The Political Foundations of Industrial Policy: Emergence, Endurance, and Exhaustion*

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Abstract

We study how politics shapes industrial policy through two paradigmatic twentieth-century cases: the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno in Italy (1950–1984) and Kennedy's Moonshot in the United States (1961–1972). Drawing on historical and primary political sources, we show that each policy originated in a broader political project rather than in an economic diagnosis: the Christian Democrats' pursuit of national integration and democratic consolidation, and Kennedy's New Frontier. We introduce the concept of industrial policy vision — a publicly articulated, transformational objective that political leaders attach to a set of ideals and pursue through state-led intervention in the economy — and develop a five-component definition that makes it empirically tractable. We then trace each vision through decades of newspaper coverage, combining topic modeling and sentiment analysis with systematic close reading. In both cases, public debate proceeded largely within the frame the vision set, granting the policies tolerance for setbacks and expense. The cases diverge in their fates: the Moonshot's bounded vision was redeemed on schedule, while the Cassa's open-ended vision was exhausted by accumulated failure and the policy outlived it only briefly. This divergence points to our central conclusion: while a vision holds, it sets the terms on which an industrial policy's performance is judged, including what counts as failure and how much time the policy is given to deliver.

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1 Introduction

Industrial policy has re-emerged as a central tool of economic policy. Governments across the world are implementing policies aimed at fostering strategic sectors, accelerating technological development, and reshaping production structures. These efforts invoke transformational historical precedents such as Japan's state-led technology absorption in the nineteenth century, Korea's export-led industrialization in the postwar period, or the U.S. Apollo program in the 1960s — all large-scale policies sustained over many years. While economists debate the ex-post economic efficiency of industrial policy, a striking feature of many of today's policies is that they rarely achieve the longevity needed to succeed or fail based on these metrics. The United States effectively repealed its largest industrial policy in decades, the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), within three years of enactment, before its effects could be assessed. The United Kingdom has adopted and discarded successive industrial strategies with each change of government, none abandoned on the evidence of its performance. The European Union offers a different example: the Draghi report — commissioned from an expert rather than articulated by a political leader — was endorsed across the political spectrum, yet no one has made its ambitions their own cause.

Why does industrial policy emerge in some contexts but not in otherwise similar ones? Why are some policies abandoned before they have had the chance to succeed, while others stay in place long after it has become clear they are not working? This paper shows the central role politics plays in both the emergence of industrial policy, and in how it is understood and evaluated over the course of its implementation. We do so through two case studies of major twentieth century policies: the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno in Italy (1950–1984), a large-scale, decades long regional development policy which was the governing Christian Democratic (DC) party's principal instrument for developing the South of the country, and the Apollo program in the United States (1961–1972), announced by President John F. Kennedy in 1961 with the goal of landing a man on the Moon and returning him safely to Earth before the decade was out. We make three contributions.

First, we show that industrial policy frequently originates in a broader political project. Far from being a narrowly technocratic response to regional underdevelopment, the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno originated as the instrument of such a project — one through which the DC sought to complete the unfinished business of national unification, and stabilize Italy's post-fascist democracy against communism. In the case of Apollo, Kennedy's response to the Soviet challenges in space was shaped by his New Frontier political project which sought national renewal powered by an activist federal government willing to take a more active role in the economy. Kennedy's political project demanded a spectacle to meet the challenge, and his belief in an active role for the government led him to choose industrial policy as the means to achieve that spectacle. The role of the political project in the emergence of industrial policy is made clear by a controlled comparison: Kennedy's predecessor, Eisenhower, faced the same Soviet challenge in space, but his political project — fiscal restraint and suspicion of grand federal undertakings — dictated a different response. The shock was the same; the political projects differed; and the policy responses followed the projects.

Second, the political projects we study share a specific structure when pursued through industrial policy

— a structure we term *industrial policy vision*: a transformational objective, publicly articulated by political leadership, bound up with a set of ideals, and pursued through state-led intervention in the economy. In the case of the Cassa, the objective of modernizing the South was bound to the ideals of completing national unification and consolidating Italy's post-fascist democracy; in the case of Apollo, the objective of a manned lunar landing within the decade was bound to the ideals of human triumph over challenge, the frontier renewed, and prestige in the Cold War contest.

Third, we show that this industrial policy vision — in particular, the values and ideals attached to it — shaped how the policies were understood and evaluated at the time. To do so, we empirically examine media discourse about the policies, combining natural language processing (NLP) techniques with close reading. In both cases, our main finding is that public discourse, as reflected in the media, proceeded largely on the terms the vision set. Coverage of the Cassa in its first two decades evaluated the policy against the ideals of its founding vision — national integration, democratic consolidation, moral obligation to the South — and criticism remained reformist, targeting implementation rather than the legitimacy of intervention itself. Coverage of Apollo organized itself around missions and astronauts — figures made central by the vision's ideals of heroes conquering the final frontier; setbacks, fatal accidents, and extraordinary expense were absorbed as the price of the endeavor rather than the basis on which the policy was contested.

However, the two cases ultimately diverge: Apollo's vision was redeemed — its bounded objective achieved on schedule — while the Cassa's open-ended promise was worn down by two decades of visible failure, until coverage shifted from the vision's ideals to implementation, scandal, and waste, and the frame that had served to legitimate the policy in public discourse collapsed. The Cassa outlived its vision by only a few years, surviving on inertia rather than justification.

Our findings suggest a number of ways in which the political foundations of industrial policy matter. First, they imply that the market-failure rationale used to justify industrial policy in theory may be incidental to the emergence of major industrial policies in practice.[1] The historical record speaks especially clearly for Apollo: while an economic rationale for large-scale public R&D existed, it did not select the program — Kennedy, by his own account, would have chosen a more useful earthbound alternative only if it could match space in drama and persuasive power, and none could. The point holds equally for the Cassa, where the rationale for intervention was genuine but long-standing: Southern underdevelopment had been diagnosed since unification, but what turned a standing diagnosis into a policy in 1950 was the DC's political project, not new economic information. This observation carries an important implication for understanding variation in ex-post economic efficiency: a policy chosen to advance a political project may underperform on economic criteria without having failed on its own terms because economic efficiency was never the objective against which it was designed.

Second, the finding that industrial policy vision shapes how industrial policy is understood and evaluated

[1] Most economic policy advice rests on the market-failure framework, with politics largely absent from the analysis. Acemoglu and Robinson (2013) note this absence and argue that policy affects politics: reforms that correct market failures can backfire by reshaping future political equilibria. We argue the reverse direction: the political project selects a policy for which a market-failure rationale may exist in theory.

in public discourse through its implementation suggests a variety of ways in which it may contribute to the longevity of the policy. By appealing to broader ideals and values such as national unity or human triumph over challenge, industrial policy vision can create wider public support for the industrial policy than the narrow set of economic beneficiaries. By the same argument, industrial policy vision may also create a wider space for experimentation, and tolerance for setbacks or failures. The implications of this point cut both ways however: a successful industrial policy vision may make the difference between a long-lasting, transformational policy or one that is prematurely abandoned. However, a successful vision may also prolong a poorly designed or unachievable industrial policy. In some ways, the Cassa serves as a cautionary tale that vision is not a substitute for performance.

Related literature: This paper contributes to the burgeoning literature on industrial policy (Harrison and Rodríguez-Clare, 2010; Juhász et al., 2024) by showing the role politics plays in which policies are chosen and in how they are understood and evaluated through implementation. Existing work has emphasized institutionally shielding industrial policy from the political process. This prescription is supported by evidence from the developmental state literature, in which meritocratic bureaucracies combined autonomy from private interests with the embeddedness required to design and implement policy effectively (Johnson, 1982; Amsden, 1989; Wade, 1990; Evans, 1995), and rationalized by modern political economy, which shows how political constraints generate credibility and time-inconsistency problems (Besley et al., 2022; Juhász and Lane, 2024). Yet industrial policy is discretionary by design: it involves choosing certain activities, places, and people to promote at the expense of others. Juhász and Lane (2024) note the resulting tension between the case for capable, autonomous bureaucracies and the reality that industrial policy is designed and delivered by political actors. Removing politics from industrial policy is neither feasible[2] nor necessarily desirable: democracies in particular may have good reasons to want elected representatives, rather than unelected civil servants, involved in industrial policymaking. This paper confronts the tension directly. We identify a mechanism through which politics does not only constrain industrial policy, but also supplies a key input: visions that mobilize support, sustain policies through setbacks, and create space for experimentation. This perspective suggests that some contemporary industrial policies may struggle not because of flawed economic logic, but because they lack a vision capable of sustaining them.

A different set of literatures asks what launches transformational policies and what sustains them — the same questions this paper takes up. Political scientists have shown that ideas shape which policies are adopted and how long they endure (Hall, 1993; Blyth, 2002); within economics, Rodrik (2014, p. 189) notes that ideas are "strangely absent" from models of policy choice in which vested interests do all the explanatory work. Two frameworks come closest to the object we study. In mission-oriented innovation policy, public investment is organized around a bold, measurable, time-bound objective (Mazzucato, 2021). In science and technology studies, sociotechnical imaginaries are "collectively held, institutionally stabilized, and publicly performed visions of desirable futures" (Jasanoff, 2015, p. 4).

[2]Even among G20 countries with highly meritocratic bureaucracies, roughly half of the public entities deploying industrial policy are headed by politicians (Juhász and Lane, 2024).

Our approach differs from both in what it sets out to explain. In the mission framework, political support is a requirement of the design and where it comes from is left open (Mazzucato, 2018, p. 805); in the imaginaries literature, a vision is collectively held and need not be owned by anyone in particular. This paper makes the origin its object. A vision is endogenously generated by a political project and owned by a political principal — which is why, unlike a mission, it cannot be commissioned to specification. The Draghi report has endorsers rather than an owner — the signature of a vision produced on commission rather than out of a political project.

Finally, this paper contributes evidence of a kind these literatures have lacked. Each turns on how ideas are contested in public, yet none measures public argument systematically: Hall concedes that "like subatomic particles, ideas do not leave much of a trail when they shift" (Hall, 1993, p. 290), and Jasanoff and Kim (2009) place mass media expressly beyond their scope. Because public articulation is constitutive of a vision rather than incidental to it, a vision does leave a trail. We follow it across decades of newspaper coverage, combining topic modeling and sentiment analysis with systematic close reading.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 develops our conceptual framework. It defines political projects, traces how industrial policy emerges from them, and introduces the concept of industrial policy vision, setting out its five components and laying out its analytical boundaries. The section closes by explaining our case selection and our empirical approach. Section 3 examines the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno: we reconstruct the founding vision of Southern development as national integration and democratic consolidation, and then trace through three and a half decades of press coverage how that vision first organized public debate, then adapted under strain, and ultimately collapsed. Section 4 turns to the Apollo program: we show how Kennedy's New Frontier project shaped the three decisions that produced the Moonshot, and how the vision's ideals structured a decade of remarkably stable and supportive press coverage. Section 5 concludes.

2 From Political Projects to Industrial Policy Vision

This section develops our conceptual framework. We first define political projects and show that industrial policy often emerges from them; we then introduce the concept of industrial policy vision, the structure that arises when a political project is pursued through state-led intervention, and set out the components that make it empirically tractable. We conclude the section with our case selection and empirical approach.

2.1 Political Projects and the Emergence of Industrial Policy

The starting point of our analysis is the observation that transformational industrial policies often trace their origins to a broader *political project*: a political agenda attached to a set of ideals through which a government defines its purpose and orders its priorities. A political project in this sense concerns the ends a government pursues and the values it attaches to them. In nineteenth-century Japan, the state-led absorption of Western technology was organized around the fledgling Meiji government's political project of "Eastern morality, Western technology"—a commitment to state-led modernization in the service of national survival. In post-

war Korea, the five-year plans, export promotion, and heavy-industry drive of the Park Chung-hee era were bound up with the political project of "modernization of the fatherland" that fused economic transformation with national strength.

Seen in this light, transformational industrial policies emerge when political leaders choose them from a menu of options to advance a political project. Not all political projects lead to industrial policies—in fact, many political projects preclude them by definition. The point is easiest to see where the same external pressure produced different responses as a consequence of different political projects. Consider the Soviet space advances of the late 1950s, the launch of Sputnik in 1957 and Yuri Gagarin's orbital flight in 1961, which confronted the United States with a visible challenge to its technological standing and ideological confidence. The Soviet advances spanned two administrations, and the presidents who met them—Dwight D. Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy—responded very differently, and in ways consistent with their political projects.

Eisenhower's political project was one of restraint. He was committed to preserving the peace and prosperity of the American people through fiscal discipline, limited government, and keeping the state out of directing the nation's science and industry. This disposition would later crystallize in his warning against the military-industrial complex. From this political project, his response to the Sputnik shock followed. Eisenhower did respond—founding NASA, backing missile and satellite research, and, through the National Defense Education Act of 1958, channeling federal funds into science, mathematics, and language instruction. But these were deliberately limited measures, and the educational response is especially telling. Rather than mobilizing and directing the economy toward a target, it invested in human capital and worked through the nation's existing, decentralized institutions—a capacity-building intervention consistent with his political project. He declined to organize the nation around a grand technological contest. For a political project whose central tenet was to contain the reach of the state, industrial policy was not an instrument to be weighed and rejected; it never appeared on the menu of options at all. The political project was determinative, and it pointed away from industrial policy.

Kennedy's political project was, by contrast, transformational in its goals. His was the political project of the New Frontier: a public philosophy of national renewal, of getting the country "moving again" after what he portrayed as a decade of drift, powered by an activist federal government willing to take the lead in science, the economy, and America's standing in the world. Articulated well before any commitment in space, it promised not the maintenance of the national position but its decisive advance, and it embraced precisely the expanded role for the state that Eisenhower's project was built to resist. From this political project, Kennedy's response to the Soviet challenge followed—and it pointed in the opposite direction from his predecessor's. Where Eisenhower's restraint counseled a measured, contained response, the New Frontier counseled confrontation: the Soviet advances were to be met head-on, surpassed, and answered with a public and decisive demonstration of American capability. What Kennedy's political project demanded was a spectacle—and on the question of which spectacle, the menu was wide open. A transformational industrial policy was thus very much consistent with Kennedy's political project and it was, ultimately, the one the administration settled on.

It is exactly at the point where a political project is taken up through transformational industrial policy that a distinct object comes into being—one we call an *industrial policy vision*.[3]

An industrial policy vision is neither the political project alone nor the industrial policy alone. The political project supplies the broader ideals and objectives; the industrial policy supplies the instrument through which these ends will be met. Industrial policies that advance political projects have properties of their own: a publicly articulated objective, pursued through state-led intervention in the economy, against which the policy can be justified, defended, contested, and judged. Kennedy's political project became an industrial policy vision at the moment it committed to confronting the Soviet challenge through a state-directed project.

2.2 Industrial Policy Vision

To make it analytically tractable, we argue that industrial policy visions have five components, which the cases that follow will make concrete. An industrial policy vision involves (i) *public articulation*: the objective is stated openly by the highest levels of political leadership, in a form that can organize debate and support, rather than held privately. It involves (ii) a *transformational goal*: it promises substantial collective change, not marginal adjustment. It involves (iii) *ideals*: the goal is bound to broader ideals —typically those stemming from the originating political project—such as national unity, prestige, modernization, or democratic consolidation. These ideals give citizens a reason to support it beyond narrow economic return. It involves (iv) *industrial policy as the instrument*: the transformation is to be achieved specifically through selective state intervention in production. And it rests on (v) the *belief that government intervention can be a force for good*—what we term the interventionist commitment, distinguishing an industrial policy vision from political projects pursued through taxation, regulation, or the market.

Two clarifications follow from this definition. First, a clear objective is not sufficient for industrial policy vision. Many industrial policies have precisely articulated objectives without necessarily possessing a vision. Take the export credit guarantees often extended by state-owned export development banks. These typically have a clear objective (e.g., to facilitate the foreign market expansion of domestic firms) but the objective is routine and instrumental, it does not aspire to collective transformation, nor is it bound to a broader set of ideals (parts (ii) and (iii) of our definition). It is telling that such policies are typically deployed by long-standing, independent agencies rather than at the highest levels of political leadership. We typically expect to find industrial policy vision where the policy is transformational in its goals (ii) and advanced at the highest level of political leadership (i), and not where an enduring agency pursues a bounded, technical mandate.[4]

Second, and crucial for what follows, *vision need not be sincere to matter*. We cannot establish whether leaders privately believed the visions they articulated, and our argument does not require it. What we are interested

[3]We investigate how Kennedy's industrial policy emerged out of his political project for U.S. science and technology policy in more detail in section 4.1.

[4]Relatedly, industrial policy vision does not imply ambiguity or vagueness. The objective of the mission Kennedy landed on was extraordinarily precise—land a man on the Moon before the decade was out and return him safely—and it was visionary all the same, because the precise objective was embedded in a larger story of leadership, frontier, and Cold War competition, and in Kennedy's broader political project of the New Frontier. What makes an objective visionary is not its vagueness but its attachment to transformational ideals (parts (ii) and (iii) of our definition).

in establishing is whether vision entered public discourse, shaped industrial policy decisions, and supplied the frame through which the policy was justified, defended, and contested. Vision is neither epiphenomenal rhetoric nor private belief: it is a public structure of meaning that organizes coalitions, constrains criticism, and shapes how success and failure are interpreted. This is what makes vision empirically tractable—it leaves a trace in the public record, which is where we go looking for it.

2.3 Case Selection and Methodology

We examine industrial policy vision in two paradigmatic twentieth-century cases: the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno (Cassa or CasMez for short) and Kennedy's Moonshot (the Apollo program). The Cassa per il Mezzogiorno was the principal instrument of Italy's postwar regional development strategy. For most of its mandate (1950–1984), it sought to promote economic modernization in Southern Italy through coordinated public investment and targeted industrial support. The Moonshot, launched as a national commitment by President John F. Kennedy in 1961, was a technological program with a bounded objective. It mobilized NASA, contractors, universities, engineers, and scientists around the goal of landing a man on the Moon before the end of the decade.

We choose these two case studies for five main reasons. First, both are clear instances of industrial policy vision: both are large-scale, state-led interventions justified as means to achieving broader national goals and values. The Cassa was presented as a means to completing the unfinished work of Italian unification embodying the ideals of national unity and defense of democracy against communism. Kennedy's Moonshot had the definitive goal of landing a man on the moon attached to the values of human endeavor, Cold War resolve, and frontier spirit. In the following sections, we establish the various elements of our industrial policy vision at work in these real-world industrial policies.

Second, both policies are long lasting. They each span changes of government or coalition partners. This allows us to trace industrial policy vision through a long implementation period. We can examine how the vision changes over time, how it responds to setbacks, failures, and changes of government.

Third, the cases differ in ways that illuminate the generalizability of industrial policy vision. The Cassa provides an example of industrial policy vision applied to a more typical industrial policy goal of facilitating long-run regional development. Kennedy's Moonshot on the other hand provides a better-known, but more exceptional case: a vision tied to a sharply defined exhilarating goal espoused by a charismatic president. We can assess the extent to which the role of vision in shaping policymaking and discourse generalizes across these contexts.

Fourth, the two cases differ in their ultimate fates. The Apollo mission achieved its stated objective, landing a man on the Moon and returning him safely to Earth within the timeframe the President had laid out. The Cassa, by contrast, was plagued by inefficiency, clientelism, and scandal across its decades-long existence. We include a celebrated success and a policy that, at best, had a mixed record and was ultimately abandoned. Examining industrial policy vision in both types of contexts guards against the concern that the role of vision

is merely an artifact of studying policies that were judged as achieving their objective.

Fifth, the cases complement each other in terms of which research questions they can better address. The historical record for the political project selecting the industrial policy vision is particularly strong for Apollo: the commitment has datable decision points and preserved deliberations. The text available for examining how the vision shapes discourse through implementation, however, draws from *Newswires* — articles purchased from large news syndicates — that are generally short and fact-oriented. It is on this second question that the Cassa evidence is strongest: we are able to examine how the vision governs discourse over a full lifespan — construction, adaptation, and collapse — across thirty-four years of continuous press argument in full-length newspaper sources.

Our cases shed light on three questions: i) Can we identify industrial policy vision as defined above in each episode? ii) Does the industrial policy vision trace its origins to a broader political project, and does this affect the industrial policy that was chosen? iii) How does the industrial policy vision shape discourse through the policy's implementation?

For both case studies, we first reconstruct the initial vision and then trace how that vision influenced a) the decisions that culminated in each policy being chosen and b) public discourse over the life cycle of the policy as represented in the media. We rely on secondary literature and primary political statements to identify the different elements of industrial policy vision and to trace its origins to a broader political project. In examining media discourse, we focus on how industrial policy vision affected 1) agenda setting and 2) evaluative framing. Specifically, we are interested in whether events that chime with the vision's values and fit as steps towards the goal are present in media discourse, and whether those that align with alternative values and do not have a clear place in the vision's narrative arc are omitted. In examining evaluative framing, we are interested in assessing whether the vision creates the standards against which policy is judged. For example, do visions displace the narrow "cost-benefit" lens often applied to industrial policies in favor of more idealistic criteria? In doing so, does the vision bound the space of legitimate criticism: are objections pitched outside the vision ideals such as inefficiency represented?

To examine these dynamics, we combine NLP techniques with selective close reading. Specifically, we use BERTopic (Grootendorst, 2022), which applies density-based clustering to sentence-transformer embeddings, to identify themes and trace their evolution in our newspaper corpora, and we estimate paragraph-level policy stance through repeated LLM prompting and score averaging on a scale from -1 (critical) to $+1$ (supportive). Because both topics and sentiment are estimated at the paragraph level, we can disaggregate sentiment trends by topic and examine how the tone of specific strands of coverage changes over time. Our topic-modeling approach also produces document-level representativeness scores, which we use to select a tractable subsample of articles for close reading that captures the corpus's main thematic structures and temporal trends. The two levels of analysis therefore mutually constrain and reinforce one another: the NLP patterns identify the overall structure of the discourse and ensure that close readings are anchored in broader trends, while the close

reading reconstructs the mechanisms and rhetorical strategies through which those patterns were produced.[5]

Our empirical strategy draws on three related literatures. The first uses topic models to recover thematic structure in large political, economic, and historical text corpora. In political science, topic models have been used to measure issue attention, expressed agendas, and variation in political discourse across time and institutional contexts (Quinn et al., 2009; Grimmer, 2010; Grimmer and Stewart, 2013; Lucas et al., 2015; Roberts et al., 2019). Economics has developed a parallel literature using textual data to measure news sentiment, uncertainty, economic narratives, and policy communication (Baker et al., 2016; Shapiro et al., 2022; Larsen and Thorsrud, 2022; Bertsch et al., 2021; Lucca and Trebbi, 2009; Hansen et al., 2017; Priola et al., 2022). Together, these literatures establish the value of automated text analysis for systematically mapping large corpora that would be difficult to code manually.

The second and third literatures concern sentiment measurement and mixed-methods interpretation. Work on political communication shows that sentiment and stance must be treated as domain-specific constructs rather than generic emotional tone: a text can be negative in affect while supporting a policy, or neutral in tone while implying criticism (Young and Soroka, 2012; Haselmayer and Jenny, 2016; Rice and Zorn, 2019; Bestvater and Monroe, 2022). We therefore treat sentiment as target-specific evaluative stance toward the policy, and use repeated LLM prompting and averaging as a way to stabilize noisy textual judgments (Le Mens and Gallego, 2025). Finally, digital-humanities work treats topic models as tools for exploration and guided close reading rather than as self-sufficient interpretations (Blei, 2012; Nelson, 2010; Bunout and van Lange, 2019; Rhody, 2012; Goldstone and Underwood, 2014; Söderfeldt et al., 2025). We follow this logic by using topic modeling and sentiment analysis to map the corpus and identify representative articles, while close reading reconstructs the narratives and rhetorical strategies through which support and criticism are expressed.

3 The Cassa per il Mezzogiorno

Our first case study applies this approach to the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno. The Cassa was not simply a regional development agency, but an industrial policy embedded in a broader vision: the attempt to complete Italian national integration by transforming the South. Its long duration, open-ended objectives, and eventual association with inefficiency, clientelism, and scandal make it a valuable case for tracing both the sustaining power and the limits of industrial policy vision. The section begins by reconstructing the historical background and initial rationale of the Cassa, before turning to how this vision was represented, defended, and contested in public discourse over time.

3.1 The Cassa Policy

The Italian government created the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno in 1950 to promote economic development in the country's Southern regions. Its establishment reflected a convergence of economic, political, and international

[5]See Appendix A for details.

pressures: the widening North–South divide, exacerbated by wartime destruction and postwar disruption (Felice and Lepore, 2017; Podbielski, 1978; Vecchi, 2011); concern within the governing DC party about social unrest and political polarization in the Mezzogiorno (Barucci, 1978); and support from the IBRD, which viewed the initiative as part of Italy's broader reconstruction and development programme (Alacevich, 2013; D'Antone, 1995).

The Cassa's initial strategy focused on basic infrastructural development, based on the assumption that improved transport and utilities would stimulate industrialization by encouraging local entrepreneurship and attracting external, especially Northern, investment (IBRD, 1951). When infrastructure alone proved insufficient to generate sustained industrial growth, its mandate was expanded in 1957 to include an industrial policy program offering concessional loans and smaller subsidies for the establishment and expansion of factories in the South.[6] Thereafter, the Cassa operated through two main channels: infrastructure investment, concentrated in areas such as water systems, land reclamation, transport networks, and industrial services, and industrial credit, which supported both small and medium-sized firms and larger investments in designated Industrial Development Areas, where groups of municipalities received preferential financing and coordinated infrastructure to promote industrial agglomeration (Cassa Per il Mezzogiorno, 1959). Rather than implementing all projects directly, the Cassa acted as a centralized financing and coordinating authority, working through municipalities, regional agencies, central government bodies, and semi-autonomous development consortia to carry out large-scale works across jurisdictions.

As shown in Figure 1, the scale of these interventions was substantial: annual disbursements typically ranged between roughly 0.5 and 1 percent of Italian GDP, with peaks exceeding 1 percent in the late 1950s and again around 1970. Sustained over more than three decades, this expenditure profile places the Cassa among the largest place-based development programs implemented in postwar Western Europe.

3.2 The Cassa's Founding Vision: Southern Development as National Integration and Democratic Consolidation

From its inception and throughout most of its mandate (1950–1984), the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno was conceived as the principal instrument of Italy's postwar regional development strategy, intended to modernize the South through coordinated public investment and targeted industrial support. Throughout its history, it was also closely associated with the postwar state led by the DC: its founding legislation was drafted by technocrats aligned with the government (Davis, 2016; Forlenza, 2010), while the DC dominated national government for the Cassa's entire lifespan and the policy remained closely identified with the party across successive coalition configurations (Pombeni, 2016; Hellman, 2016; Bull, 2016).

The DC politicians and technocrats who founded the Cassa developed an interventionist approach to resolving Italy's Southern Question. Its overarching goal was to modernize and integrate the Mezzogiorno more fully into the Italian nation, while two central ideals gave this objective its broader political meaning: com-

[6] As established by Legge 29 Luglio 1957, n. 634.

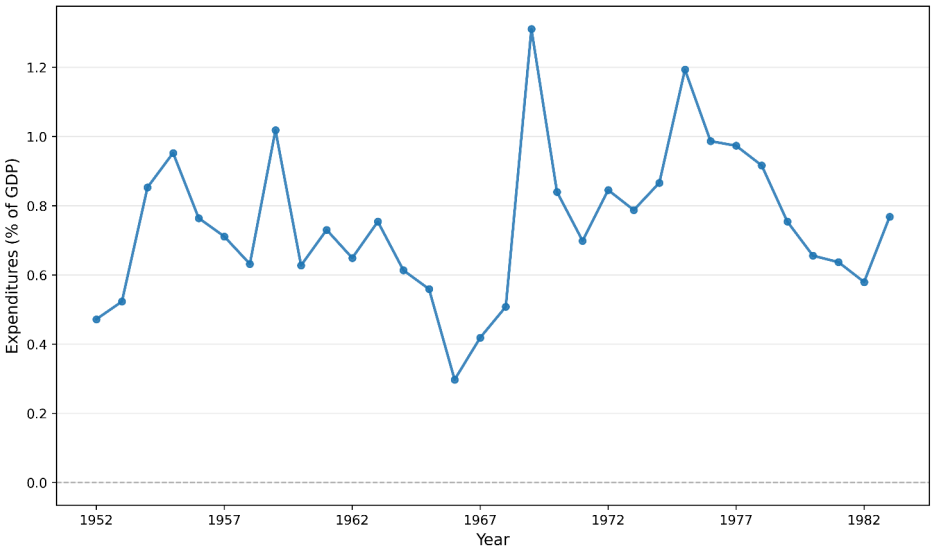

Figure 1: Annual disbursements of the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno as a share of Italian GDP, 1952–1983. The series is reconstructed from annual payment flows reported in the Cassa's balance sheets (ASET – Archivi dello Sviluppo Economico Territoriale online archives) and national GDP estimates from Baffigi (2015). Values are expressed as percentages of GDP.

pleting national unity and defending parliamentary democracy against communism. The project also served the DC's more immediate interest in consolidating its governing position in the South, although the party presented intervention as an expression of the national interest rather than partisan advantage. The decision to pursue these objectives through an expansive investment programme administered by a new public agency reflected a broader belief in the capacity of the state to promote national renewal. This belief was shared by the technocrats who designed the Cassa, several of whom had held senior positions within Italy's state-holding institutions, particularly IRI, and regarded industrialization as essential to sustained Southern development. The Cassa was consequently established as a programme of "special intervention," operating outside ordinary ministerial boundaries and using additional public funds to finance infrastructure and create the conditions for industrial development in the South (Davis, 2016).

Of the two foundational ideals, national unity bore most directly on the decision to modernize the South through investment. Since the "Southern Question" had long symbolized the unresolved tensions of the Italian state, its resolution was widely understood as essential to consolidating a coherent post-fascist national identity and completing what contemporaries described as a "second Risorgimento" (Davis, 2016).[7] The divide between North and South represented a structural tension at the heart of the national project: the aspiration to a unified political community coexisted with enduring territorial and social fragmentation. Addressing Southern underdevelopment therefore acquired renewed urgency as Italy redefined itself as a democratic republic, allowing the DC to present itself as the architect of a new national settlement capable of completing both unification and the transition to a stable post-fascist order. This vision of national unity, in turn, made the modernization and economic integration of the South a central objective of the Cassa.

[7]The *Risorgimento* refers to the nineteenth-century political and military process that led to Italian unification, conventionally dated from 1815 to 1871.

Southern policy was also inseparable from the stabilization of Italy's newly established liberal democratic order within the Western bloc. In the context of persistent postwar unrest, separatist mobilization in regions such as western Sicily, and fears of communist expansion following the Greek Civil War and the onset of the Cold War, the Mezzogiorno appeared especially vulnerable to political destabilization within the new Republic (Davis, 2016). Addressing Southern underdevelopment therefore served not only socio-economic objectives but also the strategic purpose of consolidating parliamentary democracy and demonstrating the viability of the post-fascist political order. In this respect, the DC sought to position itself as the "party of the Mezzogiorno," presenting development intervention as both a defence against communist influence and a positive programme of democratic integration (Forlenza, 2010).

The DC's commitment to Southern intervention however was also reinforced by more immediate partisan incentives. The Mezzogiorno occupied a decisive place in the political geography of postwar Italy, and the party's dominant national position rested in large part on its electoral strength there (Davis, 2016). Agrarian reform and development funding were therefore not politically neutral instruments, but formed part of a broader strategy through which the DC strengthened its territorial organization, cultivated local elites, and embedded itself within regional society (Forlenza, 2010). Yet the party sought to portray these interventions as indistinguishable from the broader interests of the country. By closely associating Southern development with its governing identity, the DC represented itself as a technocratic and supra-partisan agent of national modernization rather than as the beneficiary of a partisan programme.

This self-representation is particularly evident in a piece by Aldo Moro[8] written for the official DC outlet *La Discussione* and aptly titled "Il Partito per il Mezzogiorno." Moro argued that "the DC in the Mezzogiorno has cast off ignoble traditions and clogging clientelism and is now a liberated, living, effective instrument of political action that can truly and energetically push forward the renewal of the Italian South. And despite the grave difficulties arising from the uncertain political situation, the government has continued to work efficiently, on both the institutional, economic and structural planes, to remedy the structural deficiencies of the Mezzogiorno and contribute, through uncompromising action and independent of private interests, to the social improvement of the masses and the creation of a genuine political initiative for the South" (Moro, 1955).

Taken together, these elements show that the Cassa did not emerge as a narrowly technocratic response to regional underdevelopment. Rather, industrial policy became the instrument through which a broader political project for the future of Italy's newly established democracy was to be realized: the Cassa's interventions were presented not merely as tools for raising Southern output, but as means of completing national integration, stabilizing the democratic Republic, and demonstrating the capacity of the postwar state to direct national modernization. The DC also sought to associate itself closely with this vision, presenting itself as the political agent of national renewal while deriving electoral and organizational benefits from Southern intervention. The Cassa's inception thus exhibits each element of what we define as an industrial policy vision: a publicly articulated objective advanced by national political leaders; a transformational goal of integrating

[8] A leading figure in the Christian Democratic Party who later served as Prime Minister of Italy.

and modernizing the South; a set of legitimating ideals centered on national unity and democratic consolidation; the use of selective state intervention in investment and production as the means of achieving that transformation; and an interventionist commitment grounded in the belief that government action could serve as a force for national renewal.

3.3 Vision Shapes Cassa Public Discourse

While the previous section showed how political vision was central to the initial justification and launch of the Cassa, the next step is to examine how this founding vision circulated beyond the institutional and programmatic texts in which it was first articulated. If vision matters for industrial policy, its significance should not be visible only at the moment of policy design. It should also shape the terms through which the policy is discussed, defended, criticized, and reassessed in public debate over the course of its lifespan. For analytical clarity, we use the term *legitimation architecture* to refer to the process of instating and maintaining the vision within the public discourse. Tying back to our conceptual framework, this term refers to the set of frames through which a policy's stated transformational goals and underlying ideals are translated into public discourse and mobilized to organize its justification. The following section therefore turns to the press, using *La Stampa*, a major Italian newspaper, to examine how the Cassa's vision of Southern development and national integration entered public discourse, how it interacted with concrete debates over implementation and performance, and how the legitimacy of the program changed over time.

3.3.1 The Corpus: *La Stampa* and the Coverage of the Cassa

The empirical basis for the analysis is a corpus of 1,218 articles published in *La Stampa* between 1950 and 1985—the full duration of the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno's statutory existence, from its establishment in August 1950 to the parliamentary failure to renew its ninth extension decree in 1984, with a final year of residual coverage. Articles were identified through keyword searches of the newspaper's digitized archive[9]. The resulting corpus spans thirty-five years and encompasses the full range of coverage modes present in a quality national daily: parliamentary reporting, investigative features, economic analysis, regional correspondence and political commentary. The choice of *La Stampa* as the primary source reflects several methodological considerations. In the post-war Italian press system, *La Stampa* was one of the principal national newspapers, alongside titles such as Corriere della Sera, Il Messaggero, and La Nazione (Kelly et al., 2004), with a readership concentrated in the industrial North but with national circulation and a tradition of substantive economic and political reporting.

This Northern readership base makes *La Stampa* a particularly valuable source for the analysis of how the Cassa was legitimated to an audience that was politically central but geographically and economically distant from its immediate beneficiaries: understanding how Southern development was sold to Northern readers illuminates the broader political economy of the policy's legitimation architecture. Nonetheless, for the same

[9]Specifically, *Cassa per il Mezzogiorno* and *CasMez*.

reasons, *La Stampa* should not be treated as a perfectly neutral proxy for Italian public opinion. Based in Turin and owned by the Agnelli family throughout the period of study, the newspaper was culturally and institutionally embedded in the industrial North, whose firms — including the Agnelli-owned FIAT — were at times directly involved in the Cassa's strategy of subsidized industrialization. This positionality became particularly relevant from the late 1950s onward, as the Cassa increasingly sought to channel Northern private investment toward the industrialization of the South. At the same time, *La Stampa*'s commitment to comprehensive economic and political coverage included reporting on prominent political and intellectual actors voicing sharply critical assessments of both the Cassa and the firms benefiting from its incentives—including FIAT itself. The newspaper's ownership therefore did not translate straightforwardly into a unilateral endorsement of Northern industrial interests. Rather, *La Stampa* is best understood as a mediated arena in which political actors, journalists, experts, and economic interests articulated competing interpretations of the Cassa.

Lastly, from a practical standpoint, *La Stampa*'s digitized archives are relatively accessible, with articles recoverable through keyword search and text extraction.

3.3.2 Topic modelling and Sentiment Analysis

The topic model for the Cassa identifies 51 topics in the *La Stampa* corpus. Because classification operates at the paragraph level rather than the article level, each article may contain paragraphs assigned to multiple topics. This level of granularity is analytically useful: it captures the thematic complexity of longer pieces that span multiple domains and allows us to track more precisely how the thematic composition of coverage shifts over time. The eight most prominent topics account for 43% of all topic assignments, while each remaining topic represents a substantially smaller share.[10] We therefore focus on these eight topics, which are, in order of prominence: (1) the Southern Question and the North-South divide; (2) major public projects and infrastructure politics; (3) water infrastructure and resource management; (4) the justice system and judicial investigations; (5) agriculture, land, and the rural economy; (6) pollution, waste, and Naples' environmental crisis; (7) bank credit and the financial system; and (8) industry, labor unions, and productive investment. Together, they capture the dominant thematic dimensions of *La Stampa*'s coverage of the Cassa across three and a half decades.

Figure 2 shows how the prevalence of the eight topics evolved over time (normalized by five-year intervals). The evolution lines up with the policy's documented history. In the 1950s, coverage is dominated by broad discussions of the Southern Question, agriculture, and major public works, but the thematic composition shifts markedly over subsequent decades. From the mid-1960s onward, coverage of water infrastructure and resource management increases substantially, eventually becoming one of the largest topics by 1980. Likewise, the later years see a growing focus on judicial investigations. Overall, this evolution suggests that *La Stampa*'s coverage progressively moved away from the Cassa's founding vision—national integration, agrarian modernization, and the urgency of bridging Italy's North–South divide—and increasingly toward

[10] For example, topic 9 accounts for only 3%.

questions of implementation, administrative effectiveness, and political controversy.

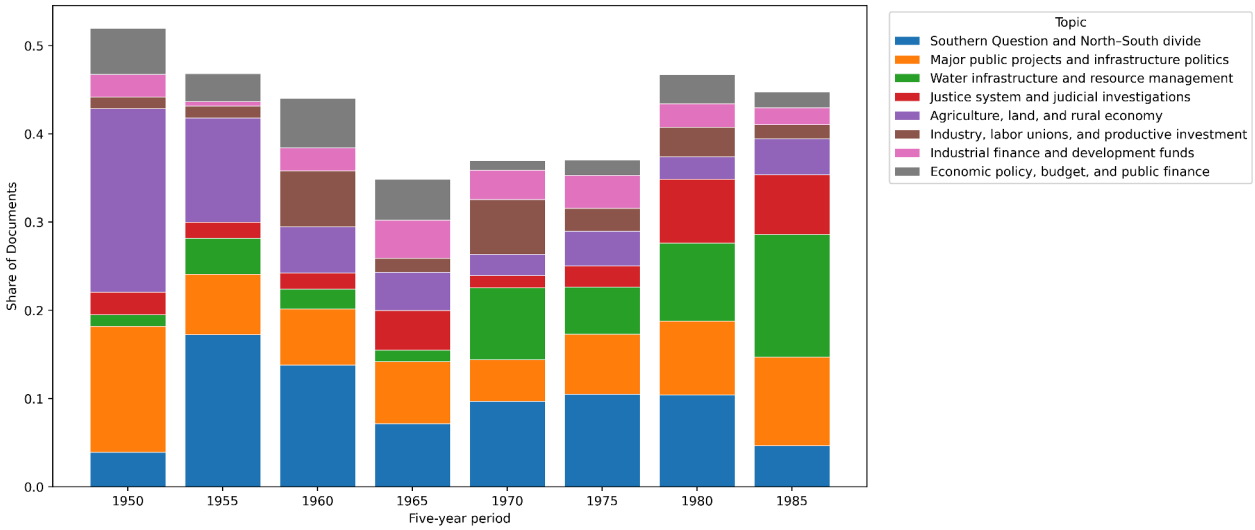

Figure 2: Topic prevalence by year (normalized), five-year intervals. Each bar represents the share of articles in that period classified under each of the eight topics. Topics are color-coded as shown in the legend.

The sentiment analysis provides complementary evidence for interpreting these thematic shifts. As shown in Figure 3, aggregate sentiment follows a clear rise–plateau–decline trajectory. In the early years, coverage is modestly negative or close to neutral, consistent with a founding period in which the Cassa was still being debated and its merits qualified rather than unequivocally endorsed. Sentiment becomes more positive through the mid-1950s and early 1960s before entering a prolonged decline from the late 1960s onward, reaching persistently negative territory during the 1970s. Together with the topic-model results, this pattern suggests that the growing emphasis on implementation, resource management, and judicial investigations was accompanied by an increasingly critical evaluation of the policy, marking a gradual departure from the more aspirational discourse that characterized the Cassa's early years.

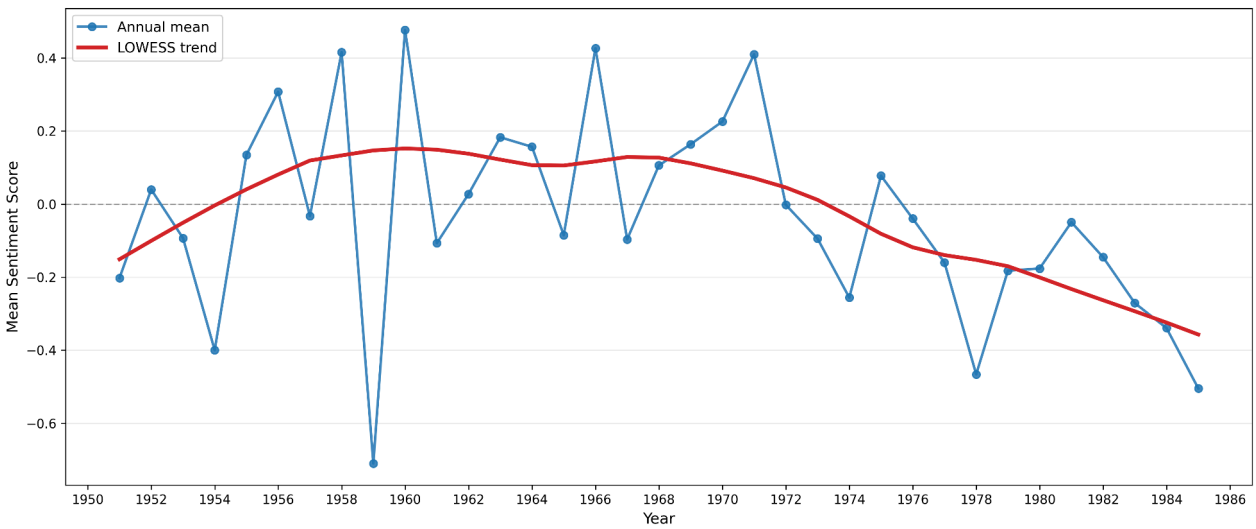

Figure 3: Aggregate sentiment toward the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno, 1950–1985.

Disaggregating sentiment by topic, as shown in Figure 4, reveals the mechanisms behind the aggregate

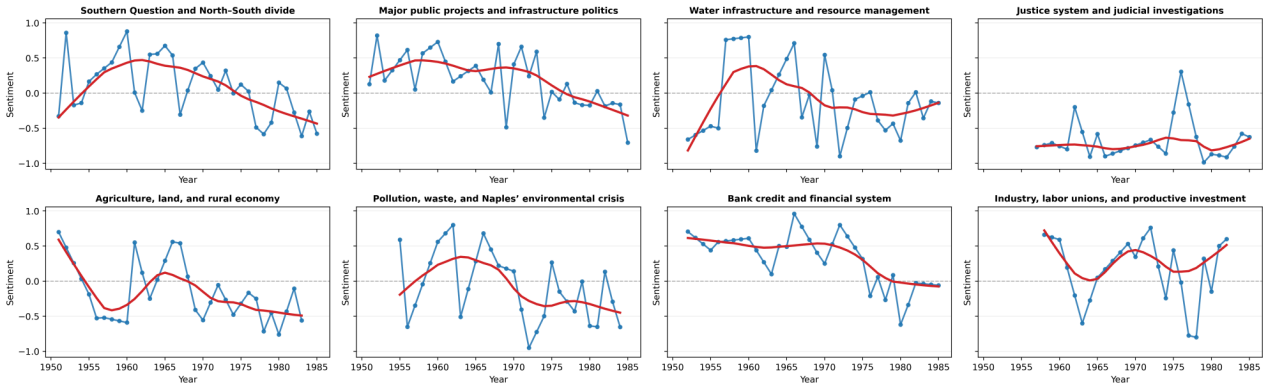

Figure 4: Sentiment toward the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno, 1950–1985, disaggregated by topic. Each panel shows annual sentiment (blue) and smoothed trend (red) for one of the eight identified topics.

decline. Rather than a uniform deterioration across all dimensions of coverage, the negative trend is concentrated in specific thematic domains.

Figure 4 shows substantial variation in sentiment trajectories across topics. Sentiment in the Southern Question and North–South divide category broadly mirrors the aggregate pattern: it is modestly negative or near neutral in the early 1950s, becomes positive in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and then declines through the 1970s, reaching negative levels by the 1980s. Major public projects and infrastructure politics follows a similar, though more volatile, trajectory, with a general downward trend from the mid-1960s onward. Other topics exhibit more consistently negative patterns. Water infrastructure and resource management begins with modestly positive sentiment in the 1950s and early 1960s, but declines sharply from the late 1960s and remains negatively evaluated thereafter. Sentiment toward the justice system and judicial investigations is negative throughout nearly the entire period in which it appears substantively, while pollution, waste, and Naples' environmental crisis also becomes increasingly negative during the 1970s and 1980s. By contrast, Bank credit and the financial system displays positive sentiment in the 1950s and early 1960s before declining in later decades. Industry, labor unions, and productive investment remains comparatively stable and close to neutral throughout the period, while agriculture, land, and the rural economy follows a broadly negative but uneven trajectory.

The disaggregated picture clarifies a key analytical finding: the aggregate decline in sentiment does not simply reflect a growing volume of critical coverage. It reflects a structural shift in the terrain of debate. In the 1950s and early 1960s, coverage was dominated by topics in which the Cassa could still be connected to its founding vision: Southern development, national integration, infrastructure, agrarian modernization, and industrial investment. Over time, however, public attention moved toward operational domains in which the policy's promises were directly testable: water provision, environmental crisis, judicial investigations, and administrative inefficiency. The declining sentiment within these topics further suggests that, as the debate shifted toward implementation, coverage became increasingly focused on perceived failures in the Cassa's delivery and administration. The aggregate decline in sentiment therefore reflects both a compositional shift, as more negative topics came to dominate coverage, and a within-topic deterioration, as even established

themes became more critical over time.

3.3.3 Close Reading

To qualify the results from the NLP pipeline, we construct a focused reading sample for the Cassa corpus. The goal is to select articles that are both representative of the thematic structure identified by the topic model and sufficiently limited in number to allow qualitative analysis. The selection procedure operates at the topic-year level. For each of the eight main topics and each year in the corpus, we identify all articles containing at least one paragraph whose assignment probability to that topic exceeds a minimum threshold. We then retain the articles whose highest-probability paragraph has the strongest assignment to that topic. In effect, this procedure selects the most prototypical articles for each thematic-temporal cell, reducing the risk that the qualitative sample is driven by atypical or boundary cases.

This produces a reading sample of 204 highly representative articles, drawn from across the full thematic and temporal range of the corpus. These articles form the empirical basis for the qualitative discourse analysis presented in this section. To keep the main text concise, we report here the main aggregate patterns from the close readings and relegate the full qualitative write-up to Appendix B. The following three subsections summarize the main qualitative patterns by period, showing how the Cassa's founding vision was constructed in the 1950s, adapted under strain in the 1960s, and progressively delegitimated in the 1970s and early 1980s.

The Founding Vision: Nation-Building as Civilizational Mission (1950–1959) The *La Stampa* coverage suggests that, in its early years, the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno was presented not as a narrow instrument of regional investment, but as the institutional expression of a broader project of national completion. In the 1950s, Southern development was framed as a moral obligation, a nation-building imperative, a Cold War necessity, and a technically rational programme of planned modernization. This dense legitimation architecture made the policy appear less like a contested redistributive intervention than like a necessary step in Italy's democratic maturation.

The first element of this vision was moral-civilizational. Coverage represented the South as structurally excluded from the social, economic, and civic standards of the rest of the country. Southern underdevelopment was therefore not treated simply as a regional imbalance or an economic inefficiency, but as a humanitarian and democratic emergency. Development promised to incorporate marginalized populations into the effective boundaries of national citizenship. In this register, the Cassa became a vehicle of redemptive integration: its purpose was not only to raise output, build infrastructure, or stimulate investment, but to transform poverty-stricken territories into participants in modern democratic society.

This moral frame was closely tied to a nation-building narrative organized around the idea of the "two Italies." The Southern Question was represented as the unfinished business of national unification, and the Cassa as the instrument through which Italy could finally become a fully integrated nation. This framing raised the political stakes of the policy. Support for Southern development could be presented as support for the completion of the national project, while opposition could be made to appear parochial, ungenerous, or

indifferent to the country's historical unity. Even early criticism tended to remain internal to this framework. The main complaint was not that state-led modernization was illegitimate, but that it was too fragmented, too slow, or insufficiently coordinated for the scale of the task.

The second element was anti-communist mobilization. In the context of the early Cold War, Southern development was cast as democratic self-defense. Poverty, unemployment, and rural unrest were understood not only as social problems, but as conditions that could strengthen communist influence. Investment in the South therefore acquired a strategic function: it was a means of consolidating democratic stability, defending Italy's Western alignment, and demonstrating the governing capacity of the Christian Democratic state. This logic narrowed the space of legitimate dissent. Criticism of the developmental programme could be associated with destabilization, ideological obstruction, or failure to recognize the geopolitical stakes of Southern poverty.

The third element was technocratic rationality and external validation. From the beginning, the Cassa's legitimacy was reinforced by the language of expertise, coordinated planning, and international financial approval. External endorsement, especially from development-finance institutions, helped recast Southern investment as economically sound rather than merely politically expedient. Domestically, the Cassa was portrayed as a centralized and rational planning body superior to fragmented local bargaining, special laws, and electoral concessions. This technocratic framing converted political contestation into a problem of inefficiency: coherent planning appeared responsible and modern, while local or partisan claims appeared parochial and potentially clientelistic.

Taken together, these frames stabilized the Cassa during its formative decade. The policy was sustained by a vision that fused moral urgency, national integration, geopolitical security, and managerial competence. The important point is not that criticism was absent, but that criticism remained largely reformist. It targeted implementation capacity, administrative coordination, and the adequacy of resources rather than the foundational premise of extraordinary intervention. In the 1950s, the Cassa was therefore legitimated as a national mission rather than defended as a policy option among alternatives.

From Integration to Instrumentalization: Defensive Modernization and Emerging Strain (1960–1971) The 1960s marked a more defensive phase in the public legitimation of the Cassa. The founding narrative of civilizational integration did not disappear, and the basic legitimacy of extraordinary intervention remained intact. Yet the terms of justification began to shift as evidence accumulated that infrastructure and investment were not producing straightforward convergence. The discourse adapted through four related moves: quantitative triumphalism, culturalization of failure, modernization paternalism, and the first acknowledgment of operational and institutional strain.

First, legitimation became increasingly data-driven. Rather than relying primarily on the moral language of national integration, coverage emphasized growth rates, industrial output, multiplier effects, income gains, and other performance indicators. Southern investment was defended as economically rational for the whole country, not simply as a redistributive obligation toward the South. This argument was especially important for Northern readers: the Cassa was presented as beneficial to national demand, industrial expansion,

labor mobilization, and social stability. Quantification therefore did more than document progress. It subtly redefined the purpose of the policy, shifting emphasis from civic integration toward aggregate national productivity.

Second, where modernization did not produce the expected social transformation, responsibility increasingly migrated from institutional design to Southern society itself. Underdevelopment was no longer framed only as a temporal lag that public investment could overcome. It was also described as cultural inertia, psychological misalignment, resistance to modern norms, and incomplete adaptation to industrial civilization. This produced a more paternalistic and at times quasi-colonial register. Development failure could be explained by the presumed persistence of archaic customs, local violence, superstition, weak civic discipline, or inability to inhabit industrial time. The implication was that the Cassa was not merely financing infrastructure, but attempting to transform mentalities and social behavior.

Third, the North and the developmental state were increasingly positioned as tutors of Southern modernization. The South appeared as a reservoir of labor, land, and potential whose activation required external capital, technical training, managerial discipline, and spatial coordination. Public intervention was cast as preparing the terrain for private investment, while Northern industry was expected to provide the entrepreneurial and organizational force needed to complete transformation. Vocational training, labor migration, industrial consortia, and cultural programming all fit within this logic. The result was a partnership doctrine, but an asymmetrical one: modernization was imagined as flowing from the advanced North and the central state toward a South portrayed as capable of progress but not yet able to generate it autonomously.

Fourth, the first visible cracks appeared in the Cassa's operational credibility. Water infrastructure became the earliest and most tangible site of implementation failure. Unlike large industrial projects, whose effects could be deferred or spatially concentrated, water supply was immediate, universal, and easy to evaluate. Failures in aqueducts, dams, distribution networks, and urban supply exposed the gap between public expenditure and functional provision. By the late 1960s, the issue was no longer only whether the South had the appropriate cultural readiness for modernization, but whether the developmental apparatus could deliver basic infrastructure in usable form.

The same period also saw the first corruption cases directly associated with Cassa-financed projects. These scandals were not yet treated as evidence of systemic collapse, but they introduced a new vulnerability into the discourse. The institution that had been presented as technocratic and corrective could itself become a channel for fraud, weak oversight, opaque subcontracting, and financial manipulation. This complicated the earlier division between a rational developmental center and a backward or resistant periphery. Problems could originate not only in Southern society or in insufficient capital, but inside the administrative machinery of modernization itself.

The 1960s therefore represent a period of adaptation rather than collapse. The Cassa's legitimacy was preserved, but at the cost of important rhetorical shifts. Development was defended through data rather than moral mission alone; implementation failures were partly displaced onto Southern culture; the North became

an explicit developmental tutor; and support for the policy became increasingly conditional on evidence of coordination, efficiency, and measurable results. The founding vision survived, but it became more instrumental, paternalistic, and exposed to the practical record of implementation.

The Collapse of the Legitimation Architecture: Crisis, Capture, and Institutional Exhaustion (1972–1984) The final period marked the disintegration of the Cassa's major legitimating frames. The 1970s and early 1980s did not produce a single decisive rupture. Instead, the policy's legitimacy eroded through the accumulation of failures that overwhelmed the rhetorical architecture built in the 1950s and adapted in the 1960s. Four processes were especially important: the collapse of water and sanitation credibility, the capture of the developmental apparatus by private and criminal interests, the emergence of systemic critiques of the policy model itself, and the shift from positive vision to defensive legitimation and abolitionist demand.

Water infrastructure became the clearest symbol of broken developmental promise. Since the founding decade, water provision had embodied the most elemental claim of Southern modernization: the state would bring arid, unhealthy, and under-served territories into productive and domestic modernity. By the 1970s, persistent shortages, incomplete connections, failed dams, leaking pipes, contaminated systems, and recurring public-health crises made this promise impossible to sustain. The issue was particularly damaging because it could not plausibly be attributed to cultural inertia or lack of entrepreneurial spirit. It pointed directly to the inability of the institutional apparatus to complete the chain from funding to working provision. The Cassa could mobilize capital, announce projects, and initiate works, but repeatedly failed at connection, maintenance, completion, and everyday functionality.

Corruption and rent extraction undermined the technocratic frame from a different direction. The Cassa had long justified itself through claims of expert planning, disciplined coordination, and insulation from localistic or partisan fragmentation. In the 1970s, major scandals made that claim increasingly untenable. Industrial incentives could be used to build private financial empires rather than Southern productive capacity. Subsidized projects could be designed around construction-phase extraction rather than long-term operation. Major public works could become sites of inflated costs, fraudulent compensation, organized-criminal penetration, and political mediation on behalf of private interests. The problem was no longer merely that implementation was slow or uneven. The apparatus itself appeared vulnerable to capture.

Alongside scandal, a broader critique of systemic inefficiency emerged. Earlier criticism had usually called for more resources, better coordination, or stronger administration. By the late 1970s, the critique increasingly targeted the model of extraordinary intervention itself. In agriculture, subsidies were said to produce temporary compliance with policy targets rather than durable entrepreneurial capacity. In industry, large externally imposed plants often failed to generate autonomous local development and sometimes conflicted with prior public investments in the same territories. Administrative procedures were criticized as slow, discretionary, duplicative, and incompatible with rational business planning in an inflationary economy. Even some of the policy's intended beneficiaries began to argue that the South needed real services, infrastructure, and technical support more than another layer of financial incentives.

Naples concentrated these failures in a single symbolic site. As the South's largest city and a central reference point in the Southern Question, it became the urban mirror of the Cassa's exhaustion. Sanitation works remained incomplete, environmental cleanup stalled, post-cholera commitments failed to produce timely transformation, and public-health emergencies recurred despite decades of extraordinary intervention. Naples showed the full gap between civilizational promise and material provision: money could be allocated, plans announced, and responsibilities assigned, while basic urban services remained unresolved. In this setting, the developmental state appeared performative rather than effective.

As these failures accumulated, legitimation became defensive. The Cassa was increasingly justified not by what it would achieve, but by what might happen without it. Continued intervention was defended as a way to contain unemployment, reduce uncontrolled migration, preserve Northern urban stability, keep construction sites open, and avoid social crisis. Reform proposals promised to reduce discretion, focus on special projects, prepare the regions for greater responsibility, or return the institution to its original functions. Yet these arguments revealed the hollowing out of the original vision. The Cassa survived because no replacement had been prepared, because its spending prevented worse short-term outcomes, and because political actors feared the consequences of abrupt withdrawal. This was legitimation by path dependency rather than legitimation by vision.

At the same time, abolitionist critique moved from the margins into mainstream political and intellectual debate. The earlier consensus, in which opposition was largely reformist and often constrained by the language of national unity or anti-communism, fractured. Intellectual discussions increasingly treated the era of special intervention as exhausted. Major parties and coalition actors began to call openly for abolition or radical restructuring. The critique now targeted not only individual scandals or failed projects, but the central logic of a centralized extraordinary body mediating development through incentives, special projects, and discretionary intervention. By the early 1980s, the demand was no longer simply to make the Cassa work better, but to replace it with a different institutional model.

The Cassa's end reflected this exhaustion. It did not fall because a new and compelling political vision displaced the old one. It dissolved because the negative justifications that sustained it – crisis management, institutional inertia, and absence of alternatives – were too weak to preserve the political will required for renewal. The founding frames had been dismantled one by one: the civilizational mission by persistent failures in basic provision, the technocratic claim by corruption and capture, the economic-performance claim by systemic inefficiency, and the political consensus by the normalization of abolitionist critique.

The trajectory of the Cassa therefore illustrates a broader dynamic in the political economy of place-based industrial policy. Legitimation frames are not merely rhetorical ornaments. They shape which criticisms count as legitimate, which indicators matter, and what kind of political coalition can be sustained around continued expenditure. The Cassa's founding vision was powerful because it made Southern development appear morally urgent, nationally necessary, strategically prudent, and technically rational. But that same vision became vulnerable when implementation repeatedly contradicted its promises. Once the policy could no longer

be defended as national redemption, democratic consolidation, or rational modernization, it survived only as an inherited apparatus. Its final condition was legitimation without vision.

Summary: Political Vision and the Cassa The Cassa case supports the paper's central argument that industrial policy is often publicly justified not as an end in itself, but as the instrument of a broader political vision. In this case, the relevant vision was the completion of Italian national integration through Southern modernization. The policy was not simply a response to an economic market failure or a technical solution to regional underinvestment. It was made politically meaningful by being attached to a larger national objective: overcoming the historical divide between North and South and incorporating the Mezzogiorno into the social, economic, and democratic life of the republic.

This vision shaped the terms on which the Cassa was publicly debated. In the founding period, the policy was evaluated through the values attached to the Southern Question–national unity, democratic consolidation, Cold War stability, moral obligation, and confidence in state-led modernization. These frames widened the constituency for the policy beyond its direct Southern beneficiaries. Northern readers could be asked to support Southern investment not only because it might generate economic returns, but because it served the national interest, defended democracy, and completed an unfinished project of unification. In this sense, political vision helped translate a costly and spatially targeted policy into a collective national undertaking.

The evidence also shows how political vision can sustain industrial policy over time. The Cassa's early legitimation architecture made criticism difficult to formulate as outright opposition: objections tended to focus on implementation, coordination, or scale rather than on the legitimacy of extraordinary intervention itself. Even when problems became visible in the 1960s, the vision did not immediately collapse. Instead, it adapted. Quantitative claims of success, arguments about Northern economic benefit, the partnership doctrine, and cultural explanations of Southern backwardness all worked to preserve the idea that the policy remained necessary, even if its results were uneven. This is consistent with the paper's broader claim that political vision can create tolerance for experimentation and delay: individual failures did not immediately invalidate the project because the project was tied to a goal larger than any single investment.

At the same time, the Cassa shows the limits of vision as a sustaining device. Its vision was powerful but open-ended. Unlike a bounded technological mission, the goal of overcoming the North-South divide had no clear moment of completion and no unambiguous test of success. This gave the policy durability, but it also exposed it to cumulative disappointment. As water failures, corruption, administrative dysfunction, and persistent underdevelopment became harder to reconcile with the promise of national modernization, the vision no longer protected the Cassa from criticism. The very frames that had once sustained the policy became liabilities: a programme justified as rational planning was undermined by corruption and incoherence; a programme justified as civilizational modernization was undermined by failures in basic provision; a programme justified as national integration was undermined by the persistence of dualism.

The Cassa therefore illustrates both sides of the paper's argument. Political vision can mobilize public support, organize elite consensus, define the terms of debate, and give industrial policy the political time

horizon it needs to operate. But vision is not an unlimited substitute for performance. When implementation repeatedly contradicts the promise that made the policy meaningful, legitimacy erodes at the level of the vision itself. The Cassa's final phase was not simply a story of policy failure, but of justificatory exhaustion: once Southern development could no longer credibly be narrated as national redemption, democratic consolidation, or rational modernization, the institution survived only through inertia and crisis management. Its collapse shows that industrial policy depends not only on technical design or economic outcomes, but on the continued credibility of the political vision through which it is made publicly defensible.

4 The Moonshot

Our second case study applies this approach to Kennedy's Moonshot. Like the Cassa, Kennedy's Moonshot represents an industrial policy vision: the attempt to land a man on the moon and return him safely to earth was envisioned as a potential triumph for human destiny, a great adventure into the New Frontier and a way to gain pride and prestige vis-à-vis the Soviet Union.

4.1 Making Space the Final Frontier: The Political Origins of Kennedy's Moonshot

Kennedy's broad political project was that of the New Frontier. He idealized the spirit that drove American pioneers to conquer the prairies and presented it as a force propelling America into the 1960s. Kennedy applied this political project to U.S. science and technology policy. He publicly articulated the transformational goal of establishing technological superiority over the Soviet Union. He attached this goal to three ideals: space exploration was presented as (1) part of human destiny to triumph over challenge, (2) a great adventure into the New Frontier, and (3) a battle for prestige and pride vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. This project was intertwined with the belief that government bureaucracy could be a force for good. This political project developed into an industrial policy vision once Kennedy chose to pursue its transformational goal through an accelerated NASA-led R&D program.

Eisenhower's political project of restraint also had a science and technology wing. Eisenhower publicly articulated the goal of having sufficient weapons to deter or defeat a Soviet attack (McDougall, 1985, p.140). He attached the ideals of rationality, peace and the prosperity brought about by hard-working Americans free from meddling bureaucrats to this goal. This political project was very different to Kennedy's. His goal of maintaining the U.S. position was not transformational. Far from being interventionist, Eisenhower's project included the belief that government bureaucracy should be resisted. Given his status-quo goal and anti-interventionist stance, Eisenhower chose education rather than industrial policy as the locus of his science and technology policy. While Eisenhower bowed to pressures to create NASA, its budget remained small and it focused on building broad competencies rather than a single government mandated aim.

Kennedy's political project shaped his choice to pursue industrial policy via a manned lunar landing. We highlight the political project's role in three related decisions: 1) pursue achievement in space, 2) organize

space efforts around a manned lunar mission, 3) choose R&D directed by a civilian bureaucracy as the primary space industrial policy instrument. Once Kennedy had made these decisions – and confirmed this industrial policy bundle as the means through which to pursue his ambitions – his political project became an industrial policy vision.

4.1.1 Decision 1: Pursue Achievement in Space

The first decision that formed part of the Kennedy administration's space policymaking was the most fundamental: the decision to pursue achievements in space with vigor. The Kennedy administration gave serious consideration to earth-based alternatives. Kennedy believed that achievements in space were less useful than other scientific endeavors (Logsdon, 2010, p.83). Additionally, other contemporaries—including former President Eisenhower, 1964 Republican Presidential candidate Barry Goldwater, conservative pundit William F. Buckley Jr., and Senator William Fulbright—argued that the administration should direct the resources it jettisoned into space on broad-based education and social welfare programs (McDougall, 1985, pp. 391–394).

The prestige element of Kennedy's political project played a significant role in his choice of space. Jerome Wiesner, Kennedy's advisor, recalled "we talked a lot about do we have to do this? He [Kennedy] said to me, 'Well, it's your fault. If you had a scientific spectacular on this earth that would be more useful - say desalting the ocean - or something that is just as dramatic and convincing as space, then we would do it.' ... Maybe a different kind of man could have said to the country, 'Look, we are going at our own pace. We are going to let the Russians win. We don't care' but Kennedy was evidently not a different kind of man: he did value prestige and he could not brush Soviet space achievements aside" (Logsdon, 1970, p.111).

The futuristic, New Frontier ideals of Kennedy's political project also played a role. Logsdon (1970) records that Kennedy was more convinced than any of his advisors that accepting a second-place space effort was incompatible with American security, with the country's role as world leader, and with the New Frontier spirit of discovery.

The decision-making of Kennedy's advisors further reveals the influence of his political project. Take James Webb, whom Kennedy appointed NASA administrator in February 1961. Webb said "there is, without a doubt, a tendency to equate space and the future. Therefore, space is one of the fronts upon which President Kennedy and his Administration have chosen to act broadly, vigorously, and with continuous purpose" (Van Dyke, 1964, p.126).

Kennedy's opponents used arguments against prestige and the spirit of adventure to build cases against funding the Moonshot. Eisenhower embodied the anti-prestige approach and how this view pointed to a more limited space program. Van Dyke (1964) writes "When asked at a news conference whether he [Eisenhower] didn't think our prestige was at stake in connection with space activities, he responded 'Not particularly, no."' For Eisenhower, "the important thing was that the space program 'be based on a systematic and technically sound approach to the complicated scientific and engineering problems involved.' He saw no reason to think in terms of competition with the Soviet Union, no reason to engage in a race." Conservative pundit William F.

Buckley Jr. decried "the most public relations conscious administration in the history of a country ... Why not tell the Soviets at the UN: 'Very well, you have reached the moon, but meanwhile here in America we have been trying, however clumsily, to spread freedom and justice'." (McDougall, 1985, p.393)

4.1.2 Decision 2: Organize Space Efforts around a Manned Lunar Landing

The Kennedy administration channeled its pursuit of space achievement into a single goal: a manned lunar landing. This was not the obvious choice; rather, a range of projects were under consideration. Kennedy asked Johnson to report on whether the U.S. had "a chance of beating the Soviets by putting a laboratory in space, or by a trip around the moon, or by a rocket to land on the moon, or by a rocket to go to the moon and back" (Logsdon, 1970, p.110).

There were compelling practical reasons to settle on a lunar landing. Johnson and NASA officials judged it to be the goal the United States was most likely to achieve first: a more distant target neutralized the Soviet lead in weight-lifting capacity and gave time for American "industrial capacity, engineering and scientific know-how" to prove decisive (Logsdon, 1970, p.96,113). NASA officials also argued a lunar landing would demand research of broader scientific value than the alternatives.

The prestige element of Kennedy's political project steered the choice toward a *manned* mission specifically. After Gagarin's flight, the American response "had to be in the form of manned flight rather than instrumental flight; but the man could have been sent around the moon and back, or to Mars" (Van Dyke, 1964, p.146). Manned spaceflight was deemed to carry the most prestige of any space project. In his Moonshot speech Kennedy said of a manned lunar landing that "no single space project in this period will be more impressive to mankind" (Kennedy, 1961).

The adventure and New Frontier ideals of his vision pointed the same way. Manned flight to the moon was a natural fit with frontier rhetoric. NASA portrayed its astronauts not merely as heroes but as pioneers, conquering space as the frontiersmen had conquered the continent (Kauffman, 1994). As the moon was the most distant goal, manned flight also centered human striving against difficulty most emotively. Hence Kennedy's "we choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard" (Kennedy, 1962) and his claim that no other project "will be so difficult or expensive to accomplish" (Kennedy, 1961).

We also see prestige-oriented reasoning in Kennedy's advisors. Lyndon B. Johnson, recommending manned spaceflight, wrote that a manned moon landing "was of great propaganda value" and "essential whether or not the United States was first" (Logsdon, 1970). James Webb likewise tied the manned mission to the contest for standing, stating that it was important "to do this thing in the shortest possible time, recognizing that if we don't make the effort the Soviet Union undoubtedly will achieve this most impressive of all space exploration 'firsts"' (Van Dyke, 1964, p.126).

4.1.3 Decision 3: R&D Directed by a Civilian Bureaucracy as the Primary Instrument of Space Policy

The administration's third decision was to pursue the Moonshot through government-directed research conducted by a civilian agency. This decision had two parts, and neither was inevitable. The first part was embracing a large, planned R&D program. This meant accepting an expanded role for technocracy, which Kennedy's predecessor had resisted. The second part was routing space efforts through the civilian NASA rather than the military. The military option was given serious consideration, and was favored by Kennedy's rivals.

The interventionist tone of Kennedy's political project—his belief that government bureaucracy could be a force for good—underwrote the embrace of technocracy. McDougall (1985, p.403) observes that "the Kennedy years saw the quiet withdrawal of American political resistance to technocracy," a shift away from the principle of limited government that "still clung to life" in the late 1950s. For the Kennedy men, the war had shown "what Americans could do with technology, the proper leadership, and the inspiration of a mighty cause" (McDougall, 1985, p.307). This confidence extended to the bureaucracy itself: proponents of Apollo within the administration viewed the space program as a "catalyst" for social progress and "the restructuring of institutions in ways dimly foreseen but assumed to be progressive" (McDougall, 1985, p.322).

The decisive evidence for the role of Kennedy's political project lies in how those who held *different* ideals were led to *different* institutional choices—and how opposing the ideals meant opposing the policy. Eisenhower's commitment to limited government and his fear of a "military-industrial complex" and "scientific-technological elite" led him to reject a planned program outright: "to train X thousands of engineers, to reach the moon by 19XX . . . these were not the assignments of a free society but the dictates of a command economy" (McDougall, 1985, p.140). Campaigning in 1964, he traced the choice to first principles, warning that "widely distributed R&D gave way to gigantic 'crash' federal stunts such as the race to the moon," and that such federal subsidies "sapped the nation's moral fiber like a narcotic" (McDougall, 1985, p.397). Where Kennedy's political project saw bureaucracy as a progressive catalyst, Eisenhower's saw it as a threat to a free society—and so each was led to a different locus for R&D.

The civilian-versus-military question shows the same pattern. Kennedy's rivals, holding that national security in space was paramount, were led to prefer military control. A Republican space advisory committee condemned Apollo and called Kennedy's failure to build a strong military presence in space "perhaps the most disastrous blunder by any government since the last war" (McDougall, 1985, p.391). Goldwater voted for Apollo but preferred a vigorous Air Force program instead, on the conviction that "only U.S. military superiority could ensure the peaceful uses of space"; the military critique of a civilian-run Apollo became "a main plank in the platform under construction by conservative Republicans in 1963" (McDougall, 1985, p.392). The contrast is precise: a security-first ideal led to a military locus, where Kennedy's progress-and-prestige project led to a civilian one.

Taken together, we see how Kennedy's Moonshot emerged out of his New Frontier political project. From the fundamental decision to pursue a spectacle in space, to the decision to make manned lunar exploration

the locus of those efforts, to the more administrative but no less consequential decision to hand the reins to civilian bureaucrats, Kennedy's New Frontier political project formed 1960's U.S. space industrial policy in its own image.

4.2 Vision Shapes Moonshot Public Discourse

At this stage of analysis, we have established our first main point for the Moonshot case study: Kennedy's political project played an important role in shaping the decision of politicians to embark on the manned lunar landing. Now, we turn to our second point: industrial policy vision shapes discourse on industrial policy. We use a corpus of *Newswires* from Silcock et al. (2024), consisting of articles produced by news syndicates that were published on the front pages of local newspapers. As with the Cassa, for the Moonshot, this analysis shows that 1) the industrial policy vision, and in particular, its ideals, set the terms of discourse in the media and 2) the vision's ideals provided the terms on which setbacks and objections were absorbed rather than allowed to derail the program. In contrast to the Cassa, the ideals of the Moonshot vision successfully set the terms of discussion not merely for a honeymoon period but for the entire duration of the policy.

4.2.1 The Corpus: Newswires and the Coverage of Kennedy's Moonshot

We analyze newspaper coverage of Kennedy's Moonshot using a corpus of 26,000 articles published from 1960-70 from the Newswires database (Silcock et al., 2024). This database includes a set of multi-class topic tags for each article.[11] We include articles that are tagged with the topic "space".

The Newswires articles are typically shorter and more factual than the articles in La Stampa. Given this, they do not allow for as deep an analysis into the complex narratives involved in the legitimation architecture of the Moonshot. Nonetheless, the Newswires dataset is particularly valuable as it draws on newspapers across the U.S.. Like the La Stampa dataset, it offers the practical advantage of easy access to the full text of articles.

4.2.2 Topic modeling and Sentiment Analysis

Topic modeling The topic model for the Moonshot identifies 98 topics with at least twenty articles in the *Newswires* corpus; in total, 8,771 articles are assigned to a topic. Here, classification operates at the article level as articles are not divided into paragraphs. However, the average article is 204 words long which means the granularity of the analysis is comparable to the paragraph level for the *La Stampa* corpus.

Our analysis focuses on the top 10 topics which we list here: 1) NASA's Ranger program, 2) the Soviet Luna program, 3) NASA's Surveyor program, 4) NASA's Mariner program, 5) NASA's Gemini program, 6) Apollo 11 celebrations led by Nixon, 7) Countdowns to Apollo missions, 8) Gordon Cooper's Orbital Mission, 9) Khrushchev and the Soviet Space Program and 10) NASA's Budget.[12] Table 1 provides our titles next to the

[11] These tags were produced using a RoBERTa-Large classifier trained on the twenty-seven topic labels from the New York Times Index of the Comparative Agendas Project.

[12] We assign these titles based on the keywords identified by the algorithm and a close reading of sample articles from each topic.

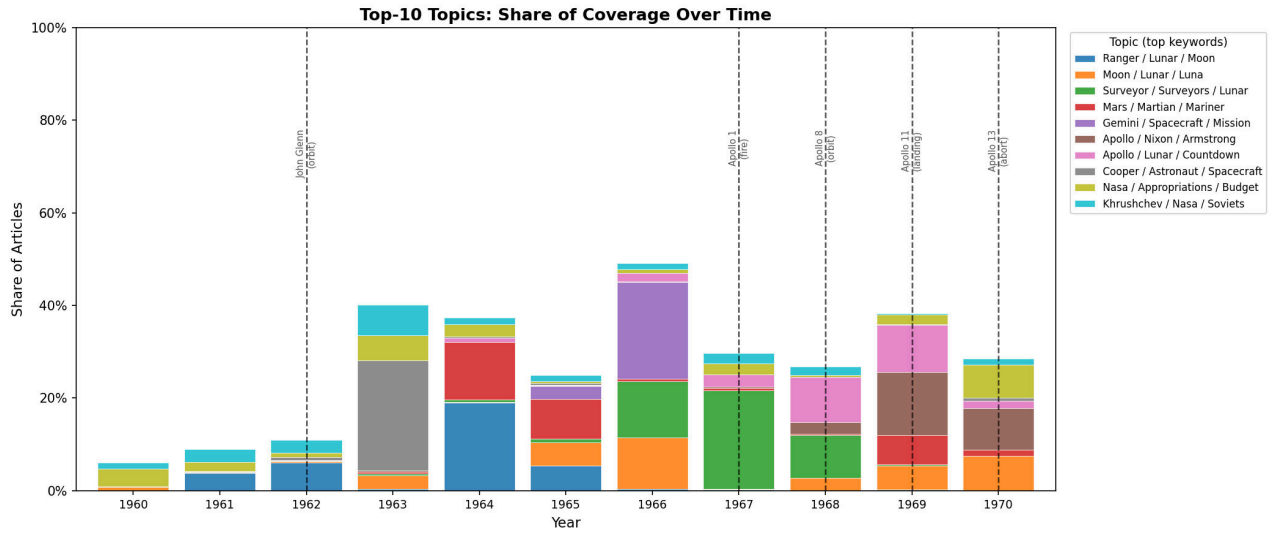

Figure 5: Share of the corpus classified in each of the top ten topics, by year.

original words and more detailed descriptions.

Discourse centers on the "mission of the moment" — be it U.S., Soviet, or both — from the start of the sample period until the Moonshot was achieved, as shown in Figure 5. The timing of budget discussion is also noteworthy. It starts high in 1960, then declines, resurfacing briefly in 1963 (when the program came under more intense public scrutiny), in 1967 (the year of the Apollo 1 fire), and finally in 1970, after the Moonshot was achieved. Interestingly, the budget topic is virtually absent from 1964-1966 — the years where NASA spending was highest.

Overall, the topic modeling provides a preliminary indication that the vision is setting the media agenda around U.S. space policy. What is considered to be the important mission by NASA is the mission that appears prominently in the topic modeling. Simultaneously, budget concerns do arise, but take up a relatively small proportion of discourse.

Sentiment Analysis Figure 6 shows the average sentiment by topic. Strikingly, the mission topics all have positive sentiment. The strongest sentiment score is for the topic about Nixon's celebrations of Apollo 11. Moreover, the NASA budget topic is weakly positive on average: budget discussions lean towards neutral or positive feelings on the money being spent by NASA.

Figure 7 shows the aggregate sentiment over time, which again is extraordinarily positive and stable compared with the Cassa. Figure 8 shows the sentiment for each topic over time. The sentiment for "mission"-based topics is consistently positive or neutral. The one topic where a Cassa-like trend presents is the budget topic. For the budget topic, sentiment slowly trends downwards starting from 0.5 and ending just below zero. Additionally, there are blips in 1963 and 1967 as expected, but these blips are relatively small. Nonetheless, in contrast to the Cassa, the tone in Moonshots reporting is remarkably buoyant. The consistently positive sentiment around missions and weakly positive coverage of budgets provides a preliminary indication that the media's evaluative frame to space was in line with the industrial policy vision.

Table 1: *Newswires* top ten topics: our titles, the algorithm's keywords, and descriptions

Our title	Original keywords	Description
NASA's Ranger program	Ranger, Lunar, Moon, Spacecraft	NASA's Ranger program, which sent unmanned satellites to photograph the moon's surface, 1961–1965.
The Soviet Luna program	Moon, Lunar, Luna, Apollo	The Soviet Luna program, which sent unmanned satellites to fly by, photograph, and perform experiments on the moon, 1959–1976.
NASA's Surveyor program	Surveyor, Surveyors, Lunar, Moon	NASA's Surveyor program, which sent unmanned spacecraft to the Moon's surface aiming to achieve a "soft landing," 1966–1968.
NASA's Mariner program	Mars, Martian, Mariner, Spacecraft	NASA's Mariner program, which sent unmanned probes to explore the inner Solar System, including Venus, Mars, and Mercury, 1962–1973.
NASA's Gemini program	Gemini, Spacecraft, Mission, Rocket	NASA's Gemini program, its second manned spaceflight program, aiming to demonstrate techniques to support Apollo, 1961–1966. The topic centres on Gemini 9, whose aims were a satellite rendezvous (failed) and a two-hour spacewalk (succeeded).
Apollo 11 celebrations led by Nixon	Apollo, Nixon, Armstrong, Astronauts	Celebrations led by President Nixon for the Apollo 11 astronauts following their successful lunar landing.
Countdowns to Apollo missions	Apollo, Lunar, Countdown, Moon	Countdowns to various Apollo missions, including Apollo 10 and Apollo 11.
Gordon Cooper's Orbital Mission	Cooper, Astronaut, Spacecraft, Flight	Astronaut Gordon Cooper's mission of 22 Earth orbits over approximately 34 hours.
Khrushchev and the Soviet Space Program	Khrushchev, NASA, Soviets, Satellite	Centres on the 1963 incident in which Kennedy proposed at the UN that the U.S. and U.S.S.R. collaborate on space efforts; the topic recurs throughout the sample period, so this single incident may not fully explain it.
NASA's Budget	NASA, Appropriations, Budget, Billion	NASA budgets passing, being amended, or failed attempts at amending NASA budgets, with hits across the full sample period.

4.2.3 Close Reading

The following sections turn to a qualitative analysis which provides confirmation that the agenda and evaluative framing of the Moonshot's media coverage align with the goal and ideals of the industrial policy vision. This alignment is not ephemeral, but rather lasts all the way from the Moonshot commitment to Apollo 11. We read 294 articles: three from each of the 98 topics to which at least 20 articles were assigned.[13]

Unlike with the Cassa, there are no clearly identifiable periods in which Newswires coverage views NASA through different lenses. For the Cassa coverage in La Stampa, we identified periods where the legitimation architecture was constructed, evolved under pressure and ultimately collapsed. Moonshot's media coverage does respond to particular successes and failures including: the launch of John Glenn, public questioning of NASA in 1963, the tragic Apollo 1 fire in January 1967 and the moon landing in 1969. However, the Moonshot's

[13]Note that this reading procedure is different to our analysis of the La Stampa articles on the Cassa in which we only read articles from the eight most prevalent topics. We did this as the articles were more evenly distributed across topics for the Moonshot than the Cassa.

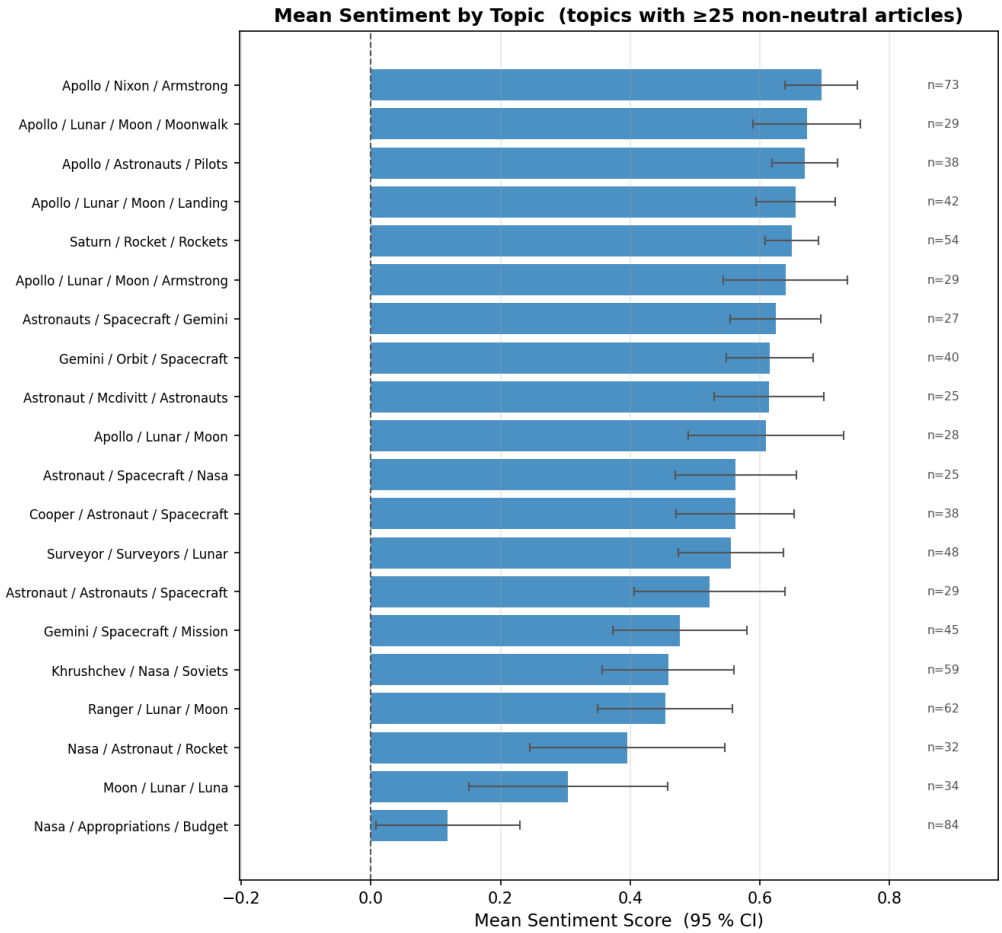

Figure 6: Average sentiment by topic.

legitimation architecture provides a consistent backbone linking coverage of these different events. In contrast to the Cassa, it emerged relatively fully formed and remained largely intact through the first Moon landings.

We present a set of observations that hold true across the sample period (1960-1970) and cement the striking degree to which industrial policy vision shaped the Moonshot's media coverage. These are the following. 1) Journalists frequently use language that evokes the ideals attached to space flight by the Kennedy administration's industrial policy vision. 2) Articles provide substantial technical detail. 3) Articles place the astronauts at the center of space flight storytelling, providing details on their feelings, remarks and families. 4) Journalists often quote scientists to explain why an endeavor is important or interesting. 5) Articles often position space achievements within the space race. 6) Delays, setbacks and even failures are accepted with strikingly little complaint. 7) Expense is often accepted with relatively little complaint.

Each observation suggests a role for the Kennedy administration's industrial policy vision in shaping the discourse on the Moonshot. Recall that we distill this vision as follows. The publicly articulated transformational goal of achieving a manned lunar landing before the Soviet Union and before the end of the 1960s. The ideals of space exploration as 1) part of human destiny to triumph over challenge, 2) a great adventure to the New Frontier and 3) a battle to gain national pride and prestige vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. As well as the supporting belief that government technocracy is a force for good. Table 2 indicates the vision ideals with

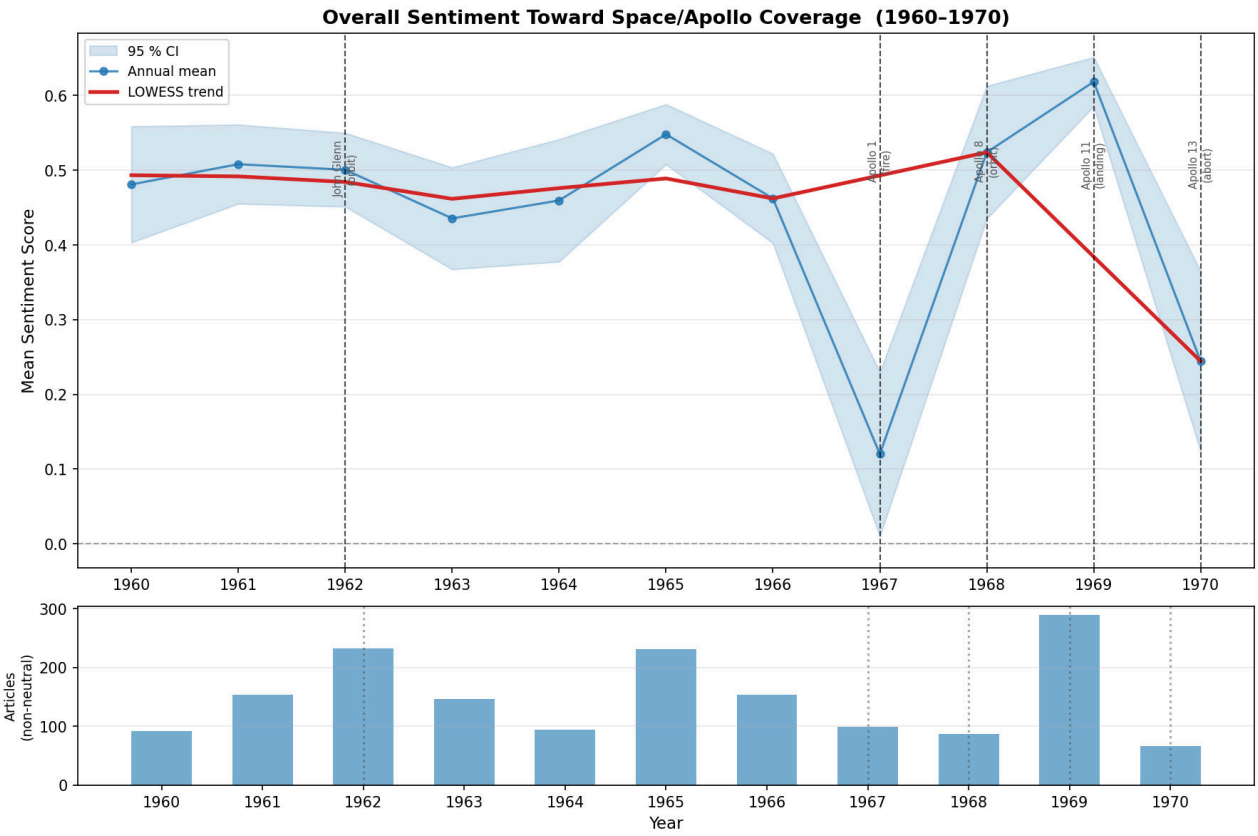

Figure 7: Aggregate sentiment toward NASA over time, 1960–1970.

which our observations from close reading align.

In isolation, each observation would not provide a compelling case. Nonetheless, together, they provide substantial evidence that vision shaped the agenda and evaluative frame of newspaper discourse on the Moonshot. That these observations hold for the entire policy period provides a striking contrast to the Cassa case study. There is detailed evidence for each observation in Appendix C.

Summary: Industrial Policy Vision and the Moonshot The Moonshot is, in many ways, the poster child for industrial policy visions. Kennedy's political project played a decisive role in shaping U.S. space policy. The rich literature on these topics has allowed us to reconstruct the contemporary deliberations of the Kennedy administration and their rivals. The NASA-led R&D push to the moon was not a deterministic response to Soviet space advances, but rather one whose thrust and details were deliberated on with an eye to the New Frontier. By contrast, Eisenhower's ideals of the hard-working, free American, unencumbered by the government, drew him to entirely different policy solutions. From these deliberations emerged an industrial policy vision for U.S. space policy. This vision went on to have a vibrant and long-lasting career, culminating in ultimate triumph: it shaped media discourse until the policy's goal was achieved.

The most striking contrast between the Cassa and the Moonshot is the duration for which each vision was able to shape media discourse. For the Cassa, as the decades passed and failures became apparent, the vision adapted and then ultimately collapsed. The Moonshot vision remained dominant — the ideals of the New Frontier still organizing discourse — through rocketing budgets, and tragic failures alike, right up until the

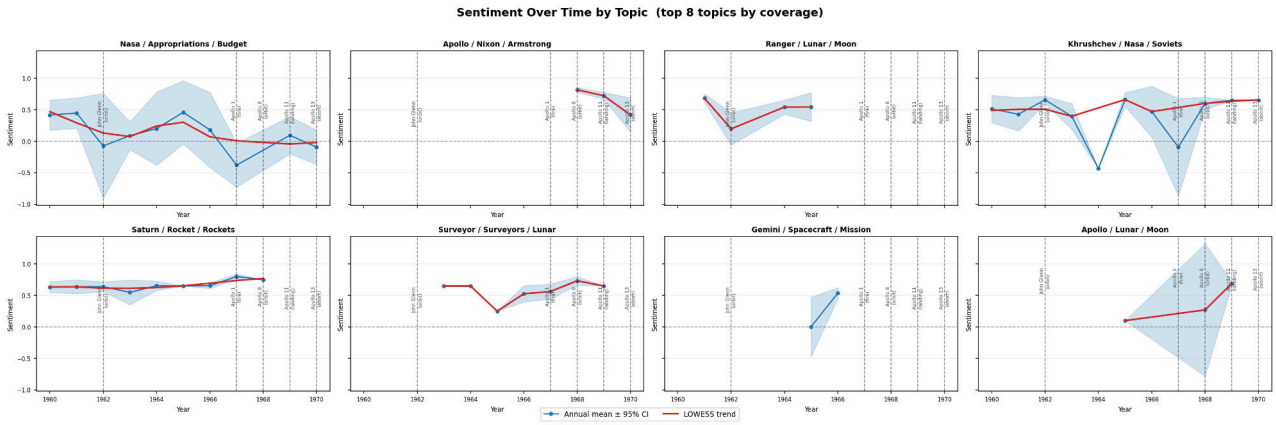

Figure 8: Sentiment for each of the top ten topics over time.

Table 2: Observations from Newspaper Coverage and the Aspects of Kennedy's Vision They Reflect

Observation	Aspect/s of Vision Reflected
Journalists frequently use language that evokes the ideals attached to space flight by the Kennedy administration's political vision.	The use of language associated with each ideal suggests that these ideals penetrated the frames through which journalists viewed space exploration.
Articles provide substantial technical detail.	The provision of technical detail aligns with the pro-science aspects of the vision and reflects the idea that scientific exploration itself was inspirational and worthy of public attention.
Articles place the astronauts at the center of space flight storytelling, providing details on their feelings, remarks and families.	The centering of astronauts, especially the portrayal of them as heroes, aligns with the ideal of space exploration as part of human destiny and as the next frontier adventure.
Journalists often quote scientists to explain why an endeavor is important or interesting.	The authority granted to scientists and technocrats aligns with the belief that government technocracy is a force for good and that scientific expertise is worthy of public respect and trust.
Articles often position space achievements within the space race.	The positioning of space achievements within a race with the Soviet Union indicates acceptance of the lunar race as the relevant yardstick for comparing the progress of the Soviet and U.S. space programs and reflects the ideal of gaining national prestige vis-à-vis the Soviet Union.
Articles accept setbacks and failures with little complaint.	The acceptance of such difficulties aligns with the view of NASA activities as efforts towards a grand goal rather than spending whose worth is in its efficiency.
Articles accept enormous budgets with little complaint.	The acceptance of such spending aligns with the view of NASA activities as efforts towards a grand goal rather than spending whose worth is in its efficiency.

successful lunar landing. It does not follow from this that the ideals of the Moonshot vision were inherently more sustainable or "better" than those of the Cassa vision. We hypothesize that one source of the difference in longevity is the shape of the underlying goals. The Moonshot pursued a specific target with a clear timeframe and publicly legible test of success, whereas the Cassa's goals were abstract and open-ended, with no comparable point at which the vision could be concluded rather than exhausted. Visions may be harder to sustain when they are asked to last without success in sight. Tellingly, the honeymoon period for the Cassa vision and the entire duration of the Moonshot policy were both about ten years: we do not know how the

New Frontier vision would have fared beyond this.

The role of the Moonshot vision in shaping media discourse is consistent with it having helped sustain the policy - but consistency is not proof. A few things push in the other direction. First, the Moonshot sustained the personal backing of powerful political figures, especially Lyndon B Johnson who was president for the vast majority of the project. Second, polling data on support for Apollo during the sixties in particular is less rosy than Newswires coverage might suggest (Launius, 2017, p.1224). There is more to investigate before we understand whether or in what way the Moonshot vision helped sustain the project.

We conclude the following from the Moonshots case study. First, the Moonshot shows the extent to which political projects played a role in the contrasting industrial policy decision making of different politicians, advisors and bureaucrats. Second, the Moonshot case study shows that it is possible for an industrial policy vision to endure through real cost and real tragedy — the Apollo 1 fire among them — without large swathes of the media contesting its legitimacy. Third, the longevity of the Moonshot vision compared to the Cassa's, points to the choice of goal as a consequential part of vision design: as important, perhaps, to the Moonshot's success as its aspirations to human destiny, adventure, and national prestige.

5 Conclusion

This paper has argued that politics plays a central role in which industrial policies are chosen, in how the ideals and values attached to a policy create the discursive frame within which the policy is understood and evaluated, and in how the exhaustion of those ideals leaves a policy without terms on which it can be defended.

We show that two significant twentieth-century industrial policies — the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno and the Moonshot — originated in broader political projects: the DC's pursuit of national integration and democratic consolidation, and Kennedy's New Frontier. When such projects are pursued through state-led intervention in the economy, they generate a distinctive object we term industrial policy vision: a publicly articulated, transformational objective bound to a set of ideals.

Tracing both policies through decades of newspaper coverage, we found that industrial policy vision shaped not only what was chosen but how it was judged: public debate proceeded largely on the terms the vision set, granting each policy tolerance for setbacks and expense that a narrow cost-benefit frame would not have supplied. The two cases diverged in the end — the Moonshot's bounded vision was redeemed on schedule, while the Cassa's open-ended vision was worn down by accumulated failure until the policy survived only on inertia.

Our findings complicate how we understand the role of politics in industrial policy. Much of what we know about effective industrial policy recommends insulating it from politics: autonomous agencies, rules-based selection, independent evaluation. That advice is well founded, but it also creates a central tension. By design, industrial policy is discretionary: it prioritizes some activities, some places and some people. This implies that there is a choice to make about the *objective* of an industrial policy. Political projects, and the

industrial policy visions they produce, supply these objectives endogenously. In doing so they do two things: they legitimate the policy, and they set the discursive frame within which it is evaluated for as long as the vision holds. Delegation therefore has limits. As Besley et al. (2022) observe, bureaucrats derive their legitimacy from politicians, who alone are directly accountable to citizens. An independent agency can be given an objective to pursue; it cannot be given the job of choosing one. Relatedly, a mission can be specified and assigned, but the mission framework treats political support as a criterion for selecting missions, an input assumed to be available, and leaves open where it comes from and how it endures. Our cases suggest an answer: legitimacy is not gathered around a well-designed objective; it is inherited from the political project that produced it, and it lasts only as long as the vision holds.

Our concept of industrial policy vision opens questions we leave to future work. Does the framework extend beyond our two cases? How does industrial policy vision interact with formal institutions — electoral cycles, coalition structures, bureaucratic autonomy — in determining policy survival? And, finally, will contemporary industrial policies, many of them adopted without a publicly articulated industrial policy vision, prove as fragile as the framework predicts?

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A Natural Language Processing Pipeline

This appendix provides a more detailed description of the NLP pipeline used in the main text. The pipeline converts the *La Stampa* and Newswires corpora into quantitative measures of thematic structure, evaluative tone, and the relationship between the two. Although developed for this study, the workflow is broadly applicable to dated textual corpora, including newspaper archives, parliamentary debates, policy documents, party publications, and other collections in which the public representation of a policy, institution, political actor, or other target entity evolves over time.

The pipeline has four connected components. First, documents are standardized so that downstream measurement is driven by substantive content rather than by archival noise. Second, topic modelling is used to identify the main thematic domains of the corpus without imposing a prior coding scheme. Third, sentiment analysis is used to measure evaluative stance toward the target entity. Fourth, topic assignments and sentiment scores are combined to measure topic-level sentiment and to construct a representative reading sample for qualitative analysis. Figure 9 summarizes the full workflow.

A.1 Text Standardization and Unit of Analysis

The first stage prepares the raw corpus for systematic analysis. Long-run archival texts often contain optical character recognition errors, inconsistent formatting, irregular paragraph breaks, duplicated fragments, merged neighboring texts, and uncertain boundaries between titles, subtitles, captions, and body text. These artifacts can distort both topic models and sentiment measures because they introduce variation that reflects digitization practices rather than the language of the documents themselves.

To reduce this source of measurement error, each document is passed through an LLM-assisted standardization step. The model is instructed to preserve the original language and substantive content while imposing a consistent structural format, correcting common OCR errors, removing non-substantive formatting noise, and regularizing paragraph boundaries. The instruction explicitly prohibits translation, paraphrase, substantive rewriting, or interpretive summarization. The purpose of this stage is not to improve the prose, but to make the corpus analytically comparable across documents and periods.

After standardization, the paragraph is used as the primary unit of NLP analysis. This choice is important. Full documents, especially journalistic or parliamentary texts, often cover multiple subjects and may contain both supportive and critical passages. Assigning a single topic or sentiment score to an entire document would obscure this internal heterogeneity. Paragraph-level analysis allows the pipeline to detect multiple themes within a single document and to attach evaluative tone to the specific passages in which it appears. Documents remain important as higher-level units for aggregation and qualitative sampling, but the core measurements are made at the paragraph level.

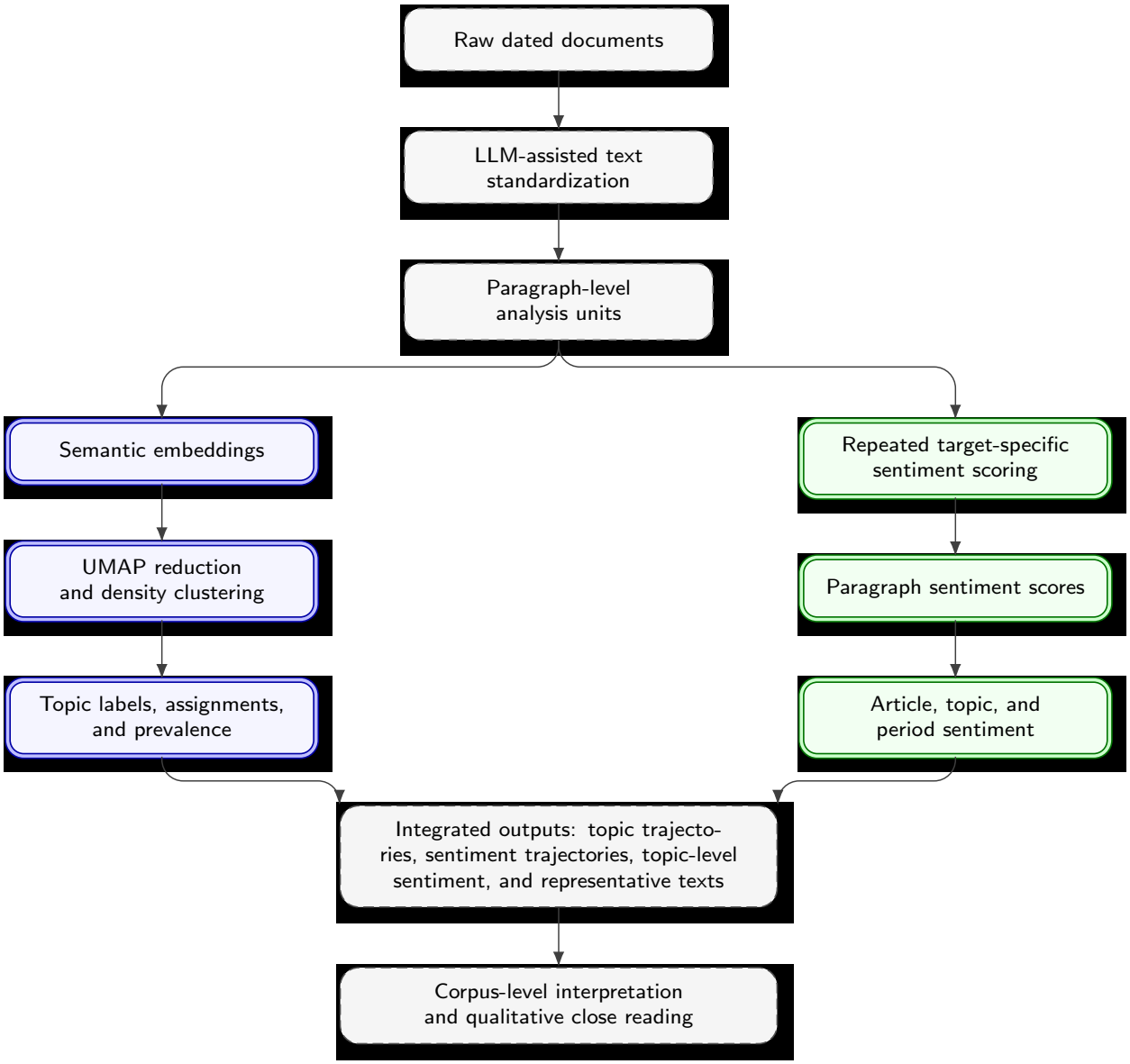

Figure 9: Overview of the NLP pipeline. The topic and sentiment branches are estimated at the paragraph level and then recombined for temporal, thematic, and qualitative analysis.

A.2 Topic Modelling

Topic modelling is used to recover the main thematic structure of the corpus. The analysis uses BERTopic (Grootendorst, 2022), a topic modelling approach that combines sentence embeddings, dimensionality reduction, density-based clustering, and class-based term weighting. The method is appropriate for this setting because the relevant categories are not assumed to be known in advance. Rather than forcing texts into researcher-defined bins, the model identifies areas of semantic density in the corpus and treats these as inductively recovered topics.

The procedure has three main stages. First, each paragraph in the corpus is converted into a high-dimensional semantic representation using a publicly available text embedding model[14], which maps textual content into a continuous vector space in which semantically similar paragraphs are geometrically proximate. Second, the

[14]Specifically, we use the `distiluse-base-multilingual-cased-v1` model from the Sentence-Transformers library, available through Hugging Face.

resulting embedding space—which has several hundred dimensions—is reduced to five components using Uniform Manifold Approximation and Projection (UMAP) (McInnes et al., 2020), a nonlinear dimensionality reduction technique that preserves the local topological structure of the original space while rendering it computationally tractable for clustering. Third, the reduced embeddings are grouped into coherent thematic clusters through density-based clustering, allowing topics to emerge inductively from the data rather than being imposed ex ante through a predetermined coding scheme. The resulting topics represent areas of semantic density in the embedding space: groups of paragraphs that share a common vocabulary and conceptual register, as identified by the model, rather than by the researcher's prior expectations.

The resulting topics are interpreted as semantic clusters: groups of paragraphs that share a common vocabulary, conceptual register, and empirical focus. Since the model operates at the paragraph level, a single document may contribute to multiple topics. This is substantively desirable in corpora where documents often move between institutional background, policy design, implementation problems, political conflict, and evaluation. The approach therefore preserves thematic complexity while still producing tractable aggregate measures of topic prevalence over time.

A.3 Target-Specific Sentiment Analysis

Sentiment analysis measures evaluative stance toward the target entity rather than generic emotional valence. This distinction is central. A passage can contain negative language because it describes a crisis, scandal, or social problem, but the relevant question is whether the passage evaluates the target policy or institution negatively, positively, or neutrally. Conversely, a passage written in an urgent or alarming register may still support the target if it presents intervention as necessary, legitimate, or effective. Generic dictionary-based sentiment scores are poorly suited to this task because they usually classify words as positive or negative without identifying the object of evaluation.

The pipeline therefore uses LLM-based target-specific sentiment scoring. In the implementation used here, sentiment is estimated with `Claude Sonnet 4.6` via the Anthropic API. Each paragraph is submitted with an instruction asking the model to evaluate the stance of the passage toward the specified target entity. The model returns a continuous score on a scale from -1 to $+1$, where -1 indicates strongly critical or negative coverage, 0 indicates neutral, descriptive, mixed, or non-evaluative coverage, and $+1$ indicates strongly supportive or positive coverage.

To reduce stochastic variation, each paragraph is scored ten times using the same target-specific instruction, and the paragraph sentiment score is defined as the average across the ten runs:

$$\bar{s}_{ip} = \frac{1}{R} \sum_{r=1}^{R} s_{ipr}, \qquad R = 10,$$

where s_{ipr} is the sentiment score assigned to paragraph p in document i on run r. Averaging repeated passes reduces the influence of idiosyncratic single-run judgments and makes the resulting sentiment series more stable (Le Mens and Gallego, 2025). Paragraph-level scores can then be aggregated to the document level, the

year or period level, and the topic level.

The main advantage of this approach is evaluative specificity. The model is not asked whether a paragraph sounds happy or sad, optimistic or pessimistic, but whether it supports, criticizes, legitimates, contests, or neutrally describes the target entity. This makes the score a closer proxy for public stance toward the object of analysis than a conventional valence measure.

A.4 Topic-Level Sentiment

Topic modelling and sentiment analysis answer different questions. Topic modelling identifies what the corpus is about; sentiment analysis identifies how the target is evaluated. The topic-level sentiment step combines the two. It asks whether different thematic domains carry different evaluative tones and whether changes in aggregate sentiment over time reflect changing evaluations within topics, changes in the composition of topics, or both. The topic-level sentiment analysis is constructed by combining the paragraph-level outputs from the two branches of the pipeline, as shown in Figure 10. Each paragraph receives a topic assignment from the topic model and a sentiment score from the sentiment model. The sentiment scores are then grouped by assigned topic and by year or period. This disaggregation is analytically important. An aggregate change in sentiment may occur because the same topics become more negative or positive over time, because topics with different baseline sentiment become more or less prevalent, or because both processes occur simultaneously. Evaluating sentiment separately by topic allows the analysis to see whether evaluative change is broad-based or concentrated in particular thematic domains.

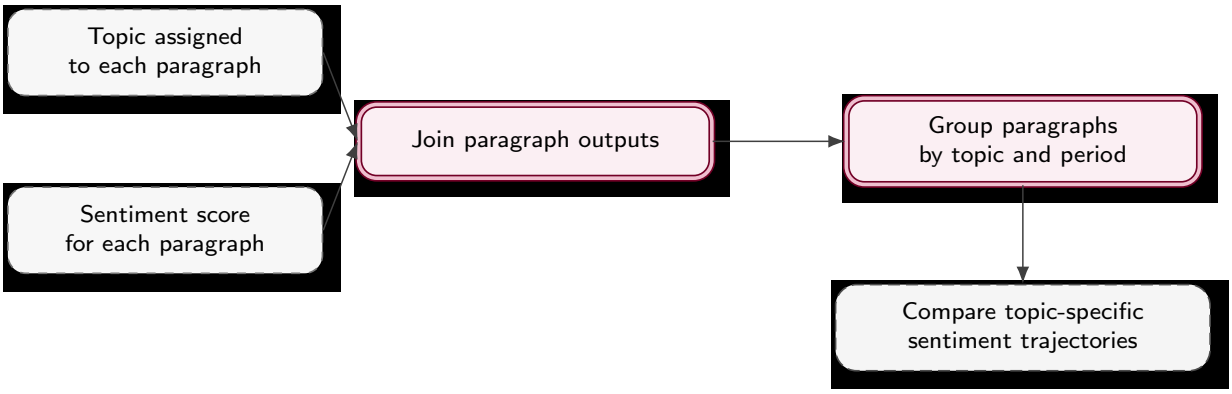

Figure 10: Construction of topic-level sentiment. Paragraphs are first assigned to topics and scored for sentiment; sentiment is then summarized within each topic-period subset.

A.5 Constructing a Representative Reading Sample

The NLP pipeline is also used to construct a qualitative reading sample. The aim is not to replace close reading, but to discipline it. Instead of selecting documents because they are already familiar, rhetorically vivid, or consistent with prior expectations, the procedure selects documents that are representative of specific topic-period cells.

The sampling rule operates as follows. For each retained topic k and each time period t, the procedure iden-

tifies all documents containing at least one paragraph whose assignment probability to topic k exceeds a predefined minimum threshold. Within each topic-period cell, documents are ranked by the highest paragraph-level assignment probability for that topic. The selected documents are those with the strongest topic membership in that cell. This produces a reading sample composed of prototypical texts for each thematic and temporal combination.

This procedure reduces confirmation bias and ensures coverage across the full thematic and temporal structure of the corpus. It also preserves the division of labor between methods. The NLP stage identifies broad patterns and representative texts; the qualitative stage reconstructs the rhetorical strategies, argumentative structures, and contextual meanings that produced those patterns.

A.6 Role of the Pipeline in the Overall Analytical Framework

The pipeline is best understood as a methodological bridge between large-scale textual measurement and interpretive discourse analysis. Topic modelling provides a map of the thematic terrain. Sentiment analysis measures the evaluative stance attached to the target entity. Topic-level sentiment shows how thematic and evaluative change interact. Representative sampling then links the corpus-level patterns back to individual documents that can be read closely.

The workflow supports four forms of inference. First, it identifies the dominant themes through which the target entity is discussed. Second, it tracks how those themes change over time. Third, it measures whether public evaluation becomes more supportive, neutral, or critical. Fourth, it distinguishes compositional change from within-topic evaluative change. These outputs do not by themselves explain the historical or political mechanisms behind the observed patterns. Rather, they provide a structured evidentiary map that guides the qualitative analysis and allows qualitative claims to be situated against the distributional properties of the full corpus.

The methodological choices in the pipeline follow from this purpose. LLM-assisted standardization addresses archival noise while preserving original text. Paragraph-level measurement preserves within-document heterogeneity. BERTopic allows inductive topic discovery without a fixed coding scheme. Target-specific LLM sentiment captures evaluative stance toward the object of analysis better than generic valence dictionaries. Repeated sentiment scoring reduces stochastic noise. Topic-level aggregation reveals whether sentiment change is driven by changing issue composition or by changing evaluations within the same issue areas. Finally, representative sampling makes close reading systematic rather than anecdotal.

Together, these components produce a self-contained analytical framework for studying the evolution of public discourse over time. The resulting evidence base is quantitative enough to identify broad corpus-level patterns and qualitative enough to preserve the interpretive depth required for historical and political analysis.

B Cassa Close Reading

This appendix presents the full qualitative analysis of *La Stampa*'s coverage of the Cassa and provides the evidentiary basis for the claims developed in Section 3.3 of the main text. The subsections mirror the structure of the main text, with each examining a distinct phase of the newspaper's coverage: 1950–1959, 1960–1971, and 1972–1984.

B.1 The Founding Vision: Nation-Building as Civilizational Mission (1950–1959)

The Cassa per il Mezzogiorno was never presented as a merely technical instrument of regional investment. In its first decade, it was embedded within a dense and mutually reinforcing architecture of legitimation that framed Southern development as, simultaneously, a moral obligation, a nation-building imperative, a strategic necessity in the Cold War, and a project certified by technocratic expertise. Far from being a contested redistribution mechanism, the Cassa was portrayed as the institutional embodiment of Italy's unfinished unification and democratic maturation.

La Stampa's coverage during the 1950s articulated this founding vision along three interlocking dimensions. First, Southern underdevelopment was cast as a humanitarian and civilizational emergency—an exclusion from "civil society" demanding redemptive integration. Second, development was securitized within the anti-communist framework of the Cold War, transforming investment into democratic self-defense and narrowing the legitimacy of dissent. Third, the policy was shielded from partisan critique through appeals to technocratic rationality and international validation, particularly via World Bank endorsement and the language of coordinated planning and measurable performance.

Together, these frames stabilized the developmental project during its formative phase. Criticism was largely internal and reformist—focused on scale, coordination, or administrative capacity—rather than oppositional. The result was a founding narrative in which modernization appeared not as a political choice among alternatives, but as a national mission combining moral urgency, strategic necessity, and economic rationality.

B.1.1 Moral-civilizational obligation and nation building

First and foremost, the most emotionally powerful frame portrayed the South as structurally excluded from "civil society," implicitly measured against the socio-economic baseline and civic norms of the industrial North. A 1953 investigation deployed stark statistics—one hospital for 180,000 inhabitants in the province of Matera, illiteracy rates of 34–48 percent in the Mezzogiorno compared to 2–12 percent in the North—to construct Southern underdevelopment as a humanitarian emergency rather than a regional imbalance (Article_1145, 1953). Entire sectors of the population were described as having remained "excluded from civil society," positioned outside the effective boundaries of democratic life. The Southern Question was consequently framed as Italy's "greatest social scourge," one that had to be "resolutely tackled" (Article_71, 1954). Within this early 1950s framework, development was cast less as economic investment than as redemptive integration. The Mezzogiorno was depicted as the "mission land of Italian democracy," (Article_1145, 1953) a

formulation that fused moral urgency with national responsibility. The objective was not merely to increase output or stimulate growth, but to incorporate marginalized populations into civic modernity—to transform subjects of poverty into participants in democratic society. The proposed remedy emphasized coordinated social action and sustained public commitment rather than market correction alone.

This narrative dovetailed with a parallel rhetorical framework mobilized to justify the policy: nation-building and the notion of the "two Italies." In this vein, a 1953 article titled The Misery of the South proclaimed that "the dramatic reality of the 'two Italies' is reflected in the instability of our political life, no less than in the inadequacies of our 'homeless' civil life" (Article_1145, 1953). Just two years later, another article reported favorably on The Economist, which argued that "more has been done in Southern Italy over the last five years than in the entire period since the country's unification, but so much remains to be done that the Italian people themselves do not realize what has been achieved. Italy is still today 'two nations,' in the sense in which Disraeli used this phrase. However, given a period of stable government that allows the promises contained in the current plans to be kept, Italy could truly become a united nation for the first time in its history" (Article_777, 1955). In this framing, the Southern Question appeared as the unfinished business of the Risorgimento, and Southern policy was positioned as the culmination of a century-long national project—rendering opposition tantamount to rejecting Italian unity itself. This sentiment was echoed by then Minister of Finance Ezio Vanoni, who, commenting on the Cassa policy, likened citizens' social commitment to helping the South to "giving one's life for the fatherland," casting development as a national struggle comparable to war. As he put it, "It must no longer happen that citizens who are ready to give their lives for their country are unable to persevere in their daily commitments, when those commitments are aimed at a higher level of social life" (Article_71, 1954).

Concurrently, early critiques of the policy—consistent with the generally negative sentiment detected in the NLP analysis—focused less on principled opposition than on perceived insufficiency relative to the scale of the challenge. In a 1951 article titled "Tackling the Mountain", Luigi Sturzo, a founding figure of Italian Christian democracy (Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, nd)[15], criticized the initial operation of the Cassa for relying on fragmented, small-scale interventions rather than confronting the structural magnitude of Southern underdevelopment (Article_109, 1951). The metaphor of the mountain framed the Southern Question not as a localized imbalance but as a massive, obstructive terrain requiring coordinated ascent. Sturzo called for an organic national modernization strategy integrating forestry, agriculture, hydraulic systems, and territorial reorganization into a single developmental design. Sturzo, himself a Southerner, further urged a reorganization of Southern territory "based on industrial utility criteria," calling for efforts to "breathe new life into the mountains now that they have been devastated, abandoned and are dying." The metaphor of the mountain to be "tackled" depicts the South as territorially inert: physically present but economically lifeless, and suspended outside productive modernity. Within this framework, the Southern territory appears as underutilized and misaligned with modern economic logic, requiring coordinated state intervention to render it productive,

[15] And who would later coin the term 'cattedrali nel deserto' to criticise large state-funded industrial projects built in unsuitable locations.

legible, and integrated into the national system.

A 1952 article similarly attributed the uneven pace of Southern development not to flaws in policy design, but to asymmetric institutional capacity (Article_1064, 1952). Despite proclamations of intensified commitment to the Mezzogiorno, statistical data showed that 55 percent of public works labor days were still concentrated in the North, with only 45 percent occurring in Southern regions. Yet this imbalance was presented as administratively explicable rather than politically problematic. The majority of public works funding continued to flow through ministerial departments whose peripheral offices were more numerous and operationally efficient in the North. Local authorities in the Centre-North were described as more resourceful and financially capable, while the Southern administrative apparatus remained comparatively underdeveloped. Even the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno was characterized as having "not yet fully opened its wings," suggesting an institution still in its formative stage rather than structurally ineffective. Delays were thus reframed as transitional growing pains within an otherwise sound modernization project. The disparity between North and South was attributed to differences in bureaucratic readiness and territorial organization rather than to strategic misallocation or flawed developmental logic. In this early phase, criticism functioned to stabilize rather than destabilize the policy framework: the problem lay in execution capacity, not in the premises of state-led modernization itself.

By the end of the decade, Manlio Rossi-Doria articulated a more refined version of the same diagnosis (Article_730, 1959). Acknowledging that land reclamation and major irrigation works were largely complete and that the infrastructural foundations of agrarian modernization had been laid, he nevertheless observed that transformation had stalled. The obstacle was no longer insufficient public works, but financial and organizational weakness within local consortia and private actors. The state had constructed reservoirs, canals, and distribution networks; yet the institutional and managerial capacity required to convert infrastructure into sustained productivity remained inadequate. Rossi-Doria did not challenge the modernization strategy itself. On the contrary, he called for more rigorous governmental coordination and the appointment of qualified administrators in place of politically weak or locally entangled figures.

B.1.2 Anti-communist mobilization

Cold War anti-communism supplied a powerful additional layer of legitimation, reframing Southern development as democratic self-defense as well as an electoral instrument. A 1954 rally in Naples—organized by Christian Democratic leadership "for the political and organizational development of depressed areas" explicitly in response to a left-wing offensive—was staged as a choreographed demonstration of state achievement (Article_827, 1954). Convoys, music, flags, and placards catalogued what each locality had received since 1943: bridges, aqueducts, roads, schools, public housing, land assignments, hospitals, and clinics. While acknowledging that the Southern Question remained unresolved, the article presented this inventory as an "impressive panorama," a balance sheet of accomplishments "that would make any government proud." Development thus became performative: infrastructure was displayed as proof of democratic competence, transforming

public works into visible counters in a political contest.

Parallel reporting cast communist strategy as parasitic upon hardship. During what was described as the "most delicate" phase of reform implementation, communists were portrayed as deliberately exploiting or inflaming local distrust, sustaining "residual hopes of revanche" among defenders of the old agrarian order while politicizing inevitable transitional discontent (Article_949, 1954). Within this frame, opposition did not represent alternative policy visions but strategic sabotage aimed at derailing modernization. Social unrest became suspect by definition, and critique risked alignment with destabilization.

By the later 1950s, this securitized logic intensified. In 1957, speaking at a Christian Democratic assembly on the development of Southern regions, party leader Amintore Fanfani framed the upcoming electoral campaign in explicitly geopolitical terms. Warning that "communism hopes to open power to itself, and the Mediterranean to Russia," he urged Italian voters to "thwart communist hopes" and reaffirm their support for the Christian Democratic project (Article_677, 1957). Within this political framing, Southern development was presented not simply as a program of economic modernization but as part of a broader struggle to defend democratic stability and Italy's Western alignment. By linking the continuation of meridionalist policies to the need for a strong electoral mandate against the communist threat, the discourse effectively recast development policy as a strategic instrument in the Cold War political confrontation. In this logic, reducing poverty and unemployment in the South was not only a social objective but also a means of weakening the political conditions in which communism could expand. Opposition to developmental policy could therefore be framed not merely as economically misguided but as geopolitically irresponsible.

Taken together, anti-communist mobilization reshaped the developmental narrative in two decisive ways. First, it fused social policy with national security, casting Southern investment as a defensive instrument in the Cold War. Second, it narrowed the space of legitimate dissent by associating critique with destabilization. Development ceased to be merely a program of integration; it became a test of democratic loyalty. In this configuration, modernization acquired not only economic and humanitarian significance but strategic urgency, further consolidating the political authority of the Cassa and embedding Southern policy within the ideological architecture of the postwar Atlantic order.

B.1.3 Technocratic rationality and external validation

Lastly, from the very beginning, the Cassa's legitimacy was buttressed by international expert endorsement. Coverage of the first World Bank loan framed the intervention as "purely economic and not political" (Article_463, 1951), offering external certification of the program's financial soundness. This logic was further reinforced with the Bank's subsequent $70 million loan in 1955, presented as proof that "independent international experts" judged Southern projects to be profitable investments (Article_139, 1955). La Stampa emphasized that project selection followed strictly financial criteria—based on detailed assessments of costs and prospective revenues—rather than political considerations, noting that financing decisions rested on investigations into productive developments capable of ensuring repayment. The newspaper highlighted that the Mezzogiorno

projects had been examined for months by a dedicated World Bank mission and evaluated against alternative international investments. The resulting loan was thus portrayed as confirmation that Italy's Southern development programs were promising not only "from a social or political point of view, but also from a purely economic one"—a conclusion the paper described as "comforting."

This move amounted to a strategic depoliticization through expertise. By foregrounding external validation and financial criteria, the Cassa was reframed not as a redistributive choice shaped by national politics, but as an economically rational necessity certified by neutral international authority. In a Cold War environment where accusations of patronage or ideological bias carried weight, the imprimatur of the World Bank insulated Southern policy from charges of partisanship and embedded it within a global architecture of development finance.

This appeal to external expertise was complemented by a discursive boundary-making that opposed technocratic rationality to partisan interference. Coverage consistently framed the Cassa as a centralized, sectorally coordinated instrument of development, while portraying alternative approaches—particularly locally targeted special laws—as electorally motivated, fragmented, and corrosive of coherent planning (Article_859, 1955). Development, readers were told, required integrated priorities across urban policy, hydraulic infrastructure, forestry, and agrarian reform rather than piecemeal concessions to individual municipalities. Fragmentation was implicitly associated with patronage, local opportunism, and even ideological agitation, whereas centralized coordination was equated with efficiency, foresight, and democratic responsibility.

Within this framework, political contestation itself was subtly recoded as a source of inefficiency. Local notables and partisan actors were depicted as exploiting Southern hardship for short-term advantage, thereby obstructing systematic modernization. At the same time, developmental progress was increasingly represented through technocratic performance indicators—housing construction, electrification rates, vehicle ownership, industrial output—transforming Southern uplift into a question of measurable outputs rather than distributive justice (Article_677, 1957). Quantification displaced moral debate. By aligning international expert validation with domestic performance metrics, coverage recast the Cassa as an objective economic necessity and relegated criticism to the realm of parochialism or political opportunism.

Taken together, external validation and technocratic performance metrics functioned to reconfigure the terms of debate. Southern development was framed as a matter of financial soundness, coordinated planning, and measurable outcomes, while dissent risked appearing ideological or parochial. The Cassa thus emerged not simply as a policy instrument, but as an embodiment of rational modernization—its authority grounded simultaneously in international expertise and domestic managerial discipline.

B.2 From Integration to Instrumentalization: Defensive Modernization and Emerging Strain (1960-1971)

If the 1950s were characterized by a founding narrative that fused moral obligation, national unification, anti-communist urgency and technocratic rationality into a coherent vision of redemptive modernization, the 1960s

marked a more complex and defensive phase. The basic legitimacy of the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno remained intact, but the terms of justification began to shift. As the first signs of uneven implementation and limited convergence emerged, the discourse surrounding Southern development adapted in two distinct yet complementary ways.

On the one hand, legitimation became increasingly quantitative. Statistical indicators, growth rates, and multiplier effects were mobilized to demonstrate that Southern investment was economically rational and nationally beneficial. Development was defended less as civic integration and more as measurable performance. On the other hand, where infrastructural expansion failed to produce the expected social transformation, explanatory responsibility gradually migrated from policy design to the social characteristics of Southern populations. Underdevelopment was reframed not only as temporal lag but as cultural inertia, psychological misalignment, and resistance to modern norms.

Simultaneously, modernization paternalism intensified. The industrial North and the developmental state were cast ever more explicitly as engines and tutors of transformation, while the South was portrayed as a reservoir of labor and potential requiring supervision, coordination, and cultural adaptation. As implementation failures in water infrastructure and early corruption cases became visible by the late 1960s, cracks began to appear in the technocratic self-confidence of the earlier period. Yet rather than collapsing the modernization narrative outright, these tensions produced new rhetorical adjustments: triumphalist quantification, civilizational diagnosis, partnership doctrine, and increasingly conditional support.

This second phase thus reveals a crucial transformation. Development ceased to be framed primarily as a unifying national mission and increasingly appeared as an asymmetrical process of guided adaptation—one that justified itself through data, external capital, and pedagogical intervention, even as practical shortcomings and institutional vulnerabilities began to surface.

B.2.1 Data-Driven Triumphalism and Internal Economic Justification

By the early 1960s, technocratic legitimation increasingly assumed the form of quantitative triumphalism. Coverage reassured Northern readers that investment in the Mezzogiorno was neither wasteful nor redistributive, but economically rational and nationally advantageous. A 1962 article explicitly addressed the recurring concern that funds allocated to the South were being "thrown away," citing newly compiled data from the Cassa's research center to demonstrate that Southern development stimulated both consumption and investment across the national economy (Article_685, 1962). Readers were assured that "it is certain that the Mezzogiorno is developing," and that the North benefited not only in terms of political and social stability, but also "on the economic plane." Redistribution was reframed as multiplier effect.

Official speeches reported in the mid-1960s reinforced this narrative. Rising income growth rates and expanding industrial output were presented as empirical proof that democratic planning was delivering measurable success (Article_219, 1963; Article_120, 1965). Development became a statistical accomplishment. Performance indicators displaced earlier humanitarian rhetoric, and Southern policy was defended less as moral

obligation than as demonstrable return on investment.

Simultaneously, this data-driven optimism was accompanied by an increasingly instrumental portrayal of the South within the national economy. Ministers emphasized that the Mezzogiorno was "the only area where labor is still available," recasting demographic imbalance as productive opportunity while insisting that industrial settlement proceed swiftly but under centralized coordination (Article_219, 1963). Infrastructure priorities were justified primarily through their contribution to national output—roads were valued for their capacity to move agricultural goods toward Northern and European markets, even when this entailed deprioritizing hospitals or schools (Article_287, 1964). Foreign investors were cited approvingly for recognizing the advantages of Southern labor availability, reinforcing the image of the region as a reservoir of workforce potential awaiting activation (Article_1037, 1966).

In this emerging frame, development was increasingly validated through its contribution to aggregate national productivity rather than its impact on local welfare. The Mezzogiorno appeared less as a site of social redress and more as a functional component of a broader economic system—its legitimacy grounded in measurable growth, export capacity, and labor mobilization. Quantification thus did more than celebrate success: it subtly redefined the purpose of Southern policy, aligning it more closely with national economic performance than with the earlier rhetoric of civic integration.

B.2.2 From backwardness to resistance: culturalization of development failure

As the first implementation failures of the policy became visible, the technocratic modernization narrative was increasingly supplemented by a cultural explanation of underdevelopment. Where infrastructure did not produce the anticipated social transformation, coverage turned to the presumed incompatibility of Southern society with modern norms. In these cases, developmental shortcomings were recoded not as administrative miscalculation or strategic limits, but as symptoms of entrenched mentality and custom. This rhetorical shift was frequently marked by paternalistic—and at times openly colonial—language toward Southern populations.

A 1962 report from Partinico (a municipality in Sicily) provides a particularly stark example (Article_210, 1962). Although aqueducts, roads, and sanitation projects were acknowledged as tangible achievements, the article emphasized that modernization had failed to alter local "customs," describing a territory still governed by violence, mafia intimidation, and what the correspondent termed "savage customs". The landscape was introduced through a revealing colonial trope: a flowering Sicilian plain portrayed as "a terrestrial paradise inhabited by primitive men." The contrast between environmental abundance and social brutality displaced developmental failure from policy design to civilizational deficiency. Resistance to the construction of a "providential" dam on the Jato river—rooted in disputes over expropriation, market competition, and criminal coercion—was narrated less as rational economic conflict than as collective irrationality, an insurrection against progress itself. Modernization appeared thwarted not by conflicting interests within reform structures, but by a society depicted as culturally incapable of recognizing or sustaining its own advancement.

By the late 1960s this paternalistic register hardened into an explicitly civilizational diagnosis. Sardinia, for instance, was likened to a "pastoral Vietnam," its inhabitants depicted as socially rigid and ill-suited to the behavioral norms demanded by modern society (Article_1150, 1967). Development discourse increasingly adopted psychological and temporal language: Southern societies were described as agriculturally rooted, mentally unprepared, and culturally misaligned with industrial time.

The logic underpinning this framing emerges with particular clarity in a 1969 article on the industrialization of Basilicata (Article_1047). While ostensibly celebrating the rapid expansion of the Basento Valley industrial consortium and the petrochemical complex made possible by natural gas extraction, the text structures development as a confrontation between modern industry and an archaic social world belonging to a "a community cut off for centuries from the national and European context". Industrial growth is narrated through statistics, infrastructure, and technological achievement ("Eleven companies (3,200 employees) located in the municipalities of Salandra, Pisticci and Ferrandina; another 25 (with 2,200 employees) in other municipalities"), yet these markers of progress are repeatedly juxtaposed with detailed descriptions of persistent folk practices, superstition, and rural medical rituals. The coexistence of synthetic fibre plants, consumer culture, and cinemas screening modern films alongside the continued presence of local healers and women curing illness through sacrificial practices ("...women try to cure meningitis, unbeknownst to the family doctor and their integrated son, by killing a hen and draining its warm blood onto the patient's head") produces a stark temporal contrast in which segments of the population appear suspended outside modern historical time.

Progress thus assumes not merely an economic but an anthropological dimension: although industrial employment and infrastructure signal decisive change, the article insists that the "ancient humus" of tradition has not yet been fully uprooted. Development is consequently framed less as regional investment than as cultural transformation, requiring the gradual dissolution of inherited mentalities deemed incompatible with industrial civilization. Basilicata appears not simply underdeveloped but insufficiently modernized at the level of consciousness itself, legitimizing intervention as a process of guided adaptation rather than economic assistance alone. In this formulation, the Cassa's industrial projects function simultaneously as engines of growth and instruments of social normalization, tasked with aligning Southern populations with the temporal discipline, rationality, and cultural dispositions associated with modern industrial society.

Taken together, these narratives reveal a decisive discursive shift. What began as a modernization story structured around temporal lag progressively evolved into an anthropological diagnosis of cultural inadequacy and social resistance. As infrastructural investment failed to produce automatic convergence, explanatory responsibility migrated from institutions to populations themselves. Development was no longer framed primarily as a problem of resources or coordination, but as a struggle over mentality, behavior, and readiness for modernity—recasting regional inequality within a language strikingly reminiscent of internal colonial governance.

B.2.3 Modernization paternalism: the North as developmental engine

In concomitance with this depiction of Southern cultural incompatibility with industrial development, coverage in the 1960s increasingly framed underdevelopment through a modernization lens that positioned the industrial North—and the developmental state—as indispensable engines of transformation. A 1966 report reaffirmed the persistence of the "two Italies," arguing that despite impressive recent investments the Mezzogiorno remained structurally displaced in time, having reached levels of education, income, and infrastructure that the Centre-North had already reached in 1930 (Article_1037, 1966). Echoing the reporting cited in the previous section, the correspondent's journey across Southern regions constructs development as a landscape of temporal disjunction: electronic installations for international energy networks rise alongside self-built rural dwellings, donkeys circulate through markets filled with modern consumer goods, and newly transplanted industrial plants coexist with inadequate schools, transport shortages, and enduring agrarian power structures. Modernization appears fragmented and externally implanted—"the new is born where it can, as it can," often prematurely or belatedly—suggesting that industrial progress does not organically emerge from Southern society but is superimposed upon it.

This temporal asymmetry is made explicit through the article's metaphor of the Mezzogiorno as "prisoner of its own time zone," governed by a special "machine of time" characteristic of underdevelopment. The South struggles to escape the gravitational pull of this condition, while the necessary propulsive force is located first in the state and ultimately in the expansion of Northern industry. Public intervention is described as filling the "voids of underdeveloped society," yet operating according to rhythms slower than those of modern production, perpetually arriving too late to synchronize regional development. The decisive propulsive force is ultimately located in the expansion of Northern industry, which alone could "force the tempo" of transformation through the transfer of capital, entrepreneurial mentality, and organizational capacity. Development is thus conceptualized as an asymmetrical process of acceleration imposed from outside: industrial rationality flows Southward, while adaptation is expected from a society portrayed as agriculturally rooted and temporally misaligned with modern economic life. Within this framework, the North assumes the role not merely of economic partner but of developmental tutor, charged with breaking the South free from the structural inertia attributed to its own historical condition.

By the late 1960s, this logic was formalized into a partnership doctrine. Fifteen years of Cassa intervention were credited with breaking Southern "resignation and inertia" through industrialization and orderly agricultural development, yet durable transformation was said to depend on Northern private capital completing what state action had initiated (Article_1154, 1967). Development thus appeared as a staged process: public investment would prepare the terrain, while entrepreneurial initiative—largely identified with Northern industry—would consolidate growth, stabilize employment, and ultimately restore equilibrium between the two Italies. In this formulation, the developmental state assumed the role of initiator rather than final agent, tasked less with eliminating structural disparities than with rendering the South compatible with market-led modernization driven elsewhere.

This intermediary function is particularly visible in coverage of vocational training initiatives financed by the Cassa. Reporting on the inauguration of professional training centers emphasized the need to prepare Southern workers for integration into the industrial economies of Northern Italy, stressing rapid adaptation to technological change in order to avoid the severe "human costs" associated with unprepared modernization (Article_199, 1966). The South here appears primarily as a reservoir of labor requiring technical formation, while industrial competence, organizational discipline, and technological dynamism are implicitly located elsewhere. Migration itself becomes developmental pedagogy: Southern workers are to be trained, adjusted, and absorbed into advanced productive systems before modernization can eventually be reproduced locally.

Even when Southern agency was acknowledged, it remained framed as potential awaiting rational direction. A 1964 portrayal of Bari's commercial temperament praised local mercantile acuity and entrepreneurial instinct, yet suggested that such qualities required organizational discipline and modern industrial structures in order to achieve full economic expression (Article_287, 1964). Cultural traits were thus neither wholly deficient nor sufficient; modernization demanded their reordering within frameworks supplied externally by capital, technology, and managerial expertise.

By the early 1970s, this developmental paternalism extended decisively into the cultural sphere. Articles on Cassa-sponsored cultural centers described them as laboratories for preparing Southern youth to encounter the "new forms of civilization," activating dormant intellectual resources while overcoming inherited inertia (Article_434, 1971). A companion piece framed these institutions even more explicitly as pioneering outposts tasked with preparing the South for industrial civilization itself, replacing humanistic rhetoric with technological consciousness, managerial training, and familiarity with computers and modern production systems (Article_520, 1971). The metaphor of the centers as lunar landing modules carrying pioneers of a different culture underscored the perceived civilizational distance separating rural Southern society from industrial modernity. Without guided adaptation, modernization was warned, risked becoming a "cultural massacre."

Taken together, these narratives reveal how the partnership doctrine gradually expanded beyond economic coordination into a broader project of social and cultural transformation. State intervention, Northern capital, labor migration, vocational training, and cultural programming formed successive stages within a single developmental logic aimed at synchronizing the South with the temporal and behavioral norms of industrial society. The North consequently emerged not merely as investor or partner but as pedagogical reference point, while the South occupied the position of a society in transition—capable of progress yet requiring supervision, preparation, and guidance. Developmental policy thus increasingly assumed the character of internal tutelage, recasting national integration as a process through which modernization flowed asymmetrically from advanced regions toward populations deemed insufficiently prepared for industrial modernity.

B.2.4 Water Infrastructure as the First Site of Implementation Failure

By the early 1960s, the first visible fractures in the developmental consensus began to emerge—not at the level of rhetoric, but in the practical implementation of flagship public works. Among these, water infrastructure

became the most symbolically and materially consequential site of failure. Unlike industrial installations, whose benefits could be deferred or spatially concentrated, water supply was immediate, universal, and measurable. Its malfunction therefore exposed the gap between investment announcements and lived experience with unusual clarity.

Already in 1960, reports from Palermo noted that despite substantial expenditure, parts of the city remained effectively "without water," revealing a disjunction between allocated funds and functional delivery (Article_1083, 1960). Similar tensions surfaced mid-decade. A 1966 article described residents protesting irregular supply, rationing, and sudden interruptions in a newly constructed aqueduct—an infrastructure project overseen not by the municipality but directly by the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno (Article_781, 1966). Here responsibility could no longer be deflected onto local inefficiency: implementation failures were linked explicitly to centralized developmental administration.

The problem acquired broader resonance in 1967 reporting from Sardinia, where billions had reportedly been spent on public works, including large dams, yet both countryside and urban centers continued to suffer from water scarcity (Article_1150, 1967). The critique was no longer simply that projects were incomplete, but that they lacked discernment and coordination. Monumental hydraulic works failed to translate into everyday provision, exposing a structural weakness in planning logic itself. Water, intended as the emblem of modernization and agricultural transformation, instead became evidence of systemic inefficiency.

By the late 1960s, this emerging skepticism extended beyond isolated cases to a reassessment of overall developmental performance. Statistical reporting in 1967 indicated that the income gap between North and South had not narrowed but widened since the establishment of the Cassa, while industrial investment growth rates in the South lagged behind those of the North (Article_626, 1967). The technocratic optimism that had characterized earlier coverage began to appear less self-evident. If infrastructural expansion failed to deliver convergence, the modernization narrative required reconsideration.

The 1968 case of Bari makes this transition particularly visible (Article_818, 1968). The city was portrayed as genuinely transformed by industrial investment—including foreign capital—yet structurally constrained by chronic water shortages. Firms were compelled to construct costly desalination facilities in order to operate, effectively privatizing what should have been a public infrastructural function. The legitimacy criterion shifted accordingly: development was no longer assessed by the scale of announced projects or heavy-industry symbolism, but by functional infrastructure, induced effects, and efficient coordination. Criticism increasingly targeted misallocation of funds, weak consortium management, and past incentive abuses. Support for Southern policy did not disappear, but it became conditional upon rational planning and technical competence rather than developmental spectacle.

Taken together, these episodes mark a subtle but significant turning point. Waterworks—initially emblematic of state-led modernization—became the most tangible indicator of implementation failure. Because water provision cut across industrial, agricultural, and domestic spheres, its malfunction revealed the limits of both technocratic planning and partnership doctrine. The issue was no longer simply whether the South possessed

the appropriate mentality or whether Northern capital would complete the process, but whether the developmental apparatus itself could deliver basic infrastructural functionality. In this sense, the water question exposed the fragility of the modernization narrative at the precise moment when its civilizational rhetoric reached its peak.

B.2.5 First Corruption Cases

Alongside implementation failures in public works, the mid-1960s also saw the first visible instances of corruption directly associated with projects financed by the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno. These cases were limited in scale compared to later scandals, yet they marked an important symbolic shift: the developmental apparatus, previously portrayed as technocratic and corrective, began to appear vulnerable to manipulation from within.

A 1963 investigation detailed a complex fraud involving maintenance works on the "Acque Alte" drainage canal in the Pontine reclamation zone (Article_1177, 1963). The project, financed by the Cassa and executed through a consortium structure with multiple layers of subcontracting, became the site of collusion among contractors and site managers, culminating in charges of fraud exceeding 70 million lire. What is striking is not merely the financial irregularity, but the structural vulnerability it reveals. The Cassa appears here not as visionary planner or developmental catalyst, but as disburser of funds within a chain of intermediaries whose oversight proved porous. The scandal of the "mine premium"—a special compensation foreseen for the discovery of wartime remnants—suggests how incentive mechanisms embedded within public works contracts could be exploited for private gain.

A similar pattern emerged in 1965 with the indictment of five directors linked to a water consortium operating across seventy-three municipalities in Lazio (Article_238, 1965). Accusations of embezzlement, fraud, and misappropriation concerned funds amounting to billions of lire disbursed by the Cassa. Again, the issue was not ideological contestation of development policy but administrative malfunction within its execution. The very institutional architecture designed to coordinate inter-municipal infrastructure—consortia, delegated management, layered oversight—created opportunities for opacity and financial abuse.

These episodes did not yet overturn the broader modernization narrative. They were reported as scandals rather than systemic indictments. However, they introduced a new element into public discourse: developmental inefficiency was no longer attributable solely to cultural inertia in the South or to insufficient Northern capital, but could originate within the administrative machinery of the state itself. If earlier critiques focused on local resistance or infrastructural delays, these corruption cases pointed to weaknesses in supervision, accountability, and contractual governance. The legitimacy of the Cassa remained intact, but it was no longer unquestioned.

In this sense, the early corruption cases functioned as minor yet symptomatic indicators of strain within the developmental apparatus. They suggested that the problem of Southern modernization could not be reduced to temporal lag, labor qualification, or cultural preparedness alone. The institutional mechanisms tasked

with orchestrating transformation were themselves susceptible to distortion, complicating the narrative of a rational, disciplined, and morally superior developmental center guiding a lagging periphery.

B.3 The Collapse of the Legitimation Architecture: Crisis, Capture, and Institutional Exhaustion (1972–1984)

If the 1960s witnessed a defensive adaptation of the founding narrative—quantitative triumphalism, culturalization of failure, and the partnership doctrine—the final period of the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno marked something qualitatively different: the systematic disintegration of every major legitimation frame. The 1970s and early 1980s brought not a single rupture but an accumulation of evidence that overwhelmed the rhetorical architecture which had sustained the institution for two decades. Four overlapping processes drove this collapse. First, implementation failures in water and sanitation infrastructure—the Cassa's most elemental and visible promise—exposed a structural gap between investment announcements and functioning provision that no amount of technocratic language could bridge. Second, corruption and the capture of the developmental apparatus by private and criminal interests revealed that the state institutions designed to guide the South's modernization were themselves sites of extraction. Third, a new and previously absent critique emerged: the charge not merely of inadequate execution but of systemic, structural inefficiency—a policy model that, even absent scandal, was incapable of generating endogenous development. Finally, these accumulating failures produced decisive discursive shifts: within the political class, the triumphalist rhetoric of earlier decades gave way to defensive crisis management, while without, criticism that had long remained marginal entered the mainstream, with major parties calling openly for abolition. In short, the rhetorical shifts in La Stampa's coverage during the final phase of the Cassa's operation expose the limits of political vision in the face of implementation. As evidence of practical failures accumulated, the narratives that had sustained the policy gradually unraveled, pushing its legitimation architecture toward a tipping point. The case illustrates how public consensus—however deeply institutionalized—remains ultimately contingent upon perceived effectiveness: when implementation repeatedly and consistently contradicts the promises of political vision, even the most deeply embedded discursive foundations of legitimacy eventually collapse.

B.3.1 Water Infrastructure Failure and the Collapse of Development Credibility

Among the multiple dimensions of policy failure that accumulated in this period, none was more symbolically powerful or materially consequential than the persistent collapse of water infrastructure. From the earliest years of the Cassa's existence, the provision of water had occupied a privileged place in its legitimation narrative: the promise to bring the South's arid territories into productive and domestic modernity was perhaps the most elemental and visceral expression of the civilizational mission articulated in the 1950s. By the 1970s and early 1980s, this promise had curdled into its own most damning refutation. Across Sicily, Campania, and Calabria, reporting documented a pattern of staggering consistency: billions of lire allocated, dams constructed, aqueducts inaugurated—and populations still without reliable water, still queuing at public fountains, still

suffering from typhoid and hepatitis in towns where state intervention had been legislated and funded for decades.

The Sicilian case was paradigmatic. A 1973 investigation described conditions that seemed to belong to a different historical era: in Palermo, women barricading streets after queuing at public taps, while industries in the "poli" of Gela, Siracusa, Catania, Milazzo, and Palermo operated under water rationing despite massive public expenditure. The Cassa's interventions had produced "only partial irrigation of cultivable land," with the agency's financial instruments described as "disjointed" and the results—vast stretches of uncultivated territory that could have become orchards and vineyards—as unrealized potential that continued to drive emigration (Article_833, 1973). The indictment was structural: the Cassa had spent considerably, yet the fundamental conditions it was designed to address had not changed.

Specific cases translated this structural failure into concrete human terms. In Trapani, four billion lire had been spent on the Bresciana aqueduct, completed only four years before a 1976 report—and the city was again without water. Only ten of the planned wells had been activated; some had silted up; the construction company had collapsed amid payment delays and what residents described as "strange interferences" that had built "an aqueduct serving private interests" (Article_213, 1976). In Caltanissetta, criminal charges were brought against twenty-one officials, including figures described as "very well known in Rome for their frequent contacts with the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno," who had presided over four years of alternate-day water supply and two consecutive typhoid epidemics totalling nearly four hundred cases—while continuing to bill waterless households (Article_674, 1977). In Licata, Sicily, where Danilo Dolci (Tolomelli, 2017), a prominent Italian activist, had brought international attention to the town's deprivations two decades earlier and the European Parliament had subsequently confirmed its conditions, a 1977 report found seventeen children hospitalized with hepatitis caused by sewage infiltrating crumbling water pipes. A special law passed fifteen years earlier—allocating substantial funds through the Cassa—had produced nothing: "the promised public works for public health were not realized" (Article_592, 1977).

Calabria completed the picture. A 1979 investigation revealed that the region, despite having received "the major part of the more than two thousand billion" the Cassa devoted to Southern water infrastructure between 1950 and 1957, continued to face severe summer shortages. The diagnosis was precise: the Cassa had built "pharaonic dams" without connecting them to inhabited centers. In Catanzaro, sewage had been accidentally connected to drinking water pipes. In Crotone, water had been undrinkable for five consecutive days. The "pharaonic dams" formulation was a variant of the "cattedrali nel deserto" critique applied with devastating specificity to water: grand supply-side works built in isolation from the distribution networks required to deliver their product (Article_1000, 1979). The companion Salerno case documented the same pattern in Campania, where the Cassa had built "colossal pipes for water supply" from the Piserno springs that nonetheless failed to supply coastal towns multiplied tenfold by summer tourism—because the local distribution networks, "old for centuries and patched here and there," defeated the purpose (Article_1108, 1979).

By the early 1980s the evidence had reached its most extreme expression. A February 1982 report documented Palermo under water rationing at barely half its normal supply: hospitals suspending surgery, schools reducing hours, the regional government declaring a state of calamity. The revelation that the Cassa had allocated twelve billion lire for pipe repairs in December 1978 but that work had begun only in July 1981—during which interval a major European city's hospital could not operate—captured the implementation gap in its starkest form. That Palermo's water pipes dated substantially from the early twentieth century, losing thirty-five to forty percent of their water to leaks, three decades after the Cassa's founding, was an indictment that admitted of no mitigation (Article_400, 1982). A contemporaneous investigation into Sicily's dam infrastructure documented the systemic nature of the failure with meticulous detail: of twenty-four dams, eight predated the Second World War and many of the remainder did not function properly. The Naro dam, "completed long ago" but lacking sluice gates, let water flow past unused. The Nicoletti dam had collapsed at its testing phase after years of construction and repair. From the Madonie mountains above Cefalú, 825 liters of water per second—captured at great cost through Cassa-funded galleries—flowed to the sea unused because the connecting works had been abandoned (Article_641, 1982). The water intended as the emblem of Southern modernization was, literally, running to waste.

Taken together, these episodes marked the most fundamental collapse in the Cassa's legitimation. Water provision had been, from the 1950s, the most basic and least contestable of its promises—the one most immune to charges of cultural inertia or developmental complexity. Its failure was not attributable to the recalcitrance of Southern society or the slowness of cultural adaptation; it was attributable to the incapacity of the institutional apparatus to complete the chain from investment to functioning provision. The "last mile" problem—connections, completions, maintenance—proved the fatal weakness of a model that could mobilize capital and initiate construction but could not deliver operational infrastructure. As cholera-era disease conditions persisted in towns where the state had been explicitly committed for decades, the civilizational mission that had justified the Cassa at its founding stood exposed as a promise serially broken.

B.3.2 Capture of the Development State: Corruption and Rent Extraction

Alongside infrastructural failure, the period 1972–1984 witnessed a substantial intensification of corruption reporting within and around the Cassa's operations. Where the earlier period had seen isolated cases that could still be characterized as symptomatic but marginal—irregularities within an otherwise sound institutional framework—the 1970s brought scandals of a different order: systematic fund capture by sophisticated private actors, organized criminal infiltration of major public works, and ultimately the indictment of the Cassa's own senior leadership. The effect was to undermine the final remaining pillar of technocratic legitimation: the claim that the Cassa, whatever its shortcomings in delivery, remained a rationally governed institution operating in the public interest.

The most emblematic case of systematic capture was the Società Italiana Resine (SIR) scandal, which broke into full public view in late 1977. Nino Rovelli's petrochemical group, SIR, had built what was described as

Italy's third-largest chemical empire "using almost exclusively subsidized public financing," including billions in loans from the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno, IMI, ICIPU, Isveimer, and the Sicilian Region—at interest rates of three percent when market rates were far higher. The judicial investigation revealed that SIR had been deliberately structured as approximately 107 nominally small and medium companies, specifically to qualify for the preferential credit reserved for smaller firms, while operating as a single group. The suspected uses of the diverted funds were equally extraordinary: the large-scale purchase of shares in Montedison—then one of Italy's leading chemical companies—by Rovelli, which allowed him to become one of its principal shareholders through the illicit funneling of funds via a subsidiary company headquartered in Liechtenstein. A 13 billion lire project for a Sicilian refinery had received its funding and never been built. Factory councils in Milan reported suspecting since 1975 that public funds were being diverted, and laid responsibility partly on "those political forces that permitted laws leaving space for maneuvers like Rovelli's" (Article_122, 1977). The SIR case was a complete exposition of the Cassa's industrial incentive system's vulnerability to regulatory arbitrage: a private actor had used the public framework not to create Southern employment or growth but to construct a private financial empire, gaming the subsidy architecture with apparent impunity.

By contrast, the Sardinian "world's largest pigsty" case of 1975 highlighted a different kind of extraction scheme: construction-phase extraction. In this instance, a private group applied for and received 40 billion lire in non-repayable grants and 75 billion in subsidized loans for a massive industrial pig-farming complex—the same amount allocated to the entire Southern livestock plan over a decade—while bypassing the Cassa's own rules requiring a local agricultural base. Local populations and regional authorities knew nothing of the plan. The suspicion was explicit: the group was "interested not in operation, but only in construction"—meaning that public money would flow into the construction phase and then, once the impossible operating conditions became apparent, the "super-pigsty" could "be left empty" (Article_1007, 1975).

A similar dynamic appeared in a 1976 report on the proposed petrochemical complex in the Valle del Sangro in Abruzzo (Article_518, 1976). The project, promoted by private investors linked to the petrochemical sector, had faced sustained opposition from multiple fronts: the ministers of Industry and Budget, Carlo Donat-Cattin and Antonio Giolitti, local administrations, trade unions, and planning authorities all argued that the plant contradicted national industrial policy. It clashed both with the chemical plan—which concentrated ethylene production in established industrial poles—and with the national oil strategy, given that Italy already possessed excess refining capacity. Moreover, the complex threatened to undermine the agricultural development strategy previously promoted in the region by the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno. Despite these objections, the project ultimately received approval from the interministerial planning committee (CIPE). Former minister Giolitti later recalled that the proposal was repeatedly pushed onto the agenda under intense political pressure, including frequent telephone calls from Prime Minister Mariano Rumor urging its consideration. Advocates of the project warned that blocking the investment would provoke unrest throughout the Sangro valley, effectively mobilizing the threat of social disorder as leverage for approval. In this case, the decision-making process revealed how industrial planning could be overridden by political mediation on be-

half of private investment initiatives, transforming development policy into a terrain where lobbying pressure, rather than economic coherence, increasingly shaped outcomes.

The Garcia Dam case, extending from 1979 through 1982, brought corruption into its darkest register. The dam—designed to irrigate 20,000 hectares across Palermo, Agrigento, and Trapani provinces at a total cost of 324 billion lire—became the site of a systematic fraud in land expropriation: costs exploded from a projected 2.5 billion to 21 billion as irrigated-land prices were paid for uncultivated terrain through fraudulent eligibility claims. Five officials of the Belice Land Reclamation Consortium were arrested for embezzlement, with the investigation originating in carabinieri probes into mafia activities surrounding the construction. The "tragic thread of blood" accompanying the project—nine murders in Corleone, nine in Monreale, the assassination of Carabinieri Colonel Russo, whose death investigators later linked to the dam's subcontracting battles—transformed what should have been an agricultural development project into a site where public investment, criminal organization, and political violence converged (Articles_449, 1107, 1979). When, in 1981, 108 persons were sent to trial for embezzlement—including the entire 1977 board of the Cassa and its former president, Gabriele Pescatore—the institution's claim to represent rational, expert-driven development planning was rendered definitionally untenable (Article_133, 1981). The subsequent acquittals, resting on the defence that the tenfold cost overrun resulted from legal provisions rather than criminal action, paradoxically deepened the delegitimation: if 21 billion instead of 2 billion was legal, then the legal framework itself was the problem. The institution's administrators were not criminals; they were operating within a system that produced criminal outcomes (Article_853, 1982).

These corruption cases collectively destroyed the technocratic legitimation frame from within. The Cassa had justified itself, since the 1950s, through appeals to expert rationality, international validation, and the superiority of coordinated planning over partisan fragmentation. Each of these claims depended on the premise that the institution's governance was disciplined and its resources directed toward the public interest. When the institution's own board members were indicted; when its flagship infrastructure projects were captured by organized crime; when its industrial incentive system was exploited by private actors who extracted public funds without generating development—this premise collapsed. The developmental apparatus appeared not as a corrective to market failures and political distortions but as their most concentrated expression.

B.3.3 Systemic Inefficiency and Policy Exhaustion

Beyond the specific failures of water provision and the specific pathologies of corruption, the 1970s produced a qualitatively new critique that had been largely absent from earlier coverage: the charge of systemic, structural inefficiency. Unlike the reformist critiques of the 1950s—which had attributed failures to insufficient scale or bureaucratic capacity—or the culturalizing diagnoses of the 1960s, this new critique targeted the fundamental logic of the Cassa's model. Even where no scandal was present, and even where spending occurred at scale, the institutional apparatus was described as incapable of generating endogenous development, because its incentive structures rewarded extraction rather than transformation, and its administrative procedures made

rational entrepreneurial calculation impossible.

Agricultural policy provided some of the clearest evidence. A 1976 analysis of the Cassa's livestock programs articulated the structural paradox of subsidy-based development with unusual precision: "premiums rarely produce agricultural entrepreneurs capable of always confronting the situation, in any economic circumstance. The moment incentives cease, if prices have not simultaneously adjusted, the artificially realized targets do not hold: stalls empty and pastures are abandoned again" (Article_1151, 1976). The metaphor was exact: public money produced temporary compliance with desired economic behaviors, but not the structural transformation—the investment in knowledge, market relationships, and entrepreneurial capacity—that would have reproduced those behaviors independently of continued subsidy. A 1977 investigation into Sicily's citrus sector offered a companion indictment: 700,000 quintals of oranges being destroyed to support prices, despite a 1971 Cassa special citrus project, prior EEC regulations, and subsequent state and regional laws. The question was rhetorical: "what positive results have all of these interventions produced?" Producers received 120 lire per kilogram while consumers paid five hundred, with the gap absorbed by an intermediation chain that the Cassa's framework had done nothing to address (Article_359, 1977).

Industrial policy generated its own catalog of systemic failure. The Reggio Calabria report of 1977 documented the aftermath of the "pacchetto Colombo"—the bundle of industrial promises made to pacify the 1970 revolt—with dispassionate quantitative precision: the Andreae textile factory had 540 workers of the planned 1,400, all in cassa integrazione[16]; Uniliq had 80 of 230; Omeca approximately 500 of 2,000. The Confindustria president for the area offered what became the definitive metaphor for imposed development: "We were not consulted; it came upon us like a coat not our size, and since we were cold, we said it was fine too" (Article_996, 1977). A companion editorial made the absurdity structural: before the steel center could be built at Gioia Tauro, the Cassa's own agricultural investments—billions spent irrigating the plain, creating citrus groves and olive orchards—were destroyed by bulldozers. The institution's successive interventions had literally canceled each other. Meanwhile, land speculation reached thirty-four million lire per hectare, mafia subcontracting battles produced thirty deaths, and the projected cost per job in the steel plant reached forty million lire in an era of European steel surplus (Article_369, 1977). The Ajinomoto case brought the pathology to its most paradoxical form. Insud—a public holding company of the EFIM group created precisely to generate and maintain employment in Southern Italy—entered in 1963 into a joint venture with the Japanese multinational Ajinomoto to build a glutamate factory in Manfredonia. After years of losses typical of a start-up industrial venture, the Japanese partner proposed expanding production in order to reach profitability. Insud initially resisted the plan and later agreed to the expansion only on the condition that the Japanese purchase its shareholding. The expansion was carried out with subsidized loans from Isveimer and the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno, increasing employment to 238 workers and raising output to nine thousand tons annually. Yet shortly afterward Insud withdrew entirely, selling its stake for only a few hundred million lire. When market conditions improved and the factory registered its first quarterly profit in eleven years, Ajinomoto—left with-

[16] An Italian public wage-supplement scheme that provides income support to workers temporarily suspended or working reduced hours due to economic difficulties faced by their employer.

out an Italian institutional partner—began considering liquidation of the plant. Workers themselves described the structural dependency created by the arrangement: "we produced glutamate for eleven years, but we did not fully learn the production technology." As the plant approached possible closure, the factory director concluded that the decision was "not due to economic reasons but to a political choice." The journalist's verdict was stark: an institution designed to create employment had effectively "murdered" a functioning factory (Article_1035, 1977).

The bureaucratic architecture of the Cassa's incentive delivery system was itself identified as a structural source of inefficiency. A 1978 technical analysis laid out the procedural labyrinth with methodical precision: a small entrepreneur investing two billion lire faced a minimum eight-month administrative process—five months of bank review, two months of parallel Cassa review, then ministerial approval—rising to twelve months for larger investments requiring CIPE deliberation. In a double-digit inflation economy, this delay was not merely inconvenient but economically destructive, rendering all cost projections obsolete and forcing entrepreneurs to restart procedures from scratch. "Hundreds of applications for many tens of billions in investment, with connected creation of thousands of jobs, judged valid by banks, remain in the waiting line of the exhausting administrative procedure." The article's key structural observation was precise: "When Italy fixes a maximum time limit for acts due from the public administration, that limit becomes, in practice, the minimum" (Article_1149, 1978). By 1980, the Confindustria's Southern committee had formalized this critique into a comprehensive institutional demand: fewer financial incentives and more "real" incentives (services, infrastructure); automatic rather than discretionary procedures; elimination of the double review by both banks and the Cassa; and transformation of the institution from a financial intermediary into an industrial promotion and technical assistance body (Article_478, 1980). That even the business community nominally benefiting from the Cassa's incentives was calling for its fundamental restructuring measured the depth of legitimacy erosion among the institution's own supposed constituency.

These systemic critiques represented a decisive intellectual shift. Earlier critical coverage had targeted specific failures or called for more resources and better coordination. The critiques of the 1977–1980 period targeted the Cassa's model itself: its reliance on external incentives that produced dependency rather than autonomy; its tendency to generate large supply-side works disconnected from functional delivery; its administrative procedures that made rational business investment calculation impossible; and its institutional incentive structures that rewarded extraction over transformation. When the Confindustria demanded that the Cassa be converted from a spending body into a technical assistance agency, it was not merely proposing administrative reform—it was acknowledging that three decades of extraordinary financial intervention had failed to create the conditions for self-sustaining development.

B.3.4 Naples as the Mirror of National Failure

Within the broader pattern of implementation failure, the case of Naples assumed a special discursive function. As the South's largest city and the symbolic center of the Southern Question, Naples concentrated in a single

urban space every dimension of the Cassa's failure: sanitation infrastructure that remained incomplete after decades of funding; a public health crisis that periodically erupted into cholera; Gulf pollution that made coastal waters dangerously toxic; and a political class that could not convert abundant financial commitments into functional services. Naples became, in the coverage of this period, what might be called the diagnostic site of the developmental project—the place where the gap between civilizational promise and material reality was most legible, most consequential, and most politically charged.

The framing of Naples as the extreme case of Southern underdevelopment had appeared in coverage from 1973, when Francesco De Martino, the PSI secretary and longtime Neapolitan deputy, described the city as "an exasperated South"—a paroxysm of the Southern condition. His statement was notable not for its diagnosis but for its context: after thirty years of political engagement with the Southern Question, he confessed that "the Southern question is still unresolved," while insisting that industrialization and continued state commitment remained the only viable paths (Article_939, 1973). The confession of failure from within the governing coalition was symptomatic of a broader mood: the language of unresolved crisis replacing the language of ongoing progress that had characterized the 1960s.

The most consequential Naples stories traced the fate of the Gulf cleanup—Progetto Speciale n.3—the Cassa's most ambitious single urban environmental intervention. Born from the shock of the 1973 cholera epidemic, the project was supposed to transform the Gulf of Naples from what a 1975 report described as a public health catastrophe—children swimming in sewage-contaminated water, hepatitis and typhoid endemic, coastal life "returned to pre-cholera conditions"—into a functioning modern waterway. The Cassa was named as the project manager. And yet the 1975 investigation could not determine "at what stage the works are, whether still in the study phase, design phase, or contracting phase" (Article_891, 1975). Three years later, a 1977 report documented 160,000 people north of Naples still living alongside open sewage channels dating to the Bourbon era—the infrastructure the Cassa had been funded to replace since 1968. Women and children blocked railway lines in protest. A municipal engineer reported that the contracting firm had never delivered final designs; the Cassa's decade-old commitment remained unfulfilled (Article_152, 1977). By 1978, the Naples city council was debating the scandal of submarine sewage pipes: of seven installed at a cost of over one billion lire, only two were connected to sewage systems, while three had been deposited on the seabed by a Danish company before any tender had been called (Article_793, 1978).

In 1979, the journalist Vittorio Gorresio crystallized the legitimacy paradox in a literary-political column built around Eduardo De Filippo's[17] famous line—"Ha da passa' 'a nuttata" (the night must pass)—and Eduardo's later decision to remove the line from a musical adaptation of *Napoli milionaria*, one of his most famous plays, because the night had not, in fact, passed. Gorresio described Prime Minister Andreotti convening ministers to address Naples' worsening crisis: 300 billion lire had already been allocated for the 1979–1981 period to finance environmental cleanup, urban rehabilitation, and sanitation works. Yet the funds remained unused. The technical studies had been completed and priorities identified, but political agreement on how to allocate

[17] A celebrated Neapolitan playwright, actor, and screenwriter (De Matteis, 1987).

the money had still not been reached. De Mita, the minister responsible for the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno, issued stern warnings that anyone obstructing implementation would be "identified and exposed." Gorresio's conclusion was devastatingly ironic: the announcement that money existed and would finally be spent might appear encouraging, but if those funds had remained unused for years because "the political forces must still reach agreement on how to spend them," then pessimism was unavoidable. Like Eduardo, he concluded, one could no longer believe that the Neapolitan "night" would soon pass (Article_522, 1979).

The 1980 corruption investigation into Progetto Speciale n.3 added the final dimension. Judicial investigation revealed rigged tenders for 600 billion lire in contracts, with Cassa board members from 1974–1975 and Cassa technical staff receiving criminal communications for fraud and abuse of office. Documents seized from Cassa headquarters revealed "the willingness of some technicians and officials of the Cassa to accommodate the interests of certain firms to the detriment of the institution itself." The post-cholera period had "lost its stimulus to obtain a clean coastline" (Article_138, 1980). The project born from a public health emergency—the most powerful possible legitimation for urgent state action—had become a site of institutional self-dealing. By 1983, ten years after the cholera epidemic, only one of fourteen planned depuration plants was near completion. An American oceanographer argued that submarine conduits would be cheaper and more effective; Cassa officials defended their depurator-based approach behind Italian institutional endorsements; a parliamentary investigation revealed that over 1,000 billion in post-earthquake contracts had been assigned through private negotiation rather than competitive bidding (Article_880, 1983). The journalist's rhetorical question—whether defense of the existing project plan was the "real obstacle to revision"—implied the obvious answer: the contracts had already been allocated, and the technical argument was a cover for their protection.

The Naples coverage thus traced an arc from moral urgency to political paralysis to institutional corruption. As the flagship of Southern development in Italy's largest Southern city, the Cassa's performance in Naples concentrated every failure of the broader system: the gap between funding and delivery, the inability to spend money already allocated, the capture of projects by private and institutional interests, and the persistence of pre-modern public health conditions in a major European urban center. That journalists could write in 1979 about "pre-cholera conditions"—echoing the language of 1975 articles, which in turn echoed the 1973 epidemic—suggested that the crisis had become cyclical, the language ritualized, and the institution's response performative rather than effective.

B.3.5 Defensive Legitimation and the Crisis of the Developmental Consensus

The mounting evidence of implementation failure, corruption, and systemic inefficiency did not immediately dissolve the political elite's commitment to Southern intervention. Instead, as earlier periods had shown, legitimation frames adapted. But the adaptation of the 1970s was of a fundamentally different character from those of preceding decades. Where the 1950s had mobilized positive vision—civilizational mission, national unification, Cold War necessity—and where the 1960s had supplemented this with quantitative triumphalism

and culturalizing explanation, the legitimating discourse of the 1970s operated in an exclusively defensive register. The Cassa was justified not by what it would achieve but by what would happen without it; not by its record but by the inadequacy of available alternatives; not by the vision it embodied but by the inertia it represented.

The most sophisticated version of this defensive argument appeared in a 1977 analysis of the new 16,000-billion lire Mezzogiorno plan. Having noted that after accounting for prior commitments, regional allocations, and deferred funds, only 3,480 billion were available for new industrial investment—"clearly insufficient, according to some, given the share inevitably absorbed by inflation"—the article offered what had become the most defensible case for continued Southern spending: the argument from Northern self-interest. Unchecked Southern emigration had "disrupted urban-social balances in cities like Turin and Milan"; a more "balanced territorial distribution of employment opportunities responds to the South's needs because unemployment is concentrated there, but also to the long-term interests of the Centre-North." The argument was rhetorically sophisticated—it recast redistribution as mutual benefit—but its defensive logic was revealing: Southern development was now justified by its service to Northern social stability rather than by its intrinsic developmental content. More striking still was the same article's structural admission: "in-area policies had been annulled by out-of-area policies favoring the Centre-North." The Cassa spent in the South, but broader national policy favored the North, nullifying the effect (Article_893, 1977).

The political class's own discourse also began to register the limits of the earlier developmental narrative. In 1972, speaking at the presentation of the Almanacco del Mezzogiorno, Minister Emilio Colombo reiterated that Southern development remained "the central issue for the economic future but also—for which we must be very careful—for the political future of the country." Yet the framing of the problem had subtly changed. Rather than emphasizing simple backwardness or humanitarian urgency, Colombo described Italy as a structurally dualistic system in which capital, labor, and technical capacity had failed to combine "in the right places, times and ways." The result was an unbalanced pattern of growth marked by massive internal migration and the risk of a new equilibrium in which the North would be identified with private entrepreneurship and the Mezzogiorno with public enterprise. The proposed remedy was correspondingly technocratic: programmed negotiation with large firms, investment incentives, and the concentration of Cassa interventions in large "special projects." Compared with the earlier rhetoric of national redemption, the language now appeared managerial and systemic, focused less on civilizational uplift than on correcting structural imbalances within a dualistic economy (Article_536, 1972) By 1975, a comprehensive year-end review of the Mezzogiorno's economic situation described the Cassa's public works spending as "the sole countercyclical force" preventing worse unemployment—particularly in Naples, where it was acknowledged that 140,000 were jobless "but would be more without Cassa construction sites." Development had been reduced to keeping construction sites open to prevent social explosion (Article_51, 1976).

The managed exit from the institution became itself a legitimation strategy. The Moro government program of 1976 confirmed the Cassa's 1980 end-date while pledging that it would focus on "special projects"

and preparing Regions for technical self-sufficiency—with the explicit aim of avoiding "discretionary interventions of a clientelist nature." The official acknowledgment that clientelism had been a structural feature of the system, embedded in the language of a Prime Minister's program, was remarkable: the Cassa was being defended against abolition partly by admitting the critique that had long been leveled against it and promising reform (Article_682, 1976). Linguistic gymnastics completed the picture: the minister of budget Andreotti's 1976 presentation of the Cassa's eleventh quinquennial program framed radical downsizing as "restoring the Cassa to its original functions of designing major interventions of a markedly programmatic character"—a euphemism that reimagined institutional decline as institutional return (Article_12, 1976). The Cassa's continuation was justified by its own temporariness: it must continue because nothing had been prepared to replace it, and its survival was warranted by the promise of its own eventual dissolution.

As the 1980 statutory expiration approached, one of the most sophisticated defenses of the institution came from Francesco Compagna, the Republican chair of the inter-parliamentary commission overseeing extraordinary intervention in the South. Rejecting the polarized positions of "Cassa sì" and "Cassa no," Compagna instead advocated a strategy of "continuity with updating." Citing a study by the San Paolo di Torino showing that the South's capital accumulation rate in the 1970–77 period exceeded the European average, he dismissed the commonplace rhetoric of "cattedrali nel deserto" as the product of superficial judgments. Yet his own diagnosis of the institution's problems was strikingly severe. Among the most urgent issues he identified were the declining real level of commitments to the Mezzogiorno, the growing gap between financial commitments and actual spending, and the conceptual weakness of the Cassa's flagship interventions: its "special projects," he observed, were "often not special and sometimes not even projects." Coming from the chair of the body charged with supervising the institution, this formulation crystallized the condition of defensive legitimation. The most authoritative defender of the Cassa articulated its dysfunctions with a clarity that its critics had long struggled to achieve (Article_1126, 1980).

What the defensive legitimation of this period reveals is the progressive hollowing of the ideational content that had originally justified the Cassa. The civilizational mission, the national unity imperative, the Cold War security argument, the technocratic performance claim—none survived the accumulating evidence of the 1970s in their original form. What remained was a combination of path dependency (the Cassa must continue because nothing replaces it), crisis management (its spending prevents worse outcomes), and institutional inertia (reform law always imminent, never enacted). This negative legitimation—sustained not by vision but by the absence of alternatives—was inherently fragile, because it could not survive the moment when the political cost of continuation exceeded the political cost of abolition.

B.3.6 The Collapse of Political Consensus: From Marginal Critique to Abolitionist Demand

The second major discursive shift of the 1972–1984 period was the entry of explicitly abolitionist critique into mainstream political and intellectual debate. In the 1950s and 1960s, opposition to the Cassa had been reformist rather than oppositional—focused on scale, coordination, and execution rather than on the founda-

tional logic of extraordinary intervention. By the mid-1970s, this reformist consensus had fractured. Academic and journalistic analysis increasingly treated the failure of the special-policy era as settled knowledge; major coalition parties demanded abolition; and prominent intellectuals questioned the institutional foundations of extraordinary intervention itself.

The intellectual delegitimation of the developmental framework emerged earlier within academic debate. A 1976 review of two books on the Mezzogiorno by the historian Giuseppe Galasso (Vidotto, 1992)—himself a central figure in Southern historiography—presented as "hardly contestable" the central thesis advanced by one of the books: that "the era of special policy for the South has closed, with a balance sheet characterized by too many shadows," and that the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno should therefore undergo a profound restructuring and reduction of its functions (Article_214, 1976). The review also highlighted a finding shared by both works: that industry, despite having become a central element of the Southern economy, had not performed an effective "driving" role in regional development. These conclusions were not framed as tentative hypotheses but as analytically grounded results from which policy implications could be drawn, most notably the call for a "unified industrial policy for the entire country." By placing the limits of spatially targeted intervention within the realm of established analytical consensus, the debate signaled an important shift: the developmental vision underpinning the Cassa was increasingly contested not only in political practice but within the intellectual frameworks used to interpret the Southern Question.

Political challenge followed. The PSI's 1975 demand that the Cassa be permitted to spend a new 1000 billion-lire allocation only on "special projects, particularly reforestation"—explicitly not on industrial incentives—was accompanied by the revelation that the party "had already called for outright abolition" of the institution. This was a watershed: a major coalition partner, the Socialists, had publicly demanded the Cassa's elimination. The regionalist argument embedded in the PSI position—that completions properly "belonged to the Regions"—reflected a deeper structural challenge to the centralist logic that had always underpinned the extraordinary intervention framework (Article_249, 1975). The PSI's position created a new political dynamic: the Cassa's survival now required defending it against governing coalition partners, not merely external critics. The space of legitimate dissent, which the early framing had narrowed almost to zero by associating opposition with communist subversion or parochial opportunism, had expanded to include the government's own members.

The PCI's trajectory was the most dramatic. At a 1979 conference in Bari, Giorgio Amendola—a historic figure of Italian communism, Neapolitan by origin, veteran of decades of Southern engagement (Fatica, 1988)—delivered what amounted to a comprehensive delegitimation of the entire Cassa model. He labeled the institution a "new cancer": the very organism designed to heal the South's underdevelopment had become its disease. His critique operated at every level: industrialists received more in Cassa incentives than they actually invested, allowing private profit without capital of risk; the resulting Southern factories were "industries that depend primarily on Northern headquarters"—branch plants, not autonomous productive centers; the agrarian reform had become "ritual," invoked periodically but never pursued. His pointed question about

how much capital of risk Fiat had actually invested at Cassino, Termini Imerese, and Grottaminarda implied the damning answer (Article_1193, 1979). Three years later, at a PCI conference in Naples, Achille Occhetto, head of the party's Southern policy commission, formalized the party's position: the abolition of the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno and its replacement with a "radically different" development model centred on small and medium enterprises, cooperatives, and artisanship—rejecting not only the institution itself but the broader "logic of extraordinary state intervention" (Article_1058, 1982).

Popular discourse completed the shift. A 1983 reader's letter from Naples cited Arturo Carlo Jemolo's[18] 1978 remark that the "money spent on the Cassa would have been more productive if simply scattered in 10-lire banknotes from helicopters over the Southern provinces (Article_322, 1983)". That one of Italy's most respected jurists had, already in 1978, suggested that random redistribution would have outperformed planned extraordinary intervention—and that, five years later, a Naples resident quoted it as an apt summary of received wisdom—measured the distance traveled from the 1950s consensus in which opposition to the Cassa was tantamount to rejecting Italian unity (Article_322, 1983). By 1984, the PCI had introduced formal legislation to suppress the Cassa entirely and convert it into a consulting and design firm assisting local governments, with Southern funds flowing through regional and municipal channels rather than a centralized extraordinary body (Article_222, 1984).

The final moment arrived without drama. In August 1984, Parliament failed to renew the Cassa's ninth extension decree—not through a decisive negative vote but through a coalition attendance failure, an anticlimactic bureaucratic accident that ended thirty-four years of extraordinary intervention. The obituary, written by journalist Mario Salvatorelli, supplied the retrospective verdict: an estimated 150,000 billion lire in 1984 values spent over thirty-four years, and the South still at the bottom of every national ranking, its gap from the North "not reducing over time." The institution had been, throughout its existence, "constantly searching for itself, for its division of tasks and operating rules, in a painful endless spiraling." Parliament's failure to muster another extension meant that "the Southern question is not extraordinarily necessary or urgent"—a conclusion that the journalist warned could leave the Mezzogiorno as "the real loser" in the political struggle. The Cassa's death, he concluded, was "the most serious failure of our contemporary history" (Article_113, 1984). No new vision replaced the one that had failed. The institution did not fall to a decisive intellectual or political challenge that proposed and carried a superior alternative; it dissolved under the accumulated weight of practical failure and rhetorical exhaustion, sustained to the end by institutional inertia and the absence of a prepared successor, extinguished finally by the indifference that is the terminal form of delegitimation.

B.3.7 Synthesis: Legitimation Without Vision

The 1972–1984 period reveals, in concentrated form, the dynamics of institutional legitimation under accumulating practical failure. The Cassa per il Mezzogiorno had been founded on a dense and mutually reinforcing architecture of justification: civilizational mission, national unification, Cold War security, and technocratic

[18] A prominent Italian scholar and jurist (Margiotta Broglio, 2004).

rationality had combined to make Southern development appear not as a political choice but as a national necessity immune to legitimate contestation. By the institution's final decade, each of these frames had been systematically dismantled—by the persistence of pre-modern public health conditions in towns where the state had explicitly committed itself for decades; by corruption scandals that exposed the developmental apparatus as a site of extraction rather than transformation; by systemic critiques that targeted the fundamental logic of incentive-based, centralized extraordinary intervention; and by the political fracture that brought abolitionist demands from within the governing coalition itself.

What the evidence cannot support is a narrative of clean transition from one legitimation framework to another. The Cassa did not fall because a compelling alternative vision displaced its founding premises; it dissolved because the negative justifications that had sustained it—path dependency, crisis management, the absence of alternatives—proved insufficient to maintain the political will required for continued extraordinary intervention. The institution's final years were marked by a condition that might be described as legitimation without vision: the apparatus continued to function, funds continued to flow, extensions continued to be granted—not because the political class believed in the project, but because no one had prepared its successor. When even that minimal inertia proved insufficient to muster a parliamentary quorum in August 1984, the Cassa ended not with a definitive debate about the future of Southern Italy but with the quiet arithmetic of absent votes.

The trajectory thus illuminates a fundamental dynamic in the political economy of place-based industrial policy. Legitimation frames are not merely rhetorical ornaments but load-bearing elements of institutional architecture: they determine the range of criticism that counts as legitimate, the metrics against which performance is assessed, and the terms on which renewal can be sought. When the founding vision of the Cassa—Southern Italy as the "mission land of Italian democracy," its development as both moral obligation and strategic necessity—gave way to defensive crisis management and negative path dependency, the institution lost not merely its rhetorical appeal but its capacity to generate the political coalitions, the public tolerance for continued expenditure, and the institutional discipline required to translate resources into results. The Cassa's story is, in this sense, not only a case study in Southern Italian development policy but a laboratory for understanding how legitimation frames are constructed, how they evolve under pressure, and how they ultimately—when the gap between vision and reality becomes too wide to bridge—collapse.

C Moonshot Close Reading

In this Appendix, we show the evidence for each of the insights from the Newswires articles on Kennedy's Moonshot summarized in Table 2.

Journalists Fall Into Visionary Language Many articles use language that reflects the ideals which the Kennedy administration attached to NASA space exploration. They frequently refer to space and missions using non-neutral concepts such as "adventure", "wonder" and "frontier". This language is used in articles describing celebrations of successful missions. It is also used casually in passages that are seemingly neutral descriptions of missions. See the passages below:

> *"The 94.8-pound space laboratory, the size of a beachball, is rush-perils which must be mastered before man ventures to the planets."* — *12-03-1960-3*

> *"Astronaut John H. Glenn Jr. received a medal from President Kennedy amid roaring acclaim for his fantastic space flight."* — *23-03-1962-6*

> *"The men who opened the Moon Age blazed back to planet earth today and were quickly hoisted aboard this carrier"* — *24-07-1969-17*

> *"While Young circles the moon alone at an altitude of 70 miles inside the Apollo 10 command ship, Stafford and Cernan plan to fly a lunar module - LEM - landing craft to within nine miles of the surface - the closest man has ever been to another celestial body."* – *13-05-1969-4*

Technical Detail The second observation is that articles provide high levels of technical detail. Articles frequently give the precise: weight of the spacecraft or satellite, time of launch (down to the minute and specifying the time zone), type of orbit, and intended maneuvers. Additionally, articles work hard to explain complicated scientific concepts, for example by using carefully thought out metaphors. It is particularly striking that these details are provided not only for the "more interesting" missions involving astronauts, but also for more mundane unmanned missions. The inclusion of such detail is consistent with a system of values that imbues the science of space exploration with wonder, adventure and national pride.

> *"The National Aeronautics & Space Administration (NASA) calculated that at 8:05 a.m. E.S.T. - about 24 hours after it was launched - Pioneer V was 187,150 miles from the earth and moving away at a speed of 6,580 miles an hour. The position of the "Paddlewheel" satellite at that hour was computed to be above the Indian Ocean about 400 miles east of Madagascar. Pioneer V was launched from Cape Canaveral at five seconds after five Friday by a Thunder, white Thor-Able rocket. The aluminum satellite was boosted into a circuit of more than 500 million miles around the sun between the orbits of earth and Venus. Aboard it were instruments which will provide man with his first detailed information about vast magnetic fields, clouds of charged particles, many kinds of radiation, and meteoric dust in the depths of space. It was the first time that*

man had attempted successfully to put a miniature laboratory into a solar orbit between earth and its nearest planetary neighbor" *– 12-03-1960-3*

"The 850-pound lunar orbiter began its difficult journey at 3:26 p.m. EDT Wednesday atop an Atlas-Agena rocket. If all goes planned, the spacecraft will fire a braking rocket Sunday to swing into a moon orbit. Its first test pictures will be taken Aug. 13. Early stages of the flight appeared flawless. The spacecraft first zoomed into 'aiming' orbit around the earth and then its Agena upper stage, serving as a flying launch platform, fired the second time to give the Orbiter a 24,000 mph push toward the moon. About two minutes after the Agena finished its job, Orbiter kicked free of the rocket, its four vital solar panels unfolded like a four-leaf clover and then two-antennae deployed as planned" *– 11-08-1966-7*

The Astronauts are the Stars of the Show There is a great focus on the astronauts themselves, be it their mission preparations, their pre-, mid- and post-mission wellbeing, their remarks and their families. It is true that interest in the astronauts – people who chose to hurl themselves out of earth's atmosphere – seems natural. Nonetheless, historian James Kauffman argues that journalists chose to inflate the role of astronauts as it fit the frontier narrative of heroes overcoming challenge to face a hostile environment (Kauffman, 1994).

"The mother of Astronaut John H. Glen said today she was 'very thrilled' to hear her son's voice from space. The Glenns, relaxed at last, watched in seclusion but sent out coffee and a few words of their reaction to newsmen who had waited outside their home since before dawn for the epic flight. Down the village, fire alarm sirens sounded as this community's most famous son was lifted into orbit. It was to sound again today when he is recovered" *– 20-02-1962-29*

"Gemini 7 astronaut Frank Borman, described by experts as 'a sound sleeper who dreams,' and his witty copilot, James A. Lovell Jr., met today with project officials to review all aspects of the space doubleheader. They also spent hours reviewing the flight plan. Schirra and Staford practiced rendezvous maneuvers in a spacecraft simulator before joining Borman and Lovell in the flight review. Dr. Charles A. Barry, Gemini flight surgeon, said both crews 'are very relaxed' and in good physical condition." *– 02-12-1965*

"Bubbling with confidence after two smooth-as-silk excursions into space, spacewalk champion Edwin E. (Buzz) Aldrin Jr. poked his head and shoulders out a Gemini 12 door today to photograph the sunrise and the Milky Way" *– 14-11-1966-3*

In addition to this, in many cases journalists not only center the astronauts, but also describe them as prototypical frontier heroes. The frontier pioneer is a very specific American archetype: the taciturn, puritanical, cool-headed, rugged individualist who toughs it out on his own through faith in the Christian God and grit. Kauffman argues that NASA made great efforts to emphasize and curate the astronauts' public personae – especially John Glenn's – in a frontier style (Kauffman, 1994).

"Astronaut M. Scott Carpenter, after a record 30 days on the Pacific floor, is convinced 'men can live forever - any length of time they wish - beneath the surface of the ocean.' Carpenter surfaced Sunday with nine other

aquanauts from the Navy's 205-foot deep Sealab 2. He told a news conference Tuesday of the beauty, pain and hard manual labor. 'The ocean is a much more hostile environment than space,' the astronaut said. 'I worked much harder in Sealab 2 than in the Mercury capsule. More energy is required just to move around ... But the real key is the isolation. I think men can live as long in underwater habitats as any place else where they are isolated" *– 29-09-1965-2*

Scientists and Technocrats' Opinions Matter—And Not Just On Science The next observation is that scientists and NASA technocrats are frequently quoted both to provide technical details and also on topics that are not in their areas of expertise. Often a scientist saying that something is interesting, important or exciting is presented as a reason for the public to be excited or accept the legitimacy of a government funded mission. The relevance of scientific and technocratic opinions on fiscal matters – decisions to allocate resources to particular endeavors – reflects the pro-technocracy element of Kennedy's industrial policy vision.

"Cost of the program was estimated at about $500 million, including about a dozen of the spacecraft together with other rockets and equipment needed. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration said that a rendezvous in orbit is one way of carrying out manned landings on the moon; another way would be a direct flight using the huge Nova rockets now under development" *– 08-12-1961-6*

"The OAO, a 3,900-pound package of telescopic eyes, is the first of four spacecrafts in a $250 million program designed to unlock some of the celestial secrets that have baffled men for centuries ... "Thus, even on its maiden mission, the potential offered by OAO in expanding man's knowledge of the universe ranks it, in many respects, with the invention of the telescope," said the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, ... "We expect to find things we never thought about," said Dr. Theodore Hauck, a scientist at the University of Wisconsin, one of the participants in OAO. "This really is for astronomers an exciting moment"" *– 28-03-1966-9*

Achievements are Positioned in the Space Race Journalists also position space endeavors, both of the U.S. and the Soviet Union within the context of the space race. Articles make an effort to elucidate the purpose of different elements of the mission to the layman reader. They explain what precisely will be learned from the activities, in what way the activities are a "first", in what way the U.S. bests the Soviet Union in this endeavor and how it brings the U.S. closer to the moon landing. Thus, journalists reified the space race as an evaluative frame for NASA activities.

"Nikolayev, a 32-year-old bachelor and former lumberjack, rocketed 100 miles into space at about 17,500 miles an hour Saturday morning and Popovich, a 31-year-old married man with a six-year-old daughter, joined him Sunday morning in another Soviet space first. The flights were designed to pave the way for putting a man on the moon, Premier Nikita S. Khrushchev said 'With the flights, Russia has blazed the trail toward group flights into space first."' *– 13-08-1962-15*

"The American spaceship Molly Brown, bearing Astronauts Virgil Grissom and John Young, completed three orbits of the earth this afternoon and splashed into the Atlantic Ocean. During their flight, the fliers scored a big first in the space race by proving that man can maneuver a space capsule into a new orbital path. The mission control center at Cape Kennedy called the successful maneuver, executed high over Texas during the first of three planned orbits, a "historic" one. Grissom, 38, an Air Force major and the first man to rocket twice into space" – *23-03-1965-49*

"It was the second major achievement in space in five days. Last Thursday, two Russians rocketed into orbit and one of them stepped outside his flying spacecraft in a space first. Both techniques must be perfected before either Russians or Americans can go to the moon. ... Three Soviet cosmonauts were aloft in the Voskhod 1 last Oct. 16 in the first multiman flight. Five days ago, two more Russians shot into orbit and one of them stepped outside the capsule in an historic space feat. Although the Gemini spacecraft is about 4,000 pounds lighter than the Vokshod, it has a key capability which the Soviet vehicle did not. It can be maneuvered so that the astronaut teams can practice techniques that must be perfected for Project Apollo manned lunar landings planned late in this decade." – *23-03-1965-49*

"With its four solar panels folded down to give it the appearance of a giant four-leaf clover, Lunar Orbiter was to dart through the weightless world of space for 90 hours, reaching the vicinity of the moon Saturday morning. If successful, it would be the first payload sent into orbit around the moon by the United States. Seven previous attempts failed, six in the early days of rocketry between 1958 and 1960. The Soviet Union succeeded with Luna 10 last April, but it carried no cameras. Lunar Orbiter is much more sophisticated vehicle than any of the others, and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration said it had a much greater chance of success than the earlier U.S. tries" – *09-08-1966*

Setbacks and Failures are Taken on the Chin Observation six is that delays and technical setbacks are generally stated flatly and accepted as part of the process. Expectant astronauts and public's disappointment is acknowledged if present. Scientists are quoted explaining what caused the issue and the article moves on. Additionally, while previous delays are mentioned in articles on subsequently successful missions, they are generally only discussed briefly, a footnote to the present achievements. Crucially, the delays are not seen as emblematic of broader problems at the heart of NASA or government intervention. This coverage reflects an evaluative frame which positions NASA's work as endeavors to achieve greater ideals rather than as government spending to be valued according to the standards of efficiency.

"Weather became a threatening factor again today as the United States aimed for Friday for the second attempt to hurl Alan B. Shepard aloft as its first spaceman. Walter Williams, Project Mercury operations director, today confirmed reports that the launching - postponed Tuesday - cannot be attempted again before Friday. ... With more astronaut shots scheduled - perhaps every six weeks - the Weather Bureau issued ominous warning Florida is moving into its summer weather regime, which means its rainy season. For the U.S. man-in-space program which expects to rocket a man around the world before the end of the year, this

could mean additional temporary delays. Shepard, 37, Navy commander, and his alternate, Marine Lt. Col. John H. Glenn Jr., 39, probably will turn in about 10 Thursday night, only to get up again four hours later. Then they will repeat the ritual that they went through Tuesday morning: shower, shave, breakfast, physical examination." *– 03-05-1961-12*

"Scientists, frustrated Sunday by electrical problems, planned to try again Monday to launch the Mariner 2 spacecraft on a 182-million mile journey to the vicinity of the planet Venus. A short circuit in the electrical section of the second stage of the Atlas Agena-B booster rocket forced postponement of Sunday's scheduled launching. ... [the rest of the article describes the mission] ... Officials said the electrical short circuit that caused Sunday's launching postponement was traced to a power line which feeds electricity to the Agena-B's second stage. This drew excess power from the rocket's batteries. The trouble was corrected and the batteries recharged." *– 27-08-1962-3*

"Cooper's Atlas lifted off only four minutes behind the earliest possible launching schedule. The short delay was caused by a minor malfunction in the ground control guidance system for the Atlas. The shot has been postponed Tuesday because of trouble with a tracking radar on Bermuda." ... [the rest of the article describes the successful mission] *– 15-05-1963-20*

"Astronauts James McDivitt and Edward White flew into orbit aboard their Gemini-4 spacecraft today but failed in history's first attempt to achieve a close rendezvous with the second stage of their Titan 2 booster rocket." ... [the rest of the article describes the other objectives that they achieved in the mission] *– 03-06-1965-29*

As well as articles that discuss setbacks, the articles that discuss catastrophic failures are also noticeably restrained in their criticism of NASA. The following articles respond to Apollo 1. NASA is criticized for withholding a report. However, the majority of the criticism is launched at a NASA contractor. NASA seems to be largely let off the hook even if they are the ones who chose the contractor and had the ultimate responsibility to vet its work.

"A congressman probing the Apollo fire charged today that the spacecraft's contractor didn't correct problems cited in a report he says space officials are suppressing. "Why are they hiding it?" asked Rep. William F. Ryan, ... Ryan said in the interview that 'on the basis of the summary of the Phillips report and the findings of the Apollo review board, in my opinion it is apparent that North American [the NASA contractor at fault] never did correct the problems that were identified by Gen, Phillips." *– 19-04-1967-2*

"One part of the report says that North American "must take immediate and effective action to improve the quality of workmanship and to tighten their own inspection. Performance goals for demonstrating high quality must be established, and trend data must be maintained and given serious attention by management to correct this unsatisfactory condition"" *– 30-04-1967-5*

Additionally, setbacks and failures provide an opportunity for reporters to talk about the skill and bravery of the astronauts. This is true for Apollo 1 as well as for other missions which encountered issues.

"Astronauts Neil A. Armstrong and David R. Scott, fresh after rest in Hawaii, fly to Cape Kennedy, Fla., on Friday night to help scientists determine why their Gemini 8 space flight was forced to end prematurely. ... Scientists at Cape Kennedy will spend three days with Armstrong and Scott, trying to learn what caused Gemini 8's gyrating gymnastics after they had successfully docked with an Agena satellite. Armstrong, a civilian test pilot, was forced to fight for control of the spacecraft. The trouble forced their man-in-space flight to end unexpectedly after only 6 and a half orbits with the splashdown near Okinawa.... Armstrong reported to a controller aboard a ship in the Pacific 'We have serious trouble here. We're tumbling end over end. It's rolling and we can't turn anything off.' Something went berserk in the spacecraft's main jet thruster control system. Armstrong had to use an emergency system and managed to stabilize the craft after a 30-minute battle. Later, the flight captain reported part of what happened to the ground station in Hawaii. Armstrong said that after docking he had used the Gemini jets to make a 180-degree turn." – 19-03-1966-4

"The three dead heroes of the struggle to reach the moon arrived at Andrews Air Force Base, Md., Monday to solemn silence... A special 12-member board of inquiry continued its investigation of the flash fire that swept the oxygen-filled Apollo spacecraft and killed the three astronauts instantly Friday during a test countdown on launch pad 34 at the Cape. The chairmen of the Senate and House Space Committees said they planned their own inquiries if the board of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) left any questions unanswered. Family, friends, fellow astronauts and officials of the space program crowded into Seabrook Methodist Church near Houston, Tex., Monday for memorial services for Grissom and White. Chafee, the rookie member of the Apollo 1 team, was eulogized Sunday. The Rev. Conrad Winborn spoke of White's commitment to nation, family, church, community and space exploration. "Let us not expect to sing the victor's song unless we are willing to risk the harsh notes of tragic loss and personal sacrifice," he said. "Ed White understood. Commitment means that."" – 31-01-1967-2

Because It's Worth It The final insight is that high budgets – like setbacks – are accepted with relatively little resistance. More than that, in some cases the amount of money is almost seen as a good thing: as emblematic of the depth of the struggle and therefore as a measure of triumph.

"When the three-man Apollo spaceship blasts off toward the moon late in this decade, the launching will climax the most expensive peacetime venture ever undertaken by man. Estimates of the total cost range upwards from $20 billion, with some sources predicting an outlay of $40 billion. The fat price tag was underscored last week when the National Aeronautics and Space Administration announced the signing of the largest contract it has ever negotiated. North American Aviation, Inc. received the $934.4 million plum for initial development and production of the Apollo craft's two major sections, the command and service modules. ... Why the high price for the great moon adventure? Walter C. Williams, associate director of the Manned Spaceflight Center, recently gave this explanation: 'Increases in technology since the days of Ferdinand Magellan' ..." – 19-08-1963

"The Senate Friday approved $4.6 billion in spending money for the civilian space agency. It refused to

cut $100 million that President Johnson said was unneeded. The measure, carrying funds for the next eight months of operation by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, was passed 60 to 5 ... Most of the money - $2.7 billion - would be used to finance the Apollo project to land men on the moon, originally targeted for 1970 but probably to be delayed by the rehearsal explosion that killed three astronauts in January" *– 07-10-1967-4*