

Extending Duverger's Law When Parties become Blocs:
Evidence from Italy
Under Three Different Electoral Systems, 1945-2010*

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ABSTRACT

Duverger's Law (Duverger, 1959) deals with the role of electoral systems on party proliferation. But we are not only interested in how many parties there are, but also in how the party space is organized. In particular, there are a number of countries in which there are multiple parties but competition occurs along the lines of a two-stage game, with parties organized into competing coalitions, although individual parties retain their identity and engage in competitive bargaining and sometimes actual electoral competition with others in their bloc. Extending ideas about *fragmented bipolarism* of D'Alimonte and colleagues (D'Alimonte and Chiaramonte, 1995; D'Alimonte, 2005; Bartolini, Chiaramonte and D'Alimonte, 2002, 2004; Chiaramonte, 2007) and combining them with the idea of *ideologically based partisan loyalties* (van der Eijk and Niemoeller, 1983), we propose a new concept, *two bloc ideological politics* to which we give a precise definition. We argue that two bloc ideological politics is an important feature of at least two democracies, Italy and France, but that the factors affecting its formation are not well understood in either the electoral systems or the political parties literature. We examine the evidence for two bloc politics in Italy in each of three periods: (1) 1946-1992, (2) 1994-2001, and (3) 2006-2010, and seek to specify the electoral system and other institutional features that fostered its continued existence in the latter two periods. These periods are demarcated by the form of electoral institutions that were in place in each: the most common form of list PR during the first period, a mixed electoral system with a preponderance of single seat constituencies in the second period, and list PR but with a strong majoritarian bonus in the last period. We find strong evidence for two bloc ideological politics in Italy in the latter two periods. Comparing Italy and France we argue that two bloc politics can arise from several quite different types of institutional rules.

1. Introduction

Duverger's Law (Duverger, 1959) deals with the impact of electoral systems on party proliferation, and we almost always think about electoral competition at the parliamentary level in terms of competition among political parties. But we are not only interested in how many parties there are, but also in how the party space is organized. In particular, in a number of countries it makes sense also to view electoral competition as a type of two-level game (Tsebelis, 1990) in which we see a fight between competing "blocs" of parties although individual parties retain their identity and engage in competitive bargaining and sometimes actual electoral competition with others in their bloc. For example, we may characterize in stylized fashion much of the French 5th Republic as one involving competition between two blocs defined in ideological terms: the "left" and the "right." (Lemmenicier et al. 2008, 2010).¹ In such settings there is competition at the party level both within and across blocs, but also some forms of cooperation among the parties of a given bloc and their supporters, e.g., formal or informal "stand-down" agreements.

Our prime focus in this essay will be on Italy during the entire post-WWII period. Italy provides a striking example of a natural experiment involving massive changes in electoral laws that allows us to examine the factors that affect the structure of political coalitions, and that gives us a useful handle on sufficient (but not necessary) conditions for the existence/persistence of two-bloc politics. After defining the concept of *two bloc ideological competition* -- based on extending ideas of D'Alimonte and colleagues (D'Alimonte and Chiaramonte, 1995; D'Alimonte, 2005; Bartolini, Chiaramonte and D'Alimonte, 2002, 2004; Chiaramonte, 2007, 2010) about *fragmented bipolarism* and combining those ideas with the idea of *ideologically based partisan loyalties* (van der Eijk and Niemoeller, 1983), we look at the evidence for the existence of this pattern of competition in Italy in each of three periods: (1) 1946-1992, (2) 1994-2001, and 2006-2010. These periods are demarcated by the form of electoral institutions that were in place in each: the most common form of list PR during the first period, a mixed electoral system with a preponderance of single seat constituencies in the second period, and list PR but with a strong majoritarian bonus in the last period. After demonstrating the existence of such competition in Italy since 1994, we then consider reasons why such ideological two bloc

competition might be created and maintained under electoral rules quite different from the French two-round ballot.

There is a considerable literature on how to classify party systems, including important early contributions by Duverger (1959), Blondel (1968), and Sartori (1974), and more recent contributions by Mair (1997, 2002), Wolinetz (2006), Golosov (2011) and Grofman and Klein (2012). The two key elements of most of these classifications are party size and ideological polarization, although some approaches (e.g. Blondel, 1968, Golosov, 2011) only make use of the first factor, and others, e.g., Bardi and Mair (2008), propose a much more comprehensive multidimensional typology.² Still, as Golosov (2011: 540) notes, the most common distinction is a simple one between multiparty and two party systems,³ although often overlaid on that distinction are more fine tuned classificatory refinements, e.g., 2.5 party systems (Blondel, 1968; Siaroff, 2003). In our overall approach we retain consistency with the main lines of work by focusing on both size and ideological distribution as tools to classify voting blocs.

An important issue is how best to measure party size, with the most common approach the Laakso and Taagepera (1979) measure of the “effective number of parties,”⁴ and the main alternative looking at party shares for the top 2 or k largest parties and basing cut-offs between party types on that percentage. For example, Blondel (1968) uses a 90% threshold for the seat share of the two largest parties, and a classification of 2.5 parties if that share is between 75% and 90%. Our own approach to counting the number of blocs will be very similar to Blondel’s approach to party counting. Where we differ is in looking at voting blocs rather than parties standing alone. Another issue is whether to focus on vote share or on seat share. In our discussion we will focus on seat share.⁵

We believe that, for at least the past two decades, Italian politics does not rest comfortably within the standard paradigm inspired by Duverger. Nor does it fit easily within alternative paradigms such as pillarization (see discussion in Bardi and Mair, 2008) Yes, as we will show, Italy still is a multi-party system; indeed, there are now more parties (using the Laakso-Taagepera 1979 measure) than in the first electoral era after WWII when PR was used. Yet, to call Italy a multi-party system would be to totally miss the existence of a relatively stable (until the economic meltdown) pattern of competition between a left bloc and a right bloc, with voter attitudes largely structured by the division between the two ideological camps (and perceived party differences muted between parties of the same camp). In like manner, although France now

resembles a multi-bloc system, rather than the two-bloc dynamic it once exhibited, to use the effective number of parties to define the party system would be to miss the existence of a demarcating line such that, when it comes to a choice between a candidate of the left and one of the right, parties/voters on the left will rally behind a candidate of the left, even if not all supporters of Le Pen rally behind the Gaullist candidate.

After WWII, for nearly 50 years, Italy elected all its representatives to the lower chamber (630) via list PR from 31 multi-seat constituencies (plus one single-seat constituency for the tiny region Valle d'Aosta). The 315 senators were elected with a system that on paper looked quite different but in practice produced the same effects as that of the Chamber. Roughly three-fourths of the seats (232) were assigned in single-member districts to the candidate who got no less than 65 % of the valid votes. The seats not assigned with this formula were allocated by PR. As very few candidates reached the 65 % threshold the Senate electoral system was effectively a PR system as well.

All of this changed dramatically in 1993, when Italy adopted a mixed-member majoritarian system for both chambers (D'Alimonte and Chiaramonte 1995; D'Alimonte 2001; Katz 2001; and see various essays in Giannetti and Grofman, 2011), with the first election in 1994 and subsequent elections in 1996 and 2001. This mixed system had a predominantly plurality component. In both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate 75 % of the seats were assigned in single-member districts with plurality rule, with the rest allocated under PR. This system had no provision preventing the formation of pre-electoral coalitions.

In 2005, just before the general elections due in the spring of 2006, there was a further dramatic change. At the instigation of the then ruling coalition headed by Silvio Berlusconi, Italy returned to PR, but the new rules deviated from proportionality by rewarding the party or coalition of parties that gained a plurality of the votes with a majority bonus. This system allowed parties to form joint lists or pre-electoral coalitions. Indeed, it required coalitions to indicate a leader and a common platform. For the Chamber of deputies, the majority bonus ensures that the coalition with a plurality of the votes at the national level will get 54 % of the seats (340). In the Senate the bonus is assigned at the regional level and it is set at 55 % of the seats. In both chambers there is an elaborate system of thresholds for getting seats. In the Chamber parties running alone need to get at least 4 % of the votes at the national level. Parties

running in a coalition can get seats with 2 % of the votes, provided the coalition gets at least 10 %. In the Senate the same mechanism applies but the thresholds are 8 %, 3 % and 20 %.⁶

There is very little continuity between the party system that was in place prior to 1993 and the constellation of parties thereafter, though some of the newer parties can be viewed as splinters of predecessor parties. After 1993 the Italian party system essentially imploded. If we take as our point of reference the parliamentary elections of 1987, the last before the fall of communist regimes in Eastern Europe, there is not a single party running in that election which has not changed one way or another between then and 1994 (See Table 1) with the Dc (Christian Democrats) and the Psi (Socialists) -- the two most important governing parties in the post WWII period -- having either disappeared (the Dc) or shrunk to insignificance (the Psi). The same thing happened to all of the other minor parties which governed with them such as Pri (Republicans), Psdi, (Socialdemocrats), Pli (Liberals). Similarly, since 1993, the Pci (the Communists) a very important party until the breakup of the Soviet Union, went through a constant series of splits, mergers and change of symbols.

<<Table 1 about here>>

In the next section we will provide a formal definition of two-bloc (ideological) politics. In the succeeding section we consider the degree to which this definition was satisfied in each of the three electoral periods in Italy. We find strong evidence for two-bloc (ideological) politics in the second (post 1993) and third (post 2005) time periods, but not in the first (immediate post-WWII) period with respect to each of the eight defining criteria we propose. Then, in the next section, we consider reasons why two bloc ideological politics was or was not found. In brief, in the first period where we do not find two bloc politics, it can be argued that the status of the Communist party (Pci) as an anti-system party, and the ability of the Christian Democrats (Dc), as the strongest party, to occupy the center of the political spectrum and to enter into coalitions both to their right and to their left, destroyed the potential for two bloc politics. For the mixed member period, where we do find two bloc ideological politics, it has been argued that plurality rule combined with a high level of party fragmentation provided strong incentives for parties to campaign together by forming *pre-electoral coalitions* in order to increase their seat share. Most parties choose not to present their own candidates in the single-member districts but rather join one of the two major blocs supporting the coalition's common candidates in exchange for a share of "safe" seats (D'Alimonte 2005). The same pattern of bipolar electoral coordination

occurred in the most recent period, where we had a return to PR but with a majority bonus. In this case, as we will argue, it is the majority bonus that provides a strong incentive for the survival of two bloc politics. Parties that are office-seekers have to join one or the other of the two major coalitions if they want to have a chance to win.

In our concluding discussion we consider how to use the Italian case (and comparisons to two-round competition in France) to develop insights into how to extend Duverger's Law about the contrast between plurality and PR (or two round) elections, one leading to two party competition, the other two to multiparty competition, to an analysis of when multiparty competition will be organized along bloc as well as along party lines. However, while we believe that Italy and France are not the only long term democracies which have been characterized, for substantial periods of their democratic history, by something closely approximating the kind of *two bloc ideological* politics that we more precisely define below, a full theory of the determinants of two-bloc ideological politics is beyond the scope of the present essay, as is an empirical examination of a larger universe of cases. What we can say, with confidence, however, is that, in the terminology of qualitative researchers, two-bloc politics involves *equifinality*, i.e. there will be more than one set of sufficient/necessary factors that can lead to two-bloc politics.

II. Defining Two-Bloc (ideological) Politics

Next we turn to a precise definition of what we mean by two bloc ideological politics.

We define *ideological two bloc politics* in the following terms:

1. (a) Political competition is such that the main competitors can be conceptualized as groupings of parties, but with the individual parties retaining a separate identity – at least once they are within the legislature.

1.(b) Pre-election bargaining takes place among (some or all of) the parties within a bloc to determine who runs where, or which candidates appear in which order on a list, or in terms of things like stand down agreements in multi-round ballots or there may even be formal pre-electoral coalitions, though not necessarily with a common manifesto.⁷

1. (c) The two largest blocs should, together, control at least 3/4ths of the seats in the parliament.

2. Voters can locate parties ideologically.⁸

3. (a) There is substantial continuity in which parties make up a given bloc⁹

3. (b) Although some parties may play a “swing role,” or drop out of their previous coalition and run alone, and there may be fissioning and fusing of parties within the bloc, as well as new parties, and even the name of the bloc may change to reflect such compositional shifts, each of the two main bloc continues to represent roughly the same segment of the political spectrum.

3.(c) Voters who support parties in a given bloc should display assimilation and contrast effects, such that the parties in the other bloc should be seen as ideologically further away, and parties in one’s own bloc seen as closer (and similarly for voter affinity to the various parties).

3. (d) When we locate the parties in a policy or ideological space, the two blocs can be defined by a separating line so that there is a clear gap between them.¹⁰

The first set of criteria (numbered items 1(a) -1(c) above) are, essentially, those used by D’Alimonte and his colleagues to define *fragmented bipolarism* (D’Alimonte and Chiaramonte, 1995; D’Alimonte, 2005; Bartolini, Chiaramonte and D’Alimonte, 2002, 2004; Chiaramonte, 2007).¹¹ However these papers do not offer a specific threshold of needed combined support of the two leading blocs to distinguish two bloc politics from other forms of bloc politics. Here we have chosen the 3/4th cutoff primarily for simplicity.¹²

The second criterion is offered by van der Eijk and Niemoeller (1983) in their proposal for generalizing the U.S. concept of party ID to the multiparty context by thinking about voter

loyalties less in terms of loyalty to specific parties than in terms of the voter's general ideological stance. It allows voters to have a preferred party, but to readily think of alternatives for strategic or tactical reasons.

The third set of criteria is original with the present paper, but its last two components draw on a large amount of earlier work on ideologically based processes of coalition formation (e.g., Axelrod, 1972; Grofman, 1982; Laver and Shepsle, 1996; Laver, 1998; Laver and Schofield, 1998), on the one hand,¹³ and work on assimilation and contrast effects first developed by social psychologists and later applied to voting behavior and the structure of partisan attachments (see e.g., Granberg and Jenks, 1977; Granberg, Harris and King, 1981; Granberg and Holmberg, 1988; Merrill, Grofman, Adams, 2001; van Houweling and Calvo, 2012), on the other hand. It can also be linked to social identity theory, and the notion of “us and them” politics (Tajfel, 1981; Brewer and Gardner, 1996; Brewer, 2001).

The three part (eight component) definition we offer allows us, in principle, to differentiate bloc politics from the more usual forms of party competition. Our definition also allows us to differentiate two bloc politics from multibloc politics in terms of the combined size of the largest two blocs.

We have deliberately included in the definition of two-bloc ideological politics both criteria based on the characteristics of parties and criteria that draw on how voters see the political space. The reason we have done so is that our principal interest here is in ideologically rooted political competition. In principle it could be the case that party leaders see the world in ideological terms and their supporters do not, or even vice versa, but we expect that the stability of two-bloc ideological competition requires that, in the aggregate, voters as well, see the world in ideological terms. But the requirement that voters, in the aggregate see politics in ideological terms does not mean that all, or even most, voters do so (Feld and Grofman, 1988). In particular, when we provide empirical evidence below on single-peaked preferences we are only looking at aggregated preferences of the various party electorates. There may be many voters who simply are confused, or use as their primary evaluative criterion something other than ideological proximity. All that matters is that these voters may be treated as, in effect, noise, in a system whose central effective cleavage is ideological, as judged by multidimensional scaling.

We would, however, wish to differentiate our notion of two-bloc ideological politics from the large literature on class voting at the individual level, or the historical scholarship, such

as Bartolini and Mair's seminal (1990) work, on the extent to which parties could largely be classified along a left-right dimension. Our notion of two-bloc ideological politics does assume that there is a single (or at least dominant) left-right dimension along which parties can be located by voters, and which is a major axis of political competition.¹⁴ And, like Bartolini and Mair (1990) we do posit considerable solidarity among the voters within the left and non-left blocs. But we require more, namely that there be specific behaviors by parties that generates a bifurcation, e.g., stand-down arrangements across constituencies, or pre-electoral coalitions.

Moreover, we need to differentiate our notion of two-bloc ideological competition from the important work done by Golder (2005, 2006) and others on the factors that give rise to pre-electoral coalitions. While pre-electoral coalitions (or some other clear form of party alliance) is a necessary condition for bloc politics,¹⁵ it is not a sufficient condition for two-bloc ideological politics.¹⁶ In particular, we also require continuity in bloc alliances, and an ideological organization of the blocs, and assimilation and contrast effects among supporters distinguishing within-bloc and between-bloc preferences, and we are particularly interested in two-bloc politics.

Note that it is possible to have two-bloc competition without an ideological dimension defining the cleavage. Consider Fiji. There we might have had two-bloc politics based on the set of parties drawing all or most of their vote from the Indo-Fijian community (imported in the 19th century as plantation workers by the British) versus the set of parties drawing all or most of their vote from "native" Fijians (Fraenkel and Grofman, 2004). However, in practice, in recent elections (pre-coup) there was a two-bloc politics that crossed "ethnic" lines, based on a competition between the in-parties and the out-parties (Fraenkel and Grofman, 2006).

We now turn to the evidence for the existence of two bloc ideological politics in Italy in each of our three electoral periods in terms of the supporting evidence for each of our eight defining components of ideological two bloc politics.

1. (a) Political competition is such that the main competitors can be conceptualized as groupings of parties, but with the individual parties retaining a separate identity – at least once they are within the legislature.

In the first period, under list PR, parties ran alone. Voters were able to identify parties belonging to the left, center and right blocs but the parties within each bloc did not form pre-electoral coalitions. In complete contrast, in periods two and three, most parties ran as part of a well defined bloc, with names on the centre-left such as “Progressisti” “Ulivo” and “Unione” and with names on the centre-right such as “Polo della libertà”, “Polo del buon governo”, “Casa della libertà” . Each bloc was formed by a number of parties, which varied in time. However, the core parties of each bloc have remained basically the same, though they went through mergers and name changes (see Table 2). On the other hand, while coalitions have become the main actors in the competition for votes, they have not replaced parties. In the post-election period, parties regain their autonomy and visibility albeit – in most cases- within the boundaries of the bloc they belonged to. Parliamentary groups were still party-based.

<<Table 2 about here>>

Because the first period does not exhibit two bloc politics, in the remaining part of this section we will only deal with periods two and three, i.e., 1994 and after. In Section III, however, we will discuss the early PR period in Italy in more detail when we consider reasons why we might not get two bloc politics.

1.(b) Pre-election bargaining takes place among (some or all of) the parties within a bloc to determine who runs where, or which candidates appear in which order on a list, or in terms of things like stand down agreements in multi-round ballots, or there are even formal pre-electoral coalitions, though not necessarily with a common manifesto.

Both in the second and third periods electoral coordination was the key for the formation of pre-electoral coalitions. But it took a different form in the two periods because of the different electoral rules. Between 1994 and 2001 the presence of SMDs led parties within each bloc into

systematic stand-down agreements. Instead of running their own candidates in the SMDs they preferred to agree on a set of common candidates who would represent the coalition as a whole. These candidates ran with the coalition's symbol and not with the symbol of the party they belonged to. These cartel agreements required the development of a set of mutually agreed criteria to determine both the number and the 'quality' (i.e., winnability) of the districts assigned to each coalition member (Di Virgilio 1998, 2002).

The pre-electoral coalitions of the third period were easier to arrange. In this period, the majority bonus replaced the SMD as the incentive for electoral coordination. The disappearance of the SMD component of the elections did away with the need for common candidates. Cartel agreements were still necessary for maximizing the chance of winning the bonus, but each party within the bloc was able to run with its own symbol and with its own list of candidates (Di Virgilio 2010). On the ballot, the coalitions were clearly identifiable as a string of parties running together, but the string was made up of a number of boxes with the name and symbol of each party. By voting for one party in the coalition, the voters were also voting for the coalition.

1.(c) The two largest blocs should, together, control at least three-quarters of the seats in the parliament.

As shown in Table 3 this condition has been met in each election since 1994. Actually the two major blocs have gained over 90 % of the seats in every election except 1996 when the Lega Nord decided to run alone. In that election the Lega, standing alone, won a significant number of seats in the SMDs in Northern Italy. The 2006 election marks the high point of Italian bipolarism with a seat concentration on the two blocs close to 100 % (Chiaramonte 2010), but the 2008 election still reflects well above 90% support for the two blocs.

<<Table 3 about here>>

2. Voters can locate parties ideologically.

As shown in Figure 1, there has been a slight increase in the proportion of voters who can place themselves on a left-right scale from that found toward the end the first (simple PR) period. Under the mixed system, and under the PR system with a majority bonus, the percentage of voters who can place themselves on a left-right scale is roughly 80%. Not only can voters identify an ideological position for themselves, as we see in Figure 2 (for 2001 data)

and in Figure 3 (for 2006 data), voters also can locate parties ideologically.¹⁷ And they do in a fashion that is consistent across parties, i.e., by aligning parties on an hypothesized single dimension along which party placements exhibit single-peaked curves.. For some parties shown in these figures the monotonicity to each side of the peak is not perfect, but minor perturbations are likely due to limited cell sizes. The graphs are only intended to be illustrative. Perfect single-peakedness (Black, 1948) demonstrates unidimensionality. The multidimensional scaling reported in the next paragraph confirms our intuitions about how well single-peaked preferences fit the aggregate level data.

<< Figures 1, 2 and 3 about here >>

We have also run multidimensional scaling on the data shown in Figure 2 (2001) and in Figure 3 (2006). For the data in Figure 2, for a unidimensional solution, we find an R^2 value of .96 and a stress coefficient of .13; for Figure 3, for a unidimensional solution we find an R^2 value of .999 and a stress coefficient of only .015.¹⁸ In both cases, the analyses provide support for an aggregate pattern of unidimensionality, but the pattern is even clearer in 2006 than it is in 2001. For 2001, a two-dimensional fit is an improvement, with an R^2 value of .996 and a stress coefficient of only .028.

<<Tables 4 and 5 around here>>

3.(a) Although some parties may play a “swing role,” or drop out of their previous coalition and run alone, and there may be fissioning and fusing of parties within the bloc, as well as new parties, and even the name of the bloc may change to reflect such compositional shifts, there is substantial continuity in which parties make up a given bloc.

In general, for bloc politics, we expect to see the existence of pre-electoral coalitions and some degree of stability in these coalitions. As shown in Table 2, the two main coalitions have varied in their party composition over time, but in both the mixed election rule period and the subsequent return to PR with majoritarian bonus period, the main parties of the two major blocs show a remarkable continuity though they have gone through several changes. The main component of the center-right bloc has always been the party headed by Silvio Berlusconi. Founded as Forza Italia (FI) in 1994, in 2008 it became the Popolo della libertà (PdL) by merging with another of its historical allies, Alleanza nazionale (An).¹⁹

The main component of the center-left bloc today is the Partito democratico (Pd). This party is the result of the merger in 2007 of the Democratici di sinistra (Ds) and the Margherita. Of these two parties the Ds was the largest. It was created as a successor party to the Italian Communist party (Pci) with the name Pds, later changed to Ds. Since its formation it has always been the major party of the center-left bloc.

3.(b) Each of the two main blocs continues to represent roughly the same segment of the political spectrum.

As noted earlier, party fragmentation (as measured by the Laakso-Taagepera index) (Laakso and Taagepera, 1979) remained high, but since 1994 Italy has had a center-left and a center-right coalition in competition with one another, and one coalition or the other has been governing. To verify that claim we can match the parties found in each of the two main blocs in each of the 1994 and after elections shown in Table 2 with the voter assigned party ideological locations shown in Figures 2 and 3. When we do, it is clear that each bloc is composed of what appears to be an ideological contiguous group of parties. This is largely true both in 2001 and 2006, which are respectively the last and the first elections of the two periods we are considering here.

3.(c) Voters who support parties in a given bloc should display assimilation and contrast effects, such that the parties in the other bloc should be seen as ideologically further away, and parties in one's own bloc seen as closer (and similarly for voter affinity to the various parties).

If there is two bloc ideological competition, then we should see an ideological separation of the parties in the two blocs. Table 4 shows the evidence for assimilation and contrast effects within and between blocs in 2001. Here we find that supporters of a party tend to show a higher propensity to vote for parties of the same coalition, but this propensity decreases for parties of the opposite coalition with a fairly uniform trend. Table 5 shows the evidence for assimilation and contrast effects within and between blocs in the 2006 elections. These elections were characterized by a very polarized pattern of competition based on two all-inclusive pre-electoral coalitions: the centre-left "Unione" and the centre-right "Casa delle libertà". We can calculate from Table 4 that within-bloc proximity on the left for other parties in the left center bloc = 52; the mean within-bloc proximity on the right for other parties in the right center = 53. We can calculate from Table 5 that within-bloc proximity on the left for other parties in the left center bloc = 54; the mean within-bloc proximity on the right for other parties in the right center = 56.

The only clear exceptions to the presence of strong assimilation effects are Lega Nord on the right, in 2001 and 2006, and Rosa nel Pugno on the left, in 2006. These parties are not seen as clearly “belonging” to one’s own bloc. There are reasons for these differences in level of acceptance by supporters of other parties in the bloc. Both parties have historically had an ambiguous attitude towards the coalition in which they are ostensibly enrolled, and Lega Nord, in particular, exhibits a regional dimension to politics that is largely orthogonal to the usual right-left dimension.

<< Table 4 and Table 5 about here >>

The contrast effects for Italian party system are even more striking than the assimilation effects: the mean proximity of supporters of one bloc to parties of the other bloc is minimal, i.e., the parties in the opposite bloc are collectively “pushed away” ideologically and not clearly differentiated one from the other by supporters of parties within the other bloc. In short, as expected by social identity theory, we get a rather clear “us versus them” categorization scheme. In 2001, mean within-bloc proximity on the left for parties in the other bloc = 21; the mean within-bloc proximity on the right for parties in other bloc = 24. In 2006, mean within-bloc proximity on the left for parties in the other bloc = 9; the mean within-bloc proximity on the right for parties in other bloc = 8. As we see, the degree of contrast voters make between the two blocs, like the fit to unidimensionality, rose in 2006 as compared to 2001. Moreover, the variance in contrast effects went down (from 11 to 4 among supporters of the left, and from 7 to 3.5 among supporters of the right), i.e., in 2006, all parties in the opposite bloc were likely to be viewed in essentially the same negative light as potential objects of voter choice.

3.(d) When we locate the parties in a policy or ideological space, the two blocs can be defined by a separating line (or hyperplane), so that there is a clear gap between them.

Because we have been able to fit the Italian data for the post-1994 period with a unidimensional representation of the party space, one way to identify a gap between the two blocs is to contrast the ideological perceptions of supporters of the rightmost party of the left bloc and those of supporters of the leftmost party of the right bloc. In the 2001 contest between Ppi and Ccd, the rightmost party of the left bloc is Ppi, while the leftmost party of the right bloc is Ccd (See Tables 2 and 4 and Figure 2). As shown in Table 6a, despite their common centrist position and Christian Democratic heritage, identifiers of both parties locate

themselves ideologically closer to their own bloc than to the (closest) centrist party in the other bloc (59 vs. 33; 45 vs. 44, with 100 indicating greatest proximity), though the differences are not that great.²⁰

On the other hand, in the 2006 contest between Unione and Casa delle Libertà, the rightmost party of the center-left bloc is Margherita, while the leftmost party of the center-right bloc is the Udc (See Tables 2 and 5 and Figure 3) but, as shown in Table 6b, despite their similarities in past history, identifiers of both parties, now locate themselves considerably ideologically closer to their own bloc than to the (closest) centrist party in the other bloc (64 vs. 18; 53 vs. 17, with 100 indicating greatest proximity). Once again, we have an indicator that shows that the degree to which Italy is characterized by two bloc politics increased from 2001 to 2006.

<< Tables 6a and Table 6b about here>>

It is well known (Granberg and Holmberg, 1988; Merrill, Grofman, Adams, 2001; von Howeuling and Calvo, 2012) that, in general, supporters of a given party tend to project the views of the party they support as being closer to their own position than may actually be the case (assimilation effect), while they project the views of opposite parties as being further away (contrast effect). What we see happening in Italy is almost certainly the same phenomenon, but now applied to blocs rather than to individual parties –with the notable exception of the Lega Nord, which is more *sui generis*, in that its supporters displays little in the way of assimilation vis-à-vis other members of the bloc they have been part of . Of course, Lega is the one party that has displayed a willingness to run independently of its natural coalition partners.

III. Explaining the Formation and Persistence of Two Bloc Ideological Politics in Italy since 1994 and the Absence of Two Bloc Politics Prior to 1994

For France, it has been argued that what we are calling two bloc ideological competition was facilitated/fostered by the use of the two round runoff system for parliamentary elections (as well as the two candidate majority runoff for presidential elections), with the first round a competition being one where members of each bloc competed not just with members of the opposite bloc but also with members of their own bloc; while the second round involved most often a contest between a candidate of the right and a candidate of the left (Tsebelis, 1990), with various arrangements fostering within-bloc cooperation on the second round to avoid the bloc splitting “its” vote, and thus going down to defeat if the other bloc was more unified (Tsebelis, 1990). For example, in parliamentary elections, two parties on the same side of the political spectrum might engage formally or informally in stand-down agreements to permit only the candidate of the party with the most support on the first round to advance to the final round even though, any party with 12% or more of the vote on the first round could choose to contest the second round (Dolez, Grofman, and Laurent, 2011b).

However, since the two round system was not used in Italy in any of the three periods we are looking at, if there is also two bloc ideological politics in Italy, we must look to other explanations for its existence. Indeed, since there are different electoral rules in place in each of the three time periods we will examine, for each such period in which we find two bloc ideological competition, we may need a different explanation, since the institutions in place are different ones -- and also an explanation of why it did not occur under other types of rules.²¹

Why Two Bloc Politics in the Mixed Member Period?

When the new electoral rules were introduced in 1993, the old party system was collapsing. This collapse of the old party system is one reason why, in Italy, the mixed system formula used in the second period did not produce the Duvergerian dualism of parties, but rather a dualism of coalitions. New “major” parties chose not to run alone in the SMDs but preferred to ally themselves with smaller parties ideologically close in order to maximize their chances to win. They adopted a risk averse strategy of electoral coordination based on the formation of large pre-electoral coalitions through *ex ante* ‘proportionalization’ of districts among coalition

partners. Each partner was assigned a number of SMDs roughly proportional to its electoral size (generally assessed at the moment of the last PR election: whether European, regional or local).

The distributive criteria for inter-coalition bargaining to achieve designation as the standard bearer in given constituencies were very complex, and they went through several adjustments between 1994 and 2001 (Di Virgilio 1998, 2002). However, we can still say that, roughly speaking, parties gained a share of plurality seats more or less equivalent to the size of their electoral contribution to the success of the coalition. That is how small parties were able to ‘beat’ (i.e., win seats under) the plurality system, and how the blocs came about. Paradoxically, small parties were able to survive thanks to the plurality arena where they had been given seats winnable by their coalition, and not thanks to the PR arena which accounted for 25 % of the seats. In the latter they needed 4 % of the votes at the national level in order to get seats. In the former they needed a lower level of voter support to claim a position in one of the blocs, and therefore a share of the SMD seats.

What still needs to be explained is why major parties under the mixed member system chose to “save” small parties by forming blocs rather than running on their own. This explanation is based on a constellation of five factors: 1) the possibility for small parties to retaliate against the big parties in other electoral arenas (city, province, region); 2) the existence of a core of very loyal voters willing to cast their vote to support the candidates of small parties in their bloc if they were asked to do so; 3) the existence of sufficiently strong party discipline to allow party leaders to engage in binding deals that committed their members to refraining from competition in particular constituencies and accepting assignment to compete in particular constituencies. 4) The ability of the actors to assess the likely election results in most constituencies, thus allowing intra-coalition bargaining over constituency assignments to parties within the bloc whose value (in terms of convertibility to won seats) could be directly assessed, and 5) the presence of calculations that go beyond short term maximization in a single election (Bartolini, Chiaramonte, and D’Alimonte 2004)

The exact party composition of these pre-electoral coalitions varied over time, but both in the second and third periods they have been large enough to establish a bipolar pattern of competition based on a center-left and a center-right bloc. Indeed, in spite of an even higher effective number of parties than found in the earlier period (see Table 7), this pattern of exchange among smaller and larger parties in the second and third electoral eras in Italy allowed

for the development of a two-bloc system that could in turn permit a system of alternating bloc-centric governments.²² Third actors did seek to compete, but with no success.

<<Table 7 about here>>

Why Two Bloc Politics in the PR with Majority Bonus Period?

The pattern of competition established with the 1994 system remained fundamentally intact even when the Berlusconi's majority in 2005 passed the new electoral law which provided a majority bonus. This new (still current) system did away with the single-member districts which had turned out to be difficult to manage for the center-right²³ (D'Alimonte and Bartolini 1995; Bartolini, Chiaramonte and D'Alimonte 2002, 2004), but it did not do away with the need for parties to form pre-electoral coalitions. Thus, the five reasons previously given as to why we might expect two-bloc politics remain in force. And there are two additional reasons based on the structure of the new electoral system.

6) Although the new electoral system is formally proportional, the majority bonus is a powerful majoritarian mechanism which provides a strong incentive for parties to coordinate before the vote, and not after (D'Alimonte and Chiaramonte 2006; Chiaramonte 2007; D'Alimonte 2007). Indeed, the bonus makes electoral coordination much easier. Pre-electoral coalitions are not based anymore on common candidates and stand-down agreements. Each party can run with its symbol and its list of candidates. And voters are 'free' to vote for the party they like and not 'forced' to vote for a coalition candidate they might dislike.

Along with the majority bonus, there is another incentive favouring the creation of blocs in the newest Italian electoral system.

7) As we mentioned above, the new electoral system contains an elaborate mechanism of differentiated thresholds for getting seats. This system operates to provide a further incentive for small parties to join a cross-party coalitions. The basic point is that parties which join a coalition get a "discount" on the percentage of votes they need to win representation. In the Chamber the discount is exactly 50 % (from 4 % to 2 %). In the Senate is even greater, from 8 % to 3%.

The new system has been used twice. In 2006 it produced two all-inclusive coalitions. Together they got almost 100 % of the votes and of the seats. In 2008 the two major blocs contained far fewer parties (Table 2). The negative experience of the previous two years and the formation of the Pd and the Pdl brought about the exclusion from the two major coalitions of a

number of smaller parties . The outcome of the elections was somewhat less bipolar but also much less fragmented . The concentration of the votes and seats of the two major blocs declined (see Table 3) but fewer parties gained seats in parliament. Leaving aside these differences -- not really that important for the overall issue of the existence or nonexistence of two-bloc politics, what we can say is that, in 2008, the overall pattern of two- bloc competition did not really change, either as compared to 2006 or as compared to the previous period under a mixed member system (see also Chiaramonte 2010, Di Virgilio 2010) .

Why Not Two Bloc Politics in the post-WWII PR Period?

The post-WWII PR period is characterized by the Christian Democrats (Dc) as the dominant party, able to govern in concert with one or more other parties, either to their left or to their right. In one sense we can think of at least the early part of this period as two-party politics (Galli 1967), since the Dc and the Italian Communist Party (Pci) (usually the next largest party) had a combined vote share of as much as 73.1 % of the votes (in 1976), gradually decreasing in vote share until a low of 45.8 % in 1992. Nonetheless the effective number of political parties (Laakso and Taagepera, 1979) during this time period ranged from 3.6 to 6.7 so calling this period one of two-party politics is not really accurate. Moreover, during this time period the Pci is an anti-system party that is not allowed to be part of the governing coalition, thus restricting dramatically the scope of possible governing coalitions, unless the Communists were to control the parliament on their own, something they never really came close to doing. (The high point of their vote came in 1976, at 34.4 % in the Chamber).

The exclusion of the communists from potential governing coalitions left the Dc in the position of being the indispensable member of any coalition. In some elections it governed with the support of the Socialists (Psi) on its left. In others it governed with the support of the Liberals (Pli) on its right. Almost always it governed with the other small centrist parties. Thus, for most of the post-WWII period during the twentieth century the Dc served as a pivot around which Italian politics turned. Sometimes this took politics in a slightly more left direction, sometimes it took politics in a slightly more right dimension.

We should also note that political competition in the period of Dc-Pci is not strongly unidimensional. In addition to the class dimension there is a religious dimension to the party

conflict that is not now as relevant in Italian politics (D'Alimonte, De Sio and Maggini, 2011). When we do a multidimensional scaling on the 1985 data on party closeness, grouping voters by the party to which the voter is closest to,²⁴ we get a two dimensional configuration (Stress = .11, $r^2 = .94$), rather than a one-dimensional structure. The one dimensional structure for this period has an unacceptably high stress level.²⁵ Also, to the extent that we can identify assimilation and contrast effects in this period, it seems that we must claim the existence of at least three blocs, with supporters of the Socialists (Psi) occupying an anomalous position in that they were almost as attached to the parties of the right as they were to the parties of the left (data omitted for space reasons).

Thus, the simplest explanations of why we do not get two bloc politics in the four decades after WWII are: (1) the size of the Dc and its centrist position rendered pre-electoral alliances unnecessary; (2) the existence of an anti-system and a religious dimension in addition to the class dimension made it harder to get a clear two-bloc structure to the space of political competition; and (3) the PR rules in place did not provide structural incentives for pre-electoral coalitions.²⁶

IV. Discussion

We have argued that it is useful to think about electoral competition as a two-level game (Tsebelis, 1990) involving both inter-party competition (both within and across bloc membership), but also implicit or explicit cooperation among the parties within a bloc (and among their voting supporters) to deny victory to a party of the opposite bloc. The clearest finding of this paper is that there are many roads leading to two bloc politics, from the French two round ballot system, to a mixed member system with strong structural incentives to form pre-electoral coalitions that can serve to assign parties to seats, to a PR system with a majority bonus.

What makes the Italian case particularly interesting in a comparative perspective is the fact that the two blocs which have shaped the pattern of electoral competition since the first election of the Second Republic in 1994 have gradually acquired an identity of their own -- much more so than what happened (and continues to happen) in France during the Fifth Republic. In Italy, coalitions have not replaced parties but they have become more important than parties for winning seats and executive power. The role of electoral blocs as the dominant actors in the competition for votes has caused an electoral realignment along a bipolar pattern that clearly separates parties and voters belonging to the two different blocs, as shown earlier. Another type of evidence for the importance of the bloc structure is provided by electoral changes. Voting shifts across the blocs have been limited during the entire period of the Second Republic. Electoral volatility has occurred more frequently within each bloc or towards abstention (De Sio 2010). In other words, voters located within the political space of one of the two blocs have expressed their desire for change by switching their vote among parties belonging to the same coalition, or by refusing to vote. Only in Southern Italy has there has been a somewhat high level of inter-bloc volatility (Raniolo 2010).

With the fall of the Berlusconi government and the formation of a technical cabinet with Mario Monti as PM (November 2011) the two bloc politics that has characterized Italy since 1993 has been replaced by cooperation among most of the parties represented in Parliament with the exception of the Lega Nord and the Italia dei Valori (a center-left party headed by the former prosecutor Antonio Di Pietro). The Monti cabinet is not a grand coalition. Parties who support the government do not have cabinet members. But they do have to share responsibility for

approving the measures introduced by the cabinet. It will be interesting to see how this period of cooperation across blocs will affect the structure of electoral alignments we have described here. The most important factor will be the relationship between the Pdl and the Lega. The alliance between these two parties has been the cornerstone of the center-right bloc. Their different stands vis-à-vis the Monti cabinet represents a serious challenge to the survival of a bipolar pattern of competition, as the Pdl might be tempted to change once again the electoral rules to offset the negative impact on the right of Berlusconi's fall. And, with that change might come the end of the two bloc politics of the Second Republic.

The question of the determinants of two-bloc ideological politics is beyond the scope of the present paper.²⁷ Our analysis does suggest, however, that there may be two critical factors that are in common to all situations where two-bloc ideological politics may be found. First, and most obviously, is the existence of at least three parties.²⁸ Insofar as plurality systems tend to hold down the number of parties, we expect that two-bloc politics are more likely to be found in PR and mixed systems. Since TR systems are also often characterized by a large number of parties, we would **also** expect two-bloc politics to be more common in such systems than under plurality.²⁹ Second, is the present of a single dimension of ideological competition.³⁰

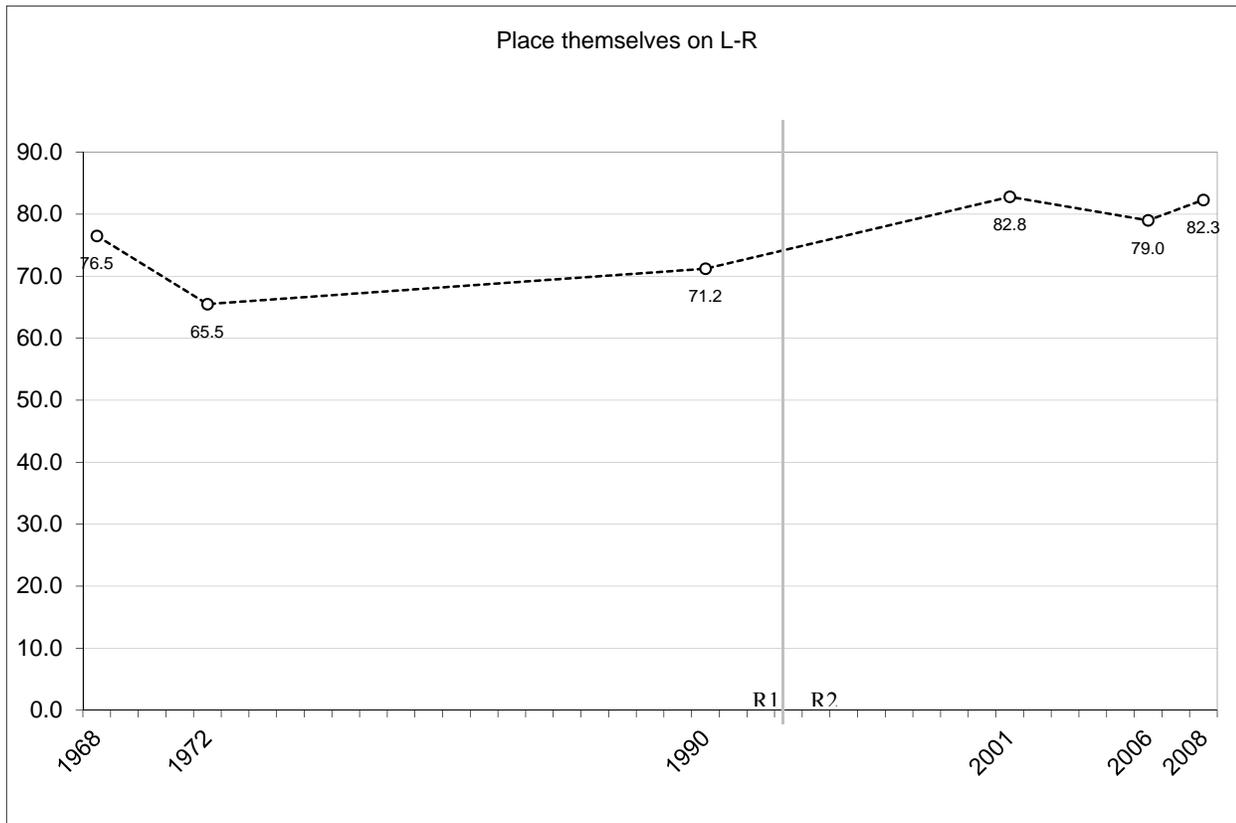
A third key factor, we would argue, is the presence of a strong inducement to coalition. The nature of that inducement can, however, vary with context. It might be formal rules for pre-electoral coalitions, especially those that reduce the threshold of exclusion for bloc members over what they would face if running alone; it might be the presence of a supermajoritarian bonus for the winning coalitions,³¹ or it might be a ballot structure that forces head on head competition at some stage for at least some elections, such as the French two-round presidential election system.³² But, because mixed systems and TR systems have more of a majoritarian component, we expect that, absent these latter features, it will be these two types of systems where two-bloc politics is more likely. In particular, absent a majoritarian bonus or rules for *apparentement* or other forms of pre-electoral coalitions, two bloc politics seems likely to be much difficult to develop in a PR setting. The Italian experience from 1948 to 1992, and that of the French Fourth Republic, support this claim. Moreover, as Strom, Budge, and Laver (2004) argue, the more disproportional the election rules, the more likely are we to see pre-electoral coalitions developing³³ if, of course, there is a multi-party system in the first place.³⁴

In Italy, in addition to the existence of an electoral system conducive to multiple parties, and an ideological based nature of party competition, and one or more of the three types of coalition-inducing factors identified in the paragraph immediately above, in our previous discussion of post WWII Italy, we have identified several other factors that appear to facilitate the creation of electoral coalitions, even though they may be neither sufficient nor necessary. These include multiple levels of government that include some where smaller parties had concentrated strength, thus providing smaller parties some bargaining power; party attachments such that loyalist voters might (initially) be willing to follow party cues in shifting their support to the candidates of other parties within the bloc, so as to allow party leaders to engage in binding deals with other parties; and reliable information about the voting support of different parties and the likelihood that any given constituency would be winnable by a party from within the bloc. Party (and voter) calculations that go beyond short term maximization in a single election has also been argued to be a factor (Bartolini, Chiaramonte, D'Alimonte 2004).

An obvious question is what factors might we expect to determine how many blocs there will be? One factor will be the strength of electoral incentives for majority coalitions. Another factor will be the ideological distribution of party support. The approach of Grofman and Kline (2011) to identifying the number of distinct ideological groupings could be useful in the latter regard. That paper develops a graph-theoretic clustering algorithm that places proximate parties together, and offers a cut-off function to determine how far the clustering process should proceed before concluding that the fit between the posited party blocs and the original party space is not good enough. In the case of situations where there are strong incentives for majority coalition building, that algorithm could be modified to stop when a majority coalition has been reached.

In sum, while we are still far from having a general theory of when we might expect bloc-based politics, we believe that we have made considerable progress in terms of our ability to go beyond Duverger's Law and Duverger's Hypothesis to consider when multi-party politics might become two bloc ideological politics.

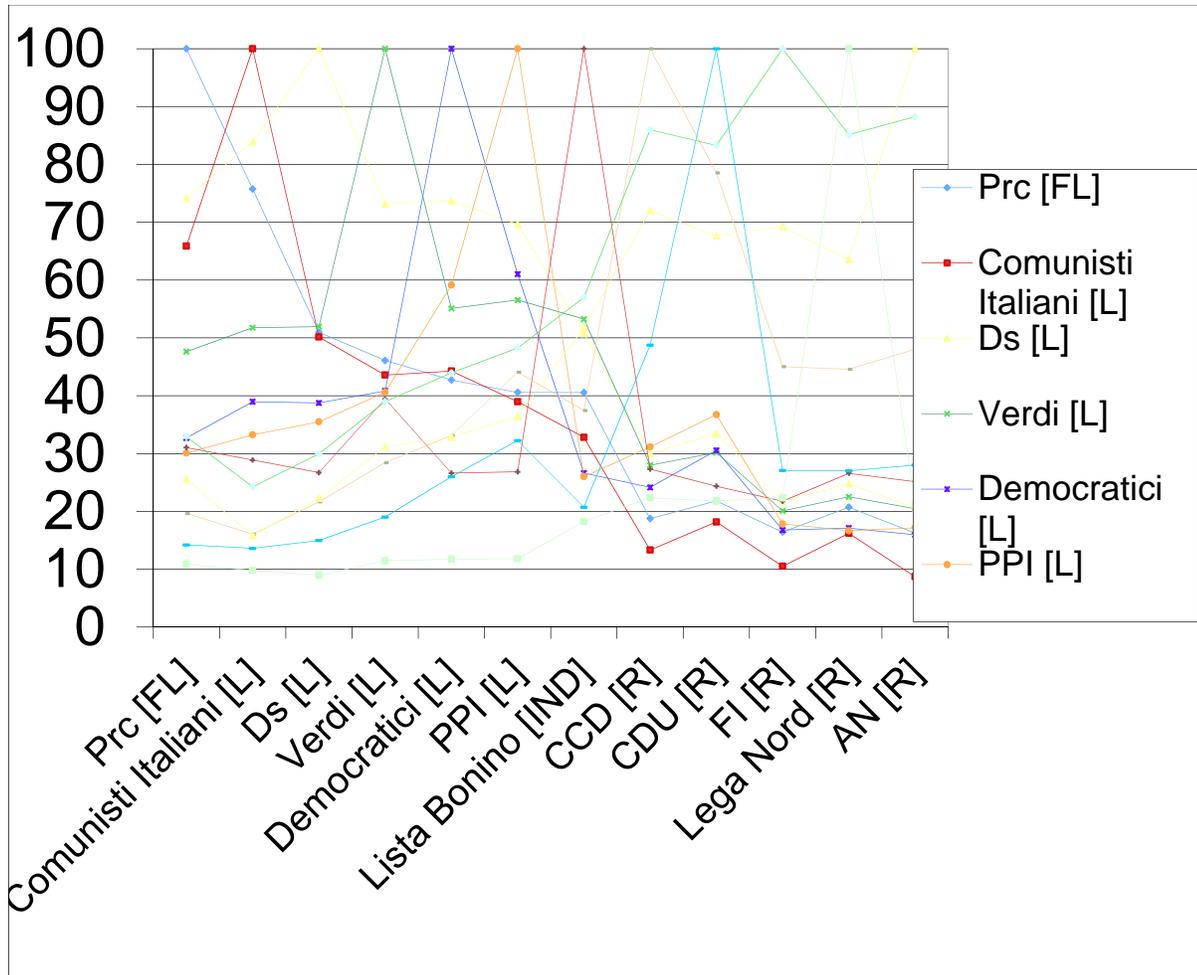
Figure 1. Proportion of Italians Who Can Place Themselves on a Left-Right Dimension



Sources: Italian Ministry of the Interior. ITANES.

Figure 2. Graph of 2001 Italian Voter Attitudes toward Political Parties*

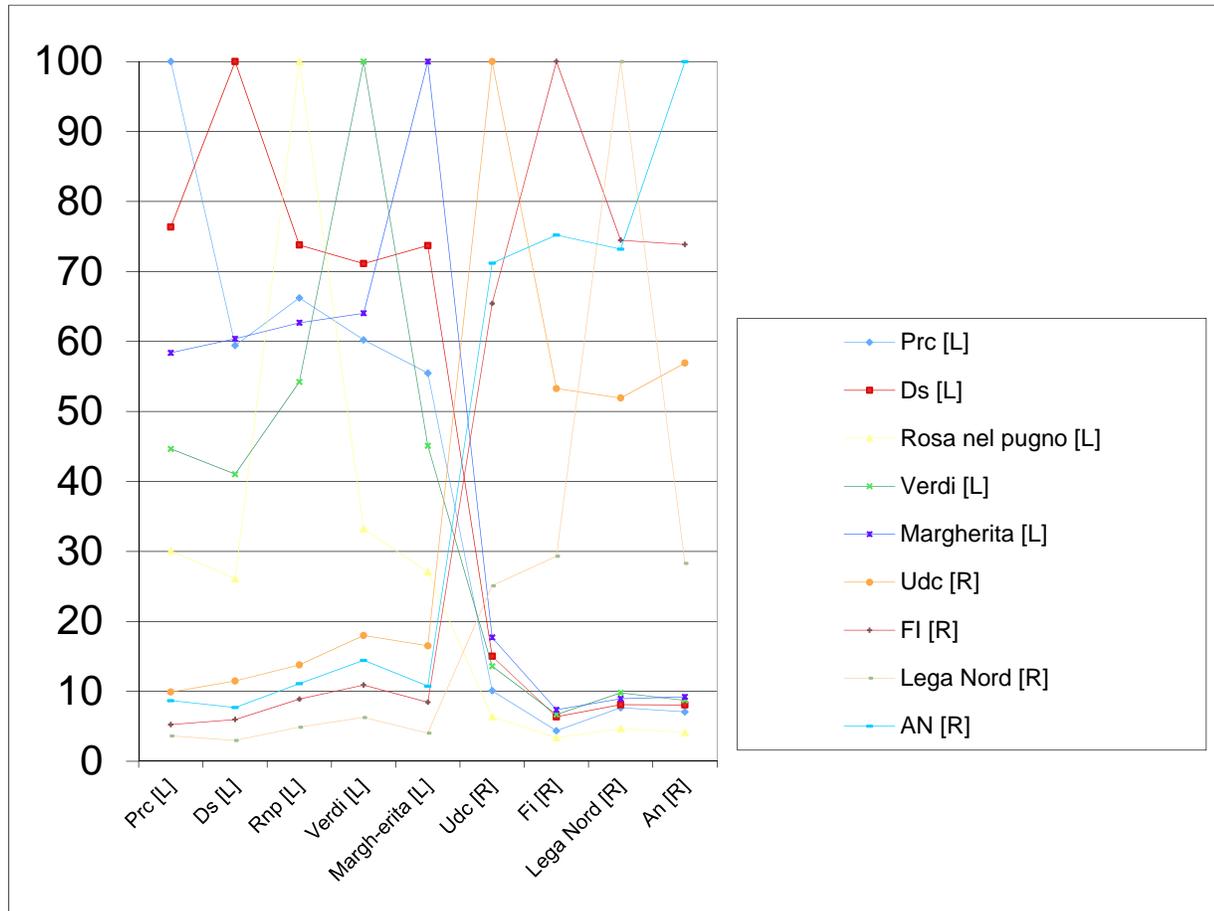
(Parties are Arrayed on a Left-Right Spectrum According to the Party's Mean Ideological Placement by Respondents)



* Graph is generated according to the percentage of respondents (sorted by Most Preferred Party) that answered either "I Could Vote For It" or "I Will Vote For It" on the three item scale: "I Would Never Vote For It"; "I Could Vote For It"; "I Will Vote For It."

Figure 3. Graph of 2006 Italian Voter Attitudes Toward Political Parties*

(Parties are Arrayed on a Left-Right Spectrum According to the Party's Mean Ideological Placement by Respondents)



* Percentages in the graph are the percentage of respondents (sorted by Most Preferred Party) that gave an evaluation above 5 on a ten point PTV scale.

Table 1. A changing party landscape, 1987-2008

	1987	1992	1994	1996	2001	2006	2008
Old parties							
	Partito comunista italiano (Pci)	Partito democratico della sinistra (Pds)	Pds	Democratici di sinistra (Ds)	Ds	Ds	Partito democratico (Pd)
	Democrazia cristiana (Dc)	Dc	Partito popolare italiano (Ppi)				
	Partito socialista italiano (Psi)	Psi	Partito socialista (Ps)	Ps	Ps	Ps	Ps
	Movimento sociale italiano (Msi)	Movimento sociale italiano-Destra nazionale (Msi-Dn)	Alleanza nazionale (An)	An	An	An	Popolo delle libertà (Pdl)
New parties							
			Forza Italia (Fi)	Fi	Fi	Fi	Popolo delle libertà (Pdl)
	Lega lombarda (Ll)	Lega Nord (Ln)	Ln	Ln	Ln	Ln	Ln

Table 2. Party composition of each of the two largest blocs, 1994-2008

	1994	1996	2001	2006	2008
Center Right	Forza Italia	Forza Italia	Forza Italia	Forza Italia	Popolo della Libertà
	Alleanza Nazionale	Alleanza Nazionale	Alleanza Nazionale	Alleanza Nazionale	Lega Nord
	Lega Nord	Radicali	Lega Nord	Lega Nord	Movimento Autonomia
	Radicali	Centro cristiano democratico- Cristiani democratici uniti	Centro cristiano democratico- Cristiani democra	Unione di centro	
	Centro cristiano democratico		Nuovo Partito socialista italiano	Democrazia cristiana- Nuovo partito socialista italiano	
	Unione di Centro		Fiamma Tricolore	Alternativa Sociale	
	Polo Liberal Democratico			Fiamma Tricolore	
				No Euro	
				Pensionati Uniti	
				AmbientaLista	
			Partito Liberale Italiano		
			SOS Italia		
Center Left	Democratici di Sinistra	Democratici di Sinistra	Democratici di Sinistra	Ulivo	Partito Democratico
	Rifondazione Comunista	Popolari per Prodi	La Margherita	Rifondazione Comunista	Italia dei Valori
	Verdi	Rinnovamento Italiano	Girasole (Verdi-Socialisti democratici italiani)	Rosa nel Pugno	
	La Rete	Verdi	Comunisti Italiani	Comunisti Italiani	
	Partito Socialista Italiano			Italia dei Valori	
	Alleanza Democratica			Verdi	
	Cristiano Sociali			Unione dei democratici per l'Europa	
				Pensionati	
				Partito popolare sudtirolese	
				Socialisti	
			Consumatori		
			Lega Lombarda		
			Liga Fronte Veneto		

Table 3. Parliamentary strength of the two largest blocs 1994-2008, Chamber of deputies

	1994		1996		2001		2006		2008	
	N.	%								
Center-right	366	58,1	246	39,0	368	58,4	281	44,6	344	54,6
Center-left	213	33,8	288	45,7	247	39,2	348	55,2	247	39,2
Total	579	91,9	534	84,7	615	97,6	629	99,8	591	93,8

Table 4. Tabular representation of ideological proximity of party supporters to other parties in 2001, with 100 =max proximity: Evidence for assimilation and contrast effects

	Prc [FL]	Comun isti Italiani [L]	Ds [L]	Verdi [L]	Democ ratici [L]	PPi [L]	Lista Bonino [IND]	CCD [R]	CDU [R]	Fi [R]	Legia Nord [R]	AN [R]	(N)
Prc [FL]	100	76	51	46	43	41	41	19	22	16	21	16	422
Comun isti Italiani [L]	66	100	50	44	44	39	33	13	18	11	16	9	367
Ds [L]	74	84	100	73	74	70	51	30	33	22	25	21	614
Verdi [L]	48	52	52	100	55	57	53	28	30	20	23	20	436
Democ ratici [L]	33	39	39	41	100	61	27	24	31	17	17	16	323
PPi [L]	30	33	36	41	59	100	26	31	37	18	17	17	313
Lista Bonino [IND]	31	29	27	39	27	27	100	27	24	22	27	25	323
CCD [R]	20	16	22	28	33	44	37	100	79	45	45	48	443
CDU [R]	14	14	15	19	26	32	21	49	100	27	27	28	275
Fi [R]	33	24	30	39	44	48	57	86	83	100	85	88	846
Legia Nord [R]	11	10	9	11	12	12	18	22	22	22	100	21	222
AN [R]	26	16	22	31	33	36	52	72	68	69	64	100	664

Table 5. Tabular representation of ideological proximity of party supporters to other parties in 2006, with 100 =max proximity: Evidence for assimilation and contrast effects

	Prc [L]	Ds [L]	Rosa nel pugno [L]	Verdi [L]	Margherita [L]	Udc [R]	FI [R]	Lega Nord [R]	AN [R]
Prc [L]	100	59	66	60	56	10	4	8	7
Ds [L]	76	100	74	71	74	15	6	8	8
Rosa nel pugno [L]	30	26	100	33	27	6	3	5	4
Verdi [L]	45	41	54	100	45	14	7	10	9
Margherita [L]	58	60	63	64	100	18	7	9	9
Udc [R]	10	12	14	18	17	100	53	52	57
FI [R]	5	6	9	11	9	65	100	75	74
Lega Nord [R]	4	3	5	6	4	25	29	100	28
AN [R]	9	8	11	14	11	71	75	73	100
(N)	495	636	225	367	521	486	597	235	608

SOURCE: Same as Figure 3.

Table 6a. Evidence for an ideological break between competing blocs in 2001.

	Democratici [L]	PPI [L]	CCD [R]	FI [R]
PPI [L]		59	100	31
CCD [R]		33	44	100
				18
				45

Table 6b. Evidence for an ideological break between competing blocs in 2006 .

	Verdi [L]	Ma [L]	UDC [R]	FI [R]
Margherita [L]		64	100	18
Udc [R]		18	17	100
				7
				53

Table 7. Party fragmentation, Laakso-Taagepera index, votes and seats 1994- 2008

	1994	1996	2001	2006	2008
Number of effective electoral parties	7.6	7.1	6.3	7.4	3.8
Number of effective parliamentary parties	7.6	7.3	5.8	7.4	3.1

Source: Chiaramonte 2010

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¹ Moreover, for much of this time period we could think about two main parties (Socialists and Communists; Gaullists and non-Gaullist rightists) within each bloc.

² **Bardi and Mair (2008) distinguish between horizontal, vertical and functional divisions that can be used to classify parties and party systems. Similarly, Golosov (2011: 539) notes, there are many features of party systems that could be used as the basis of classification, e.g., nature and/or strength of party organizations and degree of embeddedness of parties with other economic and social institutions (see discussion in Duverger, 1959).**

³ See e.g., Lijphart (1968).

⁴ See e.g., Dunleavy and Boucek (2003), Taagepera and Allik (2006), Taagepera (2007), Golosov (2010).

⁵ For reasons of space we will not concern ourselves with the degree to which votes in Italy have been only imperfectly translated into seats, important as this issue is for any understanding of long-run Italian political dynamics. This topic has been extensively studied by students of Italian politics (see e.g., various essays in Giannetti and Grofman, 2011).

⁶ The combination of new parties and new rules has changed radically not only the pattern of party competition but also the process of government formation, the style of political campaigning, the relevance of candidates and personalities, and the influence of the media. However, these issues are beyond the scope of this essay (see D’Alimonte 2001, 2005)

⁷ **Golder (2006: 195) defines a pre-electoral coalition as satisfying two conditions: (i) parties never compete in elections as truly independent entities and (ii) the coordination of party strategies is made public. The use of informal ‘coalition signals’ to indicate anticipated coalition partners falls into a gray zone which would require a case-specific inquiry to see if in our terminology, one should count this as a “bloc politics” two-level game situation. Normally, absent some further specifics, such as informal stand-down agreements, the answer would probably be no.**

⁸ **The reader may wonder why we do not inquire about party leaders’ perceptions of ideological location/locatability of their own and other parties rather than that of voters. First, we have better information about voters than we do about party**

leaders, and we are reluctant to substitute expert judgments for this missing data. Second, we believe that, *a fortiori*, if on average, voters have single-peaked preferences over what appears to be a well-defined unidimensional categorization of party locations, then party leaders will certainly be able to make similar judgments and, insofar as voters are more likely to be taking their cues from party leaders than the other way around, we expect that voter placements will, at least in ordinal terms, be close to those that would be made by party leaders.

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⁹ We have not sought to precisely quantify this criterion because changes in party names and dissolution/fusion of small parties can be exact counting difficult. In the empirical section of the paper we provide detailed information about the degree of continuity in Italian left and right blocs after 1993.

¹⁰ If there is more than a single dimension, then we would have to replace ‘line’ with separating hyperplane.’ **It is possible to have such dimensional separation even in two dimensions** (see e.g., the figure showing party competition in Norway in Grofman, 1982, Figure 2, p. 82).

¹¹ Also very relevant is the work of Golder (2005, 2006) on the determinants of pre-electoral coalitions. As Golder (2006: 194) notes, previous theoretical and empirical analyses of party coalitions provided little information about the factors that influence pre-electoral coalition formation. (She points to one key exception: Kaminski, 2001, a cooperative game-theoretic model of coalitions in Poland.)

¹² **As it turns out we could have used an even higher percentage cut-off and still scored all but one recent Italian election as two-bloc politics.**

¹³ **As Golder (2006: 198) observes: “pre-electoral coalitions arise from a bargaining process in which party leaders compare the expected utility from running independently to the expected utility from forming a coalition. Just like government coalitions, pre-electoral coalitions should form more easily between parties with similar ideological positions.” (It might seem that we would not need to cite to the coalition literature for the seemingly commonsense assumption that ideology matters in coalition formation, but the very early literature on cabinet coalitions was obsessed with the notion of zero sum politics, and with ideas such as minimal winning and least size coalitions.)**

¹⁴ As noted in a previous footnote, it is certainly possible, in principle, to have two bloc politics even without unidimensionality but, following Taagepera and Grofman (1985) we expect that k dimensional politics ($k > 1$) is more likely to result in $k+1$ bloc than in two-bloc politics.

¹⁵ In a study on the types of formal government coalition agreements in Western Europe, Strøm and Muller (2000; cited in Golder, 2005) concluded that many of the

coalition cabinets in their sample had an “identifiable coalition agreement” and that more than a third of these were written *prior* to the election.

¹⁶ Golder (2005) tests two hypotheses about factors effecting the likelihood of pre-electoral coalitions: (1) The *disproportionality hypothesis*, which states that pre-electoral coalitions are more likely to form in disproportional electoral systems if there are many parties; and (2) the *signalling hypothesis*, which states that pre-electoral coalitions are more likely to form when voters face high uncertainty about the identity of future governments. She finds support for only the first of these two hypotheses. Our own intuition is that high levels of uncertainty about cabinet outcomes may actually mitigate against two-bloc politics. **ROBERTO/LORENZO PLEASE THINK ABOUT** Golder (2006: 199) looks at some additional hypotheses, including the hypothesis that “party system polarization increases the likelihood of pre-electoral coalitions when the electoral system is sufficiently disproportional.” She finds support for this hypothesis as well.

¹⁷ The two figures (and the corresponding tables) report the percentage of respondents (classified according to their party of first preference) that have a medium to high propensity to vote for each given party. This propensity was measured differently in 2001 and 2006. In Figure 2, for 2001 data, the percentages shown are for respondents that answered either “I could vote for it” or “I would vote for it in the three point scale: (I would never vote for it, I could vote for it, I would vote for it). In Figure 3, for 2006 data, percentages include respondents that gave parties a 5 or above on a 0-10 scale indicating “propensity to vote “(van der Eijk et al. 2006).

¹⁸ Data used for the MDS analyses are shown in Tables 4 and 5, respectively. Of course, we must be careful not over interpret this good fit, since we are dealing with aggregate level data on mean party placements, not individual level responses.

¹⁹ In these two periods many other parties also changed name or splintered or fused, e.g., Umberto Bossi’s Lega Nord (Ln) was born as the Lega lombarda (Ll) in 1987 and did not become Ln until 1992; while, in the other bloc the Pds became Ds and then merged with the Margherita to form the Pd (see Table 1).

²⁰ The analysis is complicated by the fact that an independent party Lista Bonino (not shown in Table 6) is located between the two Christian Democrat heritage parties (see Table 4).

²¹ Here we are making use of the idea of “equifinality,” namely that the “same” outcome can occur for quite different reasons, i.e., there may be a multiplicity of sufficient conditions. Each of these sufficient conditions may itself be a concatenation of a set of factors, some of which are also necessary, or some combinations of which are necessary (see references and discussion in Grofman and Schneider, 2009).

²² See Chiaramonte (2010).

²³ Both in the 1996 and 2001 elections the center-right bloc obtained fewer votes in the plurality arena than in the PR one. Given the fact that, for the Chamber of Deputies, voters cast separate ballots for the SMD candidates and for a party list, it is possible to compare in each SMD the votes received by the candidate of the coalition with those received by the parties of the same coalition. Systematically, center-right candidates fell short in the constituency level votes. Many center-right voters simply defected to other candidates, even candidates with no chance of winning (Bartolini and D'Alimonte 2006). The poor coalitional performance of the right within SMDs is, arguably, the main reason that led Berlusconi to change the electoral system in 2005.

²⁴ In the ITANES studies, the question wording is the same as is consistently employed across most multi-party European party systems, namely what party - if any- does the respondent feel “closer to than to other parties”. In 1985 there is an exception: a battery of items was used asking for each party whether the respondent felt “very close”, “close”, “neither close nor far”, “far”, “very far”. For 1985 respondents, those answering “close” or “very close” were considered as party identifiers.

²⁵ Note that even the two dimensional solution in 1985 is not as good a fit as the one dimensional solution is in 2006, albeit the nature of the data is different.

²⁶ **An important exception is the 1953 ‘legge truffa’ law, which would have awarded 65 % of seats in the Camera to the coalition of parties that received an absolute popular majority. This did not lead to a coalition situation because ROBERTO/LORENZO PLEASE FILL IN.**

²⁷ **Note, too, that what we saw after 1994 in Italy is akin in some way to the development of pan-ethnic identities, e.g., in the U.S., having those born in or with ancestral origins in Central or Latin America or Mexico coming to accept the designation of themselves as Hispanics or Latinos. The bloc comes to have an identity all its own, and in a unidimensional space, we can think of parties as being either right or left of “center.”**

²⁸ **However we are interested in situations where there is bloc formation on both the left and the right, i.e., at least four parties. If there is a two party bloc on one side, and a single party on the other, it might merely be because a centrist party is swinging to its nearest neighbour or playing off the two sides to increase its influence. We would not wish to count this as two bloc politics. ROBERTO AND LORENZO PLEASE THINK ABOUT**

²⁹ **In SMDs using plurality, if there is the equivalent of two-party politics at the district level, it will not necessarily be the same two parties in each district. So, in principle, we might have multiparty ideological bloc politics even within an SMD system. But it is certainly less likely than under PR. We might expect the same pattern for pre-electoral coalitions. Golder (2005: Table 1, p. 654) finds that pre-**

electoral coalitions occur in 46% of the PR cases she reviews, but in only 27% of the majoritarian settings. However, she does not distinguish plurality and two round elections, considering both as majoritarian. She also (wrongly) puts SNTV elections into the majoritarian category, but indicates in a footnote that she has run the data with them coded as proportional and finds little difference.

³⁰ Recall from the introduction that there may be forms of two-bloc (or multi-bloc) competition where the cleavage line(s) are not ideologically based.

³¹ **There is other evidence that we plan to examine in further work. For example, consider Greece, another country with a majoritarian bonus. There** BG FILL IN

³² If there is a pure form of two bloc ideological competition, then we would expect that, in countries using two round ballots, the competitors at the second round (if there is a second round) should be parties from different blocs. In French legislative and presidential elections this is almost always the pattern found (Lemennicier, Katir and Grofman, 2009, 2010).

³³ Strom, Budge and Laver (1994: 315-316) contains a number of useful insights, Below we quote some of the most pertinent.

“[The most obvious effect lies in the incentives provided by certain electoral systems, notably the Irish STV system, the French double- ballot system, and the British simple plurality system, for parties to form pre-electoral coalitions. A similar effect exists in proportional representative (PR) electoral systems with *apparentement*, where parties themselves can form electoral alliances for the purpose of sharing their "excess" votes. *Apparentement* has been used in the Netherlands, in the French Fourth Republic, and in Norway and Sweden until the late 1940s. The so-called “swindle law,” under which the Italian elections of 1953 were contested, was an especially potent (and controversial) form of *apparentement*. This electoral law would have given two-thirds of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies to any electoral alliance of parties that collectively polled a majority of the popular vote. The Irish STV electoral system particularly encourages coalitions to form before rather than after elections, since cooperating parties may systematically transfer votes among themselves to their mutual benefit (Laver 1992). Preelectoral coalitions were announced explicitly in 1973, 1977, and 1989-winning and forming in 1973, losing in 1977 and 1989. There were also implicit preelectoral coalitions in 1981 and twice in 1982-winning and forming in 1981 and once in 1982, losing once in 1982. The French double-ballot system provides strong inducements for parties to make electoral deals between the first and the second ballots (see Tsebelis 1990). In the 1988 presidential elections, for example, the second ballot involved a runoff between the Socialist candidate, Francois Mitterrand, and Gaullist Jacques Chirac. Particularly among supporters of various first-round candidates on the right, there was very considerable interparty maneuvering to build an antisocialist electoral coalition and thereby to mount a credible challenge to Mitterrand before the second ballot.. Systems not based on PR lists tend to force parties to coalesce before elections in order to exploit

electoral economies of scale. The more disproportional the electoral system, the greater the incentives for preelectoral alliances.”

³⁴ In plurality systems we may not have bloc politics for the simple reason that there may not be four or more parties. This suggests the desirability of investigating the similarities and differences between politics organized into blocs of parties and politics organized into competition primarily between parties, but where there are strong factions within parties, as in the Japanese LDP, or the “Tea Party” faction of the U.S. Republican Party. In the latter setting, party primaries may substitute for intra-bloc bargaining for seat allocations. However, further exploration of this point is beyond the scope of this essay.