

## SUMMARIES

### **An Election Different from the Others**

by Gianfranco Pasquino

The May 2001 Italian elections have been significantly different from the previous ones for three main reasons. First, for the first time in Italian post-war political history there was an incumbent government challenged by an opposition prepared to replace it. Second, the nature of the electoral competition between the Olive-tree government and the Casa delle Libertà led by Silvio Berlusconi was clearly and unequivocally bipolar. Third, because of Berlusconi's victory, the outcome of this competition led to the first peaceful alternation ever in the Italian political system. In a sense, then, the May 2001 elections may be considered «founding elections» similar to those won by the Christian Democrats in 1948 that inaugurated the post-war democratic Italian Republic. This article suggests, however, that much remains to be done to consolidate the political regime, to reform the institutions, and to create a stable competition between more homogeneous coalitions.

### **The expected alternation. Competition in single-member districts**

by Enrico Melchionda

This essay examines the outcome of the elections in single-member districts, with special attention to changes occurred in the structure, the level and the different arenas (plurality and proportional) of electoral competition. The main thesis is that, following the renewed alliance between the Polo and the Lega Nord and the divisions of the Ulivo, the disastrous results of the center-left coalition were expected. However, because of an increasing bipolarity and competitiveness in single-member districts and in parliament, there is a tendency toward

a re-equilibrium. In fact, the Ulivo's performance has been most ineffective because it has gained votes in the North, where it was useless, and has lost votes in the competitive districts of the South. This article tries to explore the perspectives of the electoral competition according to the persistent instability of the political offer, new changes of alliances and the fluid structure of the parties. The last section deals with the «mysterious» question of the difference between plurality and proportional votes, which seems to assign a bonus to the center-left coalition, but is an indication of the extreme weakness and de-structuration of the Ulivo's parties. The author concludes by discussing some hypotheses about this phenomenon.

### **The Electoral System is Still Malfunctioning**

by Giovanni Sartori

The fact that in the May 2001 elections Berlusconi's coalition has won a sizable majority in both Chambers does not prove that the Italian electoral system is working satisfactorily. Some governmental stability and a bipolar competition have been achieved, but this outcome may also be obtained, as in several European democratic regimes, by utilizing appropriate Pr electoral systems. Where the existing Mattarellum has utterly failed is in the reduction of the number of parties. Moreover, the bipolar structure of the electoral-political competition seems to be the product of the «depolarisation» of the party system more than of the mechanics of the electoral system as such. Indeed, the voters have decided to reward the two major coalitions and to deprive of support individual parties running alone. Within the two major coalitions, small parties retain a lot of power, have been politically rewarded and remain in a position to play a destabilizing role (as the League did in 1994 and Communist Refoundation in 1998). Better electoral systems than the Mattarellum can be devised. Some reforms were entertained, but failed. However, if and when they master the logic of the electoral systems, political scientists would be well advised to criticize those politicians who behave badly and to show that they do care about the functioning of the political system.

### **How much did the political communication matter?**

di Giacomo Sani e Guido Legnante

During the last decade, political communication (particularly through television) has become a key issue in Italian politics. It has been argued by politicians and observers that partisan bias in the

broadcasts of the two major networks operating in the country has had a strong influence in the outcome of elections. This article presents evidence pertaining to this controversy collected in the course of the 2001 campaign. Analysis of television programs with data from the archive of the Political Communication Observatory at Pavia shows that public network (Rai) and Mediaset channels did differ in terms of the amount of «visibility» granted to the leaders of the two major electoral coalitions. Analysis of survey data from the archive of the Ispo institute shows the existence of a fairly strong association between voting choices and viewing preferences for the various channels. In the last section of the article, the authors present alternative models of the linkages between selective exposure to different sources and political preferences.

### **Interest in Politics, Coalition Belonging and Leaders' Evaluation: the Effects of the Electoral Campaign**

by Mauro Barisione

Starting from an analysis of the relationship between cognitive variables (such as the «level of interest in politics»), political variables (the degree of «coalition belonging») and evaluative-affective variables (in particular: individual evaluations of political leaders), this article explores the perception that different segments of the electorate had of Silvio Berlusconi and of his centre-left opponent Francesco Rutelli. More precisely, the analysis first focuses on the degree of popularity of the two candidates and then on the voters' opinions of their personal and political qualities. These two aspects of the candidate evaluation process are taken into account both in relational and diachronic terms. Indeed, the relational analysis concerns the judgments of more and less «sophisticated», more and less ideological, more and less independent voters. Special attention is given to the concept of «coalition belonging» that applies the classic notion of *partisanship* to the new main cleavage in Italian electoral politics: *Ulivo* (centre-left coalition) versus *Casa delle libertà* (centre-right coalition). The diachronic analysis, on the other hand, monitors the evolution of voters' attitudes towards the candidates and identifies four main effects of the electoral campaign: a strong «polarisation» effect, inducing voters to realign along ideological (centre-left vs. centre-right) lines; an «involvement gap» effect, in which more sophisticated voters are more strongly «aligned» with their respective coalitions; a «vedette» effect, in which the two candidates receiving the highest amounts of media exposure gradually increase their degree of popularity; and – with an apparent paradox – a «disenchantment» effect, related to a significant deterioration in the perception of the candidates' moral and political qualities.

## The 2001 Elections and the Dramatising Mobilisation

by Renato Mannheimer

This article analyzes the «dramatizing mobilization» of the electorate which took place in the Italian general elections of 2001. The author suggests that the electoral campaign has been focused mainly on the choice «for» or «against» Berlusconi and this may have somehow simplified the voting decision. It could also have stimulated the electoral participation since turnout has been greater than expected. In the center-left, the «dramatizing mobilization» seems to have mainly favoured the new aggregation called «Margherita». In the center-right, the same phenomenon goes a long way towards explaining why the «Casa delle Libertà» coalition has received a number of votes in the «plurality» vote significantly lower than the sum of the votes obtained by its individual parties in the «proportional» vote. Finally, the analysis suggests that the «dramatising mobilisation» brought a positive effect for the center-left coalition, stimulating mostly the vote «against» Berlusconi.

## The Italian party system between bipolarism and deconstruction

by Adriano Pappalardo

The article provides a systematic assessment of the Italian transition through the results of its three national elections. The analysis ranges from 1994 to 2001 and covers a wide variety of topics. In particular, the residual polarization assumed by the previous literature is found theoretically flawed and empirically disproved. The more recent center-periphery cleavage has evaporated with the demise of the Northern League. The electorate, especially the centrist one, results strongly mobile both on national and cross-national records. Far from being «winning», the political extremes are found stable or losing; parties of the center, in turn, are declining at a faster pace than in comparable democracies, and their numbers are by 2001 among the smallest, whereas they were the strongest ten years ago. As a consequence, the Italian case shows the whole set of the standard conditions for bipolar, centripetal competition, though two problems remain: fragmentation, which might be cured with the electoral reform, but is not the main, nor the most deviant feature, of the present system; and a deep deconstruction crisis, whose indicators distinguish more sharply the Italian parties from their European counterparts, and whose effects might be felt for long and significantly depress the systemic performance of the main political actors.