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# Not a Normal Country Italy and its Party Systems

MARCO VALBRUZZI

There is a country in Europe with political parties and party systems that are younger than the electorate; in which technocratic governments are seen as solutions rather than as signs of a failing democratic regime; and where a consolidated party system was able to crumble away in less than a year. There is a country in Europe in which a tycoon magnate participated in six electoral contests for the premiership, became President of Council three times, and was only obliged to abandon his parliamentary seat after a definitive conviction for tax-fraud. There is a country in Europe in which leaders of left-wing parties have never been able to attain (in the elections) the premiership and where an institutional transition that began in the early 1990s is still underway. The list goes on, but the name of this country ought to be clear: Italy.

This article is devoted to the analysis of the unusual trajectory of Italian parties and party systems from the end of World War II to the 2013 general election, when an oversized coalition of three parties, with the crucial support of the President of the Republic, formed a so-called "broad agreements" government (*governo di larghe intese*) under the guidance of Enrico Letta<sup>1</sup>. This article will not repeat the clichéd story of the passage from the First to an alleged Second Republic, for the simple fact that this transition never actually took place. Yes Italy changed the format and, above all, the mechanics of its party system in the mid-1990s, but it has never significantly changed the Constitution and the functioning of its main political institutions. If the label "Second Republic" is designed to describe the transition from a constitutional structure to something else, that "Second" republic never existed. This article will not only describe the history of this "phantom" republic, but it will also analyze with more rigorous analytical and historical frameworks and concepts the evolution (or, better, devolution) of the Italian party systems. Welcome on board.

## *Re-inventing (A) Democracy*

In the beginning was the Constitution. After twenty years of Fascist regime and the ultimate fall of the puppet Republic of Salò (formed in 1943 by the last defenders of the crumbling dictatorship), Italy began to move towards a (new) form of democratic institutional setting. This crucial passage was formally certified, in 1946, by the election of a Constituent Assembly endowed with the prerogative to write a new Constitution. Inevitably, the memory of the recent authoritarian past was difficult to cancel; the "complex of the tyrant", the fear of a return to dictatorship,

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<sup>1</sup> Gianfranco PASQUINO, Marco VALBRUZZI, "Post-electoral Politics in Italy. Institutional Problems and Political Perspectives", *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, vol. XVIII, no. 4, 2013, pp. 466-484.

was the main inspiration of the Constitution makers. In the shadow of this difficult past, the Italian Constitution established in its second part – dedicated to the new institutional structure of the state – a weak head of cabinet, prisoner of the newly formed mass-based parties and of an almighty Parliament. Within such an institutional setting, the (role of the) President of the Council was little more than a *primus inter pares* – obliged to negotiate each and every policy or decision with his ministers, his allied parties, and the factions within his own party. The electoral system used both for the election of the Constituent Assembly and, later, the Parliament until the early 1990s was consistent, on the one hand, with the institutional design recently approved by the Constitution-makers and, on the other, with the international context brought about by the Cold War. In fact, the proportional electoral system based on open party-lists had the advantage of decreasing the confrontation between those political actors in defence of/committed to the “system” (*i.e.*, the Western liberal democracy *plus* a market economy) and the so-called anti-system camp, namely those (especially Communists) more or less strictly tied to the Soviet Union. Moreover, proportional representation was particularly agreeable to the balance of political powers that emerged after the end of the World War II. The 1946 elections clearly established the greater electoral strength of three parties: the Christian Democracy (DC), the Italian Communist Party (PCI), and the Italian Socialist Party (PSI). Revolving around these three giants, and as I will discuss later, in particular around the Christian Democrats, were other small satellite parties: the Italian Liberal Party (PLI), the Italian Republican Party (PRI) (in a sense, the poor heirs of the old Liberal state Mussolini’s authoritarian regime had obliterated), the Italian Social Democratic Party (PSDI, as of 1947) and, finally, a neo-fascist party called the Italian Social Movement (MSI). This was the “format” of the party system that existed immediately after the approval of the new Constitution and was promptly crystallized by the very founding elections of April 1948: seven “relevant” parties – in Sartori’s terms<sup>1</sup> – spread across an “over stretched” left-right political spectrum. This was the launching pad of what we shall describe as the “first party system” in Italy.

### *The First Party System of the Italian Republic*

From 1945 to 1947 Italy was governed by oversized coalition cabinets encompassing the political parties that had contributed to the fall of the Fascist regime. As we have seen above, the Italian Constitution was the result of, or more accurately, the happy compromise between the partners of this “long-lived” anti-Fascist coalition, namely the Communists, Socialists and Christian Democrats. With the approval of the Constitution in December 1947 and the emergence of a clear international bipolarism (the democratic Western bloc vs. the Communist bloc) the incentives for maintaining a (quasi) all-encompassing coalition were dwindling. In fact, the April 1948 general election brought about the breakdown of the anti-Fascist coalition and the emergence of a different political and cultural divide: the defenders of liberal democracy versus the supporters of the Communist Empire, on either side of the iron curtain. And this was the profound schism that would divide Italian parties and voters for the following five decades.

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<sup>1</sup> Giovanni SARTORI, *Parties and Party Systems. A Framework for Analysis*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1976.

This "Great Divide" in the history of Italy, as Cotta and Verzichelli<sup>1</sup> have described it, had two immediate consequences for the Italian party system, both of which are inevitably linked to the domestic repercussions of the international conflict. First, the bipolarism at the international level transferred to the domestic level, albeit solely at the electoral level. In some respects, as discussed later, the DC and PCI were strengthened simply by virtue of their roles as the political ambassadors of the US and the URSS (respectively). The political identities of the two parties were moulded by the fact that they "belonged" to, or orbited around, one of the blocs at the upper, international level. This strict association was both a factor of their success as well as an obstacle to any kind of future transformation; both in terms of individual parties and for the overall functioning of the party system.

In sum, thanks to their more or less explicit connections with the two international blocs created by the international politics, the DC and the PCI very quickly became the main pillars of the party system. And it is from this particular viewpoint, that needs to be adequately specified and circumscribed, that Giorgio Galli described the Italian party system as a case of "imperfect two-party system"<sup>2</sup>; where one pole is obliged to govern and the other's role is to criticize and observe those in power. Consequently, alternation in Italy's government was impossible – both as an expectation and an empirical phenomenon. It was this missing element that became the flaw or "imperfection" of Italian-style two-party system. Thus the balance of power operating at the international level was recreated, *ceteris paribus*, at the national level: two main poles orbited by a number of minor satellites.

However, the "imperfect two-party system" model, whilst useful when describing the balance of power in the electoral arena (the relative strength of the DC and PCI), was inadequate for the description and explanation of the party system at parliamentary and governmental levels. And it is at this point that another more relevant and well-designed analytical framework enters the scene.

The premise is that the second domestic consequence of international bipolarism for the Italian party system was the creation of a divide between pro-system actors, namely, those in favour of the Western brand of democracy, and the anti-system actors, that is, those forces that were in sharp contrast with the ideals of a liberal democratic regime. This kind of cleavage, which was not unprecedented in Italian history, created the conditions for the emergence of the kind of party system Giovanni Sartori termed "polarized pluralism"<sup>3</sup> and which characterized Italy's political landscape until the early 1990s. First, the expression "polarized pluralism" is a synthesis of two distinct attributes of the system: its "format" (number of relevant political parties) and its "mechanics" (how and *where* the parties compete). As to the former, the Italian example must be included in the class of "extreme multipartism" – those party systems with more than five "relevant" parties. With regard to the mechanics of the system, Italy was a preeminent example of "polarized multipartism", in which the ideological distance between the extreme parties is large and significant. By putting these two attributes together, we obtain the type of party system known as "polarized pluralism", the

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<sup>1</sup> Maurizio COTTA, Luca VERZICHELLI, "Italy. From 'Constrained' Coalitions to Alternating Governments?", in Wolfgang C. MÜLLER, Kaare STRØM (eds.), *Coalition Governments in Western Europe*, Oxford University Press, Oxford & New York, 2000, p. 435.

<sup>2</sup> Giorgio GALLI, *Il bipartitismo imperfetto. Comunisti e democristiani in Italia*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1966.

<sup>3</sup> Giovanni SARTORI, *Parties and Party Systems...*cit.

defining characteristics of which are: 1) the presence of relevant anti-system parties; 2) the existence of bilateral oppositions; 3) the occupation of the metrical centre of the system by one party or a group of parties; 4) the congenital ideological patterning of the polity; 5) inter-party competition driven by centrifugal forces; 6) significant ideological distance between the extreme poles; and 7) the presence of irresponsible oppositions which 8) practice the politics of outbidding or over-promising. Needless to say, all eight attributes were present in the Italian political landscape at the end of WWII. If an anti-system party is, in Sartori's own words, a party that "*undermines the legitimacy of the regime it opposes*"<sup>1</sup>, then there is no doubt that both the Communists and the neo-Fascists, staunch critics of liberal democracy, would have changed/destroyed the system (given enough power). The anti-system nature of these two parties, located at the extreme poles of the ideological (left-right) spectrum, brought about the emergence of a two-fold (i.e., bilateral) opposition against the party that permanently occupied the centre of the party system, namely, the Christian Democracy. As a consequence of this specific configuration of the system, inter-party competition was driven by centrifugal forces whose main consequences were, on the one hand, the progressive undermining of the centre pro-system parties, and, on the other, the intensification of the so-called "politics of outbidding". In practice, since the anti-system parties were always defined by their oppositional role, they had no incentives, either electorally or institutionally, to behave responsibly. In sum, all of the above features created a multiparty system marked by a high level of ideological fever, a pathological level of governmental instability and, (not so) paradoxically, an immutable political landscape. Briefly put, governmental instability went hand in hand, and quite happily so, with political immobilism.

As Table 1 (see the Annex) shows, the long cycle of the first party system, in which the only stable element was the instability of the innumerable coalition cabinets, can be subdivided into four shorter sub-phases, each characterized by different governing formulae. During the "centrist coalition" (*centrismo*), lasting from 1948 to 1960, the Christian Democrats were the cornerstone of a coalitional formula that included three smaller parties: the PSDI, PRI and PLI. At the end of this first sub-phase, and especially with the failed attempt to set up a high majority electoral bonus in 1953 (with the so-called *Legge truffa*, or the "swindle law") in order to strengthen the position of the largest party in Parliament, the second coalitional formula entailed a gradual inclusion – starting at the local level – of the PSI within the "governmental field". This strategy, better known as the "opening to the left", aimed at enlarging and consolidating the group of parties committed to the democratic system. Consequently, the Socialists abandoned their "semi-responsible" attitude to the party system and gradually moved into the area of the governing-oriented parties<sup>2</sup>; at the same time, the "centre-left" coalition (PSI, PSDI, DC and PRI) tried (with only limited success) to join the modernization process that began in Italy during the mid-1950s. Besides some important economic and social reforms, this second coalitional formula failed in front of the explosion of mass protests, social unrest and the menace of terrorism that struck Italy in the late 1960s. The so-called period of "national solidarity" – namely, the third coalitional formula that entailed an understated alliance between the DC

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 117, italics in the original.

<sup>2</sup> Giovanni SARTORI, *Teoria dei partiti e caso italiano*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1982.

and the Communists headed by Enrico Berlinguer – was the belated and mostly failed attempt to face the political and economic upheavals of the 1970s.

The failure of that “historic compromise” proved, once again, that Italy was and remained a “difficult democracy”, incapable of bearing the weight of wholesale turnover in government, but also that the parties and their leading representatives were unable to kick start a party system that had lost – to use Berlinguer’s famous expression– its “forward thrust” (*spinta propulsiva*). The five-party coalition formula (*pentapartito*) of 1980-1992 represented the last attempt to defend a ruling class that was older, even more self-referential, and unable to understand the wants and needs of a society undergoing swift and profound transformation. The best indicator of that dismal state of affairs is perfectly represented by the unhappy demise of the *pentapartito*: not only did it end in disgrace but its members were also swept away in the deluge<sup>1</sup>. As a consequence, the crisis of a specific coalitional formula turned out to be a systemic crisis, that is, the crisis of a system unable to change its cabinets/players without changing the rules of the game. In 1992, the first party system had reached the end of the line. And, as we shall see in the next section, while the old system was dying, a new system was undergoing a traumatic genesis.

### *When and How the Transition Took Off*

Pundits and scholars, and historians in particular, are accustomed to dividing the Italian republican history into two distinct periods: the First and the Second Republic<sup>2</sup>. Although the cut-off point between the two republics has not been clearly identified, it is traditionally ascribed to the early 1990s, the period following the *pentapartito* phase and before the 1994 general election. It was during that transitional period that something died and something else was born. Nevertheless, the main point to stress here concerns the validity of that separation and, in particular, its “constitutional character”. The somewhat simplistic idea of a so-called Second Republic implies a *constitutional break*, i.e. the suppression of the old Constitution and the creation of a (mostly) new constitutional structure. As convenient this would be, it is simply not what happened in Italy and I reject strongly the overstated and fictitious distinction between these two alleged republics. That said, and not only for the sake of truth but also for the validity of our subsequent analyses, what happened in the early 1990s should not be underestimated. Yet, unless we construct the entire chain of events that led to the collapse of the first party system, that risk of underestimation cannot be avoided.

So, let us start from the beginning of the deflagration and look for the spark that started the fire. Since the party system was so intimately linked to the international context, the *status quo* could be modified only through a more or less profound revolution at the supranational level. The possibility for that kind of change arrived in November 1989 when the fall of the Berlin Wall signaled not only the end of a

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<sup>1</sup> Luciano CAFAGNA, *La grande slavina. L'Italia verso la crisi della democrazia*, Marsilio, Padova, 1993.

<sup>2</sup> Simona COLARIZI, *Biografia della Prima Repubblica*, Laterza, Roma & Bari, 1996; Giuseppe MAMMARELLA, *L'Italia di oggi. Storia e cronaca di un ventennio 1992-2012*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2012; Simona COLARIZI, Marco GERVASONI, *La tela di Penelope. Storia della Seconda Repubblica*, Laterza, Roma & Bari, 2012.

specific ideology but also the breakdown of legitimacy of many Communist (and anti-Communist) parties across Europe. Naturally, for the country with the strongest Communist Party in Western Europe this was even more relevant<sup>1</sup>. Put frankly, the end of the Cold War implicitly meant the history of a party came to an end; within a few years the PCI changed its name and logo, rejecting its past, and yet it maintained almost entirely its leadership<sup>2</sup>. If the transformation of the PCI into the PDS (*Partito della Sinistra*, Democratic Party of the Left) was the direct consequence of the end of the Cold War, the indirect effects must be detected among the governing parties and, in particular, in the functioning of the party system. The "Great Divide" that had characterized Italy since the end of WWII was bound to lose its import among the ruins of the Berlin Wall. The DC owed its electoral success, and its pivotal position in Parliament, to the fact that it was Italy's main defender against the Communist menace. With the demise of that menace, both its "protectionist" function and ideological *raison d'être* within the system was lost. Within a few years, the DC would also follow its main historic opponent to the graveyard of the old parties. At the systemic level, the effect of the disappearance of the "international bipolarism" brought about, on the one hand, the end of the *conventio ad excludendum*, that is, the constant exclusion of the PCI from the government, and, on the other, the "de-freezing" of that vast share of the electorate that had supported the DC or its allied parties<sup>3</sup>.

In sum, the fall of the Berlin Wall presented a window of opportunity for all those outside or under the control of the system. The judicial power, no longer controlled (either directly or indirectly) by a crumbling ruling class, promoted a widespread judicial investigation in 1992 (called *Mani Pulite*, "Clean Hands") into party corruption that seriously damaged the standing of all the governing parties with the(ir) electorate. At the same time, the serious economic downturn in the early 1990s and, concurrently, the decision to accept the terms of the Maastricht Treaty presented additional challenges to a party system on the verge of a real political disaster. Last but not least, the introduction of a new, quasi-majoritarian electoral system, following (not accurately) the popular pressure prompted by a specific referendum in 1993, changed significantly the rules of the electoral game: one of the main pillars of the first party system – the proportional electoral law – was dissolved and substituted by a hybrid system where, at the Chamber of Deputies, 75% of the seats were elected in single-member districts by a plurality system and the remaining 25% by a proportional system with closed party-list.

This combination of political, judicial, and economic factors created a condition that can correctly be described as "collective anxiety", in which new parties, led by more or less charismatic political entrepreneurs, found new pathways to electoral success. This was, first, the case with the Northern League, a new macro-regional party, created (or more correctly, confederated) thanks to Umberto Bossi with the

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<sup>1</sup> Austin RANNEY, Giovanni SARTORI (eds.), *Eurocommunism: The Italian Case*, AEI-Hoover Press, Washington, D.C., 1978.

<sup>2</sup> Piero IGNAZI, *Dal PCI al PDS*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1992; Gianfranco PASQUINO, "Programmatic Renewal, and Much More. From the PCI to the PDS", *West European Politics*, vol. XVI, no. 1, 1993, pp. 156-173.

<sup>3</sup> Leonardo MORLINO, "Crisis of Parties and Change of Party System in Italy", *Party Politics*, vol. II, n. 1, 1996, pp. 5-30; Luciano BARDI, "Party Responses to Electoral Dealignment in Italy", in Peter MAIR, Wolfgang MÜLLER, Fritz PLASSER (eds.), *Political Parties and Electoral Change*, Sage, London, 2004, pp. 111-144.

ambition of representing all the interests and identities of those living in the Northern regions. The second case of entrepreneurial success, politically speaking, was achieved by the media-tycoon Silvio Berlusconi. In less than one year he was able to build from scratch an entirely new party: *Forza Italia* ("Go Italy!"). The unexpected arrival (and success) of that party was the last, but absolutely significant, indicator of the ongoing deconstruction of the old party system. Italy was entering the age of "destructured bipolarism".

### *Italian Politics between Dealignment and Realignment*

In 1993, for the first time in Italian history the premiership was held by a "non-party personality" without any previous party affiliation: Carlo Azeglio Ciampi (former governor of the Bank of Italy). With the crucial consensus of the President of the Republic, Ciampi headed a transitional cabinet with the objectives of implementing the new electoral law, introducing institutional and administrative reforms and drafting a budget law. In a country where the Prime Ministers and ministers had always been men (though, in a few cases women) affiliated with specific political parties, Ciampi's premiership was a further sign of the decay of the Italian-style party government which, in many cases, was transformed into a vicious form of partyocracy (*partitocrazia*)<sup>1</sup> – the absolute *kratos* of the parties over the *polis* and the people. A technocrat-led party government was, however, only the first tremor of a much more profound political earthquake that would take place during the 1994 general election. Though the concept of a "critical election" is neither universally recognized nor precisely conceptualized, few would argue that the 1994 election was not, in many respects, "critical". In the definition given by V.O. Key, an election is critical if "the decisive results of the voting reveal a sharp alteration of the pre-existing cleavage within the electorate" or, more accurately, "the realignment made manifest in the voting in such elections seems to persist for several succeeding elections"<sup>2</sup>. In brief, critical elections are those in which "new and durable electoral groupings are formed". In other words, an election can be defined as critical if it brings about an electoral realignment that is, in Campbell's terms, "a durable and substantial shift in the parties' national electoral balance of power"<sup>3</sup>. So, now the question is: how many realignments can be identified in Italy since 1945? I hasten to say that answering this question is important because it can help create a new periodization scheme for the Italian electoral history. If indeed, as Campbell notes, a party system defines normal partisan politics, then "realignments are the change from one party system to the next".

Returning to the question above: How many electoral realignments can be counted in Italy? Here the issue is not what is a realignment, but how do we quantify

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<sup>1</sup> Gianfranco PASQUINO, "Party Government in Italy. Achievements and Prospects", in Richard S. KATZ (ed.), *Party Government and its Alternatives*, De Gruyter, Berlin, 1987, pp. 202-242; Salvatore VASSALLO, *Il governo di partito in Italia*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1994; Mauro CALISE, "The Italian Particracy: Beyond President and Parliament", *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 109, no. 3, 1994, pp. 441-460.

<sup>2</sup> V.O. KEY Jr., "A Theory of Critical Elections", *Journal of Politics*, vol. XVII, no. 1, 1955, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> James E. CAMPBELL, "Party Systems and Realignments in the United States, 1868-2004", *Social Science History*, vol. XXX, no. 3, p. 361.

a realignment? As Carreras et al. have pointed out, "stable alignments are relatively easy to pin down empirically: they require (a) that most voters choose one of the existing parties and (b) that electoral volatility is low"<sup>1</sup>. But the difficulty begins at the next step, when one needs to pin down (empirically) the concept of realignment. If a dealignment in the electoral market implies a period of change where the attachment of voters to established parties weakens and the support in favor of the mass parties dissolve, then the 1994 Italian general election is a good example of that kind of electoral change. To further pin down empirically this concept, Carreras et al. offer a list of indicators that can (*cum grano salis*) be used to identify cases of dealignment. Among the potential indicators suggested by Carreras et al., I will focus on three factors: a) elevated levels of electoral volatility; b) the emergence of new political challengers who lack political experience and/or a developed party apparatus; and, c) the rise of political outsiders "in association with new parties that are often nothing more than electoral vehicles serving their personal political ambition"<sup>2</sup>.

As to the level of electoral volatility, the data in Figure 1 (see the Annex) are self-evident. The highest levels of volatility are registered in 1994 and, as I will later discuss in more detail, in 2013. From 1948 to 1992 the average level of electoral mobility has a value of 9.1, and in 1994 it was over four times higher. From this perspective, the rise of electoral volatility in Italy during the early 1990s, as a sign of electoral dealignment, is undisputable. With the collapse of the traditional political parties, the new and emergent electoral offer changed completely the political landscape and, accordingly, voters' behavior.

The second indicator concerns the vacuum created by the disappearance of the main governing-oriented parties at the twilight of the first party system. That vacuum did not exist for long; especially on the right side of the political spectrum, both the Northern League and *Forza Italia* strove for the electoral legacy of the old parties. Briefly put, new parties under the direction of new political entrepreneurs with little or no concrete political experience decided to "take the field". And, unexpectedly, they won the game. This state of affairs is described well by Figure 2 (see the Annex), which shows the average age of the parties in Parliament from 1945 to date. In 1994, the average age of the party system was at its lowest: just 2 years old. That means, in a nutshell, that the old, mass-based parties, with historic roots and strong linkages with society, have been completely eradicated and substituted by new political organizations with only feeble and unstable relationships with their fluctuant voters. The same holds true with regard to the age of the oldest party. In 1992, the PSI was the oldest party in the legislature – having been founded in Genoa exactly one century ago; two years later, following the eruption of the corruption scandals (*Tangentopoli*) and the change of the electoral system, the party, along with the other two mass parties (DC and PCI), was completely decimated.

Finally, the third indicator of a critical, de-aligning electoral phase is the rise of political outsiders within the vanguard of these wholly new political organizations. In this case, the information concerns, above all, the nature of the newly created parties at the end of the first party system, that is, their specific organizational model, the role of the founder/leader and the relationship between the leadership and the

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<sup>1</sup> Miguel CARRERAS, Scott MORGENSTERN, Yen-Pin SU, "Refining the Theory of Partisan Alignments. Evidence from Latin America", *Party Politics*, online: July 14, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*.

membership (if any). Of course, we cannot dwell on all of these factors here, but suffice to say that the period from 1994 onward has been described by many scholars<sup>1</sup> as a period characterized, if not dominated, by "personal parties". These are not simply parties with a (easily identifiable) leader; these parties are the *longa manus*, the direct incarnation of the leader. To parody McLuhan, one might even say that in these cases the leader (and the message) is the party. And, precisely for this reason, when such a leader dies, or retires, or loses his charismatic popularity for whatever reason, the party's fate is sealed. The electoral trajectory of many Italian personal parties – from Berlusconi's *Forza Italia* and Antonio Di Pietro's Italy of Values to the latest (already failed) political creation of the former technocrat Prime Minister Mario Monti (Civic Choice) – is strictly linked to the personal trajectory of their founding leaders: *après eux, le déluge (et la débâcle)*. In such an unstable context, where new parties come and go with a frequency unmatched by any other West European democracy, the overall level of party system consolidation remains remarkably low.

Nonetheless, there is no doubt that the legislative election of 1994 was a turning point in Italy's political history. Mass parties disappeared, new personal parties entered the scene, anti-system forces became obsolete after the collapse of the Berlin Wall, and new electoral coalitions were created in response to the incentives of the new electoral system. Many other elements can be added to this list but the point is clear: in 1994, because of both exogenous and endogenous factors, the old party system created in the aftermath of WWII was no longer in place. After a brief and quasi-technocratic interlude in 1993, Italy awoke to its second party system. This second phase of the Italian Republic is characterized by a wholesale de-freezing of the old cleavages. Consequently, the so-called "freezing hypothesis" stated by Lipset and Rokkan<sup>2</sup> may be completely rejected and re-written as such: the current party system does not reflect the cleavage structure of the 1920s (or 1960s) and the party organizations are younger than the majority of the national electorate.

To recapitulate, extreme fluidity and personalization are the key-words for the correct understanding of the Italian second party system. These distinct but convergent factors have shaped Italy since 1994, a phase during which electoral volatility has always been, on average, higher than during the previous phase. Although the mobility of the voters has been higher *within* the coalitional bloc (either among the parties of the centre-right or the centre-left) than *between* them, high levels of volatility suggest the *status quo* has yet to reach a minimum level of consolidation. Within the two different blocs, which have changed configuration and name in almost every election, new parties enter and exit, new actors are included and others excluded and, as a result, the characteristic instability of the first party system has doubled: now there are two unstable and fragmented coalitions, rather than one. In spite of this persistent fluidity, the ostensible stability of the party system created in the mid-1990s was

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<sup>1</sup> Mauro CALISE, *Il partito personale. I due corpi del leader*, Laterza, Roma & Bari, 2010; Leonardo MORLINO, Marco TARCHI (eds.), *Partiti e caso italiano*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2006; Duncan McDONNELL, "Silvio Berlusconi's Personal Parties: From Forza Italia to the Popolo della Libertà", *Political Studies*, vol. 61, no. S1, 2013, pp. 217-233; Gianfranco PASQUINO, "Italy: The Triumph of Personalist Parties", in Tatiana P. KOSTADINOVA, Barry LEVITT (eds.), *Towards a Theory of Personalistic Parties*, forthcoming.

<sup>2</sup> Seymour M. LIPSET, Stein ROKKAN, "Cleavage Structures, Party Systems and Voter Alignments: An Introduction", in IDEM (eds.), *Party Systems and Voter Alignments*, Free Press, New York, 1967, p. 50.

mitigated by or, more precisely, encapsulated within, two all-encompassing coalitions that regularly alternate in power. Nevertheless, this "majoritarian miracle"<sup>1</sup>, in the sense that it was the artificial creation of a quasi-majoritarian electoral system, lasted for no more than five consecutive elections, when new endogenous and exogenous factors paved the way for a new critical election. In fact, the 2013 general election was affected significantly by the severe consequences of the so-called "Great Recession", perhaps the worst economic crisis in the history of the Republic. Although the crisis also hit many other European states, its political effects have depended significantly on whether a country's party system has strong roots in society or whether those roots had been cynically cultivated by clientelistic relationships between politicians and voters. Greece, for instance, is an example of the latter scenario<sup>2</sup>; Italy might be interpreted in the light of both. Be as it may, the Italian second party system did not show any degree of resiliency in the face of the economic crisis and, paradoxically, its impact was even exacerbated by those same actors that were brought in to save Italy from bankruptcy. In fact, if the technocratic government led by Mario Monti in 2011-2012 (and supported by the main parties in Parliament) had the ability (especially thanks to the personal reputation of its members) to reduce the severity of the economic crisis, at the same time it reduced the possibility for a clear process of electoral accountability<sup>3</sup>. Since the borders between government and opposition were blurred and, in addition, because of the presence of a technocratic government which is, by definition, above the parties, Italian voters had few possibilities to put into motion the mechanism of electoral accountability. Perhaps the only option in the hands of the electorate was to vote for "something new", in other words, someone who was not involved into the previous quasi-Grand Coalition government. That "someone" was the comedian Beppe Grillo, and that "something" was his newly created political party *Movimento 5 Stelle* (Five Stars Movement). Therefore, the interplay between these three international or domestic factors was the main detonator of the political crisis that hit Italy in 2013, when the level of electoral volatility broke the record set in 1994 (see Figure 1) and the largest party in terms of absolute votes (25.6%) was Beppe Grillo's new party, yet further proof of the extreme personalization of the Italian political landscape.

It is, perhaps, too early to evaluate how "critical" the election of February 2013 was. At this point we can only register the signs of a third deep dealignment that has taken place at the electoral level. Its effects in the parliamentary arena are ongoing and much, in particular the emergence of a new realignment, will depend on the decisions regarding the new electoral system that the parties are obliged to approve after the Constitutional court's ruling that certain elements of the current electoral law

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<sup>1</sup> Stefano BARTOLINI, Roberto D'ALIMONTE, "Majoritarian Miracles and the Question of Party System Change", *European Journal of Political Research*, vol. XXXIV, no. 1, 1998, pp. 293-311.

<sup>2</sup> Takis S. PAPPAS, "Embattled Democracy: Legitimation Crisis, Party System Change, and the Rise of Political Extremis in Greece", paper presented at the workshop on "Political Change in the PIIGS", European University Institute, Fiesole, June 11-12, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Gianfranco PASQUINO, Marco VALBRUZZI, "Non-partisan Governments Italian-Style. Decision-making and Accountability", *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, vol. XVII, no. 5, 2012, pp. 612-629; Duncan McDONNELL, Marco VALBRUZZI, "Defining and Classifying Technocrat-led and Technocratic Governments", paper prepared for the panel "Technocrats, Caretakers and Parties in the Long European Crisis", European Union Studies Association Conference, Baltimore, 9-11, 2013.

(implemented in 2006) are illegal. What I can say here is that, whether or not a "new" party system is in the making, the political landscape in Italy remains amorphous and at the mercy of too many personal parties with life spans that too closely follow those of their leaders. Thus far, the third party system has proved little more than a Chimera or simply the wishful thinking of some politicians and scholars. Once again, in Italy something dies and something else, with indistinct features and an uncertain future, emerge. In the next section I will delineate the main traits of the former, whereas I will let at the concluding remarks the temptation to describe the evolution of the party system after the political earthquake of 2013.

### *Neither Polarized nor Fragmented, but Destructured: The Italian Bipolarism*

In the classic US two-party system model, the transformation of a party system can be easily identified by the occurrence of a critical election. However, this does not mean that the US has changed its party system, just that the balance of power between the two largest parties is significantly changed. Indeed, the party system of the United States has remained unchanged for more than two centuries. The concept of a "critical election" is useful for a temporal, longitudinal analysis of the party system in a given country, which is why I have used it here. But, and importantly, a critical election cannot tell us anything about the nature or type of party system that it eventually creates. As the US system demonstrates, *ad abundantiam*, a party system might remain the same even after a watershed general election. Hence, it is clear that in order to evaluate if a party system has changed, we need a typology of party systems. While the literature on this topic has always been fruitful, even in recent years, the analytical framework proposed by Giovanni Sartori almost forty years ago maintains all its validity and supremacy in this field. It is within this specific framework that Mair states: "Electoral change should be seen to lead to party system change only when it brings about a shift from one type of party system to another"<sup>1</sup>. In this light, a critical election can only be interpreted as a "game-changer" if it creates the conditions for a transformation "in the inter-party relationship that both results from and affects the competition and cooperation between political parties"<sup>2</sup>.

We have seen in Section 3 that the Italian case, at least for the period from 1945 up to the early 1990s, can be included in that type of party system that Sartori called "polarized pluralism", in which an extreme multi-party system went hand in hand with a high level of ideological polarization. But now the question is: What changed after the critical election of 1994?

Many political scientists have emphasized that due to the "ideological thaw" triggered by the end of the Cold War, or thanks to the introduction of a mixed-member majoritarian electoral law, the mechanics of the party system have been modified significantly. If the first party system had been "blocked at the centre", after the rupture of 1994 Italy soon discovered the (at that time) unexpected charm of an

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<sup>1</sup> Peter MAIR, *Party System Change. Approaches and Interpretations*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1997, p. 54.

<sup>2</sup> Paul PENNINGS, Jan-Erik LANE, "Introduction", in IDEM (eds.), *Comparing Party System Change*, Routledge, London, 1998, pp. 1-18.

alternation in government. In a nutshell, the party system was no longer blocked and, as a result, Italy entered the club of the alternational party system. This trend is clear when looking at Figure 3 (see the Annex). From 1948 to 1987, the average degree of governmental turnover is 8.3: essentially, the composition of the cabinets after the election remained almost unchanged. Government changeovers involved only micro-substitutions of small allied parties but, on the whole, the fundamental structure of the coalitional formula remained intact. On this point it is worth stressing that the discovery of government alternation in Italy has been abrupt and absolutely telling. None of the eleven general elections held in the forty-five years of the first party system (1948-1993) produced a wholesale turnover in government; quite the contrary, if we exclude the last legislative election of 2013, every time Italian voters have had the possibility to express their opinion at the polls they have regularly ousted the incumbent government. The shift from complete absence of alternation to its constant occurrence occurred impressively quickly and it can also signal the passage from a blocked party system (for an excessive absence of rotation in government) to a similarly/equally blocked party system because of an excessive occurrence of alternation, a sort of vicious circle in which the system rotates ineffectively around itself.

In any case, if "polarized pluralism" is based on the centrifugal "mechanics" of inter-party competition in which, by definition, alternation in government is not envisioned, at the same time the format of that type of party system implies the existence of more than five relevant parties. From the end of WWII to the early 1990s the number of relevant parties in Italy has been constantly higher than five, a clear indicator that the system was extremely fragmented (see the Annex, Figure 4). This situation is coherent with the description of the polarized pluralism; what is not coherent, at least in light of Sartori's analytical framework, is the rise in the number of relevant parties in Italy after the critical election of 1994. As Gambetta and Warner have rightly observed, "while old parties were dying out new parties mushroomed"<sup>1</sup>, with new political actors outnumbering the old ones. This argument holds true even when taking into account a measure of fragmentation of the party system as the "effective number of political parties" (see Figure 4).

The other side of this (fragmented) picture is revealed in the concentration of votes for the two largest parties at the polls. As shown by Figure 5 (see the Annex), the electoral strength of the two largest parties has dropped from an average of 38% in the first party system to an average of 28% in the second republican phase. It is worth underscoring that this downward trend has been counterbalanced, at the parliamentary level, by the majoritarian effect (either implicit or explicit) produced by the electoral systems approved in 1993 and in 2005. For instance, thanks to the bonus-adjusted PR electoral system, in 2013 the two largest parties at the polls (M5S and PD: jointly 51%) attracted (and gained, especially the PD) 64.4% of the seats. In sum, since 1994 the Italian party system has experienced an increasing trend of fragmentation and, to some extent, atomization: more parties – often minor and short-lived organizations. For this reason the second party system has been described as a

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<sup>1</sup> Diego GAMBETTA, Steven WARNER, "Italy: Lofty Ambitions and Unintended Consequences", in Josep COLOMER (ed.), *Handbook of Electoral System Choice*, Palgrave, London, 2004, p. 246.

strange case of "fragmented bipolarism"<sup>1</sup> in which the extreme number of parties has been constrained by, and encapsulated within, two alternative all-encompassing pre-electoral coalitions characterized by a significant degree of ideological heterogeneity<sup>2</sup>. This pattern can be observed in Figure 6 (see the Annex), which shows the average number of parties in the cabinet by parliamentary term. On average, the cabinets of the party system were made up of three parties, whereas in the subsequent phase there are four or more governing parties. By the same token, the ideological range of the cabinet has also increased remarkably in the passage towards the second phase of Italy's republican history: the distance between the two parties at either end of the left-right extreme since 1994 is nearly three times higher than the previous period. To conclude on this point, after the disappearance of the established mass-based parties, Italian cabinets have become more fragmented, both numerically and ideologically. Although the prevailing type of government has changed in the passage from the first to the second party system, whereby since 1994 "minimum winning coalition" cabinet has been the most frequent coalitional formula (see the Annex, Figure 7), the higher stability experienced by the cabinets has not improved their political decision-making and effectiveness. In short, the unstable immobilism of the first republican phase was simply replaced by the stable immobilism of the second party system.

Thus far we have seen that, since 1994, Italy has abandoned the "mechanics" of polarized pluralism but, simultaneously, and especially as a consequence of a poorly designed electoral reform, the "format" of the party system has dramatically increased. So to speak, the mechanics describe a bipolar system, while the format keeps telling a story of polarization and fragmentation. In fact, it is no coincidence that scholars looking for an appropriate name for Italy's emerging party system adopted the original label "polarized bipolarism"<sup>3</sup>. From this viewpoint, the process of "bipolarization" that started in 1994 has not brought about a parallel process of depolarization of the party system. Quite the opposite, and because of the enduringly high number of political parties, the ideological distance among the same parties has remained significant. Since the ideological spectrum is "elastic", in the sense that "the more parties, the more their competition tends to spread along a linear, left-right type of space"<sup>4</sup>, even after the end of the Cold War, the ideological distance (in the electorate's perception) between the parties has remained constantly high. As a matter of fact, the temporary reduction of polarization registered in 1994 lasted no more than a few years and, since 2001, the ideological distance has reached levels similar to those of the previous (highly ideological) phase (see the Annex, Figure 8).

That said, the main question remains: Did the 1994 general election bring about a change in the type of party system? Yes and no. Yes, if we consider that many

<sup>1</sup> E.g. Roberto D'ALIMONTE, "Italy: A Case of Fragmented Bipolarism", in Michael GALLAGHER, Paul MITCHELL (eds.), *The Politics of Electoral Systems*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005, pp. 253-276; Alessandro CHIARAMONTE, "Dal bipolarismo frammentato al bipolarismo limitato? Evoluzione del sistema partitico italiano", in Roberto D'ALIMONTE, Alessandro CHIARAMONTE (eds.), *Proporzionale se vi pare. Le elezioni politiche del 2008*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2010, pp. 203-228.

<sup>2</sup> Roberto D'ALIMONTE, "Italy: A Case...cit..".

<sup>3</sup> Giovanni SABBATUCCI, *Il trasformismo come sistema*, Laterza, Roma & Bari, 2003; Giuseppe IERACI, *Governments and Parties in Italy. Parliamentary Debates, Investiture Votes and Policy Positions (1994-2006)*, Troubador Publishing, Leicester, 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Giovanni SARTORI, *Parties and Party Systems...cit.*, p. 304.

facets of the old polarized pluralism were lost on the journey towards a different "pattern of democracy", that is, towards a less consensual and more majoritarian form of democracy. Nevertheless, this transformation, which has taken the shape of an institutional *transition*, has remained incomplete: it stalled at the junction between the unexpected collapse of the old polarized pluralism and the emergence of a hybrid polarized and fragmented bipolarism. What is more, the very existence of this new type of party system, one that was not even contemplated in Giovanni Sartori's original typology, bears witnesses to the enduring state of flux and uncertainty of the Italian system. For this reason, I prefer to describe the second party system as a case of "destructured bipolarism", that is, a type of system not yet fully institutionalized which can take, from time to time and from election to election, different shapes and formats. This type of party system shows significant oscillation in the number of relevant parties, as occurred before and after the 2008 election, which has witnessed a drastic, though temporary, reduction of the parliamentary fragmentation. The same holds true also for the irregular trend of the ideological polarization: after the small decline in the early 1990s, it has grown significantly since 2001, with the minor exception of the 2008 general election. It might be argued (though this goes beyond the scope of this article) that the nature of the polarization is inherently different in the two distinct phase of Italian history (before and after 1994). If, for instance, the polarization of the first party system was driven by purely ideological reasons, in the subsequent period it turns out to be driven by the "strategic" incentives provided by the "populist bipolarism" present in Italy<sup>1</sup>. It is this specific "dynamic of polarization" – a relatively new phenomenon that may also be identified, *inter alia*, in Greece<sup>2</sup> and Venezuela<sup>3</sup> – that explains the coexistence in Italy of a bipolar pattern of inter-party competition and the increasing (and self-reinforcing) rise of polarization.

To recapitulate and conclude, the critical election that occurred in Italy in 1994 brought about a significant, albeit ambiguous, change to its type of party system. In their definitions of the new system, many scholars have alternatively emphasized either the rise of party fragmentation or the permanence of a high level of polarization. Nevertheless, neither "fragmented bipolarism" nor "polarized pluralism" are able to adequately capture the actual mechanics of the second party system. On the contrary, the defining feature that has characterized Italy since 1994 is its constant and enduring level of destructure; a level that outstrips all the other West-European countries. A simple indicator of party system destructure shows quite well this specific condition of the Italian system (see the Annex, Figure 9).

In light of all these specifications, I would define the party system born in Italy at the mid-1990s as one of "destructured bipolarism". It is a type of party system that cannot be easily compared to those of the other advanced and well functioning democracies. But, above all, it is a system bound to remain in a state of perennial fluidity, until new actors find the strength and grasp the opportunity to (re)build new and more resilient structures, both at the electoral and at the institutional level.

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<sup>1</sup> Gianfranco PASQUINO, "The 2013 Elections and the Italian Political System", paper presented at the conference "2013 Italian Elections – Italian Politics at the Crossroads?", Birmingham, 17 January 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Takis S. PAPPAS, "Why Greece Failed", *Journal of Democracy*, vol. XXIV, no. 2, 2013, pp. 31-45.

<sup>3</sup> Javier CORRALES, "In Search of a Theory of Polarization. Lessons from Venezuela, 1999-2005", *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, vol. 79, 2005, pp. 105-118.

## *In Lieu of a Conclusion: Toward a Third Party System?*

After twenty years of inconclusive institutional transition and the introduction of unstable bipolarism, the Italian party system faced another critical election. In February 2013, many of the organizations and actors of the second party system were wiped out by a new, and unpredicted, electoral upheaval. Many of the political actors that played a crucial role in the previous phase(s) were defeated and new parties, prompted by one of the severest economic crises to have occurred in Italy since the end of WWII, have entered Parliament for the first time. It is still too early to fully evaluate the consequences of the latest national election, but it is not too early to say that in the winter 2013 we saw further proof of the weak institutionalization of the Italian political parties; indeed, their ephemeral organizations have not been able to effectively cope with a changing electoral environment. If one – following Huntington<sup>1</sup>– can say that a party is “institutionalized” when it reaches a certain degree of adaptability (among other factors that I do not take into consideration here), then recent Italian history offers up very few examples of these. Their dominant trait – with only minor exceptions – is the inability to evolve and adapt to different institutional and electoral contexts. From this perspective, there is nothing new under the sun. The Italian political landscape appears bound to stay in a state of constant, if not declining, deconstruction. In such a case, the eventual third party system would be the simple continuation of the previous system in disguise.

But the current situation is much more complicated than that, largely because of the nature of the new parties that made their appearance in 2013. In particular, the flamboyant emergence of Beppe Grillo’s M5S as the largest political party at the ballot boxes cannot be simply treated, or discounted, as the usual arrival of yet another personal party in a country where personalization has put aside complex and long-lasting political organizations. The M5S party is something else<sup>2</sup>, and its consequences for the evolution of the party system might be much more profound. In a way, Grillo’s movement is not only a new personal party; it is, more importantly, a new polarization-carrier. Its main goal – as its founder and leader recognizes – is “to change the system”<sup>3</sup>, where “the system” refers to the classic *representative (parliamentary) democracy*. In this sense the M5S can be defined as a “relationally anti-system party” which, by definition,

“adopts ‘isolationist’ strategies, and tends to build a ‘separate’ pole of the system and to refuse to enter coalitions (at the national level), and resorts to outbidding propaganda tactics, systematically opposing and discrediting some founding values of the regime, on which all other parties agree”<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel P. HUNTINGTON, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1968, pp. 13-17.

<sup>2</sup> Fabio BORDIGNON, Luigi CECCARINI, “Five Stars and a Cricket. Beppe Grillo Shakes Italian Politics”, *South European Society and Politics*, 2013, online; Piergiorgio CORBETTA, Elisabetta GUALMINI (eds.), *Il partito di Grillo*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Beppe GRILLO, “Non abbiamo fretta”, online at [www.beppegrillo.it/2013/05/non\\_abbiamo\\_fretta.html](http://www.beppegrillo.it/2013/05/non_abbiamo_fretta.html).

<sup>4</sup> Giovanni CAPOCCIA, “Anti-System Parties: A Conceptual Reassessment”, *Party Politics*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2002, p. 25.

These are precisely the strategies adopted by the M5S to date, whose entry in Parliament has already incentivized the reproduction of a centrifugal competition between parties and, accordingly, the birth of new splinter groups eager to chase M5S's issues and voters.

Furthermore, the second relevant characteristic of Grillo's party is its distinctability to attract voters from very different social groups or classes. In today's Italy, the party is the best example of a truly catch-all (people's) party, a movement able to 'catch' votes from across society: from white and blue-collar workers, public employees and private entrepreneurs, students and retirees. In sum, the M5S is, at least at this stage of its organizational evolution, a *catch-all anti-system party*; and this combination of sociological and ideological factors may significantly affect the party system. More precisely, the anti-system stance of the M5S has pushed the party into an 'isolated' pole in which there is no incentive to unite with other pro-system parties; simultaneously, the sociological composition of its electorate has spread the party along the entire political spectrum, from (extreme) left to (extreme) right. As a consequence, Grillo's party is not isolated in a (single) pole but, rather, circles the pro-system actors (see the Annex, Figure 10).

At this point, it is also worth stressing that, since the 2013 legislative election brought to the fore a new political cleavage that separates those parties that have accepted the decisions taken by the European Union from those who have criticized (and would reject) the incursion of EU institutions into national politics, the party system is currently divided along two different lines of conflict: a) the classic, horizontal left-right divide; and b) the new, vertical cleavage pro- or anti-EU. In such a multidimensional political context, the current Letta government, which includes the mainstream pro-EU actors, is an oversized coalition that occupies the metrical centre of the political spectrum and faces opposition from both semi-loyal and anti-system parties. Thus, more than twenty years after the end of the Cold War, today's Italy offers all the conditions for the re-emergence of the polarized pluralism that characterized the first party system. After WWII, the opposition to the pro-system (governing) parties was bilateral, that is, isolated in two excluded poles: the Communist pole, on the left, and the Neo-Fascist pole, on the right. Today, the role of bilateral opposition to the system is carried out by a single player whose ideological and sociological heterogeneity allows it to act at both extremes of the political spectrum.

So, is Italy predestined to return to the old days of polarized pluralism, with its inevitably unstable centrist governments and the consequential impossibility of alternation in power that this poses? Of course, there are many signs that the eventual third party system might look rather like the first, especially for the cumbersome presence of a catch-all anti-system party that can "hinder, or make more difficult, the formation of 'bipolar' coalitions"<sup>1</sup>. We know from Marx that history repeats itself: first as tragedy, second as farce. Besides that, the first party system was not a tragedy but a necessary evil, the second was an unnecessary evil and the third might be a necessary virtue only if it can reverse the trend toward a complete deconstruction of its democratic politics. To do so, a serious and farsighted feat of political engineering is urgently needed. Until that day comes, Italy seems destined to remain as it is: suspended in its transitional limbo, awaiting judgement.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 27.

## ANNEX

**Table 1**  
*Phases of Coalition Government in the Italian Republic, 1945-2013*

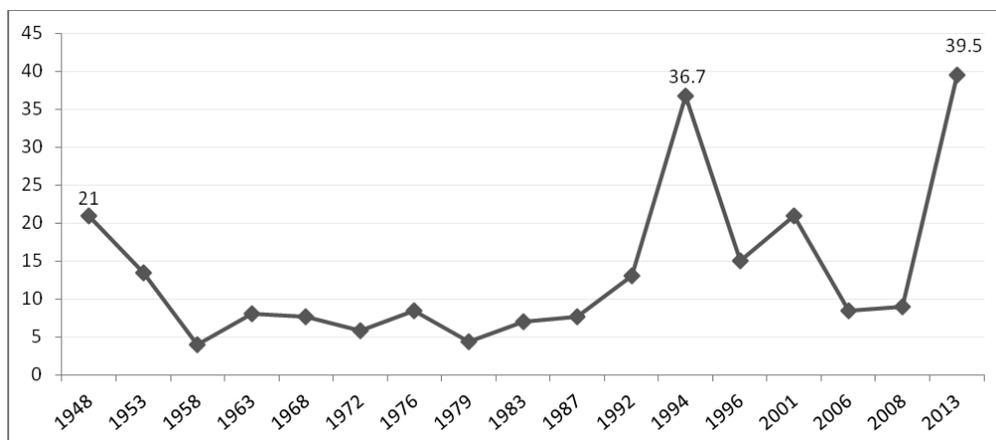
<i>Government formula</i>	<i>Years</i>	<i>Parties involved</i>	<i>Number of cabinets</i>	<i>Sub-phases and Prime Ministers</i>	<i>Major policy issues</i>
Democratic instauration	1945-7	DC-PCI-PSI-PLI-PRI	4	Parri 1945 De Gasperi 1946	Constitutional setting
First party system					
Centrism	1947-60	DC-PLI-PSDI-PRI	13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preparation: De Gasperi 1947</li> <li>• Central period: De Gasperi 1948-53</li> <li>• Crisis: De Gasperi 1953, Pella 1953, Fanfani 1954</li> <li>New stabilization: Scelba 1954, Segni 1955</li> <li>• Final crisis: Zoli 1957, Fanfani 1958, Segni 1959, Tambroni 1960</li> </ul>	International alliances, economic reforms
Centre-left	1960-75	DC-PSI-PSDI-PRI	17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preparation: Fanfani 1960-62, Leone 1963</li> <li>• Central period: Moro 1964-8</li> <li>• Crisis: Leone 1968, Rumor 1968-70</li> <li>• New stabilization: Colombo 1970</li> <li>• Attempts to change the coalition: Andreotti 1972-3</li> <li>• Decline and final crisis: Rumor 1973, Moro 1974-6</li> </ul>	Nationalizations, enlargement of the public sector, social reforms

National solidarity	1976-9	DC-PCI-PSI-PSDI-PRI-PLI	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preparation and central period: Andreotti 1976-8</li> <li>• Crisis: Andreotti 1979</li> <li>• New stabilization: Scelba 1954, Segni 1955</li> <li>• Final crisis: Zoli 1957, Fanfani 1958, Segni 1959, Tambroni 1960</li> </ul>	Economic crisis, terrorist emergency
Five-party	1980-92	DC-PSI-PSDI-PRI-PLI	14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preparation: Cossiga 1979-80, Forlani 1980</li> <li>• Central period: Spadolini 1981-2, Fanfani 1982, Craxi 1983-6</li> <li>• Crisis and renegotiation: Craxi 1986, Fanfani 1987, Gorla 1987, De Mita 1988</li> <li>• New stabilization: Andreotti 1989-91</li> <li>• Final crisis: Amato 1992</li> </ul>	Correction of the state intervention, public debts, inflation
I Transition					
Transitional cabinet	1993-4	DC-PSI-PSDI-PLI (PDS-Greens, PRI, LN)	1	Ciampi 1993	Economic crisis, institutional reforms
Second Party System					
Centre-right attempt	1994-5	FI-AN-LN-CCD	1	Berlusconi 1994	Institutional reforms, federalism, privatizations
Technocratic cabinet	1995-6	PDS-PPI-LN (FI-CCD-AN)	1	Dini 1995	Institutional reforms
Olive tree coalition	1996-2001	PDS-PPI-Greens-RIN	4	Prodi 1996-8, D'Alema 1998-99, Amato 2000	European policies, reform of the welfare state, institutional reforms
Berlusconi I	2001-6	FI, AN, LN, UDC	2	Berlusconi 2001	Federalism, Immigration, institutional and electoral reforms

Centre-left interruption	2006-8	DS-Margh-IdV-RC-Greens-Rad-Udeur	1	Prodi 2006	Economic reforms, liberalization, institutional and electoral reforms
Berlusconi II	2008-11	PDL-LN-MPA	1	Berlusconi 2008	Federalism, education reform, institutional reforms
----- II Transition -----					
Transitional technocratic cabinet	2011-13	PDL-PD-UDC	1	Monti 2011	Economic crisis, austerity measures, electoral reform
----- Third Party System -----					
Centrist-mainstream coalition	2013-	PD-PDL-UDC-SC	1	Letta 2013	Economic crisis, institutional and electoral reforms

Source: the period 1945-1993 is re-adapted from Maurizio COTTA, Luca VERZICHELLI, "Italy. From 'Constrained' Coalitions to Alternating Governments?", in Wolfgang C. MÜLLER, Kaare STRØM (eds.), *Coalition Governments...cit.*, pp. 432-497.

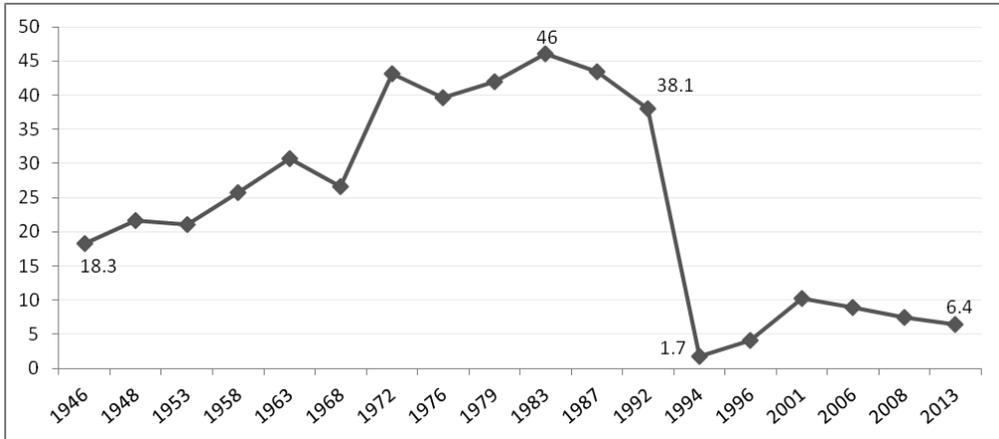
**Figure 1**  
*Electoral Volatility in Italy, 1948-2013*



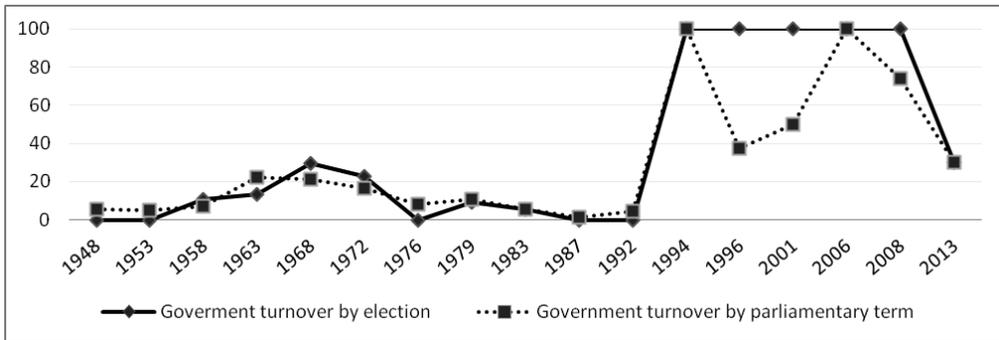
Note: author's own calculation based on Pedersen's index of electoral volatility<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Mogens N. PEDERSEN, "The Dynamics of European Party Systems. Changing Patterns of Electoral Volatility", *European Journal of Political Research*, vol. VII, no. 1, 1979, pp. 1-26.

**Figure 2**  
*Average Age of the Italian Party System, 1946-2013*



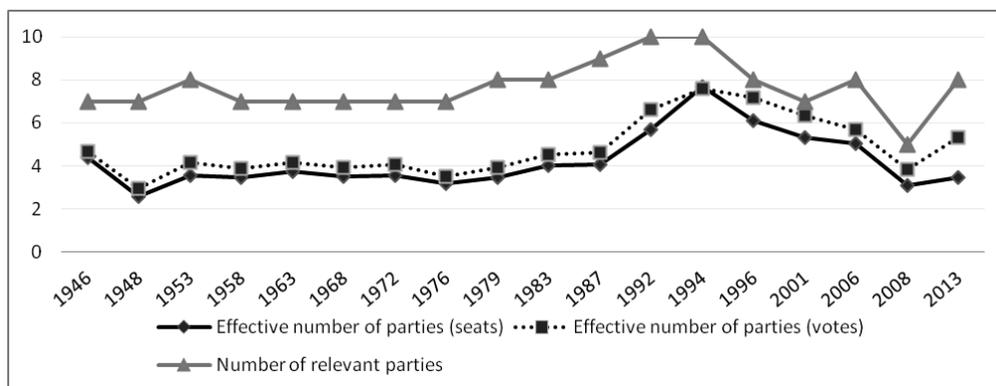
**Figure 3**  
*Governmental Turnover in Italy by Legislative Election and Parliamentary Term, 1948-2013*



Note: turnover in government is calculated as the sum of the gains of all “winning” parties (those that increased their weight in the cabinet) and the losses of all “losing” parties (those that had their weight in the cabinet reduced), divided by two. Its range goes from 0 (absence of turnover) to 100 (wholesale turnover, or alternation)<sup>1</sup>.

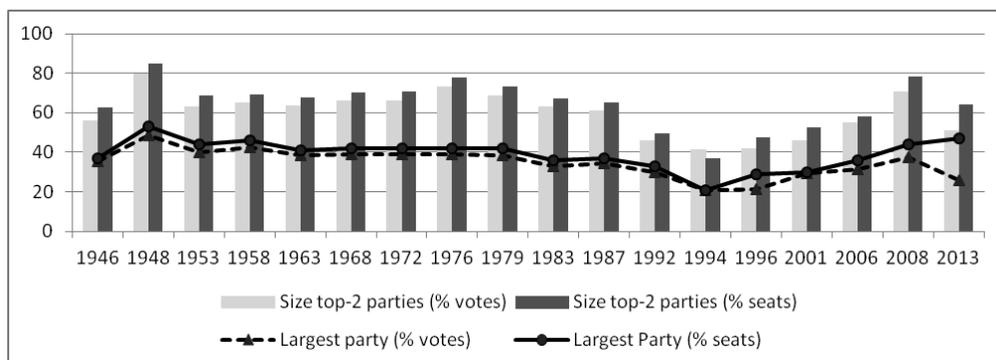
<sup>1</sup> For more details, Marco VALBRUZZI, “Misurare l’alternanza, la sua pratica e la sua mancanza”, in Gianfranco PASQUINO, Marco VALBRUZZI (eds.), *Il potere dell’alternanza. Teorie e ricerche sui cambi di governo*, Bononia University Press, Bologna, 2011, pp. 303-334.

**Figure 4**  
*Number of Relevant and Effective Parties in Italy, 1948-2013*



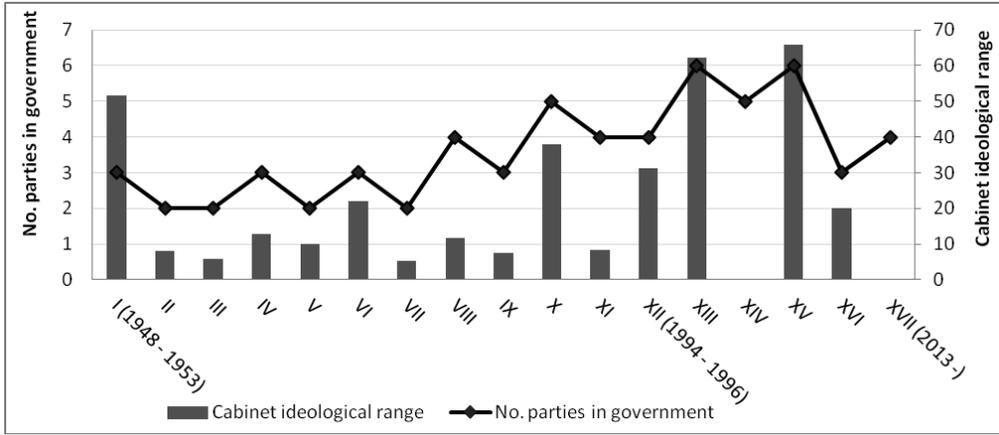
Note: author's own calculation based on Laakso and Taagepera's index<sup>1</sup>.

**Figure 5**  
*Size of the Top-2 Parties and Largest Party, 1946-2013*



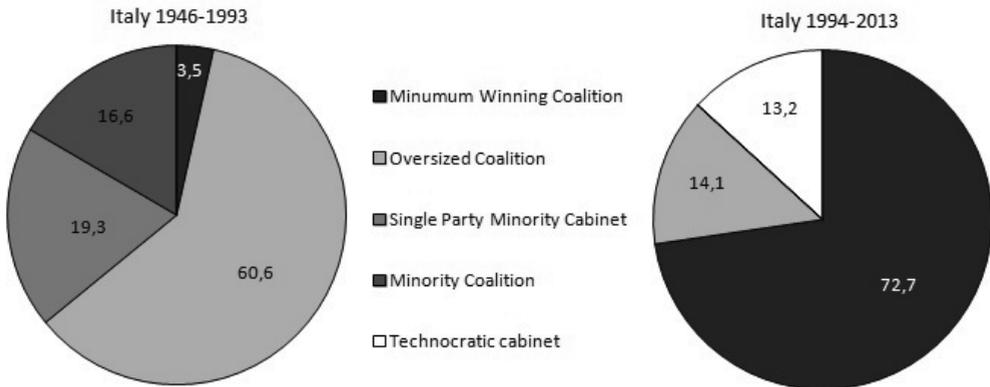
<sup>1</sup> Markku LAAKSO, Rein TAAGEPERA, "Effective Number of Parties: A Measure with Application to West Europe", *Comparative Political Studies*, vol. 12, no. 1, 1979, pp. 3-27.

**Figure 6**  
*Average Number of Relevant Parties in Government and Cabinet Ideological Range by Parliamentary Term, 1948-2013*



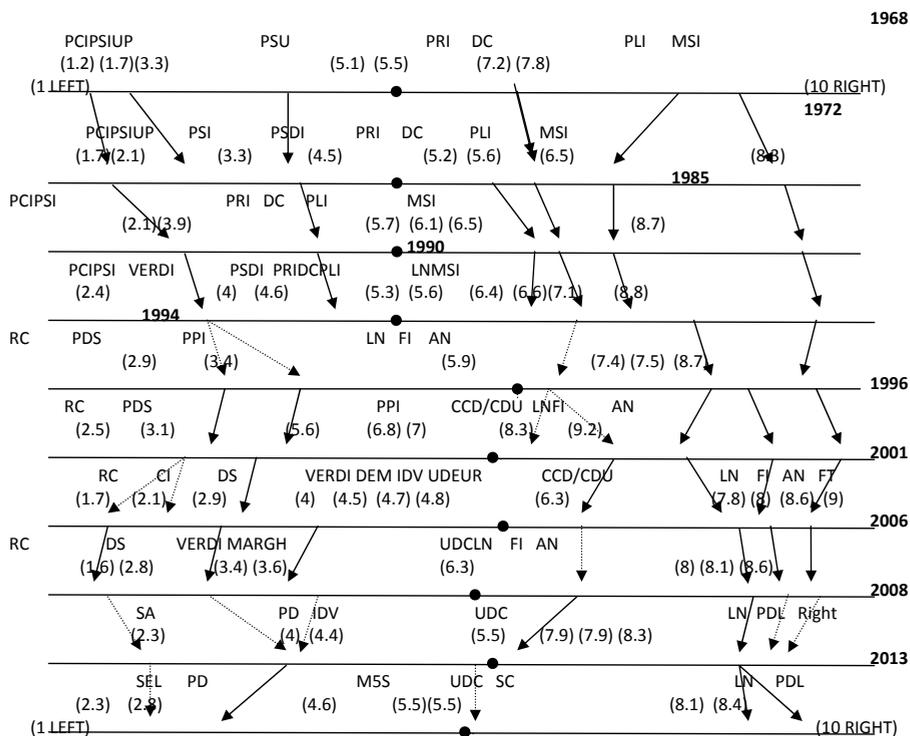
Source: for the data on the cabinet ideological range, see Andrea VOLKENS, Pola LEHMANN, Nicolas MERZ, Sven REGEL, Annika WERNER, *The Manifesto Data Collection. Manifesto Project (MRG, CMP, MARPOR)*, 2013; data for the XIV and XVII parliamentary terms are not available.

**Figure 7**  
*Types of Government in Italy, 1946-2013*



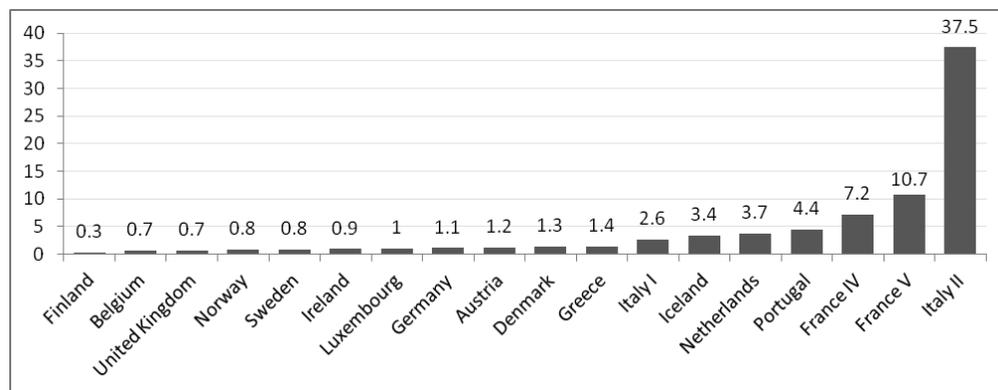
Note: the types of government are weighted by time (days in office).

**Figure 8**  
*Main Italian Political Parties' Ideological Positioning on the Left-right Scale (According to Voters' Perceptions), 1968-2013*



Source: author's own calculation based on ITANES's datasets ([www.itanes.org](http://www.itanes.org)). Note: black dots identify the median voter's position.

**Figure 9**  
*Destructuration of the West-European Party Systems, 1945-2013 (%)*



Note: Party system destructuration has been calculated as the average of: a) the vote share of new parties at the ballot box; b) the seat share of parties not previously elected for the national

Parliament (e.g., M5S in 2013 Italian election); c) the seat share of parties not previously elected for the national Parliament and immediately included in the cabinet (e.g., Berlusconi’s *Forza Italia*, in 1994). Its theoretical range goes from 0 (minimum destructuration) to 100 (maximum destructuration).

**Figure 10**  
*Multidimensional Configuration of the Italian Party System after the 2013 Legislative Election*

