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## The politicization of place in Italy

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### Abstract

In electoral geographic studies, the role of the political party is frequently overlooked in favor of analyses that concentrate on the attributes of voters. This research examines the organizational evolution of the Democratic Party of the Left (PDS) in Italy, and in particular, the geographic structure and organization of the PDS. Analyses of a 500-respondent survey show how the geographic variation of party activities corresponds to electoral support, and underscore the significance of informational networks to the continued success of the Italian Left within its territorial stronghold referred to as *la zona rossa*, or ‘the red zone’. © 2001 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

*Keywords:* Italy; The red zone; Democratic Party of the Left (PDS)

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### Introduction

Since the early 1990s, party politics in Italy has undergone a notable transition as historically dominant parties such as the Christian Democrats (DC) and Italian Socialists disappeared, the Italian Communist Party (PCI) reconfigured itself and new parties, such as the regionalist Northern League, emerged upon the political landscape. In addition to specifying positions on salient issues, forming coalitions and nominating candidates to represent the interests of the party in national, regional and other levels of government, many Italian political parties organize local festivals each and every year, sponsor youth groups and publish daily newspapers. Whether in Italy or in another established democracy, the viability and vitality of political parties depend upon their ability to garner, sustain and mobilize popular support before, during and between elections throughout the country. Though the vote is

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perhaps the most tangible means to evaluate political identity, it is the end result of a long series of processes and influences. This research focuses upon two related aspects of this process in Italy where party activism stands out compared to other democracies, and where electoral patterns are distinctly regional. First, the ways in which political parties politicize the places where they operate is examined. Second, the relationship between the politicization of places and voter attitudes and behavior is explored with a survey that asks place-specific questions.

Determining whether or not, and to what degree, political parties influence the voting choice is an important area of electoral studies. Though party campaign strategies are broadly defined at the national level, they are implemented at the state, regional, provincial and local scales of analysis and are likely to be a response to the immediate settings, conditions and circumstances in which political parties operate (Beck, 1974). Variations in party activity and organization across a polity, therefore, may partially account for geographic differences in voting behavior. Research suggests that relationships exist between party activities and the environment in which a party operates in both the United States (e.g., Beck, 1974) and Canada (e.g., Carty & Eagles, 1998), as well as between party activity and voter mobilization (Huckfeldt & Sprague 1992, 1995). Using constituency campaign spending levels as surrogates for campaign efforts in Britain, Johnston (1985, 1986) also reveals significant linkages between party activity and party support. Additional studies (e.g., Seyd & Whiteley, 1992; Whiteley & Seyd, 1992; Denver & Hands, 1992) support this line of argument and reinforce the need for electoral studies to continue analyzing and evaluating the influence of party activities upon voting behavior, and the linkages between parties and place, in all democracies. Though there is a long tradition of examining the membership structure of the major parties in Italian political studies (e.g., Galli & Prandi, 1970; Barbagli & Corbetta, 1980; Ignazi, 1989; Baccetti, 1997), relatively little work has focused upon the relationships between Italian political parties and place. This research complements and extends the existing body of work on Italian politics by providing a framework for analyzing how parties shape the environments in which they operate.

The influence that political parties have upon political behavior tends to be overshadowed by the rift between scholars of political behavior concerning the causal mechanisms underlying the act of voting itself. For many (e.g., McAllister, 1987; King, 1996), the voting choice is primarily a function of individual traits, such as level of income and sector of employment, and exogenous influences like the political party are disregarded completely. From this perspective, voting is a purely individual decision that takes place in social isolation, and one that can be explained adequately with aggregate data. Geographers (e.g., Pattie & Johnston, 2000; Agnew, 1996; Johnston, 1991; Taylor & Johnston, 1979), on the other hand, tend to argue that the social, political and economic environments, or places, where voters reside and interact possess salient influences that can sway political attitudes and choices. Such influences include the neighborhood effect based upon local social networks, where voters' choices are arguably influenced by those who live in their immediate vicinity.

Note that the terms 'context' and 'contextual effects' are commonly interchanged with place and place-based influences, respectively, by electoral geographers (e.g.,

O'Loughlin, Flint, & Anselin, 1994: 352). This creates confusion because many geographers and non-geographers that study political behavior equate or link context with the local level of analysis (e.g., King, 1996), and view contextual effects as the influence that social group membership has upon voter behavior, primarily at the local level. From this perspective, the influence of voters aggregated locally is privileged over the institutions that shape places and political attitudes, such as the political party. Constraining place and context to the local level also devalues the concept of place "as a defining element of geography and key idea for social science as a whole" (Agnew, 1989: 9), and leads to two general biases in electoral studies.

First, there tends to be a bias towards single scale analyses. With many scholars of political behavior enamored of the adage that 'all politics is local', many voting studies concentrate on this single level of analysis. In some studies that use aggregate data, the local itself is defined by the finest spatial resolution for which voting data are available, for example, the county, constituency or precinct. Concerns over the problems associated with ecological inference seemingly supersede the theoretical foundations for selecting a particular unit of analysis, and little thought is given to the actual relevance of the analytical scale of analysis. The second bias, related to the first, is the failure to recognize any geographic variation within the selected scale of analysis. Not only are the contents and attributes of the units of analysis privileged over the units themselves, but the units are viewed as equivalent and independent across space and over time; a constituency is a constituency is a constituency. Places are too often taken out of their historical setting and stripped of their geographic position and linkages relative to other places, and in voting studies the political party is often regarded as a passive receptacle for votes cast by individuals in a place.

Unlike the definitions of context-as-local, place is defined here as where historic circumstances, economic processes and socio-political identity converge. In Italy, the political party is an important social and political institution that offers itself as a means to understand better places. Examinations of the geographic structure and development of Italy's Democratic Party of the Left (PDS) within its territorial stronghold referred to as *la zona rossa*, or 'the red zone', provide several insights into the politics of place and political behavior (Fig. 1). Support for the Italian Left in each national election since the end of World War II has been 10–15% percent higher in *la zona rossa* than the national average, thus making this area the ideal setting to explore the linkages between places, the PDS and voters. The following section describes the framework used for studying the politicization of place in terms of the geographic penetration of the PDS and its overall geographic distribution, and provides the foundations for the survey data analysis.

### **The geographic penetration and distribution of political parties**

With regard to the spatial organization of a political party, there are two apparent and related dimensions to how places are politicized, namely, the geographic penetration of the party at the micro-scale (e.g., local, municipal, etc.) and the geographic distribution of the party at the macro-scale (e.g., regional, national, etc.). These two

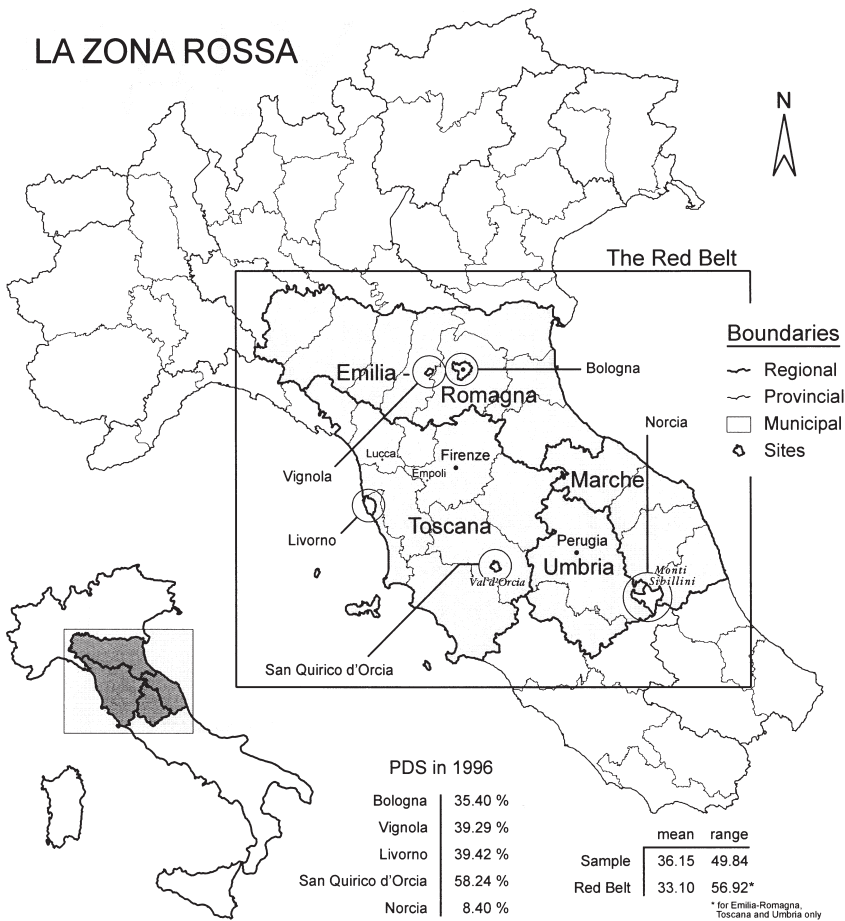


Fig. 1. *La zona rossa* — the red zone.

concepts extend Eliassen and Svaasand's (1975: 101) notions of 'institutionalization' and 'territorial spread' beyond the role that local party associations or elites play with regard to the genesis, creation and organizational development of a political party by focusing on the relationship between an established party and place. The former dimension of geographic penetration refers to the historical processes by which a political party formalizes and institutionalizes itself in various places. Considered critical to the organizational development of political parties in their formative years by some (e.g., Eliassen & Svaasand, 1975; Panebianco, 1988), the institutionalization of a party in a place is seldom examined beyond this initial period. At one end of this dimension the process of geographic penetration is guided by the principles, provisions and statutes that are set by the party's central apparatus. For example, the statutes of the PDS delineate a 'top-down' organizational and decision-making hierarchy that coincides with the tiers of Italian government (i.e., central

party organization at the national level, regional unions, provincial federations and municipal base offices).

At the other end are the issues and circumstances to which the party must respond and react that occupy a variety of environments and scales, and that ultimately characterize place. Traffic problems, crime, and local economic development are all examples of issues that Italian political parties address, not necessarily as singular policy positions spelled out by the national party leader, but on more particularistic terms as well. The geographic penetration of a party, therefore, is not only a function of its ability to make its presence felt within the various tiers of government, but also of its ability to address simultaneously local concerns, regional issues and national interests. Equally important are the place-based institutions and structures that may promote or inhibit the penetration of the party, such as the 'civic community' and social networks, or lack thereof, described by Putnam (1993). The geographic penetration of parties is an ongoing give-and-take that varies over time and across space, for example, when a party is reformed or replaced, or when places undergo economic restructuring.

The geographic distribution of the party simply refers to how and why party activities and support are dispersed or concentrated at the regional or national level. This distribution may guide the channeling of party resources during critical election campaigns, and it may also contribute to certain areas of the country becoming recognized bastions of support. According to several historians, the legacies of Papal domination in the nineteenth century, agrarian socialism in the early twentieth century, and the role that the communists played during the Resistance to fascism at the end of World War II, fostered the development of leftist attitudes in *la zona rossa* (for details, see Trigilia, 1984; Clark, 1984; Ginsborg, 1990; Caciagli, 1988; Baccetti, 1987 and De Grand, 1989). Ultimately, the parties of the Italian Left had to capitalize upon these conditions in order to shape and reproduce leftist sympathies from election to election. Maps of vote shares within and across democracies are typically used to indicate party support in places after elections, but much is left to infer with regard to these patterns, the processes behind political socialization and the politicization of place. What, if any, role does the party play in the creation and reproduction of such patterns of electoral support?

In some cases, if a party is successful in a particular place, supporters will be rewarded with the spoils of victory (e.g., a government contract, funds for education, a new medical center, jobs, etc.). This may start a circular process, which may later become institutionalized as patronage, where political attitudes and behaviors are reproduced, and this reproduction rewarded; votes beget benefits which beget more votes in subsequent elections. Such a process arguably contributed to the continuity of PCI support throughout the regions of the study area for much of the cold war era, which also helped to institutionalize *la zona rossa* in the minds of many Italians and students of Italian politics. Conversely, parties may not be able to establish a presence because of a general lack of interest, or because the geographic remoteness of a place hinders communication with the central party apparatus. From this point of view, the distribution of the party is recognized to be a function of the ebb and flow of party penetration in both the spatial and temporal domains.

### *The geographic structure of the PDS*

The *unità di base*, or territorial base units, of the PDS illustrate well the spatiotemporal dynamism of the process of penetration, and help to explain the patterns of support for the PDS throughout Italy. As the basic, grass-roots organizational unit of the PDS, the origins of the *unità di base* date back to the immediate post-World War II era when the PCI, and PCI cells, re-emerged on the Italian political landscape. With a minimum number of five members needed to be formally recognized, PCI cells were organized on the basis of workplace, geographic territory and gender (Sani, 1968). The geographic distribution and nature of these cells were quite uneven, many voting precincts in Italy were devoid of PCI cells and many cells lacked permanent premises where meetings could be held and activities such as recruitment and campaigning could be carried out. Nevertheless, in the ten year period beginning in 1945, the total number of cells increased from slightly over 29 000 to over 57 500, and at the height of the PCI's expansion in the mid-1950s, PCI membership exceeded two million (Galli & Prandi, 1970: 93).

Though workplace cells were initially the preferred form of party organization, geographic cells always outnumbered them, and were granted equal, if not favored, status by the party in 1956 (Galli & Prandi, 1970: 93). The role and number of PCI cells, and in particular those found in the workplace, declined when working conditions and Italian society were transformed by the 'economic miracle' of the late, 1950s and, 1960s (for details, see Sani, 1968 and Ginsborg, 1990). Similarly, geographic cells without permanent premises were vulnerable to absenteeism and apathetic party members, and these problems were exacerbated by ambiguous party objectives during national election campaigns. Having helped to establish permanent roots in Italian society, the cell of the PCI yielded to the section, which was composed of geographically proximate cells, though in some places sections were not divided into cells (Sani, 1968; Galli & Prandi, 1970). According to the bylaws adapted at the tenth congress of the PCI in 1963, the section "should have permanent premises which represent a meeting place and the center of Communist activity and of the political, cultural, educational, recreational, and welfare activities of all of the workers in the area" (Galli & Prandi, 1970: 95). The decline of the PCI cell, and the emergence of the geographic section, were significant trends because the arena in which the PCI operated was extended beyond the workplace.

According to Baccetti (1997: 143–144), and in light of the decline of the smaller cells, the PCI section

...was viewed as the organizational form best adapted to educate politically and to integrate into the life of the party the grand mass of party members...[compared to the Leninist workplace cell] the territorial section was instead a structure that evolved around the 'people' and was thought to exalt the expressive and associative function of the party, in order to maximize the capacities of propaganda and of mobilization in the great campaigns of agitation promoted from the [central party organization] and, above all, in election campaigns.

Guidelines were created by the central party organization that defined the scope,

purposes and character of the PCI section as a *casa del popolo*, or ‘house of the people’. These guidelines included items regarding the cleanliness and dignity of the section, the need to confront the problems of the neighborhood, the creation of a section musical group and specifications for posting the party paper and manifestos, among other technical, recreational and cultural activities (Massari, 1982). Furthermore, broadening access to the party through the de-emphasis of the workplace cell, and the coincident promotion of the PCI created by and for ‘the people’ only served to increase its position upon the Italian political landscape as a mass party. The PCI section, therefore, became the foothold for the party to embed itself and make its presence felt in many places throughout Italy from the early 1960s through the end of the cold war.

Among the activities sponsored by sections that contributed to the institutionalization of the PCI in different places throughout Italy, above and beyond recruitment and election campaigns, were the *feste de l’Unità*, or the ‘Festivals of Unity’. Ginsborg (1990: 196) notes that, “The *festa* was often the most important moment in the local Communist section’s calendar, a moment when organizational ability and the capacity to attract large numbers of non-Communists were put to the test”. Such festivals were originally organized as fund-raising events in order to keep the communist daily newspaper, *l’Unità*, in circulation. Still held today, but under the auspices of the PDS, festivals range considerably in size, activity and political content. Local section festivals may offer little more than a cookout and raffle for a *prosciutto* and wine, but the regional and national festivals can last for weeks with carnival rides, food stands, farm equipment demonstrations, home appliance sales, music performances and appearances by party leaders.

With the organizational abilities of the section put to the test with each *festa*, the existence of the section itself was seriously challenged when the PCI, or a large portion of it, reinvented itself as the Democratic Party of the Left (PDS) in 1991. When the ‘historic compromise’ of the late-1970s failed to meet its potential of including and broadening the role of the PCI in government, party membership deteriorated each and every year well into the, 1980s. The leadership of the PCI decided to reform the party in 1989 so the Italian Left could advance within parliament (for details, see Ignazi, 1992; McCarthy, 1995; Weinberg, 1995; Belloni, 1992). Subsequently, in 1991 the PDS emerged as the primary replacement for the PCI<sup>1</sup>.

Though the PDS informally inherited much of the electoral base and infrastructure of the dissolved communists, no accurate account of the number and locations of former-PCI sections inherited existed. For this reason, the PDS decided to regroup the former-PCI sections under the name *unità di base*, or territorial base units (Baccetti, 1997: 153). Seeking to institute more than a simple name change, the PDS merged smaller sections together and recycled healthy ones into the new party

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<sup>1</sup> Shortly after the emergence of the PDS in 1991, a smaller group of dissatisfied, and more radical, PCI members splintered off to form the party of Refounded Communists (RC). Recently, in an effort to be recognized as a ‘European’ social-democratic party, rather than as a post-communist party, the PDS changed its name to the Democrats of the Left (DS), and another faction of the RC splintered off to form the Party of Italian Communists (PDCI) (Massari & Parker, 1999).

organization. It is interesting to note that the PDS still does not furnish a precise count of the number of *unità di base*, but claims that “more than 7000 sections are still open” (Baccetti, 1997: 154). The regional distributions of former-PCI sections and PCI- and PDS-sponsored *feste de l’Unità* illustrate the effects that the transformation of the PCI into the PDS had upon the geographic structure of the Italian Left, and provide insight into the geographic legacies of the PCI and the spatial trajectories of the PDS throughout Italy.

Table 1 provides the last official data from the PCI regarding the actual number of sections in each of the 20 administrative regions of Italy. Each region is placed into one of five geographic zones that are frequently used by researchers of Italian political behavior. Created on the basis of shared and similar histories, and of the major political influences of the twentieth century in Italy, namely Catholicism and socialism, this five part division of Italy is remarkably stable and used by numerous scholars of Italian politics (e.g., see Dogan, 1967; Galli & Prandi, 1970; Bartolini, 1976; Barbagli & Corbetta, 1980; Cartocci, 1990). A healthy and growing number of PCI sections could be found throughout Italy in the, 1980s, particularly within the central regions, lending credence to this area’s nickname, *la zona rossa*. Over

Table 1  
Number of PCI sections in each region of Italy in 1985 and 1988, adapted from Baccetti (1997: 151)

Region	1985	1988	1988:1985
<i>Northwest</i>			
Val d’Aosta	32	32	1.00
Piemonte	1016	957	0.94
Liguria	476	523	1.10
Lombardia	1812	1798	0.99
<i>Northeast</i>			
Veneto	918	899	0.98
Trentino-Alto Adige	142	135	0.95
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	296	316	1.07
<i>Central (the red zone)</i>			
Emilia-Romagna	1969	2021	1.02
Toscana	1409	1800	1.28
Umbria	323	548	1.70
Marche	485	494	1.02
<i>South</i>			
Lazio	644	869	1.35
Abruzzo	391	404	1.03
Molise	109	116	1.06
Campania	655	824	1.26
Puglia	312	351	1.13
Basilicata	166	155	0.93
Calabria	523	523	1.00
<i>Islands</i>			
Sicilia	526	540	1.03
Sardenga	433	431	0.99
<i>Total</i>	12637	13736	1.09



1000 new sections were added between 1985 and 1988, but this was not necessarily due to increases in PCI membership. In fact, party membership declined from 1 595 668 in 1985 to 1 462 281 in 1988 (Baccetti, 1997: 120; Hine, 1993). The reconfiguration of the Italian Left beginning in the fall of 1989 did little to stop the hemorrhage of party members, and unsurprisingly accelerated losses in several regions.

When the future of the PCI was still uncertain, many sections continued to sponsor festivals, thus Table 2 links the last days of the PCI to the first days of the PDS. Since no precise data on the numbers and distribution of the *unità di base* of the PDS are available, and the PDS is recognized as the primary beneficiary of the PCI's infrastructure, *feste* data serve as surrogate measures of the new territorial base units. Unlike the data reported previously that suggest PCI and PDS activity on the basis of the raw number of sections, Table 2 provides a count of the party sanctioned festival. Even though a marked decline in the total number of festivals is apparent

Table 2  
Number of *feste de l'Unità* in each region of Italy, 1985, 1988 and 1993, adapted from Baccetti (1997)

Region	1985	1988	1993	1985:1993
<i>Northwest</i>				
Val d'Aosta	6	7	6	0.86
Piemonte	410	333	113	0.34
Liguria	296	270	91	0.34
Lombardia	1246	977	370 <sup>a</sup>	0.38
<i>Northeast</i>				
Veneto	472	363	152	0.42
Trentino-Alto Adige	39	41	9	0.22
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	164	92	26	0.28
<i>Central (the red zone)</i>				
Emilia-Romagna	1268	899	482	0.54
Toscana	846	744	264 <sup>b</sup>	0.35
Umbria	145	186	50	0.27
Marche	278	220	114	0.52
<i>South</i>				
Lazio	282	281	20 <sup>c</sup>	0.07
Abruzzo	214	149	35	0.23
Molise	52	46	4	0.09
Campania	182	144	35	0.24
Puglia	196	183	68	0.37
Basilicata	96	85	NA	NA
Calabria	152	172	40	0.23
<i>Islands</i>				
Sicilia	181	131	NA	NA
Sardenga	141	114	NA	NA
<i>Total</i>	6709	5438	1879	0.28

<sup>a</sup> Excluding the city of Milan.

<sup>b</sup> Excluding the provincial federation of Florence.

<sup>c</sup> Only the city of Rome.

across Italy, the Italian Left remains firmly rooted in the central regions of Italy, and suggests that the linkages between voters, parties and place should be examined more closely.

The evolution of the *unità di base* shows how political parties can change and transform over time, and how such change is manifest geographically. Spatiotemporal variations of section and festival numbers reflect the diverse and continuously changing circumstances under which penetration occurs and distribution fluctuates. Such changing circumstances and their effects upon the political attitudes and behaviors of voters, as well as party activities, are neither homogeneous nor isotropic throughout the Italian peninsula. In the following section, the relationship between the politicization of places and voter attitudes and behavior is explored further with comprehensive survey data analyses.

### **‘How ‘red’ is the red zone?’: perspectives on party activities and voter behavior**

Regarding place as a dynamic and constantly evolving concept is central to this examination of Italian politics. I consider regional and local variations of party membership, activity and support not the mere by-product of the spatial distribution of voters or insignificant artifacts, but the result of party organization, historic circumstances and geographic conditions which converge to characterize different places in different ways. Voters and parties alike respond to such circumstances and conditions differently over time and across space, and are always shaping and reshaping the political character of places. Evidence from a survey specifically designed to clarify the links between party preference, party activities and social networks underscores the need to look beyond the voter and to recognize the influence of place-based institutions and structures upon electoral behavior.

The 500 respondent telephone survey was administered over three weeks in September and October 1997 in five different municipalities in *la zona rossa*. Among the initial considerations behind the selection of the five sites were to include at least two urban and two rural locations. Recognizing that the Italian Left has been very successful at the polls throughout the red zone, I determined that the levels of PDS support returned in the 1996 national election for the five survey sample sites should approximate the range of values returned by the PDS in the area of study (i.e., minimum PDS value=3.70%, maximum PDS value 60.62%, range of the PDS in the red zone in 1996=56.92%). This retrospective sampling strategy, that intentionally introduces variation across the sample, reduces bias and increases the chances for making plausible inferences from the data (King, Keohane, & Verba, 1994). Since election returns for the Marche region were unavailable at the time of the survey, no survey site was selected from this region and the sample approximated the range of PDS returns for the remaining three regions of *la zona rossa*: Emilia-Romagna; Toscana; and Umbria. Two pairs of locations, similar in population structure and that fit within the calculated range of PDS support in the red zone, were identified using 1991 Italian census data and 1996 election data. The municipalities of Bologna

and Livorno were selected as the two urban locations, and San Quirico d'Orcia and Norcia were selected as appropriate rural locations. The fifth location, Vignola, was selected at random from the remaining pool of possible survey sites (refer to map in Fig. 1).

The survey used a database of publicly listed telephone numbers, and a total of 714 calls had to be made in order to obtain the 500 completed questionnaires (response rate=70%) which included several sensitive questions pertaining to political attitudes and behavior. Italian census data were used to stratify the sample by sex and by three age groups (i.e., 18–34; 35–64; 65 and over) in each of the five locations. Due to the diversity of survey sites and the sampling design, sampling errors vary according to the location of responses. Sampling errors for the cities of Bologna and Livorno, which have considerably larger populations than Vignola, San Quirico d'Orcia and Norcia, tend to be larger than those for the more rural survey sites. The sampling error for the entire sample is estimated to be  $\pm 5\%$ , and varies by individual questions on the survey instrument.

Responses to a question regarding how one voted in the 1996 Italian national election, reported in Table 3, indicate that the survey sample provides a very good approximation of voting behavior for the area of study since the survey and red zone averages parallel one another. Of all parties that appeared on the ballot in 1996, the PDS received the most support from survey respondents, and nearly half of the respondents from the rural commune of San Quirico d'Orcia voted for the PDS. In the interest of space, only the four major parties are identified and are arranged along a left to right political continuum, though more than 15 parties appeared on the ballot. On the far left are the Refounded Communists (RC) that represent the hard-line component of the former-PCI. The RC emerged at approximately the same time as the PDS, though only about one quarter of PCI members supported this movement (Weinberg, 1995). The center-left PDS is to the immediate right of the RC, and results for the centrist/conservative party *Forza Italia!* (FI) led by Italian media-mogul Silvio Berlusconi are in the third column. The post-fascist National Alliance (AN) party led by Gianfranco Fini is identified in the next column, and finally, all other parties are aggregated into the 'Other' category.

Within the scope of this study, I contend that party visibility is linked to levels

Table 3  
Voting behavior of survey respondents in selected locations throughout the *la zona rossa*, 1996

	RC	PDS	FI	AN	Other
Bologna	9	27	11	13	40
Vignola	7	27	13	7	44
Livorno	11	29	9	9	42
S. Quirico	7	48	5	3	37
Norcia	8	24	13	13	42
Total	42	157	51	45	205
Averages for the survey sample	8.4%	31.0%	10.2%	9.0%	41.0%
Averages for <i>la zona rossa</i>	10.1%	31.9%	13.2%	13.2%	31.6%

Table 4  
Most visible political party in *la zona rossa*, 1997

	RC	PDS	FI	AN	Other/don't know
Bologna	0	92	0	0	8
Vignola	0	77	1	2	20
Livorno	13	60	1	0	26
S. Quirico	4	80	1	0	15
Norcia	6	23	2	4	65
Total	23	332	5	6	134

of party support, which can help to explain variations of support from place to place. If a party is successful in penetrating a place it should enjoy a relatively high degree of visibility compared to other parties, and electoral support would be expected to follow. Subsequently, strong showings at the polls may result in the channeling of party resources to those places. Though it is difficult to determine which came first, the party or the votes, a reciprocal relationship is likely to evolve between support and party visibility in places.

Table 4 provides responses to the question, “Which political party is most active in your *comune* during elections?”, and shows that the PDS is the most visible political party in all survey locations. When compared to Table 3, these numbers not only indicate that the PDS is the most visible party in the eyes of those who voted PDS, but it is also the most visible party among non-supporters. In Bologna, the PDS was the only party identified, as the remaining eight responses were ‘Don’t know’. The dominance in visibility that the PDS enjoys suggests that the party has indeed penetrated and established a presence in many places, though only marginally so in Norcia.

Table 5 summarizes what types of activities are sponsored by political parties and provides insights into how parties attempt to institutionalize themselves in order to generate, maintain and increase support. It is likely that the majority of these activities are sponsored by the PDS given the party’s high visibility. One of the more interesting features of this table is the column that reports recruitment activities. In

Table 5  
Political party activity in *la zona rossa*, 1997 (note: more than one response permitted)

	Recruitment	Festivals	Meetings	Other	Nothing
Bologna	6	66	23	5	1
Vignola	12	46	31	3	0
Livorno	27	60	34	7	0
S. Quirico	23	73	22	0	0
Norcia	27	34	15	11	1
Total	95	279	125	26	2

Bologna, where PDS support is high, few respondents identified recruitment as a party sponsored activity, but in Norcia it is cited nearly as many times as are festivals. This difference may be a reflection of the bases of PDS support in each location. In Bologna, PDS support is recognized to be stable and secure given the left's hegemonic position in city, provincial and regional government and probably concentrates its efforts on the maintenance of this support by sponsoring activities such as festivals. In Norcia, where PDS support is tenuous from the perspective of visibility, recruitment may be an important, if not the most important activity for the party. The geographic variation of party activities reflects how parties respond to different socio-political environments in which they operate and how they try to shape or manipulate these environments to their advantage.

The presence and activities of political parties in themselves do not guarantee electoral support; rather, the voter must weigh and evaluate personal interests, group interests and political information. This mediation, however, does not occur within a spatial or temporal vacuum, nor does it follow the same path or have the same intensity in different places. An important aspect to how places are politicized are the opportunity structures and networks whence political information is disseminated and received. For example, the fact that the PDS is the most visible party in all survey locations by both supporters and non-supporters suggests that political information received from family, friends, coworkers, newspapers, regional television and local government officials may in some way be biased in favor of the PDS. This bias is neither consistent nor constant in different places, but is continuously transforming, as for example, when incumbents are defeated, parties change positions or when places experience an economic rebirth.

Opportunity structures for interaction are in large part constructed by the voter, but they are also biased by and towards certain political parties, local institutions and place-based circumstances (Johnston, 1986a,b). One of the criticisms against the argument that 'places count', as expressed by McAllister and Studlar (1992: 170), is that, "...[the argument in favor of place] subsumes a variety of social, political, and economic effects into an all-encompassing argument". Geographers concede that some level of expertise has been developed "...in accounting for [political] patterns through the *assumed* mechanism of the neighborhood effect" (Johnston, 1987: 15). Detailing the ways in which such opportunity structures evolve, change and are institutionalized in places, which in turn are set within a multiple scale, historical framework, can extend our understanding of political behavior. Scrutinizing further the places where the ballot is cast offers complementary information to models of voting behavior that only use vote shares and voter attributes, and that assume or infer neighborhood effects.

Data about the frequency of political conversations with an identified conversation partner, usually a family member or coworker, are reported in Table 6, and provide a glimpse into these opportunity structures and their respective place to place variation. It is interesting that in Norcia respondents discuss politics considerably less 'often' than those in the other four sites. This is consistent with the data presented in previous tables, and provides a possible link between voting behavior, party visibility and place. Specifically, the fact that nearly fifty percent fewer people discuss

Table 6  
Frequency of conversations about politics by location, 1997

	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Only during elections	Never
Bologna	26	42	21	9	0
Vignola	22	38	25	11	2
Livorno	22	38	22	13	6
S. Quirico	26	37	27	8	2
Norcia	13	42	26	18	1
Total	109	196	121	59	11

politics ‘often’ in Norcia than in other places suggests that the opportunity structure for political conversations are limited, not as developed or not as important from the voter’s perspective, or not as institutionalized from the party and place perspectives.

The survey data presented thus far provide insights into the socio-political character of *la zona rossa*. To evaluate further the importance of place-specific characteristics such as information networks, while controlling for the socio-economic backgrounds of respondents, I used logistic regression. Logistic regression uses a binary dependent variable and parameter estimates are returned as the natural log of the odds, or logits, of an event occurring, such as vote cast for the PDS. In the context of this analysis, calculating the anti-log of an estimate returns the multiplicative change in odds that a voter within a specified category is more or less likely to vote for the specified party than someone within a comparison category. Models were fit for the PDS in 1996, as well as for the far-left RC, the center-right FI and the post-fascist AN for comparison.

Dummy variables related to information networks and possibly linked to political parties are included in each model (i.e., family loyalty and political discussion), as are a battery of compositional controls. The selection of the compositional control variables was guided by theories of Italian (e.g., Caciagli & Spreafico, 1990) and west European voting behavior (e.g., Lipset & Rokkan, 1967) that, for example, suggest union members tend to support the parties on the left. The underlying hypothesis for the following logistic regressions is that party support is related to the information network variables, even after controlling for the socio-economic characteristics of voters in *la zona rossa*. Table 7 contains descriptions of the independent variables and comparison categories used, as well as the parameter estimates from each of the four fitted models.

The model estimated for the PDS returns the best overall fit (i.e., likelihood ratio=153.09), followed by the models for the AN and FI, respectively, but the null hypothesis for the likelihood ratio test cannot be rejected for the RC model (at the  $p < 0.05$ ). Respondents that chose not answer some of the questions related directly to the models estimated were omitted from the analysis, which effectively reduced

Table 7  
Logistic regression estimates and variable descriptions for the RC, PDS, FI and AN in 1996

	RC=I	PDS=I	FI=I	AN=I	Variable description
Intercept	-3.40(0.94)	-3.06 (0.70)	-1.00 (0.77)	-0.50 (0.74)	
<i>Age</i>					
18–34	0.03 (0.73)	0.11 (0.57)	0.16 (0.75)	0.93 (0.74)	Respondents were placed into one of three age groups, the 65+ age group is omitted from the analysis and serves as the comparison category.
35–65	-0.27 (0.64)	0.04 (0.45)	0.29 (0.60)	0.07 (0.63)	
<i>Sex</i>					
Female	0.04 (0.41)	-0.16 (0.33)	0.00 (0.40)	-0.88 (0.43)	The sex variable provides an indication of differences between male and female supporters.
<i>Education</i>					
High school	0.50 (0.70)	0.20 (0.51)	0.57 (0.65)	-0.39 (0.71)	Voters were placed into one of four education categories, those who claimed no formal or only compulsory-level education serve as the comparison group.
Technical	2.30 (0.82)	-1.19 (0.68)	0.27 (0.83)	-0.32 (0.87)	
University	0.59 (0.81)	0.46 (0.58)	0.05 (0.74)	-0.83 (0.77)	
<i>Employment status</i>					
Stud./home.	1.48 (0.69)	0.19 (0.50)	-0.62 (0.57)	0.29 (0.56)	Employment status reveals how students and homemakers, the skilled, semi-skilled and manual labor differs from the unemployed in their support for the specified party.
Skilled	0.50 (0.91)	0.68 (0.65)	-0.72 (0.74)	0.66 (0.70)	
Semi-skilled	0.34 (0.70)	0.36 (0.52)	0.26 (0.51)	-0.35 (0.61)	
Manual	0.95 (0.74)	1.98 (0.54)	-1.62 (0.85)	-2.23 (1.12)	
<i>Family loyalty</i>					
DC	-0.57 (0.69)	-2.22 (0.76)	0.44 (0.44)	-0.24 (0.48)	The party preference of a respondent's father serves as a surrogate measure of family loyalty, with those whose father did not support either the Italian Communist Party (PCI) or Christian Democrats (DC) constituting the comparison group.
PCI	0.52 (0.47)	1.75 (0.35)	-2.33 (0.78)	-2.82 (1.05)	

Continued

Table 7  
Continued

	RC=I	PDS=I	FI=I	AN=I	Variable description
<i>Discuss politics...</i>					
Often	0.29 (0.57)	<b>1.50 (0.42)</b>	<b>-1.49 (0.69)</b>	<b>-1.68 (0.85)</b>	Voters who discuss politics 'often' or 'sometimes' are compared to those who discuss politics 'rarely' or 'only during elections'.
Sometimes	0.44 (0.48)	0.20 (0.36)	-0.73 (0.41)	0.20 (0.42)	
<i>Survey site</i>					
Vignola	-1.10 (0.65)	0.78 (0.50)	-0.49 (0.57)	-0.17 (0.65)	Voters in identified survey locations are compared to those in Bologna, the survey site which most resembled the PDS' national average of 21.1%.
Livorno	-0.61 (0.61)	<b>1.48 (0.54)</b>	-0.37 (0.64)	-0.65 (0.67)	
S. Quirico	-1.24 (0.69)	<b>1.54 (0.49)</b>	-0.91 (0.75)	-1.02 (0.76)	
Norcia	-0.66 (0.60)	<b>1.09 (0.49)</b>	-0.50 (0.55)	-0.21 (0.54)	
Null deviance	216.48	426.29	236.95	224.86	
Likelihood ratio (df)	27.39 (18)	153.09 (18)	50.08 (18)	51.72 (18)	
<i>n</i>	319	319	319	319	

Notes: estimates in **boldface** are significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level.

The *R* statistical package (version 1.1.0), running under Linux–Mandrake version 7.1 (kernel 2.2.15), is used for the analyses reported here.



the sample size from 500 to 319<sup>2</sup>. Few of the compositional control variables are found to be significantly related to any party preference in *la zona rossa*. One possible explanation for this is that the Italian electorate was still trying to make sense of all of the changes (e.g., the disappearance of old parties, the emergence of new parties and politicians, etc.) that occurred to party politics in the years leading up to the 1996 national elections. Aside from women being approximately twice less likely to support the AN than men in *la zona rossa* (i.e.,  $e^{-0.88}=0.41$ ), the only other significant compositional control variable concerns employment status for the PDS and AN. As absolutely expected, manual labor is over seven times more likely to vote for the PDS (i.e.,  $e^{1.98}=7.24$ ) than are the unemployed and this same group is nine times less likely to support the right-wing, post-fascist AN (i.e.,  $e^{-2.23}=0.11$ ).

The set of variables measuring family loyalty and the frequency of political discussion return results of particular interest within the scope of this analysis. Turning first to family loyalty, survey respondents were asked for which party their father usually votes or voted. Presumably, if politics were discussed at home and given significance during childhood, adolescence and young adulthood, a lasting impression may have been formed upon a respondent's memory (Butler & Stokes, 1969; Rose & McAllister, 1990: 46)<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, Italian familial ties are renowned for their intensity. Note that the PCI has not appeared on a national ballot since 1987 and the DC has not appeared since 1992. Seeing that the PDS is recognized widely to be the primary replacement for the PCI, this variable provides a general indication of family loyalty through continuity for the Italian Left at the polls. No single party emerged to replace the DC, hence, this variable explores whether or not DC-loyalties have been translated into support for another party. In the PDS model, respondents claiming that their father voted for the DC are over nine times less likely to have voted for the PDS than non-DC supporters, while those whose father usually voted for the PCI are nearly six times more likely to support the PDS than the comparison group (i.e.,  $e^{1.75}=5.75$ ). Results from the FI and AN models indicate that if a respondent's father supported the PCI they were over 10 times less likely to support FI, and over 17 times less likely to vote for the AN, than respondents whose father usually voted for a party other than the PCI. These findings not only link current PDS support to the former-PCI, but suggest family loyalty and familial information networks are very important to the continued success of the Italian Left.

The variables measuring the frequency of political discussions return similarly interesting results. Respondents who discuss politics 'often' with an identified con-

<sup>2</sup> The mean level of PDS support for the 319 cases subsetted from the original pool of 500 observations is 38.9%. PDS data used in the logistic regressions, divided by survey location are as follows (i.e., votes cast for the PDS/number of cases used in location): Bologna (19/69); Vignola (25/61); Livorno (24/59); San Quirico d'Orcia (36/61); Norcia (20/69). Since the PDS vote share in Bologna, 27.5%, is closest to the national average of PDS support in 1996, 21.1%, this location serves as the comparison site in fitted logistic models.

<sup>3</sup> Additional assumptions, as discussed by Butler and Stokes (1969) and Rose and McAllister (1990), that are relevant to this analysis include: the voting preference of a respondent's father carries more weight than the mother's vote; and, the father's vote is reported accurately by the respondent.

versation are about four and a half times more likely to support the PDS than those who talk about politics ‘rarely’ or ‘only during elections’. Furthermore, those who discuss politics ‘often’ are more than four times less likely to support FI and five times less likely to vote for the AN than the comparison group. These results support the argument that the opportunity structures and information networks in *la zona rossa* are politically biased, and in particular by the PDS, their supporters or a combination of the two. Results from additional logistic models, not reported here, reveal that the magnitude and significance of coefficients corresponding to political discussion varies between survey locations. For example, frequent political discussions are not significantly related to PDS support in Bologna or in Norcia. Therefore, just as Agnew (1992: 57) points out that “[n]ational averages disguise a variety of local differences”, aggregating survey data from different locations may hide place-specific behaviors. The set of coefficients corresponding to survey sites reinforces this finding by exhibiting variations in the likelihood of PDS support based upon location. Also of interest is the directionality of the set of coefficients for each model, the only model yielding positive estimates is that for the PDS.

Interviews with PDS functionaries provide additional insights into the nature of opportunity structures for political interaction throughout *la zona rossa*. PDS Regional Secretary for Umbria, Piero Minini, reveals that due to the relatively low population of Umbria, the PDS regional union is not divided up into smaller provincial party federations. Thus, the PDS union of Umbria based in Perugia must cover more ground and serve a greater geographic area than federations in other regions of Italy. According to Minini, campaign efforts focus on the larger, more populated townships of the region. In more peripheral areas, such as Norcia, the PDS relies more upon the pre-existing relationships established by the PCI and the “local social fabric” (Minini, 1997). Historically, the prevalence of small landholdings and a general acceptance of the Church in and around Norcia fostered the development of more conservative political attitudes, and the Italian Left was never very successful in terms of electoral support in southeast Umbria (Bettoni, 1989; Shin, 1995). Such factors, in combination with Norcia’s geographic remoteness on the slopes of the *Monte Sibillini*, contribute to the relative lack of consideration given to this area by the PDS in recent years, and help to explain the peculiarity of survey responses from this location.

Rossano Nardi, the PDS secretary for the commune of Empoli (Toscana) describes

Every Sunday, about 100 PDS members distribute the weekend edition of [the party newspaper] *l’Unità*. About 2 000 copies are distributed, door to door, in addition to the local PDS chronicle. This is an important activity, not only for the party, but for the community which we serve, because we can maintain direct contact with our supporters, and even with those who do not vote for the PDS, on a weekly basis. We hear the concerns, problems and ideas of the Empolese, and we organize meetings to discuss these issues (Nardi, 1997).

The above excerpt illustrates how the PDS distributes and collects information from supporters and non-supporters alike, and such activities may contribute to the devel-

opment, maintenance and succession of opportunity structures for political interaction. The origins of left-wing newspaper distribution and readership can be traced back to the turn of the twentieth century (see Caciagli, 1988), and the existence of such an informational network today attests to how they evolve, transform and are reproduced, which ultimately shapes the political character of Empoli.

PDS activity in the Tuscan city of Lucca, which is less than an hour away by train from Empoli (refer to Fig. 1), is notably different from that described above. Because Lucca and its surrounding environs tended to support the DC more than the PCI during much of the post-World War II period, this area is referred to as the “white flag” of the red zone (Agnew 1987, 1992). Geographic conditions similar to those found in Norcia discussed earlier, in combination with Lucca’s status as an independent republic, are cited as contributing to the development of a unique socio-political *Lucchese* identity, as well as more conservative political attitudes (Agnew, 1992: 52). PDS Secretary of Lucca, Ulisse Di Prete, confirms that the party has difficulties generating support and membership in the area. Consequently, the historically poor performance of the left has limited the organizational structure of the PDS Federation of Lucca. Rather than distributing newspapers and circulars door to door as in Empoli, the ‘light party structure’ in Lucca limits the collection and dissemination of information to primarily the telephone and fax machine (Di Prete, 1997). The inability of the PDS to penetrate Lucca is in part a function of geographic and historical processes that have molded the character of this place in Toscana, and the PDS’ failure to improve its weak position in the area. The survey analyses, combined with the interviews with PDS functionaries, illustrate clearly that political parties are not inert organizations with passive supporters, constant political positions, stable infrastructures and unitary images. Likewise, places and voters undergo continuous changes that are initiated by any number of social, political, economic and historic processes and influences which need to be examined for their impact upon the voting choice.

## Conclusions

The framework used to link the PDS to places at various scales of analysis provides an alternate but comprehensive way to explain the patterns and variation of voting in Italy. At the national and regional levels, the spatial distribution of PDS *unità di base* and party sponsored festivals highlight the organizational strength of the Italian Left within *la zona rossa*, and illustrates how the transition from the PCI to the PDS was played out across Italy. At a more localized scale, survey analyses and excerpts from interviews show how the PDS penetrated and institutionalized itself within places, which may have influenced the attitudes and behavior of voters. Significant relationships between the frequency of political conversations and PDS support in some survey locations suggest that information networks are biased towards, and possibly by, this party. Based upon a reciprocal exchange between parties and voters, that is neither constant nor consistent across space or over time, such socio-political interrelations in *la zona rossa* are arguably critical to the creation, maintenance and reproduction of the political character of places.

Though there is more to learn about the recent transition of Italian politics, many parties, places and electoral geographies remain to be explored in other democracies. The methods of analysis used in this research can be applied elsewhere, and provide a useful way to study electoral geography when aggregate data are not available. Furthermore, within emerging democracies place-based approaches may provide the necessary foundations for understanding how electoral patterns emerge, develop and possibly ossify, while in established democracies this approach may shed light on how political attitudes and behaviors are reproduced, mature and change.

Examinations of the politicization of place complement electoral studies that solely use aggregate data, and extend the realm of voting studies beyond the debate about whether context matters or not. The findings presented substantiate the need to establish places, and place-based institutions such as the political party, as focal points for explorations into voting behavior. This is not a call to return to the particular, nor to disregard other approaches to electoral studies, but to identify and evaluate political patterns and behavior using an historic perspective when necessary, and implementing a framework guided by multiple geographic scales of analysis. Putting places within a broad geographic framework that takes into consideration history, the spatial organization of political parties and when available, information about voter attitudes, perceptions and behavior, offers much to explanations of voting patterns and political behavior. Exploring the politicization of place in this manner reveals how place and politics are inextricably intertwined and underscores the spatiotemporal dynamism of geography.

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