

# Reconfiguration of the Italian Party System, 2013–2018: A Two-Stage Political Earthquake?<sup>1</sup>

Lorenzo Cicchi & Enrico Calossi

## Introduction

The Italian election of 2018 has been described by many as a ‘political earthquake’ with effects so destructive they have been felt abroad, especially in Brussels. When elections provide outcomes that are particularly shocking, political commentators and academics often deploy the term ‘electoral earthquake’ to capture the nature of the impact. Indeed, observers used this evocative metaphor in Italy after the 2013 election (Chiaramonte and De Sio 2014). What we need, then, is an apt but novel descriptor for the events of 2018. In fact, the last two elections really ought to be considered part of the same seismic shock, the effects of which have been felt in in different arenas at various points in time.

The party system can be divided into three distinct arenas: the electoral arena, the parliamentary arena and the government arena. The Italian party system had not yet settled from the 2013 shock (when the change was perceived primarily in the electoral and parliamentary arenas) by the time of the 2018 election, when a further disruptive tremor was felt (the aftershock affecting also the governmental arena). Thus, if the 2013 election was the first stage in this long seismic process (the ‘earthquake’), the 2018 election was its second stage—a brutal ‘aftershock’ that laid complete waste to whatever had been left standing after the first.

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This chapter seeks to measure the changes wrought in the three arenas over these two seismic elections. From our perspective, this change must be viewed in a long-term perspective. Thus, we analyse the entire history of elections during the Republican era in Italy, i.e. the period 1948–2018. We devote significant attention to events in the so-called ‘Second Republic’—the institutional and political equilibrium seen in Italy after the 1994 election. Our analysis reflects a series of indicators for each of the arenas, relying on the theoretical speculations of Bardi and Mair (2008), who were the first to suppose that the complex concept of the party system might be disaggregated analytically into these three functional arenas of competition between political parties.

The chapter is structured as follows. The next part provides a description of the background and the results of the 2018 ‘aftershock’ election. We then present a review of the literature, covering the key works on the historical evolution of the Italian party system, from the period of so-called imperfect bipartitism (Galli 1967) to the emergence of polarized pluralism (Sartori 1976), and the more recent categorizations of the system’s evolution toward fragmented bipolarism (D’Alimonte 2005) and then transition—most recently—to contemporary tripolarism (Chiramonte and Emanuele 2018). The next section is empirical and analyses in detail the evolution of the three functional arenas over the entire 1948–2018 period. Here, we present first the descriptive statistics for each arena separately, and then comparatively, focusing especially on the key differences between the two ‘seismic’ junctures—that of 1994 and the one between 2013–2018. The final section draws the findings of the analysis together and offers some tentative conclusions about the possible future evolution of the Italian party system.

## **Background: Italy’s 2018 general election**

In December 2017 the President of the Republic, Sergio Mattarella, issued a decree to dissolve the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate of the Republic. New elections were then scheduled for 4 March 2018, to be conducted under a new electoral law. This came after a tumultuous 2013–2018 parliamentary term, in which the electoral system was subject to a series of incoherent reform attempts. The existing system—known generally as the Porcellum—was essentially proportional, but gave a significant seat bonus to the winning coalition or party. Some of the proposed changes to it were purely political, like the approval of the Italicum,

which was not so different from the Porcellum but was thought to work only for the Chamber of Deputies (a constitutional amendment in 2016 proposed to make the Senate non-elective). Others came after judicial interventions, for example the verdict handed down by the Constitutional Court in 2014 which mandated a weaker version of the Porcellum (without any seat bonus for the winners). After the 2016 constitutional reform attempt failed—having been rejected by voters at the December 2016 referendum—two different and contradictory electoral systems for the two chambers were in effect. Therefore, on 26 October 2017, a new electoral law—seeking to harmonize the electoral formulas of the Chamber and the Senate—was approved (Pedrazzani and Pinto 2018). The so-called Rosatellum provides that 37% of seats (232 in the Chamber and 116 in the Senate) are assigned by first-past-the-post and 61% (386 in the Chamber and 193 in the Senate) through a proportional formula with a threshold of 3% of valid votes cast on a national basis. The remaining 2% were reserved for the ‘Italians abroad’ constituencies. However the new electoral law, as had the Mattarellum and the Porcellum systems preceding it, incentivized parties to form pre-electoral alliances and coalitions (Chiaromonte and D’Alimonte 2018). In the event, prior to the 2018 elections only two were formed: one centre–left and the other centre–right. Next to the incumbent centre–left coalition (led by the Partito Democratico / PD in alliance with smaller partners), both the centre–right coalition (Forza Italia / FI, Lega—Salvini Premier, Fratelli d’Italia / FdI and Noi con l’Italia / NcI) and the stand-alone Movimento Cinque Stelle (M5S) had the highest chance of winning the election. In addition to these major competitors, other minor parties participated in the elections: Liberi e Uguali (LeU) and Potere al Popolo (PaP) on the left. The Casa Pound Italia (CPI) and Italia agli Italiani (IaI) on the right side also warrant mentioning (Valbruzzi and Vignati 2018).

In the event, the M5S—as a single list—won the most votes. Nevertheless, as a sum the centre–right parties obtained a greater vote share, winning a plurality of seats in the two chambers. Matteo Salvini’s Lega Nord emerged as the core of this centre–right bloc, surpassing the previously dominant Forza Italia. The centre–left alliance, led by former the prime minister Matteo Renzi, came third. No coalition having obtained a clear majority, Italy entered a political impasse, which took three long months to resolve, when the M5S and the Lega Nord finally reached an agreement to form a governing coalition, with their respective leaders as deputy prime ministers. The parties agreed to nominate Giuseppe Conte,

a M5S-linked law professor and non-parliamentarian, as prime minister (Valbruzzi 2018).

The enormous growth of Lega, whose vote share in 2018 was four times that obtained in 2013 (Orsina 2018), and the confirmation of the primacy of M5S amongst the Italian parties gave the impression of epochal change.<sup>2</sup> This set the stage for the winners—like the M5S leader Luigi Di Maio—to wax lyrical about the birth of a new, ‘Third Republic’. This cathartic climate was also exemplified by the informal name given to the new governing coalition—the ‘government of change’—chosen by the two partners to define their alliance (or ‘contract’, as they put it).

Despite these colourful developments, from the general point of view of the format and mechanics, the party system resulting from the 2018 election presents a continuity with that after the 2013 election. In fact, although some scholars, after the 2013 elections, had used the expression ‘three and a half pole’ party system (Cotta and Verzichelli 2016), because of the presence of the so-called ‘third pole’, the coalition under the leadership of the incumbent prime minister Mario Monti (Pasquino 2013), in 2018 the system kept its tripolar configuration as it had been substantially in 2013. This proves that the 2013 result was not a provisional deviation from the bipolarism that had characterized the ‘Second Republic’ up to that time. Five years later, Italy still has a tripolar party system.

However, some important transformations have occurred. For the first time in the history of the Italian Republic, the forces of the old ‘constitutional arch’ (largely comprised within the centre–left coalition) came in third. This meant they were well behind the centre–right coalition—but also the M5S group. In addition, the parties that only had dominated the parliament just five years before—the PD and the Popolo della Libertà, with 758 seats out 945—took just 34% of the seats in 2018.

The exceptionality of the 2018 election is largely due to the great success of the non-mainstream parties, which, for at least three reasons proved unique in Western Europe. First, parties that burst onto the scene and make a splash in their electoral debut typically cannot repeat this performance the second time around. However, the M5S, which had done well at its electoral debut in 2013 (25.6%), improved on this perfor-

2 Already in 2013, the M5s achieved the highest vote share of any single party in the Chamber of Deputies, if the ‘Italians abroad’ constituencies are excluded. However, at the time, the PD gained more seats, as it was part of the coalition that obtained more votes.

mance on the second try in 2018 (reaching 32.7%). Second, the Lega—reconstituted as a radical right party by Salvini (Passarelli and Tuorto 2018)—relinquished its original local and regional autonomism and therefore abandoned its previous name of Lega Nord per l'Indipendenza della Padania ('Northern League for the Independence of Padania'). This saw it expand its electoral base to the entire Peninsula and led to the quadrupling of its vote share. Third, the electoral strategy of conquering centrist voters by positively insisting on Europe and civil rights failed. This was the misfortune of the PD under Renzi, who had adopted that centrist strategy upon becoming leader in 2014. The result was the worst result ever for the left in Republican history (De Sio 2018).

Alongside these preliminary observations, the next section offers an original analytical framework for analysing in detail the electoral results and to include them in the historical tendencies that have characterized the evolution of the Italian party system.

## Changes in three arenas of the Italian party system

The nature of the interactions between political parties is important to classify the different types of party systems (Sartori 1976). Simply, when there are not interactions between parties, we cannot speak of 'systems of parties' but only of 'sets of parties', which are 'mere sums of their parts' (Mair 2006). This assumption is agreed within the literature and represents the starting point of the scholars who work on the classification of the different kinds of system. This research focus prevented the literature from concentrating on other aspects of the party systems for quite a long time, above all the constituent elements of a party system. Already in 1979, Mogens Pedersen (1979, p. 1) stressed that the nature of interactions between different 'levels' of a party system are a crucial consideration:

A concise mapping of party system change would have to cover the levels of parliament and government, the level of the party as an organization, and the level of the electorate. Party system change, then, can be defined as the total set of changes in patterns of interaction and competition at these three levels as well as between them.

Luciano Bardi and Peter Mair (2008) took this point further, by interpreting party systems as multifaceted phenomena. They identified the existence of three dimensions: vertical, horizontal and functional. In this

chapter, we concentrate on the functional aspect. Actually, according to the authors, within party systems there are at least three different competitive arenas: electoral, parliamentary and governmental. The fundamental element that distinguishes these three arenas is that parties follow different principles while operating in the three different environments because the incentives they receive are different. Within the electoral party systems (or, one might say, ‘the electoral face of a party system’) parties are shaped by a survival logic: they compete for each individual vote. Put simply, competition prevails, even if its strategy is strongly influenced by the electoral formula applied: centripetal for the plurality systems, centrifugal for the proportional ones.

In the ‘parliamentary party system’, the logic is different. Usually, after elections, no clear (and unique) winner emerges and parties try to form post-electoral alliances to test support for forming an executive. Therefore, cooperation is necessary, and the coalition formation logic prevails. In the governmental arena, cooperation is sometimes the rule. At other times—usually when there are coalition cabinets—competition tends to exist as member parties (typically the junior ones insistently provoke the others in the coalition to assert their importance. This methodical approach is very useful for interpreting the Italian case, in which the three arenas are shaped by different logics of competition. Before the 1990s, the fragmented nature of the Italian party system saw polarization prevail in the electoral arena. This was because parties took particularized or extreme positions to seek votes. In the parliamentary arena, in contrast, cooperation prevailed. In distinct contrast, since the 1990s fragmentation has characterized more the parliamentary arena than the electoral one. Parties have been more competitive inside the parliament than during elections. Polarization has occurred even amongst parties in the same government. An example of this is the difficult relations amongst the ministers of the second Prodi government (2006–2008), when members of the same executive (the DS and Margherita ministers on one side and the left-wing ones on the other) adopted different positions and even publicly demonstrated in streets against the executive. Thanks to the analytical approach we adopt here, we can measure the extent to which change has happened in the three functional arenas of the Italian party system, with particular attention on the 2018 election. We chose two indicators—volatility and innovation—and we use two indexes to evaluate the most significant changes in the three arenas.

First, we employ the index of volatility. As defined by Pedersen, this index calculates the total amount of change experienced by all individual entities in a closed system. For each entity it calculates the net change of a particular characteristic between two periods of time, then takes the absolute value of this change (to prevent positives and negatives from cancelling out) and divides the result by the total amount of the characteristic in the system at the first and second time periods (Pedersen 1979). As explained by Casal Bértoa, Deegan-Krause and Haughton (2017, p. 143), this formula can be simplified as the sum of the absolute value of the vote change of all parties divided by two. However, alongside the classic index of ‘electoral volatility’<sup>3</sup>—which is thought to measure change in the electoral arena—we adapt this index also for the other two arenas. For the latter, rather than considering the change of votes, we examine change in the parties’ seat shares across two terms of the Chamber of Deputies (‘parliamentary volatility’) and the percentage change between one cabinet and the next in the number of ministers occupied by exponents from a given party (‘government volatility’).

The second index is designed to measure the relevance of new parties in the three arenas. Put simply, ‘electoral innovation’ is the sum of vote share attained by all the new parties. Similarly, the ‘parliamentary innovation’ is given by the total percentage of seats obtained by new parties in a given election.<sup>4</sup> ‘Governmental innovation’, in turn, corresponds to the percentage of ministers (the prime minister included) filled by new parties.

These three indexes force us to define what we consider to be a new party. The theme of ‘newness’ of party is widely debated in literature (Emanuele and Chiaramonte 2016). Harmel and Robertson (1985) maintain a very inclusive definition, treating any new list name as sufficient for defining the party as a truly new entity. Other, more restrictive, definitions for the labelling of parties as ‘new’ require the presence at least of a merger (Birch 2003; Powell and Tucker 2014; Bolleyer 2013) or a split amongst existing parties (Mainwaring, Gervasoni, and España-Najera 2016; Hug 2001; Tavits 2006; Zons 2015; Barnea and Rahat 2011). Again, others require other criteria being matched, as the existence of a ‘start-up organization’ (Bartolini and Mair 1990; Chiaramonte and Ema-

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3 For electoral volatility, our analysis is based solely on votes cast for the election for the Chamber of the Deputies.

4 We also calculate these two indicators considering only the Chamber of Deputies.

nuele 2017) or new personnel (Sikk 2005; Marinova 2015). In this work, we combine some of the existing approaches. First, similarly to Emanuele and Chiaramonte (2016), we define as new parties those that for the first time got more than 1 per cent of votes in an election. For example, Lega Nord had already run in the 1987 general election, but took fewer than 1% of the votes. Therefore, we label it as a new party only in 1992, when it reached 8%. Second, we do not label as new those parties that have simply adopted a new name while retaining the same politicians and platform. Third, in case of a merger, we do not consider these actors as new parties if they retained the old leaders, ideologies and structures.<sup>5</sup> Fourth, in case of splits, we only label the smallest offshoot(s) of the original party as a new one.<sup>6</sup>

## Measuring volatility and innovation in the three arenas

Our analysis starts from the electoral and parliamentary arenas. In fact, as Pedersen (1979, p. 2) has noted:

even if elections are far from always being decisive events, they are still the best available vantage point for a study of change, because change will either be a result of elections, or elections will register any change which may occur in the party system.

Table 4.1 shows the evolution of the Italian party system in terms of electoral and parliamentary volatility, both for parties and blocs (coalitions).

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5 Therefore, the Partito Democratico in 2007 and the Popolo della Libertà in 2008 are not considered new parties.

6 For this reason, in the case of the end of the Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI), we only consider Rifondazione Comunista (PRC) as a new party, as it was smaller than the Partito Democratico della Sinistra (PDS). The Partito Popolare Italiano (PPI) also stands out as notable, as one faction was allowed to retain the name and the other one was allowed to keep the logo. Therefore, neither the latter, institutionalized as the Cristiano Democratici Uniti (CDU) neither the former are labelled as new parties.



**Table 14.1. Party and bloc electoral and parliamentary volatility, 1948–2018**

<b>Electoral cycle (T1–T2)</b>	<b>Electoral volatility</b>	<b>Parliamentary volatility</b>		
	Party volatility at T2	Bloc volatility at T2	Party volatility at T2	Bloc volatility at T2
1948–1953	12.4%	n/a	14.0%	n/a
1953–1958	6.5%	n/a	6.6%	n/a
1958–1963	7.7%	n/a	8.0%	n/a
1963–1968	7.6%	n/a	6.8%	n/a
1968–1972	5.9%	n/a	6.8%	n/a
1972–1976	9.5%	n/a	8.9%	n/a
1976–1979	5.5%	n/a	6.0%	n/a
1979–1983	8.5%	n/a	8.4%	n/a
1983–1987	8.1%	n/a	7.4%	n/a
1987–1992	18.7%	n/a	18.5%	n/a
1992–1994	40.9%	n/a	46.0%	n/a
1994–1996	15.8%	22.6%	21.7%	26.4%
1996–2001	22.8%	7.7%	23.1%	11.4%
2001–2006	8.9%	5.4%	13.8%	14.4%
2006–2008	16.9%	13.2%	24.5%	16.2%
2008–2013	40.3%	32.5%	44.8%	35.2%
2013–2018	29.7%	19.9%	42.9%	42.9%

*Source: Authors' own elaboration*

The result of the heavily controversial<sup>7</sup> 1953 election gave birth to a political balance that would last for roughly four decades. The DC was at the core of a centrist coalition (with the Partito Liberale, PLI, the Partito Social Democratico, PSDI, and the Partito Repubblicano, PRI) opposed

<sup>7</sup> The controversy arose on account of the super bonus of two-thirds of seats granted to the winning coalition scoring at least 50% of the votes. This was introduced by the incumbent, DC-led government prior to the elections. In the event, the centrist bloc scored 55,038 votes below the necessary threshold, so the normal proportional allocation of seats applied. The provision was subsequently repealed in 1954.

by a strong left-wing opposition (with the Partito Comunista, PCI, in a stronger position than the Partito Socialista, PSI) and a weaker right-wing opposition (the Partito Nazionale Monarchico, PNM, and the Movimento Sociale Italiano, MSI). This core basic structure of the party system remained very stable until 1992. After the 1953 election, electoral volatility reached 12.4%, due to the strong recovery of the left-wing parties, but it never again reached 10% before the restructuring of the party system that took place after 1994. The electoral fluxes were characterized by steady growth of the PCI until 1976, erosion of votes for the DC (until 1983) and the PSI (until 1976), and the steady dissolving of the monarchists' party. Already in 1967 Giorgio Galli could coin the term 'imperfect bipartitism' to describe the DC–PCI dynamic, even if the gap was still as high as 13%. Indeed, only in 1983 did the distance between the two reached a minimum: 32.9% vs 29.9.

As Table 4.2 indicates, during the first 20 years new parties had a very limited impact. From the 1970s and into the 1980s, however, the first signs of instability in the party system emerged, with several new parties appearing. But the first real symptom of a crisis, anticipating the 1992–93 collapse, was seen in the 1992 election. For the first time innovation exceeded 10%, reaching 16.1%. The three new parties—La Rete (1.86%), PRC<sup>8</sup> (5.62%) and the Lega Nord (LN, 8.65%)—together took 16.1% of votes. Of these three new parties the success of the latter sent alarm bells through the political system, as many commentators noted (Biorcio 1997). In fact, the LN launched a populist critique against the traditional 'system of parties' and explicitly placed itself outside of the classic left–right divide, which had characterized the Italian party system until that point. In conclusion, it was the first time that a new party outside of the political mainstream, other than the marginalized MSI and the already dissolved monarchists, had scored so well in an Italian election since 1946.

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8 When the PCI transformed into the PDS most of the leadership joined the new party, which kept within its new electoral symbol the ancient PCI logo (Ignazi 1992). In contrast, the PRC was led by a minor faction of the former leadership and the electoral symbol, although it kept the classical hammer and sickle in a prominent position, was completely different from that of the PCI (Bertolino 2004). Therefore, the PDS can be considered as the PCI 'in a new fashion', while only the PRC can be considered as a new party.

Table 14.2. Electoral and parliamentary innovation, 1948–2018

Election	Electoral innovation			Parliamentary innovation			
	Number of new parties	New parties overall vote	Political parties	Number of new parties	N seats assigned to new parties	% seats assigned to new parties	Political parties
1953	0	0.0%		0	0	0.0%	
1958	1	2.6%	Partito Monarchico Popolare, PMP (2.63%)	1	14	2.4%	Partito Monarchico Popolare, PMP (14)
1963	0	0.0%		0	0	0.0%	
1968	1	4.5%	Partito Socialista di Unità Proletaria (4.45%)	1	23	3.7%	Partito Socialista di Unità Proletaria, PSIUP (23)
1972	0	0.0%		0	0	0.0%	
1976	2	2.6%	Partito Radicale (1.07%), Democrazia Proletaria (1.52%)	2	10	1.6%	Partito Radicale (4) and Democrazia Proletaria (6)
1979	1	1.4%	Partito di Unità Proletaria per il Comunismo, PDUP (1.37%)	1	6	1.0%	Partito di Unità Proletaria per il Comunismo (6)
1983	1	1.4%	Partito Nazionale dei Pensionati (1.36%)	0	0	0.0%	
1987	1	2.5%	Lista Verdi (2.51%)	1	13	2.1%	Lista Verdi (13)
1992	3	16.1%	Rifondazione Comunista (5.62%), Movimento per la Democrazia—La Rete (1.86%), and Lega Nord (8.65%)	3	102	16.2%	Rifondazione Comunista (35), Movimento per la Democrazia—La Rete (12), Lega Nord (55)
1994	3	26.9%	Forza Italia (21.01%), Alleanza Democratica (1.18%), Patto Segni (4.68%)	3	163	25.9%	Forza Italia (132), Alleanza Democratica (18), Patto Segni (13)
1996	1	4.3%	Rinnovamento Italiano (4.34%)	1	26	4.1%	Rinnovamento Italiano (26)
2001	3	8.0%	Italia dei Valori (3.89%), Democrazia Europea (2.39%), Partito dei Comunisti Italiani (1.67%)	1	10	1.6%	Partito dei Comunisti Italiani (10)
2006	1	1.4%	Popolari UDEUR (1.40%)	1	3	0.5%	Popolari UDEUR (3)
2008	2	3.6%	La Destra—Fiamma Tricolore (2.43%), Movimento per l'Autonomia (1.13%)	1	8	1.3%	Movimento per l'Autonomia (8)
2013	5	40.1%	Sinistra Ecologia Libertà (3.20%), Fratelli d'Italia (1.96%), Scelta Civica (8.30%), Movimento Cinque Stelle (25.56%), Fare per Fermare il Declino (1.12%)	4	163	26.4%	Sinistra Ecologia Libertà (37), Fratelli d'Italia (9), Scelta Civica (38), Movimento Cinque Stelle (109)
2018	3	7.1%	Più Europa (2.56%), Liberi e Uguali (3.39%), Potere al Popolo (1.10%)	2	16	2.6%	Più Europa (2), Liberi e Uguali (14)

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

The 1992 legislature was very short lived. The 'Mani Pulite' ('clean hands') judicial investigation and the approval of the mixed-majoritarian electoral system (Mattarellum) resulted in a complete reorganization of the Italian party system. Electoral volatility skyrocketed to 40.9% and three new parties entered the scene. Two of the new parties were very small: Alleanza Democratica (1.2%) and Patto Segni (4.7%). But the third—Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia—made an instant splash, imme-

diately becoming the biggest party in the system, taking 21% of votes. In total, the three new parties took 26.9% of the vote, a level never reached by new parties before. These changes induced many to speak of the emergence of a so-called ‘Second Republic’, even if all other constitutional aspects of Italian democracy bar the electoral system continued in the same framework as per the previous 40 years.

The system seemed to settle into a relative stability in the period. In the four elections between 1996 and 2008, volatility only once reached 22.8% (in 2001) and in 2006 was down to the levels seen in the 1950s and 1960s (8.6%). However, this period was characterized by the birth of other new parties: *Rinnovamento Italiano* in 1996, *Italia dei Valori*, *Democrazia Europea* and the *Partito dei Comunisti Italiani* in 2001, the *UDEUR* in 2006, and finally *la Destra* and the *Movimento per l’Autonomia* in 2008. However, the overall shares of votes obtained by these new parties was much lower than witnessed by the three new entrants in the 1992–1994 period. These indicators appeared to confirm that the party system, at least in the electoral arena, had found a new level after the changes of 1994. This seemed validated also by the fact that almost the total of the votes was concentrated in only two coalitions in 2006 and that the votes received by the two biggest parties in 2008, the *PDL* and the *PD*, reached 70.5%, the second highest score after the 73.1% score recorded in 1976.

The fragility of this apparent new equilibrium, however, was demonstrated clearly in the 2013 election. The ‘electoral earthquake’ reflected both high volatility (40.3%, the same score recorded in 1994) and a large number of new entrants—five in fact. These were: *Fare per Fermare il Declino* (1.1%), *Fratelli d’Italia* (1.96%), *Sinistra, Ecologia e Libertà* (3.20%), the self-defined ‘third pole’ *Scelta Civica* (8.3%) and the effective third force of that election, and biggest party overall, the *M5S* (25.6%). Overall, 40.2% of votes went to parties that had not even existed prior to the previous election five years earlier. From an electoral point of view, other new parties entered the scene in 2018, *+Europa*, *Liberi e Uguali* and *Potere al Popolo*, but their vote share in total did not exceed more than 7 per cent. In contrast, volatility skyrocketed—reaching the third-highest level on record—indicating that the new electoral landscape after the 2013 general elections was as unstable as the post-1953 and post-1992 ones has been.

Concerning the evolution of the format and dynamics of the parliamentary arena in comparison with those of the electoral arena, it is note-

worthy that ‘institutional factors may also be responsible for creating different conditions of competition in the two arenas’ (Bardi and Mair 2008, pp. 157–8). The electoral system is one of the most important aspects that shape the differences and similarities between party systems. As for the format of the party systems in the two arenas, it is easy to understand that the proportional formula imposed a strong similarity between the two. The elections of 1953 and 1992 recorded the highest electoral volatility and were subsequently the ones with the greatest parliamentary volatility. The same happened for party innovation, which was almost non-existing in both the arenas until 1992.

As for the dynamics of competition, the analysis is more complex. The proportional system produced ‘polarized pluralism’ (Sartori 1966) in the electoral arena, characterized by centrifugal competition. However, parties that during the elections proposed different policy solutions and seemed to represent incompatible *Weltanschauungen* were able to negotiate and find agreements in the parliamentary arena. Even if the period 1948–1992 was characterized by the stability of the ruling coalition, this did not prevent the formation of a consensual climate on many general issues, at least amongst the parties of the ‘Constitutional Arch’ (i.e. the mainstream), which saw some commentators define the Italian party system as ‘bargained pluralism’ (Hine 1993). Sartori and Hine’s definitions seem to be at odds, but that contradiction is only apparent: as the Italian party system was polarized in the electoral arena and consensual in the parliamentary one. Obviously, the main reason is that the electoral arena has never been really competitive. The DC constantly occupied the centre of the system having two incompatible oppositions on the left and the right. The inclusive strategy of this ‘centrism’—with PSLI, the PLI and the PRI in the ruling coalition—always characterized the DC’s behaviour. The consequence was a continuous enlargement of the governing coalition, which passed from the centrist formula of the 1950s, to a centre–left one in the 1960s and 1970s and then to a ‘pentapartito’ format in the 1980s.

The consensual imperative of the parliamentary arena is not only exemplified by the progressive expansion of the governmental coalition but was also characterized by other two processes. The first was the recurrence of the ‘external support’ from parties formally located at the opposition, the monarchists and the neo-fascists in the 1950s and the communists in the 1970s. The second, and more frequent, was the sharing of

public offices and state resources amongst parties. This process, which touched many sectors of society—from the management of the national health service to the distribution of the top-level positions in state institutions, and from the introduction of public funding for political parties (Pizzimenti and Ignazi 2011) to the ‘occupation’ of the municipalized companies—was completely in line with the conceptualization of the ‘cartel party’ system (Katz and Mair 1995; Bardi 2006).

Things changed abruptly in 1994, when the approval of the new mixed–majoritarian electoral system and the judicial investigations into the ruling parties provoked a dramatic impact on the format and dynamics of the party system in the two arenas. The new electoral law facilitated the structuring of the electoral supply into three different blocs and new parties (Forza Italia overall) emerged. From that time on, two tendencies can be measured. The first is the divergence between electoral and parliamentary volatilities, with the latter constantly higher. This effect is clearly due to the distortive effect of the new mixed–majoritarian system. The Mattarellum (which adopted the first-past-the-post formula for three-quarters of the seats) assured higher volatility in the parliamentary arena: 46% vs 40% in 1994, 21% vs 15% in 1996, 23% vs 22% in 2001 (see Tables 4.1 and 4.3). These gaps were almost of the same degree in the three elections run with the Porcellum system (which granted 340 seats to the coalition or list with the highest number of votes): parliamentary volatility was 13% vs 8% of the electoral arena in 2006, 24% vs 16% in 2008, and 44% vs 40% in 2013. The second process was the great parliamentary strength of the centre–left and centre–right, always able to occupy more than 90% of the seats, with peaks in 2001 when only 11 seats were left to third parties and in 2006 when the two coalitions occupied the entire Chamber of Deputies. In 2008, this tendency toward bipolarity seemed to lead even to a bipartization of the system.

This tendency came to a complete halt in 2013. The change was immediately observed concerning electoral supply: three coalitions running in the elections (centre–right, centre–left and centre) and at least three alone-standing lists with the hope of winning seats (M5S, Fare per Femmare il Declino, and Rivoluzione Civile). Also in this case, high volatility in the electoral arena is reflected in a higher volatility in the parliamentary one (44% to 40%), but the party innovation was not as strong: electoral innovation was 40% but it was only 26% in the parliamentary arena. This happened because the PD, an existing party, secured the bonus,

leaving fewer seats to the new parties. For the 2018 election, the recently introduced ‘mixed’ electoral formula (the Rosatellum) continued to produce significant disproportional effects. Volatility in the parliamentary arena was also high in this election (42%) and higher than in the electoral one. This demonstrates that the 2013 election was far from shaping a new stable party system in the parliamentary arena. On the contrary, the innovation caused by successful new parties was very limited: only 2.6% of seats was conquered by new lists (see Table 4.2).

Moving on to the analysis of the governmental arena, we see that volatility and innovation show interesting results. Table 3 presents the scores of governmental volatility for the 65 governments of the Italian Republican period, together with additional information on the government (party of the prime minister, cabinet size and share of ministers between technocratic or independent ministers, new parties and established parties). Figure 4.1 shows graphically the trend of governmental volatility, and Table 4.4 presents detailed information on governmental innovation.

**Table 4.3. Governmental composition and volatility, 1953–2018**

Year	Legisla- ture	Govern- ment	Party of Prime Minister	Cabinet size	Techno- cratic & independent ministers	Ministers from new parties	Minis- ters from existing parties	Govern- mental volatility
1953	2	Pella	DC	19	0%	0%	100%	0%
1954	2	Fanfani I	DC	19	0%	0%	100%	0%
1954	2	Scelba	DC	21	0%	0%	100%	28.6%
1955	2	Segni I	DC	21	0%	0%	100%	0%
1957	2	Zoli	DC	21	0%	0%	100%	28.6%
1958	3	Fanfani II	DC	22	0%	0%	100%	18.2%
1959	3	Segni II	DC	24	0%	0%	100%	18.2%
1960	3	Tambroni	DC	23	0%	0%	100%	0%
1960	3	Fanfani III	DC	23	0%	0%	100%	0%
1962	3	Fanfani IV	DC	24	0%	0%	100%	12.5%
1963	4	Leone I	DC	20	0%	0%	100%	12.5%
1963	4	Moro I	DC	24	0%	16.7%	83.3%	37.5%
1964	4	Moro II	DC	24	0%	0%	100%	4.2%
1966	4	Moro III	DC	23	0%	0%	100%	8.0%
1968	5	Leone II	DC	22	0%	0%	100%	34.8%
1968	5	Rumor I	DC	25	0%	0%	100%	16.0%

1969	5	Rumor II	DC	23	0%	0%	100%	16.0%
1970	5	Rumor III	DC	26	0%	0%	100%	34.6%
1970	5	Colombo	DC	26	0%	0%	100%	3.8%
1972	5	Andreotti I	DC	25	0%	0%	100%	38.5%
1972	6	Andreotti II	DC	27	0%	0%	100%	29.6%
1973	6	Rumor IV	DC	29	0%	0%	100%	27.6%
1974	6	Rumor V	DC	26	0%	0%	100%	6.9%
1974	6	Moro IV	DC	25	0%	0%	100%	38.5%
1976	6	Moro V	DC	22	0%	0%	100%	20%
1976	7	Andreotti III	DC	21	4.8%	0%	95.2%	4.8%
1978	7	Andreotti IV	DC	22	4.5%	0%	95.5%	0.2%
1979	7	Andreotti V	DC	22	0%	0%	100%	22.7%
1979	8	Cossiga I	DC	25	0%	0%	100%	16.0%
1980	8	Cossiga II	DC	27	0%	0%	100%	44.4%
1980	8	Forlani	DC	27	0%	0%	100%	11.1%
1981	8	Spadolini	PRI	28	0%	0%	100%	5.3%
1982	8	Spadolini II	PRI	28	0%	0%	100%	0%
1982	8	Fanfani V	DC	28	0%	0%	100%	10.7%
1983	9	Craxi I	PSI	29	0%	0%	100%	12.1%
1986	9	Craxi II	PSI	29	0%	0%	100%	0%
1987	9	Fanfani VI	DC	26	23.1%	0%	76.9%	48.3%
1987	10	Goria	DC	30	3.3%	0%	96.7%	46.7%
1988	10	De Mita	DC	31	0%	0%	100%	4.0%
1989	10	Andreotti VI	DC	31	0%	0%	100%	3.2%
1991	10	Andreotti VII	DC	32	0%	0%	100%	10.1%
1992	11	Amato I	PSI	26	7.7%	0%	92.3%	10.6%
1993	11	Ciampi	Technocratic	28	32.1%	14.3%	53.6%	38.7%
1994	12	Berlusconi I	FI	26	7.7%	76.9%	15.4%	76.9%



1995	12	Dini	Techno- cratic	25	100%	0%	0%	92.3%
1996	13	Prodi I	Ulivo / Indep.	24	20.8%	12.5%	66.7%	79.2%
1998	13	D'Alema I	DS	26	11.5%	7.7%	80.8%	33.3%
1999	13	D'Alema II	DS	27	7.4%	7.4%	85.2%	16.2%
2000	13	Amato II	Techno- cratic	25	12.0%	0%	88.0%	13.8%
2001	14	Berlusconi II	FI	24	12.5%	0%	87.5%	79.7%
2005	14	Berlusconi III	FI	25	4.0%	0%	96.0%	19.0%
2006	15	Prodi II	Ulivo / Indep.	27	14.8%	11.1%	74.1%	82.1%
2008	16	Berlusconi IV	PDL	25	4.0%	0%	96.0%	94.1%
2011	16	Monti	Techno- cratic	20	100%	0%	0%	96.0%
2013	17	Letta	PD	22	13.6%	4.5%	81.8%	86.4%
2014	17	Renzi	PD	17	11.8%	0%	88.2%	19.3%
2016	17	Gentiloni	PD	19	0%	0%	100%	19.5%
2018	18	Conte	Inde- pendent	19	31.6%	42.1%	26.3%	100%

*Source: authors' own elaboration*

First of all, it is worth noting that until 1994 total volatility (the change in ministers representing different parties) was constantly below 50%: the majority of ministers always came from the DC. Volatility was due to the change of quotas between the parties in the governing coalition: four parties of the 'centrist' formula (other than the DC, also PLI, PSDI and PRI) between 1948 and 1963, and four during the 'centre-left' experience (with the PSI replacing the PLI in the governmental coalition), and the five in the 'pentapartito' period (DC, PSI, PLI, PSDI and PRI) between 1981 and 1993. Volatility in the governmental arena did not reflect electoral or parliamentary volatilities nor the transition from one governmental formula to another, but rather the relationships between parliamentary parties. The transition phases were characterized by 'monochrome' DC-led or centrist executives with the external support (without direct ministerial participation) of parties officially in the opposition. This was the

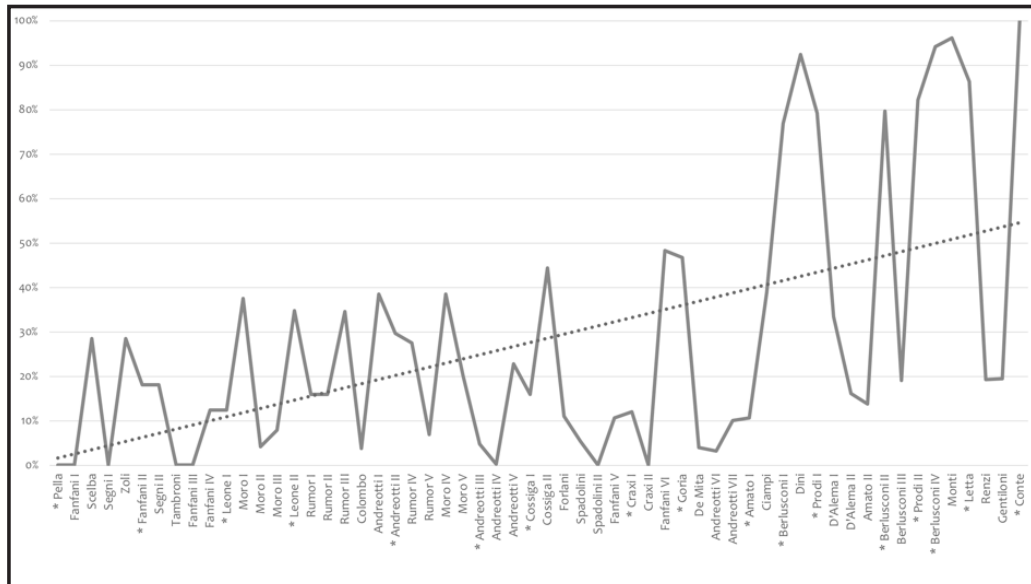
case when the MSI and the monarchists supported the Tambroni executive in 1960, when the socialists supported the Fanfani IV executive in 1962 and the communists supported the Andreotti III executive in 1976. These experiments were clear attempts to enlarge the governmental coalition at a later stage. This happened with the entry of the PSI in the first 'centre-left' cabinet in 1963, which is also the only case of innovation that happened in the governmental arena before 1993. Note as well that from 1948 until 1981, every Italian prime minister was a Christian Democrat. This informal rule was broken in 1981, when the Republican Giovanni Spadolini became prime minister and again in 1983, when it was the time for the Socialist leader Bettino Craxi (Ignazi 1997).

In 1992, following Mani Pulite, it became necessary to form a new executive, led by a non-politician and supported by the largest possible coalition. For that reason, in the Ciampi cabinet there were significant changes. For the first time two new parties, the PDS and the Greens, obtained ministerial offices: four ministers out of 28 belonged to new parties. However, this historical event had no practical consequences, because already the day after the government had sworn in, 4 May 1993, the PDS and the Greens withdrew their ministers from the cabinet, as a form of protest because the Chamber of Deputies voted against the opening of a judicial investigation of Bettino Craxi.

The watershed elections of 1994 show striking results for both indicators. For the first time, volatility reached values higher than 50%. For governmental innovation, it was even more pronounced and reached the highest peak ever (76.9%), because the three main parties forming the governing coalition had never been in power before (FI, LN and AN). Volatility was very high also in 1995, as this was a non-partisan government vis à vis the almost complete absence of technocratic ministers of the previous cabinet (McDonnell and Valbruzzi 2014). As Figure 4.1 shows, volatility keeps growing during the late 1990s–early 2010s period, consistent with the alternation of power between centre-left and centre-right. If we ignore the intra-legislature government reshufflings,<sup>9</sup> volatility grew continuously over this whole period (Prodi I: 79.9%; Berlusconi I: 79.67%; 2006: Prodi II: 82.1%; Berlusconi II: 94.1%) until Letta in 2013, when it again fell below 90% (86.2%).

9 For the technocrat-led governments Dini and Monti, formed after political governments, volatility is higher than 50%.

Figure 14.1. Governmental volatility, 1948–2018



Note: governments indicated with an asterisk are formed after a general election, at the beginning of a new legislature. Source: Authors' own elaboration.

The 2018 Conte government—the first such case in Republican history—shows total volatility (100%). In fact, through the past every executive had at least some ministers belonging to parties that had been in office in the previous cabinet.<sup>10</sup> Today, there is a total rupture with the past. If volatility is extraordinarily high, innovation is relatively low, as the yellow–green cabinet has a number of technocratic ministers, and the ‘nationalized’ Lega had already been in power in 1994, 2001 and 2008. Therefore, only the eight ministers from the M5S count for the measure of governmental innovation.

Table 4.4. Governmental innovation, 1953–2018

Year	Government	Party of Prime Minister	Ministers from new parties
1953	Pella	DC	
1954	Fanfani I	DC	
1954	Scelba	DC	
1955	Segni I	DC	

10 Most notably, politicians from centrist parties, a legacy of the long run of DC-centred cabinets.

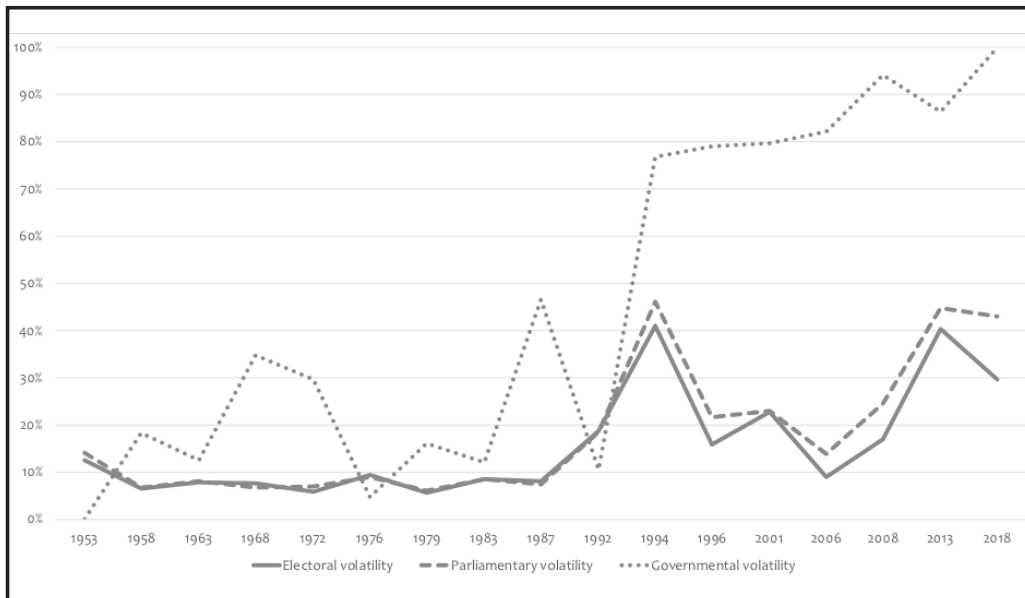
1957	Zoli	DC	
1958	Fanfani II	DC	
1959	Segni II	DC	
1960	Tambroni	DC	
1960	Fanfani III	DC	
1962	Fanfani IV	DC	
1963	Leone I	DC	4 Antonio Giolitti, Giovanni Pieraccini, Giacomo Mancini, Achille Corona (PSI)
1963	Moro I	DC	
1964	Moro II	DC	
1966	Moro III	DC	
1968	Leone II	DC	
1968	Rumor I	DC	
1969	Rumor II	DC	
1970	Rumor III	DC	
1970	Colombo	DC	
1972	Andreotti I	DC	
1972	Andreotti II	DC	
1973	Rumor IV	DC	
1974	Rumor V	DC	
1974	Moro IV	DC	
1976	Moro V	DC	
1976	Andreotti III	DC	
1978	Andreotti IV	DC	
1979	Andreotti V	DC	
1979	Cossiga I	DC	
1980	Cossiga II	DC	
1980	Forlani	DC	
1981	Spadolini	PRI	
1982	Spadolini II	PRI	
1982	Fanfani V	DC	
1983	Craxi I	PSI	

1986	Craxi II	PSI		
1987	Fanfani VI	DC		
1987	Goria	DC		
1988	De Mita	DC		
1989	Andreotti VI	DC		
1991	Andreotti VII	DC		
1992	Amato I	PSI		
1993	Ciampi	Technocratic	4	Francesco Rutelli (Verdi), Vincenzo Visco, Luigi Berlinguer, Augusto Barbera (PDS)
1994	Berlusconi I	FI	20	Ministers from Forza Italia, Lega Nord, Alleanza Nazionale.
1995	Dini	Technocratic		
1996	Prodi I	Ulivo / Indep.	3	Lamberto Dini, Augusto Fantozzi, Tiziano Treu (Rinnovamento Italiano)
1998	D'Alema I	DS	2	Oliviero Diliberto, Katia Belillo (PdCI)
1999	D'Alema II	DS	2	Agazio Loiero, Salvatore Cardinale (UDEUR)
2000	Amato II	Technocratic		
2001	Berlusconi II	FI		
2005	Berlusconi III	FI		
2006	Prodi II	Ulivo / Indep.	3	Antonio di Pietro (IdV), Paolo Ferrero (PRC), Emma Bonino (RI)
2008	Berlusconi IV	PDL		
2011	Monti	Technocratic		
2013	Letta	PD	1	Enzo Moavero Milanesi (SC)
2014	Renzi	PD		
2016	Gentiloni	PD		
2018	Conte	Independent	8	Ministers from M5S

Source: authors' own elaboration

So far, we have analysed the innovation and volatility of the Italian party system separately for the three functional arenas. However, a number of insights comes from comparing these two characteristics in the three arenas together. As shown by Figure 4.2, there is a clear-cut division in the three arenas between the pre- and post-1994 periods. In the long period between 1953 and 1993, electoral and parliamentary volatility never exceeded 10%, and consistent with what one would expect in a pure proportional system, these two indicators produced virtually identical scores. Governmental volatility, on the other hand, has a more undulating trend, showing high peaks and low troughs, but never reaching 50%.

**Figure 4.2. Party system volatility in the three arenas, 1953–2018**

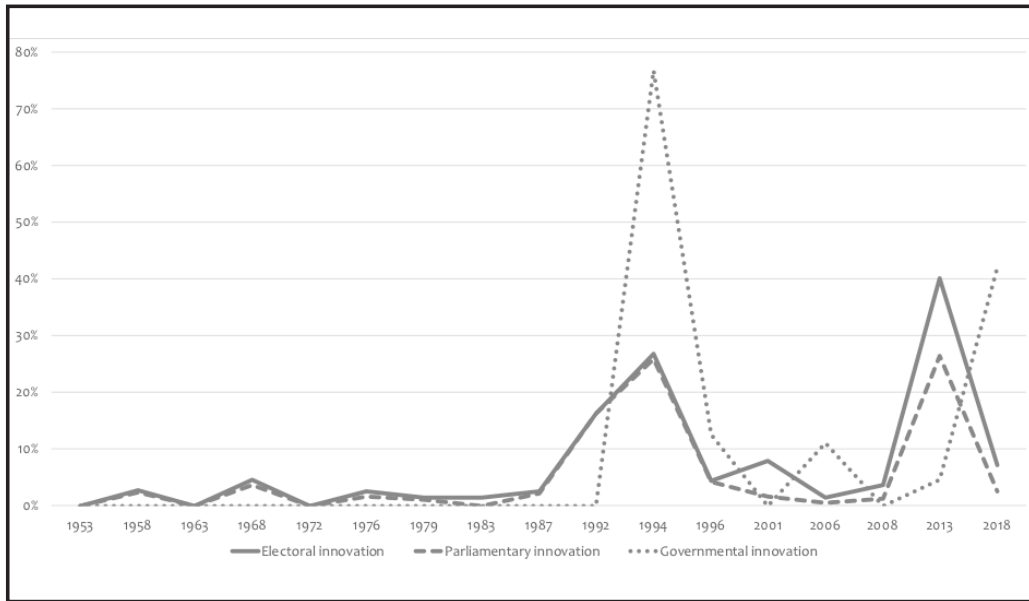


*Note: only governments formed after new elections are considered. Source: Authors' own elaboration.*

The election of 1992 showed some preliminary signs of disruption. Both electoral and parliamentary volatility showed—at that time—the highest value since 1953, close to 20%, while governmental volatility was still low. After 1994 then, electoral and parliamentary volatility show a much different and wavier pattern—they reached peaks of over 40%, but also shrank back to levels close to 10% (in 2006). Yet again, the biggest pre- and post-1994 difference lies in governmental volatility—in the first period, never above 50% and then consistently over 75% in the second. It is also worth noting how, under the mixed proportional-majoritarian systems (Mattarellum and Rosatellum) and the majority bonus proportional system (Porcellum), the results of electoral and parliamentary vol-

atility have tended to diverge much more than under the previous proportional system. The current Rosatellum, in particular, is the electoral system that so far has led to the biggest discrepancy between the two volatilities: around 13%.<sup>11</sup> This is another element of novelty of the election of 2018, a moment of substantial halt in respect to the previous setting not only for the already mentioned full governmental volatility.

**Figure 4.3. Party system innovation in the three arenas, 1953–2018**



*Note: only governments formed after new elections are considered. Source: Authors' own elaboration.*

Additional insights come from the comparative analysis of innovation in the three arenas. Here, more than volatility, we can appreciate how 1994 and the two-stage process across 2013–2018 were indeed moments of epochal change in the Italian party system. If we exclude these occasions, the index of innovation in all the three arenas never exceeds 12%. In 1994, the result of new parties amongst the electorate and in the parliament (notably FI), led to a government where 77% of ministers belonged to new parties. Between 1996 and 2008, the years of bipolarism, these indexes returned to moderate levels. In 2013, the indexes of electoral and parliamentary innovation mark the first stage of the political ‘earthquake’ (Chiaromonte and Emanuele 2014). Mainly because of the exploits of

<sup>11</sup> In 2018, the parliamentary volatility scores is about 29% while the electoral volatility scores around 42%.

the populist M5S,<sup>12</sup> electoral innovation in 2013 was, in fact, the highest in the entire period of Italian Republican history (40%)—indeed, much higher than in the next-most volatile case, in 1994 (25%). However, due to the bonus attributed under the Porcellum electoral law—which favoured the winning centre-left coalition—parliamentary innovation was limited to about 25%, approximately the same score as recorded in 1994. If these effects, then, were not perceived in the governmental arena, with the formation of the continuity-oriented Letta cabinet characterized by extremely low governmental innovation, they would concern this arena as well five years later, when the ‘aftershock’ laid waste to the electoral landscape. Despite the Lega having already been in power, and the surprisingly high number of technocratic ministers, the Conte government is, indeed, the second most innovative government since 1953. Therefore, if 1994 was a single moment of transition from one-party system to another, in the 2010s the passage occurred in bursts with the new system taking five years to fully take shape.

## Conclusions

This study has analysed the nature of the shift in the the Italian party system after the 2018 election. The impression of a significant change is widespread and the present chapter has sought to assess empirically the degree of this change. Thanks to the historical analysis of the indexes of party volatility and innovation in the electoral, parliamentary and governmental arenas, we have indicated that the party system in all three arenas was considerably stable in the period 1953–1992. The seismic sensors of the Italian party system went haywire in 1994, when both indicators skyrocketed at the same moment across all three arenas. Something different happened at the 2018 general elections. In fact, on this occasion, the volatility index reached new maximal levels only in the governmental arena, as volatility in the other two arenas is lower in 2018 than was the case in 2013. Most importantly, the innovation index of the 2018 election, very high for the governmental arena, is relatively low for the electoral and the parliamentary ones. For this indicator too, the crucial moment of change has been the 2013 election.

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12 But not only the M5S. We saw in 2013 the highest number of new parties emerge (five in total). In addition to M5S, Sinistra, Ecologia e Libertà, Fratelli d’Italia, Scelta Civica and Fare per Fermare il Declino each took at least 1% of the votes at this election.



Therefore, at least two differences can be registered between the two reshaping events of the Italian party system. The first is that the 1990s shift was instant, at the 1994 election, whereby the alliances of political parties (the forging of the electoral blocs) and the modification of the electoral system, rather than the voting behaviour of citizens, had an impact on the transformation of the party system in all three functional arenas. In contrast, the change of 2013 was mostly a consequence of the voters' strategies—since the electoral formula and the electoral alliances did not change. The change in voting behaviour, however, was enough to modify the electoral and the parliamentary faces of the Italian party system. But the variation in the governmental arena happened only with the 'aftershock' in 2018, when a new change in voters' behaviour—but not of alliance strategy—ran in parallel with the introduction of a new electoral formula. Thus, we must conclude that a party system transition that was instant in 1994 has taken two elections (five years) to pan out fully in the present moment. For the first transformation of the party system, a single transition event was sufficient. For the second, two different occasions were necessary. However, we do not know yet if this could be interpreted as the passage toward a new, 'Third Republic', as has already been posited by some commentators. After all, it is still questionable whether the 1993 events truly embodied a transition in the Republic itself, from 'first' to 'second' rather than a transition in the Republic's party system (which is more certain). In any case, only after the next election—if volatility and innovation in the three arenas reduces substantially—will we be able to affirm that the Italian Republic has acquired a new party system. Such a system would then be fully consolidated in all the three different functional arenas, and we could safely call it the 'third party system' of the Italian Republic, if not a 'Third Republic'.

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