INTRODUCTION: GOVERNING FEAR

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In 2008, Silvio Berlusconi returned to power in Italy, thanks to a decisive electoral victory, with a slimmer, more manageable coalition and a government hinging on a group of ministers who were very close to him. The previous year had ended under the banner of anti-politics and, more specifically, of widespread mistrust of a government seen as too quarrelsome and paralyzed by a crossfire of vetoes. It had also been the year of *La Casta* (The Caste), the successful book by Sergio Rizzo and Gianantonio Stella, which implacably denounced wasteful spending in Italian politics, as well as the campaigns by Beppe Grillo, which acted upon, and in turn fueled, a climate of deep resentment toward politics.¹

But 2008 was also a year of insecurity, above all due to widespread perceptions of an increase in crime, which the citizens largely attributed to the presence of immigrants. In fact, following serious episodes, such as the murder of Giovanna Reggiani by a Romanian citizen in Rome in October 2007, a powerful wave of hostility toward immigrants was recorded, probably also goaded by hammering television coverage, unequaled in the months following the elections.² According to a new edition of Rizzo and Stella's volume, published in November 2008, little seems to have changed in terms of the economic costs of politics. Comparing the Demos Institute 2007 report, "Italians and the State," with the 2008 report and with other data in a "Report on Security" by the same institution,³ we note some improvement in public perceptions of security, while the relationship with politics remains problematic.

What happened to Italian politics in 2008? Many things transpired. The fall of Romano Prodi's government, followed by political elections on 13–14 April, reconfirmed to Italy the "rule" of alternation that had emerged in the last 15 years, that is to say, from the time when the two main party coalitions started to battle for Palazzo Chigi. Today, it is Berlusconi, the clear electoral victor, alongside a resurrected Umberto Bossi, who is leading the country through an increasingly demanding economic situation, with the prospect of a recession extending through 2009.

Thus, a year that began with images, seen worldwide, of Naples suffocated by garbage ended in a climate dominated by economic uncertainty, with the slow, tortured transfer of Alitalia to the new Compagnia Aerea Italiana (CAI, Italian Airline Company) remaining non-operational, despite the many announcements following the takeover, which began at the end of August. In between was packed a series of events: the general elections in April; Gianni Alemanno's surprising victory at the local elections in Rome; the election of Emma Marcegaglia as president of Confindustria; the continued trickle of work-related deaths; and the news that heavy criminal collusion had influenced the management of the health system. All this took place on the home front, while the government strenuously tried to carve out a significant international profile in a context affected, first, by the ongoing delays in the process of European institutional consolidation, then by the war in Georgia, and finally by Barack Obama's victory in the US presidential elections. These events occurred at a time when, due to the "globalization" of the economic crisis, most Western economies fell into a recession.

For several months, opinion polls showed a relatively unprecedented level of public trust in the Berlusconi government. His ability to lead, according to some, and to decide, according to others, or indeed the policy of public announcements, as yet others believed, allowed the government (thanks also to the already mentioned change of approach by the media on the issue of security compared to 2007) to "govern the fears" of Italians. But the strong contrast with the previous government's policy of vetoes cannot hide the economic and social structural problems that remained unresolved at the end of the year, while the opposition struggled to find an effective political strategy.

A Simpler Party System?

February 2008 saw the final stage of the second-shortest legislative term in the Italian Republic, only 10 days longer than the Parliament elected in 1992, which was caught up in the Tangentopoli inquiry early on. This final stage was marked by a government crisis caused

by a vote of no confidence in the Senate following the resignation of Minister of Justice Clemente Mastella (and a parallel centrist defection led by ex-prime minister Lamberto Dini). The last months of the Prodi government were marked by a proposal for electoral reform, put forward by the secretary of the new Democratic Party (PD), Walter Veltroni, with the aim of simplifying the party spectrum and making the complex dynamics of coalitions less unwieldy, as both Berlusconi, in the 2001–2006 period, and above all Prodi, with the emergence of the *Unione* in 2006, had experienced to their cost. The failure of negotiations on electoral reform was followed, in the month of January, by the Constitutional Court's positive endorsement of the admissibility of the proposed electoral referendums, causing further deterioration in a coalition balance that was probably already compromised (see the chronology in this volume).

With the elections fixed for April, on one side, the recognized *dominus* of the center-right was finally reaching his objective, after two years of seeking revenge for the alleged (and widely refuted) election rigging that took place in 2006.⁴ On the other side, Veltroni had to tread delicately between laying claim to the (primarily economic) achievements of the two-year Prodi government⁵ and, for electoral purposes, marking a clear disconnection from the government in power. The latter in fact never recovered, in all indices of public trust recorded by major opinion polls, from the rapid drop experienced only three months after taking power, following its approval of the law on *indulto* (pardon) in July 2006. It was clear that Veltroni was embarking on a very steep path, leaving the PD with little margin of optimism as to the likely outcome of the imminent elections.

Shortly after the middle of January, even before the fall of the Prodi government and the failure of the attempt by the president of the Senate, Franco Marini, to form a short-term reforming government, Veltroni's declaration that the PD would run alone (which was later modified by an agreement with Antonio Di Pietro of the *Italia dei Valori* (IdV, Italy of Values) expressed the hope of simplifying the party spectrum, in accordance with the party's "majoritarian vocation." It was an imaginative gamble, later shown to be very risky, based on the idea that it would be enough to promote a new type of political confrontation, even to the point of legitimizing the enemy through an artificial circumlocution (the "main leader of the rival coalition") in order to achieve a decisive electoral gain.

In fact, it is not clear whether Veltroni's gamble to run alone (or nearly alone) was a deliberate risk, based on the premise of defeat and a long-term strategy of consolidating a reformist axis, or was instead misguided by erroneous expectations, to a degree encouraged by some polls, which

a few days before the election recorded a narrowing of the gap between the two parties, similarly to what had happened—but in reverse—two years earlier.⁶ In any case, an analysis of the results of the political elections reveals both important continuities and significant changes.

In the first camp belongs what Piergiorgio Corbetta (as well as other respected electoral analysts)⁷ defines in his chapter as the “enduring domination of the right.” Once the unreliable coalitional geometry is taken out, the data from 2008 are in keeping with the previous three five-year periods, with the center-right coalition winning by between 5 and 10 percentage points. However, the choices made by the PD have also contributed to a significant change from previous elections. With the collapse of the so-called radical left, Veltroni’s party clearly established a dominant position within the left spectrum, taking advantage of the prospect of a “useful vote.” That some later interpreted this as a “consolation prize” is due—apart from long-standing diatribes within the left coalition—to persistent and divergent interpretations of two ultimately undeniable facts: a clear defeat for the left and the prospect of a long phase of domination by the center-right in Italy.

As James L. Newell shows in his chapter, all of the opposition parties suffered from the great popularity of the Cabinet, demonstrating more than a little uncertainty in their attempt to create a credible alternative to the government. If, on the one hand, the Union of Christian and Center Democrats (UDC) was the first victim of the strategy to “widen the center” (at the cost of the defection of some important members toward the majority), then, on the other hand, the governing parties (until the April election) suffered from disorientation and disagreements that intensified in the final weeks of the year. In particular, the heavy defeat in Abruzzo on 13–14 December and the coinciding start of a series of judicial investigations primarily involving PD members exacerbated divergences both within Veltroni’s party and between it and Di Pietro.

The PD appeared uncertain on many occasions and was unable to develop a clear and unambiguous vision of its principal constituent mission: to consolidate its reformist image with a strong leader, who would act as a guarantor of internal pluralism, without falling hostage to internal divisions and currents, which, historically, the two parties from which the PD originated—the Democratici di Sinistra (DS, Left Democrats) and the Margherita—had been prey to. If the PD fell victim to personal diatribes “at the top” between its key leaders, whose evidence was hard to refute despite repeated denials, after the election the party had to face no less important challenges “from below.” While in the North, where the left was entrenched in a minority position, requests for a federal structure grew louder—to the point that the

mayor of Turin, Sergio Chiamparino, proposed a rapprochement with the Northern League (LN)—it was above all in the South, particularly in Campania, that the debate was especially heated, due both to the garbage management crisis and more generally to the misgovernment by the center-left in a region as crucial today as it was 15 years ago in shifting the balance between the two sides.

This is not to suggest that the regions in the center were problem-free. The defeat of Francesco Rutelli at the local elections in Rome resulted from the demobilization of a large portion of the center-left electorate at the second ballot (see the chapter by Giovanni di Franco). There were also judicial inquiries that involved, first, the arrest of the president of the Abruzzo region, Ottaviano del Turco, and then the above-mentioned investigations into important city councils run by the center-left.

All this took place while the PD remained divided on its preferred strategy for future alliances. Should it lean toward the UDC (as in the election on 9 November when Lorenzo Dellai was confirmed as president of the Trento province), or remain open to the left (as others hypothesized), or re-establish a temporary alliance with Di Pietro, which soon dissolved with the formation of parliamentary groups and often came under strain during the year? Various episodes ranged from the anti-Berlusconi demonstrations in Piazza Navona to the Alfano law and the incredible election of Riccardo Villari as president of the RAI Vigilance Commission. Or should the PDF ally itself with all of these parties, as the saying goes, “from the UDC to the Communist Refoundation”?

It is easy therefore to conclude that the outlook for consolidation of the party system still seems uncertain on the eve of the 2009 European elections and after the resignation of Veltroni as the PD’s leader left vice-secretary Dario Franceschini in charge of the party. It is possible, but highly unlikely, that thanks to the 4 percent threshold introduced for the European elections, the PD will succeed in exerting a strong aggregative pull over its side of the political spectrum, similar to that which, given the prospect of government stability following the April elections, only the Popolo della Libertà (PdL) has until now been able to exert.

The Leader’s Government and Its Agenda: Between Maneuvers and Reforms, Announcements and Deferments

“This is Berlusconi IV, but this is the first real government by the prime minister.”⁸ Among many newspaper headlines on the swearing in of the Cabinet, this one, by Gianluigi Paragone, made an important point. If we compare the make-up of Berlusconi’s fourth government

with the previous three (see the chapter by Francesco Marangoni), we see that the coalition is much more cohesive. Fewer parties are represented in key ministerial roles, even taking into account that the merger of Forza Italia (FI) and Alleanza Nazionale (AN) has not yet been implemented. The return of prominent figures—including Giulio Tremonti (Economy and Finance) and the Northern League's Umberto Bossi (Federal Reform) and Roberto Maroni (now the head of Internal Affairs)—stands out, as does the inclusion of a group of people with little significant experience of government, who were generally seen as very close to the prime minister. In this context, the appointment of Franco Frattini as foreign minister was aimed at asserting, through the choice of a highly trusted politician also in the field of foreign policy, the dominance of Berlusconi's leadership, since the prime minister was probably still mindful of the serious problems that the presence of a figure like Renato Ruggiero had caused him at the beginning of his second government in 2001. The chapter by Maurizio Carbone on this subject analyzes the war in Georgia as emblematic of the Italian position between Europe, Russia, and the United States, even if the crucial moment to understand Italy's standing in the new international balance is 2009, with Obama's arrival at the White House.

If the PD's problem was creating a credible and strong opposition around Veltroni, who was faced with increasing questions of internal legitimacy, the issue of the leadership of the center-right initially seemed to have been put to one side, thanks to the return to government amid high levels of popular support. With the election of Gianfranco Fini as president of the lower house, Berlusconi guaranteed an institutional role at the highest level to the most credible candidate for succession. Only toward the end of the year, with the first signs of a fall in support, mainly following the education reforms (see the chapter by Giancarlo Gasperoni), did the issue of the identity of the new party re-emerge, with the related, delicate prospect of a merger between the FI and AN, over which the perennial problem of Berlusconi's succession loomed, even after the party conference met in March 2009.⁹

In terms of the government composition, it was primarily the absence of the UDC that allowed Berlusconi to have a less composite cabinet structure, since the UDC had emphasized its divergent position during the two previous center-right governments in 2001–2006. In this sense, reproposing the alliance with the Northern League represented an important strategic axis, alongside the difficult process of merging with the AN.

Despite its simplification, the coalition balance undoubtedly influenced the agenda of the first months of government. Certainly, Berlusconi had *carte blanche* when it came to the highly symbolic

provisions on which he had based the electoral campaign (abolition of council tax on properties, tightening up on security). But in many cases, the image, widespread in the media, of a government engaging in “trade-offs” as a result of the alliance with the LN appeared correct. In particular, the issues of fiscal federalism and justice forced Berlusconi to tread a delicate balance between Bossi on one side and Fini on the other.

On the one hand, it is undeniable that the famous LN flagship of fiscal federalism was heavily diluted and substantially altered from the original party proposals, as is shown in Marangoni’s chapter. Playing with words, it could be said that it went from a “Lombardy” model to a “Lombardo” model (referring to the president of the Sicily region, who managed to gain significant benefits from the proposed bill).¹⁰ On the other hand, regarding justice, the government first approved the much-discussed Alfano law partly in response to criticism of an earlier, more radical model (the “trial blocking” regulation), pending a judgment by the Constitutional Court at the end of the year. It later postponed to the new year a more organic reform as a result of various disagreements (focusing especially, but not exclusively, on wiretapping) between Berlusconi, on one side, and the AN and LN, on the other.

Rereading the chronicle of the first seven months of government, one is struck by the constant seesaw between announcements and rebuttals, denials and corrections. This does not mean that the government did not do anything. In fact, it practically monopolized legislative activity, mostly through legislative decrees and recourse to votes of confidence (44 out of 45 laws approved by Parliament from May to the end of December came from the government).¹¹ In addition, in some sectors, the government was marked by strong activism. Renato Brunetta, minister of public administration and innovation, particularly comes to mind—alongside polemical outbursts on excessive attention-seeking on television by the minister and a lack of transparency concerning available data on one of the most symbolically important aspects of his work, greater scrutiny of state workers’ absenteeism,¹² which actually contributed to his great popularity.¹³

More generally, if the government claimed that it had been able to bring forward the budgetary measures to June at a time when the economic crisis, which started in the autumn, had not yet affected the country, it is also true that, with regard to the crisis itself, it seemed torn between delaying any decisions and taking short-term actions, without adopting (unlike the rest of Europe) any structural policy to relaunch the economy. Limiting itself to modest, frequently ad hoc, and time-limited measures (including the disputed “social card,” but also a family bonus, both measures seen as only partly effective in combating

poverty compared to, for example, a minimum wage),¹⁴ Tremonti's intervention aspired to a rigor that had never been a primary objective in the economic policy of previous Berlusconi governments.

After having maintained for months that the measures taken in June were appropriate, the government delayed updating the forecast on public accounts, entrenching itself behind the imperative established by the Maastricht parameters, even though it was clear that in 2009 such parameters would soon be exceeded (as they promptly were in mid-January). This approach was maintained despite the reduction in interest costs as a result of the considerable lowering of rates by the Central European Bank at the end of the year. In addition, although Tremonti scored a point in favor of the government by presenting the so-called Robin Hood tax as a measure aimed at reining in excessive profits of the oil industry, end-of-year figures confirmed (as the economist Tito Boeri had already noted at the end of June)¹⁵ that one of the most important promises made in the electoral campaign—"we will not increase fiscal pressure"—had not been respected, as this pressure had instead been slightly increased.¹⁶ Given the tri-annual nature of such a measure, a similar increase can be forecast for 2010 and 2011, unless there is a specific intervention.

At the end of the year, the partial about-turn on education reform (see again the chapter by Gasperoni) confirmed the impression of a government experiencing difficulty in following a clear strategy of change, despite high levels of support in opinion polls.¹⁷ This strengthened the widespread impression that, several months after setting in motion important changes in crucial sectors of society, the traditional logic of Italian governments still prevailed, based more on negotiation and continual readjustments than on a decisive and unequivocal reforming policy coherently laid down by the head of the government.

The Endurance of Partyocracy and State-Region Relations

An important aspect brought to light by the contributors to this volume is the constant meshing between politics and the public sector, on one side, and politics and the financial sector, on the other. Franca Maino shows the persistence of "partyocracy" in the health sector, demonstrating how nowadays it seems to be prevalent at a regional rather than a national level. The appointment of managing directors and hospital heads continues to be decided according to party interests rather than on merit, and the regions continue to resist any attempt by the central government, both during the Prodi government and today with Berlusconi, to take control of the appointment system.

As well as a partyocratic approach to health, there is also a redistributive one, as Andrea Tardiola recently maintained.¹⁸

This enduring partyocratic and redistributive approach can be observed in the Naples garbage case, which took up so much space in the national and international media throughout the whole of 2008. In her chapter, Eleonora Pasotti analyzes its unseemly outcomes, which resulted in the president of the region of Campania, Antonio Bassolino, being caught in a vicious circle, marked by a crossfire of vetoes and sectoral interests, that was entirely at odds with the logic of good government. The prevalence of particularist and clientelist interests, along with Bassolino's lack of attention to the technical aspects of the problem, as opposed to its political and electoral dimensions, therefore determined the recent crisis, registering a negative outcome in terms of the center-left's electoral results. The factors contributing to this situation included, first, the contract with the construction company Impregilo, close to Fiat, in June 2000, with terms that were advantageous to the company and disadvantageous to the council (and the people) of Naples; second, the (political) choice to close all of the landfill sites in the region before the new incinerator was up and running; and, finally, the choice of Acerra as the site for the new single incinerator for the whole region, despite the contrary opinions of several local experts and the protests of the local people, which were also fueled by the Camorra for their own ends. Apart from Bassolino's personal responsibility, on which opinions differ, what stands out is the lack of managerial ability in a southern region (which relates to Maino's analysis in the chapter on health mismanagement), complemented by individual and national actors who were ready to take advantage of this capacity deficit instead of being willing to address it.

In the economic field, Grant Amyot, following a careful examination of the enduring issue of Alitalia, comes to the conclusion in his chapter that it was not so much public ownership of the flagship company but more likely the constant party-related meddling in managerial and strategic decisions that was responsible for the recent disastrous situation. To this we should add that the last phase of this vexed affair, when the Air France-KLM offer was replaced by CAI's, as well as being less favorable to the state (and therefore Italian taxpayers) and to company employees, was heavily influenced by a "northern" logic and the political weight of the LN. In addition to the LN, the typical model of Italian capitalism, traditionally dependent on state support and with a powerful internal compensation mechanism, made itself felt (which in some ways brings to mind the old model promoted by Enrico Cuccia, when, through Mediobanca, Italy's prominent capitalists enjoyed protection and support, resulting in the enhancement of

the cohesiveness of the economic system, but at the expense of competitiveness). Amyot concludes that despite external pressure from the European Union, old practices are slow to die out, and the push to modernize must ultimately come from within. Nonetheless, if the Prodi government showed on this occasion that it was ready to follow European rules, the Berlusconi government attempted to influence them, through the appointment of Antonio Tajani as European commissioner for transport, and, if need be, to ignore them, as in the post-humous censorship by the European Union of the bridging loan of 300 million euros, which was forcefully pressed for by the current prime minister (yet also agreed upon by the Prodi government).

Another factor to emerge from the analyses in the volume concerns the local and territorial nature of decision-making, with, at times, innovative and effective outcomes (as in the case of the center-left administration in Rome) and, at other times, perverse ones (a case in point is Naples, also governed by the center-left). The North-South division remains constant, with a persistently poorer capacity to govern in the southern regions and cities compared to those in the Center-North, as demonstrated in the health sector by Maino. From this point of view, the push toward federalism does not seem to have prompted principled mechanisms or raised the level of managerial ability in the weaker regions. This seems to show the need for either a decisive push toward fiscal federalism, to rein in the use of public expenditure for clientelist and party-related interests at local and regional levels, or a major intervention by the central government, to bring an end to the squandering of resources and to raise the level of management in the less-responsible regions.

The Italian public, in turn, seems to favor more decisive state intervention, while, in comparison, public opinion of the performance of the regions seems to indicate a certain reservation, as shown in a survey carried out in November 2008, reported in the above-mentioned 2008 report by Demos.¹⁹ In this report, Diamanti emphasized that the desire for “more state” by voters “seems unquenchable,” and he put it in relation to the economic situation: the government enjoyed the confidence of 36.8 percent of citizens, an increase of 7.5 percentage points compared to 2007, placing it just below the regions, which were able to rely on the trust of 38.8 percent of Italians, an increase of barely 2 points compared to the previous year. However, there remained a gap between the government and the regions, on the one hand, and the local councils, on the other, with the latter enjoying a level of confidence equal to 44.0 percent (+2.9 compared to 2007).

The government response under Berlusconi appears contradictory. The state intervened to try to correct the distortions caused by

partyocracy (see the chapter by Maino), with poor results to date, yet in other areas the government seems to have abdicated responsibility. This is apparent primarily in the area of citizenship and integration, where, in the absence of a bipartisan vision of the preferred model of integration, there emerge different territorial models. One of these, part of the widespread socio-economic system of industrialization in the North-East—specifically, the Veneto region—is analyzed by Jacqueline Andall in this volume. In many ways perceived as a successful model, it aims above all at economic integration, but, according to the author, is not able to promote the social and cultural integration of immigrants. More generally, the national picture resembles a patchwork quilt, with citizenship rights varying according to the region or locality where immigrants live, and with all the risks inherent in such a situation.

Not by coincidence, on 13 November 2008, the president of the Republic, Giorgio Napolitano, advocated a less rigid timescale for obtaining Italian citizenship and above all “a collective understanding that the phenomenon of immigration to Italy is not temporary.” The head of state’s words were favorably received by the Vatican, and the president of the lower house, Fini, said that the time was right for a new immigration law, taking into account that “over these years, Italian society has greatly changed.”²⁰ These seemed to be positive signals that indicated a shift on the immigration question from security to citizenship, and from a local perspective to a national one. Nonetheless, in this case, too, they turned out to be contradictory signals, given that the Northern League rejected Fini’s readiness to lower the time frame needed to acquire Italian citizenship. In addition, after the EU intervened to stop the government from imposing sanctions on immigrants from the Eurozone, the Northern League relaunched the idea of blocking the flow of immigration as a result of the economic crisis. However, in the same month of November, the government announced an increase of 170,000 in the entry quota for foreign workers, of whom 90,000–95,000 were carers and domestic workers, proof that blocking immigration is not compatible with the needs of Italian society and the economy. It is not a coincidence that 2008 was a record year for immigration, with 40,000 new immigrants by November compared to 14,000 during the whole of 2007.

Therefore, while the new government enjoys a strong majority in Parliament and has adopted, from the first months, a strong, decisionist line, its solidarity and internal coherence should not be overestimated. The different components of the coalition have contrasting views and goals, whose resolution comes at the cost of a clear political program.

A Persisting Gap between Politics and Society

The insufficient role played by politics in the face of the multiple needs of society has recently been emphasized by the social study and research institute Censis in its annual report of 2008.²¹ According to Censis, Italian society, beyond its multiple fears, is capable of responding to the economic and political crisis, partly thanks to immigrants and other “vital minorities,” including its industrial and commercial sectors.²² The report, however, maintains that the “social and economic forces need to breathe freely if they are to thrive ... The political class tends to act in the opposite direction: they reduce the scope of their decisions, limiting them to a few spheres and to the short term or even just the present.”²³ The Censis reading, it can be argued, could therefore be interpreted as indicating that politics is paying the price of the symbolic nature of many party platforms—to the detriment of a functional and effective governance.

Paradoxically, in this case, we would be witnessing a growing division between politics and society, not only in parallel to but actually as a result of the apparent success of those parties that have proved most adept at intercepting and taking into account the demands and moods of the electorate. As Marangoni (in this volume) writes on the subject of fiscal federalism, this objective was perceived by the parties in the current coalition as more of a symbolic resource than as an immediately recognizable and strategic political goal. Their behavior during the electoral campaign proves difficult to reconcile with the new government’s need to offer effective rather than symbolic or rhetorical responses to the social and economic needs of the country. The impact of the financial crisis, followed by an economic one, should also be taken into account, as it both increases demands on the state and imposes strict limits on government action.

Regarding the Italian economy and society in 2008, a thorny issue concerns the continuing stratification of the job market, with an increasing incidence of interim, temporary, and immigrant work and a persistently low rate of female employment. This situation is closely linked to the current welfare system, which is centered on workers in stable employment and penalizes women, temporary workers, and immigrants. As is shown in the chapter by Alessia Donà, a serious obstacle to women’s participation in the labor market is the inadequacy of social service support for the elderly and children. For immigrants, the low level of state assistance for housing and family support constitutes an important factor of exclusion and poor social integration, as is demonstrated in the chapter by Andall.

Another well-known problem is the number of deaths in the workplace, sadly brought into the limelight in 2008 with the tragic episode

at ThyssenKrupp, which underlined the above-mentioned stratification between protected and non-protected workers. As Elisabetta Gualmini's contribution shows, although the number of fatal and non-fatal accidents in Italy has tended to decrease in recent years, an adverse trend has been recorded for the category of temporary and immigrant workers.

In the face of this situation, the business world seems more aware of the need to provide appropriate responses, both at an individual level, such as employers directly providing housing services to immigrant workers, and at a collective level, for example, Confindustria sending a clear message of innovation with the appointment of Emma Marcegaglia as president. Marcegaglia's inaugural speech made her the mouthpiece of the need to substantially increase the number of women in the workplace (see the chapter by Donà). It seems to be politics instead that has run out of steam, intervening with contradictory and inadequate provisions. The attitude of the new government on security seems emblematic. On the one hand, the immigration question was addressed as if it were a public safety issue, as shown by Minister Maroni's recent measures increasing sanctions against immigrants who have committed a crime. On the other hand, the government intervened to lighten sanctions against inadequate safety regulations in the workplace and to reduce inspection checks *in situ*.

The recent school reform, by putting into question the system of full-time primary school education, also seems to go against the needs of women and of the business world itself. It has been calculated that full-time primary schooling currently involves 25.6 percent of all students, of whom by far the most live in the Center-North (compared to only 6.8 percent in the South and the Islands).²⁴ There is therefore a clear correlation between the education system and women's participation in the workplace. On top of that, the cuts in teaching staff will primarily affect women, who make up the great majority. Thus, unless the words of the newly elected Confindustria president are destined to remain hollow, the existing model should be extended throughout Italy, whereas today it appears at risk.

At this point, we should open a brief discussion about a probable connection between policies such as these, which are not in women's interests, and the scarce institutional representation of women, above all in the national Parliament. Donà's chapter explores the historical and current factors that help to explain why Italy is lagging behind in this area, saved only by Greece from the ignominy of being last in the European list. The irony of the fact that these school measures were put forward by a female minister of education can be accounted for by her "tokenist" presence in government, as opposed to being a case of substantive representation.

Compared to the issue of school reform, where obvious needs to contain costs are at odds with social and employment requirements—and apparently also with the principles of modernization and renewal—the reform of the university system, with the introduction of meritocratic criteria into resource allocation, seems to show clearer elements of innovation. It remains to be seen how the definitive version of this reform will be developed and how it will be implemented.

The picture we have outlined above helps to explain why Italians' mistrust of politics has remained very high, despite the popularity of the Berlusconi government. Several surveys carried out at the end of the year indicated a growing mistrust by voters toward all political actors, with strong elements of continuity compared to the previous year, despite the changing of the guard in the government leadership. It is interesting to note that the Demos report in 2008 confirmed that the new "demand of more state" by the citizens was not able to counterbalance the negative relationship that they had with politics and parties.

From the perspective of the economic crisis, the persistence in 2008 of widespread feelings of mistrust among the public is an even more disturbing signal than in 2007, as the crisis is predicted to worsen, with the prospect of further sacrifices being asked of the people along with a continuing decline in the standard of living. It should also be taken into account that the popularity of a government largely depends on the electorate's perception of economic conditions, by which they judge a government's competence.²⁵ The great popularity of Berlusconi's current government could therefore prove temporary.

Governing Fear

With the caveat that a comprehensive evaluation of the new Berlusconi government would be absolutely premature, we believe that it is possible to put forward some preliminary conclusions. To start with, the government initially aimed at providing a response to the multiple fears expressed by Italians during 2007 and a large part of 2008, emphasizing actions meant for effect and with wide media resonance. These included the decision to hold the first meeting of the Council of Ministers in Naples on 21 May, during which a package of regulations on security was approved, followed in August by sending the army into Naples and other cities to reassert law and order, as well as the announcements by Minister Maroni regarding the introduction of the crime of clandestine immigration and expulsion for immigrants who pose a security risk. These actions and announcements, along with

the strong decision-making style of the government, probably contributed to its popularity in the months following the elections.

In the second place, as underlined by Censis in its 2008 report, in addition to Italians' many minor fears, there suddenly emerged a big fear, the result of the world financial crisis first and its heavy impact on economic reality later. In the face of this great fear, the government reacted with measures aimed at the banking system, generally held to be timely and effective, and with measures to support the more vulnerable social groups, which experts consider to be of a holding nature rather than aiming at a real relaunch of the economy. In the background of these actions lies the decision of Minister Tremonti not to overshoot the ceiling of 3 percent of public deficit. This decision, founded on rigor and prudence, nonetheless appears to have been based on a relatively positive evaluation of the overall stability of the Italian system and the prospects for the economic sector. It remains to be seen whether the nature and impact of the crisis and any possible social protests force the government to intervene in the future with more far-reaching measures.

In the third place, this government seems to have been characterized for almost the whole of 2008 by a reluctance to confront structural reforms. It is known that these reforms carry considerable economic and/or political costs, and it was because of this that Berlusconi held back during the electoral campaign from making too many promises to the voters. Nonetheless, the coalition program projected an extraordinary 10-year plan for infrastructure improvements and other special measures aimed at the South, in addition to fiscal federalism and justice reform. The issue of the South remained in the background throughout 2008, while fiscal federalism and justice hit the headlines in the last few months of the year. With regard to the former, the Council of Ministers approved a bill on 3 October, initiating a parliamentary procedure that is forecast to last for some years. With regard to the latter, Berlusconi issued statements in mid-December confirming that he wanted to proceed with justice reforms with or without the consent of the opposition, even if he had to change the Constitution.

The general impression created was of a government that, for most of 2008, prioritized symbolic policies for effect, carrying few economic and political costs. This is probably also due to the fact that it was limited in its actions by Tremonti's economic strictures. In addition, in order to deal with the people's fears, the government focused on those issues, such as immigration, crime, and the garbage crisis in Naples, that lent themselves to being presented and labeled as policies aimed at increasing public security. The public's great fear then shifted attention toward measures aimed at mitigating the financial

and economic crisis. The government did not relaunch its theme of “major reform”—that is to say, those provisions that carry significant cost and whose implementation remains fairly uncertain—until the end of the year, in the face of a crisis with unpredictable implications and outcomes, as well as continuing confrontation with the opposition and constant negotiations with the LN. To fuel and then govern people’s fears has shown itself to be a winning strategy for the center-right. But in the meantime, institutional, economic, and social issues that politics and government need to address with particular urgency, in the face of current international economic and financial crises, have once again been put off.

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Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the participants of the annual seminar, “Politica in Italia,” held in the library of Il Mulino on 18 November 2008. This introduction is the result of a joint effort and continued discussion on its contents. It is, however, possible to attribute the first two sections to Gianfranco Baldini and the next three sections to Anna Cento Bull.

Notes

1. See R. Cartocci, “La costruzione politica del risentimento,” *Il Mulino*, no. 1 (2008): 104–110.
2. See *La sicurezza in Italia: Significati, immagine e realtà. Seconda indagine sulla rappresentazione sociale e mediatica della sicurezza*, report by Demos-Osservatorio di Pavia Media Research, edited by I. Diamanti, partially commented on in *Il venerdì di Repubblica*, 12 December 2008.
3. See Demos, *Gli italiani e lo stato*, Rapporto 2007, edited by I. Diamanti.
4. See G. Legnante and P. G. Corbetta, “Brogli immaginari e sindrome della cospirazione,” *Il Mulino*, no. 1 (2007): 91–104.
5. See M. Donovan and P. Onofri, eds., *Politica in Italia: Edizione 2008* (Bologna, 2008).
6. For an analysis of the predictive validity of polls in the 2008 elections, compared to the previous two elections, see G. Gasperoni and M. Callegaro, “Un miglioramento immeritato? La capacità predittiva dei sondaggi preelettorali e le elezioni politiche del 2008,” *Polis*, no. 3 (2008): 483–504.

7. See the periodical electoral analyses of I. Diamanti, R. Mannheimer, R. D'Alimonte, and P. Natale, respectively, in *La Repubblica*, *Corriere della Sera*, *Il Sole 24 Ore*, and *Europa*.
8. *Liberò*, 8 May 2008.
9. M. Sorigi, *La Stampa*, 14 January 2009.
10. T. Boeri and M. Bordignon, "Federalismo ad personam," 14 September 2008, <http://www.lavoce.info>.
11. R. Turno, *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 15 January 2009.
12. G. Zanella, "Ma la cura Brunetta è davvero efficace?" 23 December 2008, <http://www.lavoce.info>.
13. R. Mannheimer, *Corriere della Sera*, 18 January 2009.
14. M. Baldini and S. Pellegrino, "Si fa presto a dire bonus," 10 December 2008, <http://www.lavoce.info>.
15. T. Boeri, *La Repubblica*, 30 June 2008.
16. L. Ricolfi, *La Stampa*, 15 January 2009.
17. E. Galli della Loggia, *Corriere della Sera*, 13 December 2008.
18. A. Tardiola, "Sanità e politica: Separarsi è difficile," 3 October 2008, <http://www.lavoce.info>. According to the author, the redistributive logic, which makes this sector extremely relevant in terms of electoral consensus, is especially present in the southern regions.
19. See Demos, *Gli italiani e lo stato*, Rapporto 2008, edited by I. Diamanti.
20. *La Repubblica*, 13 November 2008.
21. Censis, *42° Rapporto sulla situazione sociale del paese* (Rome, 2008).
22. *Ibid.*, 8.
23. *Ibid.*, 9.
24. D. Del Boca and S. Pasqua, "I tempi diversi di scuola e famiglia," 14 November 2008, <http://www.lavoce.info>.
25. For the factors that influence the popularity of governments, see P. Bellucci, "All'origine della popolarità del governo in Italia, 1994–2006," *Rivista Italiana di Scienza Politica*, no. 3 (2006): 479–503.