

## **The impact of fact-checking on politicians' behavior**

### **Project outline**

The well-functioning of representative democracy hinges on the accountability of representatives. Politicians act on behalf of voters and voters evaluate politicians upon their acts or better upon a combination of political promises and implemented policies. At the same time, political promises and more generally political persuasion are based on a wise mixture of verifiable and unverifiable statements in order to sway voters and create consensus. This project will inform the academic and public debate on how to effectively improve politicians' accountability by studying the impact of fact-checking on politicians' behavior.

### **Fact-checking politicians**

While the use of unsubstantiated claims has always been present in the political campaign rhetoric, only in the last decade expressions such as fake-news, alternative-facts or post-truth politics have started making regular appearance in the public discourse. At the same time, a number of independent fact-checking organizations appeared all over the world. Do politicians respond to fact-checking? To address this research question, we plan to empirically investigate whether and how Italian MPs respond to a rigorous fact-checking of their statements in a “business as usual” environment. We propose a research design relying on a novel randomized field experiment in collaboration with the leading Italian fact-checking company. By focusing on a broad range of outcomes in terms of political behavior, our study aims to assess the impact of fact-checking both on the truthfulness of politicians' statements as well as on the amount of verifiable information they transmit.

### **Program of Activities**

The candidate will be involved in all phases of the project: the development of a theoretical model, the implementation of the research design, and the empirical analysis.