Italy

Political Instability? Real or Perceived?
Bruno Mascitelli, Swinburne University of Technology, Australia

Abstract: Italy experienced a political system during the post war period which many have defined as a "particracy" of a "polarised" kind. This produced a permanent one party government (run by the Christian Democracy) along with a one party opposition (the Italian Communist Party). There was no alternation in government which subsequently brought on other difficulties not to mention a "deficit in democracy". The system was defined by some as being "blocked". With the end of the Cold War in 1991 and the political crisis which followed soon after (in 1992-94), changes occurred to the Italian political process. Traditional parties that had dominated the political process ceased to exist or radically changed. New parties emerged including Forza Italia, the party of the current Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi. Corruption revelations uncovered a systemic wholesale level of political corruption cutting across most parties and factions. Changes occurred as a result of these new political developments. In part there were specific reforms to the political machinery such as electoral reform. In addition the political culture changed which began to see a bi-polar political alternation of centre left versus centre right. Did these changes produce a different, more stable Italy? Were these changes of a kind which produced a new political system, a new republic? Have the fundamental weakness of the Italian political system been overcome?

Keywords: Italy, Italian Politics, Italian Party System, Italian Crisis and Instability

Introduction

ONLY THREE YEARS after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Western Europe experienced its own watershed in the spring of 1992. It was a year of political change and crisis throughout many of the Western European nations. According to Alongi and Tersman (1992), the response of the electorate was an angry one and occurred without much warning. The events were unleashed:

’in what amounted to a political earthquake, electorates in the major European countries – France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom – returned votes of no confidence in their leaders…’ (Alongi & Tersman 1992, p. 1).

What was this ‘political earthquake’ exactly? The Conservatives in Britain under John Major suffered humiliation at the ballot box and almost lost their majority. In France and Germany the leaderships suffered a major backlash from the voters. Across all electorates there were extreme responses with significant right wing growth registered not only through the polls but also on the streets. Alongi and Tersman (1992, p.1) indicated two key developments that played a role in this political turmoil. They state:

‘What happened in Western Europe… can best be understood as a result of domestic politics, as well as two major developments on the European continent: the drive towards political, economic, and monetary integration in the West and the disintegration of the post-World War II political and economic system in the East’ (Alongi & Tersman 1992, p. 1).

What had been observed as an ‘earthquake’ in Western Europe, was of even greater magnitude in Italy. ‘It went much further. There was a break up of the entire party system’ (Bufacchi & Burgess 2001, p. 245).

The Watershed Elections of 1992

Evidence that Italy was traversing an ‘earthquake election’ was reflected in the voting patterns of the electorate in the early 1990s. According to Bufacchi and Burgess, ‘The general election of April 1992 was a turning point in Italy’s transition from the First to the Second Republic’ (2001, p. 15). Between the elections of April 1992 and the middle of 1994, the two main government parties, the Christian Democracy (DC) and Socialist Party (PSI), had vanished (Anderson 2002). What initially started as a slow slide in the elections of 1992 saw the DC fall below a thirty percent electoral share and then totally disappear in the elections of 1994. Its junior partner, the PSI, saw its lowest vote since the end of the Second World War, as shown in Table 1.
Table 1: Election Results of the Major Political Parties 1987-1994 (in Percentage)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democrazia Cristiana (DC) Christian Democracy</td>
<td>32.9</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partito Socialista Italiano (PSI) Italian Socialist Party</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratici di Sinistra (DS ex PCI) Left Democrats</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alleanza Nazionale (AN) National Alliance</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forza Italia (FI)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lega Nord (LN) Northern League</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partito Repubblicano (PRI) Republican Party</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partito Sociale Democratico Italiano (PSDI) Italian Social Democratic Party</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Never had the political spectrum in post-war Italy looked so changed and yet so difficult to predict. However, the Italian electorate response was not simply one of punishment of the traditional political parties of the post-war period. There was also support for new and different political expressions. The neo-fascist Italian Social Movement (MSI) grew from 5.4 percent of the national vote in 1992 to 13.5 percent in 1994, the same year it changed its name to National Alliance. One of the most significant parties to emerge and grow during this political crisis was the Lega Nord (LN) under the leadership of Umberto Bossi. The Lega Nord garnered votes away from the DC especially in the traditional Catholic heartland of the northeast and the northwest and in these areas established itself as the second largest party behind the DC (Furlong 1994, p. 254). Though they existed as far back as 1984, the Lega Nord had remained a fringe element, at first thought to be simply a folkloristic movement exclusively limited to pockets in the north until the elections of 1992 (Gold 2003).

A later and more important development was the emergence of Silvio Berlusconi’s new party, Forza Italia (Anderson 2002). It was created only a few months before the 1994 elections in which it stood in, and received a strong twenty-one percent of the national vote. To the surprise of some political scientists, it recorded the highest number of votes of any party in the 1992 election and in some respects filled the vacuum left by the Christian Democracy (Bufacchi & Burgess 2001). The ‘victory’ of Forza Italia produced a renewed polarisation between left and right (Gilbert 1995), and renewed anti-communist rhetoric (McCarthy 1997). Furthermore, those who were expecting the ‘partitocracy’ to receive a mortal blow were to be disillusioned.

The crisis that ensued from early 1992 produced political turmoil of far greater depth and duration than in any other nation (Amato 2004). The political crisis in Italy was initially expressed in electoral terms. Although it was sparked by revelations of deep systemic corruption (Rhodes 2004; Pujas & Rhodes 2002), the political crisis subsequently brought down the party political system (Della Porta & Vannucci 1999). The Milan magistrates investigated and pursued the systemic corruption that had become commonplace throughout the workings of the Italian economy both in the public and private sphere. Almost alongside these developments, the Mafia was engaged in a war against the Italian State. The economy faced unprecedented government deficits and Italy’s public debt was unsustainable, being one of the highest of the advanced industrial world. There was a strenuous effort by the Italian political elite to become what Anderson (2002) called a ‘normal country’ (un paese normale), ‘The call for Italy to resemble others who are superior to it’ (Anderson 2002). Nevertheless, this would be interrupted by the years 1992-94 which became ‘amongst the most dramatic in the history of the Italian republic (Ginsborg 1996, p. 19).

The Mother of all Crisis: Tangentopoli

As McCarthy has pointed out that the political crisis (Tangentopoli) was the catalyst for change of the Italian political structure, the rules and the political culture (McCarthy 1997). The political crisis of 1992-94 created a ‘regime crisis’ (McCarthy 1997, p. 4). The crisis of 1992-94 sought to make Italy, ‘un paese normale’, a normal country, no longer divided by ideology and open to competition from all parties to engage in government (Guarnieri 2004). The elections in 1992 signified a change in the status quo of the ‘blocked’ or ‘frozen’ political system in which there was a permanent party of government and a permanent party of opposition. As a result of this crisis, the parties were partially removed from the centrality of the political process, opening the party
system to competition and thereby challenging the previous system (Bufacchi & Burgess 2001).

The crisis began on 17 February 1992 when a middle-ranking Socialist Party functionary, Mario Chiesa, was arrested on charges of receiving a SUS 3,500 (7 million lira) bribe in his capacity as the administrator of an old aged people’s home in Milan, *Pio Albergo Trivulzio* (Bufacchi & Burgess 2001). This seemingly insignificant event barely captured the attention of the media and on the day it occurred only received a three-line description from Italy’s press agency, ANSA (Barbacetto 2002, p.11). It took a number of weeks before the investigation slowly unfolded to become the infamous *Tangentopoli* (Clean Hands investigation) and expose the systemic corruption (Pujas & Rhodes 2002).

When accusations of corruption and Mafia association alleged against Bettino Craxi and Giulio Andreotti respectively, the ‘system’ seemed to becoming undone. A year later the whole political elite that had governed Italy since the late 1940s was either discredited or driven away from politics. Their parties had essentially disappeared or fragmented. To an interested observer the corruption revelations produced a fascination but at the same time an uneasy sense that all was not as it seemed. At a personal level, one imagined that all of these events and coincidences had to have some connection and association. This excitement and sense of the impossible happening was best expressed by a comment made at the time by Vittorio Foa, the grand veteran of the Italian left. He stated:

> ‘For more than forty years there has been the unwritten law in Italy that corrupt politicians did not go to jail, Mafiosi did not talk and you could not have a government without Giulio Andreotti... Now we have a government without Andreotti, corrupt politicians are going to jail and Mafiosi are talking’ (Stille 1996, p. 9).

Lowi (in the Calise roundtable discussion 1994) makes an interesting distinction and relationship in this crisis between the corruption revelations and the political systemic failures, which were also emerging. He correctly points out that corruption is nothing new to Italy and why it emerged in the early 1990s and not earlier must be questioned. Could it be that the events are being used as a political tool to manipulate outcomes (Lowi 1994)? He elaborated his point:

> ‘I do not believe Italy suddenly became more corrupt than before. ... If I assume for the moment that Italy was not intrinsically more corrupt in 1993 than it was in 1990, why so much scandal when it is simply the exposure of corruption? Is the scandal simply being used as a political device in a country that has become so individualised with the collapse of the party system? Is it that suddenly people are using scandal as an alternative to election?’ (Lowi, 1994).

The crisis and instability created with the 1992-94 period was the most recent political crisis but certainly not the first. Moreover the conditions creating the crisis were set long before in the immediate aftermath of the end of the Second World War and with the onset of the Cold War in 1947. We now need to examine this period to understand the exact nature of the so-called political instability and what the political ingredients of the political process were.

**The Cold War in Italy**

There is an abundance of literature on the origins and the activities of the Cold War from 1945 until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Some Italian scholars date the origins of the impact of the Cold War on Italy back to the closing stages of the Second World War (Del Pero 2001; De Michelis 2003). Mason observes that Churchill’s famous ‘Iron Curtain’ speech in 1946 discussed for the first time the role of Communism in the form of ‘domestic subversion’ (Mason 2000). Churchill clearly had in mind the ideological civil war in Greece occurring at that very moment (Mason 2000). PCI leaders like Palmiro Togliatti noticed these comments and did not hide their fear that a Greek scenario [i.e. civil war] was more than possible in Italy, and therefore one to be avoided (Spriano 1977).

Many observers uphold the plausible view that Italy’s geographical position and its social-class divisions at the end of the Second World War made it politically fragile (Castronovo 1997; Ginsborg 1990; Pasquino 2004; Richards 1994; Santarelli 1997; Tranfaglia 2004). As another scholar observed, ‘Italy was the frontier country where the Cold War was most bitterly fought, because the Italian Communist Party was the strongest Communist Party in the world outside the Soviet empire’ (Sidoti 1993, p.105). Anna Bull (1997) has argued that Italy was not only uniquely affected by the Cold War but its internal repercussions were more severe. The anti-Communism that ensued from the Cold War in Italy was stronger than elsewhere because the Communist support was also stronger. Reiterating the point, Duggan observed that:

> ‘the end of the Soviet Union ironically removed a key stabilising element in the Italian political system. Fear of the PCI coming to power had been one important reason why the Christian Democrats vote had held up so well since the Second World War; with the bogey of Commun-
After the defeat of the Germans in 1945, there were fears that the PCI would lead the Italian proletariat to overthrow a weak and divided capitalist Italy. The reality was quite the opposite. It was never the intention of the PCI to overthrow the Italian State, certainly not at that moment (Mack Smith 1997). Literature on the question indicates that the PCI had no intention of threatening the emerging new democracy and the PCI’s new political line elaborated through the ‘Svolta di Salerno’ (‘Turn of Salerno’) a position which accepted not only the new leadership of Badoglio but also that a workers’ revolution was not practicable at this point in time (Cangini 1994). Not surprisingly, the parties that formed the resistance against Fascism in Italy in 1943-45 would share power in the Italian governments between 1945 and 1947 including the Communists (Hearder 2001).

By early 1947, the immediate repercussions of the Cold War began to impact Italy directly. De Gasperi, made clear Italy’s need for economic aid during his visit to Washington (Lepre 2004). In the US, there was substantial sympathy with Italy’s economic needs and a favourable response to loans and aid programs on the proviso that the aid was tied to ‘stability and consolidation of the Italian democratic regime’, an indirect suggestion to drop the Communists and Socialists from the government (Mammarella 1966, p. 141). Eventually, De Gasperi yielded to pressure from the Americans and the Vatican and acting against advice from some Christian Democrat circles expelled the Communists from his coalition in 1947 (Mack Smith 1997; Nichols 1973). Though there is much debate about this, it was, nonetheless, within this context of USA-USSR tensions that the definitive break-up of the government collaboration between DC and the PCI in Italy evolved. In the final analysis, ‘the solution to the political crisis of May 1947 was a victory dearly paid for’ (Mammarella 1966, p. 149) as it paved the way for the ‘blocked political system’ that would dominate and deform the post-war political process and create the apparent instability that is theme of this paper. After the exclusion of the left-wing parties from government, elections were called for April 1948, producing a divisive ideological standoff between the left and the DC (Ginsborg 1990). To the relief of the anti-Communist forces, the 1948 elections produced a DC majority and a significant defeat for the left. This defeat would seal the fate of the Communist Party and relegate it to the political opposition for the next four decades.


At the time of the Italian political crisis, many raised concerns about corruption. In a review of Matt Frei’s book Italy: The Unfinished Revolution, the anonymous reviewer (called Harry) made the assertion that:

‘I had assumed that the reason the partitocrazia fell apart in 1992 was due in most part to the end of the Cold War. No longer needed as a bulwark against the PCI, the DC and its allies found their misdeeds vulnerable to the kind of investigation, which would have been impossible to carry out before 1989’ (Harry, 2002).

Bufacchi and Burgess (2001) go one step further and add that the old system collapsed in 1992 because businessmen saw no reason to pay off anti-Communist politicians once the Communist threat had been removed. The Cold War was not simply a question of foreign policy. It meant anti-Communism across all areas of life. It would affect internal affairs, industry policy, cultural issues, foreign policy, labour policy and the like. It touched all aspects of government administration and beyond.

The literature on the direct roles of both the United States and the Soviet Union in Italian political affairs is vast. The role of the US in ‘influencing’ Italy during the Cold War is significant and is now supported by publicly available documentation. US authorities have prided themselves on announcing that the first CIA covert operation involved financing the anti-Communist parties in Italy to defeat the Communists in the elections of 1948 (Lepre 2004; Trangaglia 2004). Ginsborg has also documented the vast levels of US interference in Italian political affairs especially during the elections of 1948 (1990).

According to both Ginsborg (1990) and McCarthy there is ample evidence of US involvement in Italian affairs during the 1950s with the ‘Stay Behind’ anti-Communist response force, code named Gladio and in the more ‘sinister period’ of the ‘Strategy of Tension’, the late 1960s and 1970s (McCarthy 1997). This US attention remained throughout the 1970’s and especially during the period of ‘historic compromise’ and ‘national solidarity’. The US expressed concern that the prospect of the PCI in the government was not acceptable to them. Former US Ambassador Gardner offers a very recent rich account of US involvement in Italian affairs to Italy during the 1970s and 80s. This is an important testimony if only to attempt to limit speculation of the nature of US involvement in Italian affairs in that period (Gardner 2004). By the time of the Italian crisis in 1992, Clinton was in the White House and relations had changed significantly between the USA and Italy.
There was no Cold War and the ‘Italian question’ had essentially disappeared from the US radar screen.

The relationship between the PCI and the Soviet Union after the Second World War was, until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, kept under a shroud of secrecy. This fuelled much speculation about Soviet involvement in Italian politics, which was essentially focused around its support for the PCI. Material support by the USSR to the PCI in Italy until recently was substantially unknown and therefore poorly documented. The recent documentation of the so-called Mitrokhin files has uncovered credible though not surprising evidence on the monetary support, which the USSR provided to Italian agents and politicians (Andrew & Mitrokhin 2001).

The Italian Party Political System

Political instability in Italy since the end of the Second World War had the dual effect of creating either concern or in dismissing Italy as a country locked in its political troubles and contradictions (Linz 1974; Tarrow 1977). Just before the 1992 political crisis, noted Italian political observer La Palombara, remarked that:

‘In the republic’s relatively short life there have already been forty-five national governments, or more than one per year. Any day of the week, it is a safe bet that one of the major regional or municipal governments will find itself in a state of apparent disintegration’ (La Palombara, 1987, pg 5).

The political instability of post-war Italy was the product of a political party system which remained narrowly based around the pro-Catholic DC government pressed by a political system that made collaboration with the (communist and socialist) opposition difficult if not impossible. First and foremost anti-communism was the necessary object as everything depended on this form of stability and guarantee to the western allies. Italian political reality created a certain adaptation and cynicism to political crisis. In the many circumstances of political crisis and government reshuffling, the reasons for these were sometimes obscure, factional and changing political circumstances. Rarely was this instability the result of a difference with the political program or policy.

The anomalous quality of the Italian post-war political system as compared to other European democracies has been acknowledged many scholars (M. Bull 2004; Ginsborg 1990; Parker 1996; Tarrow 1977). Pridham asserted that defining the Italian party system was difficult, as, it did not have a category of its own (Pridham 1981). Even Sartori, one of the more important social scientists to study the Italian political process and provide a model to understand Italy’s political system, felt obliged to preface his model by stating it seemed ‘a Byzantine and undecipherable party system whose end product is over complication and confusion’ (Sartori, 1966, p. 151-2). Yet, as distinguished scholar Sidney Tarrow later pointed out, despite all of the so-called confusion ‘…most models of the Italian party system would not have predicted its survival over the last thirty years’ (Tarrow 1977, p. 193).

Martin Bull (2004), borrowing partially from previous political scientists such as Sartori (1976) and mirroring Pasquino’s recent study on political science in Italy (2004), provides an excellent overview of the essential ingredients of Italy’s post-war political system. He itemises them in five categories. First, he noted the presence of strong anti-system parties at both ends of the political spectrum and their exclusion from government [eg. the former MSI and the former PCI]. Anti-system, as defined by Sartori, was those parties that have as their ideology the overthrow of the system they are part of (Sartori 1976). The second aspect he noticed was the resulting permanence in office of a single party (Christian Democracy) for over fifty years and therefore a lack of alternation of government. Though the coalitions collapsed and changed, between 1945 and 1993, the DC was in every government from 1945.

The third observation was that there was a feeling of alienation of the citizen from the State because of a legitimacy deficit of the political institutions. The fourth observation was of the dominant role of the parties in civil society and culture with the polity divided into two competing sub cultures, Communist and Catholic, which Galli and Prandi speak about in detail in their extensive study on the political sub cultures in Italy (Galli & Prandi 1970). The fifth and final observation was the development of a spoils system in which State positions could be used to buy votes (a form of clientelism) and which provided a springboard for higher forms of corruption.

Party Rule and the Blocked Political System

The ‘blocked political system’, a term used by many scholars (Ginsborg 1996; La Palombara 1994; Lupo 2004; Pasquino 2004) was the real political cornerstone of the crisis of 1992-94. This unique political system, in force since 1948, was neither parliamentary nor presidential but based on the power and will of the political parties, the partitocracy. La Palombara defined the birth of the Italian political system after World War Two as, ‘…a system born zoppicante (limping) and it remained that way until the Berlin Wall fell…’ (La Palombara 1994, p. 462). Bufacchi and Burgess referred to Italy’s political
system after the war with the more familiar connotation of ‘democratic deficit’ (2001, p. xviii), in recognition of the lack of democratic representation for the Italian citizen. What occurred due to the Cold War was that the Communist Party was effectively excluded as a legitimate alternative party for government. The real theoretical models (as listed in table 1.2) have been focused around the distinctions offered by numerous political scientists over the decades. They include Giovanni Sartori (polarised pluralism), Giorgio Galli (imperfect bi-party system) and the Paolo Farneti (centripetal pluralism). Pasquino acknowledges that ‘the best analysis of the Italian party system from 1947 until 1992 was provided by Giovanni Sartori in several writings 1966, 1976, 1982’ (Pasquino 2004, p. 3).

### Table 2: Theoretical Models of the Italian Party System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Name of model</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>Giovanni Sartori</td>
<td>Polarised pluralism</td>
<td>Anti system Ideological extremes creating polarised pluralism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>Giorgio Galli</td>
<td>Imperfect Bi-party system</td>
<td>Introduction of political subcultures as factors affecting political process and participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Paolo Farneti</td>
<td>Centripetal pluralism</td>
<td>Indicated tendencies bringing the political opposites together not creating extremist anti-system parties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990/2004</td>
<td>G. Pasquino</td>
<td>Largely imperfect proportional democracy</td>
<td>No full-blown analysis of the Italian party system has been completed or even attempted.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted by the author, 2004

Sartori argues that polarised pluralism is one characterised by the existence of many parties located along an ideological arc [Italian reference to this is called ‘arco costituzionale’], which stretches from extreme right to extreme left (Sartori 1966). He explained that there were essentially three points of polarisation along the political spectrum: (i) a centre around the DC, (ii) a rightwing around the MSI and (iii) a leftwing area focused around the PCI. Sartori stated that only the centre area was a pro-system grouping (capable of governing) while the two ideological opposites were anti-system i.e., for its overthrow thus producing a ‘polarised pluralism’. The result from this model was ‘...a static party system incapable of incremental change since the Communist or reactionary opposition, should either come to power, would destroy the system along with its opponents (Sartori 1966, p. 147). But Sartori’s model raised important issues about political process and governability. It highlighted that Italy’s system had two ideological poles of competition and not one (right and left). As both Pridham and Tarrow rightly point out, Sartori opens himself to criticism when his model puts the MSI and the PCI as ‘extreme anti-system parties’ (Pridham 1981; Tarrow 1977).

In contrast to Sartori’s view, Galli introduced a counter posed political model, which addressed the competing ideological standoff. This theory was known as the ‘imperfect two-party system’, where two parties dominate the system and where one party is permanently excluded from the power process due to ideological polarisation (Sitter 2000). Despite everything, Galli also realised that ‘this system works poorly, but it works (Galli & Prandi 1970, p. 300). Galli and Prandi explained this theory very cogently in the following writings:

‘The Italian political system has thus been operating to a considerable extent as a sort of de facto bipartisan system. All other parties have had a political impact only to the extent that they have acted as junior partners to either the Christian Democratic Party or the Communist Party’ (Galli & Prandi, 1970, p. 299).

Galli explains more precisely the ‘imperfect’ nature of this system:

‘one of the two leading parties is permanently in the government, the other permanently in the opposition. The Communist Party cannot form an alternative government, because of the limited size of its support and because of its ideological commitments and international ties’ (Galli & Prandi 1970, p. 300).

Norberto Bobbio in his introduction to Farneti’s Il sistema dei partiti in Italia (1980, it never appeared in English) presented Farneti’s interesting critique of the Italian political system and how it neither sat with Sartori or Galli’s models. In addition, they stressed the importance of the different political systems and how they were products of the political events of the different decades since 1945. Fundamentally the core of Farneti’s position was a central-
ised pluralism, a thesis that went in the opposite direction of Sartori (1980, p. 13). Farneti argued that the PCI’s involvement and compromise with the DC (especially during the 1970s) indicated tendencies bringing these political opposites together not creating extremist anti-system parties. This was also evidenced by the efforts by DC leader Aldo Moro who worked at finding ways in which the PCI could be integrated into the government process (with the historic compromise and government of national unity). There was considerable support for more involvement of the PCI in the political process in that period of the early and middle 1970s (Bobbio 1980, p. 14).

Even though Pasquino proposed his own adapted version of the party system model, which ran Italy from 1948 until 1993. He said the Italian political process from 1945 until 1992 was ‘a largely imperfect proportional democracy based on excessive power held by parties has been replaced by a still largely imperfect plurality democracy based on heterogeneous coalitions and plebiscitarian threats’. (Pasquino 2000, p. 93).

**Table 3: Votes Received in Elections by the Parties of the so-called ‘Arco costituzionale’ Sartori’s Version of ‘Pro-System Parties’ in the Chamber of Deputies, 1946 – 1992**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>RC</th>
<th>PCI</th>
<th>PSI</th>
<th>PSDI</th>
<th>DC</th>
<th>PLI</th>
<th>PRI</th>
<th>PSIUP</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>35.2</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>86.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>PCI/PSI=31.0</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>48.5</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>92.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>40.1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>84.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>42.3</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>88.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>91.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>PSI/PSDI=14.5</td>
<td>39.1</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>92.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>38.7</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>89.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>38.7</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>90.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>87.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>32.9</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>86.3</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>34.3</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>83.9</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key: PCI Italian Communist Party; PSI Italian Socialist Party; PSDI Italian Social Democratic Party; DC Christian Democracy; PLI Italian Liberal Party; PRI Italian Republican Party; PSIUP Socialist Party for Proletarian Unity; RC Communist Refoundation

We have defined the *partitocracy* as ‘rule by parties’, argued by many scholars as deforming and harmful to Italian post-war democracy (Calise 1994; Bufacchi & Burgess 2001; Guarnieri 2004). Their argument is that the penetration of political parties into the political process has deformed Italian democracy and has thereby produced a *partitocracy*, resulting in the weakness of civic sense and the decline in respect for numerous State institutions. On the other hand, other scholars have pointed out that it should not be forgotten that the ‘democracy of the parties’, the so-called *partitocracy*, sought to establish democracy in the very difficult period of the immediate post-war period and succeeded (La Palombara 1994; Nevola 2003). There is clearly merit in this objection although the argument seems to contain more of the self-justification that there is always something positive in a negative. Calise (1994) when describing the Italian political system between 1948 and 1992 defined it as being neither presidential nor parliamentary regime. ‘Italy is a partitocracy, a term that might appear self-evident… a kind of party government albeit with more negative connotations… ‘ (1994, p. 442).

**Conclusion**

Italy has been subjected to numerous political crises in its short but eventful post war history. Much of the permanent state of crisis was due to the ‘blocked political system’, which deformed the political process, creating a permanent party of government and a permanent party in opposition. Not only were the political parties to dominate the political process and machinery, thereby creating a *partitocracy*, but also only ‘pro-system’ parties, in this case, primarily the Christian Democracy, would hold the reins of government in Italy once the Cold War became the new global strategy. The strength of the Italian Communist Party produced concern and fear within and
without Italy for those who believed in pro-western, pro-market liberalism. The way the political system evolved in the post-war period was through blocking the political involvement of the Communists in the government process, which necessarily produced deformities in the political system, deformities which were partially rectified with the end of the Cold War and the events of 1992-94.

Superficially the end of the Cold War and the Italian political crisis of 1992-94 that ensued was set to change many aspects of the Italian political process. It became the catalyst for change of the Italian political structure, the rules and the political culture. This crisis worked to remove the parties from the centrality of the political process and allow new expressions of political forces. Moreover the changes indicated that political stability and longevity would return. In many respects the elections in 1992 signified this change. It heralded the moment in which there would be two alternating political expressions.

It had the possibility of making Italy ‘un paese normal e’, a normal country, no longer divided by ideology and constrained by a lack of party competition.

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About the Author

Dr Bruno Mascitelli

Mascitelli has been a lecturer at Swinburne University of Technology in Melbourne Australia since 2000. He previously worked and lived in Milan, Italy for over 17 years for the Australian government. Living in Italy for
that time period is where his interest in Italian political issues emerged. He is currently completing a Ph. D. in "A re-evaluation of the causes of the Italian political crisis of 1992-94", enrolled in the Politics Department at Melbourne University where completion is expected in 2005.