



Electoral alliances: Party identities and coalition games

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Abstract. The emergence of electoral alliances competing for plurality seats has been one of the main consequences stemming from the introduction of the new electoral laws for the Senate and the Chamber of deputies in Italy. This paper analyzes the politics of electoral alliances at the general elections of April 1996, focusing on two factors: the making of electoral alliances and their internal arrangements for coalition management. From both points of view, the elections have shown some important new developments, including a simplification in the number of coalitions. But although the centre-left alliance was able to broaden its range, the centre-right lost the Lega Nord and suffered the split of Movimento sociale-Fiamma tricolore on its right. Moreover, the centre-right alliance also suffered from a lack of cohesion, wasting its previous coalitional capability. As in the 1994 elections the politics of electoral alliances proved to be a key factor in the electoral competition.

Coalition politics in the Italian transition

The emergence of competition between multi-party coalitions was one of the main consequences of the Italian electoral reforms of 1993–1995.¹ Such reforms introduced a mixed plurality-proportional electoral mechanism which provided strong incentives to form multi-party coalitions. These coalitions – which were actually electoral cartels – did not replace the parties, but became new and important actors in the competition for single-member districts, which represent 75 percent of the total number of districts both in the Chamber and the Senate. Therefore, coalition politics became a stable and crucial aspect of the political process.

Indeed, elections during the Italian transition were characterised by a constant redefinition of coalition alignments. In the local elections held in the summer and autumn of 1993, it was the PDS who succeeded in forming the winning coalition.² In the run up to the parliamentary elections of March 1994, the media, entertainment and constructions entrepreneur Silvio Berlusconi filled the coalition vacuum in the centre-right by creating and becoming the leader of Forza Italia (FI), a new political party based on the structure and top personnel of his company, Fininvest. He won by establishing two different coalitions. In the first coalition, the Polo delle Libertà in the North, FI and the CCD (Centro Cristiano Democratico, resulting from a split of

the right of the Christian Democrats) were allied with the autonomist Lega Nord. In the second coalition, the Polo del Buongoverno in the South, FI and the CCD were in alliance with the 'post-Neofascist' MSI-AN (Movimento Sociale Italiano-Alleanza Nazionale). After 1994, the split in the PPI between the Popolari and the CDU brought about a re-balancing which, in the regional elections of April 1995, produced a bipolar pattern of competition between two equally matched coalitions.³

Despite these developments, coalition dynamics do not yet seem to have reached a stable point of equilibrium. Many factors have contributed to the fragility and lack of cohesion within the electoral coalitions. One explanatory factor is the still limited experience by the political actors of the new electoral rules, combined with the cultural legacy of their attachment to proportionality. Secondly, the large number of parties and movements which have so far taken part in the coalition game has made the management of individual alliances more difficult. Furthermore, the electoral coalitions have not always been governmental coalitions in the sense that some members of the former did not want to share governmental responsibilities. For example, Berlusconi had to resign as Prime Minister in December 1994 because the Lega – which had been a member of his electoral coalition – decided to withdraw from the government; likewise Romano Prodi's government formed in May 1996 is crucially dependent upon the support of Rifondazione Comunista (RC), who was part of the centre-left coalition but did not join the Cabinet.

In the new Italian mixed electoral system there are in fact two levels of competition. The logic of competition between coalitions is interwoven with traditional party competition, based upon individual rivalry between each alliance's component parts, particularly those that occupy adjacent positions in the political space. This coexistence of diverging and in some ways conflicting competitive logics affects the politics of electoral alliances from several perspectives. It reaffirms the distinctiveness of the party from the coalition and it emphasises the specific weights of parties within coalitions because, in the Chamber and regional elections voters' can cast both a strategic vote in the plurality arena and (presumably) a more expressive vote in the PR one. The result is a sort of proportionalization of the plurality system, a phenomenon which first appeared in the 1994 election (Bartolini & D'Alimonte 1995; Di Virgilio 1995).

The interdependence between plurality and proportional levels becomes a significant ingredient in alliance politics: for the coalitions, it represents a precarious endogenous factor, inasmuch as it defines an incentive-structure within which the interests of the parties do not always match those of their own coalition, and which seems to offer the potential for the system to become stuck in a never-ending transition.

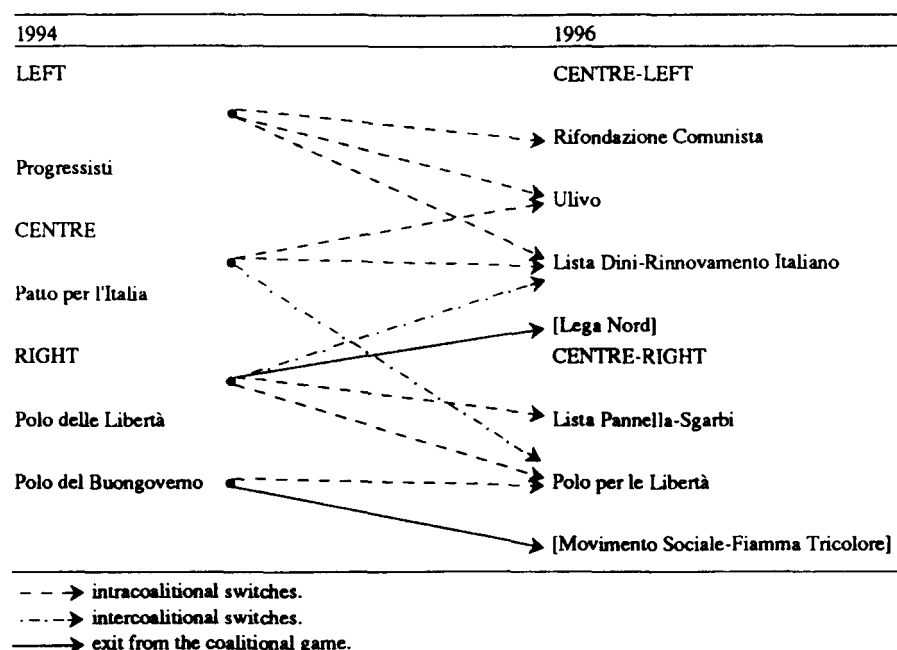
What did the parliamentary elections of 1996 add to this picture? How can electoral competition be characterised in terms of coalitional politics? And what is the relationship between the plurality and proportional arenas? Finally, what can be concluded from a comparison with the 1994 elections? To answer these questions, this article will examine the composition of the electoral coalitions and their *internal arrangements for coalition management*. The expectations are, firstly, that the actors – both parties and coalitions – should have become more familiar with the new rules in 1996, and learned how to use them. Secondly, the electoral system, at its second test, should have displayed its intrinsic properties and the actors should have been able to fit their choices to the structures of incentives and constraints provided by it. Thus, we should be able to extract useful indications as to the significance of the ‘politics of electoral alliances’ in many aspects of the Italian electoral process.

From 1994 to 1996: The reshaping of electoral coalition

In the elections of 1996, the pattern of electoral alliances in the plurality competition was significantly different to that of the previous elections. From the original four (Progressisti on the left, Patto per l’Italia in the centre, Polo delle Libertà and Polo del Buongoverno on the right) the coalitions dropped to two, namely the centre-left and centre-right. This reshaping of the coalitional landscape produced a complex shifting of positions and many novel aspects at the level of coalition-building. The results have been a re-balancing of the two coalitions, as well as new forms of coalition management.

On the right, the abandonment of the bi-coalitional strategy developed by Berlusconi in 1994 rendered the Polo per le libertà (which in 1996 competed nationally without the Lega) weaker and more vulnerable than two years previously. Three factors were primarily responsible: (a) fierce competition from the Lega and other forces operating within the electoral target-area of the coalition; (b) a shift to the right of the coalition’s centre of gravity and consequently a lower capacity for protecting its left flank and for appealing to the centre electorate; (c) the decline of coalitional cohesion which paradoxically occurred despite the reduction of the coalition’s own political space. As can be seen from Table 1, from 1994 to 1996 the centre-right cartel lost one basic component (the Lega), a small party on the right (the Movimento Sociale-Fiamma Tricolore, MSFT, which split from AN in February 1995), and a restless, minor libertarian group (the Lista Pannella). These losses, as it happened, hindered the chances for success of the Polo candidates in the single-member districts.⁴ If the presence of the MSFT candidates in the plurality competition was more costly for the centre-right cartel than expected,⁵

Table 1. The evolution of the competing coalitions, 1994 and 1996



it was nonetheless the divorce from the Lega which cut most deeply into the coalition's appeal to broad sections of the moderate electorate in the North.

As in the 1995 regional elections, the Lega was replaced as a member of the centre-right coalition by AN, which therefore took an important step in its strategy of legitimisation. The territorial homogeneity for the centre-right coalition, which allowed AN broader political space and more visibility, also contributed, as suggested earlier, to shifting the alliance to the right.⁶ The same effect was produced by events such as the decision of Lamberto Dini (Prime Minister at the time, but a member of Berlusconi's cabinet beforehand) to join the centre-left coalition and a certain weakening of the more moderate positions within Forza Italia.⁷

In turn, the diminished effectiveness of the alliance and its reduced capacity for electoral mobilisation weakened the cohesion of the coalition. The clearest indicator of this was the behaviour of AN, which, on the eve of the elections, challenged its own allies;⁸ furthermore, other reasons for conflict had appeared between the minor coalition partners – for example, between the catholic CCD-CDU and the Lista Pannella – over the distribution of districts. Moreover, there were important differences of opinion, and even distrust,

over what to do after the elections amongst the various components of the coalition (the main suspects being the CCD and CDU for their presumed predilection for neo-centrist Parliamentary alliances with the right wing of the Ulivo). There were also contrasts between coalition partners on specific policies, ranging from institutional reforms to privatisation plans.

The Polo, despite having originally succeeded in retaining most of its votes after the Lega's defection, as indicated by the regional elections of 1995, began to show signs of early weakening. The decision to confirm Berlusconi as the coalition's candidate for Prime Minister in 1996 seemed more of a necessity, rather than the dynamic element that had galvanised the coalition and ensured cohesion among its different components in 1994. More specifically, it appeared that the centre-right coalition had lost the competitive advantages it had enjoyed in 1994: its odd, but very effective variable composition in the North and South; the 'Berlusconi effect'; the shortcomings and errors of its opponents; and an election campaign that presented the coalition as the expression of something new, hinting to a 'new Italian miracle'. The Polo lacked fresh resources, those that could perhaps have been provided by a successful performance in office or by a well made party restructuring.⁹

The centre-left alliance instead showed greater capacity of innovation, a flair for managing increased complexity and even a certain amount of ambiguity. The coalition combined all the numerous components which in 1994 had campaigned under the Progressisti label with most of the members of the *Patto per l'Italia* (see Table 1). In addition, in the run-up to the elections, it acquired components which were originally part of the *Polo per la Libertà*, and extended itself by including some autonomist groups which in 1994 had not joined any coalition, namely the *Partito Sardo d'Azione*, the *Legha Autonomia Veneta*, and the *Unione Autonomista Ladina*. As a result, it comprised as many as 23 party components (Table 2), compared to the 7 on the centre-right. Most of these are actually micro-formations – often referred to as *cespugli* (literally, 'shrubs'). Only in a few cases we can speak of national parties with a reasonable level of organisational institutionalisation.¹⁰

Such crowding of the Ulivo alliance carried the risk of reproducing, perhaps even more strongly, the two main drawbacks of the 1994 Progressisti coalition: its excessive ideological breadth and heterogeneity, and hence a lack of coherence; and the high party density (i.e., too many parties vying for visibility, too many pressures from party cadres and a surplus of politicians in search of nomination). So, the Progressisti had devoted in 1994 more energies to stabilising their difficult intra-coalitional relations than to promoting the coalition to the outside world – for instance, trying to come up with a successful strategy to win those marginal districts which were crucial to the outcome of the elections.¹¹ The need to avoid the repetition of this unhappy

experience stimulated innovation and pushed the components of the new electoral alliance, and in particular the PDS acting as its strategic heart, towards 'technical' choices, aimed at reducing the political and decision-making costs associated with the breadth of the centre-left coalition.

By observing the configuration of the centre-left coalition in Tables 1 and 2, one basic idea emerges: the coalition is not simply the sum of the Progressisti and the Patto per l'Italia of 1994, but rather the result of their dis- and re-aggregation, and of the inclusion of new actors.¹² The new coalition is in fact composed of three structurally diverse set of actors: a party (Rifondazione Comunista); a coalition of differently sized components (the Ulivo) and a 'new moderate and reformist centre formation'¹³ which is itself a collection of small groups (Rinnovamento Italiano-Lista Dini). The agreement between these three components reflected, on the one hand, the experience gained by the 1994 defeat and, on the other, Dini's decision to enter the political fray as an independent actor, but in alliance with the Ulivo.

After the 1994 elections, two convergent trends can be identified. On one side, the PDS, under the new leader Massimo D'Alema, adopted a strategy of 'opening to the centre', which led the party to give up claiming for itself the prime ministership and to support instead a centrist candidate, Romano Prodi. On the other side, the former Patto per l'Italia, which had been crushed in 1994 in the plurality arena (only four seats with six million votes) and which was now searching for a new role, chose to ally itself with the PDS notwithstanding the defection of its moderate wing (the CDU), which eventually joined the Polo.

Between the spring of 1995 and that of 1996, the centre-left alliance underwent a long and tortuous process of restructuring. The coalition initially presented itself as a political alliance between the PDS and the proposed federation of centre-left *cespugli*. The latter had been announced in the early months of 1995 by three initiatives: (1) the establishment of a parliamentary group called Democratici, comprising members of Parliament from the Patto Segni, Alleanza Democratica and the Socialisti Italiani; (2) the launching of the Ulivo as a symbol of a new 'container' for those (both politicians and voters) from the Popolari, the Republicans, the Patto Segni, the Social Democrats, the Liberals and the Verdi who were willing to form an alliance with the PDS; (3) and the nomination of Prodi as the prime ministerial candidate by the Popolari.¹⁴ The alliance between the emerging Ulivo and the PDS was not intended to include the extreme left Rifondazione comunista (RC) which was not invited to take part. The founders of the Ulivo, in short, wanted their group to compete on its own in the PR arena, and in alliance with the PDS in the single-member districts.

Table 2. Composition of electoral coalitions, 1996 elections

Electoral coalitions	PR ballots lists	Party components	
CENTRE-LEFT			
Rifondazione Comunista	Rifondazione Comunista	Rifondazione Comunista	
Ulivo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — PDS-Sinistra Europea — Verdi — Pop-SVP-PRI-UD-Prodi 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Movimento dei Comunisti Unitari (Crucianelli) — Cristiano-Sociali (Carniti) — Partito Democratico della Sinistra — Federazione Laburista (Spini) — Movimento per l'Unità della Sinistra Riformista (area Ruffolo) — Socialdemocratici (Schietroma) — Rete-Movimento Democratico 	
		Verdi	Verdi
		Unione Democratica	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Partito Popolare Italiano — Comitati per l'Italia che vogliamo (Prodi, Bressa)
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Maccanico — AD-UDS (Bordon) — PRI (La Malfa) — SI dissidenti (Giugni) — Liberali (Zanone)
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Partito Sardo d'Azione — Lega Autonomia Veneto (Rigo) — Unione ladina indipendente (Detomas) 	
Lista Dini-Rinnovamento Italiano	Lista Dini-Rinnovamento Italiano	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Socialisti Italiani (Boselli) — Pato Segni (Masi) — Comitato Dini (Dini) — Movimento Italiano Democratico (Berlinguer) 	
CENTRE-RIGHT			
Lista Pannella-Sgarbi	Lista Pannella-Sgarbi	Movimento Pannella-Riformatori	
Polo per le Libertà	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — CCD-CDU — Forza Italia — AN 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Centro Cristiano Democratico — Cristiani Democratici Uniti — Socialisti e liberali europei (Ferri) 	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Forza Italia — Federalisti Liberal-Democratici (Costa-Negri) — Lista per Trieste (Camber) 	
		Alleanza Nazionale	

The unexpected relative longevity of the Dini government (January 1995 – April 1996) and the consequent, repeated postponement of the date of the elections, as well as the unwillingness of the Popolari and Verdi to give up their autonomy, forced a change of the original plan. The regional elections of 1995 provided the first test for the emerging centre-left coalition.¹⁵ After these elections, the coalition became more and more similar to the 1994 Progressisti alliance, with each component, whatever its size, screaming for recognition among constant threats to use its veto power during negotiations.¹⁶ A new plan then emerged. Its centrepiece was the direct participation of the PDS in the Ulivo. The Ulivo thus was transformed into an umbrella organization for the numerous coalition members. The label Ulivo would therefore be used for the coalition's candidates in plurality districts, rather than for the PR lists where parties would run with their own labels. Prodi's nomination as a candidate Prime Minister gave the coalition its common denominator. However, Prodi's role – as he lacked independent organisational resources – was confined to convening coalitional negotiations.¹⁷

The coalition found itself at the mercy of the turn of events. After April 1995, the Prodi candidacy became progressively more fragile, as many divisions became evident between the coalition partners – particularly on the question of institutional reforms. In the autumn of 1995, the Patto Segni and the Socialisti Italiani formally left the Ulivo, followed later by the Verdi. At the beginning of 1996, the tentative agreement between D'Alema and Berlusconi concerning the establishment of a broad-based government able to promote institutional reform severely tested the strength of the coalition and seemed to nullify Prodi's role. In mid-February, the calling of new elections boosted the Ulivo again as the regrouping of the centre-left became once again imperative. The building of the coalition thus entered a new and decisive phase, through which certain technical choices transformed a *political* alliance in disarray into a well functioning *electoral* machine. There were two principal ingredients to this process of 'coalitional engineering': (a) the separation within the Ulivo between the party components of the cartel and the party lists running in the PR arena, with the latter becoming responsible for coalitional negotiations; (b) the redefinition of the coalition's boundaries. In addition, unlike the Progressisti in 1994, the centre-left coalition developed a strategy which recognised local specificities, both in the composition of the cartel (which, as seen earlier, included the Partito Sardo d'Azione in Sardinia only, and the Lega Autonomia Veneta in Veneto) and in the skillful use of the electoral law.

In order to make the PR lists an expression principally of the alliance, rather than of individual party components, internal hierarchical criteria were established. They enabled the two main parties in the coalition – the PDS and

the PPI – to abolish the ungovernable negotiating table to which all components had participated in 1994 with equal status, and to exert more direct and central control over the alliance. This simplified intra-coalition relationships and the decision-making process. Through the creation of PR cartels within the Ulivo, a development made necessary by the poor performance of the Progressisti in 1994,¹⁸ the alliance was transformed into a ‘coalition of coalitions’, reducing the number of individual actors, and opening up new margins for negotiation and compensation between partners. For example, the cartel of the Sinistra Europea was formed around the PDS (combining the Comunisti Unitari, the Federazione Laburista, the Cristiano-sociali, and the Movimento per l’Unità della Sinistra Reformista and the Socialdemocratici). The Verdi, after a failed attempt at allying themselves with La Rete, opted instead for presenting their own list.

The formation of PR lists among the moderate members of the Ulivo was a complex problem. The right of the Ulivo has always been a difficult area, made up of different identities, positions and ambitions in competition with each other: Prodi and his Comitati; the lay *cespugli*, which had split in 1994 between the Progressisti and Patto per l’Italia coalitions; and the PPI, the only component confident of being able to overcome the 4 per cent threshold. To these, a new party was added – Rinnovamento Italiano – allied to the centre-left coalition but without becoming part of the Ulivo.¹⁹ The PPI’s unwillingness to give up its own identity in the proportional arena and Dini’s demand for independent recognition made it impossible for these parties to converge into a single PR cartel. The right of the Ulivo thus ended up forming two cartels – the Popolari-SVP-PRI-UD-Prodi list and the Dini-Rinnovamento Italiano list. Their existence indicated not so much divergence or convergence on concrete issues, but rather tactical or personal choices, including the possible confrontation after the elections between Prodi and Dini for the prime ministership.

A second crucial ingredient of the redefinition of the centre-left coalition and its boundaries was the pact between the Ulivo and RC. This nationwide agreement called for the Ulivo not to contest seats in certain number of single member districts and support instead RC candidates – in return for a similar decision by RC in those districts where the Ulivo ran its own candidates. This *patto di desistenza* seemed the best way for the Ulivo to maximise its share of the votes without having to make policy concessions to RC.²⁰ The agreement was based on the common objective of defeating the Right and on the assertion that the electoral coalition would not necessarily correspond to the governmental coalition. To emphasize visually this point the Ulivo candidates ran in the single-member districts under the Ulivo symbol whereas the RC candidates ran under the old 1994 Progressisti label. This expedient

was intended to give credibility to the Ulivo's claim that such an agreement would make it easier for Prodi's coalition to gain a 'self-sufficient parliamentary majority'. It also allowed the Ulivo's leadership better control over the interconnections between the plurality and PR ballots.²¹

In conclusion, the analysis of the two 1996 coalitions and of the process by which they were created reveals that, despite the lessons of 1994, the two cartels did not make it a priority to maximise the cohesion and coherence of their political programmes. This was especially true for the centre-left coalition which, unlike the Polo, was a cartel built to defeat a common adversary rather than to become a governmental alliance. The centre-left coalition nevertheless employed a style and techniques for coalition building and coalition management which allowed it to orchestrate as many as 23 different voices and still appear more cohesive than the Polo. The *patti di desistenza* with RC neutralised the problems connected with the ideological broadening of the coalition. Its awareness of the interaction between the plurality and the PR electoral arenas enabled it to simplify the intra-coalitional arrangements. The presence of Rinnovamento Italiano and its uncontested claim to 'independence' (Panebianco 1996), helped reach moderate voters and avoid tensions within the coalition. On the opposite side, the centre-right lacked innovation and at the same time appeared to have missed the ability to recognize the constraints and opportunities created by the new electoral law.

Changes in the *modus operandi* of the electoral cartels

In 1994 the genesis and composition of the electoral cartels had influenced intra-coalition relations in various ways. The agreement concerning the distribution of single-member districts amongst their party components and the selection of the candidates are the main processes to be observed in order to understand the relationships between coalition partners and the cartels' rules of operation. Factors such as the number of actors involved, their cultural orientations (in a broad sense), the level of territorial differentiation in the alliance, as well as the levels and the actual locations of the negotiations emerge as particularly relevant. Such factors contributed to defining the terms of coalition agreements, conditioned the times and modes of intra-coalition decision-making processes and influenced the coalitions' electoral performances (Di Virgilio 1995). The agreements within each cartel took the form of an estimated partition of anticipated electoral gains, the analysis of which constitutes the main perspective from which to consider the relationship between coalition partners, the rules of operation in each cartel, and the choices concerning electoral strategy and campaign techniques.

From all these points of view, the campaign for the 1996 elections introduced many innovations. The most important of these are found in the centre-left coalition. Mainly on the instigation of the PDS, this coalition made some radical strategic and tactical changes and demonstrated a remarkable – and rather unexpected – capacity for learning from the negative experience of 1994.

Not so for the centre-right. Here coalitional relationships were more problematic for at least two reasons. Firstly, in 1996 the coalition partners were no longer – as they had been two years previously – new parties (FI) or parties expecting a consistent and reasonably stable performance (AN), but instead they were searching for a confirmation of their electoral and parliamentary strength and were fighting amongst themselves for the leadership of the alliance. Secondly, the coalition agreement, signed in 1994 in the context of strictly bilateral meetings between FI and the other members of the two cartels, turned out to be more complex because of the participation of new actors (the CCD and the CDU, to which were added, at various stages, Pannella's Radicals and Costa's Liberals) and the weakening of Berlusconi's leadership.

The definition of a basic criterion for allotting single member districts to the different cartel's components was a much debated issue within the Polo. The criterion of continuity for sitting members of Parliament – or, more precisely, for the parties, but not necessarily for the individual politicians – did not meet with much opposition, but the specification of the 'weights' of individual parties was the cause of considerable disagreements. The coalition partners decided to reject AN's request that the findings of opinion polls – which in early 1996 had recorded a rise in voting intentions for Fini's party – should play a role in the allotting of single member districts. They also rejected the CDU's proposal that FI should be responsible for allocating the single member districts via a series of bilateral meetings with the individual members of the cartel. The agreement which was eventually reached was to base the negotiations principally upon the criterion of the parties' performance in the 1995 regional elections. As can be seen from the data in Table 3, there were significant regional variations from the mean values in the allotment of the single member districts in the Chamber amongst the components of the Polo. For example, in the North FI candidates stood in a large number of the districts allotted to the Lega in 1994, and gained a dominant position within the coalition in terms of numbers of seats contested. They secured almost two-thirds of these.²² In the South, AN remained the party with the largest number of candidates. The position of Fini's party in the Southern regions, however, was less dominant than in 1994, because AN, in exchange for being included in the Polo in the North, had to give up twenty of its Southern 1994 districts to its allies. The Catholic components of the Polo

Table 3. Centre-right: party affiliation of candidates for the Chamber of Deputies

Geopolitical area		AN	Forza Italia	FLD	CCD	CDU	Total
North	N	42	102*	10	13	12	179
	%	23.5	57.0	5.6	72.0	6.7	100
Red Zone	N	27	33		7	13	80
	%	33.75	41.25		8.75	16.25	100
South	N	93	86		21	15	215
	%	43.2	40.0		9.8	7.0	100
Italy	N	162	221	10	41	40	474
	%	34.2	46.6	2.1	8.7	8.4	100

* Including one (elected) candidate from the *Lista per Trieste*.

N.B. The North includes: Piedmont, Valle d'Aosta, Lombardy, Venetia, Friuli-Venetia Julia, Trentino-Alto Adige, Liguria; the Red Zone (Centre) includes: Emilia Romagna, Tuscany, Marches and Umbria; the South includes: Latium, Abruzzi, Molise, Campania, Apulia, Basilicata, Calabria, Sicily, Sardinia.

Source: Own calculations based on data published in *Il Secolo d'Italia*, 31 March 1996, and on data supplied by the party office of the Cristiani Democratici Uniti.

(the CCD and the CDU) won 81 candidatures, with significant increases in the North and Centre areas, where their presence in single-member districts acted as a catalyst for the PR vote.

Between 1994 and 1996, the centre-right coalition agreement thus underwent some significant changes. The most important were the decision to form one coalition with the same partners throughout the country (instead of two as in 1994) and the absence of a 'coalition-maker' – the role played by FI two years earlier. These changes emphasized the role of each party to the detriment of the interests of the coalition. Each component of the Polo put its own party interests before the shared objectives of the coalition thus making internal negotiations more difficult than in 1994. FI appeared less compliant in its dealings with its allies, and was no longer prepared to make the concessions that two years before had strengthened its role as the coalition's centre of gravity. In 1996 AN challenged FI as the leader in the bargaining process, and secured for itself a high number of safe single member districts not only in the South but also in the North. As in 1994, the 1996 negotiations over how many and which single member districts should be allotted to each member of the cartel were controlled centrally by the party leaderships. The selection of the candidates, on the other hand, was left to each party. Despite these changes there was continuity in the relative electoral performance of the Polo's individual components. Its defeat in the 1996 elections reduced its

Table 4. Centre-right; electoral performance of candidates in single-member districts by party affiliation

	AN	Forza Italia	FLD	CCD	CDU	Total
Number of Deputies						
North	16	38	5	2	1	62
Red Zone	1	2	–	–	–	3
South	48	41	–	11	4	104
Italy	65	81	5	13	5	169
<i>Level of return</i>	<i>40.1</i>	<i>36.7</i>	<i>50.0</i>	<i>31.7</i>	<i>12.5</i>	<i>35.7</i>
Number of Senators						
North	8	11	1	2	2	24
South	20	12	–	7	4	43
Italy	28	23	1	9	6	67
<i>Level of return</i>	<i>36.4</i>	<i>22.8</i>	<i>25.0</i>	<i>32.1</i>	<i>33.3</i>	<i>29.4</i>

Source: see Table 3 and official electoral data.

share of single member districts to 35.7 percent for the Chamber and 29 percent of the Senate.²³ However, just as in 1994, the AN candidates performed better than the centre-right's average (especially in the South, where they won more than half the single member districts they contested). AN's performance was better than that of FI even in the North. In the South, the CCD – but not the CDU (with whom it was allied in the PR arena) – did relatively well, while FI did better than the coalition's average only in Northern single member districts for the Chamber.

Let's take a closer look now to the centre-left coalition. As suggested earlier, here too we find important changes (for the better), by comparison with 1994, as to the allocation of single member districts to the different party components. First of all, the coalition leaders decided to shift the bargaining process from the regional level to the national level where it was conducted exclusively by party leaderships. This drastically reduced the number of negotiators and the conflicts within the cartel. Secondly the negotiations were carried on at different tables. There was a negotiating table for the Ulivo, which involved the PDS, the Verdi, the PPI and Rinnovamento Italiano, in addition to Prodi in his capacity as candidate for the prime ministership. There was also the bilateral negotiation between the PDS and RC, which defined the terms of the *patto di desistenza* between the Ulivo and RC itself. Lastly, there were specific bargaining tables for the PR cartels, where respective shares of candidates in the PR lists were decided.²⁴

The result of the bargaining process was that the coalition agreed to allot 60 percent of the candidates for the single member districts to the left (including RC) and 40 percent to the centre (including the Verdi), thus giving the centre parties a share that was higher than that they would have obtained if the distribution had been based strictly on the results of the 1995 regional elections, the most recent indicator of party electoral strength. The allocation of the single member districts to the many different components of the centre-left alliance produced a complex jigsaw (see Table 5). RC contested about half the districts it had fought in 1994, but managed to consolidate its presence especially in the centre of the country where most of the safe districts for the left are concentrated. The PDS, in spite of the fact that the coalition was broader, obtained more candidates than two years previously, and performed well at the polls, by retaining a solid grip on the districts of Central Italy. In addition it helped the election of the leaders of the *cespugli* grouped under the Sinistra Europea label.

The allocation of candidates to the two lists and the many components of the moderate wing of the centre-left coalition was more complex. Dini's hypothesis – initially supported by the PDS – that the Popolari and Rinnovamento Italiano (the two most important parties in this area) should have the same number of candidates was abandoned as a result of the negotiations. The initial strength of the then Prime Minister Lamberto Dini derived from the skilful timing of the announcement in February 1996 of his decision to join the centre-left alliance. However, Dini's advantage quickly evaporated as he was unable to give Rinnovamento Italiano credibility by developing organizational resources and fielding strong candidates. The lack of expertise and of a clear negotiating stance by Dini's party became evident during the bargaining process, especially by comparison with the PPI's political professionalism. The Popolari succeeded in gaining a dominant position not only in relation to Rinnovamento Italiano, but also to the other components of their list (Prodi's Comitati and the Unione democratica led by Antonio Maccanico).²⁵

The negotiations over the allocation of single member districts, the result of which are illustrated in Table 5, marked the emergence of RC, the PDS and the Popolari – the three components of the centre-left coalition endowed with the most professional and coherent party structure – as the main protagonists of the alliance. However, the resources of political professionalism possessed by these actors were used for different purposes. The objective of RC and the PPI was largely to maintain and develop their existing electoral and parliamentary strength and to find for themselves an influential role within the coalition. The PDS was rather more interested in the success of the coalition as a whole. Accordingly it invested more than any other member of the alliance in constructing and managing the cartel itself and accepted the political

Table 5. Centre-left: party affiliation of candidates for the Chamber of Deputies

Geopolitical area		RC	Rete	PDS-Sinistra Europea						PSDI	PSd'A	LAV
				CU	PDS	CS	FL	Area Ruffolo				
North	N	5	3	1	60	2	2	1			1	
	%	2.8	1.7	0.6	33.5	1.1	1.1	0.6			0.6	
Red Zone	N	11		3	43	1	3					
	%	13.75		3.75	53.75	1.25	3.75					
South	N	11	8	3	88	3	8		1	1		
	%	5.2	3.8	1.4	41.5	1.4	3.8		0.5	0.5		
Italy	N	27	11	7	191	6	13	1	1	1	1	
	%	5.7	2.3	1.5	40.5	1.3	2.7	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	

Geopolitical area		UAL	Verdi	Pop-SVP-PRI-UD-Prodi			Lista Dini-Rinnovamento Italiano			Total	
				Area Prodi	PPI	UD	SI	Patto Segni	Comitato Dini		MID
North	N	1	14	7	57	3	8	7	7	179	
	%	0.6	7.8	3.9	31.8	1.7	4.4	3.9	3.9	100	
Red Zone	N		6	1	6	1	1	1	3	80	
	%		7.5	1.25	7.5	1.25	1.25	1.25	3.75	100	
South	N		8	10	50	4	3	5	5	4	212 [-3]
	%		3.8	4.7	23.6	1.9	1.4	2.3	2.3	1.9	100
Italy	N	1	28	18	113	8	12	13	15	4	471 [-3]
	%	0.2	5.9	3.8	24.4	1.7	2.5	2.7	3.2	0.8	100

* In the Isernia (Molise) and Trapani (Sicilia 1) districts, the centre-left did not field any candidates; in the Mirabella Eclano district (Campania 2) it withdrew in favour of former christian democrat leader Ciriaco De Mita.

Source: Own calculations based on data supplied by the Electoral Office and Secretariat of the PDS, the party office of the PPI, the Coordinamento nazionale per i Comuni per l'Ulivo, the Patto Segni, the Federazione Laburista (website), La Rete (website), and the Movimento dei Comunisti Unitari (website).

risks connected to such a choice. In other words, the PDS played a pivotal role as coalition-maker in all the key moments of the construction of the alliance (the *patto di desistenza* with RC, the negotiations within the Ulivo, and the relations with the moderate wing) and fought an election campaign which focused on promoting the coalition rather than the party itself.²⁶ Despite this 'disinterested' conduct, the PDS did well in terms of its electoral performance

by comparison with the other components of the coalition, as shown in Table 6.

Qualitative criteria for the allocation of single member districts

An assessment of the quality of the *quality* of the single member districts formed part of the negotiations for their allocation in the run up to the 1996 elections. Qualitative considerations became more important than ever before in 1996, in part because the 1994 parliamentary elections and the 1995 regional elections had provided data about the orientations of the voters in single-member districts. These data allowed inferences to be drawn about the real value of the various districts which were placed on a scale from 'safe' to 'unwinnable'.

The rating of single member districts according to criteria of 'winnability' had already in 1994 been an aspect of intra-coalition negotiations. However, the lack of familiarity by political parties with the new electoral rules and the difficulty – if not impossibility – of producing reliable estimates about the newly-created single member districts during a period of electoral turbulence had severely limited the use of such calculations. Rating the winnability of districts became common practice among the competitors in the 1996 elections. In order to produce a map of single member districts based on their degree of winnability, the actors in the coalitional game used the results of the 1995 regional elections, and supplemented them with polls of voting intentions. These included especially commissioned surveys of supposedly marginal districts and other forecasts – provided by local parties – about the likely electoral behaviour in specific localities.

Tables 7 and 8 contain data concerning the *supposed* winnability of single member districts²⁷ for the Chamber of Deputies. In these two tables such districts are divided into four categories: 'safe', 'marginally winnable', 'marginally unwinnable', and 'unwinnable'. By comparing the two tables, it is possible to identify, first of all, the different expectations of the centre-right and the centre-left coalitions about the result of the plurality ballots. The centre-right operated within a scenario where defeat was the most likely outcome. According to such a scenario, in fact, as many as 218 districts out of 474 were considered by the Polo as unwinnable. The Polo's expectations were made more pessimistic by the fact that its own pollsters thought there could be an electoral agreement in the North between the Ulivo and the Lega Nord. Consequently, the number of districts considered as unwinnable in the Northern regions was as high as 61.5 percent. According to the Polo's forecasts only just over a quarter of districts nationwide (more than two-thirds

Table 6. Centre-left: electoral performance of candidates in single-member districts by party affiliation

	PDS-Sinistra Europea																																
	RC	Rete	CU	PDS	CS	FL	Area Ruffolo	PSDI	PSd'A	LAV																							
N of Deputies																																	
North	3	2	1	30	2	-	1				-																						
Red Zone	10		3	41	1	3																											
South	2	3	2	51	1	3		1		-																							
Italy	15	5	6	122	4	6	1	1		-	-																						
<i>Level of return</i>	<i>55.6</i>	<i>45.5</i>	<i>85.7</i>	<i>63.9</i>	<i>66.7</i>	<i>46.1</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>		<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>																						
N of Senators																																	
North	3			18	2	-	1				1																						
Red Zone	5		1	20	2		3																										
South	3	1		33		2		-		1																							
Italy	11	1	1	71	4	2	4	-		1	1																						
<i>Level of return</i>	<i>64.7</i>	<i>33.3</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>66.4</i>	<i>80.0</i>	<i>40.0</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>0</i>		<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>																						
<table border="0" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="2"></th> <th colspan="3">Pop-SVP-PRI- UD-Prodi</th> <th colspan="4">Lista Dini-Rinnovamento Italiano</th> <th colspan="2">Total</th> </tr> <tr> <th>UAL</th> <th>Verdi</th> <th>Area Prodi</th> <th>PPI</th> <th>UD</th> <th>SI</th> <th>Patto Segni</th> <th>Comitato Dini</th> <th>MID</th> <th colspan="2"></th> </tr> </thead> </table>														Pop-SVP-PRI- UD-Prodi			Lista Dini-Rinnovamento Italiano				Total		UAL	Verdi	Area Prodi	PPI	UD	SI	Patto Segni	Comitato Dini	MID		
		Pop-SVP-PRI- UD-Prodi			Lista Dini-Rinnovamento Italiano				Total																								
UAL	Verdi	Area Prodi	PPI	UD	SI	Patto Segni	Comitato Dini	MID																									
N of Deputies																																	
North	1	4	4	19	2	1	3	2			75																						
Red Zone		6	1	6	1	1	1	3			77																						
South		6	3	27	3	1	2	3	1		109																						
Italy	1	16	8	52	6	3	6	8	1		261																						
<i>Level of return</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>57.1</i>	<i>44.4</i>	<i>46.0</i>	<i>75.0</i>	<i>25.0</i>	<i>46.1</i>	<i>61.5</i>	<i>25.0</i>		<i>55.4</i>																						
N of Senators																																	
North		5	2	8	-	1	-	-	1		42																						
Red Zone		4	1	2		1		1			40																						
South		5	-	11	1	2	1	2			62																						
Italy		14	3	21	1	4	1	3	1		144																						
<i>Level of return</i>		<i>93.3</i>	<i>50.0</i>	<i>45.7</i>	<i>50.0</i>	<i>57.1</i>	<i>50.0</i>	<i>50.0</i>	<i>100</i>		<i>63.2</i>																						

Source: see Table 5 and official electoral data.

Table 7. Centre-right: winnability categories of single-member districts in the Chamber on the eve of the elections and relative electoral performance

	Safe districts			'Marginally winnable' districts			'Marginally unwinnable' districts					
	N	% of which won		N	% of which won		N	% of which won				
		N	%		N	%		N	%			
North	39	21.8	21	53.8	16	8.9	6	37.5	14	7.8	8	57.1
Red Zone	3	3.75	2	66.7	3	3.75	–	0	3	3.75	–	0
South	92	42.8	71	77.2	47	21.9	16	34.0	39	18.1	13	33.3
Italy	134	28.3	94	70.1	66	13.9	22	33.3	56	11.8	21	37.5
	'Unwinnable' districts			Total								
	N	% of which won		N	% of which won							
		N	%		N	%						
North	110	61.5	27	24.5	179	100	62	34.6				
Red Zone	71	88.75	1	1.4	80	100	3	3.7				
South	37	17.2	4	10.8	215	100	104	48.4				
Italy	218	46.0	32	14.7	474	100	169	35.7				

Safe district: one in which the lead in voting intentions for the Polo over the second strongest coalition is more than 5,000 votes.

Marginally winnable: lead in favour of the Polo parties is between 1,000 and 5,000 votes.

Marginally unwinnable: lead over the Polo parties is between 1,000 and 5,000 votes.

Unwinnable district: lead over the Polo parties is more than 5,000 votes.

Source: Own calculations based on data provided by Diakron.

of these being concentrated in the South) were considered as safe, while in almost half of marginal districts the centre-left was ahead.

In the case of the centre-left coalition, the PDS and the PPI provided at the time of the negotiations valuable information about districts' rating. The expectations of the centre-left added up to a scenario which was more uncertain and balanced than that outlined by the Polo, although a slight advantage for the Ulivo-RC-Dini alliance was forecast. There was an uncanny symmetry between the number of districts considered as safe and those considered as unwinnable, both categories containing 191 districts each. As for marginal districts, in two-thirds of them the centre-left saw itself in a leading position (see also Table 8 for forecasts in the North, the Centre and the South).

If we compare the forecasts made by the two coalitions with their actual performances in each category of districts three main conclusions emerge. The first concerns the forecasting ability of the two coalitions. The map de-

Table 8. Centre-left: winnability categories of single-member districts in the Chamber on the eve of the elections and relative electoral performance

	Safe districts				'Marginally winnable' districts				'Marginally unwinnable' districts			
	N	% of which won		N	% of which won		N	% of which won		N	% of which won	
		N	%		N	%		N	%		N	%
North	47	26.3	40	85.1	23	12.8	18	78.3	14	7.8	9	64.3
Red Zone	74	92.5	73	98.6	2	2.5	2	100	2	2.5	1	50.0
South	70	33.0	58	82.9	32	15.1	24	75.0	16	7.6	10	62.5
Italy	191	40.55	171	89.5	57	12.1	44	77.2	32	6.8	20	62.5
	'Unwinnable' districts				Total							
	N	% of which won		N	% of which won		N	% of which won				
		N	%		N	%		N	%			
North	95	53.1	8	8.4	179	100	75	41.9				
Red Zone	2	2.5	1	50.0	80	100	77	96.2				
South	94	44.3	17	18.1	212	100	109	51.4				
Italy	191	40.55	26	13.6	471	100	261	55.4				

Safe district: one in which the lead of Ulivo-RC over Polo in district is higher than 3.5%.

Marginally winnable: lead in favour of Ulivo-RC is between 0.1 and 3.5%.

Marginally unwinnable: lead over Ulivo-RC parties is between 0.1 and 3.5%.

Unwinnable district: lead over Ulivo-RC parties is more than 3.5%.

Source: Own calculations based on data provided by PPI and PDS.

veloped by the centre-left cartel – on which the alliance, and the PDS in particular, had based their electoral strategy – was very reliable. Secondly, and scarcely surprisingly, the outcomes of the competition for marginal districts was a crucial factor in the final result of the elections. The centre-left won just over 70 percent of the districts it had classified as marginal (with an especially good performance in the North, where the coalition benefited from the strong presence of the Lega Nord). The Polo, on the other hand managed to win about 35 percent of such districts. Lastly, as shown by Table 8, in terms of its electoral performance the Polo appeared more and more dependent on its heartlands in the South, while the centre-left achieved a more balanced distribution of its electoral strength throughout the country.

By linking each cartel's assessment of the winnability of single member districts, on the one hand, and the party affiliation of the candidates on the other, we can have a richer and more precise evaluation of the negotiating process and its outcomes. We can also see more clearly other aspects

Table 9. Distribution of districts among the party components of the Polo by winnability category

	Safe districts		Marginal districts		Unwinnable districts		Total	
	N of which won		N of which won		N of which won		N of which won	
AN	56	42	44	14	62	9	162	65
Forza Italia	60	42	61	23	110	21	231	86
CCD	13	8	7	3	21	2	41	13
CDU	5	2	10	3	25	–	40	5
Total	134	94	122	43	218	32	474	169

Table 10. Centre-right: electoral performance by party components by winnability category of districts (%)

	AN	Forza Italia	CCD	CDU	Total
<i>Safe districts</i>					
%	41.8	44.8	9.7	3.7	100
of which won	44.7	44.7	8.5	2.1	100
Level of return	75.0	70.0	61.5	40.0	70.1
<i>Marginal districts</i>					
%	36.1	50.0	5.7	8.2	100
of which won	32.5	53.5	7.0	7.0	100
Level of return	31.9	37.7	42.9	30.0	35.2
<i>Unwinnable districts</i>					
%	28.4	50.5	9.6	11.5	100
of which won	28.1	65.6	6.3	0	100
Level of return	14.5	19.1	9.5	0	14.7
<i>Total</i>					
%	34.2	48.7	8.7	8.4	100
of which won	38.5	50.9	7.7	3.0	100
Level of return	40.1	37.2	31.7	12.5	35.7

of intra-coalition relations, such as the negotiating ability of their different components and their electoral performance. In order to do this, Tables 9 to 12 reconstruct the allocation of single member districts to each party component in the two coalitions. The four tables specify both the number of safe, marginal and unwinnable districts respectively allocated to each party component, and each party's performance at the 1996 elections for each of the three categories of districts.

In the centre-right coalition, AN obtained through the negotiations more winnable districts than those allocated to its allies. AN gained the largest share of safe districts and the smallest of unwinnable ones. The numbers of districts allocated to FI according to the three categories of winnability were close to the averages for the Polo as a whole, while the coalition's Catholic component was over-represented only in the 'unwinnable' category (see Tables 9 and 10), a further proof of its relative political weakness. In terms of electoral performance, AN did better than its partners in the Polo especially in the 'safe' category and, more generally, in Southern districts, while FI and the CCD achieved better results than those of their allies in marginal districts (Di Virgilio 1997: 113–115).

In the case of the centre-left coalition, the allocation of different types of districts to the individual party components shows a complex pattern. The first question to be considered is that of the relationship between the left and the moderate wing of the coalition. Tables 11 and 12 show how the left secured for itself the overwhelming majority of safe districts, leaving to the moderates the bulk of the unwinnable districts and a slight majority of those in the marginal category. For example, RC, in return for the *patti di desistenza* with the Ulivo, obtained as many as 23 safe districts out a total allocation of 27, while the PDS secured for itself 100 safe districts out of a total of 191.

Secondly, it is worth focusing on the relationships among the moderate forces in the centre-left alliance. The component which gained more from the negotiations were the Popolari – also by comparison with Rinnovamento Italiano. The Verdi too did relatively well, principally because they benefited from the agreement within the coalition to re-assign districts to the parties who had won them in 1994 (the Verdi had succeeded in winning 11 districts for the Chamber and 7 for the Senate in those elections).

A third level of analysis concerns the qualitative allocation of the districts to the parties/groups making up the lists for the PR ballots. The PDS resisted more effectively than in 1994 the pressing requests for winnable districts by the *cespugli* of the Sinistra Europea, while the Popolari secured for themselves a much higher share of districts considered as winnable than those of both the Comitati Prodi and the Unione democratica (Di Virgilio 1997: 117–119). Lastly, the four components of Rinnovamento Italiano achieved a more

Table 11. Distribution of districts among the party components of centre-left by winnability category

	Safe districts		Marginal districts		Unwinnable districts		Total	
	N of which won		N of which won		N of which won		N of which won	
RC	23	15	2	-	2	-	27	15
CU	4	4	2	2	1	-	7	6
PDS	100	93	32	22	59	7	191	122
CS	1	1	1	1	4	2	6	4
Laburisti	6	6	1	-	6	-	13	6
Area Ruffolo	1	1		-			1	1
PSDI			1	1			1	1
PDS-SE	112	105	37	26	70	9	219	140
Verdi	10	9	7	6	11	1	28	16
Area Prodi	3	3	4	3	11	2	18	8
PPI	28	26	17	14	68	12	113	52
UD	3	3	3	3	2	-	8	6
Pop.-UD-Prodi	34	32	24	20	81	14	139	66
SI	2	1	3	2	7	-	12	3
Patto Segni	3	3	4	3	6	-	13	6
Comitato Dini	2	2	7	5	6	1	15	8
MID	1	1		-	3	-	4	1
Lista Dini	8	7	14	10	22	1	44	18
Rete	4	3	3	2	4	-	11	5
PSd'A			1	-			1	-
LAV			1	-			1	-
UAL				-	1	1	1	1
Total	191	171	89	64	191	26	471	261
Total of Sinistra	135	120	39	26	72	9	246	155
Total Moderates	52	48	45	36	114	16	211	100

N.B. Left includes RC and PDS-SE candidates; Moderates include Verdi, Pop.-UD-Prodi and Lista Dini candidates.

balanced allocation of districts, although perhaps with slight advantages for the Patto Segni and the Comitato Dini (see Table 11).

With regards to electoral performance, Table 12 highlights significant differences between partners in the centre-left. The most striking data concern RC, whose candidates won only 15 of the 23 safe districts allocated to them (only 2 out of 8 in the South). At the other end of the spectrum, moderate

Table 12. Centre-left: electoral performance by PR lists by winnability category of districts

	RC SE	PDS	Verdi	Pop.-UD- Prodi	Lista Dini	Altri	Total	Left	Moderates
<i>Safe districts</i>									
%	12.1	58.6	5.2	17.8	4.2	2.1	100	70.7	27.2
of which won	8.8	61.4	5.3	18.7	4.1	1.7	100	70.2	28.1
Level of return	65.2	93.7	90.0	94.1	87.5	75.0	88.9	82.8	92.3
<i>Marginal districts</i>									
%	2.2	41.6	7.9	27.0	15.7	5.6	100	43.8	50.6
of which won	–	40.6	9.4	31.2	15.6	3.1	100	40.6	56.2
Level of return	0	70.3	85.7	83.3	71.4	40.0	71.9	66.7	80.0
<i>Unwinnable districts</i>									
%	1.0	36.7	5.8	42.4	11.5	2.6	100	37.7	59.7
of which won	–	34.7	3.8	53.9	3.8	3.8	100	34.6	61.5
Level of return	0	12.9	9.1	17.3	4.5	20.0	13.6	12.5	14.0
<i>Total</i>									
%	5.7	46.5	6.0	29.5	9.3	3.0	100	52.2	44.8
of which won	5.7	53.6	6.1	25.4	6.9	2.3	100	59.4	38.3
Level of return	55.6	63.9	57.1	47.5	40.9	42.9	55.4	63.0	47.4

candidates – especially in the case of the Popolari – performed better than the cartel's average. At the level of individual party components, the two largest and leading partners in the cartel – the PDS and the Popolari – buttressed their dominance in the coalition through their good electoral performance. On the contrary, results for minor parties did not always match the quantity and quality of the districts they had secured via the pre-electoral negotiations (one can contrast, for example, the creditable performance of the Cristiano-sociali and of Unione democratica with the disappointing results of the Laburisti, of the Socialisti Italiani and of the Comitati Prodi).

Learning the rules of the game

After two elections with the new electoral rules what conclusions can we draw on how they have been used by the main actors? Are there differences between the 1994 and 1996 elections pointing to a linear learning process?

Since the picture we have presented here is mixed, let us summarize our main findings.

The first conclusion is about the proportionalization of the plurality system, that is the systematic distribution of the single-member districts among the parties allied in each electoral cartel. This phenomenon had already appeared in 1994. In the 1996 elections it became more politically important and better established. The distributive criteria were fine-tuned and the expectations linked to were consolidated. This is because the actors involved in the intra-coalitional negotiations possessed more reliable data in 1996 than in 1994 on the status of single-member districts, as well as on the likely electoral performance of the different party components of the cartel. Moreover, the very competitive nature of the 1996 elections gave minor parties within both coalitions substantial bargaining power. As a result they got more districts and more seats and this favoured their survival and the trend towards proportionalization. Such a phenomenon in 1996 was not limited to the plurality arena, but it extended to the PR one since it involved also the arrangements for the PR lists and the linkages (*collegamenti*) between the plurality and proportional arenas, through the mechanism of the *scorporo*. Pre-electoral negotiations over the allocations of districts – in 1994 and especially in 1996 – absorbed much of the energies and resources deployed by the coalitional actors for strategic innovation. The results of these efforts however have not been the same for the Ulivo and the Polo. The former was very successful, in spite of its fragmentation and ideological heterogeneity, in forming a highly representative, yet well functioning coalition: quite an achievement compared to the 1994 Progressisti. For the Polo the exact contrary occurred. The two successful coalitions built in 1994 gave way to a single coalition in 1996 which found itself marred in a maze of intra-coalitional conflicts. This leads to a second, related observation.

Coalitions have become the most important key to success in the elections. This is true because 75 percent districts are assigned with the plurality rule, but also because a successful coalition is able to attract voters who do not like any of the parties in the coalition itself, but like the coalition. In other words, the last two elections have shown clearly that coalitions can provide an ‘added value’ which can be a crucial factor for winning plurality districts. This value is the difference between the plurality votes received by the candidate of the cartel in the district and the PR votes received by the cartel’s members in the same district.²⁸

This ‘coalition effect’ depends from the ability of the parties in the building, managing and promoting the coalition. This ability was shown remarkably by Berlusconi in 1994. He had grasped very quickly and had exploited very skillfully the nature of the new electoral system and the fact that he was

perceived as someone outside the established but discredited political elites. He created an innovative alliance which brought the 'post-neofascist' AN into the Italian political mainstream, and had different configurations – suited to local electoral preferences – for the North and the South of the country (Di Virgilio 1995). In 1996 this ability was gone. On the one hand, the alliance suffered the negative consequences of the poor management of its internal fragmentation; on the other, at the very moment in which the divorce from the Lega made it necessary to give the coalition a new and more coherent identity, it fell into a state of disarray. In retrospect, what happened to the Polo indicates just how much the 1994 success depended upon Berlusconi's entrepreneurial and leadership skills, and, conversely, how little it had to do with any institutional understanding by the members of the cartel. Berlusconi's politico-judicial misfortunes may have contributed to undermining the coalition's cohesion and, at least in part, may explain the lack of teamwork by the Polo's components. Nevertheless, we cannot fail to pinpoint the striking lack of competence and the inadequate technical resource used by the centre-right.

In 1996 the 'coalition effect' rewarded the centre-left who demonstrated the capacity to learn from its mistakes. The serious electoral defeat of 1994 acted as a catalyst for change and for devising new procedures for coalition-building. The centre-left coalition in 1996 was constructed almost as a conscious alternative to the internal culture and the arrangements for coalition management of the 1994 Progressisti alliance. For example, the paralytically large, multiple coalitional negotiating tables of 1994 were replaced by the more centralised, leaner and faster decision-making procedures of 1996.²⁹ Much greater attention was paid to extending the alliance towards the centre by forging ties with the Popolari and the Lista Dini. Following the same strategy of catering to moderate voters the extreme left Rifondazione Comunista was kept outside of the governing coalition, yet tied to it by a more flexible *patto di desistenza*.

Many of these changes bear the influence of the PDS. Not only was it able to persuade its allies to take seriously the implications of the new electoral rules but it made the success of the coalition its primary objective. The party deployed its own resources to this end, and made use of external expertise, in order to forge a solid alliance and fine tune the management of the election campaign. As suggested earlier, the PDS invested in setting up an observatory on single member districts and in monitoring marginal districts. The party then used these additional resources to increase its bargaining power in intra-coalition dealings, and to maximise the cohesion of the alliance. D'Alema's party established a well-functioning working relationship with the PPI, which also possessed its own resources of political professionalism, local organisa-

tion and management ability, and made use of such collaboration to run the coalition, as well as to advance its own interests. These innovations made the election campaign more effective and better targeted, also through the concentration of efforts and resources on marginal districts. The PDS strategy was still embryonic, did not meet with much enthusiasm among coalition partners and met resistance within the party itself. The centre-left's sense of direction, however, was clear, as can be seen from various innovations concerning its electoral strategy towards marginal districts. Candidates were selected on the basis of the local socio-economic characteristics or of their wide personal appeal; visits and speeches by the best known national leaders, as well as general and targeted electoral propaganda, were concentrated in these districts, for some of which there were even specific and detailed election campaign action plans.³⁰

The 1996 elections confirmed that the tailoring of an appropriate coalition strategy is a precondition for electoral success. It is not easy to establish to what extent the innovations introduced by the centre-left coalition, in part as a result of learning from their 1994 defeat, contributed to the outcome of the elections two years later, and whether the strategy of the Ulivo and its partners was more important a factor than the mistakes and internal problems of the Polo, who, on the contrary, seemed to have forgotten the formula of their own success.³¹ We have demonstrated, however, that the centre-left took part in the 1996 elections with a well-engineered coalition, and was thus able to win by exploiting those favourable circumstances in the electoral competition which were created by the shortcomings of the Polo.

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Notes

1. These reforms are contained in Law 276 (Senate) and 277 (Chamber of Deputies) of 4 August 1993, in Law 43 of 23 February 1995 (regional councils), and in Law 83 of 25 March 1993 (provincial and municipal councils).
2. See Di Virgilio (1994).
3. See D'Alimonte (1995) and Di Virgilio (1996).
4. More specifically, in the Chamber single-member districts, the Polo candidates were opposed in 195 cases by a Lega candidate, in 34 cases by a Lega candidate and an MSFT

- candidate, and in 145 cases by an MSFT candidate alone. In 79 districts, the Polo candidate had no 'internal' rivals (if we exclude the candidates on the Pannella-Sgarbi list, with whom the Polo signed an electoral agreement one week before the elections).
5. See D'Alimonte & Bartolini (1998).
 6. But without a corresponding radicalisation in the coalition's programme. The divorce from the Lega and the diminished emphasis of FI on neo-liberal economic and social policies in fact rendered the Polo's 1996 programme less divergent from that of its opponents than in 1994.
 7. There were many attempts to reinforce this border zone. However, these turned out to be either impractical – Berlusconi, for example, did not manage to recruit Mario Segni and the 'presidentialist' from the centre-left – or counterproductive – as in the endless search for an agreement with Pannella's Radicals.
 8. In an interview in *Corriere della Sera* (19 February 1996) in the early days of the campaign, Fini raised the issue of choosing a centre-right prime ministerial candidate and expressed some reservations about Berlusconi's suitability, without hiding the fact that one of his party's main objectives was to overtake FI in the PR ballots.
 9. This observation is particularly relevant to FI, which could not manage any substantial move towards building a mass liberal-conservative party, or even show the desire to do so, being incapable of addressing any of its many structural deficiencies (Maraffi 1996; Panebianco 1996).
 10. Some of the members of the alliance were created after the elections of 1994 as a product of parliamentary dynamics. For example, the Comunisti Unitari led by Garavini and Crucianelli, who left Rifondazione Comunista after voting in favour of Dini's budget in March 1995; the splitting of traditional governing parties and of their successors, such as Spini's Federazione Laburista or Boselli's Socialisti Italiani (who split from the Italian Socialist Party), and even Bianco's PPI (a product of a split from Democrazia cristiana); groups formed specifically for the elections, such as Rinnovamento italiano, the new movement led by Prime Minister Dini formed on 23 February; the Unione Democratica, the federation of *cespugli* led by Antonio Maccanico; and the Comitati per l'Italia che vogliamo, which supported Prodi's candidacy for the post as Prime Minister since the 1995 spring.
 11. See Di Virgilio (1995).
 12. It is perhaps worthwhile recalling that in 1994 the composition of the left and centre coalitions was the following: Rifondazione Comunista, Rete, Verdi, PDS, Rinascita Socialista, Partito Socialista, Alleanza Democratica, and Cristiano-Sociali for the Progressisti; PPI and Patto Segni (itself composed of the Popolari per la Riforma, Partito Repubblicano, the Amato socialists, and the Zanone liberals) for Patto per l'Italia.
 13. The definition used by Dini to present his 'party'. See *Corriere della Sera*, 23 February 1996.
 14. The name of the ex-president of IRI was put forward by certain members of the Popolari's left wing – Andreatta, Elia, Mancino and Mattarella – to hasten internal clarification and to block Secretary Buttiglione's strategy of allying the PPI with FI.
 15. This was the first time the problem of RC had to be dealt with. On this occasion, RC participated in centre-left coalitions in seven cases out of 15, and its independent standing allowed the centre-right to win control of the government in three regions – Piedmont, Venetia and Calabria.
 16. See Ignazi (1995) and Gilbert (1996).
 17. From 8 June, the coalition began to meet on a regular basis to discuss tactics and alliance strategies. At such meetings, following leaders took part, each with equal status: D'Alema for the PDS, Bianco for the PPI, Segni for the Patto Segni, Bordon for Alleanza Democrat-

- ica, Boselli for the Socialisti Italiani, La Malfa for the PRI, Orlando for La Rete, Ripa di Meana for the Greens, Zanone for the Federazione dei Liberali, Spini for the Federazione Laburista, Schietroma for the PSDI, Carniti for the Cristiano-Sociali and Petrini, head of the Lega in the Chamber of Deputies, as an observer.
18. In the 1994 elections, four lists belonging to the Left coalition – Verdi, Rete, PSI and AD – were excluded from the distribution of proportional seats for not having overcome the 4 percent threshold. The four parties had obtained a total of three million votes (8% of the total votes) and a dozen deputies.
 19. In support of his initiative, Dini could count on the *cespugli* which had abandoned the Ulivo (the Patto Segni and the Socialisti Italiani), some ministers from his ‘non-political’ government of 1995–1996 (Fantozzi, Ossicini, Treu), a collection of former Lega deputies and senators, including the ex-leader of the Chamber of Deputies, Petrini, and Sergio Berlinguer’s Movimento Italiano Democratico (MID).
 20. Prodi had defined the patti di desistenza as ‘a swindle against the nation’ (*Corriere della Sera*, 18 November 1995).
 21. This is because of the effects of the *scorporo*, a peculiar mechanism of the electoral system (see Appendix to this issue of the Journal). Particularly in the Senate, the interplay between the two arenas can yield very unpredictable results.
 22. Except for a small number that went to the Federalisti Liberal-Democratici.
 23. In 1994, the levels were 90.9% in the Chamber and 84.9% in the Senate for the Polo della Libertà; and 71.3% in the Chamber and 54.5% in the Senate for the Polo del Buongoverno.
 24. District negotiations were held in the most contentious cases, with the aim of simplifying and negotiating potential conflict. In 1994, the centralised negotiating table for the Progressisti alliance reserved for itself a quota of ‘national candidates’, who were parachuted into safe seats; in 1996, each component selected its own candidates, according to the criteria determined by its own party leadership. This criterion was balanced in part, as requested by the PDS, by the coalition’s vetting of candidates for marginal districts.
 25. In 1994, Alleanza democratica – a political group similar to Maccanico’s Unione Democratica – had 70 districts, of which 50 were in the Chamber and 20 in the Senate.
 26. The decisions not to use its own symbol in the plurality ballots and to identify as the prime objective of the campaign the maximisation of the coalition’s proportional vote, are elements which seem to support this hypothesis.
 27. The two maps of single-member district winnability (and their use in the negotiations) have been reconstructed by using, in addition to the sources cited in the tables, data kindly provided by Gianni Cuperlo and Mauro Zani (PDS), Lapo Pistelli and Antonella Rossi (PPI), Giuliano Urbani (FI), Giampaolo Parenti (Diakron), Antonio Deparolis and Mario Tassone (CDU), and Altero Matteoli (AN), to all of whom I am very grateful. The data used have different origins and were employed by the two coalitions in different ways. The values in Table 7 were calculated using a model by Diakron, commissioned by FI, which made them available to other members of the Polo. The model used a sample of 21,000 telephone interviews carried out in September 1995 and January 1996, and replies to a survey of voting intentions in the PR ballots. The values in Table 8 came directly from the parties themselves. These were calculated by the PDS and the PPI, by using the 1995 regional election results, combined and revised on the basis of local party estimates.
 28. This phenomenon is examined in Bartolini & D’Alimonte (1995) and in D’Alimonte & Bartolini (1998).
 29. Paradoxically, this occurred at the same time when certain members of the alliance hastened to propose primaries for the selection of candidates. The advocates of such proposal intended not only to promote non-professional candidates, but also to challenge the role of

the PDS in the coalition. They ignored the fact, however, that primaries, even though they give an important role to the media and the opinions of the interested public, leave great scope to party manipulation (Sartori 1994: 29–30) and, in this case, would have probably allowed the PDS to have its own candidates elected with considerable ease.

30. This information derives from interviews with Gianni Cuperlo and Mauro Zani.

31. See D'Alimonte & Bartolini (1998).

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