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Italy: Political Data and Developments in 2020

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Introduction

In Italy, 2020 was marked by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, which affected the country earlier and harder than the rest of the world. The Cabinet in office was the second Cabinet formed under the leadership of Giuseppe Conte (Conte II). This government had been in charge since September 2019, after the League/*Lega* (Lega) had toppled the previous Cabinet (Conte I). The new Cabinet involved the Five Star Movement/*Movimento 5 Stelle* (M5S), Free and Equal/*Liberi e Uguali* (LeU), Italy Alive/*Italia Viva* (IV), and the Democratic Party/*Partito Democratico* (PD). Despite a relatively ample majority, this Cabinet was challenged by both the external pressure of the opposition (led by the League) and continuing intra-coalition disputes, raised in particular by IV. This ultimately led to the collapse of Conte II in January 2021.

The other two major events of 2020 were a constitutional referendum that reduced the size of the Italian Parliament, and the regional elections. The main issues dominating the political agenda were the Covid-19 emergency and the consequent policy issues aimed to manage the health crisis, Italy's economic crisis measures, the European recovery package (Next Generation EU), the European Union's (EU) response to the pandemic crisis and vaccine procurement.

Election report

Regional elections

In 2020, nine out of 20 Italian regions held elections. In two regions, Emilia-Romagna and Calabria, elections took place as planned on 26 January. The Covid-19 emergency and the consequent measures for containing the virus led to the postponement of regional elections until 20–21 September for the other seven regions (Valle d'Aosta, Veneto, Liguria, Tuscany, Marche, Campania and Puglia).[1] Given that public health governance in Italy is mostly decentralized at the regional level and that the pandemic emergency had territorial specificities, this round of regional elections was exceptionally salient in Italian politics.

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Besides the pandemic emergency and its socio-economic impact, this regional electoral cycle was characterized by a heterogeneous set of coalitions across regions. In terms of electoral supply, there was a de-alignment between coalitions across territorial levels of government. While at the national level the so-called 'yellow-red' governmental coalition composed by M5S, PD and IV remained relatively cohesive, at the local level the three parties did not reach an electoral agreement. The three parties fielded different candidates, emphasizing the image of a non-cohesive coalition. Conversely, the three main parties of the centre-right opposition, namely Silvio Berlusconi's Go Italy/*Forza Italia* (FI), Brothers of Italy/*Fratelli d'Italia* (FdI) and the League/*Lega per Salvini Premier* (LpSP), were able – despite their differences and rivalry – to converge on the same candidates across regions, maximizing their electoral chances.

The centre-right national opposition maintained their regional strongholds in Veneto and Liguria, while the centre-left remained in power in Tuscany, Puglia, Emilia-Romagna and Campania. The Marche and Calabria regional governments went from the centre-left (PD) to centre-right, while in the Aosta Valley the autonomist–regionalist parties, together with the local centre-left, won against the incumbent centre-right coalition led by the League.

In terms of electoral supply, regional elections are usually characterized by a plethora of local parties and electoral lists supporting the regional prime ministerial candidate. Tables 1 and 2 thus show high levels of party fragmentation. For instance, in Campania, 15 electoral lists were supporting the centre-left presidential candidate, of which 12 obtained at least one seat in the regional parliament. Moreover, electoral lists created locally to support each prime ministerial candidate scored higher than national parties. For instance, in Veneto the incumbent right-wing candidate Luca Zaia – in office since 2010 – obtained 44.6 per cent of votes and 23 seats just for his list. His party, the League, obtained only 16.9 per cent of votes and nine seats.

Referendum

On 20–21 September, a constitutional referendum aimed at reforming the size of the legislative branch was held. The reform proposed to reduce the number of MPs: the senators would be decreased from 315 to 200 and the deputies from 630 to 400. In addition, the proposal set a limit of five senators for life. Finally, for those seats elected from abroad, deputies decreased from 12 to eight, and senators from six to four. The rationale of the reform was to cut the costs of politics (about €100 million per year), whilst creating a more efficient Parliament. Opponents to the reform argued that this would increase district magnitude, weakening the MPs' relationship with voters. In addition, in the case of linguistic minorities and small regions, this reform would negatively impact their representation (Garavoglia 2020).

The reform was the M5S flagship, epitomizing its anti-elite rhetoric (Newell 2020). The other government coalition members' positions about the referendum were more nuanced. While the PD also campaigned for a 'yes' vote, this generated a heated debate within the party. Both Lega and FdI also supported the initiative – although less enthusiastically. Conversely, FI, IV and parts of LeU abstained to indicate a party line on the vote (Bergman 2020).

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Table 1. Results of regional (Emilia-Romagna, Calabria, Campania and Liguria) elections in Italy in 2020

Region			Region Emilia-Romagna			Region Calabria			Region Campania			Region Liguria		
Total number of seats			48			29			49			29		
Electorate			3,578,179			1,895,990			4,996,921			1,340,604		
Total votes cast			2,373,974			840,563			2,774,104			716,211		
Turnout			67.7%			44.3%			55.5%			53.4%		
Total valid vote			2,325,497			813,355			2,574,718			6,842,490		
Share of valid vote			64.9%			42.9%			51.5%			50.9%		
Party			Vote %	Seat		Vote %	Seat		Vote %	Seat		Vote %	Seat	
				N	%		*N*	%		*N*	%		*N*	%
Democratic Party	*Partito democratico*	(PD)	34.7%	22			45.8%	15.2%	16.9%	8	16.3%	19.9%	6	20.7%
League	*Lega*	(Lega)	31.9%	14	29.2%	12.2%	4	13.8%	5.6%	3	6.1%	17.1%	6	20.7%
Brothers of Italy	*Fratelli d'Italia*	(FdI)	8.6%	3	6.2%	10.8%	4	13.8%	5.9%	4	8.2%	10.9%	3	10.3%
Five stars movement	*Movimento 5 Stelle*	(M5S)	4.7%	2	4.2%	6.3%			9.9%	7	14.3%	7.8%	2	6.9%
Go Italy	*Forza Italia*	(FI)	2.6%	1	2.1%	12.3%	5	17.2%	5.2%	2	4.1%	5.3%	1	3.4%
Green Europe	*Europa Verde*	(EV)	1.9%	1	2.1%				1.8%	1	2.0%	1.5%	0	0.0%
Union of the Centre	*Unione di centro*	(UdC)				6.8%	2	6.9%	1.9%	1	2.0%	0.6%	0	0.0%
Italy Alive	*Italia Viva*	(IV)							7.4%	4	8.2%			

Table 1. (Continued)

Party		Vote %	Seat		Vote %	Seat		Vote %	Seat		Vote %	Seat	
			N	%		*N*	%		*N*	%		*N*	%
Bonaccini for President	*Bonaccini Presidente*	5.8%	3	6.2%									
Jole Santelli for president	*Jole Santelli Presidente*				8.4%	2	6.9%						
I stay in Calabria with Pippo Callipo for President	*Io resto in Calabria con Pippo Callipo Presidente*				7.9%	3	10.3%						
De Luca for President	*De Luca Presidente*							13.3%	6	12.2%			
Let's change with Toti for President	*Cambiamo con Toti presidente*										22.6%	8	27.6%
Ferruccio Sansa for President	*Lista Ferruccio Sansa Presidente*										7.1%	2	6.9%
Others (with seat)[a]		3.8%	2	4.2%	12.5%	4	13.8%	26.7%	13	26.5%	2.5%	1	3.4%
Others (no seat)		6.0%			7.4%			5.2%			4.7%		

Notes: Bonaccini for President, Jole Santelli for President, are lists supporting the candidate running for president of the region (Stefano Bonaccini, Jole Santelli)
[a]This is the aggregate of locally relevant electoral list which will not lead to one sit.
Source: Ministero dell'interno (2020).

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Table 2. Results of regional (Regions Vento, Toscana, Marche, and Puglia) elections in Italy in 2020

Region	Region Veneto	Region Toscana	Region Marche	Region Puglia
Total number of seats	49	37	30	49
Electorate	4,126,114	2,987,881	1,310,843	3,565,013
Total votes cast	2,522,920	1,870,283	783,173	2,011,520
Turnout	61.1%	62.6%	59.8%	56.4%
Total valid vote	2,453,519	1,777,809	735,200	1,862,023
Share of valid vote	59.5%	59.5%	56.1%	52.2%

Party			Vote %	Seat		Vote %	Seat		Vote %	Seat		Vote %	Seat	
				N	%		*N*	%		*N*	%		*N*	%
Democratic Party	*Partito democratico*	(PD)	11.9%	6	12.2%	34.7%	22	59.5%	25.1%	7	23.3%	17.3%	15	30.6%
League	*Lega*	(Lega)	16.9%	9	18.4%	21.8%	7	18.9%	22.4%	8	26.7%	9.6%	4	8.2%
Brothers of Italy	*Fratelli d'Italia*	(FdI)	9.5%	5	10.2%	13.5%	4	10.8%	18.7%	7	23.3%	12.6%	5	10.2%
Five stars movement	*Movimento 5 Stelle*	(M5S)	2.7%	1	2.0%	7.0%	1	2.7%	7.1%	2	6.7%	9.9%	5	10.2%
Go Italy	*Forza Italia*	(FI)	3.6%	2	4.1%	4.3%	1	2.7%	5.9%	2	6.7%	8.9%	3	6.1%
Green Europe	*Europa Verde*	(EV)	1.7%	1	2.0%	1.7%						3.8%		
Union of the Centre	*Unione di centro*	(UdC)							2.3%	1	3.3%	1.9%		
Italy Alive	*Italia Viva*	(IV)				4.5%	2	5.4%	3.2%	1	3.3%	1.8%		
Zaia for President	*Zaia Presidente*	(none)	44.6%	23	46.9%									
With Emiliano	*Con Emiliano*	(none)										6.6%	7	14.3%
Others (with seat)[a]			4.4%	2	4.1%				4.8%	2	6.7%	14.4%	10	0.4%
Others (no seat)			8.9%			12.6%			10.6%			15.1%		

Notes: Go Italy and Union of the Centre presented a joint list in Tuscany (reported once for Go Italy).

[a]Puglia: of the 10 seats in Others, seven belong to *Popolari con Emiliano* (a centrist-Catholic party supporting the left-wing candidate), and three to Puglia Tomorrow/*La Puglia Domani* (supporting the right-wing candidate).

Sources: Ministero dell'interno (2020) for Veneto; for the other three regions, the webpage of the region was used: Regione Toscana (2020), Regione Marche (2020) and Regione Puglia (2020).

As shown by Table 3, the proposed constitutional reform was approved with 69.64 per cent of the voters in favour, with 51.12 per cent turnout.

Cabinet report

There were no changes at the head of ministries, or any significant changes in the Cabinet composition (Table 4). The pandemic emergency was managed by centralizing decision-making processes and, above all, by relying on experts and task forces.

Parliament report

Within the Italian Parliament, party switching is quite frequent. Notably, this practice has increased during the current legislative term (OpenPolis 2021). Since the beginning of the legislature, more than 147 MPs have switched to another parliamentary group. There were 57 changes in 2020 – more precisely, 52 MPs switched parliamentary group, but some of them more than once, bringing the total to 57. M5S (with 33 MPs deflecting) and FI (with 14), are the parties most affected by this phenomenon.

M5S' defections depend on a set of different factors. In the early months of the year, many could be ascribed to internal disputes regarding the new alliance with the PD, with some MPs leaving M5S, advocating a closer relationship with their previous coalition partner, the League. Some M5S MPs were expelled because they were not respecting their financial obligations to the party. At the end of 2020 – in the wake of the Conte II crisis – four MPs left the M5S group after a controversial vote on a resolution on the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) reform, on which the M5S (which voted in favour) would have taken (according to the dissidents) a 'soft' position, betraying its own 'fundamental values'. FI MP defections were mainly related to disagreements on the party line. They considered their party's opposition to the Conte II government ineffective and most of them joined the League parliamentary group.

Political party report

Since January, M5S suffered multiple parliamentary defections and a considerable decrease in popularity compared with the 2018 elections. Attempting to calm the turmoil within his party and guarantee government survival, Luigi Di Maio resigned from his position as M5S political leader in January, retaining his position as foreign minister. According to the party rules, Vito Crimi, being the senior member of the *Comitato di Garanzia* (a sort of internal party oversight committee) and also head of the M5S group in the *Camera dei Deputati*, was appointed as the interim head of the M5S.

Institutional change report

Article 138 of the Constitution establishes that a request to submit a reform to a popular vote needs the support of one-fifth of Senators. On 10 January, 71 senators filed a request for the referendum described above. This request was validated by the Central Office for Referenda

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Table 3. Results of the referendum on Parliament size in Italy in 2020

Date of referendum	20 and 21 September 2020				
Electorate	54				
Total votes cast	24,993,015	Votes cast as share of electorate		53.8%	
Total valid votes	24,653,450	Valid votes as share of votes cast		98.6%	
Referendum question		Valid answers	*N*	%	Outcome
Approve the text of the constitutional law concerning 'Amendments to Articles 56, 57 and 59 of the Constitution on the reduction of the number of parliamentarians', approved by Parliament and published in the Gazzetta Ufficiale of the Italian Republic No. 240 of October 12, 2019	*Approvate il testo della legge costituzionale concernente 'Modifiche agli articoli 56, 57 e 59 della Costituzione in materia di riduzione del numero dei parlamentari', approvato dal Parlamento e pubblicato nella Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana n.240 del 12 Ottobre 2019*	Yes	17,168,702	69.6%	Pass
		No	7,484,748	30.3%	

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Table 4. Cabinet composition of Conte II in Italy in 2020

Duration of Cabinet	Inception	5 September 2019	Dissolution	Still in office at the end of the year
Period covered by table	From	1 January 2020	Until	31 December 2020
Type of Cabinet	Minimum Winning Coalition			

A.	Party/gender composition on 1 January 2020			Seats in Cabinet		Seats held by women		Seats in Parliament	
				N	%	*N*	% of party	*N*	%
	5 Star Movement	*Movimento 5 Stelle*	(M5S)	10	41.7%	3	30.0%	213	33.9%
	Democratic Party	*Partito Democratico*	(PD)	7	29.2%	1	14.3%	88	14.0%
	Italy Alive	*Italia Viva*	(IV)	2	8.3%	2	100.0%	29	4.6%
	Free and Equals	*Liberi e Uguali*	(LeU)	1	4.1%	0	0.0%	12	1.9%
	Independents			4	16.7%	1	25.0%	0	0.0%
	Totals	24	100.0%	7	29.2%	342	54.4%		

B.	Composition of Conte II Cabinet on 1 January 2020
	See previous editions of the *Political Data Yearbook for Italy* or http://politicaldatayearbook.com

C.	Changes in composition of Conte II Cabinet during 2020	Outgoing minister	Outgoing date	Incoming minister	Comments
	Ministerial title				
	None				

D.	Party/gender composition on 31 December 2020			Seats in Cabinet		Seats held by women		Seats in Parliament	
				N	%	*N*	% of party	*N*	%
	5 Star Movement	*Movimento 5 Stelle*	(M5S)	10	41.7%	3	30.0%	213	33.9%
	Democratic Party	*Partito Democratico*	(PD)	7	29.2%	1	14.3%	88	14.0%
	Italy Alive	*Italia Viva*	(IV)	2	8.3%	2	100.0%	29	4.6%
	Free and Equals	*Liberi e Uguali*	(LeU)	1	4.1%	0	0.0%	12	1.9%
	Independents			4	16.7%	1	25.0%	0	0.0%
	Totals			24	100.0%	7	29.2%	342	54.4%

Source: Governo Italiano – Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri (2020).

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Table 5. Party and gender composition of the *Camera dei Deputati* in Italy in 2020

Party			1 January 2020				31 December 2020			
			All		Women		All		Women	
			N	%	*N*	%	*N*	%	*N*	%
Democratic Party	*Partito Democratico*	(PD)	88	14.0%	31	35.2%	92	14.7%	31	33.7%
5 Star Movement	*Movimento 5 Stelle*	(M5S)	213	33.9%	89	41.8%	188	29.9%	79	42.1%
Go Italy	*Forza Italia*	(FI)	97	15.4%	32	33.0%	91	14.5%	29	31.9%
Free and Equals	*Liberi e Uguali*	(LeU)	12	1.9%	1	8.3%	12	1.9%	1	8.3%
League for Salvini Premier	*Lega per Salvini Premier*	(LpSP)	125	19.9%	36	28.8%	130	20.7%	39	30.0%
Brothers of Italy	*Fratelli d'Italia*	(FdI)	35	5.6%	11	31.4%	33	5.2%	11	33.3%
Italy Alive	*Italia Viva*	(IV)	29	4.6%	9	31.0%	30	4.8%	10	33.3%
Other	*Gruppo Misto (altri)*		30	4.7%	12	40.0%	52	8.3%	20	38.5%
Totals			629	100.0%	221	35.1%	628	100.0%	220	35.0%

Source: Camera dei Deputati (2020).

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Table 6. Party and gender composition of the *Senato della Repubblica* in Italy in 2020

Party			1 January 2020				31 December 2020			
			All		Women		All		Women	
			N	%	*N*	%	*N*	%	*N*	%
Democratic Party	*Partito Democratico*	(PD)	36	11.4%	12	30.0%	35	10.9%	12	34.2%
Five Star Movement	*Movimento 5 Stelle*	(M5S)	100	31.5%	43	43.0%	91	28.4%	39	42.8%
Go Italy	*Forza Italia*	(FI)	62	19.2%	20	32.8%	54	16.8%	18	33.3%
Free and Equals	*Liberi e Uguali*	(LeU)								
For Autonomies	*Per le Autonomie*	(SVP-UV/PATT-UPT-PSI-MAIE)	8	2.5%	2	20.0%	9	2.8%	2	22.2%
League for Salvini Premier	*Lega Salvini Premier*	(LpSP)	60	18.9%	18	30.0%	63	19.6%	21	33.3%
Brothers of Italy	*Fratelli d'Italia*	(FDI)	18	5.7%	3	16.7%	19	5.9%	3	15.8%
Italy Alive-PSI	*Italia Viva-OSI*	(IV-PSI)	17	5.4%	8	47.0%	18	5.6%	8	44.4%
Others			19	5.4%	5	26.3%	32	10.0%	8	25.0%
Totals			320	100.0%	111	34.7%	321	100.0%	111	34.6%

Source: Senato della Repubblica (2020).

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Table 7. Changes in political parties in Italy in 2020

A.	Party institutional changes in 2020											
	Let's Change!	*Cambiano*	(C!)	Became an officially registered political party	under the leadership of	Giovanni	Tori	1968	Male	C!	The party was founded in August 2019 by the former coordinator of Go Italy!, Giovanni Toti. It refers mainly to the centre-right area. However, it provided official documents for being formally acknowledge as a political party in July 2020	
	Us with Italy	*Noi con l'Italia*	(NcI)	Became an officially registered political party	under the leadership of	Maurizio	Lupi	1959	Male	NcI	It has founded as an electoral list in 2017 within the centre-right area. The party organization was then structed and consolidated in 2020. Precisely, it was formally acknowledged as a political party in December 2020	
B.	Party leadership changes in 2020											
	Five Star Movement	M5S	Political Chief	Luigi	Di Maio	1986	Male	In order to react to internal conflicts and opposition Di Maio resigned	22 December 2020	Vito	Crimi	1972	Male	M5S

of the Supreme Court. Given the Covid-19 crisis, on 16 March, the government postponed the deadline for organizing the constitutional law referendum by six months. In June, Law no. 59/2020 stated that all upcoming elections (local, regional and referendum) should be held on the same days. Planned by-elections were thus held on 20 and 21 September. Following the positive result of the referendum, on 19 October the President of the Republic Sergio Mattarella promulgated Constitutional Law n. 1 (published in the Gazzetta Ufficiale n. 261, 21 October 2020). The law was approved by a large majority in both houses. The constitutional reform reduced the MPs from 630 to 400 and the senators from 315 to 200.

Issues in national politics

As mentioned above, 2020 started with Conte II in office. There had already been tensions within the coalition in January, in particular regarding the legislative reform on the statute of limitations pushed by M5S (the 'Bonafede reform'). The M5S wanted to freeze the statute of limitations after the first-instance trial, while the PD and IV wanted to restore the previous norms. A first test for the stability of the coalition was represented by the regional elections on 26 January. The League and FI won the majority of votes in the southern Calabria region, but lost in Emilia-Romagna (one of Italy's most populous regions and traditionally left-wing). A victory of the centre-right in the latter region was considered to be potentially fatal for the government. After the elections, in February, Conte organized a round of talks with the government coalition to verify whether he still had support (*verifica di governo*). This exacerbated the tensions between M5S and the two other coalition partners. The conflicts were rooted in the ideological differences between M5S's populist vision and the pro-European and reformist vision of the centre-left (in particular of IV), which pressed Conte to modify Salvini's controversial 'Immigration and Security Decrees', but also requested education and research policy reforms and a 'shock plan', a public spending programme of more than €100 billion.

From March onward, the issue of the Covid-19 pandemic entirely dominated the political agenda. The first outbreak of the epidemic was discovered on 21 February in Codogno (Lombardy), and a total lockdown was imposed as of 11 March. All other political disputes dissolved, and public opinion rallied around the flag, and also around Prime Minister Conte, to fight the pandemic. This strong government support and lack of public debate lasted until the end of the summer. Debates as usual resumed in September, with the constitutional referendum, regional elections and a few local elections (such as in Venice, Reggio Calabria, Trento and Bolzano).

This electoral round reinforced the PD within the government coalition but did not radically change its internal dynamics. In October, public debate focused again on the contagion rates, and eventually on the second wave of Covid-19 and related containment measures. A new issue also emerged, namely the management of the Recovery Fund. Conte's plans to appoint a task force for overseeing the use of the money Italy will get from the EU Recovery Fund was strongly opposed by other coalition partners, and in particular by ex-premier Matteo Renzi's IV party, which advocated the management of the funds by the Ministry of Economy and Finance. Moreover, M5S had already contested the use of MES and of Recovery Fund for financing Italy's economic response to the crisis over the summer.

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The complexity of the situation was highlighted by the parliamentary vote on the fiscal gap and the 2021 budgetary law (Nadef), which were both approved with slim majorities (four votes in the Senate and nine votes in the lower chamber).

In November, the confrontation over the EMS caused disagreements within the government coalition, as it was strongly opposed by M5S. Moreover, the tensions continued over electoral reform and further constitutional restructurings (for eliminating bicameralism and lowering the voting age for the Senate to 18 years). On 17 December, Renzi sent an open letter to Conte asking for a radical change in inter-institutional relations between government and Parliament, advocating new management plans for the Recovery Fund and criticizing the overall management of the health crisis, recently tainted by corruption scandals and delays in organizing the vaccination campaign. Renzi also criticized Conte's attempt to directly oversee the secret services. This led to the withdrawal of the ministers of IV (a party estimated to have about 2 per cent of the popular vote) from the coalition in January 2021 and, ultimately, to Conte's resignation.

Over the year, PD and M5S were severely weakened both by the consequences of their continuous intra-coalition bickering and by internal conflicts. However, the organizational stability of M5S and its role within the governmental coalition emerged as significantly more weakened than the PD's. The latter consolidated its electoral support during regional elections in the fall and consequently obtained more influence within the coalition. The 23 confidence votes that have been held on legislative acts upon the government's request since the start of the pandemic are a clear indication of the tensions within the majority.

The Conte II Cabinet had to face a fierce opposition led by League leader Salvini, with a short period of grace, mostly due to the general uncertainty at the beginning of the Covid-19 emergency. During the first stages of the Covid-19 outbreak, the League and FdI struggled to set the agenda and build dynamics of issue ownership (Bertero & Seddone 2021). The League later turned into Conte's most vocal critic on pandemic management, forcing its allies in FdI to assume similar positions. FdI's leader, Giorgia Meloni, mostly blamed the EU during the spring, because it had been too slow in helping Italy at a time of crisis. Since the approval by the European Council in July of the €750 billion plan for the Recovery Fund, Salvini again took the lead as the opposition critic, accusing Conte of having 'surrendered to the EU without conditions'. The government crisis triggered at the end of 2020 by IV has led to a redefinition of the political landscape: a new government led by Mario Draghi and supported by a large majority that holds all the major parties together, while FdI (strategically) remains in opposition.

In 2020, the main issues dominating public debate were Italy's economic crisis measures, the European recovery package (Next Generation EU), and the EU response to the pandemic and vaccine procurement. It is worth noting that until late October, Italy experienced the highest number of deaths (out of the confirmed number of cases in Europe), and third highest in the world in terms of number of deaths per 100,000 inhabitants. Italy was the first among EU countries to be hurt by the pandemic, which caused delays in adopting and implementing the necessary policy interventions (Pisano et al. 2020). We briefly outline three dimensions of analysis of the pandemic response in Italy at the core of the political debate in 2020: the government task forces, the legislative measures and the economic policy measures.

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The management of the emergency was centralized by the government, resulting in a hectic activity of legislative decrees and the marginal involvement of Parliament in decision-making processes. A more (inter)active relationship with Parliament and, in particular, between government and opposition, was observed in summer because the reduced contagion rate lessened the need for containment measures.

Since the World Health Organization's (WHO) announcement of the pandemic on 21 January and the declaration of the state of national of emergency on 31 January, the Italian government created seven new task forces, all under the oversight either of Conte himself, Minister of Health Roberto Speranza (LeU) or the Department of Civil Protection. The first and main one was the Scientific & Technical Committee (CTS), formally created on 5 February. This temporary, technocratic, executive-controlled policy advisory body was (and still is at the time of our writing) responsible for the overall management of the Covid-19 crisis response and for coordinating the handling of the interventions with the regions (which are in charge of implementing most of the response policies). Six other task forces were set up for handling policy-specific emergency responses: one coordinating financial support measures ('liquidity task force'); the 'COVID-19 data management' task force; the 'Unit for monitoring the spread of fake news related to COVID-19'; the Committee of Economics and Social Experts (CEES; also known as the *Colao* Commission); the 'Women task force', and, finally, the 'Committee of Experts' at the Ministry of Education (Galanti & Saracino 2021). At the height of the crisis (on 18 March), a special Covid-19 Commissioner (Domenico Arcuri) was appointed to manage the Covid emergency, including the supply of medical equipment and the management of the EU Solidarity Fund (Bull 2021).

Capano (2020: 333) observed that, between January and May, 278 crisis-related regulations were issued by 20 different national authorities. The Stringency Index computed by the Oxford Coronavirus Government Response Tracker (OxCGRT) calculates the mean score of nine different metrics (all ranging from 0 to 100). A higher score indicates a stricter response, that is 100 = strictest response. This index reached 93.52 for Italy at the height of the pandemic (12 April 2020), meaning that Italy adopted earlier and stricter restrictions than other EU member states.

A total of 588 legislative acts were issued in 2020 to counter the spread of the virus in Italy, with an average of over 37 acts per month. Most of them aimed to derogate from regular legislative procedures. The first months were the most intense: in February, 67 Covid-19 related acts were issued, in March, 103, and in April, 65. The Conte II Cabinet adopted 26 Decrees of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers (DPCM), an average of 2.6 per month, meaning this was the main administrative act used by the executive during the emergency. This allowed the government to act quickly and not to flood Parliament's agenda, because these acts did not require the involvement of Parliament. Only from the fall onwards did a new law (DL19/2020) establish the fact that the DPCM need to be scrutinized by Parliament.

Among the Conte II economic measures in response to the emergency, the main ones are aimed at the financial support of: (1) the national healthcare system (executive decree n. 18 *Cura Italia* – Healing Italy, 18 March); (2) businesses ('Liquidity decree' no. 23, 8 April); and (3) businesses, families and workers ('Relaunch Decree', 19 May). The Economics and Finance Document (Nadef) was presented by the government in October, with further measures to address the crisis. At the end of October, along with further restrictions for businesses and on free movement, additional financial and income support was given to

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businesses and workers. Italy's economic infrastructures were already weakened by a decade of economic crisis and a progressive defunding of its public health system (Capano 2020; Bull 2021). Overall, the Conte II government allocated more than €100 billion of additional expenditures in income, business support and debt relief, although the OxCGRT project's economic support index shows that the funds cover fewer than 50% of individual lost salaries (Hale et al. 2021).

Note

1. The elections in these regions were supposed to be held on various dates between March and June.

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