
INTRODUCTION: MANAGING UNCERTAINTY

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The year 2009 was a period of uncertainty, during which the Italian political world appeared to be floundering and in need of a compass. As evidenced by the chronological overview, many events continued to beleaguer the political and social life in Italy. Some, such as the result of the European elections and the escalation of the economic crisis and its repercussions, were foreseen or, in any case, predictable. Others, including the numerous scandals and irregularities that tarnished the political year, continuously feeding the mass media with distractions and nurturing the public debate with less than edifying themes, were less expected.

The government that was formed after the spring 2008 elections should have been able to count on its unprecedented numerical strength in order to rule the country in an equable manner. After all, the coalition supporting Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi was more compact than the previous fragmented coalition of Romano Prodi and even Berlusconi's own 2001–2006 coalitions (which included the UDC). Furthermore, the government did not seem to suffer from a decisive loss of popular support, and it was able to contrast itself with an opposition that showed little indication of having a clear and consistent strategy.

Nevertheless, for various reasons the year 2009 was characterized by repeated threats of crisis and early elections. The Northern League (LN) raised this possibility before the electoral referendum took place,

and the president of the Senate, Renato Schifani—while proclaiming the necessity of having “a united majority or else we will have elections”—repeatedly cautioned against political and personal conflicts within the government.¹ Prime Minister Berlusconi had to reaffirm what, in abstract, he should have been able to take for granted, namely, that his competence is a legislative one that nothing and no one should be able to hamper, given his political strength. The torrent of scandals, conflicts with the media, internal tensions, and institutional contests generated new uncertainties and nurtured the perception that even more unspecified problems remained on the horizon.

In such a climate, it is easy to understand why various forms of *dietrologismo* (conspiracy theorizing) seem to persist. Above all, it is easy to see why the current phase of Italian politics—following the change in structure on the center-right, especially after the fusion between Forza Italia (FI) and National Alliance (AN) became official in the spring of 2009—is marked by a game of positioning.

The coalition in the government is not the only actor reflecting upon the immediate future of Italian politics. The opposition faces the same fundamental questions. The Democratic Party (PD) of the post-Walter Veltroni era has abandoned its project to maintain a “shadow government,” and the leadership that emerged from the most recent round of party elections does not seem to have defined its own style of opposition yet. On the one hand, there is the recurring temptation to construct an identity in contrast to Berlusconi, thriving on so-called anti-*Berlusconismo* like that found in the radical rhetoric of Italy of Values (IdV). On the other hand, there is the need to hold open the possibility of pushing politics, even if only marginally so, toward bipartisan agreement. In sum, there is the eternal issue of alliances, which generates a certain myopia, depending on who claims the center—the Union of the Center (UdC) and the new Alliance for Italy (ApI), or even the left, which is divided into two factions and cannot be represented in a unified manner in either the Italian or the European Parliament.

These developments have all occurred within the general framework of an economic and financial crisis that has necessitated a difficult balance between a firm hand and concerted solutions. This is the reason why concerns about an insecure future have been voiced, above all, by the socio-economic core of Italian society: citizens, employees, autonomous workers, small and medium-sized organizations. If the leitmotif of Italian politics in 2008 was based upon the necessity to rein in the political anxieties of the people, the fears of 2009 materialized along economic lines. According to a poll conducted by Ipsos in late November, 70 percent of the Italian people identified employment

as their primary concern. Subsequently, in descending order, people were concerned with economic development (30 percent), the political situation (28 percent), crime (20 percent), health (17 percent), justice (11 percent), and immigration (8 percent).²

Nevertheless, according to the annual Censis report on the social situation in the country, the social fabric seems to have held together rather well, radiating an almost indomitable resilience.³ The social structure and the mode of capitalism, the family network, the traditional tendency to save, and the sense of “being used to emergencies” (to quote from the report) have absorbed many of the shocks coming from the economic crisis. Furthermore, consumer confidence is growing and, according to the estimates of the ISAE, was at a higher level in December 2009 than in the middle of 2002.⁴ The government did not hesitate to point out the findings of these two reports, which were reaffirmed by Economics and Finance Minister Giulio Tremonti when he stated that “Italy remained strong during the crisis, it remains strong now, and it will continue to stand even stronger than other countries.”⁵

However, this crisis has not come without cost, as evidenced by ISTAT figures, which show that, in comparison to the third trimester in 2008, the GDP dropped 4.6 percent by the same period in 2009 and unemployment increased by 2.2 percentage points. Furthermore, according to INPS statistics, during the first 11 months of 2009, the use of the *cassa integrazione* (paid redundancy) increased by another 320 percent, and *Il Sole 24 Ore* claimed that there has never been a greater number of bankruptcies among firms.⁶ Within this context, the challenge is to understand whether these elements of resistance may form an engine of revival, as envisaged by some, or safety nets, which could hinder the development and modernization of the country in different contexts.⁷

The absolute impact of the economic crisis in Italy is impressive, but its relative significance has been considerably less than elsewhere. If we contrast Italy with the United Kingdom, for example, the situation is much better than most Italians would expect.⁸ Unemployment has risen by considerably less, particularly in the manufacturing sector, and fiscal accounts have held up better. This is fortuitous, as Riccardo Rovelli argues in his chapter, given the tight constraints on Italian macro-economic policy-makers. Automatic stabilizers—the natural decline in tax revenues and rise in transfer payments that occur when the economy slows down—used up almost all of the country’s room for fiscal maneuver. Meanwhile, monetary policy is set at the European level and so remains outside of explicit national control. This does not mean that the government has been inactive. Rovelli documents a number of different initiatives across the range

of economic policy domains. The point to note, however, is that these policies have been at least as controversial for their impact on the balance between institutions (or levels of government) as they have been for how effectively they have addressed the causes or consequences of the economic crisis *per se*.

The notion of inter-institutional balance is a recurrent theme that is addressed in this volume. The various chapters therefore refer to the tensions and the forthcoming difficulties that may stem from efforts to achieve this balance.

A Precarious Balance within Parties

The parties that sprang out of the 2008 elections have had twelve months to construct their own identities. On the one hand, in March 2009, the constituting congress of Berlusconi's People of Liberty (PdL) produced the image of a party that, for the time being, has its leader as the principal bonding agent and that measures its cohesion by the extent to which its direction corresponds to the position taken by its leader. Precisely for this reason, the party has yet to face its most significant challenge, namely, a change in leadership. Much of the tensions within the party can thus be understood as "preliminary leadership contests," although no current national coordinator of the PdL—be it Sandro Bondi, Ignazio La Russa, or Denis Verdini—would be able to take up the leadership role in the immediate future.

In practice, the current state of affairs is marked by the necessity to develop sources of legitimacy or distinctive roles in order to challenge the party's leader, who is also the leader of the government. This challenge might come from the local level, as suggested by the differences expressed by Roberto Formigoni, the president of Lombardy, or, more recently, by Gianfranco Micciché, undersecretary of the presidency of the Council of Ministers and an advocate of a Sicilian breakaway from the PdL.⁹ Alternatively, this challenge might come from an institutional angle and the position of the party's co-founder, as evidenced by the numerous tensions with Gianfranco Fini, the current president of the Chamber of Deputies and former leader of the National Alliance, one of the two principal components of the PdL.¹⁰ Yet another challenge could arise from strategic positions within the government itself, as might be the case with Tremonti, who, due to his strong political standing assured by the Northern League, has been involved in a couple of rounds of "personal arm-wrestling" with Berlusconi.¹¹

In the PD, the game to be played is much less clear, given that, in a certain sense, its political class openly embraces the internal rules

for succession that, through the primaries, have now been adopted as custom. In contrast to the PdL, the leadership of the principal party of the center-left is thus always openly addressing its internal conflicts and is continuously put to the test during elections. As a result, Veltroni resigned from his role as leader after his electoral defeat in Sardinia. The few months that his successor Dario Franceschini was in charge certainly did not contribute to the reconstruction of the party's unity, not only because of the unfavorable outcome of the European elections, but also due to the ongoing internal campaigns for the primaries that were scheduled for the fall. The resulting victory of Pierluigi Bersani signaled two paradoxes that stem from the procedural way in which the leadership is elected. On the one hand, it signaled an implicit disregard of this procedure when Francesco Rutelli and other colleagues of the PD refused to accept the outcome of the primaries. On the other, it demonstrated a somewhat distorted logic of competitiveness when the defeated candidate was then appointed as the head of the parliamentary faction in the lower house.

It is not our intention to attribute these consequences to the primaries as such, nor would we want to express a normative judgment about the final outcome. Rather, we suggest that these events did not contribute to the construction of a new internal balance within the party—a failure that, as pointed out by Chris Hanretty and Alex Wilson in their chapter, would prove to have severe consequences in the final weeks of the year. Indeed, during the “No B day” in early December, the PD was not officially present, although many of its members, including Franceschini, Rosy Bindi, and Ignazio Marino, were. When Bersani claimed that “it is right not to attend this event,” Veltroni immediately attacked him.¹² What was true here also holds with regard to institutional reforms for which a majority agreement is required. The problem, however, is that any attempt by Bersani or Massimo D'Alema to pave the way for such a majority is immediately overshadowed by the opposition of Franceschini or Veltroni.¹³

While the principal parliamentary parties were not able, for various reasons, to form stable organizations devoid of internal tensions, the parties that had been shut out of the Parliament were even worse off. In their chapter, Enrico Calossi and Luciano Bardi have hypothesized that by modifying the electoral law for the elections to the European Parliament, the effects on the partisan system, which were already prevalent during the elections of 2008, have now been consolidated. The most relevant result of this modification is that the party system has been curtailed. Specifically, during the European elections, more than 3 million voters who had declared themselves to be affiliated with either the left or the right found themselves without any institutional

representation. This lack of representation tends to trigger a vicious circle of exclusion from decision-making forums that leads to less media attention and ultimately pushes the electorate to fall back on distinct ideological fault lines or cleavages.

Interestingly enough, however, the creation of electoral cartels on both the left and the right, as incentivized by the electoral system, did not bring an end to the internal divisions within the two political wings. On the right, competition arose between the *Fiamma Tricolore* and *Forza Nuova*, to which the exit polls ascribed, respectively, 3 percent and 1.3 percent of the electoral vote. If these parties had campaigned together, their combined outcome would have surpassed the 4 percent threshold. On the left, the *Left and Liberty (SL)* and the *Lista Anticapitalista* were more or less able to control equally a slightly broader share of the electorate. Not taking into account the *Bonino-Pannella* list, and discounting instrumental votes, approximately 6.5 percent of the electorate cast its vote in favor of these cartels of the left—a result that effectively surpassed the threshold by 2.5 percentage points. Every electoral defeat inevitably tends to generate or even broaden a certain political cleavage. Nonetheless, the current electoral rules favor the reverse effect, and, judging from the latest polls, it seems as though the excluded parties are now witnessing a drop in their electoral relevance compared to a few months ago.¹⁴

Recurrent Institutional Conflicts

It is not only political parties and their representatives that are subject to precarious balances. There are signs that even the political institutions in the narrow sense—in particular, the government and the Parliament—are struggling to reach equilibrium.

In her chapter, Elisabetta De Giorgi addresses the government and its attempts to rise above the simple numerical data on the capacity to translate electoral promises into law, in order to formulate a more adequate portrayal of the internal tensions within the executive branch. Although these tensions have been personified by the contrasts between the principal political leaders, they have touched upon certain themes and sensitivities that the government has found difficult to bring together. Fiscal federalism, electoral referendums, the so-called security package, and institutional reforms are among the most problematic issues. By the same token, the fact that the delegates of the *Movement for Autonomy (MpA)* did not participate in the final vote on the financial law should not be underestimated, particularly given its ramifications for the representation of the region of Sicily.¹⁵

It is useful to consider the characteristics of the Italian political system through the lens of relations with the Parliament itself. The political system now appears to be less fragmented than it was in the past, with regard to both the majority and the minority. The broad majority seems to leave less space for its backbenchers, while the heterogeneous minority increasingly qualifies itself as a mere opposition. In the first instance, the Parliament appears to have acquired a more decisive role as a challenger, leaving behind its initial role as co-legislator.¹⁶ At the same time, however, it is doubtful whether it is effectively ensuring the accountability of the government—a task that representative assemblies usually take up only when threatened with being deprived of their legislative authority by the executive.¹⁷

On closer inspection, the picture seems to be somewhat more detailed, yet still blurred or imprecise. As pointed out by De Giorgi, the executive branch did not attain its power solely by virtue of having a majority in Parliament. It also used shrewdness and gamesmanship that it had learned in recent years: emergency decrees as a means to push forward its agenda; maxi-amendments to smooth over the differences and potentially to bypass the workings of the assembly, all the while maintaining the confidence of the majority; and laws that do not require parliamentary approval, with the aim of getting around potential parliamentary obstacles. It is a pattern that by now has been picked up on by prime ministers, who, starting with Bettino Craxi in the 1980s, bemoan the confusion of the legislative route, and by the presidents of the assembly (in this case, Fini in the Chamber of Deputies), who have emerged as the protectors of the institutional seat in which the formal legislative power resides.

At the same time, 2009 saw the approval of fewer than 19 laws (out of 87 in total) that had originated in Parliament.¹⁸ The majority of these laws, moreover, were concerned with either micro- and local-level issues (such as the detachment of local communes, the valuation of architectural heritage sites, compensations for military escorts, contributions to non-profit organizations) or with universal themes that were supported by both coalitions (the day of remembrance for the casualties of international peace missions, action against pedophilia, the Italian candidacy for the Rugby World Cup).¹⁹

In sum, a close analysis of the record points to a less cohesive and less majority-driven executive branch than the statistics would have us believe and a less incisive Parliament than the simple production of laws would suggest. It also reveals a government that contributes to the Parliament's lack of real power by employing regulations that are increasingly unscrupulous. And it discloses a Parliament that envisions itself as being more than simply a forum for compensation but that does not expand its efforts at evaluation.

In this relationship, a third level of controls has necessarily needed to play an ever more relevant role. First among these is the president of the Republic, Giorgio Napolitano, who has been “grabbed by the collar” on various occasions and by various parties. Napolitano has been prodded by the government, which does not cease to pursue its objectives in spite of attempts at moral suasion by the head of state. He has been pushed by the opposition, as embodied in particular by Italy of Values (IdV) and its president, Antonio Di Pietro, who has more than once crossed political boundaries by asking Napolitano not to sign legislative proposals made by the government. The president has been challenged by the prime minister, who has frequently and explicitly accused him of bias, and he has been teased by a chorus of politicians, who claim to be following his words and who then espouse a different political discourse in everyday life. Finally, Napolitano has had to deal with the blogs of satirical actors such as Beppe Grillo and journalists such as Marco Travaglio, who, despite the best of intentions, are less sensitive to the required neutrality that comes along with the highest institutional office in the country.

In 2009, more than ever before, the neutrality required of the president of the Republic had to reveal itself in its complex political entirety regarding a variety of issues. It suffices to recall the case of Eluana Englaro and the bill on the prohibition of suspending medical feeding, the security package, the so-called Alfano law, the legislation regarding wiretapping, the reform of the judiciary, the “anti-crisis” bill, and the “fiscal shield.”²⁰ This is not to mention Napolitano’s appeals for calm in the political climate, for respect for the prerogatives and competences of each institution and level of governance, and for the necessity not to upset the aim of legal instruments such as decrees or rules concerning the trustworthiness of parliamentary scrutiny. To conclude, the president also had to deal with more informal requests in matters of employment, the fight against discrimination and xenophobia, support of poverty, research and universities, the South, social cohesion, and so forth. These issues were all touched upon during 2009 and then recapitulated during the discourse that would bring a tumultuous year to a close.

While the institutions of the country faced various political controversies over the course of the year, the real source of tension very likely concerned the separation of powers—in particular, the contrast between the executive and the judicial branches. This contrast unfolded on different levels, as Justin Frosini points out in his chapter dealing with the reform of the judiciary.

On one level, this conflict reflects the relationship between the prime minister and the ministers and judges. It is here that controversies

arose between Berlusconi, his advocates, and parliamentarians of the PdL, on the one side, and the “red togas”—judges whom the prime minister accused of leaning to the left—on the other. This became especially clear after the trial of David Mills, when the “Communist public ministers” were referred to as being a “true Italian anomaly.” It is also important to recall the reaction of the National Association of Magistrates with respect to the possible “short procedure” reform proposed by the government (“no form of protest is to be excluded”), forcing the head of state to intervene in an attempt to tone down such polemical outbursts.²¹

At a second level, the conflict refers to the pressure on the legislative process regarding rules in matters of justice, with the focus on the superior Council of Magistrates, a self-governing body. The suggestion now is that the Council of Magistrates should become a preventative body, used to provide judicial advice on the constitutionality of provisions that are still undergoing discussion, such as the bill on wiretapping, the reform of the penal process, and the norm concerning the “accelerated hearings.”²² Although this is not the first time that these procedures have been implemented, it is important to acknowledge that their use, in a climate that is already embittered by many political conflicts, has not facilitated the relations between institutional powers.

A final level of conflict is the one that has set the head of the executive against the Constitutional Court and its judges. As usual, the sentences of the Court have political relevance as soon as they define a limitation to the exercise of power, citing the founding principles of a democracy. Yet such relevance is not necessarily transformed into an institutional clash, even when it comes to matters that are deemed sensitive and controversial, such as when, in the beginning of April, certain articles of Law No. 40/2004 on artificial insemination were ruled to be unconstitutional.²³ In October, when Law No. 124/2008 on the immunity of the highest offices of state (the Alfano law) was ruled to be unconstitutional, the situation was different. Immediately after the ruling, Berlusconi challenged the basic assumption that the Court could be unbiased because the previous presidents of the Republic had appointed a body that would be personally hostile to the prime minister due to his opposing political views. This is an assessment that Berlusconi repeated on various occasions and that would eventually flow into his declaration, during the December summit of the European People’s Party, that “sovereignty has passed on from the Parliament to the judges. The Constitutional Court has been transformed into a political institution.”²⁴

Despite the tumultuous events in Berlusconi’s personal life, the fact remains that he draws backing in this conflict from a plebiscitary

model of democracy in which his alleged popular support modifies the material Constitution to the extent that the formal Constitution becomes obsolete.²⁵ The logic here is as follows: the transition to a majority-driven democracy, in which electoral results determine the executive power, is incomplete for the moment. The limits become clear in light of the many mechanisms of control that are foreseen in the Constitution of the First Republic. These limits have been stretched by means of the (ordinary) electoral law, which, involving the name of the future prime minister, partially deprives the head of state of his autonomy to nominate the head of the government—at the risk of provoking a different investiture than initially agreed upon. Questions of legitimacy are called on to justify the government's use of any instrument in order to circumvent the constraints that stem from the other institutions of the political system: emergency decrees, which are removed from the area of competence of the president; the request to limit the vote in the legislative assembly to the heads of factions only; the use of motions of confidence in order to speed up the measures undertaken by the government and to eliminate the possibility of amendment by a Parliament that is considered to be an obstacle to the efficiency of the legislation; the implicit possibility of a fictitious crisis that would justify the dissolution of Parliament, as the executive sees fit; the impossibility of annulling laws that were suggested and approved by a government that, even though elected by the popular vote, cannot be contradicted without contradicting the very source of democratic legitimacy.

In other words, in the absence—or anticipation—of clear-cut powers for the government and its leader, one falls back on the contrast between the popular will, as embodied by the executive at the time of its election, and everything that would contrast with its realization: the judiciary, the courts, the parliamentary minority, the president, etc. As a result, the ostentatious use of polls is to be understood not only as an instrument of communication in political competition, but also as a more substantial justification of limitless executive action. The inter-institutional conflict is thus not merely contingent on but also the result of a more profound degenerative syndrome that underlies the internal dynamics of the Italian democracy.

The other side of the coin is the institutional reform that had been strongly accelerated during the last weeks of the year, leaving behind an important mark on the Italian political system, as was evidenced by the final speech of the president of the Republic. After the failure of the referendums and the implementation of new rules regarding the European elections, there is little room left for intervention in the electoral system, in order to avoid the re-entrance of possible competitors.

The idea of a clear-cut constitutional reform remains on the table, however, as it is a matter that has been invoked by the principal leaders of the majority and is also shared by a significant part of the opposition. It is important to point out that the ideas and priorities here—presidentialism, the direct election of the prime minister, the Senate of the regions, and the Violante bill—are very diverse. There are some who speak of a new era and who anticipate that the government will proceed by itself, and some who would use the term *inciucio* (vague compromise) to refer to the possibility of finding an agreement between the two major parties. Still others would be more inclined to delegitimize the proposals made by the adversary from the start.²⁶ Moreover, as has been pointed out, the distance between the various proposals is nothing compared to the internal divisions within the contracting parties, which will render it difficult to obtain a fixed result.²⁷ This problem is of vital importance for the opposition, particularly the PD. The majority, including the PdL, however, is not immune to this problem.

In reality, the recurrent references to institutional themes in the political agenda constitute a refrain that should not be overestimated in terms of importance. Offering solutions to the problem that is the country's principal handicap that are more or less shared by the different actors has become a low-cost rhetorical exercise, if not a perfectly futile tactic, after a lost decade of reforms. Alas, this is not the only area where we see a flourishing of such traditional themes.

Back to Basics

In 2009, Italian politics returned to a number of fundamental cleavages: public-private, church-state, domestic-foreign. These conflicts cut across party and coalition lines, creating significant divisions on both the left and the right.

The public-private cleavage was most notable in reference to Prime Minister Berlusconi. The slow drip of information about his private life exploded in a torrent on 28 April with the revelation that he had attended the birthday celebration of 18-year-old Noemi Letizia.²⁸ *La Repubblica* initiated a campaign (lasting throughout the summer) to force the prime minister to answer a series of 10 questions about how he came to know the girl. The goal was not just to embarrass the prime minister but also to challenge his fitness to rule the country. Meanwhile, press investigations uncovered new stories about parties that the prime minister had organized, both at his residence in Rome and his vacation retreat in Sardinia.

The frenzy of media attention was intense. Nevertheless, as Stephen Gundle argues in this volume, the flood of lurid speculation failed to develop into a full-blown media scandal or, indeed, to damage the prime minister in any serious way. Berlusconi may have become tainted by an odor of unseemliness, and Michelle Obama's rigid body language on greeting the prime minister at the Aquila G8 summit spoke volumes about his reputation abroad. But his political influence was only temporarily diminished. If anything, the "non-scandal" revealed the extent to which Italian elites—on both the left and the right—have been overly sheltered by the widespread tendency in Italy of drawing a distinction between public and private life. The Bologna mayoral candidacy of Flavio Delbono was almost derailed by last-minute allegations that he may have abused public funds to take his girlfriend on official missions, and Lazio's regional president, Piero Marrazzo, lost his office when the press discovered that he was being blackmailed with photographs showing him in bed with a transsexual prostitute next to a night-table covered with cocaine.

With the personal foibles of Italy's ruling class on full display, the prime minister launched an intensive campaign against the media for conducting what he called sensationalist reporting and for making baseless accusations. Proponents of press freedom responded with complaints about media censorship. This debate resonated widely, both at home and abroad. Yet while the international media—including *El Pais*, the *Economist*, and the London *Times*—viewed the charges of press censorship against Berlusconi as an open-and-shut case, many of the mainstream Italian papers, such as *Corriere della Sera*, projected a more balanced view.

More importantly, the Italian people were largely ambivalent. When Di Pietro warned in a series of large newspaper advertisements that Italian democracy was under threat, few voices rose in his support and few voters rallied to his banner. Italians were obviously aware of the prime minister's considerable influence in television (particularly) and the media (writ large), but they were also conscious of the many ways in which the public-private boundaries had been crossed, such as the widespread leaking of wiretapped conversations to the press. Meanwhile, the travails of Delbono and Marrazzo provided convenient cover for Berlusconi and inconvenient distractions for the opposition. Marrazzo's fate was immediate. Delbono's was deferred. After the investigations into his use of public resources restarted in 2010, the Bologna mayor soon found himself in an untenable situation. The grandees of his party forced him to resign, only to find themselves powerless to determine when a new election could be held.

The ambivalence remained even as the taint of scandal continued to spread. The head of Italy's civil protection agency, Guido Bertolaso, came under scrutiny for both his financial management and his personal behavior, even as leaked telephone conversations revealed state officials chortling about how much they could make from the Aquila disaster. Nonetheless, public opinion was divided. A 13 February poll conducted by Crespi Ricerche showed that while more than 70 percent were aware of the situation, just over 40 percent agreed with the prime minister that Bertolaso should be left alone, against 32 percent who wanted stronger action.²⁹ The combined effect of these turns of events, which also characterized the start of 2010, was ultimately expressed as a disaffection of public opinion with all things political—institutions, parties, magistrates, and so forth.³⁰

While the debate about the freedom of the press revealed unexpected ambiguities, the debate about church-state relations engendered unbridled passion. Here Nicola Pasini's chapter on Eluana Englaro is particularly revealing. We have already mentioned how this specific case threatened to upset the balance between institutions. Yet Pasini goes further to examine how the wider debate about living wills—specifying treatment and delegating power of attorney—touches on basic concerns about the sanctity of human life. These concerns emanate from Italy's deep cultural roots in the Catholic faith and continue to hold sway even where confessional devotion has fallen off. As a consequence, they cut across party and coalitional boundaries—pitting Catholic against the secular left (a point also noted by Hanretty and Wilson in their chapter) and libertarian against conservative right. Hence, even though Eluana Englaro was eventually allowed to pass away, her impact on Italian politics will resonate into the future.

Shades of the church-state cleavage were also exposed in the “recalibration” of the welfare state, as analyzed by Matteo Jessoula, and in the reform of public administration, as examined by Mita Marra. Again, it is important to emphasize that this opposition has less to do with the practice of religion than with the cultural Catholicism that is embedded in Italian society and institutions. Liberals view the state as an agent of progressive change in this context, allowing groups to become liberated through the institutionalization of formal equality. Conservatives view state action—or, in this case, welfare state reform—as a threat to traditional family structures and gender roles.

Jessoula gives pride of place to the debate about pension reform and the European requirement to treat men's and women's pensions equally. At issue was whether and how women should be compensated for work that they do in the home. Moreover, the debate was complicated by the paradox that equal treatment will be superficially

disadvantageous because it will entail leveling women's pensionable age to make it the same as that of men. Thus, the debate about welfare reform lacked much of the moral clarity of the Englaro case. If anything, however, the implications will be more widely felt.

A final point of consideration is the domestic-foreign cleavage. It plays out in debates about immigration, foreign relations, and Italy's position on the world stage.³¹ In her chapter, Saskia van Genugten maps the political turmoil surrounding immigration, both as an issue on its own and in relation to Islam. The distinction she highlights is between real public policy problems and populist political discourse. In real terms, immigration does present a challenge, as new groups come into Italian society with different needs and wants. But because the distribution of this problem is uneven and manifests differently from place to place, no single solution is likely to be adequate to all circumstances.

The reality of immigration has little to do with the populist discourse that surrounds it, much of which conflates immigrants with Islam in order to tap into fears about physical security, terrorism, and crime. Such fear is xenophobic not in the pejorative sense of the term but because it crystallizes around "the other," who may as well be Romanian as Muslim. Because it is xenophobic, however, it often feeds into self-reinforcing stereotypes, isolating and alienating those groups who attract attention and so encouraging them to respond.

The consequences of this isolation revealed themselves in force during the early months of 2010: violent conflicts broke out between immigrant and local communities in Calabria and between different immigrant communities in Milan. The two explosions were not connected by religion, ethnicity, or economic circumstances, but they shared elements of isolation, exclusion, and desperation. Unfortunately, rather than highlighting the immigrants' plight in Italy, the images of this violence have reinforced the stereotypes that link "the other" to crime, insecurity, and disorder. The situation is likely to get worse rather than better.

More of the Same

If 2009 was a year of political uncertainty, the early indications are that 2010 will offer "more of the same"—and then some. The growing tension within Italy's immigrant community is one example. The prolonged deliberations over the election of a new mayor for Bologna is another. But these can be seen as sideshows to the main event. If the principal question concerns who will inherit the mantle of Berlusconi or, as an alternative, who will manage to unseat him, the answer is that no one knows as yet.

The disarray on the center-left is easy to illustrate. At the national level, public opinion polling data show that just over three-fourths of the electorate believes that the PD has done poorly in opposition, including a narrow majority of PD voters themselves (52 to 46 percent).³² Meanwhile, PD elites have done little to counter these sentiments and, instead, seem to be turning on each other. Consider the situation in Puglia, where Nichi Vendola managed to wrest control over the center-left despite the opposition of the PD leadership, which gave its official backing to Vendola's opponent, Francesco Boccia. The turn of events in Lazio is no more reassuring. Following Marrazzo's resignation, the PD has had little luck in finding a replacement candidate. Instead, Emma Bonino of the radical left threw her hat into the ring and, virtually unopposed, managed to grab control over the center-left in the region. One-time PD leader Franceschini might have wished for a different candidate, but that does not mean he had a viable alternative to hand.

If the center-left cannot unite to hold power within a region, let alone the country, then we are back to looking at the internal dynamics of the center-right in order to divine the future. This is where our story started in 2009; it is also where it begins in 2010. Italian politics faces another year of "more of the same." We can only hope that this pattern will not be repeated for many more years to come.

— *Translated by Laura Beke*

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Notes

1. P. Di Caro, *Corriere della Sera*, 18 November 2009.
2. Ipsos poll for *Il Sole 24 Ore*, <http://www.sondaggipoliticoelettorali.it/>. It is interesting to note an imbalance on various levels between the citizens' preoccupations and the executive pro-active actions.
3. See the report of Censis, a social study and research institute, at <http://www.censis.it/22>.
4. ISAE, *Inchiesta mensile sulla fiducia dei consumatori* (Rome, 2009), http://www.isae.it/not_cons_ita_12_09.pdf. It is not clear whether these data indicate a trend, as is the case when the stock markets have a series of negative closings, or if they represent a real change in consumer spending, which would become a political tool for the government. After all, signs of consumer confidence were present before the crisis, and they had already reached their lowest levels by mid-2008.
5. M. Sensini, *Corriere della Sera*, 24 December 2009.
6. Respectively, ISTAT, *Rilevazione sulle forze di lavoro* (Rome, 2009), http://www.istat.it/salastampa/comunicati/in_calendario/forzelav/20091212_00/; INPS, *Cassa integrazione: A novembre cala l'ordinaria aumentano straordinaria e "deroga"* (Rome, 2009), [http://www.inps.it/Doc/Informazione/ComunicatiStampa/Comunicati 2009/cs091204.pdf](http://www.inps.it/Doc/Informazione/ComunicatiStampa/Comunicati%202009/cs091204.pdf); E. Scarci, *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 7 December 2009.
7. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) indicators seemed positive regarding this issue, more so than other organizations and international observers. See <http://www.oecd.org/oecdEconomicOutlook>.
8. E. Jones, "Italy and the Euro in the Global Economic Crisis," *International Spectator* 44, no. 4 (2009): 93–104.
9. *Corriere della Sera*, 3 November 2009.
10. F. Verderami, *Corriere della Sera*, 20 November 2009. Many of the disagreements between Berlusconi and Fini are examined in this volume. See the chapters by Elisabetta De Giorgi, Saskia van Genugten, and Nicola Pasini.
11. F. Verderami, *Corriere della Sera*, 14 October 2009. See also De Giorgi's chapter in this book.

12. A. Trocino, *Corriere della Sera*, 7 December 2009.
13. M. T. Meli, *Corriere della Sera*, 20 December 2009.
14. The last poll on this subject from the end of December 2009, <http://www.sondaggipoliticoelettorali.it/>, can be compared to the earlier polls of the European elections, [http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elezioni_europee_del_2009_\(Italia\)](http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elezioni_europee_del_2009_(Italia)).
15. M. Cremonesi, *Corriere della Sera*, 29 December 2009; M. Sensini, *Corriere della Sera*, 23 December 2009.
16. C. De Micheli and L. Verzichelli, *Il Parlamento* (Bologna, 2004).
17. For a current perspective regarding the Italian Parliament, see Marco Giuliani and Francesco Zucchini, eds., "Law-Making in Italy in the Age of Alternation," *South European Society and Politics* 13, no. 1 (2008), special issue.
18. In 2008, during the eight-month term of the 26th Legislature, only one law originating in the Parliament was approved.
19. The exceptions to these rules—the law of public accounting and finance, prolonged Italian participation in international missions, the referendum process—can only formally be considered parliamentary laws. They were either "necessary" regulations, entrusted to a member of Parliament, or government initiatives, in which the government (not only formally) maintained strong decisional power. Perhaps only the electoral law for the European elections, handled by three deputies from linguistic minorities of the Gruppo Misto della Camera dei Deputati, was the result of significant parliamentary debate. Approved in a couple of weeks, this law (discussed in the chapter by Calossi and Bardi) was the result of party deliberation and did not follow the linear parliamentary process.
20. See also the chapters in this book by Justin Frosini, Saskia van Genugten, and Nicola Pasini.
21. One should also note the ethically questionable Mediaset news story about the private life of Judge Raimondo Mesiano, who had sentenced Fininvest to pay 750 million euros to Carlo De Benedetti's United Industrial Companies. (Both Mediaset and Fininvest are companies owned by Berlusconi.) E. Muschella, *Corriere della Sera*, 17 October 2009; M. Galluzzo, *Corriere della Sera*, 28 October 2009; M. Breda, *Corriere della Sera*, 7 November 2009.
22. D. Martiran, *Corriere della Sera*, 12 February 2009 and 15 December 2009; N. Mancino, *Corriere della Sera*, 13 February 2009; S. Romano, *Corriere della Sera*, 27 December 2009.
23. M. De Bac, *Corriere della Sera*, 2 April 2009.
24. *Corriere della Sera*, 8 October 2009; M. Galluzzo, *Corriere della Sera*, 11 December 2009.
25. G. Sartori, *Corriere della Sera*, 31 October 2009.
26. The chronology of this volume contains more details about these proposed scenarios and political functions.
27. A. Panebianco, *Corriere della Sera*, 30 December 2009.
28. C. Sannino, *La Repubblica*, 28 April 2009.
29. See <http://www.crispircerche.it>.
30. R. Mannheimer, *Corriere della Sera*, 1 March 2010.
31. See more on this topic in Emiliano Alessandri's chapter regarding Italian foreign affairs with respect to the new Obama administration, as well as the chapter by Massimiliano Andretta and Nicola Chelotti, which analyzes the prelude to and results of the G8 meeting held in Aquila.
32. See <http://www.sondaggipoliticoelettorali.it/>.

