

SUMMARIES

What is «political competition» and how should we study it

by Stefano Bartolini

The main point of this paper is that competition in politics rests on non-competitive preconditions which set the capsule within which it can take place and without which it easily converts into other, differing social relationships: for instance into utterly unregulated conflict or into strong collusive closure of the political class. The paper is a step toward the building of a theory of political competition which is empirical and comparative. To do so one must depart both from formal theory and from descriptive application. A framework needs to be developed which: 1) identifies the main empirical conditions of competition, 2) combines them in different structures of competitive interaction, 3) allows an evaluation of their performance in terms of which goals and values of democracy are achieved and which are sacrificed by different structures.

In the first two sections the nature of competition as opposed to other types of social interactions, and the relationship which exists between political competition and political democracy are discussed. Next the article focuses on which conditions need to be met for electoral competition to contribute to political elites' accountability and responsiveness. Its central part is devoted to a thorough analysis of such conditions. For each of them, it is shown that while they are crucial to electoral competition, they also open the way to and leave room for strong collusive pushes. The paper concludes with the problem of the relationship between the different conditions of competition, questioning the possibility of devising maximisation models as well as their utility for empirical and comparative research.

The growth of judicial power in contemporary democracies: the structural variable

by Carlo Guarnieri and Patrizia Pederzoli

All democratic regimes seem to be interested, at least to a certain extent, by a process of judicialization of politics. Here, the trend is analyzed by focusing on the way the judicial system is organized. Even in this domain the elements conducive to an expansion of the role played by the judiciary in a democracy are several. First of all, the larger the jurisdiction – i.e. the cases which can be brought to justice – the higher the political significance of the judiciary. More ambiguous is the effect of decisional cohesion as well as the influence of the highest courts in the judicial system. Even though a cohesive judicial system could intervene more effectively in the political process, some autonomy is necessary in order that strong relationships develop between the judiciary and the political environment. Another set of elements concerns access to justice. Here, procedural rules on standing are especially important, since they allow groups to exploit the judicial process. However, a crucial part is played, especially in the criminal field, by the public prosecutor, whose powers and status are extremely relevant. Finally, the powers of the judge in the process, and especially judicial review of legislation, must be taken into account. Unlike the United States, in Europe judicial review has been traditionally concentrated in the hands of a specialized court. However, since ordinary judges are normally in charge of filtering the cases to such a court, they enjoy a discretion that the process of European unification – with the emergence of a sort of European constitution – is further enhancing.

The Formation of Confessional Parties in Europe

by Stathis N. Kalyvas

Taking its cue from recent findings that ascertain a strong relationship between Christian democracy and Catholicism (in various operationalizations) on the one hand and many aspects of politics and policy on the other, this article points to the need for a theoretical understanding of the Christian democratic phenomenon. Such an understanding requires an account of the formation of confessional parties in Europe at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. The article introduces a model of party formation applied to confessional parties which revises the seminal work of Stein Rokkan using rational choice theory. This model makes agency explicit and endogenizes identity, mobilization, and organization. The main

finding is that the formation of confessional parties was the contingent outcome of strategic decisions made by the political actors. These parties were formed in spite of and not, as is usually assumed because of the church's intentions and actions. They emerged as an unplanned and unwanted byproduct of the strategic choices that the church and conservative political elites made under constraints. This finding is empirically confirmed through historical research. Many implications follow, one of which is that the posited overlap between Christian Democracy and Catholicism in the recent sociological research is tenuous. This article suggests a way in which rational choice theory can be fruitfully combined with a comparative and historical perspective to supply explanations superior than those provided by existing approaches.

Looking for Collegiality: Majority Summits from 1970 to 1994

by Annarita Criscitiello

This article examines the establishment – over the last 25 years – of an extra-governmental device of cabinet decision-making: the coalition parties' Majority Summits bringing together party leaders and governmental representatives. The analysis of their number, composition, content, seat and outcome shows how these informal arenas have become highly institutionalized and how the intra-governmental coordination and collegiality has been replaced by an extra-governmental party bargaining managed by Majority Summits.

Until the 7th Andreotti government (April 1991 – April 1992) Majority Summits continued to be a privileged site of the core executive, but with the governments led by Amato and Ciampi political parties have lost many of the prerogatives which they had gained in the past years. They both made important decisions without consulting the party secretaries. In short, Amato and Ciampi never once resorted to Majority Summits.

This «institutional transition» was interrupted by new elections in March 1994 and, in particular, by a stronger resort to Majority Summits made by the new premier, Silvio Berlusconi. From this point of view, the so-called «Second Republic» does not seem very different from the First one. Once again, in fact, these summits have been used as the solution to face a very low level of collegiality among the coalition partners, but with an important change compared to the past: the high number of informal – and less institutionalized – meetings between the premier and the different coalition partners.

Parliamentary Groups after 1994

by Luca Verzichelli

This article points out the features and the effects of the continuous process of re-definition among the parliamentary groups during the XII legislature in Italy. It is an interesting case of failure of consolidation for a new party system, because, after the election of 1994, the expected stabilization of the three electoral poles created at that time did not happen. Yet, at the level of the parliamentary groups, a permanent transition began, characterized by a number of splits from important parties (Lega Nord, Popular Party, New Communist Party) and even by a number of individual changes. The author, after a detailed description of such a complicated and unusual process, suggests some hypotheses about the explanatory factors of this phenomenon, indicating the possible consequences in terms of further changes of the party system and delays in the consolidation of a new political class.