

Two Against Each Other and All Against Themselves: The 2006 Italian Parliamentary Elections

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Abstract: This short paper deals with the 2006 parliamentary elections in Italy, looking at these election results to evaluate the importance of their new electoral system and estimating its possible consequences. Therefore the authors firstly try to focus attention on the description of new electoral rules that stress the logic of majority premium. The analytic part of the text consists of an evaluation of electoral results: the 2001 and 2006 election results are compared and differences in results between the two chambers examined.

Keywords: Italy, electoral systems, elections, majority premium

1. Introduction

The second Sunday and Monday in April 2006 were dedicated to elections for both houses of the Italian parliament – The Chamber of Deputies and The Senate – elections which would decide whether the country would be further governed by the right-wing coalition led by Silvio Berlusconi or if there would be a “*turn-to-the-left*” symbolized by a win by Romano Prodi’s bloc. The Italian parliamentary elections were important not only because of a possible cabinet change, but also because they meant the introduction of a new electoral system, one which would (conditionally) supply the winner with an artificial majority of seats.¹ In the following pages we will attempt to describe the imposition of this new electoral technique, analyze its consequences, and comment on the electoral results.

What is really noteworthy about the Italian party system is the existence of two heterogeneous blocs, each consisting of many parties that can hardly be recognized as “believing in the same god”. In other words, although differences within the blocs are sometimes more considerable than those between the two blocs themselves, the parties are pushed to persist in such alliances. The main reason can be seen in the electoral system (explained later), which provides the winning alliance with surplus seats to ensure it an absolute majority of seats in the lower chamber, thus making government-forming easier.

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Table 1: Composition of the Two Blocs

CASA DELLE LIBERTÀ	L'UNIONE
Alleanza Nazionale Democrazia Cristiana-Nuovo PSI Forza Italia Lega Nord Per Italia Nel Mondo Unione dei Democratici Cristiani e dei Democratici di Centro	Autonomie Liberté Démocratie Comunisti Italiani Federazione dei Verdi Insieme con l'Unione Italia dei Valori Lista Cosumatori L'Ulivo: – Democratici di Sinistra – La Margherita – Movimento Republican Europei Popolari-UDEUR Rifondazione Comunista Rosa nel Pugno Südtiroler Volkspartei

Source: *www.interno.it*

2. The Electoral System

Changes in electoral procedure for Parliament are not something completely new in Italy. The system of proportional representation of the so-called First Italian Republic, which used the Imperiali quota for allocating seats, was replaced in 1993 by a mixed system usually referred to as either correction (Massicotte, Blais 1999) or mixed-member majoritarian with partial compensation. In the first case, seats (630) were distributed according to the Imperiali formula ($Q = V/(S+2)$) in 31 multi-member districts and Val d'Aosta where there was only one MP to elect. If every seat was not filled in the first round, the remaining mandates were distributed among the lists with more than 300.000 votes and at least one already allocated at the national level according to the largest remainder. With the fall of the First Republic and the transformation of almost all political parties into new entities it was inevitable to also change the electoral system to prevent extreme party fragmentation. This corrective mixed system applied two tiers – nominal and proportional – so that voters had the possibility to cast their ballot both for candidates in single-member districts (SMD) and for party lists in 26 multi-member districts (MMD). The total number of 475 mandates in the nominal tier was distributed according to the British FPTP system and the other 155 deputies in the proportional tier were elected according to the Hare formula in combination with the largest remainder among the lists having achieved the 4% minimum threshold. Both tiers were connected through the very unusual system of scorporo, which is intended as a specific tool to compensate for disproportions produced by the nominal tier (for more see Čaloud 2004: 152–153).

As we have previously mentioned in an article dealing with the electoral system, this technique suffered from a substantial lack of confidence among many scholars as well as among the majority of Italians. However, even though it did not manage to reduce party fragmentation, it undoubtedly forced parties to cooperate at the level of broad alliances (see Čaloud, Foltýn 2006). The new system is based on the notion of making the best of the former, i.e. to compel parties to cooperate even more than before. The electoral procedure for the Chamber still presumes existence of 630 seats, but there are no longer two tiers applied. Each voter has only one ballot, which is cast for a party list. Of the total, 617 deputies are to be chosen in 26 MMDs according to the system of “proportional representation”. To determine the allocation of seats, the Hare quota in combination with the largest remainder method is applied, i.e. the same allocation method used under the former electoral system in the proportional tier.² The remaining mandates are distributed to deputies elected by Italians residing abroad (12) and one seat is traditionally reserved for the region of *Val d'Aosta*.

What is most important about the new system is the majority premium awarded to the winning coalition or party. The premium becomes active only in the case that no party or coalition obtains 340 mandates. This means that the winner automatically receives 340 of 617 seats, i.e. about 55% of the total. By contrast, the remaining 277 mandates are apportioned among the other parties and coalitions that have crossed the threshold. On the other hand, when the party/coalition gains more than 340 out of 617, the majority premium is not applied and the system operates as a classic system of proportional representation (Čaloud, Foltýn 2006: 189–190).

In regards to the classification of this new technique, there are at least two opinions as to where it should be placed. One group of scholars (Alvaréz-Rivera 2006; Shugart 2006, Ferrara 2006) recognizes it as a *proportional system with a majority premium*, the second group (which included the authors of this text) believes that it would be better termed as a *mixed conditional system* (using the Massicotte-Blais classification).

3. The Election Results from A Comparative Viewpoint

The two early spring days in April showed that on the one hand, the party system in Italy is increasingly structured into two wide alliances receiving roughly the same proportion of votes, but on the other hand, the parties united in those alliances are still mutually very contradictory. The 2006 parliamentary elections also confirmed that the potential third pole is (at least clinically) dead. Almost all the small parties that ran their candidates separately in previous elections were swallowed by one of the two blocs this time. That is why there was only a negligible number of “wasted” votes (0,5%) for irrelevant smaller parties outside the big coalitions.

The Parliamentary elections of 2006 will always be remembered as the elections in which less than 0,1% of votes cast decided who would be the winners and losers for (probably) the next five years. One of the tightest results in the history of elections eventually gave the prime minister's chair to the leader of the left-center coalition, Romano Prodi, after it became clear that his side overwhelmed the opponents “by a nose”, only obtaining approximately 25,000 more votes than Berlusconi's coalition. This number should be seen as the most striking outcome of the whole election because had the result been reversed, the majority premium of seats would have gone to the House of Liberties.

Table 2: Results for the 2006 Italian Parliamentary Election (Chamber of Deputies)

BLOC/Party	Votes		Seats
	Number	%	
CASA DELLE LIBERTÀ	19 356 412	49,5	281
Forza Italia	9 247 791	23,6	140
Alleanza Nazionale	4 706 654	12,0	71
UDC	2 645 745	6,7	39
Lega Nord	1 768 293	4,5	26
DC-PSI	285 744	0,7	4
Per Italia Nel Mondo	73 289	0,2	1
Others	628 896	1,6	–
UNIONE	19 461 138	49,7	348
L'Ulivo	12 350 692	31,6	226
Rifondazione Comunista	2 229 604	5,7	41
La Rosa nel Pugno	991 049	2,5	18
Italia dei Valori	901 591	2,3	17
Comunisti Italiani	884 912	2,3	16
Federazione dei Verdi	783 944	2,0	15
Popolari-UDEUR	544 245	1,4	10
Südtiroler Volkspartei	182 703	0,5	4
Autonomie Liberté Démocratie	34 176	0,1	1
Others	555 231	1,4	–
Others outside the blocs	319 271	0,8	1
SUMMARY	39 136 821		630

Source: www.interno.it

This tiny number of votes dividing success and failure made Berlusconi doubt the election results. For many days “Il Cavaliere” was not ready to accede to his opponent and demanded verification and re-counting of the questioned votes. Regardless of a clear decision by the Supreme Court confirming the election result, even many months later Berlusconi did not forget to mention occasionally that Prodi’s win was illegal or at least illegitimate. Nevertheless, Berlusconi’s opinion cannot overrule the court’s decision and therefore we can continue to analyze the results of the 2006 parliamentary elections.

By observing these election results we must first find out due to which parties *L’Unione* succeeded and House of Liberties failed. In comparison with the 2001 election results (though such comparison is barely justifiable under the difference in electoral system conditions) we can easily make the following remarks. There is no reason to perceive the success of *L’Unione* as owing to the merit of any specific political party within the left-center bloc, and even the share of its leader Romano Prodi is arguable. On the other hand, identifying the “pure loser” in these elections should not create any controversy. Berlusconi’s *Forza Italia* lost approximately 2 million votes compared to the 2001 election results. From the perspective of percentage it

Table 3: Results for the 2006 Italian Parliamentary Election (Senate)

BLOC/Party	Votes		Seats
	Number	%	
CASA DELLE LIBERTÀ	17 486 556	49,9	156
Forza Italia	8 387 126	23,9	81
Alleanza Nazionale	4 234 693	12,1	41
UDC	2 366 374	6,8	21
Lega Nord	1 548 821	4,4	13
Others	949 242	2,7	–
UNIONE	17 151 621	48,9	158
Democratici Sinistra	5 977 313	17,1	62
DL – La Margherita	3 664 622	10,5	39
Rifondazione Comunista	2 518 624	7,2	27
Insieme con l'Unione	1 423 226	4,1	11
L'Ulivo+ L'Unione	446 644	1,3	5
Südtiroler Volkspartei	152 038	0,4	5
Italia dei Valori	1 012 180	2,9	4
Popolari-UDEUR	490 203	1,4	3
Lista Cosumatori	72 139	0,2	1
Others	1 394 632	4,0	1
Others outside the blocs	403 660	1,2	1
SUMMARY	35 041 827		315

Source: www.interno.it

means that *Forza Italia* sank noticeably from 29,5% to 23,7% (see Sesto 2006). We must nevertheless simultaneously emphasize that the final result of the whole right-center bloc was much better than what the majority of opinion-polls predicted, and Berlusconi undoubtedly contributed substantially to this “relative success”. After all, “Il Cavaliere” must be noted as the “leading loser” of the 2006 parliamentary elections. The following observations on the behavior of selected voter segments illustrates why Berlusconi did not succeed and why the left-center coalition’s win in the upper house was jeopardized until the last moment.

3.1 Differences between Chambers, Regions, Sex and Age

The first analyses of 2006 parliamentary elections confirmed some long-term tendencies and also revealed some new aspects of voter behavior and emerging trends in the party system.

When observing any election results in Italy we have to bear in mind that all of them are – more or less – territorially determined. Each party (or even bloc) has its own region where it receives considerably more votes than in any other.³ On the other hand there are also districts where hardly any voters cast their ballots for the party. The *Lombardia*, *Veneto*, *Sicilia*, *Piemonte* and *Puglia* districts are usually considered strongholds of the right-wing parties.⁴

Although we cannot include *Lazio* in this list as Rome is typically leftist, we must point out the importance of this region for Berlusconi's bloc since it is assumed to be the flagship of the *National Alliance* (see Foltýn 2005). With the exception of *Piemonte*, the right-center coalition improved its results in all of these strongholds compared to the 2001 elections. So why didn't they win? One possible answer: whereas the House of Liberties increased only marginally in its strongholds and even less in the rest of the country, the Union gained profoundly everywhere (Trentino A.A. excluded) and did extremely well throughout the entire South, islands included. The left-center coalition gained many new voters not only in *Calabria*, *Campania*, *Puglia*, *Sicilia* but even in the heart of Berlusconi's empire – *Lombardia* (comp. Istituto Cattaneo 2006a). Such gains, nevertheless, could have been valuable only under the a proportional electoral system.

In general, the Chamber of Deputies election results showed a slight loss of support for *Casa*, which cost it the electoral win. Compared to the 2001 elections, where Berlusconi won in 15 out of twenty-seven districts, in 2006 he failed to regain the majority of votes in three districts (*Lombardia 1*, *Campania 1* and *Calabria*). The worst results for *Casa* are found mainly in *Trentino Alto Adige* (35,3%), *Toscana* (38,3%), and *Basilicata* (39,5%). On the contrary, the highest number of people who voted for Berlusconi's bloc was in the *Lombardia 2* district (61,1%). The Romano Prodi's alliance was most successful in those districts where Berlusconi failed, such as *Trentino Alto Adige* 62%, *Toscana* (61,7%) and *Basilicata* (60,1%). Vice versa, the fewest ballots for Prodi were counted in the *Lombardia 2* and 3 districts.

Until now we have only examined the results of the lower house of the Italian parliament. It's important to point out that the Senate reports slightly different figures.⁵ There are two reasons for this phenomenon. The first one is the fact that unlike the Chamber, there is no national majority premium in the Senate – this premium is distributed separately in every region. This is why there are 17 (independent) premiums which do not have to assure the majority of seats for the winner in the Senate (comp. D'Alimonte 2006a). The second reason and more important reason is the electoral law that restricts voting for the Senate only to citizens older than 25. The current results are therefore influenced by the system of 17 regional majority premiums, as well as by excluding the youngest voters. The exclusion of voters under 25 must in any case be seen as a crucial feature of the Senate election. Namely, the youngest voters (especially first-time voters) prefer the left-center bloc more than the average voter (Polchi 2006, D'Alimonte 2006b). In addition, voters older than 64 years tend to prefer the parties of the right-center coalition, particularly *Forza Italia* (comp. Orbach 2006b). The synergy of such findings flows into an easy conclusion – the right-center bloc has a far better chance to succeed in the upper house than in the lower house. Simultaneously it means that the left-center coalition must expect that because many of their potential voters are not allowed to vote due to their age, the representatives of *L'Unione* must compensate for anticipated losses. However, the present reality is slightly different because the results have clearly shown that the left-center bloc lost many voters in the Senate elections who had voted for *L'Ulivo* in the Chamber. The voters of the joint list (in the Chamber) simply did not find the list called *L'Ulivo* (in the Senate) and thus did not vote for one of the composing parties (mainly *DS* or *Margherita*) but voted for another party, sometimes even from the opposing bloc. Some scholars actually suggest this is the main reason for the poor results of the Union in the Senate. They concurrently doubt the assumption that the

left-center coalition is disadvantaged by the exclusion of the youngest voters who – in their opinions – prefer the right-wing parties (comp. Istituto Cattanéo 2006b). Whatever point of view is correct, we can note that voters of different sex and age express approximately the same preferences. There are however two substantial exceptions – women and voters older than 64 – both of whom prefer *Forza Italia* more than the average voter (Fonda 2006, Orbach 2006b).

4. Conclusion

The 2006 election results can be perceived either as a reward for the former opposition led by Romano Prodi or as a punishment for the former government headed by Silvio Berlusconi. Whichever option is chosen by the reader, in the end we must emphasize two facts. First, that the success of the Union can be seen as a consequence of the so-called “light fidelity” (Natale 2006c) of Italian voters who were more faithful to the left-center bloc this time – only about 3% of former voters for the left-center coalition voted *Casa* this year whereas more than 8% of former voters for the right-center bloc preferred a political subject from the opposite bloc during these elections (comp. Natale 2006a, Mannheimer 2006). The second potential question concerning the 2006 parliamentary elections is, what kind of results would there have been if the previous electoral system was used? Paolo Natale (2006b) has tried to find a possible answer and discovered that although any such conclusion is highly hypothetical, even under the conditions of the former mixed electoral system the left-center coalition would have succeeded, though it would have lost about 15 current deputies. From this point of view it seems that the victory of the Prodi coalition was inevitable.

Poznámky

1. Another novelty of the electoral system was that for the first time Italians abroad were also entitled to vote.
2. Seats are allocated to parties having proceeded to the *scrutinium*. The threshold that needs to be overcome is set in a rather complicated way:
 - a political party running individually or as a part of a coalition that obtains less than ten percent must obtain at least four percent of the national vote;
 - a coalition that obtains at least ten percent of the vote must include at least one party that obtains two percent of the national vote or more;
 - political parties representing recognized linguistic minorities must obtain at least twenty percent of the vote in their corresponding regions. The last change and experience from the 2006 election tells us that also the first party under the threshold takes a seat (comp. Čaloud, Foltýn 2006: 189, Álvarez-Rivera 2006, CdS 2005, La Repubblica 2005).
3. At the level of single parties, a typical instance of geographically fluid support is *Lega Nord*, a party getting votes mainly in Northern Italy. LN has reached their best results in districts such as *Lombardia 2* (16,1%), *Veneto 1* (11,6%), *Veneto 2* (10,4%) or *Lombardia 3* (9,8%). By contrast, no LN deputies were elected in southern and central-Italian districts with the surprising exception of two Sicilian districts, where *Lega Nord* gained 3 mandates in total. *Alleanza Nazionale* is an entirely different party, for which mostly Romans vote. This is why AN got the most votes in both of the *Lazio* districts and in *Umbria*.

At least two districts are interesting for their national minority composition. One of them, *Trentino Alto Adige* is a region inhabited by many people of Austrian origin, so it is a traditional stronghold of *Südtiroler Volkspartei*, a party backing the interests of the Austrian minority. In the 2006 election SVP received 28,5% and four seats (out of 11 distributed there). The other is *Val d'Aosta*, a Northwestern region inhabited mainly by French people. The only seat to be allocated there went to *Autonomie Liberté Démocratie* (43,4%), a part of Prodi's coalition.

4. Typical strongholds of left-centre parties might include *Emilia-Romagna* and *Toscana*.
5. The question of life-time senators is left aside for the purpose of this paper. It is nevertheless worth mentioning that Prodi gained also in the upper house only when obtaining four of the last five seats distributed from voters abroad.

Notes and abbreviations

Alleanza Nazionale (AN) – National Alliance

Democrazia Cristiana-Nuovo Partito Socialista Italiano (DC-NPSI) – Christian Democracy – New Socialist Party of Italy

Forza Italia (FI) – Forward Italy

Lega Nord (LN) – Northern League

Per Italia Nel Mondo (PINM) – For Italy in the World

Unione dei Democratici Cristiani e dei Democratici di Centro (UDC-DC) – Union of Christian Democrats and Democrats of the Centre

L'Unione – The Union

L'Ulivo – The Olive Tree

Autonomie Liberté Démocratie (ALD) – Autonomy, Freedom, Democracy

Comunisti Italiani (CI) – Italian Communists

Federazione dei Verdi (V) – Federation of Greens

Insieme con l'Unione – Together with the Union

Italia dei Valori (IV) – Italy of Values

La Rosa nel Pugno – The Rose in the Fist

Lista Cosumatori – Consumer List

Democratici di Sinistra – Democrats of the Left

Democrazia e Libertà – La Margherita – Democracy and Liberty – The Daisy

Movimento Repubblicani Europei – European Republican Movement

Popolari-UDEUR – People's Party-UDEUR

Rifondazione Comunista – Communist Refoundation

Südtiroler Volkspartei (SVP) – South Tyrol People's Party

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