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Do bishops matter for politics? Evidence from Italy

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**Do Bishops Matter for Politics?
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Abstract

This paper studies whether and how religious leaders affect politics. Focusing on Italian dioceses in the period from 1948 to 1992, we find that the identity of the bishop in office explains a significant amount of the variation in the vote share for the Christian Democracy party (DC). This result is robust to several exercises that use different samples and time windows. Zooming into the mechanism, we find that two characteristics of bishops matter: (i) his political culture, and (ii) his interaction with the population—the latter being measured using state-of-the-art text-analysis techniques.

JEL-Classification: D72, Z12, D02.

Keywords: Voting Behavior, Religion, Bishops, Leaders.

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Non-Technical Summary

Spiritual leaders across the world and from different religious organizations often enter political matters by expressing their views, possibly affecting voters' behavior. For instance, in Italy –a country where religion and politics have historically been highly interconnected– before the most recent parliamentary election, in September 2022, the Italian Episcopal Conference invited all electors to turn out and “[evaluate] the various political proposals in the light of the common good” to build a more just society and “leaving no one behind.”

In this paper we build on the context of 20th-century Italy to empirically study whether religious leaders affect electoral outcomes and through which mechanism. We focus on Catholic bishops in Italian dioceses during the 1948-1992 period and study whether and how they affected electoral support for the Democrazia Cristiana, the Christian Democracy party (DC). The DC, created during WWII, was strongly backed by the Pope to the extent that the historical record suggests that “the Church led the electoral battle on behalf of the new Christian Democratic party” (Warner, 2000, p. 40).

To carry out the empirical analysis, we assembled a novel dataset on the universe of bishops appointed in all Italian dioceses from 1948 to 1992 –with detailed information on bishops' biographical characteristics– and match it with electoral results from regional, national, and European elections.

Controlling for geographical and time factors, we find that bishops significantly affect the share of votes for the DC. Importantly, we shed light on two mechanisms through which bishops influenced voters: (i) the bishop's political culture, and (ii) different types of bishop's direct interaction with the population. We measure each bishop's activism using novel text data from the historical archive of a major national newspaper, *Il Corriere della Sera*. Exploiting state-of-the-art text analysis techniques, we find that bishops performed two main types of activities: controversial debates with members of the population and public events fostering the sense of community or celebrating new socioeconomic achievement. We find that bishops involved in public controversies display a lower bishop effect, suggesting that these type of activities reduce the ability of a bishop to influence voters' support for the DC. By contrast, the more bishops were involved in celebrating masses and participating in public events involving politicians and local authorities, the larger their ability to bring votes to the DC.

1 Introduction

Throughout history, the relationship between church and state has been particularly complex, with moments of crash and others of alignment between the two institutions. Even today, religious leaders often step into the political sphere, more or less openly.¹ Specifically, religious leaders may affect the political preferences and choices of their congregation, with important social, political, and economic implications. However, given the lack of detailed information on religious leaders and their characteristics, there is still scant empirical evidence on whether this happens and through which mechanism.

This paper addresses this question by focusing on one of the largest religious organizations, the Catholic Church. In particular, we investigate whether and how bishops affected electoral support for the *Democrazia Cristiana*, the Christian Democracy party (DC) in 20th-century Italy. The DC, created during WWII, was strongly backed by the Pope as an antidote against the “Communist threat,” and the historical record suggests that “the Church led the electoral battle on behalf of the new Christian Democratic party” (Warner, 2000, p. 40).

To carry out the empirical analysis, we assembled a novel dataset on the universe of bishops appointed in all Italian dioceses from 1948 to 1992—with detailed information on bishops’ biographical characteristics—and match it with electoral results from regional, national, and European elections.

First, we provide evidence that the identity of bishops matters for political outcomes. In particular, after controlling for geographical and time factors, we find that bishop fixed effects explain a significant amount of the variation in the share of votes for the DC. In terms of magnitude, our results are comparable to the ones obtained in studies of the impact of managers on productivity in private-sector firms (Bertrand and Schoar, 2003) and in the public sector (Fenizia, 2022).

When looking at our results, one main concern is whether bishop fixed effects are capturing unobserved diocese-time variation—related, for instance, to endogenous sorting of bishops to dioceses—rather than the ability of bishops to influence political outcomes. We perform a variety of robustness checks to rule out this possibility. For instance, we do not find evidence that our results are driven by trends in political support prior to bishops’ transitions or by bishops being allocated to dioceses based on their comparative advantage. Our results are also robust if we consider only bishops who left office for exogenous reasons or when we

¹In some Muslim countries, religious leaders are also officially recognized as political leaders. In Iran, for example, the Supreme Leader is the highest-ranking political and religious authority. On the other hand, in more secular societies, religious leaders may influence politics less directly.

restrict our analysis to limited time windows around bishops' transitions, as in [Fenizia \(2022\)](#) or [Jones and Olken \(2005\)](#).

The question that naturally follows is: which bishop characteristics matter and how do those characteristics influence voters? To answer it, we relate the coefficients of the bishop fixed effects to several bishop-specific biographical characteristics, as well as to measures of activism and public engagement. The latter are constructed using novel text data from the historical archive of a major national newspaper, *Il Corriere della Sera*. In particular, relying on the Supervised Latent Dirichlet Allocation algorithm ([Mcauliffe and Blei, 2007](#)), we uncover two main topics related to the bishops' public engagement in two domains: controversial debates with members of the population and involvement in public events fostering the sense of community or celebrating new socioeconomic achievements.

First, we find that bishops' political background matters: bishops born in municipalities with a higher share of votes for the DC in 1948 (the first year the DC ran in elections) are more likely to influence voters' support for this party. Moreover, we observe that bishops involved in judicial disputes with civilians or public controversies display a lower bishop effect, suggesting that these type of activities reduce the ability of a bishop to influence voters' support for the DC. By contrast, the more bishops were involved in celebrating masses and participating in public events involving politicians and local authorities, the larger their ability to bring votes to the DC.

By analyzing how religious leaders may influence politics, this paper contributes to a vast literature on the economics of religion, starting with the seminal work of Max Weber (1905). Many authors have studied how religion may affect human capital ([Becker and Woessmann, 2009](#); [Botticini and Eckstein, 2007](#); [Valencia Caicedo, 2019](#); [Squicciarini, 2020](#)), innovation ([Bénabou et al., 2015, 2022](#)), and economic growth ([Barro and McCleary, 2003, 2005](#); [Guiso et al., 2003](#)).² We mostly connect to the few studies analyzing how religion (and religious leaders in particular) affects political outcomes.³ Historically, [Belloc et al. \(2016\)](#) show that during the Middle Ages municipalities with a bishop delayed their transition to communal governance. In a more recent context, [Spenkuch and Tillmann \(2018\)](#) document that German districts with a

²A related literature studies incentives and behavior of clergy. Among the others, [Engelberg et al. \(2016\)](#) and [Hartzell et al. \(2010\)](#) focus on pastors' quality and incentive compensation, [Bottan and Perez-Truglia \(2015\)](#) and [Hungerman \(2013\)](#) study the effects of clergy abuse scandals. For more details on the economics of religion, see [Iyer \(2016\)](#) and [Iannaccone \(1991\)](#).

³Little is known about the role played by religious leaders for political outcomes ([Iyer, 2016](#)). Within the political science literature, [Hazelrigg \(1970\)](#) and [Norris and Inglehart \(2011\)](#) study the correlation between religiosity (proxied, for instance, by church attendance and importance of religion) and left-to-right orientation through survey data in the context of Italy and Europe, respectively. [Ignazi and Wellhofer \(2017\)](#) study regional differences of DC support in different time windows (1953–1972 and 1972–1992). None of these studies provides causal estimates on the effects of religious leaders on political outcomes.

larger share of Catholics had fewer votes for the Nazi party, but to a lower extent when local bishops looked favorably on Hitler. Our paper is closest in spirit to [Pulejo \(2022\)](#), who shows that DC political candidates connected to a native bishop obtained higher within-party preferences during the national elections. Contrary to [Pulejo \(2022\)](#), we study how bishops affected the share of votes for the DC, i.e., the final outcome of the elections, rather than local within-party preferences for a specific candidate. In addition, we shed light on the mechanism, by testing which bishops characteristics and types of behavior may have played a role in influencing voters' behavior.

Moreover, this paper contributes to a vast literature studying how leaders affect economic outcomes. For instance, research in economics and finance has investigated the role of political leaders for growth ([Jones and Olken, 2005](#); [Besley et al., 2011](#)) or the impact of CEOs on organizational performance in the private and public sectors (see, among others, [Bertrand and Schoar, 2003](#); [Fenzia, 2022](#)). We contribute to this literature by focusing on religious leaders and studying their role in politics.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows: Section 2 illustrates the historical background. Section 3 describes the data. Section 4 presents the empirical results. Section 5 concludes.

2 The Catholic Church and Italian Politics: Historical Background

The Christian Democracy (DC) party was created in 1943 by Alcide De Gasperi, a former member of the first Italian party of Catholic inspiration (the Italian People's Party, or *Partito Popolare Italiano–PPI*). As with the PPI, the Pope strongly backed the DC to the extent that Italy was defined “the Papal State of the Twentieth Century” ([Webster, 1959](#), p. 214).

According to [Warner \(2000\)](#), the Church's involvement in Italian politics naturally stemmed from three main factors. First, Rome has been the center of Western Christianity since the Middle Ages, and the Vatican has ever since “conflate[d] its temporal location with its religious mission” ([Warner, 2000](#), p. 43).⁴ Second, proximity of Italian dioceses to the Vatican allowed its “palpable presence throughout Italy.” Third, the hierarchical and granular structure of the Catholic Church in Italy crucially fostered its influence within society. While the pope was directly responsible for the policy response to the secular state's actions, the over 300 bishops and 65,000 clergy in 320 dioceses and 24,000 parishes preserved the capillarity of the

⁴As the archbishop of Milan, Cardinal Schuster, said shortly after WWII: “God has so linked the political destiny of Italy to its religious conditions that, after so many centuries, it is no longer possible to untie the knot tightened by the very hand of the Almighty” (June 1946, in [Durand \(1991, p. 522\)](#)).

Catholic network and guaranteed local penetration, as well as the ability to mobilize voters and monitor and sanction noncompliance (Pollard, 2008, p. 122).⁵

Between 1945 and 1958, Catholicism had its best chance to accomplish Pius XI's ambitious project of a "Christian restoration of Italian society," and bishops were at the frontline in its implementation. For instance, in the Lazio region some bishops blessed or consecrated the DC flags during population gatherings (Baris, 2014), and in the Lombardo-Veneto region "[bishops] chose the leaders and other organisers of the various Catholic lay associations [...], guided the work of the organisations [...] [and] gave the imprimatur to the selection of leaders of the Christian Democrats and even its local councillors and parliamentary candidates" (Pollard, 2008, p. 122).

Beginning in the late 1950s, the "economic miracle" and Anglo-Saxon influences fostered a wave of secularization in the country (Romano, 2005). The election of Pope John XXIII first and of Paul VI later, also had a profound impact on the Church, due to their "determination to disengage the Italian Church from his predecessor's policy" that culminated with the second Vatican council (Pollard, 2008, p. 138).⁶ Bishops, however, did not stop interfering in Italian politics and "still seemed to move in the name of contiguity with the "Christian party" (Santagata, 2013, p. 66).⁷ Similarly from 1978 onward, despite his non-Italian nationality, Karol Wojtyła–John Paul II still paid a lot of attention to Italian political matters, for example, by openly taking a position against abortion in the national referendum of 1981. Moreover, by employing "a succession of leading Italian cardinal archbishops" such as "Siri of Genoa and Poletti and Ruini, cardinal vicars of Rome, as president of the CEI, the Vatican maintained a tight control over the Italian Church" (Pollard, 2008, p. 153). Although the DC often attempted to disengage from the dirigism of the Church, it could not ignore the position of the Pope and his bishops on several matters, for fear of repercussions on electoral outcomes (Romano, 2005; Canavero, 1991).

Bishops' activities could be either favorable or detrimental to DC electoral support. As an example, in the run-up to the 1948 parliamentary elections, bishops' direct engagement in the political campaign and public endorsement of DC candidates contributed to the DC victory (see Romano, 2005, pp.102–103).

⁵Until 1952, Italian bishops were directly under the pope's authority. Beginning with the 1953 Episcopal Conference, instead, bishops had their own assembly in which to discuss the administration of dioceses.

⁶During the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), Pope John XXIII "[made] it clear that Italian churchmen had to hold back from dictating to Italian politicians, even Christian Democratic politicians" (Pollard, 2008, p. 138).

⁷In 1968, the Italian Episcopal Conference (CEI) issued an official document titled "The Christians and Public Life," in which bishops emphasized that "it was the duty of the Catholic hierarchy to enlighten the consciences of the faithful on the problems of public life, even when they did not directly concern the religious field, but involved moral problems that engaged the conscience." The document underlined "how the [religious and political] realities were called to collaborate."

Similarly, bishops used to lend support to the DC by praising DC-led public works—as in the inauguration of new stretches of highway (see *Corriere della Sera*, January 28, 1960) and the opening of new firms in low-industrialized regions (see *Corriere della Sera*, June 17, 1966)—or by acting as mediators between the population and politicians during periods of economic or social strain.⁸

But there were also episodes that go in the opposite direction. For instance, during the campaign for the referendum on the divorce law, Bishop Ferrari of Mantua sent a letter to all diocesan members to vote against this law. This generated public discontent, as many perceived the bishop’s intervention as “going against freedom of conscience and fundamental human rights” (see *Corriere della Sera*, April 19, 1974). Similarly, when the tribunal of Florence obliged Bishop Fiordelli of Prato to pay a fine for defamation of a couple whom he publicly called “concubinaries” for not getting married in the Church, the debate mounted against DC politicians not defending the lay institution of civil marriage (see *Corriere della Sera* March 4, and October 3, 1958).

Disillusioned by the party’s “association with clientelism and corruption,” after the *Tangentopoli* (“Bribesville”) scandals in 1994, many Catholics turned to other political parties putting an end to the life and political hegemony of the DC (Pollard, 2008, p. 159).

3 Data

We assembled a rich dataset from several primary and secondary sources. In this section, we briefly describe the geographical units at which the analysis is carried out and the variables used. Online Appendix A provides further details on data construction and summary statistics for all variables.

3.1 Constructing Diocese Boundaries

We conduct our analysis at the Italian diocese level during the period from 1948 to 1992. In 1948, Italy was divided into 273 dioceses across 20 regions and 107 provinces.⁹ Italian dioceses are smaller territorial units than Italian provinces—and they are also smaller than other dioceses worldwide. The 1984 revision of the Concordat between the Italian government and the Catholic Church redefined the exact administrative

⁸Examples are the visit of bishop Cocolin of Gorizia during the occupation of a bankrupted plant and when Bishop Mazzola of Cefalù publicly scolded the local politicians against corruption, spurring them to behave in the name of law (see *Corriere della Sera*, July 11, 1976, and August 10, 1990, respectively).

⁹In 1948, the geographical distribution of dioceses in Italy was as follows: 24% of the dioceses were located in the North, 31% in the Center, and 45% in the South.

boundaries of dioceses,¹⁰ unifying several of them and leading to a total of 223 from 1987 onward.

To construct the diocese boundaries over time, we proceed in two steps. First, we track the evolution of the name of each Italian diocese from its birth up to the present day based on a digital version of the Pontifical Yearbook.¹¹ Then, we build a comprehensive dataset on diocese boundaries throughout the 1948–1992 period. In particular, starting from the 2017 diocese shapefile, we manually revise backwards the set of municipalities included in each diocese.¹²

3.2 Share of Votes for the DC

Data on electoral results are from the Italian Ministry of Interior. We aggregate the municipal-level voting outcomes at the diocese level and compute the share of votes for the DC party.¹³ We consider all available elections within the 1948–1992 period, i.e., from the birth of the Italian Republic to the dissolution of the Catholic Party, for a total of 19 rounds of elections distributed as follows: 11 rounds of parliamentary elections, 5 rounds of elections for regional councils, and 3 rounds of elections for members of the European parliament.

3.3 Bishops

The Pope is the only person in charge of appointing bishops, typically choosing from a list of three candidates or selecting a bishop of his preference (see Appendix A.1 for further details).

For each bishop in office, we collect several pieces of personal information. In particular, we know the bishop’s year and place of birth, the year of his ordination as priest or member of a religious congregation, the year of appointment to each bishop (and non-bishop) office, and his participation in the Second Vatican Council.¹⁴ For bishops who passed away, we also know the death date. All these data are from the Pontifical Yearbook (available at <https://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/>). Finally, using data from Sportelli and Vian

¹⁰For details on the redefinition of diocese boundaries and the underlying criteria, see Appendix Section A.2.

¹¹This is to make sure that we correctly identify the same diocese over time, even when the name changed. Name changes occurred 55 times during the 1948–1992 period. For instance, in 1986 the diocese of Adria changed its name to Adria-Rovigo to acknowledge the importance of Rovigo as provincial capital and usual place of residence of the bishop. See <https://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/>. Data were retrieved in March 2020.

¹²This is based on a variety of sources, including the Acta Apostolicae Sedis (available at https://www.vatican.va/archive/aas/index_sp.htm), and the historical section of each diocese’s website. For the 2017 shapefile, see <https://www.danieledapiaggi.it/z011702-dataset-1-diocesi-italiane.html>.

¹³These data are available at <https://elezionistorico.interno.gov.it/>.

¹⁴Non-bishop offices include, among others, serving as the Pope’s personal secretary, and serving as an apostolic administrator or nuncio.

(2019), we construct a dummy equal to one for bishops who had been the national president or general ecclesiastical assistant of the Catholic Action, the major Catholic lay association in Italy, during the 1948–1992 period.

Next, to build measures of bishops’ involvement in society and to grasp which bishops’ activities may have influenced voters, we rely on data from the historical digital archive of the Italian newspaper *Il Corriere della Sera*.¹⁵ In particular, we perform a text analysis on 2,333 documents reporting on bishops and identify two main topics: bishops’ public engagement in society, and controversies bishops were involved in.¹⁶

When no bishop is in office in a given period, the diocese is considered *Vacant*.¹⁷ We drop from the sample the electoral years in which dioceses were vacant.

4 Empirical Analysis

We first provide evidence that bishops significantly influence the share of votes for the DC. Then, we employ different empirical strategies to deal with identification concerns. Finally, we shed light on the mechanism and suggest that bishops’ personal traits and activism are key to affect voters’ behavior.

4.1 Did Bishops Affect Support for the DC?

To investigate bishops’ relevance in support for the DC, we estimate the following equation:

$$Y_{irt} = \alpha_b + \beta_i + \gamma_{rt} + \delta \mathbf{X}_{it} + \varepsilon_{irt}. \quad (1)$$

where Y_{irt} is the share of votes for the DC party in diocese i in region r and electoral year t , α_b is a set of bishop fixed effects, β_i represents a set of diocese fixed effects, γ_{rt} are region-time fixed effects, $\delta \mathbf{X}_{it}$ is the vector of time-varying diocese-level controls, and ε_{irt} is the error term. As control variables, we include the (log) number of electors and dummy variables for the type of elections (national, regional, European). We interpret bishop fixed effects (α_b) as the ability of bishops to influence political elections and, in particular, to foster the electoral support for the DC party.¹⁸

¹⁵<https://archivio.corriere.it/Archivio/interface/landing.html>.

¹⁶See Appendix Section A.6 for details on the newspaper data and text analysis.

¹⁷According to the canon law, vacancies are exceptional events that may occur when a bishop dies, retires, or resigns. In these cases, the administrative tasks are promptly taken over by a coadjutor or auxiliary bishop (if present), or by a diocesan administrator, until the new bishop is appointed.

¹⁸When referring to “high-ability/quality” bishops, we specifically refer to their ability to affect voters’ support for the DC.

Table 1: Bishops Affect Support for the DC

Dependent Variable	Share of Votes for the DC						
	Full		Restricted (R)				R-Dead
Sample:	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Election Type FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Region-Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Diocese FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Bishop (All) FE		✓		✓			✓
Bishop (All)-Diocese FE						✓	
Bishop (Mover) FE					✓		
Joint significance of bishop effects							
N. Constraints		741		597	194		215
P-value		0.000		0.000	0.000		0.000
Observations	4,645	4,645	3,721	3,721	3,721	3,721	990
Adj. R-Squared	0.930	0.956	0.922	0.950	0.927	0.952	0.926

Notes: OLS estimates. Observations are dioceses in national, regional, and European election years in the 1948–1992 period, excluding years in which the diocese was vacant. The dependent variable is the share of votes for the Christian Democracy party (DC). The full sample is in columns 1-2, and the restricted sample of diocese-election years where at least one bishop can be observed in at least one other diocese for at least three (actual) years is in columns 3-6. Specification 7 includes all diocese-election years in which a diocese was ruled by a bishop who subsequently died while in office. All specifications control for the (log) number of electors, region-year, and type of election fixed effects. All columns except 6 include also diocese fixed effects. Columns 2, 4, and 7 include bishop-specific fixed effects, while column 6 includes bishop-diocese fixed effects. Column 5 controls for a dummy for each bishop who can be observed in at least two dioceses for at least three years (labelled *Mover*). See the text and the Appendix for details on all variables and samples. Standard errors in parentheses. Below columns 2, 4, 5 and 7, we report the number of constraints and the p-value of the F-tests for the joint significance of the bishop fixed effects included in the specification. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Table 1 reports the results. We start by estimating equation (1) without the bishop dummies (column 1); these are added in column 2. The adjusted R^2 increases from 0.93 (column 1) to 0.956 (column 2), suggesting that the identity of bishops explains a non-negligible amount of the variation in the share of votes for the DC party. Reassuringly, the magnitude of this increase is comparable to that reported by [Bertrand and Schoar \(2003\)](#) and [Fenizia \(2022\)](#). In line with this, the F-test rejects the null hypothesis that all bishop-fixed effects are zero (the p-value is equal to 0.000 in column 2).

The interpretation of the bishop fixed effects as a proxy for bishop's ability to influence elections relies mainly on the assumption that the coefficients α_b are not capturing any other diocese-period unobservables. Indeed, if bishops never leave a diocese throughout their career, their effect cannot be disentangled from the diocese-period fixed effect (due to perfect collinearity).¹⁹ We proceed in different steps to address this

¹⁹Period represents those years in which the bishop was in office in that diocese.

concern.

First, following [Bertrand and Schoar \(2003\)](#), we consider the *restricted* sample of dioceses where at least one bishop can be observed in at least one other diocese for at least three years (columns 3-4)—excluding 20% of the dioceses.²⁰ This allows us to exclude those dioceses for which all the bishop effects would overlap with diocese-period effects.²¹ Column 3 reports results without bishop fixed effects; these are added in column 4. The adjusted R^2 now increases by 0.028 percentage points (an increase similar in magnitude to the one in the full sample), and the null hypothesis that all bishop effects are zero can still be strongly rejected. This represents our baseline specification, and its estimated fixed effects will be used in the robustness analysis.

Second, we perform a more demanding exercise on the restricted sample. In particular, in column 5, we only include dummies for bishops who moved across dioceses (194 out of the 597 bishops considered in column 4). The advantage of this approach is that it removes all bishop effects that overlap with the diocese-period effect. On the other hand, the number of bishop effects estimated is considerably reduced. Looking at the regression results, we still safely reject the hypothesis that bishops are equally good, and we observe an increase in the adjusted R^2 compared to the one reported in column 3. This increase is obviously smaller than in column 4, as we are now considering only one-third of the bishops in the sample.

4.2 Robustness

While focusing on the restricted sample already mitigates endogeneity concerns, in this section we perform a battery of additional checks to further rule out that the bishop effects are spuriously picking up diocese-time unobserved factors. In particular, this could occur in the case of bishops' endogenous mobility, i.e., when bishops end their term for endogenous reasons or when the allocation of bishops to dioceses is related to trends in political support or to bishops' comparative advantage.²² For instance, bishops may end their term due to reasons related to political outcomes. Similarly, if high-quality bishops were systematically appointed to dioceses where support for the DC is increasing, their effect would be correlated with dioceses'

²⁰This is to ensure that bishops have the chance to “imprint their mark” on a given diocese. Three years corresponds to the 10th percentile of the distribution of the number of years a bishop stays in office (the median is 9, and the average is 11 years).

²¹This happens for instance in the case of the diocese of Milan, where all bishops were not appointed to any other Italian diocese during the 1948–1992 period. The only exception was Giovanni Battista Montini, who became the Pope in 1963; however, since we exclude from the sample the diocese of Rome, Montini cannot be considered as being appointed to more than one diocese. For the dioceses in the restricted sample, we include all observations, i.e., also those periods in which the diocese has bishops whom we do not observe in other dioceses.

²²See [Card et al. \(2013\)](#) for related discussion on endogenous mobility of workers.

political trends and our model would overestimate their ability to influence elections. Finally, sorting based on comparative advantage would occur if bishops were systematically appointed to dioceses where they have stronger ties (e.g., for personal reasons). In this case, the coefficients of the bishop fixed effects would be capturing the quality of the match between the bishop and the diocese. First, we deal with the concern of endogenous mobility—first broadly, then zooming into the three specific cases—and then we perform two more-general exercises on restricted time windows.

We start by estimating equation (1) including bishop-diocese fixed effects (rather than bishop and diocese effects separately). If the match components played a crucial role in explaining election results, we would expect the resulting R^2 to be higher than the one in the baseline specification.²³ Column 6 of Table 1 shows that the fit improves only marginally with respect to column 4, with an adjusted R^2 increasing from 0.950 to 0.952.

We now zoom into the three specific cases of endogenous mobility. First, to mitigate the concern of endogenous end of term, we restrict our attention to bishops who exit the sample for exogenous reasons. In column 7 of Table 1, we test the joint significance of the bishop effects, focusing on bishops who died while in office—thus excluding those who retired or resigned. The p-value of the F-test is still significant at the 1% level. Next, to study endogenous mobility related to trends in political support or to comparative advantage, we investigate the correlation between our estimated bishop fixed effects and a set of diocese’s characteristics. We focus on transition years, i.e., those electoral years in which the bishop in office is different from the one in the previous electoral year for the same type of election. Table 2 reports the results of the analysis, controlling for connected-sets fixed effects.²⁴ In column 1, we find no evidence of bishops sorting on trends in the growth rate of vote share for the DC. Column 2, instead, uses the (log) distance between the bishop’s birthplace and the diocese headquarter, as a proxy for bishops’ ties in the diocese of appointment. There is no significant relationship between bishop fixed effects and our measure of a bishop’s local ties. Our results hold if we account for both types of sorting in column 3. In addition, we test for the correlation between the bishop fixed effects and a set of diocese-specific measures, including baseline levels of religiosity and of DC political support. We find no significant relationship. These results provide reassuring evidence that endogenous mobility of bishops is not confounding our main findings.

²³The match component would represent a differential increase in the DC share of votes that depends on the specific role of bishop b in diocese i ($\phi_{b,i}$) and that is in addition to the separate bishop and diocese effects ($\alpha_b + \beta_i$).

²⁴Connected sets are clusters of dioceses that were ever administered by the same bishop. We include them because the bishop effects are separately identified within a set of dioceses that are connected by bishop mobility. See [Abowd et al. \(1999\)](#) and [Abowd et al. \(2002\)](#) in the context of firm and worker mobility.

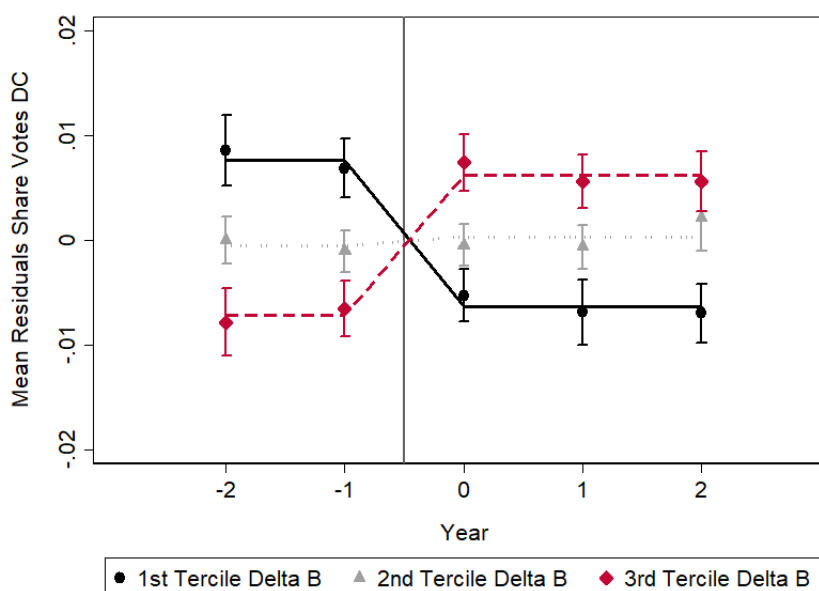
Table 2: Diocese-Specific Observables and the Incoming-Bishop Fixed Effect

Dependent Variable	Bishop FE		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Growth Rate Share Votes DC -1	-0.005 (0.016)		-0.005 (0.016)
Share Votes DC -1	0.067 (0.048)		0.066 (0.048)
Distance Birth to Diocese (Km)		0.001 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.002)
South	-0.011 (0.008)	-0.009 (0.008)	-0.011 (0.008)
Distance to Rome	0.001 (0.007)	-0.001 (0.006)	0.001 (0.007)
Archdiocese	-0.002 (0.007)	-0.004 (0.007)	-0.002 (0.007)
Unified or Split Diocese	0.004 (0.006)	0.005 (0.006)	0.004 (0.006)
Share Votes DC in 1948	-0.044 (0.039)	-0.012 (0.027)	-0.044 (0.039)
Share Catholics in 1950	-0.079 (0.079)	-0.124 (0.091)	-0.079 (0.079)
Parishes per 1K Catholics in 1950	-0.001 (0.012)	0.001 (0.011)	-0.001 (0.012)
Priests per 1K Catholics in 1950	0.005 (0.011)	0.007 (0.009)	0.004 (0.011)
Rel. Males per 1K Catholics in 1950	0.004 (0.007)	0.002 (0.006)	0.004 (0.007)
Rel. Females per 1K Catholics in 1950	-0.003 (0.002)	-0.002 (0.002)	-0.003 (0.002)
Connected Set FE	✓	✓	✓
Observations	694	963	694
Adj. R-Squared	0.241	0.234	0.240

Notes: OLS estimates. Starting from the restricted sample, the dataset includes all election years in which the bishop in office in a given diocese is different from the bishop who was in office in the previous election year (within type of election, i.e. national, regional, and European) in the 1948–1992 period. We exclude events for which we cannot calculate the growth rate of the share of votes for the DC in previous periods, either because of limitations in the time span covered by the sample, or because the incoming bishop is preceded by a vacancy. The dependent variable is the bishop effect estimated in column 4 of Table 1. *Growth Rate Share Votes DC -1* is the growth rate in the share of votes for the DC between the electoral year of the event and the previous electoral year, while *Share Votes DC -1* is the share votes for the DC in the previous electoral year. *Distance Birth to Diocese* is the log of the distance between the bishop’s place of birth and the headquarters of the diocese in which the bishop is in office. *South*, *Archdiocese*, and *Unified or split diocese* are dummy variables tracking dioceses located in southern Italy, the most important dioceses, and dioceses that ever changed boundaries during the sample period, respectively. *Distance to Rome* is the distance between the diocese headquarters and Rome (in log). *Share votes DC in 1948* is the share of votes for the DC in the baseline election year (1948). Then, we account for the following measures of religiosity in 1950: Share of Catholics, as well as the number of parishes, of priests, and of religious males and females, for 1000 Catholic members of the population. All specifications control for connected-set fixed effects. Standard errors (clustered at the diocese level) in parentheses. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Next, we perform two additional exercises to check the robustness of our findings when zooming into limited time windows. These further help attenuate the possibility that previous results were capturing time-varying diocese-level omitted variables. We start by focusing on a period that includes transition years—for which we observe a change in bishop quality ($\widehat{\Delta B}_i = \hat{\alpha}_{i,incoming} - \hat{\alpha}_{i,outgoing}$)—and the two preceding and following electoral years. We classify transition years in three groups, based on the terciles of the change in bishop quality: (i) from a high- to a low-quality bishop, (ii) across same-quality bishops, and (iii) from a low- to a high-quality bishop. Then, using an event-analysis approach, we plot the residuals obtained after partialling out diocese, region-year, and type of election fixed effects against the transition year and the two preceding and following electoral years for each of the three groups identified. The results are displayed in Figure 1. Two main observations stand out. Reassuringly, we observe a clear positive jump when we move from low- to high-ability bishops and, viceversa when moving from high- to low-ability bishops. Also, the magnitude of the effect of the two opposite changes (from the first to third tercile and vice versa) is very similar, suggesting that a model with additive bishop and diocese effects may be a good approximation of reality.

Figure 1: Mean Residuals Share of Votes for the DC for Dioceses Experiencing a Change of Bishop Classified by Tercile of Changes in Bishop Effects



Notes: The figure plots on the *y-axis* the residuals from a regression using as dependent variable the DC share votes controlling for diocese, region-year, and type of election fixed effects. The sample includes transition years and the two preceding and following electoral years. We classify observations based on the type of transitions: from a high- to a low-quality bishop (black circle), across same-quality bishops (gray triangle), and from a low- to a high-quality bishop (cranberry diamond).

Finally, in the last exercise, we again focus on bishops who died while in office. As explained above, this attenuates the selection problem that could occur if bishops change diocese in reaction to transitory shocks. Differently from the previous exercise, though, we retain all bishops who did not die while in office, and we rely on the full sample of dioceses. In line with [Jones and Olken \(2005\)](#), we estimate the following model:

$$Y_{irt} = \lambda_z^{PRE} PRE_{zt} + \lambda_z^{POST} POST_{zt} + \beta_i + \gamma_{rt} + \delta \mathbf{X}_{it} + \varepsilon_{izrt} \quad (2)$$

where all terms are defined as in equation (1), but instead of including the bishop fixed effects (α_b), for each bishop who died in office, we include a separate set of dummies, denoted by PRE_z and $POST_z$. z indexes the exogenous transitions, PRE_z is a dummy equal to 1 in the T years before the bishop z 's exogenous transition in that diocese, and $POST_z$ is a dummy equal to 1 in the T years after bishop z 's exogenous transition. We exclude the actual death year from both dummies to avoid capturing changes specific to that year.²⁵ For each bishop's death z , we estimate separate coefficients for λ_z^{PRE} and λ_z^{POST} . After estimating (2), we compute a chi-squared test, using the Wald statistic J to test the null hypothesis that the difference in the share of votes for the DC before and after each death is zero. In other words, the test verifies the equality of the effect of two consecutive bishops before and after an exogenous transition in a particular diocese.²⁶

Table 3: Significant Changes in the Share of Votes for the DC Before and After Random Transitions

Timing	Num. Bishops	J-Stat	P-Value
	(1)	(2)	(3)
t	193	1.596	0.000
t+5 (placebo)	178	0.877	0.880

Notes: Each row reports the results from performing equation (2) based on a different definition of the periods before and after a random bishop transition (a death while in office). In t , we consider the share of votes for the DC within five years before and after the year of transition (that falls within the control group), while in $t+5$, we present a placebo exercise in which we shifted the transition year backward for five years and compute the PRE and POST dummies as in t thereafter. Under the null hypothesis, the DC vote share is similar during election years that occur within 5 years before and after a random bishop transition. Column 1 reports the number of random events that enter into each regression, column 2 presents the J -statistic presented in [appendix A.5](#), and column 3 reports the p -value of the probability that the null hypothesis is true.

Table 3 presents the results. Column 1 reports the number of deaths, column 2 presents the J -statistic discussed above, column 3 presents the p -value of the J -statistic. The two rows report different specifications, involving different timing of the PRE and $POST$ dummies. The first row reports the results using

²⁵As in [Jones and Olken \(2005\)](#) we set $T=5$ and correct standard errors for macro-region-specific heteroskedasticity and a macro-region-specific AR(1) process based on election years of the same type. We consider three macro-regions, South, Center, and North.

²⁶See [Appendix A.5](#) for the formulation of the J statistics.

the baseline timing: the p -value suggests that we can safely reject the null hypothesis. The second row presents the p -value of a placebo test in which we pushed the *PRE* and *POST* dummies back five years, thus simulating the bishop's death earlier in time. Consistently, we cannot reject anymore the null hypothesis at conventional levels of significance (p -value = 0.88).

These last two exercises on restricted time windows corroborate our main findings, suggesting that bishop effects are not capturing diocese-time unobservables.

4.3 Mechanism: Bishop's Characteristics

So far, through a series of exercises, we have established that bishops' identity does affect the share of votes for the DC. The next question is: which bishop characteristics are particularly relevant?

We answer this question in Table 4. In particular, we regress our estimated bishop fixed effects on several observable bishop characteristics. In all specifications we control for connected-sets fixed effects and for the bishop region of birth fixed effects.

Column 1 controls for a bishop's year of birth, a dummy equal to one if he was born abroad, and the 1948 DC share of votes in his birth municipality. The latter is a proxy for bishop's political culture and it is positively and significantly associated with a bishop's ability to affect DC share of votes. This suggests that a bishop born in a "DC-friendly" municipality manages to attract more votes for this party.

Columns 2–4 account for a set of variables related to a bishop's career, such as his age at ordination to priesthood, as well as dummies for his membership in a religious order, for his participation in the Second Vatican Council, and for his appointment to non-bishop offices involving strict collaboration with the Pope. None of these characteristics seems to matter.

Finally, in columns 5–7, we construct measures of bishops' activism in society, based on articles from the national newspaper *Il corriere della Sera* from 1948 to 1992. We use as our reference corpus the set of documents that mention one of the bishops in our sample. Using the supervised LDA algorithm, we identify two main topics running through the corpus. The two topics describe, respectively, a positive and a negative form of activism in society. The first topic is about bishops' positive engagement within society, which includes participation in public events, such as masses and inaugurations of public places, while the second topic concerns bishops' conflicting relationship with members of their congregations or with public authorities and politicians.

Table 4: Correlates of Bishop Fixed Effects

Dependent Variable	Estimated Bishop FE						
					Dummy	Number	Share
Activism (Documents)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Year Born	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000* (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000* (0.000)
Foreign	-0.009 (0.032)	-0.005 (0.032)	-0.006 (0.032)	-0.006 (0.033)	-0.006 (0.033)	-0.010 (0.031)	-0.010 (0.029)
DC Vote Share in Birthplace (1948)	0.039** (0.016)	0.039** (0.016)	0.039** (0.016)	0.039** (0.016)	0.030** (0.015)	0.036** (0.016)	0.026* (0.014)
Age Ordained Priest		-0.001 (0.002)	-0.000 (0.002)	-0.000 (0.002)	-0.000 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.000 (0.001)
Religious Order		-0.010 (0.009)	-0.009 (0.009)	-0.009 (0.009)	-0.007 (0.008)	-0.009 (0.009)	-0.007 (0.008)
Participated CVII		0.003 (0.004)	0.003 (0.004)	0.003 (0.004)	0.004 (0.005)	0.002 (0.004)	0.003 (0.004)
Pope-related offices			0.008 (0.021)	0.008 (0.021)	0.005 (0.013)	-0.022 (0.030)	-0.000 (0.015)
CEI President/Secretary			0.015 (0.016)	0.015 (0.016)	0.011 (0.013)	0.016 (0.016)	0.013 (0.012)
Other Offices			-0.008 (0.007)	-0.008 (0.007)	-0.006 (0.007)	-0.007 (0.007)	-0.006 (0.007)
Catholic Action				-0.002 (0.010)	-0.000 (0.011)	-0.006 (0.011)	-0.008 (0.010)
Topic Public Engagement					0.024*** (0.005)	0.002*** (0.000)	0.026*** (0.005)
Topic Controversies					-0.031*** (0.005)	-0.001** (0.001)	-0.042*** (0.006)
Region of Birth	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Connected Sets	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	598	598	598	598	598	598	598
R-Squared	0.226	0.225	0.224	0.223	0.276	0.241	0.312

Notes: OLS estimates. Observations are the estimated bishop fixed effects from column 4 of Table 1. All specifications control for the bishop's year of birth, a dummy taking the value 1 if the bishop was born abroad, dummy variables tracking the bishop's region of birth if born in Italy, the DC share votes in 1948 in the bishop's municipality of birth, and connected sets fixed effects. Column 2 adds the age or ordination to priesthood, a dummy taking value 1 if the bishop was part of a religious order, and a dummy taking the value 1 if the bishop participated to the Second Vatican Council. Column 3 also controls for *Pope-related offices*, that is a dummy taking value 1 if the bishop collaborated with the Pope as his personal secretary, secretary of State, or head of Vatican press, a dummy taking value 1 if the bishop has ever been the president or secretary of the Italian Episcopal Conference (CEI), and a dummy tracking the bishop's appointment to any other non-bishop office within the Church. Column 4 includes a dummy taking value 1 if the bishop has ever been the president of the lay association *Catholic Action*. Columns 5-7 add to the specification two variables that define the bishop's activity in two domains (topics): participation to public events and controversies with civilians and public authorities, based on the text analysis of newspaper articles mentioning bishops. For each topic the bishop involvement is defined based on: a dummy taking value 1 if the bishop has ever been mentioned by a document related to either topic in column 5, the number of documents in column 6, and the share of documents in column 7. See the text and the Appendix for details on all variables. Robust standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

We classified newspaper articles into two main groups, based on which topic is prevalent within the article according to the algorithm. Given this document classification, we build three sets of bishop-specific

measures of activism. First, for each form of activism, we build a dummy variable taking the value one if the bishop was mentioned in at least one document classified in the related activism topic. Second, for each bishop, we look at the number of documents related to a specific form of activism. Third, for each bishop, we compute the share of documents related to a specific form of activism over the total number of documents mentioning the bishop.²⁷

Regardless of how we measure bishop activism, we find that bishops involved in controversies display a lower bishop effect, while bishops engaged in public events display a higher bishop effect. Given the broad content of the two topics, these results suggest that not only a bishop may have a direct effect on voters' choices by directly supporting or publicly praising the DC, but also an indirect effect. The extent to which voters appreciate a bishop's behavior may ultimately be likely to affect their support for the DC, pointing to underlying voter association between Catholic leaders and the "party of the Catholics."

5 Conclusion and Discussion

Do religious leaders matter for politics? To answer this question, in this paper we have empirically studied whether and how Catholic bishops influenced voters' support for the Christian Democracy party in Italy from 1948 to 1992. We find that bishops affect the share of votes for the DC. Through a variety of econometric exercises, we show that this result is unlikely to be driven by diocese-period-specific unobservables such as bishops' endogenous mobility. Importantly, we shed light on two mechanisms through which bishops influenced voters: (i) the bishop's political culture, and (ii) different types of bishop's direct interaction with the population.

The political context of 20th-century Italy—a country where religion and politics have historically been interconnected—share important similarities with how religious leaders intervene in the political sphere in many societies today.

In Italy itself, even after the dissolution of the DC and the progressive secularization of the country, bishops have continued to step into politics. Before the most recent parliamentary election, in September 2022, the Italian Episcopal Conference invited all electors to turn out and "[evaluate] the various political proposals in the light of the common good" to build a more just society and "leaving no one behind."²⁸ More

²⁷We set these variables to zero if bishops are never mentioned.

²⁸For instance, in 2018, Bishop Cantoni of Como contested the Northern League secretary at the Ministry of Interior for his abrupt decision to close a local migrant shelter camp and asked the electorate to avoid voting for the populists (see

broadly, spiritual leaders across the world and from different religious organizations continue to express their views on several political matters, possibly affecting voters' behavior.²⁹ Our findings suggest that the factors affecting electoral results go beyond voters' political and economic considerations. They instead point to religious leaders as important actors in shaping voters' political preferences.

<https://archivio.corriere.it/Archivio/interface/view.shtml#!/NTovZXMvaXQvcnNzZGF0aW1ldGhvZGUxL0AzNTE0NTk%3D> and <https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/politica/vescovo-como-cantoni-scende-campo-votare-populisti-peccato-1479478.html>). See <https://www.agensir.it/italia/2022/09/21/appeal-of-the-italian-bishops-for-the-upcoming-elections-not-opportunities-but-vision-italy-needs-responsibility-and-participation/> on bishops' appeal to citizens to vote in 2022.

²⁹This happens in different degrees depending on how secular a society is. For instance, recent abortion restrictions in Arizona and Ohio renewed the debate over abortion rights in the US, with the US Conference of Catholic Bishops proposing to prevent pro-abortion politicians from receiving the holy communion (see <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-57531070>). Christian voters across US states seem to have been influenced by the abortion debate during the 2022 midterm elections (see <https://apnews.com/article/christian-voter-trends-2022-midterm-elections-0377eed4eed23d5356c29b10af9f6f69>).

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A Data Appendix

In this section we discuss in detail the construction of the main datasets used in the paper. Section A.1 presents the construction of the bishop-level dataset. This provides the starting point for the construction of the diocese-level dataset, described in Section A.2. Combining these two datasets, we are able to identify bishops that move between dioceses. This is the focus of Section A.3. Section A.4 provides descriptive statistics and Section A.5 discusses further definitions and results on the effects of exogenous transitions. Finally, Section A.6 presents the construction of the bishop’s activism database.

A.1 Details on the Construction of the Bishop’s Career Dataset

We start the construction of the bishops dataset using data on all members of the Catholic hierarchy (e.g., bishops appointed to dioceses or to other offices within the Catholic Church, such as apostolic nuncio, auxiliary bishop, etc...). These data were scraped from a digital version of the Pontifical Yearbook in the website <https://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/>. Each individual comes with a numeric identifier, with a field containing name and lastname and with information about his appointment(s). For individuals with the same name and lastname we create an additional name id which uniquely defines each individual. For each individual’s appointment, the dataset reports the starting date, we specifically focus on the years.

Bishop appointments. The Pope is the only person in charge of appointing bishops, typically choosing from a list of three candidates. This list is drafted by the *Apostolic Nuncio* (a Pope’s representative) after consultation with the former bishop (if alive), with the other bishops in the same ecclesiastical province (roughly corresponding to the territory of Italian regions), and with the president of the National Episcopal Conference. The Pope may decide not to appoint any of the three candidates, either requesting another list or selecting a bishop of his preference.

To construct a set of variables related to bishops appointment we use data from the Catholic hierarchy website. We first clean the name of the diocese of appointment by separating the name of the diocese from the name of the country and then we clean the name of bishop by keeping only his name and lastname and dropping any additional detail (i.e., titles such as “Father” or “Cardinal”).

For each individual we then focus on the following information: years of birth and death, year of ordination to priesthood, and year and dioceses of appointment for all bishop appointments in his career. We keep only bishops appointed to dioceses located in Italy.

We also track the affiliation to a religious order by constructing the dummy variable *Friar* taking value one if the ordination as bishop occurred within a religious order (such as the Society of Jesus) or if the ordination title includes either the keywords “Friar” or “Order of”.

Other appointments. We build four indicators for individuals who covered important non-bishop offices within the Church.

First, we construct the dummy *Pope-related offices* equal to one for all bishops that have been personal assistants of the Pope, or his Secretary of State, or Head of the Vatican Press. These information are from

Wikipedia.

Second, we rely on the Catholic hierarchy dataset and track with the dummy variable *Other offices* if the individual has ever been appointed to any other non-bishop office. Thus, the dummy takes value one if the bishop has ever covered either of the following non-bishop offices: adjunct secretary, administrator, apostolic administrator, apostolic delegate, apostolic internuncio, apostolic nuncio, apostolic pro-nuncio, archpriest, archivist, cardinal-deacon, chamberlain, chancellor, datary, dean, vice-dean, vicegerent, grand master, librarian, major penitentiary, member of association, minister general, official, permanent observer, prefect, president, pro-secretary, secretary, secretary general, under secretary, pro-vicar general, rector, secret almoner, vice president, substitute, superior general, vicar apostolic, and vicar general.

Third, we construct a dummy *CEI President/Secretary* which is equal to one if the individual has ever been appointed as President or Regional General Secretary of the Italian Episcopal Conference during the 1948–1992 period. These data are from Wikipedia.

Finally, we track with the dummy variable *Catholic Action* if the individual has ever been appointed as the national president or general ecclesiastical assistant of the Catholic Action during the 1948–1992 period from [Sportelli and Vian \(2019\)](#).

Place of birth. The bishop’s place of birth was retrieved by scraping the “Event-Place” section of the Catholic hierarchy dataset that reports information on bishop’s city and country of birth. We select only bishops appointed to Italian dioceses. For those born in Italy, we match the municipality of birth with the coordinates of its centroid based on the 2011 shapefile of Italian municipalities. For bishops born abroad we retrieve the latitude and longitude of their birthplace by using the Openstreetmap API through STATA. If the API did not return the coordinates or reported the latitude and longitude of the centroid of the country, we manually corrected the geolocation.

Bishops participating to the Second Vatican Council. We construct the dummy variable *Participated CVII* taking value one if a bishop has ever participated to the Second Vatican Council. These data are from the Catholic hierarchy website.

A.2 Details on the Construction of the Diocese Dataset

To construct our diocese dataset we follow several steps, combining information from different sources. We start from the Bishop appointments dataset described in Section A.1. First, we fill the bishop-diocese dataset with missing years that we can attribute to vacancies (temporary absence of a bishop in the diocese). Then, when trying to construct a balanced panel of dioceses, we face two main issues: (i) name changes (involving a change in the denomination of a diocese without a change of boundaries), and (ii) changes of boundaries (typically associated with changes of denomination as well).

Based on the “Historical summary” section of the webpages dedicated to each diocese from the website <https://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/>, we are able to reconstruct three key pieces of information: (i) the timing of name changes (without changes of boundaries), (ii) whether a diocese has been united to another diocese,

thus creating a new diocese (with its own new name), and (iii) whether a diocese has been split into two or more smaller dioceses (with their own name).

Within our period of interest there were more than 62 major changes of boundaries: 7 split and 55 unifications. Most of the boundaries' changes occurred in 1986 in the context of the revision of the Concordat between the Church and the Italian State. The new Concordat was meant to revise the Concordat signed during Fascism and to redefine the fiscal relationships between the State and the Church. To acquire legal status, dioceses had to specify their exact boundaries in terms municipalities under their jurisdiction, so that it would become clear which ecclesiastical buildings were subject to their administration.

The criteria for the unification of dioceses were the following: (i) *Pastorality*, meaning that the unification had to be based on religious, rather than political, historical, or cultural reasons; (ii) *Unity*, implying that after the reform no diocese would have shared the bishop with other dioceses and it would have been fully autonomous; (iii) *Common wellbeing*, so that the unification should have favored the mission of the Church at the local and national level; (iv) *Uniformity*, meaning that each diocese with an informal union should have been formally unified; (v) *Graduality* in the implementation; (vi) *Continuity*, as the name of the new diocese had to include the name of all the dioceses that were independent before the unification to keep the cultural and historical heritage of unified dioceses; and (vii) *Uniqueness*, meaning that each diocese had to create one seminar, one religious court, one Priests and Catholic council and one Coetus Consultorium with the possibility of some administrative decentralization (Moreira Neves, 1986).

We track with the dummy variable *UnitSplit* if a diocese has ever been united or split. For diocese that experienced a simple change of name, we exploit the aforementioned Historical Summary to homogenize the diocese's name throughout time. This allows us to build two variables for each diocese.

On the one hand, the variable *Diocesi_name_chang* reports the actual name of each diocese at each point in time, except in the case of simple name changes, for which we homogenize the name to the last name attributed to the diocese. On the other hand, the variable called *Diocesi_final* reports the name of the dioceses after the process of unification/split for all dioceses involved.

For instance, in 1986 the dioceses of "Acquapendente", "Bagnoregio (Bagnorea)", "Montefiascone", and "Viterbo e Tuscania" were united in a unique diocese called "Diocese of Viterbo, Acquapendente, Bagnoregio, Montefiascone, Tuscania e San Martino al Monte Cimino", and in 1991 this diocese was renamed "Viterbo". In this case, the variable *Diocesi_name_chang* takes values "Acquapendente", "Bagnoregio (Bagnorea)", "Montefiascone", and "Viterbo e Tuscania" for the dioceses prior 1986, and the name "Viterbo" from 1986 onwards for the unique observation comprising the territory of the four dioceses that were united. The variable *Diocesi_final* takes the name "Viterbo" for both the four dioceses prior to 1986 and the united diocese after 1986.

The diocese-level votes and fixed effects will be computed based on the variable *Diocesi_name_chang*. We drop from the final sample (i) the dioceses of Rome, because its bishop is the Pope; and (ii) the diocese of Aosta, as here the DC had peculiar denominations and programs.

Diocese share votes to DC party. To compute electoral data at the dioceses level we need to know which municipalities belong to each diocese at each point in time.

We start from the 2017 shapefiles reporting all municipalities within each diocese. These information are from the website <https://www.danieledapiaggi.it/>, based on data from the Italian Episcopal Conference. In particular, for each ecclesiastical region (roughly corresponding to an Italian region), we have a shapefile reporting for each municipality the corresponding diocese as of 2017.³⁰ On average each ecclesiastical region has 14 dioceses. After assembling all shapefiles and correcting the dataset for 5 missing municipalities, we carry out a manual revision of the set of all municipalities included in each diocese to historically trace back all changes of dioceses boundaries. We use a variety of sources including the yearly reports of the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* and the historical section of each diocese's website.³¹

Once we have assigned municipalities to the correct diocese throughout time, we combine municipality-diocese data with the municipality-level data on votes. We sum-up the votes to the DC party and the total votes at the diocese level and then calculate the DC vote share for each diocese from 1948 to 1992.

Archdioceses. Archdioceses are dioceses whose bishop is placed at the head of an ecclesiastical province, or at the head of a very important diocese within a province (typically the diocese in which a provincial capital is located). Accordingly, we set up the dummy variable *Archdiocese* taking the value one for the following dioceses: Acerenza, Acerenza-Matera, Agrigento, Amalfi-Cava de' Tirreni, Amalfi, Ancona-Osimo, Ancona, Bari-Bitonto, Bari, Benevento, Bologna, Brindisi-Ostuni, Cagliari, Camerino-San Severino Marche, Camerino, Campobasso-Boiano, Catania, Catanzaro-Squillace, Catanzaro, Cosenza-Bisignano, Chieti-Vasto, Cosenza, Crotone-Santa Severina, Crotone, Fermo, Ferrara-Comacchio, Ferrara, Firenze, Foggia-Bovino, Foggia, Forli-Bertinoro, Forli, Gaeta, Genova, Gorizia, Lanciano-Ortona, L'Aquila, Lecce, Lucca, Manfredonia-Vieste-San Giovanni Rotondo, Matera-Irsina, Matera, Messina-Lipari-Santa Lucia del Mela, Messina, Perugia, Milano, Modena-Nonatola, Monreale, Napoli, Oristano, Otranto, Palermo, Perugia-Città della Pieve, Pesaro, Pescara-Penne, Pisa, Potenza e Marsico Nuovo, Reggio Calabria, Rossano, Salerno, Potenza-Muro Lucano-Marsico Nuovo, Ravenna-Cervia, Reggio Calabria-Bova, Rossano-Cariati, Conza-Sant'Angelo dei Lombardi-Bisaccia, Siena, Sorrento, Spoleto, Salerno-Campagna-Acerno, Sant'Angelo dei Lombardi-Conza-Nusco-Bisaccia, Sassari, Urbino, Siena-Colle di Val d'Elsa-Montalcino, Siracusa, Sorrento-Castellammare di Stabia", Spoleto-Norcia, Taranto, Torino, Trani-Barletta-Bisceglie, Trento, Udine, Urbino-Urbania-Sant'Angelo in Vado, and Venezia.

Dioceses' headquarters and distance to Rome. As dioceses are typically named after a city, for each diocese we retrieve the location of the main city giving the name to the diocese. Then, we manually check on each diocese' website if the diocese changed the location of the bishop's seat overtime and we accordingly change the headquarter name and geographical location. Finally, we compute the distance between the headquarter of the diocese and Rome.

Diocese-level measures of religiosity in 1950. Using dioceses' webpages from the Catholic Hierarchy website, we collect different proxies for local religiosity: the share of Catholic individuals over population,

³⁰See, for instance, <https://www.danieledapiaggi.it/z011702-dataset-1-diocesi-italiane.html>.

³¹A digital version of the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* is available at https://www.vatican.va/archive/aas/index_sp.htm.

the number of parishes, priests, and religious males and females over 1,000 Catholics around the year 1950 (if no information was available in 1950 we use information from the closest year).

A.3 Details on the Bishop that Move across Dioceses

To track bishops that can be observed in at least two dioceses for at least three years (labelled *Movers*), we start from our bishop dataset. We drop the dioceses of Aosta and Rome, for which we do not consider voting outcomes.

To calculate the number of dioceses where the bishop has been appointed throughout our sample period we rely on the *Diocesi_fin* identifier described in Section A.2, that is the common identifier for all the diocese that were ever part of the same larger diocese. We do this because, prior the wave of diocese unifications in 1986, many bishops were simultaneously in office in the two dioceses that were then united, and in most cases they became the bishop in office in the newly created diocese. Similarly, if a bishop has been in office in a diocese that subsequently split and in one of the two afterwards, we do not consider this change of office as a switch. This allows us to build a conservative measure of the number of dioceses administered, which prevents the double counting of dioceses that were practically always administered by the same person within a given time period.

For instance, in 1951 Luigi Boccadoro was appointed as bishop simultaneously in the dioceses of “Acquapendente” and “Montefiascone”, while in 1970 he was additionally appointed as bishop of “Viterbo e Tuscania”. In 1986 all these dioceses were united with the diocese of “Bagnoregio (Bagnorea)” (vacant from 1971) into the unique diocese of “Viterbo, Acquapendente, Bagnoregio, Montefiascone, Tuscania e San Martino al Monte Cimino” (later denominated for simplicity “Viterbo”), and Luigi Boccadoro continued to administer the full territory up to 1987 when he retired. Bishop Boccadoro never administered for at least three year any other diocese beyond those that he also administered within the unique denomination “Viterbo”, therefore, we do not consider him as a mover.

Another example is provided by bishop Giovanni Proni. Bishop Proni started his career as bishop with an appointment in the diocese of “Termoli” from 1962 to 1970. In 1970 he was appointed bishop of “Bertinoro”, and became bishop of “Forlì” as well from 1976. In 1986 the dioceses of “Forlì” and “Bertinoro” united into the diocese of “Forlì-Bertinoro”, and Proni continued to jointly administer their territory until 1988 when he retired. We consider him as a mover because he administered for more than three years both the diocese of “Termoli” and the territory corresponding to the final diocese of “Forlì-Bertinoro”.

A.4 Samples and Descriptive Statistics

We perform the empirical analysis using two main samples. First, we use the *full* sample of dioceses and electoral years.³² One caveat of this approach is that the effect of bishops who never leave a diocese thorough their career (within our sample period) cannot be estimated separately from their diocese-period fixed effect (due to perfect collinearity). Thus, following [Bertrand and Schoar \(2003\)](#), in a second step, we consider the *restricted* sample of dioceses where at least one bishop can be observed in at least another diocese for at least three years (to ensure that bishops have the chance to "imprint their mark" on a given diocese).³³ Note that for these dioceses we include all observations, i.e., those periods in which the diocese has bishops that we do not observe in other dioceses.

Table A1 reports the related descriptive statistics for the full and restrictive samples—in columns (1) and (2) respectively. Among the 742 bishops in the full sample, 26% are bishops who moved from one diocese to another one. The percentage of movers is similar when we focus on the restricted sample (33%).

Table A1: Descriptive Statistics

Sample	Full	Restricted
	(1)	(2)
Sh. votes DC (st.dev.)	0.389 (0.100)	0.398 (0.097)
Ln N electors (st.dev.)	11.325 (1.026)	11.353 (1.000)
N dioceses	341	281
N bishops	742	598
N bishops movers	195	195
N connected sets	74	28
N bishop deaths while in office	253	214
N observations	4,645	3,721

Notes: The table reports summary statistics for the full sample (column 1) and the restricted sample (column 2) of dioceses. The full sample includes all dioceses in our dataset. The restricted sample focuses only on those dioceses where at least one bishop can be observed in at least another diocese for at least three years. For more details on data construction, see Appendix A.2.

³²We only exclude dioceses for those electoral years in which they are vacant.

³³Three years correspond to the 10th percentile of the distribution of the number of years a bishop stays in office (the median is 9 and the average is 11 years).

A.5 Further definitions and results on exogenous transitions

To compute the J statistic with the Wald test for the null hypothesis that the difference in the share votes to DC before and after each death is zero we follow [Jones and Olken \(2005\)](#) and compute

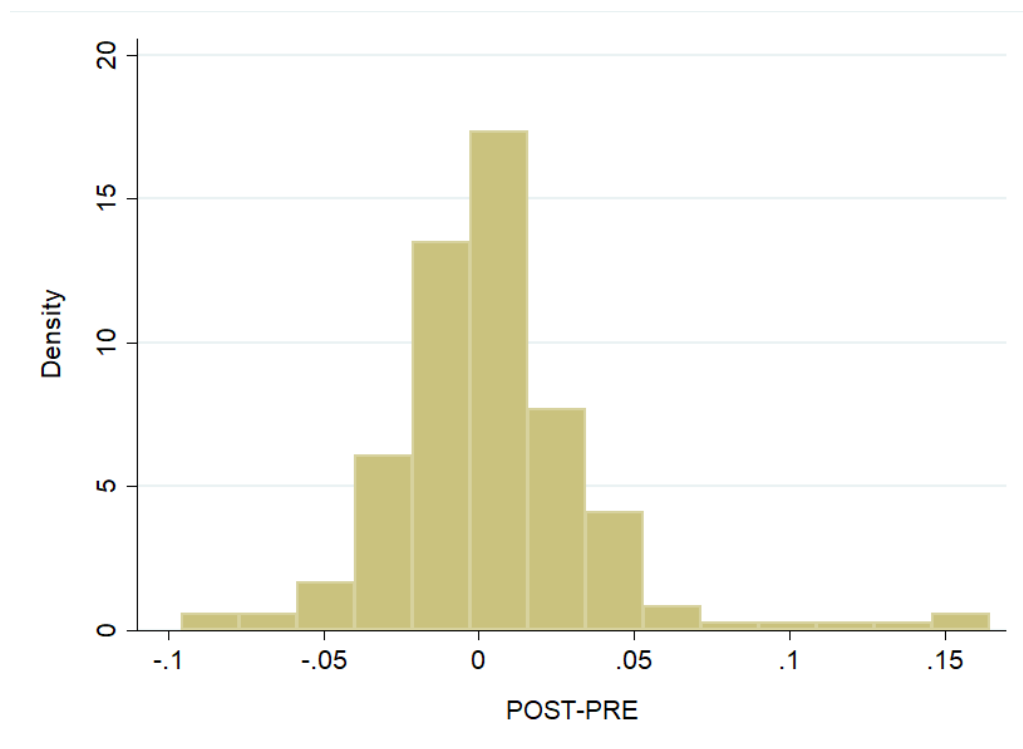
$$J = \frac{1}{Z} \sum_{i=1}^Z \frac{(\overline{POST}_z - \overline{PRE}_z)^2}{2\widehat{\sigma}_{\varepsilon_i}^2/T}$$

where Z is the number of bishop' deaths, $\overline{POST}_z - \overline{PRE}_z$ captures the change in the share votes to DC around a bishop death in diocese i , and $\widehat{\sigma}_{\varepsilon_i}^2$ is an estimate of $\sigma_{\varepsilon_i}^2$ for diocese i . The test verifies the equality of the effect of two consecutive bishops before and after an exogenous transition in a particular diocese. The magnitude of the effect can be computed as

$$\theta = \sqrt{\frac{(J-1)\sigma_{\varepsilon}^2}{T\sigma_l^2(1-\rho)}}$$

Normalizing σ_l to 1, setting $\rho = 0$, and substituting in the variance of the error process, σ_{ε}^2 , provides a conservative estimate of how much one standard deviation in bishop quality affects the share votes to DC.

Figure A1: Distribution of POST-PRE coefficients estimates



Notes: Histogram of the distribution of the POST-PRE coefficient estimates from performing equation (2) on the full sample of dioceses and transitions due to death of the bishop in office. See Section 4.2 for further details on the empirical setting.

Based on the results in the first row of Table 3, the θ estimate suggests that a one standard deviation

increase in bishop quality is associated to a 3.4 percentage point increase in the share votes to the DC during the 5 years following an exogenous bishop transition. Note that, reassuringly, the histogram of the distribution of POST-PRE coefficient estimates of bishops that died while in office (see Figure A1) displays both negative and positive values and has a mean of 0.005 (very close to zero), suggesting that bishop's death are not systematically associated to, for instance, low bishop political influence due to high age.

A.6 Mechanism: Details on the Measures of Bishops' Activism

To construct our measure of bishops' activism in different domains, we searched the historical archive of articles published in the national newspaper *Il corriere della Sera* during the 1948–1992 period.

To identify articles mentioning bishops we use different combinations of the keywords “Monsignor,” “Mons,” or “Vescovo,” followed either by the name and lastname of the bishop, or by his lastname only. Note that for each search pattern the browser returns only the first entry, while more than one search pattern may appear within the same article. In the latter case, we combine all the text that can be related to the same article. If an article mentions more than one bishop, it will appear more than once in the dataset, and each entry will be associated to a different bishop.

To avoid miscoding we manually checked all articles related to bishops with the same lastname, ambiguous lastnames (e.g., Agostino, that is also an Italian first name), or popular lastnames (e.g., Pirelli or Rossi). Finally, to avoid overreporting, we manually checked all articles for bishops holding non-bishop offices and dropped those articles related to the non-bishop mandates. For example, besides being bishop of Chieti and then of Loreto, Bishop Capovilla was Pope John XXIII's personal secretary during the 1958–1963 period. After the Pope's death, several articles reporting on Capovilla, were centred on the recently-died Pope—and, thus, reporting on Capovilla's role as Pope's personal secretary. These types of articles are excluded from our dataset.

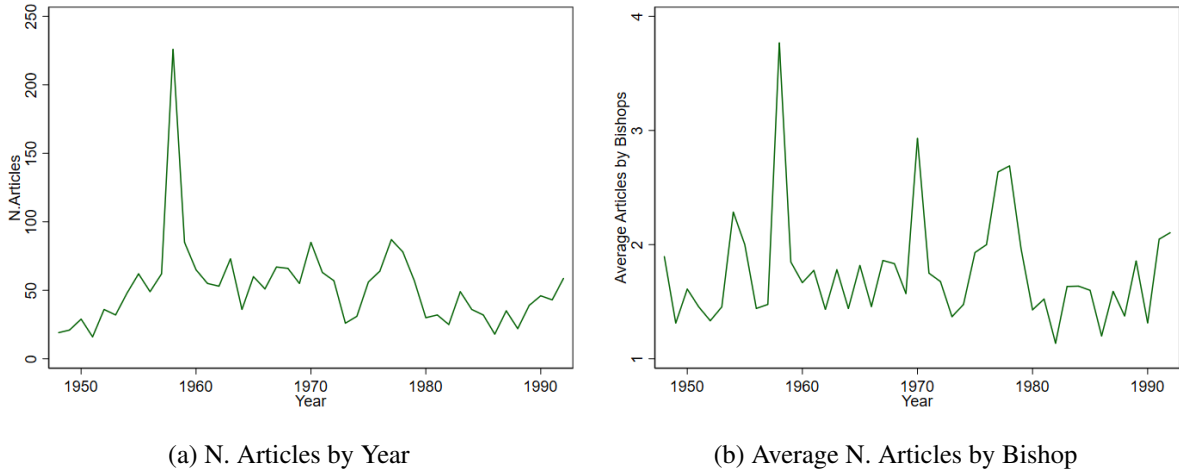
Based on our baseline sample of bishops (column 4 of Table 1), we find that 54% of them are mentioned in the *Corriere della Sera*. Panel a of Figure A2 presents the yearly evolution of the number of articles mentioning bishops. The time series shows a peak in correspondence of 1958, when the new pope had to be elected, and the Bishop Pietro Fiordelli was condemned for calling as “public concubines” and “public sinners” a couple that decided to only have a civil marriage. On average, a bishop appears in slightly more than one article.

For each article including the search pattern, the newspaper browser reports the title and a few words before and after our keywords. We combine these two pieces of information into a single document (an “extended title”) and conduct the text analysis on the corpus of all these documents.³⁴ To do this we exploit the supervised Latent Dirichlet Allocation (sLDA) algorithm (Mcauliffe and Blei, 2007).

The sLDA is a supervised machine-learning algorithm that, given a corpus of documents and an associated response variable, aims to detect latent topics that are predictive of the response. In our case, the response variable will be the estimated bishop effects. We prefer employing the sLDA rather than an unsupervised LDA, because the performance of the former algorithm is superior when the ultimate goal of the

³⁴We follow this procedure because (as of July 2022) it was not possible to download the full text of all articles.

Figure A2: Time Series of Number of Bishop-Related News and Average Number of Articles per Bishops



Notes: Yearly number of articles regarding bishops in panel (a) and yearly number of bishops cited in the news in panel (b). The sample comprises all bishops included in column 4 of Table 1. Source: *Corriere della Sera* and own elaborations.

exercise is to infer latent topics predictive of a variable external to the corpus of documents (for more details see the discussion in [Mcauliffe and Blei, 2007](#)).

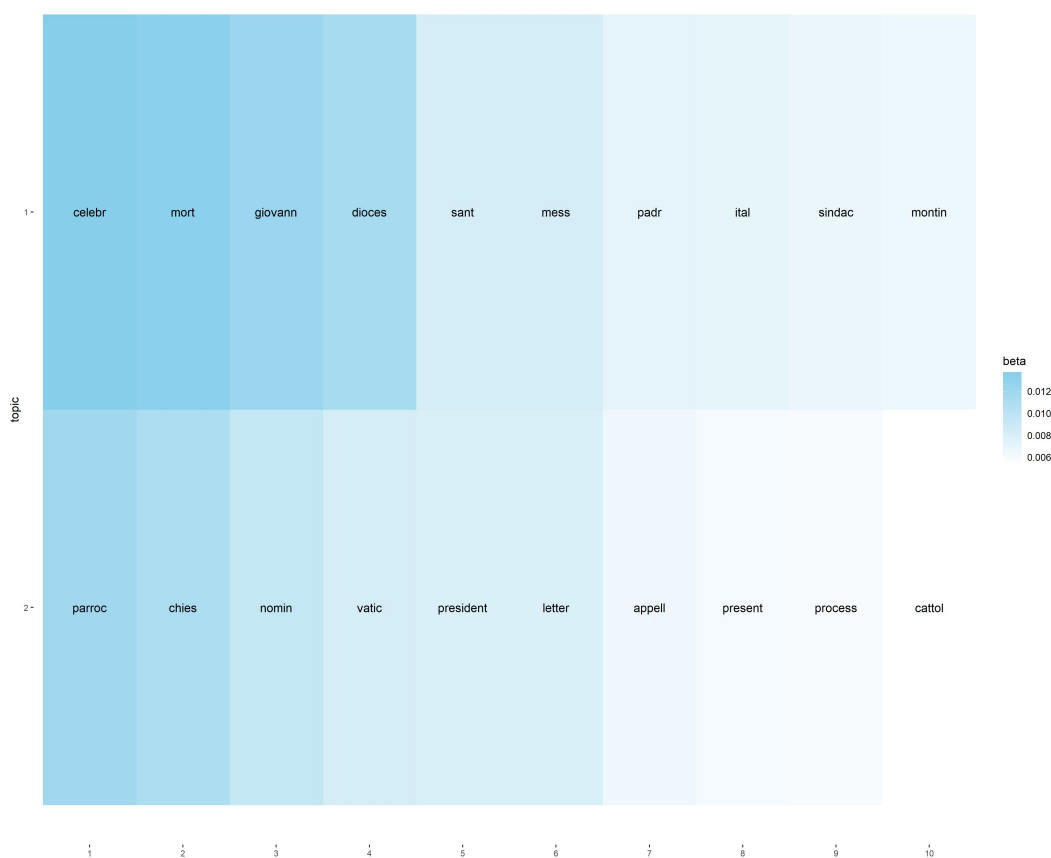
We allow the algorithm to classify articles in two topics, based on a α parameter of 50/2 (the standard value when two topics are allowed), and a η parameter of 0.003.³⁵ Given the relatively small size of the available vocabulary, we chose this value of η to have a more defined classification of (words and) documents to topics. Robustness checks using lower or higher levels of η return similar results.

As standard in text-analysis exercises, we preprocessed the text to remove punctuation, numbers, and stopwords. Moreover, to render the text more general, we removed the Italian terms for “bishop,” “archbishop,” “cardinal,” and “pope,” as well as all bishops’ name and lastname included in the search pattern, and all names of dioceses and municipalities. Finally, we reduced the remaining words to their Italian stems. For instance, “cattolico” (the attribute “catholic”) and “cattolicesimo” (the noun “catholicism”) were all replaced with “cattol” in the analysis. We apply also the tf-idf filter to exclude most and least common words. The algorithm averages the word-topic probabilities and assigns to each document a weight that defines its belonging to each topic. We repeat the algorithm 100 times and then consider the average word-topic probability and document-topic weight to obtain the final classification of articles in two topics.

Figure A3 shows the two topics identified by the sLDA with the related 10 terms with the highest weight, while Figure A4 presents the wordclouds. A brief description of the two topics follows. We conclude this section by discussing how we computed the topic-related variables for the analysis of their correlation with the estimated bishop fixed effects reported in Table 4.

³⁵The α parameter controls the mixture of topics for any given document, lower values imply that documents will have less of a mixture of topics and viceversa. The η hyperparameter controls the distribution of words per topic. Lower values of η imply that the topics will be characterized by fewer words and viceversa.

Figure A3: Top Terms of Topics of the Supervised LDA



Notes: The matrix displays the 10 keywords with highest weight in defining the 2 topics of the supervised LDA. A lighter color is assigned to keywords with lower weight. Source: *Corriere della Sera* and own elaborations.

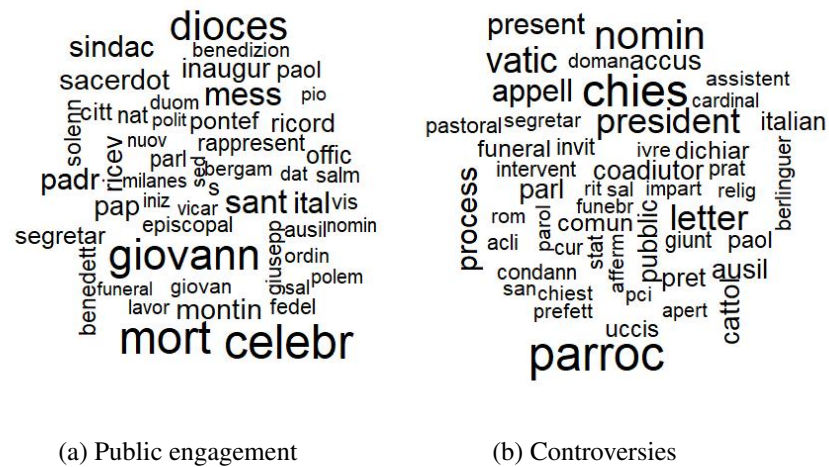
Topic "Public engagement". Within the top terms identifying the first topic we read: “celebrate,” “death,” “John,” “diocese,” “saint,” “mass,” “priest,” “italy,” “mayor,” and “Montini.” These keywords refer to articles mentioning bishops for their celebration of masses (for deaths of important people, saints, and festivals) or their participation to events involving mayors and public authorities. In fact, the wordcloud in panel a of Figure A4 also includes keywords such as “inauguration,” “blessing,” and “funerals.” We report below some examples of titles and quotes from the articles that mostly represent this topic.

- 30 Jun 1960 – [Tambroni inaugura a Bergamo la «Cittadella» e due Musei](#) – generale, mons. Morstabilini, ha...

English translation of extended title: Tambroni inaugurates the “Citadel” and two museums in Bergamo – General, Mons. Morstabilini, has...

Translated excerpt from article: “Received on his arrival in the city by the Bergamo parliamentarians and by the civil, military and religious authorities [the Prime Minister] Tambroni reached the ‘Citadel’ located in the heart of ancient Bergamo where the provicar general, Mons. Morstabilini blessed the new center and the adjoining museums that the Prime Minister subsequently inaugurated.”

Figure A4: Wordclouds of Topics of the Supervised LDA



Notes: In each topic, larger words are most recurrent. Source: *Corriere della Sera* and own elaborations.

- 27 Apr 1989 – [Il naso tappato dei vescovi per le elezioni](#) – Monsignor Caporello...

English translation of extended title: The bishops’ noses plugged for the elections – Monsignor Caporello...

Translated excerpt from article: “Punctual as the dovetail of St. Benedict the bishops return to invite Catholics to vote DC in the upcoming European elections. The Lombard CEI, gathered around Cardinal Martini, has prepared a demanding document ‘Educating to socio-political participation,’ in which Christians are urged in order to promote the singli ‘values’ and to safeguard their ‘unity,’ not to act ‘divided and dispersed.’ [...] Monsignor Caporello, bishop of Mantua and former secretary of the CEI, called for ethical reoxygenation. Rather than reoxygenation, the conclusion of the document makes us think of Indro Montanelli’s ‘let’s plug our noses.’ Which is very sad for the successors of the apostles.”

- 05 Aug 1968 – [Pellegrinaggio al Grappa](#) – Padova, monsignor Bortignon...

English translation of extended title: Pilgrimage to mount Grappa – Padua, Monsignor Bortignon...

Translated excerpt from article: “The bishop of Padua. Monsignor Bortignon celebrated Mass at the camp in suffrage of the fallen. During the ceremony, a patrol of Air Force jets repeatedly flew low over the summit.”

- 07 Sep 1950 – [Il mercoledì della fratellanza](#) – monsignor Agostini, Patriarca...

English translation of extended title: The Wednesday of Brotherhood – Monsignor Agostini, Patriarch...

Translated excerpt from article: “In the name of fraternity, today our bonds with the rest of the human race are working as never before; Each of us has a piece of sky within us. This blue Wednesday began

with the 'Mass of cinema' that Monsignor Agostini, Patriarch of Venice, celebrated this morning in San Marco, for the benefit of the filmmakers gathered here for the exhibition and for the congresses: and ended tonight with the screening of a marzipan film, *First Communion* by Alessandro Blasetti."

- 29 Dec 1958 – [La «Casa della Gioventù » inaugurata a Lodi](#) – vescovo di Lodi mons. Benedetti, dal sindaco comm...

English translation of extended title: The "House of Youth" inaugurated in Lodi – the bishop of Lodi mons. Benedetti, by the mayor comm...

Translated excerpt from article: "Received by the prefect dr. Vicari, by the bishop of Lodi mons. Benedetti, by the mayor comm. Vaccari and other authorities, the archbishop immediately went, between two wings of cheering people, to the sanctuary of Santa Maria Ausiliatrice, whence he moved a procession that escorted the urn of the young martyr San Felicissimo, which will henceforth be kept in the chapel of the new House."

- 28 Jan 1960 – [INAUGURATA DA TOGNI l'autostrada Ceva-Savona](#) – ministro, il vescovo di... , ha impartito la benedizione...

English translation of extended title: INAUGURATED BY TOGNI the Ceva-Savona motorway – minister, the bishop of... , imparted the blessing...

Translated excerpt from article: "At the end of minister Togni's speech, the bishop of Mondovì, mgr. Briacca, imparted the blessing and then Togni himself cut the inaugural ribbon. Immediately afterwards, at about 4.00 pm, a very long line of cars, with all the authorities inside, took the motorway and headed towards Savona, which they reached after about forty minutes."

- 18 July 1960 – [L'autostrada Torino-Ivrea inaugurata dal ministro Togni](#) – il cardinale arcivescovo...

English translation of extended title: The Turin-Ivrea motorway inaugurated by Minister Togni – the cardinal archbishop...

Translated excerpt from article: "Immediately after the minister [of public works Togni], who was welcomed by a large group of personalities and technicians, the bishop of Ivrea, mgr. Mensa, and the cardinal archbishop of Turin, Maurilio Fossati, came. [...] 'This motorway - Togni said in the course of his speech - is a gateway to Italy and a gateway to the whole of Italy and as such it can be defined as of national utility'."

- 17 Jun 1966 – [Inaugurata da Andreotti una raffineria in Sardegna](#) – Cagliari, monsignor...

English translation of extended title: Andreotti inaugurates a refinery in Sardinia – Cagliari, the bishop...

Translated excerpt from article: "[DC] Minister Giulio Andreotti was present at the ceremony. After the blessing of the works by the archbishop of Cagliari, Monsignor Botto, and the speeches of the president of the Sardinian Industrial Credit, Raffaele Garzia, of the regional councilor for industry, Tocco, and of the president of the Sardinian region, Dettori, the industry minister talked, recalling

another pioneering undertaking by Moratti, the construction of the refinery in Augusta, around which an industrialization process has developed which now involves the entire coastal strip with significant effects on the Sicilian economy.”

- 11 Jul 1976 – [Occupati gli stabilimenti della Bloch Martedì un incontro con Donat Cattin](#) – lavoratori l’arcivescovo, monsignor (che celebrerà la messa nella fabbrica occupata), l’altro giorno c’è stato il sindaco Spaccinl..

English translation of extended title: Bloch factories occupied. Tuesday there will be a meeting with Donat Cattin... – workers the archbishop, monsignor (who will celebrate a mass in the occupied factory), the other day the mayor Spaccinl visited...

Translated excerpt from article: “This morning the archbishop, Monsignor Cocolin (who will celebrate a mass in the occupied factory) will be with the workers, the other day the mayor Spaccini was there. The interest is alive but the uncertainty is serious.”

- 10 Sep 1962 – [Colombo inaugura a Bari la XXVI Fiera del Levante](#) – Bari, monsignor Nicodemo, ha...

English translation of extended title: Colombo inaugurates the XXVI Fiera del Levante in Bari – Bari, Monsignor Nicodemo, has...

Translated excerpt from article: “After Minister Colombo’s speech, the Archbishop of Bari, Monsignor Nicodemo, officiated the rite of blessing. The vice-president of the council Piccioni and the ministers Colombo and Codacci Pisanelli then made the traditional visit to the district of the event.”

- 15 Jul 1963 – [Celebrata in valle Stura la festa della montagna](#) – di Cuneo, monsignor Tonetti...

English translation of extended title: Celebrated in the Stura valley the festival of the mountain – [the bishop]of Cuneo, Monsignor Tonetti...

Translated excerpt from article: “In a vast plateau, present a few thousand people gathered from Piedmont, Lombardy and Liguria, the archbishop of Cuneo, Monsignor Tonetti, celebrated Mass at the camp, after addressing words of homage to the mayor of Demonte, Abellonio, the lawyer Oberto, vice-president of the Union of municipalities and authorities of the mountains, the lawyer Andreis, president of the provincial tourism authority. The Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, Mr Mattarella, then gave the official speech.”

- 24 Mar 1975 – [Messa del cardinale al Vigorelli per quindicimila cresimandi](#) – ha celebrato la messa insieme ai vescovi ausiliari monsignor Tresoldi e monsignor...

English translation of extended title: Mass by the Cardinal Vigorelli for fifteen thousand confirmands – he celebrated the mass together with the auxiliary bishops Monsignor Tresoldi and Monsignor...

Translated excerpt from article: “About 15,000 confirmands from all over the Ambrosian diocese attended yesterday the Mass celebrated by Cardinal Giovanni Colombo, archbishop of Milan, at the Vigorelli velodrome.”

Topic “Controversies”. Within the top terms identifying the second topic we find: “parish priest,” “church,” “nomination,” “vatican,” “president,” “letter,” “appeal,” “present,” “process,” and “trial.” These keywords point to the involvement of bishops into judicial controversies, or matters concerning parish priests and the church in general. In the wordcloud in panel b of Figure A4 there are also references to the communist party (“pci,” “comun”) and to its secretary (“Berlinguer”). We report below some examples of titles and quotes from the articles that mostly represent this topic.

- 13 May 1984 – [Processo canonico a don Baget Bozzo](#) – respiscenze, il vescovo di Isernia, monsignor Palmerini.

English translation of extended title: Canonical trial on the priest Baget Bozzo – awareness of mistake, the bishop of Isernia, monsignor Palmerini

Translated excerpt from article: “The priest Giovanni Baget Bozzo, theologian, writer and journalist, will end up in ecclesiastical court for having accepted the candidacy for the European Parliament on the PSI lists. [...] The suspension ‘a divinis’ was imposed on him, after four months, in the hope of reprieve, the bishop of Isernia, Monsignor Palmerini.”

- 27 Nov 1977 – [Anche un sacerdote ha abbandonato la chiesa con i fedeli contrari alla lettera del vescovo per il SI](#) – quando i celebranti hanno cominciato a leggere la notificazione del vescovo sul referendum. mantovani, che si sono...

English translation of extended title: Even a priest left the church with the faithful opposed to the bishop’s letter for the YES – when the celebrants began to read the bishop’s notification on the referendum. mantuans, who are...

Translated excerpt from article: “Among the demonstrators there was also a priest, Don Sandro Monicelli, 27 years old, former curate of Cerese and now a working priest. ‘I left mass - he declared - because I didn’t feel like continuing a gesture that signifies communion at a time when this communion no longer existed. An attempt was made to capture votes from an exquisitely liturgical act such as the celebration of the word of God, citing faith as a motivation, going against freedom of conscience and fundamental human rights’.”

- 27 Nov 1977 – [Il consiglio dei vescovi ignora le lettere Berlinguer-Bettazzi](#) – lettera di Berlinguer a monsignor Bettazzi...

English translation of extended title: The bishops’ council ignores the letters Berlinguer-Bettazzi – a letter from Berlinguer to bishop Bettazzi

Translated excerpt from article: “We do not believe that the attitude of Christians can change in the face of movements which remain substantially linked to ideologies incompatible with the Gospel’. This is the very concise sentence, contained in the press release of the permanent council of the Italian episcopal conference, with which the Italian bishops intervene in the debate sparked by Berlinguer’s letter to Monsignor Bettazzi.”

- 10 August 1976 – [Il vescovo frusta, i fedeli applaudono](#) – monsignor che nel 1988 tuonò, accuse circostanziate perché fra i 30 consiglieri...

English translation of extended title: The bishop whips, the faithful applaud – monsignor who thundered in 1988, limited accusations because among the 30 councilors...

Translated excerpt from article: “The bishop whips the mayor and aldermen, godfathers and powerful personalities of Cefalù from the pulpit and the people applaud for a quarter of an hour, clapping their hands with a thousand eyes fixed on the administrators rebuked by Monsignor Rosario Mazzola: ‘In our political situation private interests and infighting to the death shamelessly emerge. [...] The politicians at the ceremony listened to the homily with bowed heads.’”

- 09 Aug 1990 – [Il vescovo di Nuoro: con due milioni si assolda un sicario](#) – dal vescovo Giovanni Melis durante l’omelia pronunciata ai...

English translation of extended title: The bishop of Nuoro: with 2 millions you can hire an assassin – from bishop Giovanni Melis during the homily pronounced at...

Translated excerpt from article: “To hire a killer in the Nuoro area, 2-3 million are enough. By now people kill without justification and this is the sign of the utmost abjection: these are some of the phrases spoken by Bishop Giovanni Melis during the homily delivered at the funeral of the bartender Mauro Moreddu, assassinated on Sunday in the countryside of the capital of Barbagia.”

- 23 Oct 1958 – [Il Vescovo di Prato in appello oggi alla Corte di Firenze](#) – a mons. Pietro Fiordelli la pena di 40 mila lire di multa...

English translation of extended title: The bishop of Prato at the appeal today at the Florence court – to mons. Pietro Fiordelli the sanction of 40,000 lire

Translated excerpt from article: “The appeal process against the bishop of Prato will open tomorrow morning [...] The magistrate should illustrate the complex precedents of the current judgment, from the now famous episode of the civil marriage of the Bellandi spouses, on August 12, 1956, up to the sentence of March 1, 1958 that inflicted on Mons. Pietro Fiordelli the penalty of 40 thousand lire fine.”

- 09 Dec 1991 – [Appello anti-criminalità dell’arcivescovo di Napoli](#) – Monsignor Giordano ha anche...

English translation of extended title: Appeal against criminals by the archbishop of Naples – Monsignor Giordano has also...

Translated excerpt from article: “The archbishop of Naples, Cardinal Michele Giordano, took the opportunity of the Immaculate Conception to remind his city that ‘spiritual emptiness is a cancer that spreads metastases not only in degraded ghettos, but also in places where political, economic and administrative power is managed’. He added: ‘To this inner emptiness is attributable the social and moral malaise widespread in the Neapolitan territory that distances so many men from God and leads them to trample on the dignity of others. Hence the urgency of the new evangelization. It is an epochal

undertaking, in which I rely on families and Christian youth for a recovery of legality and the common good.’ ”

- 05 May 1971 – [Isolotto: rinvio al 21](#) – aiutino di monsignor Florit ... è un uomo come noi...

English translation of extended title: Isolotto [neighborhood of Florence] postponement [of the trial] – help of bishop Florit ... he is a man like us...

Translated excerpt from article: “With the testimony of Monsignor Florit we would have had the probability of demonstrating a side of the truth that you constantly claim to seek. Our idea is that Florit is a man like us. You excluded him from the process. He could provide clarifications, he could explain certain responsibilities.”

- 09 Jun 1990 – [Discoteche L'appello del vescovo Monsignor Tonini](#) – monsignor Tonini...

English translation of extended title: Discos, the appeal of bishop Tonini – Bishop Tonini...

Translated excerpt from article: “ ‘They play with the lives of young people for twenty denarii. It’s not enough to close the discos at two in the morning or leave the decision on times to the individual municipalities’. The Archbishop of Ravenna, Monsignor Ersilio Tonini, writes this in a note that will appear in the next issue of the Catholic magazine ‘Perspectives in the World’.”

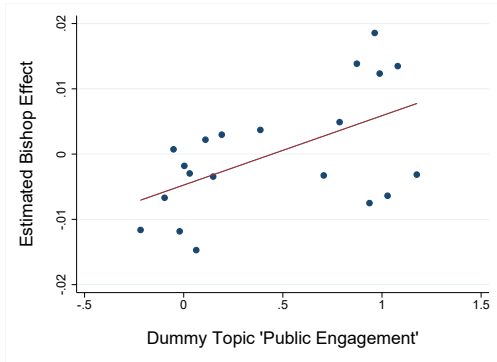
Computing the topic-related variables for the regression analysis. The sLDA algorithm assigns to each document a set of topic-specific weights (called “gamma”) that define to what extent the document belongs to each of the topics (the weights sum to 1). We assign each document to the topic that displays the highest gamma and use this information to build 3 alternative bishop-specific measures of activism, that we relate to the estimated bishop effect.³⁶

First, looking at the extensive margin of activity in the two topics, we build two dummy variables taking the value 1 if the bishop was mentioned in at least 1 document classified in the two topics, respectively. Second, focusing on the intensive margin, for each topic we build a variable tracking the number of documents classified in that topic. Third, we compute the share of documents that could be classified in each topic over the total number of documents mentioning the bishop.

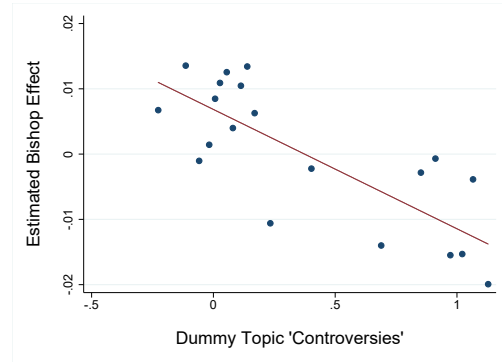
Figure A5 shows the binscatter of the correlation between the bishop fixed effects and our 3 measures of bishop’s involvement into public events (left-hand side) and controversies (right-hand side), controlling for connected sets and region of birth fixed effects, the year of birth, and a dummy for bishops born abroad (as in specification 1 of Table 4). Independently on how we computed the involvement of bishops in the two types of activities, we find that the more bishops were involved in public activities (celebration of masses, inaugurations, etc.) the higher is the value of the estimated fixed effect, while bishops more involved in controversies with civilians or political authorities display a lower value of the estimated bishop effect.

³⁶We drop documents where both topics have gamma equal to one half.

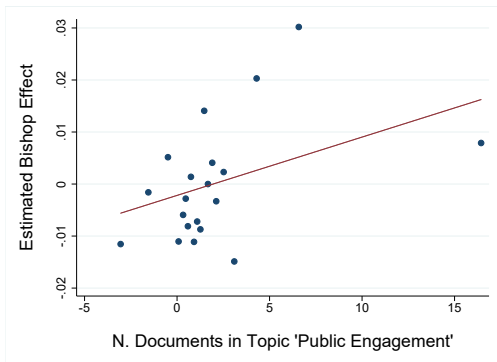
Figure A5: Correlation between the estimated bishop FE and different measures of bishop activism



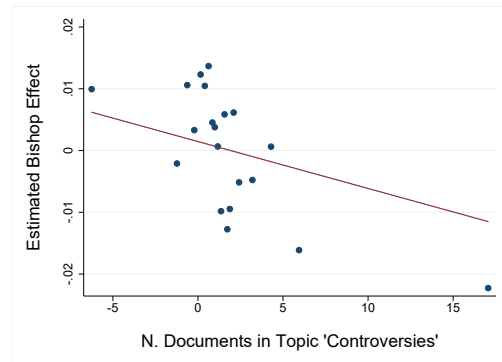
(a) Dummy Topic "Public Engagement"



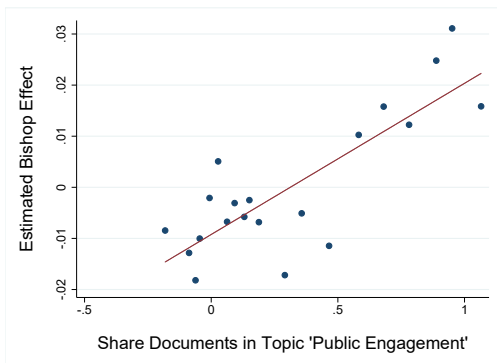
(b) Dummy Topic "Controversies"



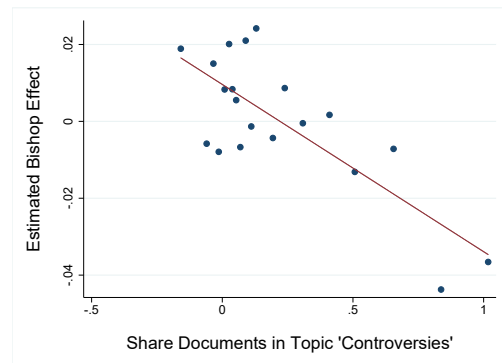
(c) N. Documents in Topic "Public Engagement"



(d) N. Documents in Topic "Controversies"



(e) Share Documents in Topic "Public Engagement"



(f) Share Documents in Topic "Controversies"

Notes: Binscatters of the correlation between the estimated bishop fixed effect from column 4 of Table 1 and different measures of bishop engagement into public events (left-hand side) and controversies (right-hand side), controlling for connected sets and region of birth fixed effects, the year of birth, and a dummy for bishops born abroad. Each dot represents about 30 bishops. Source: *Corriere della Sera* and own elaborations.



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