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**A simulative assessment of the Italian
electoral system**

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Introduction

From 1948 to 1992 members of both houses of the Italian Parliament were elected by proportional representation. Since 1993 a new electoral system has been adopted. Three quarters of the seats are elected by plurality voting in single member districts, while the remaining seats are filled by proportional representation. This choice was justified by the fact that in 44 years some 50 governments were in office, on average for less than one year. The new electoral system was supposed to be the right tool to obtain more stable and long-lasting governments. Unfortunately, this was not the case.

In section 1 we propose two simple indices we use to evaluate the goodness of an electoral system. In section 2 we apply them to the Parliaments elected both by the old (1992) and by the new (1994, 1996 and 2001) electoral system. Section 3 is devoted to some simulations based on electoral data from 1992 to 2001. The aim is to present some possible electoral results with different electoral systems. In section 4 we analyse the relevance of strategic voting, while section 5 is devoted to some forecasting about the next elections (2006). Conclusions are in section 6.

1. Representativeness and Governability

The performance of a Parliament affects a lot of features¹. Ideally, a criterion to choose the best electoral system should take account of all of them. However, there is a general agreement that the most relevant ones are actually two: representativeness (R) and governability (G).

Representativeness may be defined “the capacity to correctly represent the choices of the electors”. The parliament elected by pure proportionality in a nation-wide district may be assumed to be the most representative². When, under an electoral system, some parties obtain more seats than under the proportional rule, we have a loss of representativeness. This allows to build a very intuitive index of representativeness (r_j):

$$r_j = 1 - \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n \max\{S_{j,i} - S_{PP,i}, 0\}}{S_T} \quad (1)$$

where:

j = electoral system

i = party

n = number of parties

$S_{j,i}$ = number of seats obtained by party i under system j

$S_{PP,i}$ = number of seats obtained by party i under perfect proportional rule

S_T = total number of seats in the House

The range of r_j is (0,1]. When it is equal to 1, the parliament is as representative as under the proportional rule³.

Governability may be defined “the capacity to effectively govern the State”. We assume that governability is inversely related to the number of parties in the governing coalition, and directly to the number of seats⁴. The resulting index (g_j) is:

¹ See Ortona, 2000, for a sixteen-item, non exhaustive list.

² Actually, the representativeness of Parliaments elected by one-district pure proportionality may be different due to the "running costs". We will not deal with this topic here, as it concerns mostly inter-country comparisons.

³ Note that the indices of proportionality based on the difference between the share of votes and the share of seats, like Gallagher's, are not suitable to compare the representativeness of electoral systems, because the share of votes is affected by the electoral system.

⁴ This assumption is in line with mainstream theory (for a discussion see f.i. Shugart and Wattenberg, 2001, ch.2). However, it has been challenged by several authors (see f.i. Farrell, 2001, ch 9.).

$$g_j = \frac{S_{j,m}}{P_m} * \frac{1}{S_T} \quad (2)$$

where:

m = majority

$S_{j,m}$ = number of seats obtained by the majority m under system j

P_m = number of parties in the majority

How is it possible to compare the performance of different systems? When a system results to be either dominant among a set of systems (i.e. it shows the highest levels of representativeness and governability) or dominated by one of them, there is no doubt. The former is the best system while the latter is ruled out. When there exists a trade-off between the two dimensions, we have to establish a criterion to decide which one is the most relevant. A possible solution is to introduce a social utility function⁵:

$$U = Ag^a r^b \quad (3)$$

where:

A = constant term

g = index of governability

r = index of representativeness

a = partial elasticity of the utility with respect to g

b = partial elasticity of the utility with respect to r

The relative importance of the two main dimension is represented by the ratio a/b ⁶. When its value is higher than 1, governability is assigned a higher weight than representativeness. When a/b is lower than 1, representativeness is the most relevant dimension. Obviously, the system with the highest value of U is the best one.

The problem of choosing the best electoral system is reduced to that of choosing the value of a/b . The proof follows.

⁵ There are several reasons why a Cobb-Douglas function is most suitable; they are illustrated in Fragnelli *et al.*, 2006.

⁶ Actually, the ratio of partial elasticities may be considered a proxy for the relative weight that the community assigns to relative increase in the value of g and r . See Fragnelli *et al.* (2006) for a broader discussion.

Let's indicate, for simplicity, an electoral system X with small letters, and another one Y with capital. From $u > U$ iff $Ag^a r^b > AG^a R^b$ we get $u > U$ iff $(g/G)^a > (R/r)^b$, $u > U$ iff $(g/G)^{a/b} > (R/r)$, and finally

[1] $u > U$ iff $a/b > \ln(R/r)/\ln(g/G)$ [if $g > G$; otherwise $U < u$. The case of $g = G$ is trivial.]

A major problem is how to determine the ratio a/b . A normative solution may be represented by a decision of the Supreme Court or someone else at a very high level. Alternatively, someone (but not the Parliament itself) may vote on its value. A positive solution may be obtained through an applied analysis where the values of a and b are chosen by the voters. An experiment and a further discussion is in Ortona (2005).

2. The Italian Parliament from 1992 to 2001

In 1992 Italian citizens chose for the last time their Parliament by proportional representation (see Table 1 for the results).

Table 1 – Chamber of Deputies in 1992

| Parties | Seats – Proportional system |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|
| <i>DC</i> | 206 |
| <i>PDS</i> | 107 |
| <i>PSI</i> | 92 |
| <i>Lega lombarda</i> | 55 |
| <i>Rif Comunista</i> | 35 |
| <i>MSI</i> | 34 |
| <i>PRI</i> | 27 |
| <i>PLI</i> | 17 |
| <i>PSDI</i> | 16 |
| <i>Verdi</i> | 16 |
| <i>la Rete</i> | 12 |
| <i>Pannella</i> | 7 |
| <i>Others</i> | 6 |

In 1993 the electoral system was changed, to become a mixed system with 75% of seats elected by plurality and 25% by proportional representation. In the meanwhile, a big corruption scandal (*Tangentopoli*) changed the political scenario. The *Democrazia Cristiana* (DC) split into two parties: PPI and CCD. The *Lega Lombarda* became the *Lega Nord*, while the MSI changed its name into AN. A new right-wing party entered the political scene: *Forza Italia*.

In 1994 the major coalition was the *Polo* (*Polo della Libertà*⁷ in the north and *Polo del Buon Governo*⁸ in the south). The results are in Table 2.

⁷ An alliance of *Forza Italia* with CCD and the *Lega Nord*.

⁸ An alliance of *Forza Italia* with CCD and AN.

Table 2 – Chamber of Deputies in 1994

| Alliances | Seats |
|---|-------|
| <i>Polo</i> | 366 |
| <i>Progressisti</i> ⁹ | 213 |
| <i>Patto per l'Italia</i> ¹⁰ | 46 |
| <i>SVP</i> | 3 |
| <i>UV</i> | 1 |
| <i>LAM</i> | 1 |

In 1995 the center-right wing of the PPI left the party and formed the CDU. In 1996 the winning coalition was the *Ulivo* (PDS + PPI – SVP + *Verdi* + *Rinnovamento Italiano*). The results are in Table 3.

Table 3 – Chamber of Deputies in 1996

| Alliances | Seats |
|--|-------|
| <i>Ulivo</i> | 287 |
| <i>Polo per le libertà</i> ¹¹ | 246 |
| <i>Lega Nord</i> | 59 |
| <i>Rif. comunista</i> | 35 |
| <i>UV</i> | 1 |
| <i>LAM</i> | 1 |
| <i>Democrazia libertà</i> | 1 |

In 1998, the less-extreme part of *Rifondazione Comunista* left the party and constituted the *Partito dei Comunisti Italiani*. Following other marginal secessions in different parties, UDR (UDEUR after few months), Democratici and SDI entered the political system. Before the elections of 2001, an alliance of PPI, *Rinnovamento Italiano* and other new left-wing forces resulted in a new party, *La Margherita*.

In 2001, the winner was the *Casa delle Libertà* (*Forza Italia* + AN + UDC¹² + *Lega Nord*). The results are in Table 4.

⁹ PDS + *Verdi* + *La Rete* + *Rifondazione Comunista* + *Alleanza Democratica*.

¹⁰ PPI + *Patto Segni*.

¹¹ *Forza Italia* + AN + CCD + CDU

¹² CCD + CDU

Table 4 – Chamber of Deputies in 2001

| Alliances | Seats |
|----------------------------|--------------|
| <i>Casa delle libertà</i> | 368 |
| <i>Ulivo</i> ¹³ | 247 |
| <i>Rif. comunista</i> | 11 |
| <i>SVP</i> | 3 |
| <i>UV</i> | 1 |

The existence of a proportional share allows to apply our index of representativeness. As expected, the mixed system from 1994 to 2001 is always less representative than the proportional one in 1992 (see Table 5). However it performs quite well, mostly if one takes the high share of plurality seats into account. It is noticeable the absence of a negative trend: the adoption of plurality did not imply a tendency towards a reduction of the number of parties.

Table 5 – Representativeness

| Year | <i>r</i> |
|-------------|---------------------------|
| 1992 | 0.96 ¹⁴ |
| 1994 | 0.83 |
| 1996 | 0.89 |
| 2001 | 0.87 |

The index of governability was computed for the House where the Government had the lowest ratio between the number of seats in the majority (computed on the basis of the vote of confidence) and the total number of seats. The Governments with the highest values are those lead by Berlusconi, while the lowest are those of D'Alema's and Amato's (II) leadership. However the values are generally low, and not that different, due to the high number of parties in the majority coalition. The figures are in Table 6.

¹³ PDS + *La Margherita* + SDI + *Verdi* + *Comunisti Italiani*.

¹⁴ The representativeness index in 1992 is lower than 1 due to the existence of many multi-member electoral districts instead of a single national district.

Table 6 – Governability

| Year | Prime Minister | Alliance | Seats | <i>g</i> |
|--------------------|----------------|---|-------|--------------|
| 1992 | Amato I | DC + PSI + PLI + PSDI | 173* | 0.135 |
| 1993 | Ciampi | DC + PSI + PLI + PSDI | 309 | 0.123 |
| 1994 ¹⁵ | Berlusconi I | <i>Forza Italia</i> + CCD + AN + <i>Lega Nord</i> | 159* | 0.124 |
| 1996 | Prodi | PDS + PPI – SVP + <i>Verdi</i> + <i>Rinnovamento Italiano</i> + <i>Rifondazione Comunista</i> | 322 | 0.102 |
| 1998 | D'Alema I | DS ¹⁶ + PPI – SVP + <i>Verdi</i> + <i>Rinnovamento Italiano</i> + <i>Comunisti Italiani</i> + UDR + SDI | 333 | 0.075 |
| 1999 | D'Alema II | DS + PPI – SVP + <i>Verdi</i> + <i>Democratici</i> + <i>Comunisti Italiani</i> + UDEUR | 310 | 0.082 |
| 2000 | Amato II | DS + PPI – SVP + <i>Verdi</i> + <i>Democratici</i> + <i>Comunisti Italiani</i> + UDEUR + SDI + <i>Rinnovamento Italiano</i> | 319 | 0.063 |
| 2001 | Berlusconi II | <i>Forza Italia</i> + UDC + AN + <i>Lega Nord</i> | 175* | 0.137 |
| 2005 | Berlusconi III | <i>Forza Italia</i> + UDC + AN + <i>Lega Nord</i> | 334 | 0.133 |

* Seats in the Senate

We may compare these governments by using the utility function (3). First of all, we obtain the best government for each legislative term of office by ruling out the dominated governments. Amato I (1992), Berlusconi I (1994), Prodi (1996), Berlusconi II (2001) result to be the best. Secondly, we rule out the dominated governments among the best ones for each period. The final

¹⁵ In 1995 Mr. Dini formed a non-political government of technical experts. We do not consider this government because we cannot provide a good proxy of the number of parties that supported it.

¹⁶ The former PDS

comparison is between Amato I and Berlusconi II. The citizens with a value of a/b equal to 6.7 are indifferent between the two governments. Those with a value of a/b greater than 6.7 prefer Berlusconi II. Amato I is chosen when a/b is lower than 6.7. People who find Berlusconi II better than Amato I have a very strong preference for governability. Actually, they accept up to a 6.7% decrease in representativeness in exchange for a 1% increase in governability.

3. The Italian Parliament from 1992 to 2001: some simulations with different electoral systems

In the previous section we examined the goodness of the Parliaments and governments elected from 1992 to 2001 under the actual electoral system. The aim of this section is to simulate what would have happened under different electoral systems. In particular, on the basis of the recent debates about the choice between a proportional and a plurality system, we start from the real electoral data and we compare the mixed system both with the national pure proportional representation and with the plurality system. Under the mixed system the Chamber of Deputies is elected through two lists: a list for the seats voted by proportional representation and a list for the deputies chosen by the plurality system. We use the real votes obtained by the parties in the former to simulate the Parliament under the proportional system (with one nation-wide district) and the votes obtained in the latter to simulate the Parliament under the plurality system. The results of the simulations are in Table 7, 8 and 9.

Table 7 – Chamber of Deputies in 1994 – simulations

| Parties | Seats | | |
|---------------------------|---------------|---------------------|------------------|
| | Actual system | Proportional system | Plurality system |
| <i>Progressisti</i> | 213 | 203 | 218 |
| <i>Polo</i> | 366 | 271 | 401 |
| <i>Patto per l'Italia</i> | 46 | 99 | 5 |
| <i>SVP</i> | 3 | 4 | 4 |
| <i>UV</i> | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| <i>LAM</i> | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| <i>Others</i> | 0 | 52 | 0 |

Table 8 – Chamber of Deputies in 1996 – simulations

| Parties | Seats | | |
|----------------------------|---------------|---------------------|------------------|
| | Actual system | Proportional system | Plurality system |
| <i>Ulivo</i> | 287 | 219 | 331 |
| <i>Polo per le libertà</i> | 246 | 266 | 224 |
| <i>Lega Nord</i> | 59 | 64 | 52 |
| <i>Rif.comunista</i> | 35 | 54 | 20 |
| <i>UV</i> | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| <i>LAM</i> | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| <i>Democrazia libertà</i> | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| <i>Others</i> | 0 | 26 | 0 |

Table 9 – Chamber of Deputies in 2001 – simulations

| Parties | Seats | | |
|---------------------------|---------------|---------------------|------------------|
| | Actual system | Proportional system | Plurality system |
| <i>Casa delle libertà</i> | 368 | 313 | 374 |
| <i>Ulivo</i> | 247 | 221 | 251 |
| <i>Rif. comunista</i> | 11 | 31 | 0 |
| <i>SVP</i> | 3 | 3 | 4 |
| <i>UV</i> | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| <i>Others</i> | 0 | 62 | 0 |

In 1994 and 1996, the winning coalitions (*Polo* and *Ulivo*) would experience a relevant difference of seats if switching from the actual mixed system to one of the others. *Patto per l'Italia* and *Rifondazione Comunista* too would score significantly different results. At the same time, the difference of seats obtained by the main contenders of the winners (*Progressisti* and *Polo*) and by *Lega Nord* is quite limited.

The scenario for 2001 is different. The presence of decoy lists (“liste civetta”) eliminates any relevant difference of seats between the mixed and the plurality system for the winners. Also, it is noticeable that in 1994 the actual majority would not have been such under proportionality. Moreover, in 1996 a single-party majority would have been possible under plurality (actually a single-coalition one), while in 2001 the system does not affect the composition of the majority.

What is the best system? The indices of representativeness (Table 10) and governability (Table 11) allow to compare the three different systems for each year (the data for the actual system are in table 5 and 6).

Table 10– Representativeness

| Year | Proportional system | Plurality system |
|------|---------------------|------------------|
| 1994 | 1 | 0.77 |
| 1996 | 1 | 0.82 |
| 2001 | 1 | 0.85 |

Table 11 – Governability

| Year | Proportional system | | | Plurality System | | |
|------|--|------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|-------|-------|
| | Alliance | Seats | g | Alliance | Seats | g |
| 1994 | <i>Polo + PPI</i> | 341 | 0.108 | <i>Polo</i> | 401 | 0.159 |
| 1996 | <i>Ulivo + Rifondazione Comunista + Lega Nord</i> or <i>Polo + Lega Nord</i> | 333 or 330 | 0.088 or 0.130 | <i>Ulivo</i> | 327 | 0.131 |
| 2001 | <i>Casa delle libertà + Democrazia Europea</i> | 328 | 0.105 | <i>Casa delle libertà</i> | 374 | 0.148 |

The straight application of criterion [1] to these data produces a relevant result: the mixed (actual) system is always dominated, as results from This means that, depending on the value of p , citizens prefer either the proportional representation or the plurality system. In particular:

- in 1994 the plurality system is preferred when a/b is greater than 0.68;
- in 1996 the plurality system is preferred when a/b is greater than 0.5 in the first alliance and as much as than 25.6 in the second (the real one);
- in 2001 the plurality system is preferred when a/b is greater than 0.47.

4. The Strategic Voting

Strategic voting occurs when a voter does not vote her first preference, thinking that another one could get a better result. The most common situation where people find it profitable to implement the strategic voting is the plurality electoral system. A voter may decide to vote not for her first choice, but for a further one she hopes will be more likely to win.

Since the Italian Chamber of Deputies is elected partially by proportional representation and partially by plurality, it is possible to check whether the Italian citizens chose the strategic voting to show their preferences in the plurality list. We analysed the data of the elections in 2001. This choice is due to the fact that we suppose that people need some time to “learn” how the system works and the consequences of their choice.

The result obtained under the two different systems by the two big coalitions (*Casa delle Libertà* and *Ulivo*) and by two small parties (*Lista Di Pietro* and *Democrazia Europea*) that ran alone are in Table 12.

Table 12 – Strategic voting

| | Lista Di Pietro | | Democrazia Europea | | Casa delle Libertà | | Ulivo | |
|------------------------------|-----------------|--------------|--------------------|--------------|--------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| | <i>Prop.</i> | <i>Plur.</i> | <i>Prop.</i> | <i>Plur.</i> | <i>Prop.</i> | <i>Plur.</i> | <i>Prop.</i> | <i>Plur.</i> |
| Piemonte 1 | 4.1% | 5.3% | 0.9% | 1.3% | 46.1% | 42.6% | 44.8% | 49.2% |
| Piemonte 2 | 4% | 3% | 1.7% | 2.8% | 54.5% | 49.8% | 35.5% | 40% |
| Lombardia 1 | 3.8% | 5.4% | 0.7% | 0.8% | 52.9% | 52% | 38.5% | 41% |
| Lombardia 2 | 4% | 5.6% | 1.6% | 2.6% | 59% | 54.5% | 30.4% | 36.1% |
| Lombardia 3 | 4% | 4.3% | 1.6% | 2.3% | 52.8% | 49.1% | 38.7% | 42.5% |
| Trentino Alto Adige | 4% | 4.3% | 1.6% | - | 31.9% | 31% | 60.5% | 35.1% |
| Veneto 1 | 4.5% | 4.6% | 2.2% | 4% | 56.3% | 48% | 31.4% | 34.3% |
| Veneto 2 | 4.8% | 4.5% | 1.3% | 2.5% | 52.5% | 46.4% | 35.2% | 40% |
| Friuli Venezia Giulia | 4.2% | 4.9% | 2.1% | 2.9% | 51.4% | 47.8% | 38.8% | 41.6% |
| Liguria | 3.6% | 3.3% | 1.8% | 1.4% | 45.5% | 43.9% | 46.3% | 50.5% |
| Emilia Romagna | 3.5% | 3.4% | 1.1% | 1.7% | 39.5% | 37% | 53.6% | 56.8% |
| Toscana | 2.5% | 2.4% | 1% | 1.6% | 38.6% | 36.6% | 55.6% | 57.4% |
| Umbria | 2.7% | 3.1% | 1.6% | 0.9% | 42.6% | 41.4% | 51.1% | 53.4% |
| Marche | 3.7% | 3.1% | 1.5% | 2.7% | 44.8% | 38.3% | 47.3% | 51.5% |
| Lazio 1 | 2.5% | 2.5% | 1.7% | 1.1% | 48% | 46.6% | 44.8% | 47.6% |
| Lazio 2 | 3.7% | 3.3% | 3.3% | 4.7% | 57.2% | 51.9% | 34% | 38.8% |
| Abruzzi | 6.3% | 5.3% | 1.9% | 3.5% | 50.6% | 45.2% | 38.2% | 43.5% |
| Molise | 14.3% | 15% | 3.4% | 11.2% | 45.6% | 35.8% | 33.7% | 36.2% |
| Campania 1 | 3.8% | 4.3% | 2.4% | 5.3% | 52.2% | 44.5% | 39% | 43.1% |
| Campania 2 | 3.9% | 3.5% | 6.2% | 8.6% | 50.6% | 42.6% | 35.1% | 41.3% |
| Puglia | 5.1% | 4% | 2.9% | 6.1% | 50.6% | 45.1% | 37.6% | 41.3% |
| Basilicata | 5.2% | 4.9% | 6.6% | 9.2% | 37.1% | 36.3% | 48.2% | 47.5% |
| Calabria | 3.6% | 4.1% | 4% | 6.8% | 49.8% | 44.5% | 39.4% | 41.8% |
| Sicilia 1 | 3.6% | 3.1% | 7.9% | 9.2% | 56% | 50.7% | 30.4% | 35.5% |
| Sicilia 2 | 4.1% | 3.6% | 6.3% | 8.1% | 56.5% | 52.8% | 30.9% | 33.8% |
| Sardegna | 3.3% | 3.4% | 1.9% | 1.5% | 49.5% | 45.2% | 38.9% | 43.4% |
| Valle d'Aosta | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |

Switching from the proportional to the plurality system the *Ulivo* is voted by a higher number of citizens. This is perfectly in line with the strategic voting; but the change is small, more so if you consider that the contest was forecasted to be a close one. When we consider the votes received by the *Casa delle Libertà*, the result is even more striking: in all the districts the percentage of votes under the proportional system is higher than the percentage of votes under the plurality system. At the same time, small parties like *Lista Di Pietro* and *Democrazia Europea* are preferred on average by a higher number of citizens under the plurality system. A possible explanation is that the distance among the parties in the *Casa delle Libertà* is high enough to create a competition à la

Hotelling between the coalition and small parties (for instance, *Democrazia Europea*) that are close to the most central party of the coalition (UDC).

To sum up, we cannot affirm that the strategic voting is implemented by the Italian voters. This is a remarkable results, as it undermines the main reason to move away from proportionality.

5. Forecasting

What will be the political scenario in 2006? It is a difficult question. First, we do not know whether the future coalitions will further change. Second, we are not able to predict the reaction of the voters to the last political events. And finally, and most important, the return to proportionality is debated in the Parliament when these pages are written (October-November 2005), and likely to be adopted.

However, we try and provide a forecasting of the next political elections, starting from two surveys: the *Osservatorio del Nord Ovest's* survey (May 2004)¹⁷ and the *Repubblica - IPR's* survey (October 2005). The results are in Table 13 and 14; Ulivo is the center-left coalition, CDL ("Casa delle Libertà") the center-right one.

Table 13 – Elections 2006 forecasting (*Osservatorio del Nord Ovest's* survey)

| Parties | Survey | Proportional | Plurality | New Proportional |
|-------------------------------|--------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| | % | Seats | | |
| <i>Rifondazione Comunista</i> | 8.8% | | | |
| PDCI + <i>Verdi</i> | 5.1% | | | |
| DS | 16.9% | | | |
| SDI | 1.1% | | | |
| <i>Margherita</i> | 12.2% | | | |
| UDEUR | 0.1% | | | |
| <i>Lista Di Pietro</i> | 7% | | | |
| TOT. ULIVO | 51.3% | 328 | 498 | 340 |
| <i>Forza Italia</i> | 20.2% | | | |
| <i>Lega Nord</i> | 5.6% | | | |
| <i>Alleanza Nazionale</i> | 13.5% | | | |
| UDC | 4.5% | | | |
| TOT. CDL | 43.8% | 280 | 132 | 290 |
| <i>Nuovo PSI</i> | 1.9% | 12 | 0 | 0 |
| <i>Radicali</i> | 1.6% | 10 | 0 | 0 |
| MSI | 0.3% | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| <i>Others</i> | 1% | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | | r = 1 | r = 0.73 | r = 0.97 |
| | | g = 0.074 | g = 0.113 | g = 0.077 |

¹⁷ We'd like to thank the director of the Osservatorio, prof. Luca Ricolfi, for his kind permission to use the data.

Table 14 – Elections 2006 forecasting (*Repubblica - IPR's survey*)

| Parties | Survey | Proportional | Plurality | New Proportional |
|-------------------------------|--------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| | % | Seats | | |
| <i>Rifondazione Comunista</i> | 6% | | | |
| PDCI + Verdi | 4.5% | | | |
| DS | 22% | | | |
| <i>Margherita</i> | 12.5% | | | |
| <i>Lista Di Pietro</i> | 1.5% | | | |
| UDEUR | 2% | | | |
| SDI + Nuovo PSI | 2.5% | | | |
| TOT. UNIONE | 51% | 322 | 450 | 340 |
| <i>Forza Italia</i> | 18% | | | |
| <i>Lega Nord</i> | 5.5% | | | |
| <i>Alleanza Nazionale</i> | 12% | | | |
| UDC | 5% | | | |
| <i>Nuovo PSI De Michelis</i> | 1.5% | | | |
| <i>Democrazia Cristiana</i> | 2% | | | |
| <i>Alternativa Sociale</i> | 1.5% | | | |
| TOT. CDL | 45.5% | 286 | 180 | 290 |
| <i>Radicali</i> | 1.5% | 9 | | |
| <i>Others</i> | 2% | 13 | | |
| | | r = 1 | r = 0.80 | r = 0.97 |
| | | g = 0.073 | g = 0.102 | g = 0.077 |

We consider only the Lower Chamber, and three different electoral systems: the proportional representation, the plurality system and the new proportional system that will be probably voted by the Italian Parliament. This is a proportional representation where the winning coalition is entitled to a majority premium. The alliance that has been chosen by the plurality of the electors obtains the maximum number of seats between 340 (54% of the total number of seats) and the actual seats assigned by the proportional voting. In both surveys, the winner is the *Unione* (the center-left coalition).

Also in this case we try and find out which is the best electoral system. The data from the *Osservatorio del Nord Ovest's* survey suggest that:

- the plurality system is preferred when $a/b > 0.745$
- the pure proportional system is preferred when $a/b < 0.745$

From the *Repubblica - IPR's* survey, we find out that:

- the plurality system is preferred when $a/b > 0.685$

- the new proportional system is preferred when $0.571 < a/b < 0.685$
- the proportional system is preferred when $a/b < 0.571$

The most interesting result is that the new system may be the best one only under very restrictive conditions. Actually, it is such only when the government elected by the proportional system tends to be unstable (i.e., when the number of seats of the majority under the pure proportional representation is close to half of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies). In this case, the majority prize solve the problem by increasing the governability at an acceptable cost in terms of representativeness. But as the number of seats of the majority approaches 340, the (small) gain in governability is rapidly counterbalanced by the loss of representativeness.

5. Conclusive remarks

The results of the last section may appear somehow disappointing. The threshold values are so close that they do not allow to safely pinpoint the best electoral system. Actually, they are quite precious. They indicate that a choice criterion based on the trade-off between representativeness and governability is not that discriminating, at least for contemporary Italy. In a sense, it does not matter that much which system is actually chosen. One could object that the advantages of the plurality systems take some time to manifest, as voters must change their habits; but the data of section 4 (and subsequent anecdotic evidence) suggest that some ten years is not enough for a trend into this direction to manifest.

If representativeness and governability cannot be used to individuate the best electoral system, we must resort to a further dimension. Which one? We suggest that, lexicographically, the third most important one is the trust of the voters for the political aristocracy. Our feeling is that such trust is higher in proportional representation with open lists, as the political market is more contensible.¹⁸

This, obviously, is a matter for further research. Another one is the following. Why voters did take advantage only to a very limited extent of the possibility of reducing the redundancy of the parties offered by the electoral reform of 1993? Possibly they were too strongly linked to traditional fidelities. But possibly they shared instead the opinion of Lijphart (1999) that the advantages of plurality are at most very dubious, and "voted with their votes" against the electoral reform. Putting the argument the other way round, the behavior of Italian voters provide some support to Lijphart.

¹⁸ Possibly this is why this hypothesis has not been considered by any party in the current debate on the electoral reform.

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