



TOBBMUN '26

TURKIYE ODALAR VE BORSALAR BIRLIGI SCIENCE HIGH SCHOOL
MODEL UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE

TANGENTOPOLI

UNDER SECRETARIES GENERAL:

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&

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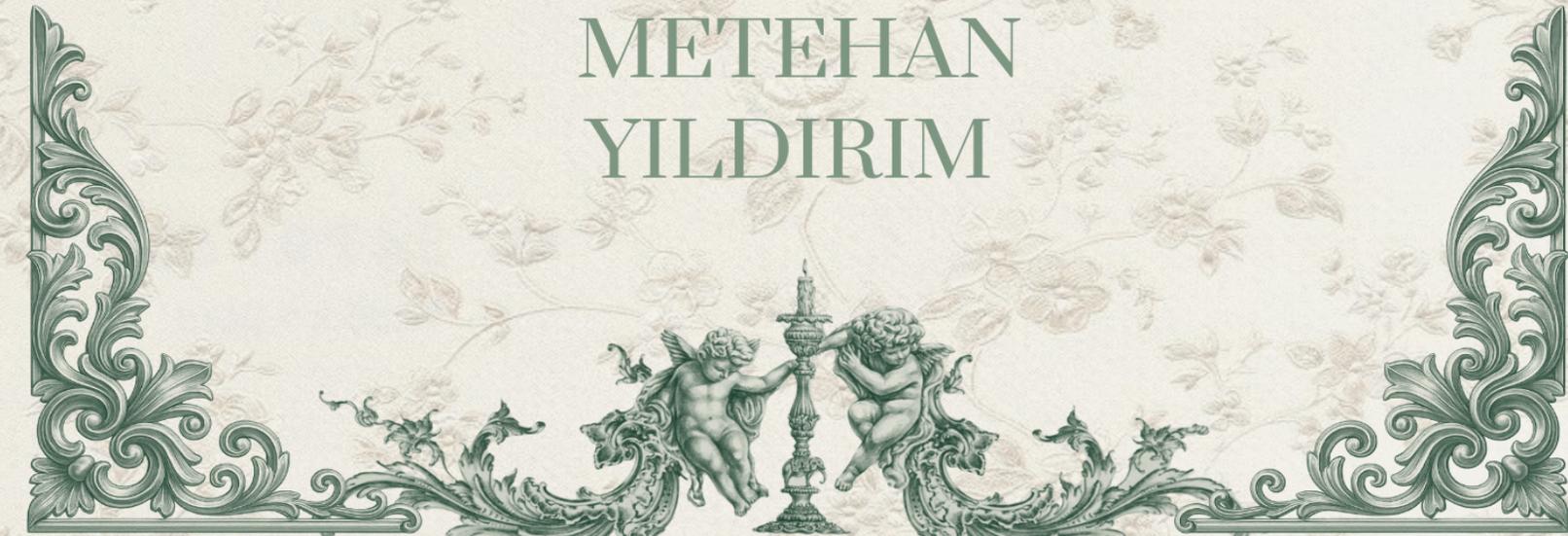


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1. Opening Remarks

1.1. Letter From Secretaries-General

Honourable participants of TOBBMUN'26,

As the Secretaries-General of TOBBMUN'26, taking place from January 17th to January 20th, we would like to extend our warmest welcome to all participants of this prestigious conference.

With its first official edition, and this year's first conference in Antalya, of TOBBMUN, we are proudly bringing together enthusiastic and passionate individuals eager to experience, witness the best instance of diplomacy, collaboration, and intellectual exchange at its finest. As the years and institutions first conference in Antalya, we are confident that we will not only achieve but we will even surpass our motto.

Throughout the path we took in the MUN circuit, we have worked hard and tirelessly to build this conference upon the foundation of experience, dedication, and innovation. With the knowledge and expertise we have gained, we want to shed light on your experience as well and help you feel the same joy we did while creating and attending such committees.

With a blend of experienced and new generation of academic members, we strongly believe that TOBBMUN'26 will provide an unparalleled MUN experience for all of its participants. The seasoned members of our academic team contribute their deep knowledge and insight, while the newer members bring forward creativity and fresh perspectives.

We hope and believe that this conference will grant all participants a platform and an opportunity for all attendees to develop and acquire skills, learn how the dynamics of different specialized committees work, and engage in a constructive way. By organizing TOBBMUN'26, we are not only trying to create something remarkable but also to inspire and contribute to the growth of new members and delegates within the MUN community.

To achieve this, we have brought an academic team of unparalleled intellect and proven capability, supported by an organization team marked by its commitment and strength. When you attend TOBBMUN'26, you will start your MUN year at the very peak of excellence and in the rest of the year, you will continue striving to reach even higher summits.

Welcome to TOBBMUN'26,
With our warmest regards,

Kuzey Karlık & Mustafa Aslan

1.2. Letter From Under-Secretaries-General

Dear Delegates,

It is our pleasure to welcome you to our committee at this year at the TOBB Model United Nations. We are honored to be your Under-Secretaries-General, and to lead you on a committee which studies the interlocking and intricate world of politics, business, and law in reference to one of the most epochal times in the recent history of Italy. The case study on the issue of political corruption, systemic accountability, and the weakness of democratic institutions is the scandal of Tangentopoli, commonly known as Bribesville. The topics in this committee will be transparency, accountability, institutional reform, and the implications of unmitigated political power on society. It is a rare chance to discover not only the legal and procedural aspects of the corruption but the human, political, cultural aspects that facilitate the latter.

We urge each of our delegates to study the background content thoroughly, be analytically accurate in each case, and develop solutions that are just, practical and politically sound. In Tangentopoli, any decision can have a wave of influence throughout the political environment, impacting the future of the institution and the confidence of people. This committee is a test of your critical thinking, strategic action, and operating in a high-stake environment in which ethics, law, and political ambition come in conflict.

We are keen enough to see your arguments, innovative problem solving and negotiation techniques as you manoeuvre through this turbulent political landscape. Collectively, you can find new methodologies of fighting corruption, regaining people trust, and knowing the bigger picture of political responsibility.

Please do not hesitate to contact us at @bersunakkaya@gmail.com

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Cordially,

Bersun AKKAYA & Metehan YILDIRIM

Under-Secretaries-General of Tangentopoli Committee

2. Introduction to the Committee

2.1. Purpose and Scope of the Committee

This committee represents the crisis of politics, judiciary, and institutions of the Italian Republic

in the early 1990s that is the center of the conflict known as Tangentopoli. The exposure of deep-rooted systemic corruption in political parties, state institutions, private corporations, and public procurement through the Mani Pulite (Clean Hands) investigations was the cause of this period. The committee intends to make the delegates understand that corruption is not just an individual crime but a structural phenomenon that can undermine the entire democratic governance system. The committee's first aim was to discover how the spheres of political power, judicial authority, and economic interests intertwined in a decaying political order and at the same time to question the range of legality, accountability, and moral responsibility. Delegates should conduct their negotiations in a highly unstable setting where the legal framework, public trust, and the legitimacy of the institutions are continuously challenged. The resolutions made may be either a reinforcement of democratic transparency or an intensification of the decay of the system. The committee's extent of work goes beyond the formal court proceedings and covers the negotiations, media influence, political strategizing, and crisis management going on behind the scenes. Delegates can create emergency laws, have an impact on judicial decisions, negotiate with economic actors, change the public's view, or make secret alliances. No player is isolated; each action may lead to a chain of unforeseen circumstances that will determine the path of the Italian state. This committee in a state of crisis where information is fragmentary, loyalties ambiguous, and trust a treasure. Delegates will have to face ethical dilemmas, power struggles, and institutional disintegration since, in Tangentopoli, corruption is not an exception but the very system itself.

2.2. Committee Dynamic

This committee would be divided into various sections. The committee will work mainly by directives in the first part that is, by orders, secret meetings, and a personal conference. The Committee Academy will email you with their view on your role, and this will give you the latest information regarding the individual or institution you represent. It is on this basis that you should be able to come up with proper strategies and maneuvers to counter the changing situation. Once you get into the committee you are supposed to be on the move. Remember that, when you are not proactive in the first agenda item, but, you fail to develop plans that are forward-looking, then you will necessarily lag behind in the second agenda item. It is thus advisable that you come to the committee with prior preparations and strategic plans. Trust no one. Persuasion, manipulation, and strategic planning will be of great importance in the initiation of the committee. These processes may be done on a private basis, in a public speech, alliance, and negotiation, in a more open manner, or in a closed-door fashion. In all these things you will have special written instructions, called directives. Procedural details will be made known to you in detail during the committee sessions. Until present we shall relate here briefly a general explanation of what directives are in the circumstance of this committee. Please bear in mind: it is not the complete process, but only a slight opening into the workings of the committee.

2.2.1. Directives

Directives are the main materials of a Crisis Committees or Special Committees; they are what distinguish these kind of committees from the General Assembly. As the name implies, the term "directive" refers to an order or instruction. On the committee, any realistic and feasible action can be taken by writing directives. Consequently, it is guaranteed that the majority of the time spent on the committee will be devoted to writing directives (Triumphs are attained through concrete actions, rather than mere speeches or campaigns.) Unlike the GA procedure, it is unnecessary to encourage, suggest, or demonstrate any ideas to make it happen; only a decent directive is required. There are several types of directives depending on what one wants to do. To summarise, directives are written when one wishes to accomplish or do something. Writing a directive allows one to take any realistic action, therefore instead of long discussions and talking sessions to execute your ideas and progress in the committee, directives will be written.

2.3. Expectations from Delegates

The delegates attending this committee are expected to be extremely prepared, possess stellar analytical skills, and observe their roles strictly. Every delegate is made up of a character coming from a political, judicial, economic, or media network of Italy in the early 1990s. They are required to behave in line with their institutional role, interests, and constraints. Besides, court decisions should not be made out of pure idealism, rather a consideration of the history, legal arguments, and political factors involved in the case. It is not an option for delegates not to participate. They have to be present not only at the formal debates, judicial proceedings, and the crisis sessions but also at the informal channels like negotiations, lobbying, and alliance-decisions. The ones who plan will succeed; delegates are expected to be leading action initiators and not only waiting to be instructed. They are also expected to lead their investigations and trials, as well as the political outcomes. And it shall kept in mind that, every step u will be taking will navigate the committee itself, and every step you will be taking will have a role in the awards. When it comes to Tangentopoli, delegates are required to be ready for ethical dilemmas. Components such as Law, politics, the media, and the human instinct for survival are what keep on contradicting. Delegates are expected to exercise a shrewd judgment regarding the varying factors contributing to the legality, political expediency, accountability, and self-interest matters that can be harmonized. They should be strategic realists, not moral absolutists. If a point is to be credible and convincing, it has to be supported by evidence. A delegate who is knowledgeable about the legal, political, media, and social aspects of Italy in the 1990s is the one whose opinions will have the greatest impact. Everything that is said, suggested, or done must at least represent a legitimate example of the institution's reasoning and appear, historically, plausible. A delegate who is discredited is one who uses baseless allegations or adopts arguments that have become outdated.

Besides an energetic and engaging committee, delegates should cultivate an atmosphere of trust. Secretiveness, information tricks, and the whole setting are only the elements of the game. A single decision, whether it is made in public or private, will always have its consequences. By their actions, those delegates who will recognize the consequences, narrow the scope of

uncertainty, and provide the appropriate response to the situation changes will be the ones who determine the fate of the Italian Republic at one of its most historically significant moments.

3. Historical Background: Italy Before Tangentopoli



During the decades after the Second World War, Italy became a democratic republic that was molded by the political disintegration, the reconstruction of the economy and profound ideological division. At the time of the formal founding of the Republic in 1946 and the coming into force of the Constitution in 1948, Italy took a parliamentary system with an express purpose of eliminating the possible re-establishment of authoritarian rule. Although the institutions of democracy remained nominal and regular elections took place, the functioning of government became more based on shaky coalitions, networks of patronage and informal system of power-sharing.

At the very moment when the war came to an end in May 1945, all the major anti-Fascist parties created a provisional government which was headed by the action party leader and the prominent figure of the Resistance, Ferruccio Parri. The National Liberation Committees (CLNs) temporarily ruled over the areas northward and significant industrial facilities. The period was characterized by efforts to eliminate Fascist influence in the life of the population: the Fascists were killed or overthrown in power in about 15,000 people, and the reprisals did not end until 1946 in such areas as Emilia-Romagna and Tuscany. These purges however were not long before swirling up concern as membership in the Fascist Party was a pragmatic stipulation in most public-sector jobs.

The liberal forces soon formed a political backlash and a withdrawal policy was adopted with regard to systematic purges. As a matter of fact, the procedure was brief and superficial and even high-ranking Fascist officials were afforded a series of amnesties, among them the famous 1946 amnesty of Communist Minister of Justice Palmiro Togliatti. Parri was forced to step down in November 1945, and succeeded by Alcide De Gasperi, of the Christian Democratic Party. De Gasperi developed a more moderate, Rome based coalition government which dropped massive purges, restored big industrial enterprises to their pre-war holders, and replaced partisan executives with the old style state officials. Consequently, this ensured considerable institutional continuity in the judiciary, police and to a large extent the legal fabric that had been laid down under the Fascist regime.

King Victor Emmanuel III abdicated in May 1946, and the next month, Italy ended the monarchy in a referendum (with 54 percent of the vote) and declared Italy a republic. The main divisions

between the central and northern part of Italy and Naples and the southern part, especially Naples, were predominantly divided in terms of supporting the republic or the monarchy. Not only was the monarchy heavily criticized due to its cooperation with Mussolini but it also was seen as not opposing German occupation.

Simultaneously, a Constituent Assembly was chosen through the universal suffrage, and women voted in Italian history, first time, in history. The Christian Democrats, the Socialist, and the Communists almost had three-quarters of the seats thus controlling the drafting process. The Constitution was completed after much discussion that had taken place in 170 sessions and it came into force on 1 January 1948. The new constitutional system created a parliament, which was bicameral, guaranteed civil and political rights, an independent judicial system and a Constitutional Court, and provided such mechanisms as referendums to protect the democratic participation. Nonetheless, a number of them, including the Constitutional Court, came to be introduced only decades later. Cold War played a significant role in the consolidation of the Italy post-war political order since it was the determinant factor that stabilized the situation in the country and, thus, in distorting the institutional system.

The Cold War significantly influenced the process of consolidation of the Italy post-war political order as it was the decisive factor in stabilizing the situation in the country and, consequently, in distorting the institutional system. The existence of the one of the most powerful communistic parties in Western Europe the Italian Communist Party (PCI) caused the constant fear of the domestic elites and the international partners especially the United States. This led to the establishment of political continuity over institutional change and consequently the establishment of inefficiency, patronage and corruption as standard practices in state institutions instead of the systematic challenge to the system (Ginsborg, 1990; Judt, 2005).

Since 1947 the Cold War had a direct impact on Italian politics. In January the same year, Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi visited the United States and received about 150 million dollars of American aid. He had already removed Communist and Socialist ministers in the government in May 1947, in the effort to reassure the Vatican as well as serving to placate conservative legislative bodies and, most notably, ensuring the renewal of U.S. economical and political aid. Italy was at the center of early Cold War politics as U.S. Secretary of State George C. Marshall threatened publicly to cut off American aid in case Communists or Socialists came to government (Ginsborg, 1990).

Leading to the April 1948 parliamentary elections, the first in the new Italian Republic, United States gave a wide field of political and financial aid to the Christian Democrats and their Liberal, Republican, and Social Democratic supporters. The Christian Democratic campaign was also based on anti-communist and anti-secular discourses to mobilize the electorate using civic committees and under the firm support of Catholic Church. The outcome was a landslide: the Christian Democrats obtained above 48 percent of the vote, and the Communist-Socialist one achieved a bit more 31 percent, controlling only several major areas, the so-called Red Belt. The turnout of the voters was an unprecedented 92 percent, which highlights the perceived stakes of the election (Ginsborg, 1990; Judt, 2005).

The post election situation also solidified political polarization. In July 1948, the leader of PCI, Palmiro Togliatti escaped an attempted assassination outside the Parliament, which provoked a wave of strikes and demonstrations throughout the country. In certain regions, there was a short time of takeover of transportation and communication networks by Communism supporters,

triggering the fear of a looming uprising. But Togliatti and the executive of the party urged moderation, and the disturbance was calmed down in a few days. These occurrences reinforced old-time apprehensions of a communist overthrow and gave the Christian Democrats a permanent reason to keep the PCI off the national government. In their turn, the Communists rejected the idea of revolution and formulated the new principle of the Italian road to socialism, which focused on slow reforms in the institutions of democracy (Sassoon, 1986; Ginsborg, 1990).

The polarization of the Cold war also divided the labor movement. By the end of the 1940s trade unions were divided into ideologically oriented confederations, which reduced the power of collective bargaining and entrenched the political split into social institutions. Such disintegration would continue over decades and it would only be contested briefly during the times of mass mobilization like the strike waves of the late 1960s (Ginsborg, 2003).

The next four decades of Italian politics were of a strict cold war nature. The Christian Democrats controlled the government with the help of the U.S. military and financial resources with rotating coalitions with the lesser pro-Western parties. They had well resourced religious and social networks in northern Italy and resorted to deep-rooted anti-communist feeling in the south and they always got about 40 percent of the votes and dominated strategically important offices in the state. By the late 1950s the Italian Socialist Party split with the Communists and joined the Christian Democrats, and developed center-left governments which made some minor reforms in education, state housing, and nationalization. Since the early 1960s, Socialists officially entered into coalitions to rule and gained dominion over significant ministries and state-owned enterprises, with the likes of Aldo Moro being at the centre of preserving political stability (Ginsborg, 1990; Judt, 2005).

The PCI was a huge political force, even though it was excluded by the center in government, who consistently got between a quarter and a third of the national vote and even made it into a peak in the mid-1970s. It gained firm roots among workers of industry and agriculture and controlled many local and regional governments especially in central Italy. However, it was restrained by international limitations, namely, the strategic position of Italy in the NATO which did not allow the real alternation of the powers at the national level. The resultant system was what was referred to as blocked or polarized pluralism whereby there were democratic procedures with no political turnover that mattered (Sassoon, 1986; Judt, 2005).

This exclusionary and inflexible political balance was also worsened in the 1970s due to deep social and economic shocks. Italy was plunged into the Years of Lead (Anni di Piombo), a time of political violence, far-right and far-left political terrorism, and both rising levels of state-radical opposition and radical-radical conflict. Simultaneously, the world economic turbulence, especially oil crisis of 1973 and 1979 added to inflation, unemployment, and accumulating government spending. In its turn, it caused the government after the government to depend more and more on deficit spending, the growth of the public sector and the state-owned corporations as the means of social pacification and the political consensus-making. This strategy strengthened clientelism and the reliance of political parties on the resources of the state instead of addressing the structural deficiencies, which only further institutionalized informal relations between politics, the bureaucracy and the private economic actors (Ginsborg, 1990; Judt, 2005).

This frozen political system became increasingly maintained with patronage networks, growing public debt, and large dependence on the public procurement and state owned enterprise, by the 1970s and 1980s. The political parties got highly interwoven with the economic interests and the illegal financing of the parties by means of bribes, commissions and even favoritism transformed the isolated criminal cases to the everyday mechanisms of governing. Despite the common knowledge of corruption, it remained unchecked to a large extent because of political immunity, restrictions of the judiciary system, and interdependency between the parties, business elites, and actors of the media (Della Porta & Vannucci, 1999).

When Tangentopoli was about to be reached in Italy, the country was seen to be externally sound but was weak internally. Democratic institutions just operated formally, but the political legitimacy had deteriorated. It was only in the early 1990s, when judicial enquiries used to finally break into this system, that the structural breakdown of a political order that had been fashioned, nurtured and eventually paralysed by the Cold War was revealed, not just of individual criminality but of a structural level (Ginsborg, 2003).

4. Understanding Tangentopoli

4.1. Definition and Origins of Tangentopoli

The word Tangentopoli was a media neologism in Italy in the early 1990s and it was meant to describe the corruption scandal that came to light through the judicial investigations of Milan. Actually, the term is a mix of the Italian word *tangente* which means "bribe" or "kickback" literally and the suffix/*poli* which comes from the Ancient Greek word *polis* and means "city". Hence, the term could literally mean "city of bribes" or "kickback city".(Oxford Reference, n.d.)

In fact, the word was intentionally modeled on words like *Topoli* or *Metropoli*, and the intention was to conjure up a political and economic system that was geared to corruption rather than to the idea of citizens and good public governance. At first, the term Tangentopoli meant only the city of Milan, the place where the *Mani Pulite* ("Clean Hands") investigations started and where the political and institutional corruption were first revealed. Although, as the investigations spread, the term began to be used in a wider sense to mean not only the geographical area but also the whole Italian political system infected with systemic corruption.(Barrington et al., 2024)

Eventually, the word Tangentopoli was used figuratively to indicate the bribery and clientelism that had become the norm. Since it was very common in the media, it was not just the name for the corrupt scandal but also for the decline of the moral and political legitimacy of the First

Republic of Italy.(Onorato, n.d.)



The scandal became known to the public after a judicial investigation was initiated in Milan in 1992 by Judge Antonio Di Pietro and was named Mani Pulite ("Clean Hands"). What was initially a small case soon grew locally as well as nationally, exposing vast networks of corruption among political parties, politicians, public officials, private companies and, especially in the case of southern Italy, organized crime groups. The scale of the disclosures was unparalleled: approximately 5,000 people were under investigation, more than half of the members of Parliament were indicted, and some 400 municipal councils were disbanded. Illegal payments linked to public contracts were said to run into billions of dollars yearly.

As the investigation went on, the evidence revealed that the corrupt behavior of politicians in Italy was not simply due to the misbehavior or abuse of certain individuals but that, in fact, the normal operation of the system was such that these corrupt practices were so closely intertwined with everyday governance and, at certain points, legally permitted in the chain of command. This fact so undermined the political institutions' legitimacy that the public's view of corruption shifted from seeing it as a violation of the system to one of the system's essential elements.

Meanwhile, the judiciary-led anti-corruption move was in tandem with a similar strict action by the Italian state against the Mafia. Lots of people, in fact a tremendously large number of people, were under investigation for their ties to the Mafia, and quite a few top Mafia bosses were arrested and put on trial. Besides that, political vendettas were also taking place during the same period: former ministers on one side and party leaders on the other were all suspected not only of corruption but also of Mafia crimes. Ex-PM trials of Bettino Craxi and Giulio Andreotti most literally engraved their names in history. Their cases were a symbol of the moral decay of the

political elite in power, and therefore, these events paved the way for the break-up of the major post-war political parties.

The principal aftermath of the Mani Pulite investigations in the 1990s was the disintegration or drastic transformation of the main political parties in Italy. When people talk about this process, they generally refer to the collapse of the First Republic. However, the renewal process was a double-edged sword. Although the old political system was dismantled, a new political leadership without the old vices was very hard to come by. Later acquittals and the return to the spotlight of those characters related to the pre-Tangentopoli era illustrated the lack of structural changes in judicial reform and therefore highlighted the perennial problem of accountability versus political continuity in Italy.

4.2. Mani Pulite (Clean Hands) Investigations

During the 1990s, political and administrative corruption in Italy was a hot topic on almost everyone's lips. Its disclosure and its placing at the center of the political agenda had never been taken to such a point before. The majority of the people point the start of the whole thing to Milan in 1992, where the manager of a publicly owned nursing home, Mario Chiesa, a member of the Socialist Party was caught in the act of accepting a bribe from a small cleaning company. This was the very first incident on which the judicial investigation that became known as Mani Pulite ("Clean Hands") would later be based. Barely months after his arrest, Chiesa contacted the prosecutors and this step he had taken led to the whole investigation which rolled out from Milan to the entire country in no time like a snowball effect. The investigation got so much that it became common knowledge that corruption was not an incident but the system itself, political parties and public administration being the biggest culprits. The prosecutors particularly Antonio Di Pietro and his team received high public acclaim and were recognized as heroes of moral integrity (Travaglio, Barbacetto & Gomez, 2012).

Moreover, other investigations revealed the heavy involvement of practically all the big political parties in what is now known as Tangentopoli ("Bribesville"). The entire political spectrum was, of course, involved in corruption to a greater or lesser extent but the centre of the power of the system was certainly the long-standing Christian Democrats (Democrazia Cristiana) and the Socialist Party. A lot of politicians, top officials, and prominent business persons were arrested, charged, or indicted. The former Prime Minister Bettino Craxi was convicted on several counts of corruption and in order to escape imprisonment he fled to Tunisia where he finally passed away in 2000. By mid-1993, the judicial investigations had pulled more than 200 members of the Parliament, including a few former ministers, into their vortex, numerous court sessions were broadcast live, and judicial proceedings thus became media events. What was started as a fringe

protest against judicial abuses has gradually gained political and social support.



The supporting data lay down the magnitude of the Mani Pulite investigations very well. Before the 1992 operations, the average number of corruption cases per year was 252 with 365 suspects; the figures for 1992-1995 were 1,095 cases and more than 2,000 suspects respectively. 2,731 people were accused in over 1,000 cases in 1995 alone. The Milan Public Prosecutor's Office petitioned for prosecutions a total of 2,319 times concerning corruption-related crimes in the period 1992 up to October 1996 (Procura di Milano, 1996; Della Porta & Vannucci, 1999). Mani Pulite investigation deeply shook Italy by creating the biggest political crisis the Italian Republic had ever faced. In only a few months, the judiciary managed to expose a huge network of political corruption involving almost the entire ruling class and a large part of the business community. Italy's post-war political stability, which had lasted for decades, was suddenly broken and a political transition came - the change from the "First Republic" to the "Second Republic" which, however, is often and controversially called so, (Della Porta & Vannucci, 2007b; Vannucci, 2009). After more than 45 years of continuous dominance by Christian Democrat, the party completely disintegrated when the leadership collapsed, the same went for the Socialist Party and other coalition partners. Leading political figures were forced to resign or go into exile, major parties either changed radically or disappeared. The void was occupied by new political actors while some parties, which had been completely sidelined, like the post-fascist Alleanza Nazionale, the xenophobic Lega Nord and the post-communist blocs, were included in the governing coalitions (Della Porta & Vannucci, 2007b; Vannucci, 2009).

Institutional reforms came as a result of political turmoil. The 1993 referenda, later ratified by Parliament, allowed to introduce a new electoral system that abolished proportional representation and replaced it mainly by a majoritarian system under which only one-quarter of deputies and senators were elected from party lists. Giuliano Amato (1992–1993), Prime Minister, who had been able to run a Socialist government and who had become very powerless because of the corruption scandal, stepped down right after the referenda. After the resignation, President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro called Carlo Azeglio Ciampi to head a technocratic government that would work, among other things, on the implementation of electoral reforms and on revival of the economy.

The sudden disintegration of the existing party system and the general elections of 1994 held under the new changed law were the two major episodes that brought to a close the era of *partitocrazia* and inaugurated a new political order.

Ironically, the biggest determiner of the crisis, corruption, quickly stopped being the major concern of public discourse. The advent of the new political actors, most notably the media magnate Silvio Berlusconi and his party Forza Italia, distracted the political debate from the comprehensive anti-corruption reform. The first comprehensive anti-corruption legislation in Italy (Law No. 190) was only passed in 2012. Moreover, Berlusconi's numerous corruption scandals since 1994 and his 2014 tax fraud conviction did not generate a fervent and persistent demand for institutional reform (Della Porta & Vannucci, 2007a).

In these circumstances, the natural hostility between judiciary and politicians got more intensified. By his political speeches, Silvio Berlusconi increasingly depicted judges as a politically biased gang, unaccountable people exercising arbitrary power; hence, judicial reform became the priority in politics. As a result, the magistrates who wanted the general public to see them as the defenders of "public virtue" and politicians who were determined to keep their immunity because the entire political system was deeply illegal (Pizzorno, 1998) members became diametrically opposed. Therefore, Tangentopoli was not simply a corruption scandal; it was a critical breach of democratic stability in Italy, a breach that subsequently repressed to a great extent the domains of political legitimacy, institutional trust, and law-politics relation for a long time after.

4.3. Key Judicial Figures and Prosecutors

Mani Pulite (Clean Hands) investigations seemed at first to be the work of a small, but very powerful group of judges concentrated mostly in Milan. The prosecutors in the case decided not to designate a single judge, but rather a "pool" of them as a way of protecting the judge from political pressure, intimidation, or isolation (Nelken, 1996; Della Porta & Vannucci, 1999). In fact, the "pool" system became the signature institutional feature of the investigations.

Antonio Di Pietro has been probably the best-known figure among them. As a public prosecutor, he earned the public admiration for his straightforward and relentless way of investigating, frequent use of pre-trial detention, and forceful methods of interrogation, but these also made

him a controversial figure (Bohlen, 1995; Petti, 2012; Pasqualini, 2022). Di Pietro helped uncover the illegal financing of political parties as well as bribery on a very large scale, which mostly involved public procurement and city contracts (Barbacetto, Gomez, & Travaglio, 2012). Additionally, Gherardo Colombo, Piercamillo Davigo, and Ilda Boccassini were the key magistrates who among others left their stampe on the legal system of the inquiry. While Colombo was more focused on the moral and constitutional issues of corruption, Davigo became known for his scrupulous (almost pedant) treatment of criminal liability and actually being in front of the judicial independence in the public eye (Nelken, 1996; Barbacetto et al., 2012). The Milan prosecutors as a whole radically altered the perception of corruption as just a human weakness to one where it was seen as an inherent feature of the Italian political system (Della Porta & Vannucci, 1999).

During that period, the activism of the judiciary had a considerable impact on changing the balance of power between political and judicial institutions. The prosecutors increasingly assumed the role of the guardians of public morality and legality, which was supported by the majority of the society, but the political elites challenged them fiercely (Koff, 2002; Della Porta & Vannucci, 2007). Eventually, this antagonism set the main dividing line in Italian politics in the 1990s and 2000s (Nelken, 1996).

4.4. Early Arrests and Confessions

The investigations into Tangentopoli suddenly took a decisive turn after a series of early arrests followed by confessions revealed the systemic corruption of the political system in Italy. The arrest of Mario Chiesa for accepting a bribe on 17 February 1992 was the first public indication that a system of illegal party financing, which had been a secret for a long time, was in fact very deeply entrenched. At first, the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) pretended to be unaware of the matter as if it were just a single case. Craxi, party leader, publicly denied Chiesa and called him mariuolo (“villain”), i.e., a dishonest character, who had nothing to do with the party (Corriere della Sera, 2012; Moliterno, 2000).



This political desertion had a reverse impact. The feeling of being a weapon in the hands of enemies became an incentive for Chiesa to cooperate with Milanese prosecutors to describe with his testimony party officials, public administrators, and business intermediaries involved in bribing on a large scale. His engagement with justice was used by the others as an example: once politically vulnerable, many of the accused admitted their guilt, and some of them even pointed at others in return for the reduction of their penalties or the granting of leniency (Koff, 2002; Nelken, 1996).

By May 1992, arrests were no longer limited to Milan, and soon top businessmen and politicians from the majority as well as opposition parties were implicated. The arrests had such an effect that a) the perpetrators felt judicial as well as psychological pressure to admit their guilt, and b) they were at the same time, encouraged to cooperate with the authorities. According to the confessions, these acts of corruption were neither isolated incidents nor aberrations but a standardized system in which bribers were looked upon as normal business operating costs and political parties' usual sources of funding (Barbacetto et al., 2012).

It was a tragic event when, on 2 September 1992, Socialist politician Sergio Moroni, who was in the dock for corruption charges, hanged himself. He admitted in the note he had drawn up that it was not personal benefit that had driven him to break the law but rather loyalty to the party and to the political system in which he found himself. This was blamed for the reaction of the public, which was more angry than ever and the overall perception that corruption was essentially a

normal part of the structure, the system, and not simply the moral debilitation of the individuals involved (Socialist, 2009).

The initial batch of arrests and confessions transformed Tangentopoli from a crime investigation into a real political crisis. The breaking of the pact of silence among the political class, when combined with the repeated reporting by the press, gradually undermined the legitimacy of the existing party system and thus laid the foundation for the disappearance of the First Republic.

5. Institutional Actors and Power Structures

5.1. The Judiciary and Prosecutorial Independence

The Italian judiciary during the Mani Pulite investigation (1992), entitled Clean Hands, proved it can and can also limit its capacity to deal with systemic corruption. A mix of factors that included increased internal autonomy of a new generation of investigating magistrates (*giudici ragazzini*), the popularity of anti-mafia initiatives, the weakening of the cold war-related priorities of political stability and powerful new legal protections against judicial independence made the investigation, eventually involving more than six thousand individuals, including more than five hundred of the members of parliament and five former prime ministers, possible. Investigations were further promoted by the popular approval of magistrates particularly when initially parliament attempted to protect itself against questioning.

The prosecutorial independence was also exposed to weakness by the path of Mani Pulite, though. As time elapsed, magistrates who were investigating were seen to be too aggressive or even politically inclined to the extent that people lost trust in them. Most of the big politicians and businessmen such as Silvio Berlusconi managed to play the upheaved political scene. The constraints of prosecutorial instruments enabled hundreds of defendants to get away with their crimes by the virtue of statutes of limitation, which promoted a spirit of impunity amongst the corrupt elites. Further legal changes were thwarted and the Berlusconi government took the initiative to curb the judicial authority. Besides, the continued media reporting on corruption might have led to desensitization of the people making them tolerate corrupt activities. As the case shows, despite formal independence of prosecutors, structural, political, and societal pressures can seriously limit their efficiency, which explains the multifaceted nature of the association between judicial autonomy and the larger political context (Taylor, 2018, pp. 6869).

5.2. Parliament and Political Immunity

The parliamentary immunity (*immunità parlamentare*) was a key factor during Mani Pulite to determine the path of investigations. Italian lawmakers or parliament members could not be prosecuted on actions conducted during the office, which, to begin with, did not accelerate the investigation as Parliament tried to protect its members (Taylor, 2018, pp. 6869). The joint coordination by many legislators so as to maintain their privileges left the judiciary and the

political class in a tension to protect their own interests. Official immunity to face prosecution in legislation was also shown to have its boundaries by the scandal, and that systematic legal safeguards against political leaders can postpone justice. The reactions to Mani Pulite reform debates were aimed at curtailing immunity and bringing parliamentary rules and prosecutor effectiveness in line.

5.3. Executive Authority and Crisis Governance

The Italian executive, which was headed by the government at the time of the Tangentopoli, and then by transitional authorities was able to display the strengths and limitations of crisis governance. Though the executive was not legally capable of intervening in the current court cases, the political influence and the power over ministries had an indirect impact on investigations (Pajno, 2023, pp. 2328). As an example, the ministers at times affected the administrative procedures which affected the prosecutorial activities. The activity of the executive in the crisis manifested the dilemma between the government stability and the necessity of quick institutional reaction to the systemic corruption. The subsequent ascendancy of Berlusconi also demonstrated how the executive power can take advantage of the fractured politics following the mass scandals.

5.4. Law Enforcement and Investigative Units

Mani Pulite relied heavily on specialized law enforcement units and investigative magistrates (giudici istruttori) who operated with a high degree of autonomy. The Carabinieri, Guardia di Finanza, and police investigative departments were essential in uncovering financial fraud, kickbacks, and bribery networks (Taylor, 2018, pp. 68–69). Public trust and media coverage amplified their efforts, yet gaps in investigative tools, statutes of limitation, and political interference allowed many suspects to avoid prosecution. The case illustrated that investigative effectiveness depends on both legal instruments and institutional independence, with coordination among multiple units being critical to expose systemic corruption.

6. Political Parties and Elite Networks

6.1. Christian Democracy (DC)

In Italy, the institutional balance changed drastically in the Mani Pulite (Clean Hands) investigations when judicial actors were able to have an unprecedented influence on the political system. Prosecutors, especially in Milan, were very independent and sought corruption cases against senior politicians, party officials and shook up decades-long systems of political protection. This aggressive judicial position was contrasted with a weakened position of the

Parliament, where parliamentary immunity was becoming a weapon to protect elites more than secure the democratic presentation, and thus resulting in a rising disapproval of the masses.

Meanwhile, the executive power was weak and responsive. The changing governments and lack of trust of people kept the executive at bay and thus the executive responded hesitantly and in bits to the crisis. Investigative and law enforcement agencies, particularly financial departments, were also vital in a supportive role where they were used by the prosecutors to help open up the intricate corruption and patronage rings. In general, Mani Pulite changed the balance of power forces in the Italian state temporarily raising the institutions of the judiciary and hastening the disintegration of the political structure of the First Republic.

6.2. Italian Socialist Party (PSI)

The PSI was also hugely involved in corruption investigation during the Mani Pulite. The party had been linked to shady party fundraising and patronizing networks under the leadership of Bettino Craxi. These practices were exposed publicly and this damaged the credibility of the party and this resulted in internal division and the ultimate political collapse of the party.

6.3. Opposition Parties and Reform Movement

The reformation movements and opposition parties capitalized on popular disaffection on traditional elites. Sidelined parties, as well as new political players, posed themselves as ethical alternatives acknowledging transparency, institutional reform, and clean governance. They came into existence accelerated the reformation of the political order in Italy as the ruling parties were weakened.

6.4. Patronage, Factionalism, and Power Brokers

This pre-Mani Pulite system of political operation in Italy was dominated by patronage networks, inner party forces and informal power brokers. These structures were revealed through investigations to be a part of systemic corruption. The degradation of such networks did not only help to destroy the key parties but also terminated most clientelist practices that had ensured political stability in the First Republic.

7. Media, Public Opinion, and Information Warfare

7.1. Role of Traditional Media

The case of Tangentopoli or Mani Pulite investigation is one of the best examples of how the traditional media can influence the consciousness of people regarding the political corruption. At first newspapers and television had a very insignificant role to play in unearthing the scandal. Although there was an extensive network of collusion between politicians and private contractors,

this received little media attention, initially being placed in the local news pages, as was the case with *Il Corriere della Sera* which reported on the Chiesa affair as the Baggina case (Giglioli, 1996).



Yet, as soon as the office of Public Prosecutor started to investigate, the media coverage rose at a very fast pace. By mid-1992, newspapers and television commenced to give the events a saturation coverage so that the scandal kept the front page (Giglioli, 1996). This coverage was at its highest in 1993 especially in major occasions like the notifications to Bettino Craxi, the resignations of mainstream ministers and the protests over government decree on financing of parties. This trend is exemplified by data of leading newspapers such as *Il Corriere della Sera*, *La Repubblica*, *La Stampa* and *L'Indipendente* that reveal the consistency of media coverage in a number of months (Giglioli, 1996).

The effect was further enhanced on television. The scandal was given massive coverage in the public media such as the RAI through TG1, TG2, and TG3, and the commercial network TG5 which also covered crucial events of the judicial activities (Giglioli, 1996). As an example, the Cusani trial broadcasts on TV in 1993-1994 turned the courtroom into a mass spectacle, placing a greater stress on the moral aspect of the political corruption than the technical or legalistic one (Giglioli, 1996). The nervousness, anger, and human imperfection of the politicians under trial, were emphasized by close-up shots and detailed coverage that made a significant impact on the populace concerning the degradation of morality and accountability, well beyond the norms of news coverage (Giglioli, 1996).

It was not just the press and television that reported- but structured Tangentopoli as a moral drama of good and evil. The nobles in Milan were described as the warriors of the people making a heroic stand and the political elites were represented as a depraved and arrogant caste that were not connected with the rest of the citizens (Giglioli, 1996). This framing was enabled by the fact that the Italian media became commercialized in the late 1980s and thus the newspapers and television networks started to work more independent of the political parties and address directly to the interests of people and audience demand (Giglioli, 1996). As a result, media houses like *L'Indipendente* which aimed at consolidating its circulation offered more comprehensive coverage, which strengthened the belief of people that there is corruption in politics (Giglioli, 1996).

7.2. Leaks, Whistleblowers, and Anonymous Sources

One of the most essential aspects of the Tangentopoli case was the information that was provided to the media by the sources of the political and administrative system. Although the Public Prosecutor office was the key in the investigation, journalists used leaks, denunciations by the various citizen associations and sometimes anonymous sources to develop their reporting (Giglioli, 1996). These sources were important to give details that were necessary to make the newspapers and the television represent the extent of corruption and pinpoint the crucial actors to make the story both deep and immediate.

Playing a somewhat major role in the initial stages of the investigation, prior to the full development of media attention. Even though the media coverage was initially piecemeal, the insiders sometimes told the journalists about the role of individual politicians and how the party is financed and then the journalists could proceed with more specific accusations (Giglioli, 1996). These revelations played a central role in putting the scandal in a context of systemic, as opposed to isolated, individual crimes and connected them to the larger trends of political and administrative corruption.

Furthermore, investigative reporting and whistle blowers enhanced the scrutiny by the people. Media outlets might highlight the activities of such high-profile figures as Bettino Craxi and other ministers, and this way make Tangentopoli be seen as not simply as a court case but as an ethical and social disaster (Giglioli, 1996). This use of anonymous sources was of great significance in the protection of the informants and at the same time enables the journalists to provide credible and verifiable information which the authorities and the citizens can act upon.

Media also facilitated the interpretation and spread of the information that had been leaked and given by the whistleblowers. Newspapers and television emphasised the moral issue of corruption, the opposition between the virtuous and the vice of privateness, which strengthened the symbolic account of Tangentopoli as a kind of moral crusade (Giglioli, 1996). The agendas of leaks were thus not only driven by the content of the information but the manner in which journalists had packaged the information i.e. what information to emphasize on as well as how to package the information to be conveyed in the most effective way possible to the society.

7.3. Media Trials vs. Judicial Trials

The Tangentopoli scandal created a very important distinction between a judicial and media trial. These judicial enquiries, run by the office of the Milan Public Prosecutor, followed the rules of procedure, collecting evidence, questioning witnesses, and finally filing charges against the politicians involved in the case and bribery, or financing of political parties and other corruption activities. These judicial trials were limited to the slowness and deliberate pace imposed by legal procedure, media coverage served on a more temporal and symbolic logic.

The television broadcasts and the newspapers, especially when it was a high profile case, like the Cusani case in 1993-1994, turned the courtroom into a platform on which the country was to act out a drama. The prime time coverage also enabled millions of Italians to see politicians who were being investigated to either confess to their crimes, develop nervous tics, or proclaim that they were morally innocent, which essentially turned the court process into theatre. The human and ethical aspects of guilt as opposed to the technical legal reasoning were highlighted by close-up shots of sweating foreheads, shaking hands and other minor signs of tension.

This dramatization formed what may be termed as a media trial where the citizenry decided against politicians largely based on the foundation of formality and juridical finalities but based on the moral story told by journalists and television producers. The politicians were presented as members of some corrupt elite, and the magistrates like Antonio Di Pietro were promoted into the role of heroic protectors of the integrity of the society (Giglioli, 1996). The social impacts of judicial acts were exaggerated thus through the media trial during which the courtroom could not solely provide the symbolic meaning to the events that were occurring.

The interaction between the judicial and media trials was mutually supportive. Judicial processes offered the factual basis to the media accounts and media presence influenced the general perceptions of the people and elevated the political and moral significance of every trial. As an illustration, the televised Cusani trial helped to discredit the political elite of the First Republic and gave rise to an atmosphere where politicians were subject to both legal and moral disapproval by the general public (Giglioli, 1996). Practically, when judicial hearings, which were the means of legal conviction or acquittal, were taking place, media trials, which were the means of societal legitimacy and political survival, were being conducted, and it goes without saying that through the traditional media, the legal proceedings were being converted into a play wherein morality, social morality.

7.4. Public Trust, Protests, and Legitimacy Crisis

Tangentopoli caused significant consequences on the trust of the people and the perceived legitimacy of the political system of Italy. These feelings of widespread cynicism and distrust of political parties existed prior to the scandal, but the scandal made these sentiments solid into an all-out legitimacy crisis (Giglioli, 1996). The press reports and television news coverage did not just focus on the legal misconduct of individual politicians, but the endemic corruption of the elite, and in this way presented the First Republic as a system that was morally and structurally flawed.

Reaction of the masses was instant and much seen. It was the numerous crowds that formed in the Palazzo di Giustizia, in Milan in support of the magistrates and to hold the political leaders to account (Giglioli, 1996). The press reporting about these demonstrations also contributed to the fact that they gained more importance, as they represented the citizens as one angry and on the morally correct side against corrupt politicians. This framing served to strengthen the opposition between the good folks and the bad elites and the creation of a shared realization of the scandal as a social and not just a legal crisis.

The Cusani trial that was televised served to heighten the view that the political elite had not been doing the right thing ethically. The tendency to spread courtroom videos, interviews, and commentaries meant that citizens could observe the accountability process first-hand, which increased the confidence of citizens in the judicial system, despite the weakening of trust in political institutions (Giglioli, 1996). This two-sided effect, which strengthens the legitimacy of judicial participants and undermines the legitimacy of elected officials, helped to reinforce the transformation of the Italian political environment. Voters were willing to abandon traditional parties and turn to the new political constellations as it happened in April 1994 elections and the ascent of Forza Italia. (Giglioli, 1996).

Social regulation in this case was done through media coverage and protests by people. The media contributed to the creation of a collective story where corruption was unacceptable, the political system was no longer legitimate, and systemic change was needed by increasing moral outrage and making visible collective dissatisfaction. As a result, Tangentopoli shows that media, people and the legitimacy of institutions are interdependent, and how distrust, mobilization and coverage become widespread to turn legal inquiries into political and social reform. (Giglioli, 1996).

8. Organized Crime and Shadow Power

The mafia groups, such as the Cosa Nostra, Camorra and 'Ndrangheta, were not just peripheral at this time, but rather coordinators and distributors at the business and politician links. The politicians used illegal finances provided by businesses to uphold electoral supremacy as firms demanded favored treatment to access the government contracts through bribes and kick backs. Mostly, mafia cartels ensured that they adhered to these informal contracts and acted as a shadow government that mediated between legal and criminal worlds (Gurciullo, 2014; Pinotti, 2020). The initial widespread publicity was the arrest of the member of the Socialist Party, Mario Chiesa, in 1992, on charges of taking a bribe to get a cleaning contract in the society. This incident led to the series of investigations which ultimately involved high ranking political figures and exposed the three-legged nexus that exists between organized crime, political elites and corporate actors. It became known as Tangentopoli, which literally means Bribe City, as a reference to this systemic corruption to show just how deeply the mafia penetrated into its public governance and procurement systems. Organized crime used such an environment to run its influence further into the public procurement and especially in areas like infrastructure, transportation, and healthcare. Research indicates that in the early 1990s, contracts usually had to contend with mafia approval or facilitation in order to pass through without difficulties, which gave mafia groups the control of the state resources (Sciarrone & Storti, 2025). As it is indicated in the reports made by Transparency International and the further analysis of the period, the number of traced bribes in 1992-1993 was almost 620 billion lire, which indicates not only the level of corruption but also the impact of organized crime on the institutionalized financial exploitation. In addition to the manipulation of finance, the mafia groups would influence politics through their shade power. Organized crime members were also well connected to parties like Italian Socialist Party and Christian Democrats since they had long-term relationships that

helped them make clientelist arrangements and influence their policy choices. The case of judges Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, who managed to fight these deep-rooted networks but was assassinated in 1992, can serve as an example of the high risk such an operation poses to these systems. These killings indicated the ability of the mafia to make people comply with intimidation and under-the-surface violence to its shadow power spread not only to the economic but also to the political and social realms. Yet another way, which was depicted by the interactions between organized crime, politics, and business during Tangentopoli, is that mafia organizations were both intermediaries and rulers in the Italian society. Companies that relied on government contracts usually resorted to use of mafia middlemen to avoid bureaucracies, or to obtain favorable results. In other parts, especially in Lombardy, Sicily, and Campania, the practices became institutionalized to the extent that the political economy became corrupt (La Spina & Reuter, 2009; Pinotti, 2020). This systematized corruption highlights the presence of organized crime as not just a secondary challenge but a member in state affairs with its shadow power just like elected leaders. The political implications of the shadow power of an organized crime can be seen in the crumbling of a number of leading political parties such as the Socialist Party and the Christian Democrats following Mani Pulite scandals. The removal of old party networks left power vacuum to be filled by new actors, including Silvio Berlusconi and Forza Italia party, who soared to power. Nevertheless, the fact that, even after the investigation shook the system, the mafia influence in the area of public contracts, infrastructure and local government remained still suggests that the shadow of the organized crime was still intact.

8.1. Mafia–Politics–Business Nexus

At this time, mafia groups (Cosa Nostra, Camorra, and 'Ndrangheta) were no longer fringe players in political and business affairs but facilitators of business. Politicians became dependent on illegal financing of business, and companies needed a chance to be offered a preferential contract in the government on the basis of bribes, kickbacks, and unofficial deals (Gurciullo, 2014; Pinotti, 2020). The mafia served as the intermediary and the enforcer, so these deals would run efficiently and the deals would be upheld, and this would help in filling the gap between what is legal and what is criminal.



In 1992 the nexus came into the limelight with the arrest of Mario Chiesa on the same grounds that he accepted a bribe to get a cleaning contract in the town. His confession sparked

investigations that involved top political leaders and exposed the level of interdependence that existed between political, economic and criminal players. This scandal, which was known as Tangentopoli (also referred to as Bribe City), has underscored how mafia had penetrated the government and in procurement of goods and services .

This three-facet network allowed the mafias to have an influence in the political and economic arena. Companies that needed the government contracts tended to use mafia as the middlemen to overcome bureaucratic hurdles, and the political parties also took mafia finances to fund the campaigns. As an example, inquiries found that the mafia was involved in the awarding of construction and infrastructure projects in Lombardy, Campania and Sicily, where the problem of corruption and organized crime was highly established (Sciarrone and Storti, 2025).

The mafia also had the influence of molding the political results. Established connections between organized crime and political parties such as the Italian Socialist Party and the Christian Democrats enabled mafias to influence policymaking and have control of the system. The assassination of judges Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino in 1992 highlighted the dangers of dealing with these networks and demonstrated how the mafia can defend the interests of their networks by engaging in intimidation and violence.

Tangentopoli crisis eventually contributed to the demise of the old political parties and the emergence of a vacuum of power. The rise of new political players, including Silvio Berlusconi and Forza Italia party, heralded the structural change in the politics of Italy. Nevertheless, the influence of mafia did not disappear altogether, and it still influenced the process of contracting among the population, local governance, and the infrastructure projects, proving the longevity of the mafia-politics-business nexus (La Spina & Reuter, 2009; Gurciullo, 2014).

8.2. Corruption in Public Procurement

Mani Pulite investigations indicated that one of the areas that were the most susceptible to corruption in Italy was the public procurement. In 1990-1992, a group of politicians, businessmen, and mafia members took part in the manipulation of tendering as well as the assignment of contracts at the cost of bribes, kickback, or electoral favors. There were especially vulnerable the public contracts in the field of infrastructure, transport, healthcare, and urban development, which were often impossible without the interference of mafia to pass without challenges (Sciarrone & Storti, 2025; Pinotti, 2020).

By way of example, the magnitude and endemic character of 1992-1993 bribery in the public procurement process can be illustrated by the estimates of Transparency International and historical records of the size of bribes paid (more than 620 billion lire) (Wikipedia contributors, n.d.). The mafia groups made sure that construction firms, suppliers, and contractors adhered to

informal agreements and basically monopolized the contracts and contract execution (Gurciullo, 2014).

The Tangentopoli scandal showed that the prevalence of these corrupt practices were not accidental but structured systems imbibed in both the political and bureaucratic systems in Italy. The power of the officials could often be used to bend tenders, and companies used the contacts with politicians and intermediaries of the mafia to achieve good results. The areas such as Lombardy, Sicily and Campania were highly hit because they had a long rooted history of organized crime as well as political corruption (La Spina & Reuter, 2009).

The political impact of corruption in the process of public procurement was illustrated by the fall of the political parties like the Socialist Party and Christian Democrats following the Mani Pulite investigations. Although certain changes were implemented, the mafia continued to affect the contract distribution, which proves that it is hard to break the institution of corruption.

8.3. Financial Crimes and Money Laundering

The Tangentopoli period also brought into focus the convergence of political corruption on the one hand with financial crimes such as money laundering, evasion of taxes and transfer of illicit funds, among others. The mafia organizations often served as brokers in these schemes by helping the business operators to transfer bribes to politicians and hiding the source of illegal money (Pinotti, 2020). The Italian banking system was not supervised enough and this enabled the transactions to be carried out with little detection, further entrenching corruption.

High-profile cases that were discovered due to Mani Pulite investigations showed that the mafia controlled financial networks were a vital part of the Italian economy and offered a source of liquidity, as well as enforcement means of filthy transactions. The financial sophistication of these activities is also emphasized by the fact that firms engaged in the process of public procurement routed bribes via shell companies or offshore accounts (Gurciullo, 2014).

The financial scandals revealed in the period between 1990 and 1992 were not only the work of generally opportunistic parties; it was a systemic issue, in which organized crime, politicians and business elites worked together to steal the resources of people. These actions undermined the trust of the population in financial institutions, raised costs of the projects and redirected the state money to other services (Sciarrone and Storti, 2025).

8.4. Threats, Intimidation, and Covert Violence

The mafia did not just manipulate the economy, they also used threats and coercion as well as violence. The mafia applied intimidation to compel politicians, bureaucrats and business leaders

to comply with their actions during the Tangentopoli period. The attempts of assassinating two judges (Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino) in 1992 symbolized all the extreme steps that mafias could take to ensure their shadowed power and influence on the political processes.

The threats and underhand violence were not confined to those in the limelight; it was also spread to the civil servants and contractors and local politicians who opposed the mafia rating on the contracts and business transactions. The power of mafia in this sense was structural and psychological in that they could shape the results without having to be involved in a direct violence in all the instances. This enabled them to have an overall presence in government, business and society with the least exposure to law enforcement (La Spina & Reuter, 2009).

The threat, financial power, and institutional corruption of the Tangentopoli period accentuate the way the organized crime was a shadow state, which could and did operate covertly and with great power through the official institutions and the major impact on the policy and law enforcement and administration of the population. The mafia continued to intimidate, coerce, and have covert influence, which is why the strength of the shadow power of mafia families remains strong even after the first wave of Mani Pulite investigations (Gurciullo, 2014; Pinotti, 2020).

9. Economic Dimension of Corruption

The Tangentopoli scandal of early 1990s Italy was the culmination of decades of economic, political, and institutional processes that gave way to the ground conditions of systematic corruption. At the end of the 1980s, the economy of Italy had to cope with gross structural imbalances such as high public debt, spatial inequality between the industrialized north and poorly developed south and a government strongly engaged in public investment, which contributed to the conditions of extensive illicit exchanges (OECD, 1990). According to the OECD 1990 Economic Survey, they also started to notice inefficiency in state expenditure, stagnant infrastructure developments, and frailty of fiscal management which led to an economy whereby the distribution of resources has remained cloudy and prone to clientelism as well as corruption (OECD, 1990). These weaknesses being collided with political motives and institutional flaws formed a system where politicians, corporate leaders and organized crime colluded with each other especially in terms of public expenditure system, corporate bribery mechanisms, support through the banking sector and international financial exposure. The government expenditure, especially on infrastructural development, was at the center of determining the incentives that developed Tangentopoli. The development policy adopted in the post war Italy had put a lot of investments in road, rail, utility and public building, but by the late 1980s financial constraint had limited the effectiveness of the public investment. The nature of large infrastructural projects is that they have various points of discretion such as project selection, procurement, contract award, payments and supervision and this provides them with the opportunities of trade illicitly (OECD, 1990). Companies that wanted to receive contracts in government were usually obliged to bribe or redirect some of the project funds to political parties and political actors used such illegal funds to support patronage networks and electoral politics. Groups of organized crime (Cosa Nostra, Camorra, and 'Ndrangheta) often played the role of

intermediaries and enforcers, making sure that informal agreements are followed and money flows in the directions of the political elites (Pinotti, 2020; Sciarrone and Storti, 2025). The ensuing system of clientelism entrenched corruption within government procurement, projects in many cases were postponed, overcharged or of low quality especially in areas such as Lombardy, Campania and Sicily where mafia penetrations were very high (La Spina & Reuter, 2009). These trends of corruption were facilitated by corporate bribery and kickback schemes that became standard in areas where government business contracts were required. At the end of 1980s, bribery was accepted as part of doing business and not something extraordinary or illegal. Companies that used systematic payments to political intermediaries or employed opaque exits like over-invoicing or shell company or consulting fee transfers were firms that transferred funds in exchange of contracts (Shleifer and Vishny, 1993; Murphy, Shleifer and Vishny, 1991). As early as the OECD noted structural shortages in the transparency and enforcement of this activity in the public sectors, this implied that corporate actors could easily go scot-free (OECD, 1990). Such kickback deals formed self-interdepending networks where the businesses, the political parties, and the mafia families came to rely on each other and corruption became an institutional aspect of the Italian economy (Vannucci, 2009). The Italian banking industry was also very instrumental in supporting the economic patterns that formed Tangentopoli. The public and the private bank was very much interconnected to the political and business elites giving them a financial intermediation though, there was no sufficient monitoring on how the money was actually used. Weak regulations enabled companies and other political players to gain access to loans or credit facilities used to fund both legal and illegal operations such as the giving of bribes and campaign contributions (OECD, 1990). Banks became useful as channels of illegal finances and helped the money flow of high-funds connected with the government acquisition and supported the existence of the shadow systems of corruptness in the society. These weaknesses came to the fore in 1990 when the OECD reported that there was not enough financial regulation and enforcement to stop politically linked organisations abusing credit channels (OECD, 1990).

The domestic vulnerabilities were further worsened by Italy being exposed to international financial markets. By early 1990s, an open world and integration into the European financial system meant that capital flows, exchange rate effect, and investor confidence affected the Italian macroeconomic conditions. Italy was open to speculative attacks due to structural inefficiencies such as high levels of public debt, as well as low levels of fiscal credibility. This led to the foreign exchange crisis which occurred in September 1992 as investor confidence was lost and lira was severely devalued, making fiscal strains more intense, and decisions-making in making decisions in terms of spending a matter of concern (OECD, 1990; Rossi, 2007). The crisis highlighted the feedback mechanism between domestic corruption and international financial exposure: the poor governance and high levels of malpractices lowered investor confidence, leading them to borrow at higher rates, further burdening the state budgets, and increasing the likelihood of distributing resources via networks of corruption. This combination of public expenditure, corporate bribery, bank facilitation and international pressure is what has led to infrastructure projects being a center of systemic corruption. High levels of state-funding provided companies with the chance to make large profits, which was possible only after adherence to unofficial, bribery networks. These networks were used by political players to finance electoral campaigns and stay in power, and ensure that deals are finalized and illegal streams are not broken (Pinotti, 2020; Sciarrone and Storti, 2025). OECD surveys pointed to the manifestations of inefficiency, cost overruns and lack of transparency in the Italian high-end

sector as increasingly revealing the ineffectiveness of the existing system, the economic logic behind corruption is that, in an environment where the quality of oversight is weak and discretion is great, the returns to the dubious transactions are high and the risks of doing so are low (OECD, 1990; Rose-Ackerman, 1999). Wage and fiscal policy constraints further increased the economic aspect of corruption. In the early nineties, the government efforts on stabilization of the economy comprised wages moderation, budgetary restraint, and trying to hold the lira at the exchange rate (Rossi, 2007; Visco, 1999). Nevertheless, such policies were not sufficient to reverse the resources diversion to corrupt networks by the citizens. Companies and political players who were integrated into kickbacks systems might be able to easily circumvent the regulatory restrictions whereas mafia intermediaries guaranteed adherence and persistence. As a result, structural economic reforms were subverted by endemic systemic corruption in terms of public expenditure and money ladders.

10. Legal Framework and Constitutional Constraints

10.1. Italian Criminal Law on Corruption

The *Tangentopoli* scandal and the *Mani Pulite* (Clean Hands) investigation of the early 1990s revealed not only the depth of political corruption in Italy but also how well-established the legal framework was for prosecuting corrupt conduct. The scandal began in 1992 when Judge Antonio Di Pietro arrested Mario Chiesa for accepting a kickback, quickly expanding into a nationwide judicial probe that exposed systemic bribery, illicit party financing, and collusive networks between businesses and political elites. Over 5,000 public figures were investigated and more than half of the Italian Parliament was at one point under scrutiny for corruption-related offences. This legal and political crisis fundamentally challenged Italy's institutional framework for combating corruption and highlighted both the strengths and limitations of Italian criminal law as applied to public corruption in the 1990s (Giglioli, 1996).

At the heart of Italy's legal response to corruption lies the Italian Criminal Code (Codice Penale), which categorizes bribery and related offences in provisions that were already in force during the *Tangentopoli* period. Under the Criminal Code, corruption offences are principally outlined in Articles 318–322, distinguishing between various types of bribery and the nature of the corrupt act, whether it involves a public official, relates to the performance of public duties, or affects a judicial process. These articles remained the foundational statutory definitions of criminal corruption during the 1990s (Pinto, 1994).

Article 318 of the Criminal Code defines ***corruption for the exercise of a function*** (*corruzione per l'esercizio della funzione*). A public official or person in charge of a public service who receives money or other benefits in connection with the exercise of official functions commits a crime. During the *Tangentopoli* investigations, this form of corruption was central: politicians and administrative figures were accused of accepting bribes to facilitate contracts, influence public procurement, and secure favourable administrative decisions. The essence of Article 318 is the sale or compromise of official responsibilities in exchange for undue advantage, penalized with imprisonment and additional sanctions such as disqualification from public office (Giglioli, 1996; Pinto, 1994).

Article 319 addresses a more serious category: *corruption for acts contrary to official duties* (corruzione per un atto contrario ai doveri d'ufficio). Under this provision, a public official who receives or accepts promises of money or other benefits to omit, delay, or commit acts contrary to their official duties is guilty of corruption. This category was especially relevant to Tangentopoli because many investigated politicians and bureaucrats were alleged to have used their roles to intentionally distort administrative processes. Manipulating public contracts, delaying bureaucratic acts, or abusing discretionary powers in return for personal or party gain clearly fell into this category. The penalties under Article 319 are more severe than those under Article 318, reflecting the greater harm to public administration and the rule of law (Giglioli, 1996; Pinto, 1994).

The Italian Criminal Code also criminalizes active bribery under Articles 321 and 322. Article 321 punishes the act of offering or promising money or other benefits to a public official in order to influence the performance of official duties. Article 322 penalizes *instigation to bribery*, meaning the attempt at bribery, even if the bribe is not ultimately accepted or acted upon. During *Mani Pulite*, these provisions were applied both to public servants and to private actors who offered illicit payments to secure competitive advantages or to influence public procurement. The application of these articles demonstrated that the law targeted both sides of corrupt transactions, a critical aspect of the scandal investigations (Giglioli, 1996).

Another significant provision is Article 319-ter, which criminalizes bribery in judicial proceedings. While judicial bribery was not the primary focus of Tangentopoli, it remained a concern in ensuring the integrity of the *Mani Pulite* investigations. Although no high-profile judicial bribery cases emerged from Tangentopoli, the provision emphasized the seriousness with which Italian law viewed interference in judicial processes (Giglioli, 1996).

The Criminal Code's provisions functioned within a broader legal context emphasizing constitutional principles such as judicial independence and impartial public administration. Article 97 of the Italian Constitution asserts that public offices must operate according to principles of good administration and impartiality. Corruption, by definition, undermines these constitutional principles by allowing private interests to distort public functions and administrative fairness. The Tangentopoli investigations highlighted how deeply corruption could erode constitutional values and weaken public trust in governance (Giglioli, 1996).

However, the practical application of these articles during *Mani Pulite* revealed structural challenges. Enforcement depended heavily on prosecutorial independence and judicial activism. The independent drive of magistrates in Milan and other cities was a crucial factor in pushing corruption prosecutions forward and exposing systemic malfeasance. Judicial activism sometimes provoked political resistance, including attempts by politicians to roll back or weaken prosecutorial authority or to use procedural shields (e.g., parliamentary immunity) to avoid prosecution (Giglioli, 1996; Pinto, 1994). Another challenge was the statute of limitations, which limited the prosecution of long-term or complex corrupt networks. Many Tangentopoli cases involved multi-year schemes that could not always be concluded before procedural time limits expired. While the legal framework prescribed severe penalties for corruption, procedural time limits sometimes prevented full judicial resolution of high-profile cases (Giglioli, 1996).

Despite these limitations, the application of Articles 318–322 during Tangentopoli reaffirmed the

relevance of Italian criminal law in addressing corruption. Prosecutors successfully used these laws to charge, indict, and in many cases convict political figures and business leaders. The volume of prosecutions demonstrated that the legal framework, when vigorously enforced, could penetrate entrenched systems of corrupt exchange and unravel complex networks of illicit behavior (Giglioli, 1996; Pinto, 1994).

10.2. Parliamentary Immunity and Legal Shields

One of the key aspects of the Italian criminal law that made it difficult to prosecute political corruption in Tangentopoli was the immunity granted to the parliament. According to Article 68 of the Italian Constitution, the Members of Parliament have immunity when performing any acts in the line of their legislative duties. Although this is meant to protect political independence and guarantee legislative freedom, it also provided legal protection that could be used by politically corrupt politicians. In early 1990s, a lot of Parliament members who were being examined over bribery, illegal party funding, or any other form of corruption tried to use immunity to derail or hinder prosecution (Giglioli, 1996). The formal and informal aspects of the protection of the law provided by the parliamentary status were two. Formally, the immunity meant that before a criminal action was taken against a sitting parliamentarian, it had to be approved by the parliament and only then an arrest or a detention. This measure was designed as a control against politically motivated persecutions in fact, it regularly slackened the judicial inquiry and created procedural roadblocks. Informally, political actors used the procedural complexity that comes with immunity to procrastinate trials, negotiate political trades or to seek to discredit judicial activism (Pinto, 1994). The scandal of Tangentopoli revealed the weaknesses and impropriety of the parliamentary immunity. Following the Mani Pulite investigations, the public prosecutors often demanded the removal of the immunity to pursue the deputies and senators involved. Such demands created a major debate in parliament and brought out tensions between constitutional defenses of elected leaders and the judicial requirement of dealing with systemic corruption. Political pressure and media attention often affected the immunity vote simply showing the effect of law, politics and the popular opinion on each other (Giglioli, 1996).

10.3. Arrest Warrants, Detention, and Due Process

The other issue of great importance of the legal system of the time in the case of Tangentopoli was the issue of arrest warrants and detention obtained through the Italian criminal law. In Milan, prosecutors often made arrest warrants against politicians and government officials who were suspected to have taken bribes or embezzled party funds. Italian Code of Criminal Procedure (Codice di Procedura Penale) had provision of preventive detention in cases where there was high evidence of guilt and the risk of fleeing, altering evidence, or criminal persistence. In the Mani Pulite cases, the judges have upheld preemptive arrest in various high profile cases on the basis of the severity of the alleged corruption and the likelihood of interference (Giglioli, 1996).



The way the political figures were treated when they were under arrest was very sensitive. The detention of high-profile politicians questioned traditional values of political respect and created serious media attention, as was the case with the high-profiling of Mario Chiesa and following hearings of particular party leaders. Although these actions were legally appropriate under the preventive detention provisions, they pointed to the conflict between the rights to due process and the societal need to hold people accountable. The Italian legal system tried to strike a balance between these issues by giving the system of judicial questioning, procedural redress, and the accused right to an advocate (Pinto, 1994).

The state of Tangentopoli media coverage had a tendency to make an issue out of preventative detention and arrest warrants such that judicial processes became more of a moral and political spectacle. Television trials like the Cusani trial increased the sense of guilt and moral culpability among the population, and supported the larger story about systematic corruption. Even though the legal procedures in which the codified due process was followed, the fact that the entire world was watching, inflated the stakes among the politicians, and in essence, the detention and hearings became a means of legal and social accountability (Giglioli, 1996).

10.4. Constitutional Court and Legal Challenges

Lastly, the era of Tangentopoli revealed the Constitutional Court (Corte Costituzionale) as an interpreter and arbitrator of controversies of corruption prosecutions, parliamentary immunity and procedure rights. The Italian Constitutional Court served in the 1990s as one of the major tribunals making decisions on the constitutionality of laws concerning the prosecution of political actors. As an illustration, issues concerning the coexistence of immunity and the principles of equality before the law and the right to the effective judicial redress were raised. The question to ask courts was whether measures of legislature or legislative privileges established an intolerable shield to individuals suspected of corruption (Giglioli, 1996).

There were also a number of legal issues raised that revolved around preventive detention and procedural restrictions. Defense counsels claimed that prolonged detentions were in violation of constitutional securities of individual freedom (Articles 13 and 27 of the Constitution) and of presumption of innocence. Although the Constitutional Court traditionally supported the preventive measures, they stressed the necessity of proportionality and rigorous regard to the procedural protection of the rights. This jurisprudence strengthened the validity of judicial interference in addition to protecting the basic rights that described the balancing act between civic responsibility and constitutional rights (Pinto, 1994).

The Constitutional Court dealt also with questions on legal reform at large due to Tangentopoli. When the systemic corruption was revealed, the debate on the necessary changes to criminal laws, the definition of immunity, and the strengthening of the prosecutor forces. The Court made interpretations that would inform the legislators in crafting reforms that would lower the possibility of future legal shields without violating constitutional requirements. The interventions were essential and essential in making sure that the Italian legal system continued operating and in what was credible during the unprecedented political turmoil (Giglioli, 1996).

11. Conclusion: Italy at a Crossroads, Reform, Survival, or Systemic Collapse & Legacy of Tangentopoli

The Tangentopoli scandal and the Mani Pulite investigations of the early 1990s marked a turning point in Italy's political history. The exposure of widespread corruption on the scale of systemic not only discredited the political elite of the ruling party but also destroyed the public trust in the political system as a whole (Giglioli, 1996). The Italian state had to decide between three options: substantial reform, survival through compensation, or systemic collapse.

Reform was both a need and a reaction to the pressure from the public and the judiciary. The scandal exposed the structurally flawed Italian party system, the non-transparency of party financing, and how the political offices were used for the officials' self-enrichment. Hence, there was a debate on the legislation reforms and their partial implementation, which was aimed at intensifying the judicial control, the mechanisms of accountability, and the anti-corruption laws. That the general public was behind these reforms exhibited their longing for a political class that was capable of self-regulation and moral resurrection (Pinto, 1994). These measures were intended to achieve a mere penalization of the individuals involved in wrongdoing and a fundamental change of the Italian institutional structures that served as a ground for corruption practices.

Nevertheless, survival turned out to be the way that was taken by the majority of Italy's political system since it was seen as a viable solution. Tangentopoli, for instance, was the cause of the fall of the traditional Christian Democrat and Italian Socialist Party, and it also ended the careers of many established politicians; however, new political players, namely Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia, took advantage of the opportunity. The media performed a significant role in shaping the judiciary as the moral savior of society and politicians as morally corrupt characters and, thus, the rise of new political elites who partly derived their legitimacy from their position outside the

old corrupt networks was made possible (Giglioli, 1996). So, in that situation, survival was hardly dependent on the restoration of the status quo ante-Tangentopoli but rather on the coming into being of a reconfigured political landscape, which was influenced by both legal accountability and media narratives.

Tangentopoli and, more generally, reform and change, went very close to bringing down the Italian political system completely. In fact, on one hand, some parts of the old political class had their reputation quickly ruined in the eyes of the public, and, on the other hand, the public's perception of the politicians as being corrupt "at every turn" practically destroyed the trust which allowed the old system to continue running. A weakening of political authority can be observed in many places, and the people even asked themselves whether the institutions could survive the double shock of the scandal and the economic crisis. The risk of system breakdown was avoided largely due to the efforts of the judiciary, the media, and the capacity of the new political forces to keep the state functioning, but the episode reminded everyone of how vulnerable democratic institutions can be when distrust between the government and the citizenry approaches 100% (Giglioli, 1996; Pinto, 1994).

The effects of Tangentopoli share a great deal in common with the political turmoil that took place in the early 1990s and extend far beyond them. The first thing that happened was the scandal radically changed the ways in which the media, the public opinion, and political accountability relate to one another. The press, which turned the judicial investigations into public entertainments, gave rise to a new ethical and political narrative according to which corruption was illegal as well as being culturally wrong, unacceptable, and publicly condemned. The second point is that the scandal made it absolutely clear that it was not possible to ignore the state reforms, especially those concerning parliamentary immunity, party financing, and judicial independence. And the last, but not the least important, the scandal still stays in the Italian political culture; therefore, it is the main factor behind the high level of distrust which the Italian people have towards the traditional parties and, at the same time, it reveals the potency of collective civic scrutiny in demanding ethical governance (Giglioli, 1996). Looking back, Tangentopoli demonstrates the delicate balance between the need for the public to hold politicians accountable and the ability of institutions to go on functioning. Italy was faced with a tremendous decision: the country could implement reforms to turn around democratic institutions and thus emerge stronger from the crisis; it could continue with the rise of new political actors; or it could go down the path of systemic collapse if the co-existence of corruption and delegitimation was allowed to continue. On the one hand, the scandal was proof that judges and the media have a crucial role to play when it comes to bringing the misdeeds of the powerful to light, but, on the other hand, the renewal of politics which lasts needs structural changes as well as building a political culture based on integrity, transparency, and caring for the public interest.

It can be said that, after all, Tangentopoli is a very significant part of the contemporary Italian history. It was a warning story about what happens if you go too far with corruption, and at the same time, it was a demonstration of how powerful the civil sector, the judiciary, and the press are when they join forces to make drastic political changes. The legacy of the scandal is still alive in the ongoing discussions about political accountability, the independence of the judiciary, and the media's role in forming public opinion and keeping democracy strong.

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