The Partito Democratico: A Troubled Beginning

Chris Hanretty and Alex Wilson

Writing in this annual two years ago, Marc Lazar discussed the birth of the Partito Democratico (PD, Democratic Party). Like many births, that of the PD was characterized by trepidation and optimism in similar doses. Yet the party was in government and had, in Walter Veltroni, a leader who was backed by an overwhelming majority of party sympathizers. Two years later, the PD is in much poorer health. It is now out of government, has performed badly in sub-national and European elections, and has a new leader, Pierluigi Bersani, who does not command the support of an overwhelming majority and may indeed antagonize some of the party’s right-leaning members. The PD is either a sickly child or, in the recent judgment of Francesco Rutelli, was never actually born at all.¹

In this chapter, we analyze the travails of the PD in 2009, starting with Veltroni’s resignation as party leader and the reasons for it. We then sketch out what we see as the three principal dividing lines within the party. Having set out the terrain, we summarize the rules governing leadership selection and evaluate the results of the leadership contest. We show how Bersani managed to win by peeling off a number of social conservatives to add to his strong support among former members of the Left Democrats (DS). We conclude by suggesting that the internal divisions within the PD are likely to continue, with the party showing few signs of fulfilling its professed “majoritarian vocation,” or desire to govern alone and without the support of a broader coalition. Doing so would likely require a reconstitution of its alliances with the radical left and with centrist parties in future elections.

Notes for this chapter begin on page 91.
Veltroni’s Resignation

Veltroni resigned as leader of the PD on 17 February 2009, shortly after regional elections in Sardinia. He had been party leader for 16 months, following his election in October 2007 as the PD’s first secretary. Veltroni was replaced in the interim by Dario Franceschini, formerly a student member of the Christian Democratic Party (DC), the national vice-secretary of the Italian Popular Party (PPI), and a leading figure within the Margherita. Veltroni’s decision came as a surprise to many international observers, who wondered why the head of the opposition would resign on the same day that the prime minister’s co-defendant in a corruption trial had been found guilty. Veltroni himself gave no single reason for his resignation, adding to the sense of confusion.

The immediate explanation for Veltroni’s resignation was, of course, his party’s poor performance in the Sardinian elections. Yet this result alone cannot explain the resignation. The poor showing in Sardinia was part of a pattern of similar performances in both regional elections and national polling. In December 2008, the party had done badly in regional elections in Abruzzo, which had been called after its governor, Ottaviano Del Turco (PD), had been arrested on charges of corruption. National polls showed the party polling at between 22 and 25 percent. This figure was not only below the party’s performance in the 2008 national elections, but also below the combined share of the DS

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FIGURE 2.1 PD polling and electoral performance

![Graph showing PD support from June 2008 to June 2009 with key events marked: 2008 Election, Veltroni resigns, 2009 EP elections.]

Source: http://www.sondaggipoliticoelettorali.it/.
and the Margherita—the two parties that had merged to form the PD. The fact that the PD could be less than the sum of its parts, in electoral terms, was an extremely worrying sign for the party.

The PD’s poor results can probably be explained as the outcome of the disappointing performance of Veltroni as a leader. In his resignation statement, Veltroni himself admitted that he had failed to create the party that he had wanted, and that the responsibility for this was his alone. Certainly, Veltroni the opposition leader never recaptured the enthusiasm that he had mustered as Veltroni the candidate or Veltroni the Italian Barack Obama. His willingness to enter into dialogue with Silvio Berlusconi was shamelessly abused by the latter, and his leadership resignation seemed to reflect a greater psychological resignation.

The party that Veltroni wanted was, of course, a party with a majoritarian vocation—a party that could by itself win a plurality of votes and therefore a party that looked toward the center of the political spectrum. That strategic choice was not shared by all within the PD, certainly not by Massimo D’Alema. Part of Veltroni’s resignation may therefore have been due to his having to oppose Berlusconi outside the party and D’Alema within it.

Indeed, the battle between Veltroni and D’Alema has been the great unresolved psychodrama of the PD. In comparison with other regicidal struggles on the European left, it is less overt than Tony Blair versus Gordon Brown, less explosive than Gerhard Schröder versus Oskar Lafontaine. But it has nonetheless seemed a useful struggle, since it is bound up with so many other debates on the strategic choices that the PD has to make: whether it has a majoritarian vocation, whether it should privilege territorial organization and party membership or be a more lightweight party, whether it should strike alliances or negate them, and so on. Some have gone so far as to interpret the 2009 campaign for the party’s leadership as a repeat of the struggle between Veltroni and D’Alema, with Franceschini acting as a proxy for Veltroni and Bersani for D’Alema. We do not share that interpretation, but we would suggest that this constant, low-intensity fighting within the party contributed to Veltroni’s resignation. Our analysis of the leadership struggle, however, takes a different path, starting with an examination of the divisions within the PD.

**Divisions within the PD**

Many Italian parties have been deeply internally divided. This was famously the case for the Christian Democrats, whose disunion resulted, in part, from the strains of governing. The PD is also internally
divided, but its divisions result, if anything, from the strains of opposition. When we say that the party is internally divided, we mean that important party officials and parliamentarians repeatedly and publicly disagree about certain issues. Internal division in this sense need not be negative. The fact that the PD publicly airs its differences may be a sign that it is open and pluralistic, unlike other parties of the center-right, which are more hierarchical. Internal division in this sense does not mean that the party in Parliament lacks cohesiveness; in fact, the PD has been the most disciplined parliamentary party during the post-2008 elections. Nor does it mean that the PD is divided about all issues—or even the most important ones. Rather, we suggest that there are a number of divisions that are harmful to the party.

In this section, we identify three particular divisions that we think are important for understanding the PD: a division between the (economic) left and right of the party, a division between the clerical and secular wings of the party, and a division between the center of the party (i.e., the party leadership at the national level) and the periphery of the party. In discussing these divisions, we focus on the positions of the three candidates—Bersani, Franceschini, and Ignazio Marino—in their campaigns for leadership of the party, while the campaigns themselves are discussed more fully in the next section.

The first division is between left and right. Much of the journalistic coverage of the birth of the PD emphasized the fact that the new party’s constituent elements—the DS and the Margherita—came from two different party families, the social democratic and Christian social traditions, respectively. This emphasis sometimes made it appear as if the DS and the Margherita had arrived at the same point but had merely followed different traditions to get there. In fact, the DS and the Margherita did have different positions on the left-right spectrum in general, and on economic policy more specifically. One survey of experts showed that the DS was about as far to the left of the Margherita as the Greens were to the left of the DS. That difference is not insignificant. We argue that during the course of 2009—and in particular during the campaign for party secretary—the first differences within the party on economic policy became visible.

In particular, we maintain that there is a division between the economic left of the party and the economic right. The right of the party emphasizes economic growth and, in particular, improved conditions for producers of goods. Only with improved economic growth, runs the argument, can living conditions for all—especially for the working class—be improved. The economic left of the party, by contrast, focuses explicitly on labor’s share of producer surplus, arguing that this must be tackled directly. This faction has rather dismissively been.
referred to as a group of “watered-down social democrats” by the scholar Angelo Panebianco. The economic right of the PD is (or was, as we shall see) best represented by individuals such as Massimo Calearo. Calearo is a former president of the Association of Industrialists of Vicenza and the president of a firm that specializes in antennae and communications equipment. Veltroni asked Calearo to run for the PD in Veneto at the top of the party’s list as a concession to industry and to the industrial North-East. Calearo’s candidacy and the candidacy of another political neophyte, Matteo Colaninno, were strongly criticized by the radical left, who accused the party of “representing the bosses.” Calearo had been extremely critical of what he sees as the PD’s outdated views on employment. A supporter of Franceschini during the primaries, he has now left the PD to join Rutelli, the former leader of the Margherita, in forming a new party. Rutelli himself had complained about the pro-labor orientation of the left of the PD. After the victory of Bersani, Rutelli commented: “(I)It is incredible that the Democratic Party should build socialist roots—and very left ones at that—after more than a quarter of a century of delay, [while the electorate] has shifted to the right … Only about 13 to 14 percent of small business people vote for us. They vote in greater numbers for the old Communist Party.”

The economic left of the PD is, perhaps surprisingly, represented by Bersani. It may seem strange to consider Bersani as being on the left of the party, particularly in juxtaposition to a right that emphasizes economic growth and the concerns of producers. After all, as minister of economic development, Bersani had promoted a series of liberalizing measures in many service sectors in the summer of 2007. To describe a liberalizing minister as a leftist may seem strange, despite the best efforts of those who have tried to argue that liberalization should be considered a left-wing policy.

Yet Bersani the candidate was different from Bersani the minister, and in 2009 Bersani’s electoral platform was, in terms of economics, the most left-wing of the three candidates—at least as far as labor market policy is concerned. The diagnosis of Italy’s economy given at the beginning of his statement was strongly pro-labor: inequality is the product of labor’s ever-decreasing share of producer surplus and, as such, should be challenged; employment ought to be dignified; workplace security should be achieved. While Bersani himself might moderate these statements, were he to return to government, and emphasize more the challenge of increasing productivity, the coalition that voted for him in the primaries was very much pro-labor. Bersani did extremely well in the primaries in the South of the country, not coincidentally in the very same areas where Marino, the candidate who rather courageously
argued for “flexicurity” (a combination of “flexibility” for employers and “security” for employees) in the Italian labor market, did worst.

We must stress that these differences are relatively minor and that, in most cases, they are differences of emphasis rather than policy. Marino was the only candidate who presented a strongly differentiated labor-marked policy, but he was the candidate least likely to win. The links between positions on this left-right division and the division between ex-DS and ex-Margherita are very unclear. Virtually the only groups that have staked out a clear position are those with new people (such as Calello), who were recruited by Veltroni as part of a pitch to the industrial North-East. Since many members of these groups have left the PD, their continued relevance is in doubt.

The dissension between the economic left and right of the party is the most important divide within the PD, but it is not the one that has garnered the most attention. That honor goes to conflicts over religious and ethical issues, which have arisen at regular intervals from 2005 onwards. This divide separates those who believe that public policy should privilege social and ethical stands that are derived from, or in harmony with, the beliefs of the Catholic Church (the so-called *teo-dem*) from those who believe in a wider sphere of personal liberty, often in the areas of sexual and reproductive behavior.

It is important to place this division in its proper context. First, intra-party debates on these issues are often provoked by a small number of parliamentarians within the party. In either house of Parliament, there are probably no more than a handful of deputies who could be considered as accredited *teo-dem*. Those who are, however, occasionally embarrass the party by their parliamentary votes. Senator Paola Binetti provides an example. When the PD introduced a proposal to add a victim’s sexual orientation to a list of aggravating factors in assault, Binetti joined the People of Liberty (PdL) and the Union of the Center (UdC) in voting against the proposal on the grounds that the reference to sexual orientation could include not just homosexuality but also “incest, pedophilia, zoophilia, sadism, necrophilia, and masochism.” The number of parliamentarians who are active on the other side of this divide is probably even smaller.

Second, the division between clerical and secular only partly overlaps with an individual’s party affiliation. While past membership in the Margherita is probably a necessary condition for being a *teo-dem*, it is by no means a sufficient condition. Many former members of the Margherita have considerably different views about the proper relationship between church and state.

Third, the division between clerical and secular had only very limited impact on the campaign for the leadership. One might have thought
that since Franceschini had a background in the Christian Democratic Party, his campaign would have taken a position (very) marginally closer to the *teo-dem*. But in fact Bersani was the most aggressive in recruiting social conservatives, such as Binetti, to his side. He was also the only candidate to quote a papal encyclical, “Caritas in veritate” (Charity in Truth), in the text of his manifesto. In any event, whenever concrete cases arose, the positions taken by the three candidates for the leadership differed only very slightly, as Nicola Pasini’s chapter (in this volume) demonstrates.

A third division that exists within the PD is between the center of the party and its periphery. Since its inception, the PD has experienced continual strife—fueled by corruption and mismanagement scandals, mainly in southern regions—between the party organization and its elected politicians at sub-national levels. This conflict represents a major flaw in the party’s organization, namely, the separation between institutional and party leadership. The PD was intended to be a party organized on a federal basis: autonomous regional unions would be free to make their own strategic choices and determine coalitions on a territorial basis, with limited intervention from the central leadership. In theory, the regional party assemblies and the post of regional secretary were to become valuable forums through which the party’s strategy would be decided on a region-by-region basis. In practice, however, the post of regional secretary is rarely coveted by the most powerful local and regional politicians. The initial division of regional secretaries in 2007 was dictated by a power-sharing logic: DS and Margherita leaders agreed that 12 posts would go to the DS, 6 to the Margherita, and 2 to candidates from other backgrounds. Many of the secretaries are young and relatively inexperienced, and they rarely control key institutional positions. Several of those elected in 2007 resigned their posts in the following two years for reasons that included defeat in a leadership contest and the inability to manage intra-party divisions.

The federal apparatus of the party has therefore not established its own power base. Even worse, it has interfered with governing center-left coalitions, particularly in southern Italy. While the former DS exercised hegemonic influence in center-left coalitions in the North, the DS and Margherita were evenly balanced, in electoral terms, in the South. Absent clear leadership, center-left parties tended to form “oversized” coalitions in these regions to accommodate as many power brokers as possible, holding together an unwieldy coalition by sharing out the spoils of office. These alliances were threatened by the prospect of new PD alliances that would be open to political actors normally excluded from the levers of power in sub-national...
government. Entrenched elites had little to gain from complying with the demands of the PD leadership.

There has, therefore, been no real organizational apparatus capable of mediating conflicts (often mired in scandal) between the national leadership and local office-holders. A few prominent examples serve to illustrate the scale of the problem. In the region of Campania, the center-left coalition has come to exercise a quasi-monopoly of power over sub-national governments since the 1990s. Yet this has not developed into effective or responsible government, as the long-anticipated collapse of the refuse management system in 2008 demonstrated. Judicial investigations into the administration of Antonio Bassolino (PD regional president of Campania) increased tensions between elected elites and their party organization, leading to the resignation of Luigi Nicolais as PD provincial secretary in Naples. Public disgust over a group of politicians who were once acclaimed as harbingers of a “Neapolitan Renaissance” saw many in the PD leadership turn against Bassolino and his allies, but without success in terms of forcing resignations. Bassolino held on to his post as regional president, while his close ally, Rosa Russo Iervolino, remained mayor of Naples. Local and regional councilors were more concerned with keeping their jobs than responding to appeals from the central leadership for internal renewal.

In Abruzzo, the regional president Ottaviano Del Turco (PD) was arrested on suspicion of taking bribes from private operators in the health-care system. This arrest forced Del Turco to resign and caused early regional elections in Abruzzo, which took place in December 2008. Voter turnout collapsed due primarily to the demobilization of PD voters. The party gained less than 20 percent of the vote, and the center-right coalition won a clear victory.

This was soon followed by a crisis in Sardinia, where the regional president Renato Soru clashed with PD politicians in the regional assembly over their resistance to his house plan. This was the last of several conflicts between the regional president and PD politicians in Sardinia, a tourist island where housing speculation and property development are a source of huge personal wealth and vested political interests. Soru called an early regional election for February 2009, in order to avoid association with the European elections in June 2009 (in which the PD was expected to perform badly), but he unexpectedly lost to a property developer who had campaigned as a personal adviser of Berlusconi. The PD sank to under 25 percent of the vote. Unlike the Abruzzo regional election, where the PD could claim it was defeated by an (as yet) unproven corruption scandal, the debacle in Sardinia was harder to digest because Soru was a widely respected figure, tipped to be a future party leader. Soru was an Internet entrepreneur,
rather than a product of the DS or Margherita party machines, and his appeal across party lines was cited as proof of the PD’s modernizing edge. It was immediately after Soru’s defeat that Veltroni felt compelled to resign as PD leader, his modernizing strategy having yielded too few fruits in terms of electoral gains or government control. The last of the “non-party” center-left regional presidents, Piero Marrazzo of Lazio, was forced to resign in October 2009 after allegedly taking cocaine with transsexual prostitutes in a Roman suburb.

If the PD has problems governing in the South, it has problems getting elected in the North. PD support is holding up (although not as well as before) only in the “red belt” regions of the Center-North, where it faces the challenge of electoral erosion as the long-standing incumbent of regional politics. In large northern regions such as Lombardy and Veneto, the PD has failed to produce credible leaders or policies and has thus become increasingly excluded from public office. While the PD project initially garnered some public enthusiasm in northern Italy, particularly due to Veltroni’s aggressive recruitment of candidates, the poor PD performance in the 2009 European elections shows that this early interest has failed to reverse a process of long-term decline.

The Mechanics of Leadership Selection

Technically, the PD chose two leaders in 2009. In February, the party’s national assembly elected Franceschini to serve out the remainder of Veltroni’s mandate, an option allowed by Article 3 of the party’s statute. Franceschini’s election came only four days after Veltroni’s resignation and was almost unanimous. His sole opponent, Arturo Parisi, a persistent critic of the leadership of the party, garnered only 92 votes of the 1,258 assembly delegates. The decision to elect a secretary immediately was made because of the need to prepare for European and local elections. Although Parisi criticized it, a majority of party supporters approved of the decision. After the European elections in June, the contest for the leadership of the party began in earnest. The procedure set out in the party statute for electing a new party secretary through national primaries is complicated. In part, this is because the process builds in a number of safeguards to ensure that party elites strongly condition the ultimate choice of party secretary and that many of the traditional defects of winner-takes-all elections, such as bare-plurality victories, are avoided.

In order to stand for the post of secretary, candidates must be party members (Art. 2, §5 of the statute) and must be nominated by at least 1,500 party members from at least five regions. The first requirement
caused difficulties for political satirist Beppe Grillo, who announced his intention to stand for the position but who was initially denied membership in his local area party. After having been granted membership in a different area, the party’s Commissione Nazionale di Garanzia annulled Grillo’s membership on the grounds that Grillo “had, on numerous occasions, stated his opposition to the ideas and values of the PD.” The second requirement was not met by antiquarian Amerigo Rutigliano since one-third of his backers were not party members.

These decisions—and the decisions not to stand made by Turin mayor Sergio Chiamparino and blogger and perennial primary candidate Mario Adinolfi—left three official candidates: Bersani, Franceschini, and Marino. Bersani had announced his candidacy prior to Veltroni’s resignation, while Franceschini did so shortly after the European elections, and Marino, a fortnight later. These candidates competed in a lengthy electoral contest composed of three principal stages. In between these stages, candidates and their proxies campaigned across the country, with each candidate averaging three campaign events per day, often traveling between 200 and 300 kilometers daily.

In the first stage, which was held in mid- to late September, party members in Italy and abroad voted in their party circolo (or local organization), expressing a single preference for a candidate. These votes were then tallied at the provincial level. Each province was assigned a number of delegates to the national convention in proportion to its population and how strongly it voted for the PD. Delegates from the various provinces were elected in proportion to the vote share of the candidate with whom they were affiliated. The purpose of this first stage is to exclude fringe candidates and to allow party members to express their judgment on the candidates. Normally, those candidates who poll less than 15 percent of all votes at the provincial level, or who poll more than 5 percent of votes at the provincial level but who are not among the top three candidates, are excluded at this stage. In the 2009 contest, all three official PD candidates passed the 5 percent threshold.

In the second stage of the electoral process, the delegates meet at the party’s convention to vote on the platforms of the respective candidates. These manifestos are not useful as an indication of policies that the party intends to pursue, as they are entirely too vague. Rather, they are used to differentiate between the candidates’ different positions. In this sense, although the method of leader selection used by the PD represents a considerable institutional innovation, it also harks back to the past: each candidate’s platform contains just as much studied ambiguity and reiteration of common tropes as did those of the party congresses of the First Republic. Nor are the candidates’
position statements intended for external consumption. If they were, they would not be so harsh about the PD’s record to date. The platforms of Franceschini and Bersani were both strongly critical of the party’s strategy. Such criticism might be expected from Bersani, who has long been a critic of the majoritarian vocation pursued by Veltroni. Yet Franceschini too criticized the party for not having communicated its message clearly, even to the point of praising Berlusconi.12

Bersani’s platform (“For the Democratic Party and for Italy”) was the shortest and least specific of the three, which likely reflected the unusual nature of his electoral coalition and his front-runner status. Franceschini’s platform (“Trust, Rules, Equality, Merit, Quality”) was the longest and the only one written in the first person. Finally, Marino’s platform (“Long Live the Democratic Party, Change Italy”) was by far the most specific of the three, as befitted his outsider status. The convention was primarily a test of strength and an opportunity for the candidates to appear in front of the party. The limited number of delegates somewhat accentuated the majoritarian dynamics of the contest, and if one of the candidates had been in a particularly strong position, he might have taken advantage of the opportunity to propose amendments to the party’s manifesto or Code of Values.13 Bersani was not in that position after 11 October, but the victory of his electoral platform did cement his position as the front-runner.

In the third stage, primary elections are held across the country, open to all those who are willing to contribute a donation of at least 2 euros to the party, to declare that they support the party’s ideals and intend to vote for it, and to supply contact information. Voters may express a single preference for national secretary and thereby vote for a slate of delegates to the national assembly. There is no logical reason why the “winner” of the party convention should also triumph in the primaries, but in any event, primary voters show that they are not “from another planet” and that their support for each candidate is similar to the support that the candidates had received at the convention. Nor is the winner of the primary election automatically elected secretary. As a safeguard against a bare-plurality victory, the winning candidate must secure 50 percent +1 of valid votes in the primary if he or she is to become secretary immediately. If the candidate does not win a majority but only a plurality, the question is decided by assembly delegates in a run-off between the top two candidates.

The nightmare scenario for the PD would have been (1) a national convention that voted for the losing candidate in the primary, (2) a victorious candidate in the primary who failed to reach a majority, and (3) a national assembly that then reinstated the decision of the national convention, with a spoiler candidate playing the role of
king-maker. This nightmare scenario was unlikely, given the consistency of Bersani’s support and the commitment of both front-runners to the Scalfari law, whereby the plurality winner of the primaries would be recognized by the losing candidate as the party’s new secretary. In primaries held on 25 October, Bersani was elected party secretary with 53 percent of the vote.

Who Won, Why, and with Whose Support

Given that this was only the second primary campaign in the party’s short history—and the first in which there was no clear front-runner—there was a high degree of ex ante uncertainty about the outcome of the contest. However, we wish to argue that the results of the primary could readily have been predicted even prior to the beginning of the official campaign.

An immediate reason for considering Franceschini as the prohibitive favorite was the fact that his political line reflected a continuation of the status quo as represented by Veltroni, who drew the support of a majority of the party in the 2007 primaries. Secondly, Franceschini, as acting party secretary, enjoyed a higher media profile and the benefit of having control over the levers of power within the party. On the other hand, a drawback was that Franceschini had extremely limited name recognition—both within and outside the party—immediately prior to his appointment as acting secretary. In addition, the political line pursued by Veltroni had certainly not paid off for him. Lastly, while Veltroni’s background in the Italian Communist Party (PCI) compensated for his centrist political line, the same could not be said for Franceschini.

Conversely, while Bersani had lower name recognition outside the party, he did have long-standing roots within the party, as well as a strong network of supporters across the country, which had allowed him to consider running against Veltroni in the party’s first leadership primary. Moreover, almost every opinion poll conducted since the summer showed Bersani enjoying a lead over Franceschini, although the size of this lead varied. Thus, much of the uncertainty surrounding the primary was due to doubt about whether Bersani’s support was broad enough to include primary voters and whether it would be deep enough to bring Bersani the majority of votes he needed to avoid a run-off. Although in the next sections we discuss dynamics over time and across different sections of the party, the eventual election outcome would likely still have been the same, had these dynamics been different.

In conducting our research, we began by assessing the candidates’ backing among party elites. We searched for public statements in
support of any of the candidates from the PD’s delegation to the Chamber of Deputies, searching through newspapers and from the candidates’ lists for the party assembly. We then cross-tabulated parliamentarians’ support for each of the three candidates with their previous political history. The results are shown in table 2.1.

**TABLE 2.1 Support among parliamentarians in the Chamber of Deputies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bersani</th>
<th>Franceschini</th>
<th>Marino</th>
<th>Undeclared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Margherita</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DS</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other parties</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No prior party</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Authors’ calculations.*

As might be expected, Franceschini led in two groups—former members of the Margherita and “new” parliamentarians who have no history in either the DS or the Margherita. Franceschini’s backing among former Margherita members was to be expected, either on the basis of his own past in the DC (linked with friendship ties or other non-ideological associations) or because his program lay to the right of Bersani’s and was thus disproportionately likely to attract former members of the Margherita. The second explanation is more likely, since Franceschini also did well among those who had no history in the DS or Margherita and who were disproportionately brought in by Veltroni, who shared Franceschini’s left-right positioning. This last group is, however, the most reticent to pick a candidate.

Bersani, by contrast, led strongly among former members of the DS, the largest part of the parliamentary delegation to the lower house. His support among former Margherita members came from those close to either Rosy Bindi (Giovanni Burfone, Guglielmo Vaccaro) or Romano Prodi (Giulio Santagata, Riccardo Levi). Geographically, Bersani’s support was more southern, with a notable cluster in Puglia, thanks presumably to D’Alema, while Franceschini did well in the North-East. The overall levels of support for each of the three candidates (15:14:1) was disproportionate to their support among party members and among primary voters, suggesting either that party parliamentarians leaned toward the center or that Franceschini enjoyed greater sway among this group as a result of his position as acting party leader or due to his past in the DC.
We next examined the candidates’ support among party members. The level of support for each of the three candidates can be gauged from the provincial-level results of the polls of party members. Just how this electorate differs from party elites at the national parliamentary level and from party sympathizers voting in the primaries is unclear. Based on some of the returns from several provinces, the level of support for each candidate seems to be far too structured to result from a very large or heterogeneous electorate. In other words, it is somewhat improbable that the levels of support for Bersani in Reggio Calabria (92.7 percent) or Piombino (81 percent), or for Franceschini in Messina (81 percent), or even for Marino in Frosinone (47.9 percent) genuinely represent the levels of support for these candidates in these provinces, as opposed to the orchestrated efforts of local notables supporting each candidate—even given the relatively high turnout of party members (about 467,000 of approximately 726,000 party members registered to vote). Still, the ratio between the candidates shows Marino with relatively more support and Bersani ahead of Franceschini by a reasonable margin (see table 2.2).

**TABLE 2.2 Support among party members and sympathizers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contest</th>
<th>Bersani</th>
<th>Franceschini</th>
<th>Marino</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Party members</td>
<td>255,189</td>
<td>171,041</td>
<td>366,740</td>
<td>466,573</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(55.1%)</td>
<td>(37.0%)</td>
<td>(7.9%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primaries</td>
<td>1,623,239</td>
<td>1,045,213</td>
<td>380,904</td>
<td>3,102,709</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(53.2%)</td>
<td>(34.3%)</td>
<td>(12.5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: http://www.partitodemocratico.it/.*

Perhaps because these tallies are so strongly influenced by the decisions of local elites, there is no link between the national-level voting history of each province and its support for each candidate. One might suppose that provinces which voted proportionally more for the Margherita, compared to the DS, might have been more likely to support Franceschini, either because of his policies or because of his background. In fact, this was not the case: the Pearson correlation of 0.10 between, on the one hand, the ratio of the DS to Margherita vote share in the 2006 Senate elections and, on the other hand, the ratio of Franceschini’s to Bersani’s vote share is not at all significant.

Finally, we examined the candidates’ support among primary voters. In the period between the party convention and the primaries, Franceschini closed strongly, with 75 parliamentarians signing a statement in
favor of his candidacy and a somewhat unexpected endorsement from film director Nanni Moretti. The Franceschini campaign managers felt that they had everything to gain and nothing to lose. Their argument was that a high turnout at the primaries would benefit Franceschini rather than Bersani. Bersani had won a strong majority among involved party members and a slender majority among parliamentarians. Would he therefore lose his majority when reaching out to party sympathizers? And would this effect be greater if the number of party sympathizers who turned out also increased? The turnout in the primaries was important not only for the result of the leadership contest; it also had material consequences for the party’s financial health.

Altogether slightly fewer than 3 million voters participated in the primaries—around half a million fewer than had participated in the 2007 primary, despite a much closer contest. The turnout was slightly higher than expected, but Bersani’s majority remained intact. The margin between Bersani and Franceschini was roughly similar to the margin among party members. Only Marino improved notably, compared to his performance among party members.

There is little high-quality, individual-level data concerning who supported which candidate. Opinion polls conducted shortly after the vote must perforce rely on small sub-samples with high margins of error. Nevertheless, the data we have suggest that Bersani drew more left-wing supporters, while Franceschini had the backing of more religious voters. Voters who identified with the left rather than the center-left were 25 percent more likely to vote for Bersani than Franceschini. In general, older, less well-educated, male voters favored Bersani. More of Franceschini’s voters were sporadic or practicing Catholics than voters for either of the other two candidates, but it is not legitimate to infer from this that Catholics were more likely to vote for Franceschini, although this seems probable.

One feature of the primary vote that did stand in marked contrast to results within the party was the geographical distribution of support. Gone were the huge reservoirs of support for Bersani and Franceschini in the South and in the former “white belt,” respectively; rather, their national support was distributed fairly evenly. Marino was an exception in this respect, polling far better in the North than in the South.

How do the levels of support shown for each of the candidates at these three levels—parliamentarians, party members, and primary voters—match with the electoral platforms that they offered? At the elite level, it seems that most parliamentarians voted on the basis of their left-right stance. Former members of the DS, who are ex hypothesi to the left of former members of the Margherita, were disproportionately likely to support the more left-wing candidate, while those associated
with the Margherita or with the leadership of Veltroni voted for the more right-wing candidate. While this broad picture seems plausible, we cannot explain the exceptions to this rule—namely, the former DC members whose support helped Bersani to avoid accusations that he was the candidate of the ex-DS. At the level of party voters, there is reasonable evidence to suggest that voters who felt on the left of the party were more likely to vote for Bersani. It would be desirable to know whether Catholics were less likely to vote for Bersani. It would be even more desirable to know (but more difficult to assess) whether the support of those Catholic parliamentarians whom Bersani did attract limited Franceschini’s advantage in this area.

Conclusion

Whether the choice of Bersani as leader of the PD ultimately benefits the party will no doubt be dealt with by future contributors to *Italian Politics*. There are, however, some immediate costs that the party has incurred by choosing Bersani. A number of party members, including Rutelli, have left to form a new party, the Alleanza per l’Italia (ApI). Whether the ApI will become a staging point in the move to form a new political center, together with the UdC, is unclear. Those who have left the PD are drawn evenly from the economic right of the party and the social-conservative wing of the party. This seems fitting, given that our argument has been that the PD leadership contest was not just about left versus right, DS versus Margherita, or clerical versus secular.

In the medium term, the party will have to decide its strategy for the regional elections in 2010 and, in particular, its coalition partners, region by region. These elections will reveal how Bersani is perceived within the party and will, in the long term, set up the strategic choices that the PD makes, as it approaches the next general election—whether it is held as scheduled in 2013 or is called early.

Notes

2. Based on the authors’ calculations.
5. See http://www.repubblica.it, 26 October 2009.
7. Many of these issues have been addressed in previous volumes of *Italian Politics* and are discussed in the chapter by Nicola Pasini in this volume.


9. Polls of 23 February 2009 carried out by ISPO Srl for *Porta a Porta* and Ballerò. See http://www.sondaggipoliticoelettorali.it/.

10. Technically the term “primary” ought to be reserved for elections used to select a candidate for further electoral office, not for positions within a party itself. Nevertheless, we follow the common journalistic usage here.

11. Commissione Nazionale di Garanzia, *Delibera* no. 1 of 14 July 2009. The rejection was probably a blessing for Grillo, as it bolstered his anti-politics message. Acceptance would have forced him to reveal that his electoral strength was less than that of either Franceschini or Bersani. See poll of 10 July 2009, carried out by Simera Simulation Intelligence, http://www.simulationintelligence.com.

12. “Berlusconi himself represented the prospect of change in 1994. It was illusory, but it was a prospect of change … If you voted for the right, you knew what you were voting for. If you voted for the left, you did not know what your vote represented.”

13. Article 9 of the rules for the election of the secretary of the National Assembly.


16. Polls by Ipsos, Simera, IPR, and Crespi Ricerche showed Bersani with leads of 2 percent, 15 percent, 19 percent, and 4 percent in June, July, August, and September, respectively. See http://sondaggipoliticoelettorali.it/.

17. The full list of parliamentarians and the candidates whom they supported (if any) is available from the authors.

18. Poll of 22 October 2009 carried out by Ipsos for the *Corriere della Sera*, http://www.sondaggipoliticoelettorali.it/.

19. Poll of 22 October 2009 carried out by Ipsos for *Porta a Porta*, http://www.sondaggipoliticoelettorali.it/.