

The troubled early years of the *Partito Democratico**

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1 Introduction

Writing in this series two years ago, Marc Lazar discussed the birth of the Democratic Party (*Partito Democratico*, PD). Like many births, the birth of the PD was surrounded by trepidation and optimism in similar doses. Yet the party was in government, and had, in Walter Veltroni, a leader who had convinced an overwhelming majority of party sympathizers.

Two years later, the party is in much poorer health. It is now out of government, performing badly in sub-national and European elections, and has a new leader, Pierluigi Bersani, who does not command an overwhelming majority of party sympathizers, and may indeed antagonize some of the party's right wing. The party is either a sickly child or, in the recent judgement of Francesco Rutelli, was never really born at all ([Rutelli 2009](#)).

In this article, we analyze the travails of the PD. We start with the fall of the Prodi government, an event for which the Partito Democratico's then-leader, Walter Veltroni, has sometimes been blamed. We then discuss the poor polling

* This article covers events up until the 30th October 2009. We offer no thanks to members of the Partito Democratico, who could scarcely have made our job more difficult.

and electoral performance of the party under Veltroni, and his consequent resignation. Veltroni's resignation set in motion a leadership contest that exposed a number of cleavages within the party, never dormant but broadly managed by the dominant coalition of DS and DL elites that founded the party. We set out three principal dividing lines within the party – the tension between the centre and periphery of the party, which is primarily an organizational dividing line; the divide between the economic left and right of the party; and the divide between Catholic social conservatives and secularists.

Having set out the terrain, we then summarize the rules governing leadership selection, the policy stances of the three candidates – Dario Franceschini, Pierluigi Bersani, and Ignazio Marino – and their relative support amongst the party-in-parliament, party members, and primary voters. We show how Pierluigi Bersani managed to win by peeling off a number of social conservatives to add to his strong support amongst former members of the Left Democrats. We conclude by suggesting that the internal divisions within the party are likely to continue, with the party showing few signs of fulfilling its professed “majoritarian vocation”, so likely to require a reconstitution of its alliances with the radical left and centrist parties in future elections.

2 The Prodi Government and the 2008 General Election

The formation of the Partito Democratico (PD) was not the sole or even the most important factor in the fall of the Prodi government. Radical left parties acted as an internal opposition to the government, particularly in foreign policy. The collapse of the government was triggered by the defection of a number of centrist senators for largely personal calculations.¹ Yet the birth of the new party, and in particular the strategic choices of party leader Walter Veltroni did little to help this internally divided and increasingly unpopular government

last more than is eighteen turbulent months.

Shortly after his election as party leader Veltroni distanced himself from the Prodi government in policy terms and suggested that the PD had a 'majoritarian vocation' which obliged it to run alone in the next election. Veltroni thus signalled to most of the parties in Prodi's government that the coalition which formed the basis for their victory in 2006 (Bordandini et al. 2008) would not be repeated, and thus that the incentives for co-operation would be limited.

Veltroni compounded this decision by proposing an electoral reform drafted by Salvatore Vassallo and Stefano Ceccanti which would have accentuated the bipolar characteristics of the party system, but would have reduced the incentives for pre-electoral coalition formation. Instead, parties would fight for a proportional share of the seats in a number of small (five- to seven-member) constituencies. This posed more of a threat to smaller parties in the centre-left coalition than the existing electoral system (the 'Porcellum', passed on a partisan basis in late 2005) which guarantees parliamentary representation for small (c. 2%) parties in electoral coalitions that poll more than ten percent of the vote (Renwick et al. 2009). Worst of all, Veltroni used this proposed electoral system as the basis of negotiations with the centre-right opposition, bypassing Prodi and undermining the cohesion of his government.

The PD thus displayed its 'genetic flaw': the separation of governmental and party leadership. This flaw has been seen before at the sub-national level, where it continues to exacerbate centre-periphery tensions within the party; similar flaws have plagued centre-left governments in the past (most notably during the period of the Bicamerale). Nevertheless, the separation of governmental and party leadership was largely ignored by PD elites in their haste to overcome internal opposition and achieve a full merger (Pasquino 2009). This 'genetic flaw' manifested itself despite the best efforts of the parliamentary party, which continued to support the Prodi government until the bitter end; the government's fall came as a bitter shock both to the party and to Vel-

troni, who had hoped for more time to develop the party organisation and prepare his electoral strategy.

Veltroni was confronted with a general election just 6 months after his own election as party leader, but approached the task with surprising confidence, formulating a positive campaign modelled on the slogans and style of Barack Obama, despite obvious demographic differences between Italian and American society (Pasquino 2008). Veltroni almost never mentioned Berlusconi by name during the campaign, and sought to project a vision and programme for government, as opposed to rallying the traditional 'anti-Berlusconi' forces in Italian politics and society. Candidate selection was highly centralised, despite the "federal" structure of the nascent PD organisation. Tight leadership control over candidate selection was facilitated by the electoral system (which allows only for closed lists), largely accepted in the PD because the proximity of election gave no time for other mechanisms of internal selection (e.g. party primaries or branch selection), and justified by the imperative of renewal among the PD's parliamentary elites, over half of which were not re-selected. The stated objective was to develop a parliamentary group that better reflected Italian society in terms of gender, age, and experience. This was certainly an outcome of the process, with a substantial increase in women and young people among the PD parliamentary ranks (Bordandini et al. 2008). However, the selective application of the three-term limit (Art. 22 of the PD statute) was interpreted by some incumbents as a way to rid the party of internal dissenters, leading to defections of such grandees as Ciriaco De Mita, a former DC prime minister and factional leader in southern Italy.

More controversially, Veltroni rejected pre-electoral coalitions with any party that did not support the PD programme. This move was designed to isolate the radical left parties, who formed their own (very unsuccessful) electoral coalition, known as the Rainbow Left. The PD's only coalition partner was Italy of Values, whose leader Antonio Di Pietro signalled his support for the PD

programme and agreed to form a joint parliamentary group after the election. Some Radicals were given relatively safe positions on PD lists (in exchange for giving up their own), but the Italian Socialists did not agree to this dilution of their identity and fielded a competing list that obtained less than 1% of the vote, provoking their disappearance from the Italian parliament.

The formation of a new, more nimble coalition was designed to help Veltroni present the PD as a new project that had little in common with the Prodi government, a difficult task to achieve since most PD leaders were also incumbent Ministers. Criticism of the government proved to be the final straw for Prodi, who resigned as President of the PD in April 2008, and announced his retirement from active politics. Prodi had been the major supporter of a unified centre-left party in the 1990s and 2000s. The post of PD President had been created *ad personam* to recognise his particular status as ‘founding father’ of the party, and was left glaringly vacant after his resignation.

The 2008 election presented a mixed picture for the PD and its new leader. Despite the unpopularity of the Prodi government, Veltroni had increased the PD’s vote share in both Chamber (33.2%) and Senate (33.7%), increasing the number of seats allocated to PD parliamentarians. This improved electoral performance was more evident in the Senate, where separate DS and DL party lists performed badly in the 2006 general election (28.2), and much less evident in the Chamber, where DS and DL had fielded a single Ulivo list in 2006 (31.3%) (see Table 1).

There were, however, good reasons to expect a bigger improvement on 2006. That year, Radicals now hosted on the PD lists had run a separate joint list with the Socialist party. Also, the PD and IdV could credibly claim to be the only alternative governing coalition, and might therefore have benefited from the siren calls for a *voto unico* [a “useful vote”] which would determine government formation.

Table 1: Electoral support from 2006 to 2009

Region	2006 (Senate)	2008 (Senate)	2009 (EP)
Party list	DS + DL	PD	PD
Lombardia	22.4	28.2	21.3
Veneto	23.4	27.2	20.3
Friuli-Venezia-Giulia	26.8	31.9	25.6
Piemonte	28.6	33.2	24.7
Liguria	32.5	38.3	29.8
Emilia-Romagna	40.0	45.4	38.9
Toscana	41.0	47.1	38.7
Umbria	36.3	44.5	33.9
Marche	34.4	41.9	29.9
Lazio	28.3	37.3	28.1
Abruzzo	30.7	33.9	22.3
Basilicata	35.3	38.5	29.4
Calabria	24.8	33.0	25.4
Campania	26.9	29.2	23.4
Molise	31.9 ^a	19.1	12.3
Puglia	26.7	31.5	21.7
Sardegna	29.7	36.5	35.6
Sicilia	23.2	25.6	21.9
ITALY	28.2	33.7	26.1

^a Party list was the Ulivo

Survey data suggests the PD held onto its core vote, but made few inroads into the centre-right or centrist vote, with the Union of Christian Democrats (UDC) retaining much of its support base and securing parliamentary representation in both chambers. Increased PD support was largely due to one-off vote shifts from the radical left parties. These occurred in part because voters strategically deserted parties which were unlikely to clear electoral thresholds, and because the radical left parties had been so instrumental to the downfall of the Prodi government. However, many radical left voters chose to abstain rather than vote for PD, or even voted in protest for the centre-right coalition (Hanretty 2008).

The Rainbow Left therefore failed to surpass the legal threshold in either Chamber (4% on national basis) or Senate (8% on regional basis), and lost all 110 of their parliamentary seats. Veltroni's 'go it alone' strategy had thus over-achieved one of his more strategic aims: to end the blackmail potential of radical left parties over future centre-left coalitions, whether in government or opposition. Following further poor performance in the European Parliament elections, the radical left now faces considerable leadership and funding crises.

Following the elections, Antonio di Pietro and Italy of Values reneged on the pledge to form a joint parliamentary group with the PD, and chose instead to vehemently oppose the Berlusconi government. This contrasted with the moderate and constructive opposition of Veltroni, predicated on a supposed need for bipartisanship in institutional reforms and on the mutual recognition of the government and official opposition. Veltroni emphasised this dimension of inter-party relations by nominating a number of 'shadow ministers', following British fashion.

The strategy of constructive opposition after the election proved even less successful than the strategy of positive campaigning during the election. Veltroni misread Berlusconi's intentions. Whilst Berlusconi claimed to be open to negotiation, his government continued to pursue Berlusconi's own judicial and

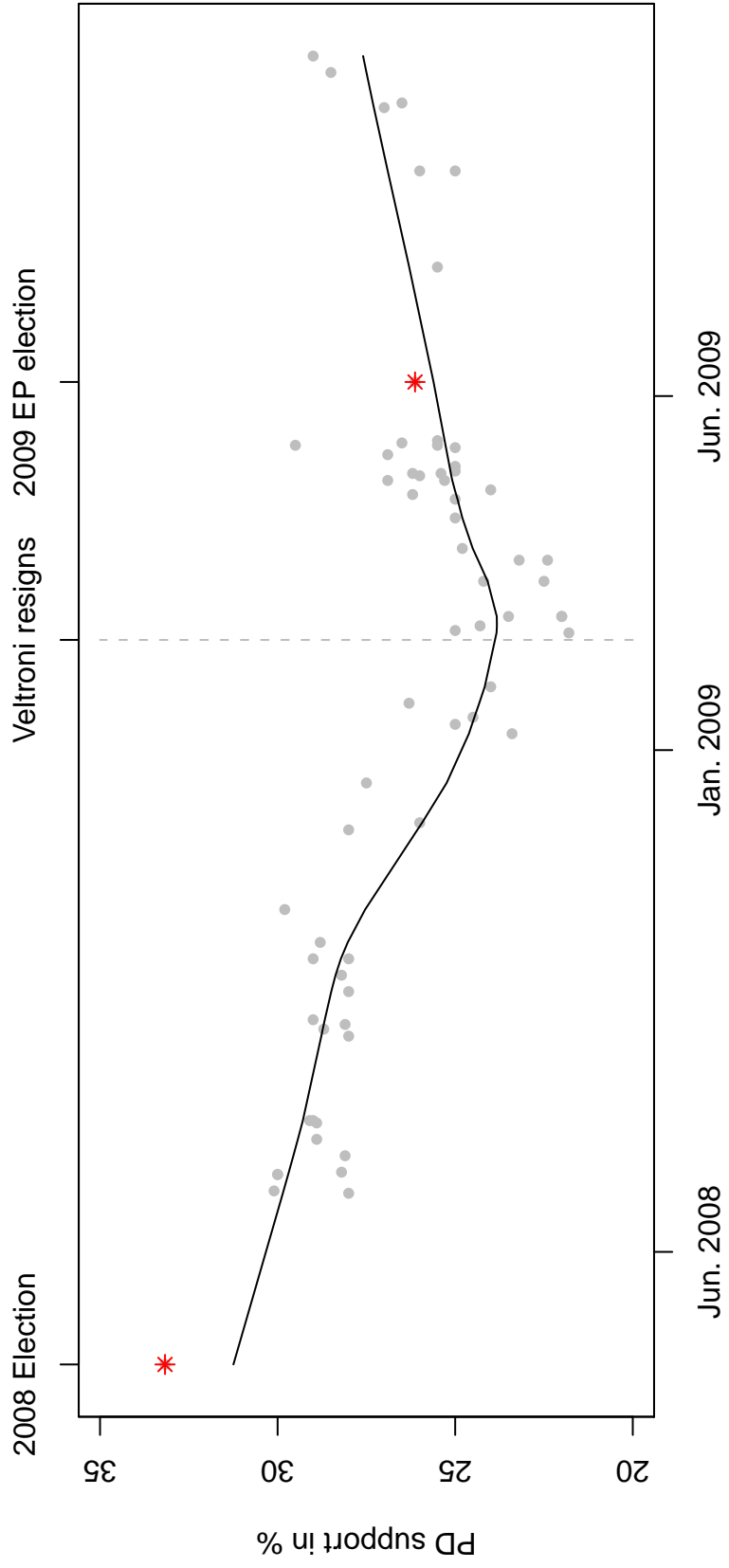
media interests without concessions to the opposition. The claim that Berlusconi wished to negotiate did, however, allow Berlusconi to play off internal PD divisions over the nature and negotiation of institutional reforms and turn the leaders of PD and IDV against each other.

The elections of 2008 and 2009 demonstrated that the PD's 'majoritarian vocation' was doomed to fail. The PD-IdV coalition fell more than 9%, or 1.5 million votes behind Berlusconi's coalition in the general election; outcomes of elections since 1994 have shown that the broadest coalitions tend to be most successful (Pasquino 2008; 2009). Whilst Veltroni's majoritarian vocation did marginalize the radical left, it made any form of coalition formation with the UDC impossible, and did not help the party to capture voters from the PdL. Nor did going it alone sharpen the party's message: divisions within the People of Liberty over economic liberalism and ethical-biological issues could not be exploited by the PD, because of its own internal divisions on these themes (see §4).

Support for the PD decreased in the polls (see fig. 1), and early regional elections in Abruzzo and Sardinia were disastrous for the party. Following these elections, Veltroni resigned as party secretary. In his resignation speech, Veltroni defended the party's majoritarian vocation, but admitted that he had failed to create the party he had wanted (*"devo dire di non avercela fatta, ed è responsabilità mia"*). In a reference to those party members close to Massimo D'Alema, Veltroni noted that his leadership had become a problem for some in the party. Veltroni's resignation opened the door for critics of the majoritarian vocation to challenge for the leadership of the party – but equally it allowed time to Veltroni's deputy, Dario Franceschini, to establish himself as a stop-gap leader.

Franceschini's tenure as leader was mixed. The PD's support stopped declining in polls, but the party's result in European parliament elections was disastrous. Franceschini's leadership moderated the majoritarian zeal of Veltroni:

Figure 1: Support for the PD, 2008 – 2009



he dropped the 'shadows ministers', was more open to the UDC, and was more strongly critical of Berlusconi. However, the party remained a moderate opposition voice in comparison to Italy of Values.

One of the problems that Franceschini could not address within his limited term was the continuing division between different parts of the party: the centre versus the periphery, left versus right, and teo-dems against secularists. We now turn to examine these divisions within the party, before coming back to the leadership election process which Franceschini ultimately lost.

3 Centre-periphery conflict within the party

Since its inception, the PD has been characterised by continued conflict between the party organisation and its elected politicians at sub-national levels, fuelled by corruption and mismanagement scandals, mainly in southern Italian regions. This conflict again demonstrates the PD's 'genetic flaw', namely the separation of governmental and party leadership. The PD was intended to be a party organized on a federal basis: autonomous regional unions would be free to make their own strategic choices and determine coalitions on a territorial basis, with limited intervention from the central leadership. The regional party assemblies and the post of regional secretary were, in theory, to become valuable fora in which to decide the party's strategy on a region-by-region basis.

In practice, however, the post of regional secretary is rarely coveted. Many are young and relatively inexperienced, and rarely control key institutional positions. The initial division of regional secretaries in 2007 was dictated by a power-sharing logic, with DS and DL leaders agreeing that 12 posts would go to the DS, 6 to the DL, and 2 to candidates with other backgrounds. Many of the secretaries elected that year resigned their posts in the following two years, for reasons including defeat in a leadership contest, inability to manage

intra-party divisions, and a loss of interest in the position.

The federal apparatus of the party has therefore not established its own power base. Worse than this, it has unsettled existing governing centre-left coalitions, particularly in southern Italy. Whilst the former DS exercised hegemonic influence in centre-left coalitions in the North, DS and DL were evenly balanced in electoral terms in the South. Absent clear leadership, centre-left parties tended to form 'over-sized' coalitions in these regions to accommodate as many power-brokers as possible, holding together an unwieldy coalition by sharing out the spoils of office (Wilson 2009). These alliances were threatened by the prospect of new alliances in the PD, open to political actors excluded from the levers of power in sub-national government. Entrenched elites had little to gain from complying with the demands of the PD leadership.

There has, therefore, been no real organizational apparatus capable of mediating conflicts between the national leadership and local office-holders who have often become mired in scandal. A few prominent examples can illustrate the scale of the problem: in the region of Campania, the centre-left coalition has come to exercise a quasi-monopoly of power over sub-national governments since the 1990s; yet this has not developed into effective or responsible government, as the long-awaited collapse of the refuse management system in 2008 demonstrated. Judicial investigations into the administration of Antonio Bassolino (PD regional president of Campania) increased tensions between elected elites and their party organisation, leading to the resignation of Luigi Nicolais as PD provincial secretary in Naples. The public disgust over a group of politicians once acclaimed as harbingers of a 'Neapolitan Renaissance' saw many in the PD leadership turn against Bassolino and his allies, but without success in terms of forcing resignations. Bassolino held onto his post as regional president until the end of term in 2010, while his close ally Rosa Russo Iervolino remained Mayor of Naples. Local and regional councillors were more concerned with keeping their jobs than responding to appeals from the central leadership

for internal renewal.

In Abruzzo, regional president Ottaviano Del Turco (PD) was arrested on suspicion of taking bribes from private operators in the health-care system. This arrest forced Del Turco to resign and caused early regional elections in Abruzzo, which took place in December 2008. Voter turnout collapsed due primarily to the demobilisation of PD voters. The party gained less than 20% of the vote and the centre-right coalition won a clear victory.

This was soon followed by another crisis in Sardinia, where the regional president Renato Soru clashed with PD politicians in the regional assembly over their resistance to his housing plan. This was the last of several conflicts between the regional president and PD politicians in Sardinia, a tourist island where housing speculation and property development are a source of huge personal wealth and vested political interests. Soru called an early regional election for February 2009, to avoid contamination with the European elections in June 2009 (where the PD was expected to perform badly), but unexpectedly lost to a property developer that campaigned as a personal adviser of Berlusconi. The PD sank to under 25% of the vote. Unlike the Abruzzo regional election, where the PD could claim it was defeated by an (as yet) unproven corruption scandal, the debacle in Sardinia was harder to digest because Soru was a widely respected figure tipped to be a future party leader. Soru was an internet entrepreneur rather than a cadre from the DS or DL party machines, and his transversal appeal was cited as proof of the PD's modernising edge. It was immediately after Soru's defeat that Veltroni felt compelled to resign as PD leader, his modernising strategy bearing few fruits in terms of electoral gains or government control. The last of the 'non-party' centre-left regional presidents, Piero Marazzo of Lazio, was forced to resign in October 2009 after allegedly taking cocaine with transsexual prostitutes in a Roman suburb.

If the PD has problems governing in the South, it has problems getting elected in the North. PD support is only holding up (though not as well as before) in

the ‘red belt’ regions of central-northern Italy (see Table 1), where it faces a different challenge of electoral erosion as the long-standing incumbent of regional politics. In large northern regions such as Lombardy and Veneto, the PD has failed to produce credible leaders or policies, and has become increasingly excluded from public office. Whilst the PD project initially garnered some public enthusiasm in northern Italy, particularly due to Veltroni’s aggressive recruitment of candidates, the poor PD performance in the 2009 European elections shows this initial enthusiasm has failed to reverse a process of long-term decline.

4 Cleavages within the party

For all its alleged faults, the PD could not be described as a party with a *pensiero unico*. Rather, it is divided by a number of cleavages – sets of political issues which persist over time and which divide the members of the party. In this section, we argue that the party is principally divided by two cleavages – a muted left-right cleavage, and a clerical/secular cleavage. When we say that the party is divided by cleavages, we mean something more than merely saying the party is divided into different factions. We mean that these divisions are, in some way, principled divisions. The different factions within the party are formed not just from the desire for mutual advantage, or from non-ideological reasons such as familiarity, friendship, or a shared political history. These aspects are important, and affect and are in turn affected by divisions on the basis of political issues, but we believe that we can flesh out the ideological content of these cleavages. We set up these cleavages before discussing, in sections 6 and 7, how the appeals of the candidates in the leadership contest cross-cut these cleavages.

4.1 The left-right cleavage

The first cleavage within the party is the left-right cleavage. Numerous authors have pointed out the difficulty of specifying the content of the left-right cleavage *sub specie aeternitatis*, and even in the Italian context the content of the left-right cleavage has changed as policies formerly associated with the right have been adopted by the left. Liberalization of product and service markets is a good example of such a policy, which has been reclaimed in principle by [Alesina and Giavazzi \(2007\)](#), and in practice by Pierluigi Bersani in his capacity as Minister for Economic Development and author of the famous *lenzuolate* [laundry list] of reform measures.

Yet it is liberalisation which forms the crux of the left-right cleavage within the PD. Rather, the principal cleavage is that identified by [Salvati \(2008\)](#): a cleavage between those on the right of the party, who believe that the principal objective is to ensure economic growth by ensuring favourable conditions for producers of goods, and thereby improving living conditions and purchasing power, and those on the left, who believe that the principal objective is to ensure that labour's share of producer surplus increases – watered down social democrats, to use the term adopted by [Panebianco \(2007\)](#).

The first group is probably best represented by someone like Massimo Calero. Calero is a former president of the Association of Industrialists of Vicenza, and president of an eponymous production group specializing in antennae and communications equipment. Veltroni asked Calero to run for the PD in the Veneto at the top of the party's list as a promissory note to industry and to the industrial north-east; his candidacy, as well as the candidacy of fellow political neophyte Matteo Colaninno, was strongly criticised by the radical left, who accused the party of "representing the bosses".² Unlike Colaninno, Calero has been active in criticising what he sees as out-dated views towards employment, and had threatened to leave the party were Bersani elected party secretary. The second, pro-labour group, is more diffuse, but is probably more numerous than

the first group. It lacks a identifiable figure, and is more likely to hail from the South.

The divisions resulting from this cleavage only partially match the divisions between those party members who came from the Margherita and those who came from the DS. Former leader of the Margherita Francesco Rutelli, who now looks set to leave the party, has complained bitterly of the pro-labour orientation of Pierluigi Bersani's platform (*"È incredibile che il Pd si costruisca radici socialiste con un quarto di secolo di ritardo e molta sinistra è andata a destra... Vota per noi soltanto il 13-14 per cento dei piccoli imprenditori. Ne votavano di più per il vecchio Partito comunista"*).³ In organizational terms, the most important difference is not between those who entered the PD through the Margherita versus those who entered from the DS, but rather those who entered the PD under Veltroni versus those who were already there: the candidates that Veltroni recruited are more likely to belong to the first, pro-producer group.

It should be said that neither group holds a monopoly on pro-growth policies, nor a monopoly of expertise on labour policies. The candidate who seems to have given most thought to labour market issues is Ignazio Marino, but his campaign in favour of flexicurity in the labour market was largely ignored.

These differences between the two groups are subtle, and affect principally the labour market. In other economic issues, they tend to hold similar viewpoints: both groups tend to favour liberalization of product markets, and both groups tend to pass over the service sector. Nevertheless, these differences, because they affect a hugely symbolic area, that of labour, can be described as the principal left-right cleavage dividing the party.

4.2 The clerical/secular cleavage

Whilst this left-right cleavage is probably the most important cleavage dividing members of the party, it has not always been the most visible. That honour goes to divisions over religious and ethical issues. Such issues have arisen at

regular intervals from 2005 onwards; they have included the referendum over artificial insemination in 2005, the debate over the Prodi government's proposal for civil partnerships in 2006 and 2007, and ongoing debates about living wills and whether the sexual orientation of victims of crime should be considered an aggravating factor. This cleavage is much sharper than the left-right cleavage within the party: it separates those who believe that public policy should privilege social and ethical stands which are derived from or in harmony with the beliefs of the Catholic Church, or who believe at least that those stand-points should not be under-mined by the grant of further rights, from those who believe in a wider sphere of personal liberty, often in the sphere of sexual and reproductive behaviour.

This cleavage is particularly visible because those who represent opposing positions within or close to the party form cohesive and well-organised groups. On one side, several members of the Radical party sit with members of the PD in the same parliamentary fraction in the Chamber of Deputies. Fruit of Veltroni's decision to grant the Radicals a number of safe spaces on the party's electoral lists, the Radicals constitute a veritable awkward squad, particularly when allied with sympathetic members of the party proper, such as Anna Paola Concia. On the other side, the teo-dem: former members of the Margherita who are particularly sensitive to moral and ethical issues. The teo-dem have enjoyed considerable media exposure, and with the formation of the association *Persone e Reti*, constitute a notable faction within the PD. It remains to be seen whether this faction, whose members include Paola Binetti, Luigi Bobba and Donato Mosella, amongst others, will follow its patron, Francesco Rutelli, and leave the party.

This cleavage has also been visible because it has caused party members to vote against the party line in parliament. Thus, Paola Binetti was strongly criticised for voting with the PdL and against a proposal to add the victim's sexual orientation to a list of aggravating factors in criminal prosecutions. Binetti's vote

was criticised by Dario Franceschini as not represent the values of the party; Bersani, who had Binetti's support in the primaries, stopped short of criticising Binetti's vote but did say that whoever supported him would have to follow the party's rules.

There is overall, no link between how members of the party vote in Parliament and their positions on these two cleavages. The party has only seriously split on motions presented by the Radicals calling for a capping of parliamentarians' expenses and for greater transparency in the Parliament's budget. On these motions, the party split down the middle.⁴

5 The mechanics of leadership selection

Technically, the PD chose two leaders this year. In February, the party's national assembly elected Franceschini to serve out the remainder of Veltroni's mandate, an option allowed it by Art. 3 of the party's statute. Franceschini's election came only four days after Veltroni's resignation, and was almost unanimous: his sole opponent, Arturo Parisi, a persistent critic of the leadership of the party, convinced only 92 of the 1,258 assembly delegates. The decision to elect a secretary immediately was taken because of the need to prepare for European and local elections; although Parisi criticised it, a majority of party supporters approved of the decision.⁵

After the European elections in June, the contest for the leadership of the party began again. The procedure set out in the party statute for electing a new party secretary through national primaries is complicated. In part, this is because the process builds in a number of safeguards to ensure that party elites strongly condition the ultimate choice of party secretary and that many of the traditional defects of winner-takes-all elections, such as bare-plurality victories, are avoided.

In order to stand for the post of secretary, candidates must be party mem-

bers (Art. 2, §5 of the statute) and nominated by at least 1500 party members from at least five regions. The first requirement caused difficulties for comic Beppe Grillo, who announced his intention to stand for the post, but who was initially denied membership of the party in his local area; after having been granted membership in a different area, the party's Commissione Nazionale di Garanzia annulled Grillo's membership on the grounds that Grillo "had, on numerous occasions, stated his opposition to the ideas and values of the PD" [*ha anche più volte palesato la propria contrapposizione alle idee e ai valori del Partito Democratico*].⁶ The second requirement was not met by antiquarian Amerigo Rutigliano, on the grounds that one-third of his backers were not party members.⁷ These decisions – and the decisions not to stand from Turin mayor Sergio Chiamparino and blogger and perennial primary candidate Mario Adinolfi – left three official candidates: Pierluigi Bersani, Dario Franceschini and Ignazio Marino. Bersani had announced his candidacy prior to Veltroni's resignation; Franceschini, shortly after the European elections; and Marino, a fortnight later.

These three candidates then competed in a lengthy electoral contest composed of three principal stages. In between these stages, candidates and their proxies campaigned across the country, with each candidate averaging three campaign events per day, often travelling between two and three hundred kilometres per day.

In the first stage, held in mid- to late-September, party members in Italy and abroad vote in their party *circolo*, expressing a single preference for a candidate. These votes are then tallied at the provincial level. Each province is assigned a number of delegates to the national convention in proportion to its population and how strongly it votes for the Partito Democratico. Delegates from the various provinces are elected in proportion to the vote-share of the candidate they are affiliated with. The purpose of this first stage is to exclude fringe candidates and to allow party members to express their judgement on

the candidates: those candidates who poll less than fifteen percent of all votes at provincial level, or who poll more than five percent of votes at provincial level but who are not amongst the top three candidates, are excluded at this stage. In this contest, all three candidates passed the five percent threshold.

In the second stage, the delegates meet at the party convention to vote on the motions of the respective candidates. The convention is primarily a test of strength and an opportunity for the candidates to appear in front of the party. The limited number of delegates somewhat accentuates the majoritarian dynamics of the contest; and had one candidate been in a particularly strong position, he or she might have taken advantage of the opportunity to propose amendments to the party's manifesto or Code of Values.⁸ Bersani was not in that position after the 11th October, but the victory of his motion did cement his position as front-runner.

In the third stage, primary elections are held across the country, open to all those who are willing to contribute a donation of at least €2 to the party, declare that they support the party's ideals and intend to vote for it, and hand over contact information. Voters may express a single preference for national secretary, and thereby vote for a slate of delegates to the national assembly. There is no logical reason why the 'winner' of the party convention should also triumph in the primaries; but in the event, primary voters showed that they were not 'Martians', and their support for each candidate was similar to the support the candidates had received at the convention. Nor is the winner of the primary election automatically elected secretary: as a safeguard against a bare plurality victory, the winning candidate must secure 50%+1 of valid votes in the primary if s/he is to become secretary immediately. If s/he does not win a majority but only a plurality, the question is decided by Assembly delegates in a run-off between the top two candidates.

The nightmare scenario for the party would have been (1) a national convention which voted for the losing candidate in the primary, (2) a victorious candi-

date in the primary who failed to reach a majority, and (3) a national assembly which then reinstated the decision of the national convention, with a spoiler candidate playing a role as kingmaker. This nightmare scenario was unlikely given the consistency of Pierluigi Bersani's support, and the commitment of both front-runners to the so-called *lodo Scalfari*, whereby the plurality winner of the primaries would be recognised by the losing candidate as the party's new secretary. In primaries held on the 25th October, Bersani was elected party secretary with 53% of the vote.

6 The offer

The benefit of holding a national party congress prior to primary elections lies not only in giving cues to potential primary voters, but also in requiring each candidate to issue a programmatic statement, or motion, to be voted on at the congress.

These motions are useful not as indications of future policies the party intends to pursue: they are, with certain exceptions, entirely too vague to serve as manifestos. Rather, they are useful for differentiating between the candidates' different positions. In this sense, although the method of leader selection used by the PD represents a considerable institutional innovation, it also harks back to the past: each motion contains just as much studied ambiguity and re-iteration of common tropes as did the motions of the party congresses of the First Republic; and the support given to each motion has also been scrutinized to give indications of the size of each faction within the party, just as in the First Republic.

Nor are these motions intended for external consumption. If they were, they would not be so harsh about the PD's record so far. The motions from Franceschini and Bersani are strongly critical of the party's strategy. Such criticism might be expected from Bersani, who has long been a critic of the *"vocazione*

maggioritaria" pursued by Veltroni. Indeed, Bersani does not disappoint, and opens his motion with criticism of the vocazione maggioritaria and the rootlessness of the party. Yet Franceschini too criticises the party for not having communicated clear and unambiguous messages, garnishing this criticism with praise for Berlusconi ("*Berlusconi stesso nel 1994 rappresentava una proposta di cambiamento – illusoria, ma era una proposta di cambiamento... se voti destra sai cosa voti, se voti di qua non sai cosa voti*" [Berlusconi himself in 1994 represented an idea of change – an illusory one, but an idea of change nonetheless... if you vote for the right, you know who you're voting for; if you vote for the left, you don't]).

Bersani's motions is the shortest and least specific of the three motions, which likely reflects the unusual nature of his electoral coalition and his front-runner status. It is the most left-wing of the three motions insofar as it represents a strong pro-labour ideology: inequality is the product of labour's ever-decreasing share of producer surplus, and as such should be challenged; employment ought to be dignified; and workplace security is to be secured. This pro-labour ideology occasionally receives aid from unfamiliar quarters – the Pope's June 2009 encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* is cited as a demonstration of increased attention to global and national inequalities. At the same time, Bersani's trademark emphasis on liberalization of service industries remains and, like Marino, Bersani acknowledges the necessity of increasing the age of retirement.

Franceschini's motion is the longest and is the only one written in the first person. Although all three candidates praise merit-based recruitment, Franceschini's motion is, of the three, the most favourable towards equality of opportunity as opposed to equality of outcome. There is, throughout the text and particularly in the call for a new reformism, a link to New Labour, explicitly acknowledged in the reference to Tony Blair's famous dictum, "tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime" (which is softened somewhat in the Italian translation). Franceschini's text indeed reads more like that of a former Blairite than

a former democristiano: marginally greater attention to the family is perhaps the only instance of classically Christian Democratic preoccupations seeping through.

As the outsider candidate, Marino was able to permit himself the luxury of a more specific motion which is also distinguished by its reference to issues which excite the base of the party but which fail to move the country as a whole: his motion is, for example, the only motion which explicitly mentions the role of the media, or which gives more than a brief nod to the environment. It is also noteworthy for attempting to substitute 'flexibility' ("an inevitable characteristic of modern work") for the usual discourse on precarietà: flexibility "need not be considered a disgrace" as long as it is carried out alongside continued professional development. This position can only be described as courageous. Laicità, so much a part of Marino's campaign, is not given much rhetorical emphasis, but a long list of policy commitments does (civil unions, passage of legislation on living wills, passage of a law against homophobia) bear out the common depiction of Marino as the anti-clerical candidate.

There is, therefore, enough difference of emphasis in the three motions to bear out the common picture of Bersani as standing to the left of Franceschini, with Marino difficult to place on left-right issues but fairly clear on clerical/secular issues. These differences of emphasis, however, are muted in comparison with the differences of position in terms of party strategy. In line with his emphasis on reform and change, Franceschini frames the issue of the choice of coalition partner as a choice between the past and future. "We will not go back to the time of fragmented and litigious coalitions... even hypothesising so means declaring the PD a failed experiment". For Bersani, the question is rather a question of roots: from the Ulivo we came, and to the Ulivo – or to some form of grande alleanza democratica – we shall return, instead of falling into the "shortcut of a political modernism [nuovismo politico]"

7 Who won, why, and with whose support

Given that this was only the second primary campaign in the party's short history, and the first in which there was no clear front-runner, there was a high degree of *ex ante* uncertainty about the outcome of the conflict. However, we wish to argue that the outcome of the primary could readily have been predicted even prior to the beginning of the official campaign.

The reasons for considering Franceschini as the prohibitive favourite were the fact that his political line represented a continuation of the status quo, the status quo represented by Veltroni, which commanded a majority of the party in the primaries of 2007. Second, Franceschini, as acting party secretary, enjoyed a higher media profile and the benefits of having control over the levers of power within the party. On the other hand, Franceschini benefitted from extremely limited name recognition both within and outside of the party immediately prior to his appointment as acting secretary;⁹ and the political line pursued by Veltroni had certainly not paid off for Veltroni. Additionally, whilst Veltroni's background in the PCI compensated for his centrist political line, the same could not be said for Franceschini.

Conversely, Bersani, whilst he had lower name recognition outside the party,¹⁰ did have long-standing roots within the party, and had a sufficiently strong network of supporters across the country to allow him to consider running against Veltroni in the party's first leadership primary. Moreover, almost every opinion poll conducted since the summer showed Bersani enjoying a lead over Franceschini, though the size of this lead varied.¹¹ Thus, much of the uncertainty surrounding the primary was due to doubt about whether Bersani's support was broad enough to include primary voters, and whether it would be deep enough to bring Bersani the majority of votes he needed to avoid a run-off. Thus, although in the next sections we discuss dynamics over time and across different sections of the party, the eventual outcome would likely still have been the same had these dynamics been different.

Table 2: Support amongst parliamentarians in the Camera

	Bersani	Franceschini	Marino	Undeclared
DL	14	26	0	1
DS	47	25	3	9
Other parties	0	0	0	3
No prior party	29	35	3	14
Total	90	86	6	27

7.1 Amongst the party elite

In order to assess the candidates' support amongst party elites, we searched for public statements in support of any of the candidates from the PD's delegation to the Camera dei Deputati, searching through newspapers and from the candidates' lists for the party assembly.¹² We then cross-tabulated parliamentarians' support for each of the three candidates with their previous political history. The results are shown in Table 2.

As might be expected, Franceschini leads in two groups – former members of the Margherita, and 'new' parliamentarians who have no history in either the DS or the Margherita. Franceschini's backing amongst former Margherita members is to be expected either on the basis of Franceschini's own past in the DC (and so on the basis of friendship ties or other non-ideological links), or on Franceschini's program lying to the right of Bersani's, and thus disproportionately likely to attract former members of the Margherita. The second explanation is more likely since Franceschini also does well amongst those who had no history in the DS or DL, and who were disproportionately brought in by Veltroni, who shared Franceschini's left-right positioning. (This last group is, however, the most reticent to pick a candidate).

Bersani, by contrast, leads strongly amongst former members of the DS, the largest part of the parliamentary delegation to the Camera. His support amongst

former Margherita members comes either from *bindiani* (Bindi herself, Giovanni Burtone, Guglielmo Vaccaro) or from *prodiani* (Giulio Santagata, Riccardo Levi). Geographically, Bersani's support is more Southern, with a notable cluster in Puglia thanks presumably to Massimo D'Alema, whilst Franceschini does well in the former white belt.

The overall levels of support for each of the three candidates (15:14:1) are disproportionate to their support amongst party members and amongst primary voters, suggesting either that party parliamentarians face towards the centre, or that Franceschini enjoyed greater sway amongst this group as a result of his position as acting party leader or due to his past in the Christian Democrats.

7.2 Amongst party members

The level of support for each of the three candidates can be gauged from the provincial-level results of the polls of party members. Quite how this electorate differs from either party elites at the national parliamentary level, or from party sympathizers voting in the primaries, is unclear. Based on some of the returns from several provinces, the level of support for each candidate seems to be far too structured to result from a very large or heterogeneous selectorate. In other words, it is somewhat improbable that the levels of support for Bersani in Reggio Calabria (92.7%) or Piombino (81%), or for Franceschini in Messina (81%), or even for Marino in Frosinone (47.9%), genuinely represent the levels of support for these candidates in these provinces rather than the orchestrated efforts of local notables supporting each candidate, even given the relatively high turnout of party members (approx. 415,000 of approx. 726,000 party members registered to vote). Still, the ratio between the candidates shows Marino with relatively more support (7.9%), and Bersani ahead of Franceschini by a reasonable margin (53.6% to 37.7%).

Perhaps because these tallies are so strongly influenced by the decisions of local elites, there is no link between the national-level voting history of each

province and its support for each candidate. One might suppose that provinces which voted proportionally more for the Margherita compared to the DS might be more likely to support Franceschini, either because of his policies or because of his background. In fact, this is not the case: the Pearson correlation of 0.10 between, on the one hand, the ratio of the DS to Margherita vote share in 2006 Senate elections, and, on the other hand, the ratio of Franceschini's vote share to the combined vote share of Franceschini and Bersani, is not at all significant.

7.3 Amongst primary voters

In the period between the party convention and the primaries Dario Franceschini closed strongly, with seventy-five parliamentarians signing a statement in favour of his candidacy, and a somewhat unexpected endorsement from Nanni Moretti. The Franceschini campaign also felt optimistic that they had all to play for. Their argument – that high turnout at the primaries would benefit Franceschini rather than Bersani – was supported by opinion polling¹³ and by some political science literature: May's law of curvilinear disparity suggests that middle-ranking elites in a party tend to lie further to the extremes of the political spectrum than top leaders, and that non-leaders are still further to the centre. Bersani had won a strong majority amongst involved party members, and a slender majority amongst parliamentarians – would he therefore lose his majority when reaching out to party sympathisers? and would this effect be greater the more party sympathisers turned out? Turnout in the primaries was not only important for the result of the leadership contest, it also had material consequences for the party's financial health.

Altogether slightly more than three million voters participated in the primaries, around half a million fewer than had participated in the primary of 2007, despite a much closer contest. Turnout was slightly higher than expectations, but Bersani's majority remained intact. The margin between Bersani and Franceschini was roughly similar to the margin amongst party members; only Ignazio

Marino improved notably compared to his performance amongst party members.

There is little high quality individual-level data concerning who supported which candidate. Opinion polls conducted shortly after the poll must perforce rely on small sub-samples with high margins of error. Nevertheless, those data we have suggest that Bersani has the more left-wing supporters, and Franceschini has more religious voters. Voters who identified with the left rather than the centre-left were 28% more likely to vote for Bersani than Franceschini; in general, older, less well-educated, male voters favoured Bersani.¹⁴ More of Franceschini's voters were sporadic or practising Catholics than voters for either of the other two candidates, but it is not legitimate to infer from this that Catholics were more likely to vote for Franceschini, though this too seems probable.¹⁵

One feature of the primary vote which did stand in marked contrast to results within the party was the geographical distribution of support: the huge reservoirs of support for Bersani and Franceschini in the South and the former white belt respectively were more moderated, although Bersani did better in mainland southern Italy. Ignazio Marino was an exception in this respect, polling far better in the North than in the South.¹⁶

7.4 Support overall

How do the levels of support shown for each of the three candidates at these three levels – parliamentarians, party members, and primary voters – match with the policy offer provided by the candidates?

At the elite level, it seems that most parliamentarians voted on the basis of their left-right stance. That is, former members of the DS, who are ex hypothesi to the left of former members of the Margherita, were disproportionately likely to support the more left-wing candidate; those associated with the Margherita or with the leadership of Veltroni voted for the more right-wing candidate.

Whilst this broad picture seems plausible, we cannot explain the exceptions to this rule – namely, the former Christian Democrats whose support helped Bersani avoid accusations that he was the candidate of the ex-DS.

At the level of party voters, there is reasonable evidence to suggest that voters who felt on the left of the party were more likely to vote for Bersani. It would be desirable to know whether Catholics were less likely to vote for Bersani; it would be even more desirable to know (but more difficult to assess) whether the support of the *bindiani* and *prodiani* limited Franceschini's advantage in this area.

8 Conclusion

This article has recounted the story of the PD after its organisational fusion in October 2007, emphasising a series of salient cleavages in the party, including labour-capital and Church-state cleavages. These cleavages weaken the party's internal cohesion and undermine its external projection. The conflictual relationship between the new party organisation and its elected politicians in local and regional governments points to the PD's "genetic flaw", namely the separation of institutional and party leadership. The contested leadership of Veltroni and Franceschi, and the early collapse of the Prodi government, also contributed to the shaky organisational developments of the PD. The new Bersani leadership is unlikely to resolve these cleavages, because the coalition within the party that supported Bersani crosses these divides. Although it was an uneasy alliance between the DS apparatus and some leading Christian Democrats, it was a necessary one: had Bersani been the candidate of the rump of the DS, his victory would have been much less likely. His success in the leadership contest is not the victory of the DS over DL; rather, it represents a new attempt at negotiating divides within the party. Under the leadership of Bersani, the party is likely to orient itself more towards the traditional left-

ist positions of the DS, attempt to re-engineer the pre-electoral coalitions with radical left parties, and develop new alliances with the centrist bloc forming around UDC. The PD will continue to be undermined by severe difficulties linked to the absence of strong organisational cohesion, leading to continued defection on the right, such as that declared by Francesco Rutelli (former DL leader) after the election of Bersani as party leader, and the continued possibility of defection on the left, such as that of Fabio Mussi and the Democratic Left when the PD was formed. The PD faces a difficult electoral environment, characterised by its exclusion from government at central level, and the expected loss of numerous regional and local governments in 2010. Although the PD obtained a third of votes cast in the 2008 general election, the party sank to below a quarter of votes in subsequent European and local elections, and survey data gives few hopes for a substantial recovery in the near future. The 2008 general election was uniquely characterised by the termination of electoral alliances with the radical left, prompting the defections of many of their voters to the PD, to cast a “useful vote” that would determine whether Berlusconi could be defeated. Whilst in early 2008 the PD could campaign as a fresh and new party, subsequent years have mired it in scandals and internal tensions reminiscent of its organisational predecessors. Even if the PD did obtain a third of Italian votes in future elections, these would remain insufficient for a party that claims to have a “majoritarian vocation” which it shows few signs of fulfilling.

Notes

¹ This is now the subject of a judicial inquiry.

² Guerzoni, Monica, “Veltroni lancia Calearo capolista”, *Corriere della Sera*, 3rd March 2008.

³ “Pd, Rutelli verso l’addio, “Con Casini e non da solo””, *Corriere della Sera*, 26th October 2009

⁴ Ordini del giorno of the 24th July 2008, 2/9, 2/10/, 2/11.

⁵ **Poll of the 23rd February 2009** carried out by Ispo Srl for *Porta a Porta*; **Poll of the 23rd February 2009** carried out by Ipsos for *Ballarò*.

⁶ Commissione nazionale di garanzia, delibera no. 1 del 14 luglio 2009. The rejection was probably a blessing for Grillo; rejection bolstered his anti-politics message; acceptance would have forced him to reveal that his electoral strength was less than either Franceschini or Bersani. See [this poll of the 10th July](#), carried out by simera for www.simulationintelligence.com

⁷ Commissione nazionale per l'elezione del 25 ottobre, delibera n. 11, del 28 luglio 2009.

⁸ Article 9 of the Regolamento per l'elezione del Segretario e dell'Assemblea Nazionale.

⁹ [Poll of the 18th February](#), carried out by IPR Marketing for *Repubblica*.

¹⁰ [Poll of the 10th July](#), carried out by simera for <http://www.simulationintelligence.com/>

¹¹ Polls by Ipsos, simera, IPR and Crespi ricerche showed Bersani with leads of 2%, 15%, 19%, and 4% in June, July, August and September respectively.

¹² The full list of parliamentarians, and the candidate they supported (if any), is available from the authors.

¹³ de Marchis, Goffredo, "Congresso Pd, primo match tra i tre sfidanti", *Repubblica*, 10th October 2009.

¹⁴ [Poll of the 22nd October](#) carried out by Ispo for the *Corriere della Sera*.

¹⁵ [Poll of the 22nd October](#) carried out by Ispo for *Porta a Porta*.

¹⁶ See Annunziata, Lucia, "Quel liberal nordista di Marino", *La Stampa*, 27th October 2009

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