

## ***Regional political systems in Italy: A story of increasing instability***

### **Il Sistema politico regionale in Italia: una storia di instabilità crescente**

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#### **Abstract**

*After the First Republic, a growing instability has been affecting Italian politics at different levels. Most of the literature has focused on the transformation of Italian political and party systems from a national point of view; however, the analysis of regional level could be used to better understand the trajectories of instability in Italy. The paper aims to contribute to the existing literature on instability and regional politics. An analysis of national, regional and European electoral data in three different periods (First Republic, bipolar Second Republic, tripolar Second Republic) will be provided in order to assess the degree of instability of each region over time. Regional majorities are confirmed to have become increasingly unsure about their own re-election even in those territories being historically considered as parties' strongholds at subnational level; the results of the analysis show that instability affects all regional political systems even more after the appearance of a third pole (the Movimento 5 Stelle – M5S) in 2013, with the only exception of the Veneto region.*

Dopo la fine della Prima Repubblica, una crescente instabilità ha investito la politica italiana a tutti i livelli. La letteratura accademica ha studiato il fenomeno dell'instabilità dal punto di vista nazionale in applicazione alla tenuta e alle caratteristiche degli esecutivi; tuttavia, il livello regionale può aiutare a comprendere meglio le traiettorie dell'instabilità in Italia. Il lavoro si propone di contribuire al filone di studi incentrati sull'instabilità e sulla politica regionale. L'analisi si sofferma sui dati elettorali nazionali, regionali ed europei risalenti a tre diversi periodi (Prima Repubblica, Seconda Repubblica bipolare, Seconda Repubblica tripolare) della storia politica italiana al fine di valutare il grado di instabilità di ciascuna regione nel tempo. I risultati confermano la crescente instabilità delle maggioranze regionali sempre più insicure sulla propria rielezione anche in quei territori storicamente considerati roccaforti dei partiti a livello subnatale; l'instabilità cresce in tutti i sistemi politici regionali ancora di più dopo la comparsa di un terzo polo (il Movimento 5 stelle – M5S) nel 2013, con la sola eccezione del Veneto.

#### **Keywords**

*Regionalism, regional political systems, instability, elections*  
Regionalismo, sistemi politici regionali, instabilità, elezioni

## The dynamics of Italian regional political systems over five decades

The “rise to power” of Italian regions began with their very institution in 1970. The region-building dynamics of the 1980s and 1990s allowed regions to acquire and affirm a personal identity within the political arena, a process favoured by the Europeanization process and endogenous factors, as the “*Tangentopoli*” scandal. During the so-called First Republic (1948-1992), the results of general elections and regional ones did not differ to a significant extent: in line with other European countries, the “nationalization” of Italian politics ensured stable territorial configurations of voting with the consequence of making the regional electoral support for the main national parties rather homogeneous (Caciagli and Corbetta 1987; Chiaramonte and Di Virgilio 2000; Caramani 2004) – and predictable. The turmoil of the party system following 1992, the direct election of Presidents of regions since 1999, and the constitutional reform of 2001, that transferred relevant powers in a wide range of policy fields to subnational governments, changed the perception of regional politics’ relevance in the public debate as well as from parties’ perspective (Tentoni 2020). As a consequence of these dynamics, regional elections’ status has been changing too from being considered as a replica of the national elections’ results to a testing ground for the national majority in power (Tentoni 2020; Bolgherini and Grimaldi 2015; Chiaramonte and Tarli Barbieri 2007).

The First Republic is the period of “partitocracy”, during which two main parties, the *Democrazia cristiana* (DC) and the *Partito comunista italiano* (PCI), dominated the political scene. Even if the PCI neither won general elections once nor it was part of any national ruling majority, its deep local roots were a matter of concern for its political opponent and one of the main reasons for the delay in the establishment of regions (Guarnieri 2016; Cotta and Verzichelli 2020). As soon as the first regional elections took place in 1970, it was clear the extent to which the two parties were deeply rooted in different areas of the country: on the one side, there was the “red area” of the PCI, that included three regions of Northern-Central Italy (Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany and Umbria); on the other side, there was the “white area” of the DC, limited to the North-East and the peripheral areas of the North of the country, even if the party’s electoral success was extended almost throughout the Peninsula. The two areas were not only different in terms of electoral results; indeed, the red zone and the white zone were two different expressions of the so-called “Third Italy” (Bagnasco 1977), that was made up of areas characterized by high levels of social integration and political participation, a good degree of voting fidelity, dense trust relationships, extended solidarity networks, non-conflictual industrial relations, a solid local identity and a high legitimacy for institutions – the municipality in the red area, the Catholic Church in the white one. The two areas were the expression of two different “political subcul-

tures”. Without going into much details into the evolution of the concept, we hereby accept the definitions by Trigilia (1981), according to whom a subculture is a particular organizational modality of the political system that concerns its relations with society from which an electoral monopoly derives, and Caciagli (2011: 101), according to whom the political subculture is a «coherent system of cultural and behavioural traits typical of a population settled in a territory (...) based on a sense of belonging produced by collective experiences, delimited by territorial boundaries and settled over time» even if it does not always lead to constant electoral results.<sup>1</sup> When regions were created in 1970, strong peripheral subcultures, especially religious and workers’ ones, had, in fact, already developed quite solid social institutions within the territories (Putnam 1993). The newly born regional majorities used the acquired control over part of the welfare programmes as a mean to legitimize themselves in front of the international community as well as the national one according to their dominant culture, identity and economic and social capital (Putnam 1993). Specifically, the white zone was characterized by a strong dominance of values that included religiosity, pluralist democracy and anti-communism; the DC, therefore, proposed itself as the party that embodied the values of social Catholicism, the only possible mediator with the power in Rome. Within the red zone, the PCI embodied the communist values, according to which the party and the local institutions were the centre of the community. Meanwhile, in the rest of the country no dominant subculture emerged, although the DC maintained control over large sections of the electorate thanks to a political elite capable of attracting broad consensus – even through vote trading.

Because of the attention given from parties to territorial organization, the First Republic can be considered as the period of “politics within the territory”; the Italian political system of the Second Republic can be defined instead as a system of “politics without territory” (Diamanti 2009). None of the main political parties of the First Republic survived to the *Tangentopoli* scandal in 1992: few resilient parties and new political actors, such as Bossi’s *Lega Nord* or Berlusconi’s *Forza Italia* for the centre-right coalition or the *Partito Democratico* for the centre-left one, have been crowding the political scene from the 1990s onwards (Ignazi 2018). Does this put an end on political subcultures? According to some authors, the old subcultures have been replaced or adapted to the new society. The white zone was replaced in some of its territories by a new “green subculture” deriving from the emerging of various small leagues first, and *Lega Nord* then, in which the influence of Catholicism and the presence of a strong territorial organization are still evident, especially in Veneto (Vampa 2016; Ignazi 2018). In its initial stage, this area was characterized by a “territory against politics” ideology,

<sup>1</sup> See also: Galli (1968); Almond and Verba (1963); Ramella (2005); Baccetti and Messina (2009).

according to which the territory was used to evoke antagonistic feelings towards the central state (Diamanti 2009; Ignazi 2018). In other areas of the country, the end of the white subculture resulted in the emergence of a “light-blue zone” established by Berlusconi’s party, which showed little interest in pursuing a deep-rooted territorial organization from the very beginning (Guarnieri 2016; Diamanti 2009). Furthermore, the light-blue zone had different features throughout the Peninsula: in Southern regions, it resulted from an increase in the exchange vote to the detriment of the membership one; in Northern regions, it derived from the interests of the entrepreneurial economic and social structures. At the same time, some authors argued that the red zone has had a stronger degree of resistance, adaptation, and transformation to the changing times (Diamanti 2009; Florida 2010; Barbieri and Damiani 2011). Despite the gradual extinction of the communist soul in the main heir parties, the survival of the centre-left was favoured by a (relative) continuity of political subjects and by the autonomy provided to regional political leaders. However, according to other authors, the transformations that have taken place in the recent decades would have definitively eradicated the red subculture even from its strongholds: if, on the one hand, in the new millennium Tuscany seems to take the place of Emilia-Romagna in terms of success of the centre-left coalition at the polls, on the other hand, today «the party that collects the most consensus in Tuscany is not waving red flags, but tricolour ones» (Caciagli 2011: 100);<sup>2</sup> thus, “red regions” should be used only to refer to the electoral results.

Despite the transition towards a “politics without the territory” (Diamanti 2009), regions have become politically stronger, especially after the reform of the electoral law in the 1990s and the constitutional reform of Title V in 2001. Starting from 1994, the bonus for the winning party/coalition, the possibility of vote splitting, the direct election of the President of the Region and the form of government based on the *simul stabunt, simul cadent* principle were intended to guarantee a more stable level of governability (Pacini 2007). Regions were given the power of choosing their own electoral systems, thus producing considerable variation, especially with regards to the assignment of the bonus (Masseti 2018). Indeed, these innovations created the conditions for a new bipolar system between a centre-right and a centre-left coalition to emerge (Bolgherini and Grimaldi 2017), although in a context of great fragmentation (Bolgherini and Grimaldi 2015; Pacini 2007) and in continuity with the nationalization of electoral competition (Chiaromonte and Tarli Barbieri 2007). Over the years, regional elections have been recognized as a true test for the stability of national governments, putting more and more stress on the majority in power (Chiaromonte and Di Virgilio 2000). Due to the early dissolution of different regional councils, the end of

<sup>2</sup> Our translation.

the horizontal simultaneity in regional elections generated a “calendar effect” which places them close to the national ones (Chiaramonte and Tarli Barbieri 2007); thus, each regional election has become a mean to test the consensus of national majority and parties (Masseti 2018; Tentoni 2020). The structure of the political offer changed: a bipolar competition was established between two catch-all coalitions (Chiaramonte and Di Virgilio 2000), exacerbating party fragmentation, which is typical of the Italian polarized pluralism (Sartori 1982).<sup>3</sup>

Bipolarism became almost a “mission” for parties until the *Movimento 5 Stelle* (M5S) climbed into the political arena (Bull and Pasquino 2018). During the Second Republic, regional elections initially have been conforming to the classic “second-order election model” because of the increasingly lower levels of turnout and the poor results of national majorities in power (Chiaramonte and Di Virgilio 2000; Massetti 2018); however, the fading of the bipolar competition, the temporary fragmentation of the centre-right coalition, the difficulty of the M5S to prevail at regional level, the win of national ruling parties in regional elections have been making the second-order model less convincing in the latest years (Masseti 2018; Grimaldi 2021). The unprecedented outcomes of 2013 national elections<sup>4</sup> were immediately confirmed by the 2015 regional ones which validated the tripolar structure of the political competition (Bolgherini and Grimaldi 2017). In that occasion, the M5S failed to prevail at regional level as opposed to what happened in 2018 at the national one<sup>5</sup> – which was even a greater result if one considers that the party ran alone. In this very same period, another relevant transformation occurred: after the brief parenthesis of Roberto Maroni’s secretariat, the leadership of the *Lega Nord* moved from Umberto Bossi to Matteo Salvini in 2013, who substituted the party’s regionalism with a new nativist nationalism well represented by the new name *Lega* starting from 2018 (Albertazzi et al. 2018; Ignazi 2018). New elements have emerged during this last decade: the deconstruction of the regional party systems, a sharp increase in local/personalized lists,<sup>6</sup> a greater diversification of the regional political and party systems, a clear difference in the voting behaviour

<sup>3</sup> For a review of the definitions, see Bolgherini and Grimaldi (2015).

<sup>4</sup> The 2013 national elections witnessed a new increase in fragmentation, disproportionality, and electoral volatility (Bolgherini and Grimaldi 2015). The M5S obtained 25,3% of the votes for the Chamber of Deputies and 23,8% for the Senate, while the centre-left coalition 29,6% and 31,6% and the centre-right 29,2% and 30,7% respectively.

<sup>5</sup> The competition has been considered “tripolar” with regards to national elections, “imperfectly bipolar” with regards to regional ones (Tentoni 2020). The “tripolar” formula will be used in order to differentiate between the periods 1994-2010 and 2013-2020.

<sup>6</sup> The list of the candidate regional President received high voting percentages, if not the highest, in Lazio in 2010 (Renata Polverini Presidente 26,4%), in Calabria in 2014 (Oliverio Presidente 12,5%), in Veneto in 2015 (Lista Zaia Presidente 23,1%) and 2020 (Zaia Presidente 44,6%), in Apulia in 2015

between the centre and the periphery<sup>7</sup> (Bolgherini and Grimaldi 2015; Tentoni 2018). The increased differentiation between regional political and party systems is connected not only to the intensified institutional polycentrism within the territories, but also to their progressive differentiation (Bolgherini and Grimaldi 2015). Consequently, it would be impossible to consider the Second Republic as a unitary period from the point of view of the characteristics of the political system: the years following 2013 constitute a new, third phase of the Italian political system characterized by an even stronger fragmentation (Bolgherini and Grimaldi 2017) whose durability and effects are still early to predict.

### **Regional political systems in the literature: the need for an “update”**

The academic literature widely explored the consequences of the transition from the First to the Second Republic on the Italian political system. With regards to the regional dimension, great importance was given to the study of political subcultures and their transformation in time. Even if one considers political subcultures as extinguished, the concept is still relevant today to (at least) understand the past and its influence on the present.

During the last decades, other fields of study have given attention to regional political dynamics from different points of view. Some authors concentrated on the different features of the party system in the First and the Second Republic from a national as well as a regional perspective, adopting a single-party focus (Bardi and Pizzimenti 2020) as well as an all parties' one (Ignazi 2018). The regional point of view has been declined in terms of the relationship between politics and territory (Diamanti 2009)<sup>8</sup> and subcultures evolution (Floridia 2010; Caciagli 2011), which has been fundamental in explaining the increasing instability affecting regional systems.

A second strand of the literature took an interest in the results of regional elections. The works focusing on single elections (Chiaromonte and Di Virgilio 2000; Valbruzzi 2019; Fittipaldi 2021; Grimaldi 2021; Reda 2021), on regions' electoral history (Barbieri and Damiani 2011; Pellegrino 2020) or the connections between electoral outcomes and broader political phenomena (Chiaromonte and Tarli Barbieri 2007; Masetti 2018; Bolgherini and Grimaldi 2015; *id.* 2017; Tentoni 2018; *id.* 2020; Vampa 2021) are un-

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(Emiliano Sindaco di Puglia 9,7%) and in 2020 (Con Emiliano 6,6%), in Liguria in 2020 (Cambiamo con Toti 22,6%), in Campania in 2020 (De Luca Presidente 13,3%).

<sup>7</sup> The competition is tripolar in the main cities and bipolar (right/centre-right coalition versus M5S) in the periphery (Tentoni 2018).

<sup>8</sup> Diamanti (2009), adopting a national perspective, argues that one of the main transformations between the First and Second Republic concerns the relationship between politics and territory.

doubtably an important means of understanding of regional politics. They provide in-depth analysis and a broader understanding of regional elections' results connected to the deconstruction of the political system, the challenging role of the new third pole, the concerns of low turnout and the new voting dynamics. In recent years, attention has been given to electoral behaviour within the centre-periphery cleavage, the increasing instability of the leftist strongholds and the transformations of the voting behaviour during regional elections (Cataldi and Emanuele 2019; Pellegrino 2020; Tentoni 2020).

As far as this overview represents only a small part of the existing literature, it still seems that little attention has been given to the features of regional political systems in the long run. Vassallo and Baldini (2000) and Tronconi (2013) certainly tried to fill this gap; however, as their works were both published in the first decade of the new millennium, they missed to examine what happened after the emergence of a third pole in the political competition. Indeed, also the four groups of regional systems by Mazzoleni (2002) compare regional party systems between the First Republic and the 90s as well as the classification of regional voting made by Corbetta and Passarelli (2015) stops at 2013. For this reason, this paper can be understood as an update of the existing literature with regards to regional political systems from a theoretical and empirical point of view.

The aim of this work is to contribute to the field of studies focused on the transformation of the Italian regional political systems. The analysis focuses on the stability/instability of regional systems from 1970 to 2020. Instability is a broad concept that has been differently defined in the past; however, its importance in political studies has never been denied. It is possible to distinguish between different kinds of instability (government instability, electoral instability, or coalition stability) differently measured – as electoral volatility, durability in power, number and kind of conflicts within majorities, duration of ministers in charge and government's crisis, expectation of a victory, durability of peaceful interactions within coalitions (Bartolini 1996; Battezzorre 1987; Pappalardo 1976). The chaotic set of definitions derives from the coexistence of different research purposes: one should distinguish between questioning the consequences of instability and questioning instability itself as an observable phenomenon (Battezzorre 1987). In the latter sense, stability and instability can be understood as characteristics of regional political systems that can be measured in terms of net shifts of votes from a political side to another (Novelli 1981); thus, stability is a condition at a given time of a political system «when from the examination of certain conditions, it can *reasonably* be expected that it will persist» (Morlino 1973: 254). While instability is a well-known feature of Italian national government (Pritoni 2021; Curini and Pinto 2017; Improta 2022), this work aims to “reasonably predict” if regional political systems can be considered as stable or unstable in a certain period of time examining the duration in power and (in)vulnerability of their ruling majorities.

## Methodology

This research aims to contribute to the study of regional politics with an empirical and theoretical update of the literature on regional political systems. The work will analyse the period 1970-2020, including the years after the M5S entered the political arena in 2013. For this reason, it will necessarily adopt new tools and adapt past ones in the transition from a bipolar system (1970-2010) to a tripolar one (2013-2020). We expect to find that the increasing instability affects not only the already-known unstable regions of the Peninsula, but also those that have always been considered as stable ones – as the traditionally left-wing territories and/or Veneto.

The analysis will cover three different periods based on the different characteristics assumed by the Italian political system and divided by turning point elections: the First Republic, the bipolar Second Republic and the tripolar Second Republic. Framing an historical period is always risky; however, it makes sense for the research purposes to use the classic division between the First and Second Republic, to which a third period of tripolar Second Republic was added as a result of the events of the last decade. During the First Republic, the political system undergone several transformations (Guarnieri 2016; Cotta and Verzichelli 2020), some of them differentiating the national from the regional levels of government; nonetheless, it will be used as a single season of analysis because of the bipartisan competition concerning all the levels of governments. Thus, regional political systems will be evaluated on the basis of the following temporal span: i) the first Republic (1970-1994), from the establishment of regions until the last elections in which the DC participated; ii) the bipolar Second Republic (1994-2010), from the 1994 national elections after the disbandment of mass parties up to the last elections before the 2013 turning point; iii) the tripolar Second Republic (2013-2020), from the 2013 national elections until the regional elections in autumn 2020. The data on national, regional, and European elections from 1970 to 2020 come from the historical archive of the Ministry of the Interior.

The main dimensions of analysis are the duration in power and the invulnerability of regional governments. The duration in power is measured by the number of alternations of opposing political ruling Italian regions. The aim is to provide a first glance on the regional political characteristics in terms of duration in power of the main political parties/coalitions. The invulnerability of regional majorities is measured by an index of invulnerability from the voting percentages of the main parties/coalitions (Tronconi 2013): DC and PCI during the First Republic; centre-right (Cr) and centre-left (Cl) coalitions during the bipolar Second Republic; Cr and Cl coalitions sided by the M5S during the tripolar Second Republic. In the analysis of the second and third period, the voting percentages of the coalitions have been calculated as the sum of the percentages of votes obtained by the single lists composing the coalition and the lists that are generally part



of the coalition to avoid punctual contingencies and consider their average pool of voters.<sup>9</sup> Then, the change index and the invulnerability index provide an indication of the confidence to be re-elected in the following election (Tronconi 2013). Even if Tronconi's work is undoubtedly a great source of inspiration for this work, we can still draw some differences between the two deriving from the necessity to adjust the research to a new objective and a longer period of analysis: first of all, this study covers the 1970-2020 period, thus posing the problem of the presence of a third pole starting from 2013; furthermore, the analysis is applied to each of the three periods. For these reasons, the same interpretative categories – albeit adapted – are used to each time range in order to bring cohesion and clearness to the results of the work. The change and invulnerability indexes in the third interval of analysis only include the Cr and Cl coalitions in their calculation: this choice is justified by the fact the *Movimento* won substantial voting percentages, so much so that it has been part of the ruling majority from 2018; however, it never succeeded in winning any of the regional elections. Nonetheless, the role of the third pole certainly cannot be ignored, given that it reached percentages close to those of the two coalitions in some territories, such as Molise or Sicily: indeed, the M5S directly influences the electoral results of the other poles, and indirectly the index of change and invulnerability. Within the analysis, the M5S is included by extending the operational categories in order to take account of its role in (perhaps) increasing regional instability. In the end, the analysis is not interested in understanding which is the strongest party but rather how competitive it is with respect to other regional political forces.

Finally, regions are classified into different areas on the basis of scores obtained in different categories: the duration in power, the voting percentages of the main parties/coalitions, the distance between the main political competitors, the vulnerability of majorities in power.<sup>10</sup> The highest the scores, the strongest the regional stability. The identified areas are the competitive area, the unstable area, the stable area, the politically affiliated area, the regionalist area.<sup>11</sup> The competitiveness group includes those regions characterized by low certainty about re-election due to the very open electoral competition expressed by at least one alternation of the main parties/coalitions in power, high vulnerability, low distance between the voting percentages of the main parties/coalitions. The instability group is composed by those territories where, even without an alternation in power, there is a modest degree of vulnerability and a small gap in the main parties/coalition voting percentages. The stability group includes those regions in

<sup>9</sup> The voting percentages include those lists that are not part of the coalition in one electoral date, but they are part of the coalition in the preceding and following election dates. See Annex.

<sup>10</sup> See Annex.

<sup>11</sup> Tronconi (2013) divides regions into four areas: competitiveness, instability, Cl stability and Cr stability.

which the majorities in power have confidence in their own re-election thanks to a low vulnerability and a non-existent alternation. The political affiliation group is very similar to the stability group; however, with respect to the preceding one, within this group regional majorities obtain such high voting percentages in all elections as to detect a margin of victory over political opponents that is very difficult to overcome if combined with a low index of change – more than 15% of voting percentage in average. Finally, the regionalist group stands as an exception with respect to the described areas: in this area, a regionalist political force holds the power – whether it is composed of a regionalist party alone or in coalition with other regionalist or national parties. As we will see, this case concerns two regions, Aosta Valley and Trentino Alto-Adige, both characterized by an alpine political culture (Vampa 2016): although through different alliances, regionalist parties hold power for the entire period of analysis; this means that the political characteristics of the two regions cannot be evaluated using (only) the classic right-left cleavage, but rather they should be assessed using the centre-periphery one (too).

### **The analysis of regional political systems' instability from 1970 to 2020**

The analysis of duration in power in terms of alternations examines which parties/coalitions won regional elections in each electoral round (Fig. 1). During the First Republic, either the DC or the PCI obtained the highest voting percentage in each regional election, apart from the elections in Aosta Valley and Trentino-Alto Adige. During the 1994-2010 period, a bipolar competition clearly emerges between the centre-right and centre-left coalitions – except for, again, the two regionalist regions. However, this time the situation seems a bit more mixed than in the past: during the First Republic, the DC ruled over most of regions apart from the two regionalist ones and the red strongholds, whereas during the bipolar Second Republic the CI coalition succeeded in winning the more elections than in the past, even with a certain continuity – as in Marche and Basilicata. Finally, during the tripolar Second Republic, the rare alternations in power of the First Republic has become a thing of the past. Few regions stick to a single political faction for the entire period, generally in those territories that already showed this characteristic before. In most regions, one or more alternations in power occurred, recently mostly in favour of the Cr coalition. As already pointed out, the third pole has not been able to win any regional election since its appearance into the political arena, also due to its “oppositional nature” (Tentoni 2020). However, the M5S role is still relevant to understand the transformation of the political competition from 2013: the presence of a third pole, in fact, has altered the balance of the Italian political system, exacerbating the clash at the polls and bringing greater instability to the entire country.

Figure 1- Alternation in power in Italian regions and total number of alternations per period between 1970-2020

	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	n
Piedmont	DC	PCI	DC	DC	DC	2
Aosta Valley	R	R	R	R	R	1
Lombardy	DC	DC	DC	DC	DC	0
Liguria	DC	PCI	DC	DC	DC	2
Trentino-Alto Adige	DC	DC	DC	R	R	1
Veneto	DC	DC	DC	DC	DC	0
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	DC	DC	DC	DC	DC	0
Emilia-Romagna	PCI	PCI	PCI	PCI	PCI	0
Tuscany	PCI	PCI	PCI	PCI	PCI	0
Umbria	PCI	PCI	PCI	PCI	PCI	0
Marche	DC	PCI	PCI	DC	DC	2
Lazio	DC	PCI	DC	DC	DC	2
Abruzzo	DC	DC	DC	DC	DC	0
Molise	DC	DC	DC	DC	DC	0
Campania	DC	DC	DC	DC	DC	0
Apulia	DC	DC	DC	DC	DC	0
Basilicata	DC	DC	DC	DC	DC	0
Calabria	DC	DC	DC	DC	DC	0
Sicily	DC	DC	DC	DC	DC	0
Sardinia	DC	DC	DC	Cd	DC	Cs

	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	n
Piedmont	Cr	Cr	Cl	Cr	Cl	Cr	4
Aosta Valley	R	R	R	R	R	R	0
Lombardy	Cr	Cr	Cr	Cr	Cr	Cr	0
Liguria	Cl	Cr	Cl	Cl	Cr	Cr	3
Trentino-Alto Adige	R	Cl-R	R-Cl	R-Cl	R-Cl	R-Cr	0
Veneto	Cr	Cr	Cr	Cr	Cr	Cr	0
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	Cr	Cl	Cr	Cl	Cr	Cr	4
Emilia-Romagna	Cl	Cl	Cl	Cl	Cl	Cl	0
Tuscany	Cl	Cl	Cl	Cl	Cl	Cl	0
Umbria	Cl	Cl	Cl	Cl	Cl	Cr	1
Marche	Cl	Cl	Cl	Cl	Cl	Cr	1
Lazio	Cl	Cr	Cl	Cr	Cl	Cl	4
Abruzzo	Cl	Cr	Cl	Cr	Cl	Cr	5
Molise	Cl	Cr	Cr	Cr	Cl	Cr	3
Campania	Cr	Cl	Cl	Cr	Cl	Cl	3
Apulia	Cr	Cr	Cl	Cl	Cl	Cl	1
Basilicata	Cl	Cl	Cl	Cl	Cl	Cr	1
Calabria	Cr	Cr	Cl	Cr	Cl	Cr	4
Sicily	Cr	Cr	Cr	Cr	Cl	Cr	2
Sardinia	Cr	Cl	Cr	Cl	Cr	Cr	4

In 1980s in Liguria, regional governments are formed by the so-called "pentapartite" (DC-PLI-PSI-PSDI-PRI), despite the PCI won regional elections.

Source: elaboration based on data by the Ministry of Interior.

The analysis of stability provides additional information with respect to the characteristics of regional political systems. Regions were grouped into the five different areas on the results obtained by each region according to the previously set out criteria. The comparison between the three periods provides useful insights into the strength of

regional majorities both in a synchronic and diachronic way. Fig. 2 shows the transformations occurred in entire period based on the classification by area resulted from the analysis. From the comparison of the three maps of Italy, it is already evident that regional political systems have been becoming more instable as much as the Peninsula lightens from the First Republic to the tripolar Second Republic.

Figure 2 - Regions classified by the five areas during the First Republic (1970-1992), the bipolar Second Republic (1994-2010) and the tripolar Second Republic (2013-2020)



During the First Republic (Tab. 1), the red Emilia-Romagna and Tuscany and the white Veneto and Molise are included in the area of political affiliation, where the large distance between the average voting percentages of the two parties, combined with a rather low rate of change, results in a rather high index of invulnerability. The voting percentages for one of the main parties – DC in Veneto and Molise, PCI in Emilia-Romagna and Tuscany – is higher than 45%; furthermore, there is a very consistent average gap with the other party's percentage: 34,3% in Molise, 27,3% in Veneto, 21,3% in Emilia-Romagna and 17,1% in Tuscany. In combination with a low change index, these conditions make the invulnerability index of the regions the highest in the country. Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Umbria, Abruzzo, Basilicata, and Sicily are part of the stability area: the invulnerability index is still relevant, but the voting percentage of the majority party is below 45%. Lombardy, Campania, Apulia, Calabria, and Sardinia fall within the area of instability: unsatisfactory results are found in terms of invulnerability index because of the short distance between the voting percentages of the two main parties (between 10% and 15%). Piedmont, Liguria, Marche, and Lazio are included into the competitive area, where there is at least one alternation in power and an open electoral competition so much so that neither the PCI nor the DC can be certain of their re-election: these territories are characterized by a small gap between the average voting percentages of the two parties (below 5%) and a low invulnerability index – negative indeed in the case of Marche. Finally, the regionalist area is composed by Aosta Valley and Trentino-Alto Adige, where the regionalist parties obtain large voting percentages, even more so if compared to the ones of DC and PCI.

Table 1 - Analysis of regional political systems during the First Republic

	DC	PCI	Difference	Change	Invulnerability
Piedmont	31.7	29.3	-2.4	1.9	0.5
Aosta valley	24.4	17.3	-7.1	5.2	1.9
Lombardy	36.7	26.4	-10.2	2.4	7.8
Liguria	30.4	34.5	4.1	3.3	0.7
Trentino-Alto Adige	31.4	9.4	-22.0	2.4	19.6
Veneto	47.5	20.2	-27.3	2.2	25.0
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	38.4	21.9	-16.5	2.0	14.5
Emilia-Romagna	25.1	46.5	21.3	2.1	19.2
Tuscany	28.0	45.1	17.1	2.5	14.6
Umbria	28.2	44.2	16.1	2.7	13.4
Marche	36.7	36.0	-0.7	2.2	-1.5
Lazio	33.5	29.7	-3.8	2.6	1.2
Abruzzo	44.5	28.3	-16.2	4.8	11.4
Molise	53.9	19.6	-34.3	7.4	26.9
Campania	38.4	24.3	-14.0	4.1	9.9
Apulia	39.4	26.1	-13.3	3.8	9.5
Basilicata	44.5	26.5	-17.9	5.1	12.8
Calabria	38.3	26.6	-11.7	6.2	5.4
Sicily	38.8	21.3	-17.5	5.8	11.7
Sardinia	36.9	28.7	-8.2	4.0	4.2

Source: elaboration based on data by the Ministry of Interior.

During the 1994-2010 period (Tab. 2), electoral competition is starting to be more open than in the past. The composition of the area of political affiliation is similar to the preceding one except for the substitution of Molise with Lombardy: here, in fact, the new Cr coalition led by Forza Italia relies. In the politically affiliated regions, one coalition obtains on average more than 50% of votes and the gap with the opposing coalition is high (more than 15%) as well as the invulnerability indexes – the highest in the country. The composition of the area of stability is similar to the previous one too: here, the novelty is the substitution of Abruzzo with Marche. In stable regions, there is no alternation in power and one coalition still obtains high voting percentages on average (except for Marche, in all regions one coalition receives more than 50% of votes); however, the high change index make the invulnerability index lower than in the previous group. The area of instability includes Piedmont, Liguria, and Apulia: at least one alternation in power can be found as well as worst results in terms of coalitions' difference (from 0,3% in Liguria to 11% in Piedmont) and invulnerability index (negative in Liguria and Apulia). The competitive area grows to six regions: Lazio, Abruzzo, Molise, Campania, Calabria, and Sardinia. The uncertainty of

re-election is caused by a mix of factors: the number of alternations in power, the very little gap between coalitions' average voting percentages (from 1,3% to 6%) and a negative invulnerability index in all territories. As in the previous period, in Aosta Valley and Trentino Alto-Adige, regionalist majorities can be certain about their own re-election because of the low voting percentages obtained by the Cr and Cl coalitions – below 30% of votes.

Table 2 - Analysis of regional political systems during the bipolar Second Republic

	Cr	Cl	Difference	Change	Invulnerability
Piedmont	51.2	40.2	-11.0	8.7	2.3
Aosta valley	21.1	12.5	-8.5	9.0	-0.5
Lombardy	58.0	33.6	-24.4	7.7	16.7
Liguria	46.4	46.7	0.3	3.3	-3.0
Trentino-Alto Adige	28.0	26.7	-1.3	5.0	-3.7
Veneto	56.9	32.6	-24.3	9.6	14.7
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	53.5	36.1	-17.4	10.2	7.2
Emilia-Romagna	37.8	54.8	17.0	6.7	10.4
Tuscany	36.1	52.7	16.6	8.6	8.0
Umbria	38.6	52.7	14.0	11.3	2.7
Marche	41.1	49.5	8.4	6.3	2.2
Lazio	49.0	43.0	-6.0	6.4	-0.4
Abruzzo	47.2	44.7	-2.5	6.0	-3.5
Molise	46.9	43.5	-3.4	9.3	-5.9
Campania	47.3	43.1	-4.2	12.5	-8.3
Apulia	48.6	41.6	-7.0	9.2	-2.2
Basilicata	34.7	53.5	18.9	17.4	1.4
Calabria	45.5	44.2	-1.3	7.6	-6.3
Sicily	56.5	34.3	-22.2	13.4	8.8
Sardinia	43.7	41.3	-2.4	5.8	-3.4

Source: elaboration based on data by the Ministry of Interior.

During the tripolar Second Republic, the instability increase continues in the wake of the previous period (tab. 3). The politically affiliated area now includes only one region, Veneto, where the Cr coalition still obtains high voting percentages on average (51,5%) and maintains a consisting gap with the Cr coalition (27,8% gap) and the M5S (36,2% gap), thus confirming a high invulnerability index (14,5). The area of stability is composed by those regions that were previously part of the politically affiliated area: Lombardy, Emilia-Romagna, and Tuscany. Here, even if one coalition still wins all the elections held in the period 2013-2020, the fluctuations of the electorate, especially during the most recent elections, make the gap between the two main coalitions be reduced (just above 10% of votes on average) and, consequently, the index of invulnerability suffer (from -0,1 in Lombardy to 2,5 in Tuscany). The

instability area is made up of only four regions: Piedmont, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Umbria, and Calabria. In this group, the M5S seems to attract part of the votes from both the Cr and Cl coalitions, reducing the distance between them (even below 5% in Umbria and Calabria); furthermore, the very low invulnerability index (apart from Friuli-Venezia Giulia) and at least one alternation in power contribute to increase instability. The competitive area includes almost the entire central-southern part of the country: Marche, Lazio, Abruzzo, Molise, Campania, Apulia, Basilicata, Sicily, Sardinia and only one region in the North, Liguria. The negative invulnerability index is the result of the M5S attracting significant electorate's shares of the Cr and Cl coalitions: the gap between the two main coalitions never exceeds the 10% of votes on average. Finally, once again, in the Aosta Valley and Trentino-Alto Adige the two main coalitions have not been able to reach an average of 30% of the preferences, while the M5S' voting percentage has stopped at around 10% of the votes.

Table 3 - Analysis of regional political systems during the tripolar Second Republic

	Cr	Cl	M5S	Bipolar difference a	Tripolar difference b	Change	Invulnerability
Piedmont	39.5	34.0	20.1	-5.5	16.6	5.3	0.1
Aosta valley	24.7	16.2	12.3	-8.5	8.2	13.7	-5.2
Lombardy	45.9	34.4	19.6	-11.5	20.5	11.6	-0.1
Liguria	38.0	31.0	22.3	-7.1	12.2	7.5	-0.4
Trentino-Alto Adige	22.0	21.6	9.3	-0.4	12.5	10.6	-10.2
Veneto	51.5	23.7	15.3	-27.8	22.3	13.2	14.5
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	44.9	30.4	14.7	-14.4	22.9	9.3	5.1
Emilia-Romagna	32.6	42.8	16.9	10.1	20.8	8.1	2.0
Tuscany	30.8	44.7	16.6	13.8	21.2	11.4	2.5
Umbria	39.4	36.0	18.3	-3.4	19.4	11.6	-8.2
Marche	35.6	34.8	22.6	-0.8	12.6	10.4	-9.5
Lazio	34.5	32.8	23.6	-1.7	10.0	10.5	-8.9
Abruzzo	37.7	29.3	26.9	-8.4	6.5	8.7	-0.3
Molise	35.9	27.8	28.6	-8.1	3.2	10.1	-2.0
Campania	32.8	34.7	25.7	1.9	8.1	11.6	-9.7
Apulia	36.8	32.3	24.6	-4.5	9.9	9.8	-5.3
Basilicata	29.8	36.0	24.6	6.2	8.4	18.7	-12.4
Calabria	41.5	36.7	16.0	-4.8	23.1	16.7	-11.9
Sicily	35.1	24.4	29.8	-10.7	0.0	8.9	1.8
Sardinia	36.2	31.3	22.9	-4.8	10.8	6.0	-1.1

<sup>a</sup> Difference between centre-right and centre-left coalitions.

<sup>b</sup> Difference between centre-right and centre-left coalitions and M5S.

Source: based on data from Ministry of Interior.

The comparison between the three periods (Fig. 3) confirms the growing instability in regional political system, whose electoral geographies make them more and more similar to a “Newton disc” (Diamanti 2009). The competitive area has expanded from four during the First Republic to ten regions in the tripolar Second Republic – i.e., half of the country. Furthermore, in recent years the rest of Italian regions are mostly distributed between the area of instability and that of stability, whereas in the politically affiliated area only Veneto survives. The results are compatible with the arguments of Cotta and Verzichelli (2020: 292), according to whom «the orientations of the old electoral Italy are still discernible, but it is increasingly difficult to bet on the solidity and boundaries of these areas». In short, cards have been reshuffled again: except for the regionalist area and Veneto, all regions have been experiencing a worsening of their invulnerability and stability.

Figure 3 - Regions classified by area during the three periods of analysis

	First Republic	Bipolar Second Republic	Tripolar Second Republic
Regionalist area	Aosta Valley Trentino-Alto Adige	Aosta Valley (=) Trentino-Alto Adige (=)	Aosta Valley (=) Trentino-Alto Adige (=)
Competitive area	Piedmont Liguria Marche Lazio	Lazio (=) Abruzzo (-) Molise (-) Campania (-) Calabria (-) Sardinia (-)	Liguria (-) Lazio (=) Marche (-) Abruzzo (=) Molise (-) Campania (=) Basilicata (-) Apulia (-) Sicily (-) Sardinia (=)
Instability area	Lombardy Campania Apulia Calabria Sardinia	Piedmont (+) Liguria (+) Apulia (=)	Piedmont (=) Friuli-Venezia Giulia (-) Umbria (-) Calabria (+)
Stability area	Friuli-Venezia Giulia Umbria Abruzzo Basilicata Sicily	Friuli-Venezia Giulia (=) Marche (+) Umbria (=) Basilicata (=) Sicily (=)	Lombardy (-) Emilia-Romagna (-) Tuscany (-)
Politically affiliated area	Veneto Emilia-Romagna Tuscany Molise	Veneto (=) Lombardy (+) Emilia-Romagna (=) Tuscany (=)	Veneto (=)

Note: The symbols indicate the changes in the area to which the region belongs: (=) means no change with respect to the previous period; (-) means a change towards a less stable area with respect to the previous period; (+) means a change towards a more stable area with respect to the previous period.



## Instability, new political actors and party politics

The analysis shows that the increasing instability that affected Italian regional politics until the appearance of the M5S (Bolgherini and Grimaldi 2015), has continued to do so in recent years. The results are in line with the argument in favour of the existence of multiple regional political systems (Tentoni 2020); however, there remains a lot more to be said about the causes of this instability. At this point, we can at least provide some preliminary suggestions using the recent literature on Italian politics. In this way, the increasing regional instability can be looked in conjunction with, on the one side, the transformations of the political system, and, on the other side, the evolution of party politics.

With regards to the transformation of the political system, we refer to two elements: from the one side, the climbing of new parties in the 90s; from the other side, the emergence of the M5S in 2013. Especially after 2013, the social and economic dynamics, the intensification of the centre-periphery cleavage and the rise of new political actors have marked «the end of any foreclosure in the change of vote» (Tentoni 2020). The M5S has obtained voting percentages which range on average from 9,34% in Trentino-Alto Adige to 29,84% in Sicily, that is a remarkable result considering that regional voting systems favour coalitions rather than standing alone parties (Masseti 2018); furthermore, in 2015 regional electoral round it was the second most voted party in seven regions – Molise in 2013; Abruzzo and Piedmont in 2014; Liguria, Umbria, Marche and Apulia in 2015. These results are mostly due to a shift from the centre-right and/or centre-left electorates (Bolgherini and Grimaldi 2015; Russo et al. 2017; Tentoni 2018; Cotta and Verzichelli 2020). For this reason, the role of the M5S becomes pivotal to understand the regional political dynamics of the latest period. Initially, the M5S has been able to activate the protest-vote of the abstentionists (Colloca and Marangoni 2017), but after few years it managed to win the national election in 2018 and to rule the country together with the *Lega* until August 2019, then the centre-left coalition until February 2021. Depending on the region, it is possible to identify different voting dynamics: for example, in some cases the M5S has absorbed parts of the electorate of both coalitions (Colloca and Marangoni 2017), thus making the electoral competition between them even tighter, while in other cases it has exploited one coalition's difficulties, as happened in Marche and Apulia with regards to the centre-right coalition (temporary) fragmentation in 2015 (Bolgherini and Grimaldi 2015). In some regions, the party was able to attract voters in national elections, but not in regional and European ones, hence transferring them to one of the main coalitions as happened in Basilicata (Valbruzzi 2019). Finally, in some cases the M5S attracted the votes of the weaker coalition, making the domain of the winning one even

more invulnerable, as in 2013 elections in the red zone (Russo et al. 2017). The results of the analysis show that all the scenarios have variously become true: the only region that still in the politically affiliated area, Veneto, is the only one in which the M5S never obtained significant results in regional elections (Bolgherini and Grimaldi 2015); even the red regions' invulnerability finally collapsed, as the most recent regional elections highlighted in Tuscany (Fittipaldi 2021). As a result, in this new "age of the clay" (Ignazi 2018), the transformation of the electoral competition had an effect in the already unstable regions as well as in the most stable ones. Veneto could be an example of the latter dynamics: the voting percentages of the winning centre-right coalition maintain the same level between the second and the third period, while the percentages of the centre-left coalition drop at a similar extent as the rise of the M5S' share of votes. Here, the recent regional electoral performances of the *Lega* could suggest a new invulnerability of the "green party". However, one should remember that the sharp increase in the party support is relatively recent, because before 2018 the *Lega* only received high voting percentages in regional elections. Furthermore, the last regional election has been won by the centre-right coalition guided by *Lega* above all thanks to the list of the candidate for President – collecting more than 44% of the votes; indeed, this element, together with other similar regional electoral results in 2020 (Grimaldi 2021; Reda 2021), has questioned the role of national parties in regional electoral competition (Vampa 2021). In the (former) red stronghold, the success of the centre-left coalition could be attributed to the long-proven efficiency of its majorities and to the activation of a silent left-wing electorate defending the old red political affiliation, rather than the survival of a strong political subculture (Caciagli 2011; Cotta and Verzichelli 2020). The electoral vote alone cannot be considered as an indicator for the presence of subcultures (Caciagli 2011); indeed, the social capital analysis shows the sunset of white and red subcultures' primacy in favour of Trentino-Alto Adige and Friuli-Venezia Giulia (Bordandini and Cartocci 2014). At the end, even if the *Partito Democratico*, the centre-left main party, still hold the biggest share of votes in Emilia-Romagna, a dramatic part of its pool of votes has shifted towards the M5S and the *Lega*, especially in the periphery (Ignazi 2018; Pellegrino 2020).

With regards to the transformation of parties' structure, the increasing distance between territory and politics could be linked to the greater instability that has been affecting regional political systems. Is the increasing instability the cause or the effect of this distance? To answer this question, a more in-depth analysis of the phenomenon would be needed. At this point, one can only suggest that it is not a coincidence that both the dynamics have emerged after the *Tangentopoli* scandal: the new parties replacing the mass-parties had in fact little interest in set down roots in any territory. While the PCI heirs held on to the idea of a territorially founded party to

retrieve consensus, mostly in difficult times, the new centre-right political opponent, Berlusconi's *Forza Italia*, was a personal party organized in a very different way from the past (Calise 2000; Ignazi 2018). The strategic use of the media (television first, social networks then) has helped political leaders to enter every voter's house. With the need of a strong territorial organization gone, politics have no interest in committing to local interests but rather it is more inclined to focus on topics affecting society as a whole. The establishment of a two-dimensional political space based on the left-right and anti-pro establishment cleavages (De Sio and Schadee 2013) has favoured the rise of the non-ideological M5S in the whole country, especially in the Southern regions (Russo et al. 2017), without the need of presenting itself as territorially affiliated. The new style of "doing politics" influenced the entire party system. With this regard, the transformation of *Lega* provides the most evident example: born with a very deep ethno-regionalist core, during the last decade it has abandoned its federalist purpose to embrace a national one, bringing its ideas all way down to Sicily (Albertazzi et al. 2018).

Finally, the increasing instability of regions might be a consequence of the progressive crumbling of the sacredness that has always surrounded "doing politics", causing trouble of responsibility and accountability with respect to policy making. The scandals that several times hit the national, regional and local politicians, the low turnout and the drastic drop in electoral participation in all kinds of elections<sup>12</sup> have given rise to a profound distance between government and governed as well as concerns about democratic legitimacy (Masseti 2018). However, territorial and regional political forces play a fundamental role in the elaboration and implementation of social policies. Can the increasing alternation and the growing instability be stretched up to the point to question the salience of politics in influencing the content of policy? The link between instability and political performance is not new to the academic literature (Mack Smith 1997; Huber 1998; Vassallo 2013). When a majority is considered "strong and stable", it can promote its political vision through public policies since it has no reason to worry about overturning the electoral result in the next round (Vassallo 2013).<sup>13</sup> Given the limited time of a legislature compared to that necessary for the design, programming, and implementation of complex public policies, it is necessary for the majority in power to enjoy some security in re-election in order to work over longer time horizons. The

<sup>12</sup> Electoral participation in political elections has fallen below 80% of entitled voters because of the new wave of mistrust in the political class generated by the scandals and the economic crisis of 2008. Abstention has been initially mitigated by the emergence of anti-establishment parties as the M5S (Cotta e Verzichelli 2020; Tentoni 2018), though it reached the record threshold of 27,1% of entitled voters in 2018 general elections.

<sup>13</sup> Other two conditions are needed, i.e., a small number of large parties and few internal veto players (Vassallo 2013).

decline of the membership vote in favour of the exchange one has led parties to provide policies in order to meet their electorate's interests – which very often means to neglect medium level policies (Guarnieri 2016). Government instability threatens the cohesion necessary for the elaboration and implementation of complex political programs because ruling majorities prefer policy allowing electoral returns in the short term (Huber 1998; Tentoni 2018). In particular, the new parties and the presence of a deinstitutionalised party system are problematic in terms of governments' accountability and quality of democracy (Chiaromonte and Emanuele 2015). However, Huber (1998) argues that instability represents an obstacle that can be overcome, especially in the long run. Furthermore, the presence of stable governments is not a guarantee of better policies: precisely the confidence about one's re-election is likely to make majorities feel excessively self-referential (Barbieri and Damiani 2011), with the risk of producing a stable, but still, government (Sartori 1982). Sartori (1982) denied on several occasions that a stable government – defined as a lasting one – is efficient *per se*. However, if stability cannot be considered a sufficient condition of efficiency, it should in any case be understood as a necessary one (Battezzozzore 1987).

## Conclusion

This paper aims to be a theoretical and empirical update of the studies on regional politics. In particular, it was under investigation whether the instability of regional systems has increased or decreased from the 1970 regional elections until 2020. The results confirm that instability has grown in all regions from 1970 to 2015; furthermore, they argue that in recent years instability has affected even those territories that have been considered as politically affiliated and more stable, except for Veneto – where the “green subculture” and the popularity of the President of the Region certainly played a role. Then, these results have been discussed in the light of some of the most relevant transformations of the Italian political system: the decline of mass parties, the presence of a third pole since 2013, the changing relationship between politics and territory.

The study of regional stability is of great importance to understand the status of politics within a country. This work has tried to contribute with an update of the literature, but much more can be said about how instability affects the voting behaviour, the party system, the electoral competition, etc. In our opinion, further studies should focus on two main aspects: first, the elements that favoured the increase of instability in each regional system – some of which we tried to highlight in the last paragraph;

secondly, the consequences of regional instability on policymaking, even more considering the key role of Italian subnational governments in some welfare sectors.

To conclude, two main issues remain to be addressed concerning future developments of political regional systems. First, the latest electoral results seem to put an end to the third pole's existence because of the poor support received by M5S and its incapacity to institutionalize itself at regional level (Grimaldi 2021). The M5S joined a coalition with the centre-left parties in some of the most recent regional elections; however, the two parties ran divided – and lost – in autumn 2022 national elections. In those occasions, for once the structure of political competition between the regional and national levels was different; whether the alliance will be renewed in the future and/or the M5S will definitively fail to institutionalize itself (then favouring a return to bipolarism) remains to be seen.

Recently, the Covid-19 crisis has given new attention to the territorial dimension of politics. It is no coincidence that regional Presidents became a reference point for citizens as well as for national and international politicians since the beginning of the pandemic. During autumn 2020 regional elections, in fact, the distance between national politics and the territory was so evident that the lists of candidate Presidents were the ones receiving the highest voting percentages, mostly in those regions where the opinion voting was generally strong; however, this fact also suggests that to a certain extent working within the territory pays back in electoral terms.

*[Submitted 22 September 2022 – accepted 24 March 2023]*

## Annex

Parties included in the coalition outside of the declared cases

Region	Centre-right coalition	Centre-left coalition
Abruzzo	AN: 1994 national el. UDC and Fiamma Tricolore: 2008 national el. La Destra: 2010 regional el.	RC: 1996 national el.
Aosta Valley	-	*Regionalist parties have been excluded from this calculation
Apulia	Fiamma Tricolore: 2001 national el. (Senate) UDC and PLI: 2008 national el.	RC: 1996-2001 national el. (Senate) Pop: 1999 European el.
Basilicata	Fiamma Tricolore: 2005 regional el. UDC and Fiamma Tricolore: 2008 national el.	RC: 1995 regional el.; 2001 national el.
Calabria	UDC and Fiamma Tricolore: 2008 national el.	RC: 1995 regional el. IdV: 2013 national el.
Campania	AN: 1994 national el. UDC and Fiamma Tricolore: 2008 national el.	RC: 1995 regional el. PRI: 1999-2004 European el. Europa Verde: 2019 European el.
Emilia-Romagna	AN: 1994 national el. UDC: 2008 national el.; 2015 regional el.	Europa Verde: 2019 European el.
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	AN: 1994 national el. LN: 1996 national el. UDC: 2008 national el.	-
Lazio	UDC: 2008 national el. Fiamma Tricolore: 2013 national el.	Pop: 1999 European el. UDEUR: 2004 European el.
Liguria	AN: 1994 national el. LN: 1996 national el. UDC: 2008 national el.	RC: 1995 regional el.; 2001 national el.
Lombardy	AN: 1994 national el. LN: 1996 national el. UDC: 2004 European el.; 2006 national el. (Senate) Fiamma Tricolore-UDC: 2008 national el.	RC: 1995 regional el.; Comunisti Italiani: 2000 regional el.; 2001 national el. (Senate). IdV: 2004 European el. +Europa: 2019 European el.
Marche	LN: 1995 regional el.; 1996 national el. UDC: 2008 national el. La Destra: 2009 European el. L-Fdl: 2015 regional el.	Pop: 1999 European el. Comunisti Italiani: 2001 national el. SEL: 2010 regional el.
Molise	UDC-Fiamma Tricolore: 2008 national el. La Destra: 2010 regional el.	IdV and RC: 2001 national el.
Piedmont	AN: 1994 national el. LN: 1995 regional el. UDC-Fiamma Tricolore: 2008 national el. UDC: 2015 regional el.	RC: 1995 regional el.; 1996 national el. (Senate) Italia Europa Insieme: 2018 national el. (Senate)

Sardinia	AN: 1994 national el. UDC-Fiamma Tricolore: 2008 national el.	RC: 1996 national el.
Sicily	UDC-Fiamma Tricolore: 2008 national el. La Destra: 2010 regional el.	RC: 2001 national el. IdV: 2001 national el.
Tuscany	AN: 1994 national el. LN: 1996 national el. (Chamber of Deputies) UDC-Fiamma Tricolore: 2008 national el. LN-Fdl: 2015 regional el.	UDEUR: 2004 European el. RC: 2005 regional el. Europa Verde: 2019 European el.
Trentino-Alto Adige	AN: 1994 national el. LN: 1996 national el. Fdl: 2013 regional el.	R-IdV: 2003 regional el. Comunisti Italiani: 2004 European el. *SVP has been excluded from this calculation except in the case of merging with the main centre-left party (i.e. 2006 el.).
Umbria	LN: 1996 national el. Nuovo PSI: 2005 regional el. UDC: 2008 national el.	RC: 2001 national el. Europa Verde: 2019 European el.
Veneto	AN: 1994 national el.; 1999 European el. LN: 1995 regional el. UDC-Fiamma Tricolore: 2008 national el.	IdV: 2001 national el. (Senate); 2004 European el.

AN: Alleanza Nazionale; Fdl: Fratelli d'Italia; FI: Forza Italia; IdV: Italia dei Valori; L: Lega; LN: Lega Nord; Pop: Popolari/Partito Popolare; RC: Rifondazione Comunista; SVP: Südtiroler Volkspartei; UDC: Unione di Centro; UDEUR: Unione Democratici per l'Europa

#### Operational definitions

Region	Region name
Coalition 1	Average percentage of votes obtained in political, regional and European elections by the centre-right coalition
Coalition 2	Average percentage of votes obtained in political, regional and European elections by the centre-left coalition
Difference	Coalition 2 – Coalition 1
Change	Average variation in absolute value of the gap between the votes of each electoral round and the previous one obtained by each coalition.
Invulnerability	Difference between “Difference” in absolute value and “Change”

Operational categories used to classify regions into the five areas

	1970-1990	1995-2010	2013-2020
Alternation	0 = no DC / PCI government 1 = more than one change 3 = one change 5 = no change	0 = no Cr / Cl government 1 = more than one change 3 = one change 5 = no change	0 = no Cr / Cl / M5S government 1 = more than one change 3 = one change 5 = no change
Coalition 1	DC: voting percentages 0 = <24% 1 = between 25% and 34.9% 2 = between 35% and 44.9% 5 => 45%	Cr: voting percentages 0 = <24% 1 = between 25% and 34.9% 2 = between 35% and 44.9% 5 => 45%	Cr: voting percentages 0 = <24% 1 = between 25% and 34.9% 2 = between 35% and 44.9% 5 => 45%
Coalition 2	PCI: voting percentages 0 = <24% 1 = between 25% and 34.9% 2 = between 35% and 44.9% 5 => 45%	Cl: voting percentages 0 = <24% 1 = between 25% and 34.9% 2 = between 35% and 44.9% 5 => 45%	Cl: voting percentages 0 = <24% 1 = between 25% and 34.9% 2 = between 35% and 44.9% 5 => 45%
Difference	0 = bet. +/- 5 1 = bet. +/- 5 and +/- 10 3 = bet. +/- 10 and +/- 15 5 => +/- 15	0 = bet. +/- 5 1 = bet. +/- 5 and +/- 10 3 = bet. +/- 10 and +/- 15 5 => +/- 15	0 = bet. +/- 5 1 = bet. +/- 5 and +/- 10 3 = bet. +/- 10 and +/- 15 5 => +/- 15
Invulnerability	0 = negative 1 = between 0 and 1.99 3 = between 2 and 10 5 => 10	0 = negative 1 = between 0 and 1.99 3 = between 2 and 10 5 => 10	0 = negative 1 = between 0 and 1.99 3 = between 2 and 10 5 => 10
Difference between the three poles			0 = bet. +/- 5 1 = bet. +/- 5 and +/- 10 3 = bet. +/- 10 and +/- 15 5 => +/- 15



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