

SUMMARIES

Party platforms, media and public opinion

by Giacomo Sani e Paolo Segatti

The paper presents data on party platforms, political communication and public opinion in the 1996 election campaign. It is shown that the electoral platforms of the two major coalitions were largely overlapping, except for some economic and social issues. The center-right coalition seemed more inclined to adopt pro-market policies, while the platform of the «Ulivo» coalition was more oriented toward a social partnership approach. In the month before the elections, policy issues were discussed on television more extensively than the political ones. Public and private networks covered the 1996 election campaign at the same level of the 1994 one and to some extent with the same bias. Voting intentions seem to have remained stable prior to and during the electoral campaign.

The candidates. Political visions and careers

by Liborio Mattina and Alessandro Tonarelli

This research covers the whole set of candidates presented for the Italian political elections of April 1996 by the three major actors: Ulivo and Rifondazione comunista, Polo per le libertà and Lega nord. The research has two purposes: to investigate the strategies adopted by each actor in order to select attractive candidates in the single-member districts and to outline the political careers followed by parliamentary and party élites. With reference to the first goal, the data show that coalitions and parties' strategies for candidate recruitment were highly centralized and that candidates' attractiveness was defined in terms of their social background and/or their former political activities which embodied different and clearly shaped «visions» of society. The data also show that political careers today develop either at the

local government level or by «direct» access to parliament. The more traditional career pattern, namely party bureaucratic service, has become considerably less important as it involves only a slight minority of candidates.

The electoral alliances. Party identities and coalitional games

by Aldo Di Virgilio

The emergence of electoral alliances competing for plurality seats has been one of the main consequences stemming from the introduction of the new electoral laws for the Senate and the Chamber of deputies. The paper analyzes the politics of electoral alliances at the general elections of April 1996, focussing on two factors: the making of electoral alliances and their internal regulation. From both points of view, the elections have shown some important new developments.

The main innovation was undoubtedly the simplification of the number of coalitions. The four groupings of the 1994 general elections were cut back in 1996 to just two: Center-Left and Center-Right. The center-left alliance was a merger of (a) *l'Ulivo*, the 1995 center-left political coalition led by Mr. Prodi as candidate-Prime Minister and hinged on Pds and Ppi; (b) *Rinnovamento italiano*, the new center movement created by Mr. Dini, the outgoing Prime Minister, four weeks before the elections; (c) *Rifondazione comunista*. The center-right coalition was formed by *Forza Italia*, *Alleanza nazionale* and the *Ccd* and *Cdu*. Unlike 1994, the coalition did not present on this occasion significant geographical variations in that *Alleanza nazionale* replaced the *Lega* even in the Northern regions. While the center-left alliance was able to broaden its range, the center-right one lost key allies as the *Lega Nord* and suffered the split of *Movimento sociale-Fiamma tricolore* on its right.

A number of conspicuous changes concerned the make-up of the coalitions. The paper provides empirical data on the politics of single-member districts allocation within each alliance and on the management of the proportional arena. As in 1994, the alliances were «proportionalized» on the basis of estimates on the future electoral returns. Unlike 1994, however, the center-left coalition was more efficient in adapting to the constraints and opportunities defined by the electoral rules. Compared to the institutional learning of the center-left, the performance of the center-right coalition was very poor: the alliance suffered from a lack of cohesion, wasting its previous coalitional capability. As in the 1994 elections the politics of electoral alliances proved to be, on the whole, a key factor of the electoral competition.

The electoral participation: The effects of plurality competition on voting turnout

by Daniele Caramani

The article, after a detailed description of the relevant data, discusses a well-known hypothesis on the positive relationship between the level of marginality – or competitiveness – among the major candidates within single-member constituencies and the levels of turnout. The adoption in 1993 of a plurality electoral law allows for the test of the hypothesis in Italy. However, although the hypothesis has been confirmed in several other plurality systems, it appears that in the Italian case the traditional socio-economic variables of social and geographical marginality remain the main explanatory factors of the levels of turnout. Above all, the new electoral law does not seem yet to have affected the traditional forms of sub-cultural and clientelistic electoral mobilisation in the various areas of the country. The empirical evidence clearly shows that it is in those areas in which competition is lower, i.e., the areas in which sub-cultures still have strong roots, that turnout is higher. The clientelistic forms of mobilisation typical of the Southern areas tend, by contrast, to restrain participation even though the level of competitiveness among candidates turns out to be higher, thus witnessing the basic continuity of the forms of electoral participation in Italy.

Omens of an early freeze: Equilibrium and continuity in the proportional vote

by Roberto Cartocci

The proportional arena has been designed as a buffer and corrective for the hard verdicts of the plurality system. However, the political impact of this arena is much deeper than its purely electoral role. It measures the loadings of single parties within coalitions and, subsequently, influences their interactions and bargaining tactics. The elections of April 21 clearly show the effects of institutional learning by the different actors involved: voters, coalitions, candidates, etc. The analysis of electoral data shows the following main findings: (a) the remarkable equilibrium between left-wing and right-wing coalitions; (b) the left won thanks to its better ability to manage alliances with the centre and extreme left; (c) surprisingly little change in voter behaviour occurred between 1994 and 1996 and most of this change is due to movements toward vote nationalization, i.e. reduction of regional peculiarities. The main features of Italian electoral geography are thus confirmed; the votes gained by the Lega Nord in the Northern re-

gions highlight the relevance of the territorial cleavage in the political agenda.

How to lose a majority. The competition in the single-member districts

by Roberto D'Alimonte and Stefano Bartolini

Few observers expected that the 1996 elections would yield a clear-cut outcome. Even fewer people expected that, after the disastrous results of the previous elections, the center-left coalition would be able to gain a majority of seats in both branches of Parliament. Yet this is precisely what happened on April 21, 1996. This article tries to explain the comeback of the 1994 losers by focusing on three factors which have changed the electoral balance between the two major coalitions in the single-member districts: the coalitional re-equilibrium, the fragmentation of the center-right, the defections of the moderate voters in the plurality arena. The first factor refers to the ability of the center-left coalition (Ulivo-RC) to broaden its range while its major rival (the Polo) lost key allies. The result has been a more competitive stand of center-left candidates, particularly in the North. The second factor has to do with the lack of cohesion of the moderate forces. The Polo lost the support of the Lega Nord and suffered the split of the Movimento Sociale on its right. These defections, along with others, have caused the loss of a considerable number of seats. On top of this, the Polo suffered also from the defection of a considerable number of its voters who did vote for one of the parties of the center-right coalition in the proportional arena, but refused to vote for the Polo candidate in the single-member districts. The authors conclude by suggesting a number of hypotheses that could explain this phenomenon.

Majoritarian rules and the lack of strategic voting

by Alessandro Chiaramonte

The goal of this essay is to investigate the existence of strategic voting in the electoral behaviour of Italian voters in both the 1994 and 1996 elections and its effects on the restructuring of the party system.

Strategic voting is a topic discussed in the literature for many years. In the context of the effects of electoral systems, the term strategic voting is normally used to describe the district-by-district phenomenon of third party supporters under the plurality rule voting for one of the two major parties. This is due to the tendency of such electoral systems to discourage voters from wasting their vote (minor par-

ties are in fact systematically underrepresented). As a consequence, «winner-takes-all» electoral laws tend to produce two-party systems, but only if the two major parties are the same in every constituency.

On this theoretical basis, the Italian electoral reforms of 1993 with the introduction of a predominantly majoritarian system were expected to offer new incentives toward strategic voting in the single-member districts and therefore toward a bipolarization of the party system, provided that the pattern of competition was the same nationwide. However, empirical tests based on district-level data show that strategic voting has not significantly occurred either in the 1994 or in the 1996 elections.

The heritage of the old proportional electoral system, a slow learning process of the new rules, the persistence of ideological voting and also the contradictory incentives deriving from the mixed proportional and majoritarian nature of the new electoral system (especially for the Senate) are all reasons for the lack of strategic voting.

Nevertheless, the Italian party system, emerging out of the electoral transition shows a bipolar tendency. In other words, party élites have successfully negotiated appropriate coalitions at the system level replacing the effects produced by strategic voting at the mass level.

The political class during the Italian transition

by Luca Verzichelli

Only two years after the critical elections of 27 March 1994, the parliamentary election of 1996 has been another important step in the transformation of the political class. The extent of turnover is declining (but remains larger than the mean rate of the *first republic*) and, after the second election under the new electoral system, the renewal of the parliamentary class shows some signs of stabilization. It is time to investigate the effects of such a change: how different is the sociological configuration of the new élite? And does it mean that new consolidated pathways to the parliamentary élite already exist?

This article provides an exploration on these problems, analysing at first the distribution of freshmen in the political class, the come back of old backbenchers in the new political parties, the social and occupational background of the MPs and, at the end, their local and political experiences.

In the last section the Author discusses some hypotheses about the perspectives of MPs recruitment in Italy, focussing in particular on the effects of different variables, like the structural crisis of political parties and the introduction of the plurality system. A typology of professionalisation patterns among the new MPs is provided, on the basis of empirical evidence.