes underlying party replacement are geographic in nature. For instance, it is often presumed that the Northern League replaced the Christian Democrats throughout northern Italy, and in some places this is indeed what occurred. However, the spatiotemporal instability of party replacement estimates suggests that while the League was able to attract former-DC voters and to colonize some provinces of the Veneto, it was also a poor choice among other possible DC replacements, such as *Forza Italia*.

Explanations for the popularity of the League, and in particular, its ability to colonize new 'spaces' in the Veneto are in part linked to increasing levels of secularization in the region and the failure of the DC to support the small firms and enterprises that are credited with bolstering the Italian economy over the last quarter century (Riccamboni, 1997, 299). The stagnating and corrupt DC model of representation, which relied upon small towns and rural agricultural areas, failed to recognize and address the needs of the growing northern Italian economy that was characterized by high levels of employment, rising productivity and industrialization (Diamanti, 1993). It is precisely in the industrial districts and the 'urbanized countryside' of the north where the League's platform based upon 'localismo', or the preservation, promotion and protection of local territorial identities and culture, resonated the most with voters.

The example of the League illustrates clearly the need to consider the geographical bases of party replacement and political change, but similar arguments can be made when replacement is akin to substitution. Referring back to the replacement of the neo-fascist Italian Social Movement (MSI) with the post-fascist National Alliance (AN), spatial analyses reveal that the geographies of support for each party more or less overlap. Notwithstanding this overlap, there were also significant regional differences in support: the Italian right is popular throughout much of the south, but its electoral performance in the north is mediocre at best. The detection of such clustering is important when examining and explaining political change because it is often presumed that political change is a stationary process. For instance, when using flow of vote estimates to evaluate political changes at the national level, it is implied that vote shifts between parties are consistent in magnitude and direction across all units of analysis, and consequently, that units of analysis are more or less identical and interchangeable with one another (Agnew, 1996). This assumption is often untenable and in some cases it may be problematic because electoral shifts are likely to be under- or over-estimated, depending upon where they are obtained. In other words, political change is seldom uniform across a democracy. As illustrated in the worked example, using a spatial analytic framework prior to obtaining estimates of vote flows and voter transitions may improve estimates and yield a more accurate account of electoral change.

Italian democracy presents itself as a compelling arena to examine political change because the recent transformation of parties was so dramatic and comprehensive. Spatial analyses show that the nature of political change in Italy was, and continues to be, geographically dependent. The variety of clusters detected indicates that different processes govern change in different places across Italy. The spatial analytic approach used in this study is not limited to the Italian case or to party replacement, but can be applied elsewhere to examine electoral change in general. Showing how electoral change occurs, and being able to locate precisely such changes, gives a more complete understanding of how political change occurs.

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