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## Can the left respond to new cleavages in Italy?

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### ABSTRACT

Over the last forty years, there has been a mounting societal shift towards post-materialist values in all countries adhering to the democratic tradition. This has fuelled demand for increasingly personalized content, reflected in political and electoral preferences that, shaped by new agencies of socialization, have gradually distanced themselves from former loyalties. The political supply has been reorganized as a result. The old mass parties have morphed into the so-called catch all party and the more recent variations of the professional-electoral party, forced to drum up votes however it can, chiefly by concocting new issues to compensate for the weakening of traditional subcultures and the fact that the social groups and classes that were the mainstay of twentieth-century parties have now exited the scene. In Italy, this process has led to a political system that is – to say the least – fragmented and unstable. Taken as a whole, the Italian left is even harder pressed than other European lefts, though they too have shown themselves incapable in recent years of sensing the changing pulse and adapting to the new milieu and how it will affect the left's legacy in terms of the industrial conflict between capital and labour. This is a cleavage that has marked the platforms of liberal-democratic political systems and the form that parties accordingly take even more than it has affected their value content. The Italian left's perennially upwelling legacy has thus prevented it from retooling for a changing society and formulating policies that can build a solid voter base by interpreting the expectations of the more moderate portions of the electorate who, though sceptical about the centre-right coalition, harbour even greater doubts concerning the centre-left's ability to actually govern.

### RIASSUNTO

Nel corso negli ultimi quarant'anni in tutti i paesi a tradizione democratica il mutamento sociale orientate alla progressiva affermazione di valori post-materialisti ha fatto emergere nuove domande dal contenuto sempre più individualizzato, riflesse in preferenze politiche ed elettorali che, condizionate nel loro formarsi da nuove agenzie di socializzazione, si sono progressivamente emancipate dalle appartenenze tradizionali. Tali domande hanno innescato una ristrutturazione dell'offerta politica, caratterizzata dalla trasformazione dei tradizionali partiti a integrazione di massa dapprima nei cosiddetti partiti pigliatutti, per giungere fino alle più recenti varianti di partiti professionali-elettorali, sempre più costretti a costruire il proprio consenso in maniera trasversale e mutevole, soprattutto attraverso l'elaborazione di nuove issues, per compensare il cedimento delle sub-culture tradizionali e superare la scomparsa dalla scena di classi e gruppi sociali di riferimento che costituivano l'asse portante del consenso organizzato dai partiti novecenteschi. In Italia questo processo ha determinato, inoltre, la formazione di un Sistema politico quantomai instabile e

frammentato. La sinistra italiana nel suo complesso fatica più delle altre sinistre europee, che pure negli ultimi anni si sono dimostrate anch'esse incapaci di interpretare efficacemente i mutamenti in corso, ad adattarsi a questo nuovo ambiente in ragione della permanenza dell'eredità della sua definizione nei termini della dimensione del conflitto industrial tra capitale e lavoro. Frattura che ha caratterizzato lo sviluppo dei sistemi politici liberal-democratici più ancora che nel contenuto valoriale, nella proposta politica e nella conseguente forma partito. I condizionamenti esercitati dall'indistruttibile e sempre riemergente radicamento di questa eredità hanno impedito alla sinistra italiana di intercettare i mutamenti della società italiana e di formulare conseguenti politiche in grado di costruire consenso, interpretando le aspettative di quella parte di elettorato mediano e moderato che, pur scettico nei confronti della coalizione di centrodestra, è ancora più dubbioso verso la effettiva capacità di governo del centrosinistra.

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## 1. Demand and supply for goods and services in a changing world: new forms of social demand and the irreversible crisis of the social democratic compromise

The dynamics that have resulted in new consumption patterns and lifestyles, influencing individual choices in many sectors of social life – including, obviously, politics – have largely been driven by rising trade in goods and services. These dynamics have had a profound impact on the relational processes that shape individual and collective identities, increasing people's 'potential for Individualization'.<sup>1</sup> These transformations have chiefly affected the middle class, as it is more open to new lifestyles and more secular ideas about what constitutes good, which emphasize Post-Materialist values together with personal self-realization (Inglehart 1977). There has thus been growing attention to expressive needs – like self-realization in the private sphere, the quality of life and new and often unconventional forms of political participation – and an *individualization of expectations* that, in terms of motivation, are centring more and more on personal rather than collective goals (Hirschman 1982). In more recent years, this process has been gradually overlaid by another: the pursuit of greater personal security in a world where it has been possible for large portions of the population to grow up taking their own survival for granted (Inglehart 2019). This second process – which was heightened by the cumulative impact of the 2008/2018 economic crisis, the 2020/2021 health crisis and the ongoing international crisis triggered by Russia's attack on Ukrainian democracy in 2022 but is a *longue durée*

phenomenon involving several age cohorts, as a number of authors have maintained for many years (Dalton 1996; Della Porta and Diani 1997; Inglehart 2019, 1977) – has not brought a resurgence of materialist values. These expectations of security, in fact, play out in a society that is both individualized – and thus shows waning interest in collective strivings for better living conditions – and functionally differentiated, seeing survival as the sum of many aspects of life, where the economic dimension is not necessarily considered central.

This greater individual sensitivity to differences has burdened the processes of forming public policies with an unprecedented range of demands. An ever-shakier understanding of the surrounding social environment and all its disorientation has gradually eroded people's identification not only with the traditional parties, but also with the state, political institutions and the underlying administrative structures. At the same time, personal considerations prevail when selecting services, imperiling prospects of bringing goods which by nature continue to be public back into the collective fold, or of standardizing the provision of goods and services through public welfare policies.<sup>2</sup>

With changing demand, there have also been radical revisions to service supply, especially from the organizational and ideological standpoint. Since the early 1990s, major efforts have been made to modernize the administrative apparatus, in Italy as elsewhere. This has been a true paradigm shift: over the last twenty years, New Public Management (NPM) and New Public Governance approaches to administrative reform policies have supplanted the Weberian ideal-type of legal-rational bureaucracy centring chiefly on the relationships – and often the tensions – between the administrative and political spheres under the rule of law (Pasini 2014). This new phase has seen cuts in government services to citizens, especially to socially weak groups such as the elderly, ill, disabled and unemployed, gutting Western liberal democracies' root principle of solidarity, which contemplates social rights guaranteeing minimum standards of service provision for 'all'. The difficulties of ensuring universalistic social citizenship as it was understood during the Glorious Thirties – the 'Golden Age', as the period was famously dubbed by Eric Hobsbawm – were aggravated by economic globalization, driving those whose welfare had suffered to lend credence to political forces who preach, and promise, closed borders, independence from out-of-touch European bureaucracies, a return to traditional values and a shield against immigration, seen as a threat to jobs as well as to cultural and religious customs.<sup>3</sup> A look at the sociological, cultural and political factors that have redefined the notion of citizenship (Giddens 1996, 79) shows that the neo-liberal and conservative front's approach to this new situation emphasizes the exercise of the civil rights granted by the state in defending the citizen's ability to enter freely into contracts with other citizens, public and private

enterprises and the public administration, in the belief that putting social welfare above civil considerations would end by increasing paternalism and government intervention in the economy. By contrast, the social democratic groups promote social rights and the extension of equal citizenship. However, though the European social democracies marked the apex of progressive policymaking in democratic countries, championing social reforms while at the same time respecting the rules of the capitalist system, it must be admitted that this compromise – hinging on Keynesian economic policies – has become increasingly unsustainable. Indeed, in the last forty years the political-institutional model founded on these principles has sunk into a structural crisis from which – aside from a brief interlude with Tony Blair's Third Way – it has never emerged. In Italy as elsewhere, flagging economic growth has chipped away at the political and social appetite for redistributing surplus wealth. With fewer 'benefits' to go around, ever-broader swaths of the public clamor to have their voices heard, protesting the selective policies that block access to services once figuring among universal citizenship rights by tightening entitlements, as well as the decline in service quality.

Welfare systems that were ill-prepared for globalization must meet high standards in satisfying needs and rights, making them costly. And the costs are spiralling, just when governments are clamping down on social spending and demand for market-based services is surging. Changes in the needs for public goods and services call for reflection on how the very notion of citizenship in the broad sense is evolving, not just because social services span many sectors – education, health, labour, social security and more – but also because needs are shifting from the universal to the particular. As a result, uniform, standardized approaches are giving way to public services providing increasingly differentiated goods. The problem of contemporary societies – Italy included – is not so much that service provision cannot guarantee traditional social citizenship, but that, precisely because social citizenship has been acquired, it cannot provide the specific individualized services the public wants: groups or individuals with particular needs find that unconditional universality is no longer able to serve them. Hence the proposals advanced for selective welfare systems based on two diametrically opposed criteria: positive selection, aka positive discrimination, reverse discrimination or affirmative action (where selection serves to provide beneficiaries with additional resources) and negative selection (which aims to subtract resources).<sup>4</sup> The difficulty lies in reconciling universalism – which a growing proportion of the population is inclined to abandon, turning to private service providers and thus raising doubts as to whether they are willing to keep funding the welfare system via the redistributive mechanism – and particular demands that are nevertheless claimed as social rights that can only be guaranteed by public intervention. Such claims, Dahrendorf (1988,

96) argues, 'do not refer to the substantial goods contemplated by traditional social rights, but to the quality of life and particular lifestyles. This creates difficulties in bringing together multiple differences in a single basket of public goods'.

From the old social obligations to satisfy rights as they were traditionally seen, we are thus moving towards concepts of citizenship that seek to overturn the principles that have been the basis of contemporary societies social policies from the beginning, in order to justify new ways of formulating political decisions where individuals or groups are empowered to decide what is needed to fulfill their own life projects.

Under these circumstances, it is increasingly difficult if not impossible for social democratic parties to translate the universal principles that are their lifeblood into political action, as the tools traditionally used to pursue these principles cannot meet public demand for personalized services while still guaranteeing protection for all. In societies where competing traditions, beliefs, customs, lifestyles and ideas of what is good vie for scarce resources on the basis of their differences rather than their equality of citizenship, recognizing and respecting individual and group differences – pluralism and multiculturalism, in a nutshell – is an essential part of the political agenda. And a model held up throughout the entire history of the left thus becomes obsolete.

## **2. Changing political demand and the evolution of the Italian left**

The Italian and European party system seems locked in political bounds that fail to reflect these profound changes in society. This problem has been convincingly captured by the political scientist Herbert Kitschelt (1994, 1997), who argues that the appeal of the traditional platforms presented by socialist and social democratic parties on the one hand, and conservative and right-wing parties on the other, has gradually waned since the early eighties in most Western European countries. One of the causes of this declining appeal, which was to some extent hastened as the differences between blocs blurred, was the advent of the so-called 'Post-Materialist society' with its emphasis on self-realization and the quality of life. Over the long run, increasing social well-being and ever more globalized markets brought a change in the mechanisms that hit closest to home in affecting voters' preferences, shifting contention between the right and left away from its traditional focus on the pros and cons of government intervention in the market and towards a dimension which is more concerned with cultural values. This is a dimension that can produce new social bonds across class divisions, bringing people from many different occupations back together while generating orientations and identities entirely outside the ties formed by traditional party loyalties. Among centre-left voters, this produced

a general drift toward a more liberal, secular view of social relationships and politics. Something similar took place among centre-right voters, with attention shifting towards a more particularistic and communitarian conception and a return to primary identities (Fasano and Pasini 2004).

An awareness that these changes are here to stay and must thus be interpreted prompted the political efforts of the reform-minded members of the Ulivo coalition formed by the main centre-left groups in the aftermath of the majoritarian electoral law of 1993. However, the coalition was unable to formulate a convincing response to the voters who would have liked to see modernizing neo-reformist policies such as those offered by Blair. Consequently, Italy's centre-left parties have evolved by fits and starts, leading to a paradox that a look at the events of the 1990s – and the contradictory expectations they engendered – can help us understand. For some of the movers and shakers in the Ulivo, and later in the Partito Democratico (PD), the strategy seemed simplicity itself: all hopes of keeping loyalists on board and reconquering the voters who traditionally supported centre-left parties, and the socialists in particular, but had moved rightwards since the 1994 elections (Bartolini and D'Alimonte 1995; Itanes 2001) hinged on making an all-out attack on the agenda of the Berlusconi governments, from the rules of the game and the economic and employment issues to the war on globalization. They did not stop to ask whether such old-style left-wing opposition tactics could in fact win over an electorate made up largely of private sector employees who were more concerned with their bank accounts, vacation houses and the career opportunities available to themselves and their children than with rhetoric about job protection. And in fact, apart from the barely eked-out win in the 2006 elections, this strategy was a dismal failure. How the British, German, Spanish and French elections in the same period played out suggests that an unabashedly neo-reformist platform that finally came to grips with the radical changes that had swept society in Italy and the rest of Western Europe would have fared far better. The most innovative aspect of the pioneering platform put forward by Ulivo in 1996 – which from a cultural, political and programmatic standpoint foreshadowed the 'Third Way' that later underpinned the success of Blair's New Labour and Schroeder's Die Neue Mitte – and was returned to with the founding of the PD in 2007–2008 consisted essentially in leaving traditional party identities behind in a bid to create a vision meeting the needs of a society in constant change (Giddens 1998; Salvati 2003). This vision inspired the party's action under the leadership of Walter Veltroni and Matteo Renzi, when it showed it could take up the challenges of change but proved lacking in staying power. Now, with Elly Schlein at the party's helm, there is no room for this vision, and it is reasonable to think there will continue to be no place for it in the future. Plausibly, it will be

abandoned entirely, replaced by a maximalist political culture as frenemies with Movimento 5 Stelle. This was abundantly clear from the strategies devised to oppose the current Meloni government.

Over the last twenty years, these internal difficulties in the Italian left's political culture were compounded by a number of factors that alienated voters from the parties, especially those in the social democratic tradition, and brought challenges to the political, economic and bureaucratic élites that fuelled new social movements marked by hostility to immigration and the EU and all its works:

- The powerlessness of politics to counter other forces that shape the world's destiny (finance and scientific or technological advances, especially in the digital sphere) has eroded the rule of law in contemporary societies. Disaffected and disillusioned, an increasingly demanding – or lazy and resentful – citizenry has turned its back on politics;
- Parties, trade unions, employers' associations and the like are no longer effective forms of representation, as they cannot channel the welter of demands and expectations expressed by a massified society and bring about institutional change. The result has been disintermediation in the representation of interests and political verticalization in the increasingly overloaded policymaking process, hampering institutional efficiency;
- Demographic imbalances – with populations growing in developing countries and shrinking in the West – combined with global climate change have had an inevitable impact on immigration flows;
- As studies of civic and political culture, which analyse value orientations to explain the voting behaviour of various European and North American populations, particularly as regards '*beliefs* (what people think is in fact right or wrong), the *values* that guide behaviour (what people think is morally good or bad) and *social norms* (socially sanctioned guidelines for conduct)' (Welzel and Inglehart 2022, 126) have shown, without bedrock values such as those offered by the twentieth-century's totalizing ideologies, culturally weak voters are seemingly unable to grasp the public questions on the agenda.

### 3. The shortcomings of the Italian left: a scant liberal culture and a 'secular' approach to politics

At this point, we can ask why it has been so difficult for the Italian left – and, with rare exceptions, its European counterparts – to bring its political culture into line with the needs of a changing society. As we see it, the left's inability to come to grips with the characteristics and consequences of a society of mass individualization stems primarily from the lack of a liberal culture that has long been a feature of this political family. In Italy, this is a failing that infects the entire



political system, extending to most of the parties and forces that have come to prominence over the years. This is confirmed by the poor showing at the polls made by liberal and secular parties from the advent of fascism to the First Republic and down to our own day. Even in the postwar Constituent Assembly, efforts to hammer out Italy's institutional framework were hampered, in a variety of ways, by a feeble liberal-democratic political culture. Tellingly, anecdote has it that both Communist and Christian Democratic delegates shared a keen interest in the 1936 Stalin Constitution (Martelli 2018). Likewise, both blocs were presumptuous enough to believe that the fledgling Republic's ability to evolve into a fully-formed progressive democracy depended almost entirely on their own power and popular support as a great mass party. This led them to underestimate the importance of institutional arrangements and mechanisms capable of effectively regulating conflict between parties in their legitimate expression of divergent interests, as can be inferred from the Constitution's lacunae regarding the functions vested in the executive branch (Martelli 2018; Ceccanti 2016). But there is undoubtedly something more deeply rooted than this early presumptuousness, as can be seen in the various points of contact between the DC and PCI, which served as the ideological and cultural underpinnings of the 'consociativismo coperto' (overcast consociativism) peculiar to the early republic (Pizzorno 1969), known as the 'Republic of the parties', and which can to some extent be found in the lengthy and incomplete political transition of the so-called Second Republic (Addario and Fasano 2019). The common denominator of these two political forces, which unsurprisingly are the parties whose legacy was inherited by the PD, was essentially their ambivalent view – or even moral censure – of modernity and all its cultural, economic and social trappings. Historically, this ambivalence arose out of a *qualified* embrace of representative democracy in the liberal mold, whose legitimacy was not considered to lie in its institutions as a whole, but in the function the parties performed in these institutions, and out of scepticism about the capitalist economy and the market's ability to create growth resulting in widespread well-being (Addario and Fasano 2019). In addition, Communists and Christian Democrats shared a recognition that they were both political subcultures rooted in the pursuit of ultimate aims, and both saw political action as a driver of profound change in society. These attitudes were very much of their time: we must not forget that Italian society in the fifties was still largely agricultural, coming later to modernity than most other Western European countries. When it did modernize, however, it did so quickly, in a mere thirty years. The dominance of the social-communist and Catholic subcultures, and its impact on making the country's political culture the patchwork it was to become, against the backdrop of the bipolar world order and the cold war, long prevented a shared idea of nationhood from forming. And even today, it makes it hard to imagine a national identity we could rally around as a political community, over and above party loyalties. Consequently, the public's integration in the political arena that DC and PCI made possible was only indirect, i.e. hinging on individuals'

partial and partisan forms of politico-cultural identification, and proved quite different from what could have been constructed from a common project for the nation-state and a uniform political culture. Thus, what actually came about was a selective sense of membership that differed for each of the two parties: a sense of belonging to a community rooted in a particular idea of the good in the case of the DC, and a sense of belonging to a class, mediated by the international communist movement, in the case of the PCI (Galli 2004). Both parties' claims to legitimacy rested in institutions that were outside and alternative to the representative institutions of liberal democracy: the Catholic Church and its hierarchies for the DC; the international communist movement for the PCI (Panebianco 1982). This ended by encouraging the parties to organize their social presence via a series of volunteer auxiliary associations. These are the points of contact that – as we have said – were the boundary conditions for the covert power-sharing that was long a distinctive feature of Italian democracy.

Together, the Christian Democratic and Communist subcultures shaped the value orientations and political attitudes of generations of party activists and officials. And they continue to do so today, though the DC and PCI are long gone. It has often been remarked that the birth of the Partito Democratico was, as the intellectuals and politicians who were its founding fathers intended, the outcome and consummation of the best political traditions and lineages that breathed life into the culture of the republic. It should come as no surprise that even now they have a profound influence on the values and normative horizons of the vital core of Italy's major centre-left parties.

Studies conducted over the years of national delegates from parties such as Partito democratico della Sinistra (PdS), Democratici di Sinistra (DS) and PD (Bellucci, Maraffi and Segatti 2000; Natale and Fasano 2017), the direct heirs of the tradition of Italian communism, provide interesting insights that confirm our thesis that the Italian left's political culture has absorbed few of the individualistic and liberal values needed to speak to the wants and desires of societies of mass individualization. As Schwartz (1992, 1994) has cogently illustrated, individuals' conduct tends to be guided by certain fundamental values, i.e. relatively stable convictions about ideal or desirable ways of acting or being that direct their thinking in many areas of life, including the political sphere. These values stem from the motivations that individuals perceive as most salient in satisfying basic needs such as their security and that of their group, control, dominance and belonging. Values intermix, as they can express similar or opposing motivational goals, and can be viewed as organized in two bipolar dimensions: conservation versus openness to change, which opposes the desires for independent thought and conformity, and self-transcendence versus self-enhancement, which contrasts concern for others' welfare with the pursuit of success and dominance over others.

Applying this framework, which is clearly compatible with Inglehart's approach we have used so far, we see that even the delegates to the first national

congress of the DS were behindhand in accepting individualistic liberal values: 61.5 per cent still believed the essence of capitalism was the '*exploitation of man by man*'. This was an even higher percentage than that noted a few years earlier among the delegates to the second national congress of the PdS in 1997 (Bellucci, Maraffi and Segatti 2000). Evidently, the enthusiasm for the values of the liberal tradition that had inspired Occhetto at the time of the so-called 'Bolognina turn' (the start of the PCI's transformation into the PdS) had waned. More significantly, attitudes quite similar to those of the PdS and DS core are also apparent among the delegates of the national assembly of the PD. In surveys conducted between 2009 and 2023,<sup>5</sup> average scores on a 1–10 scale for agreement with individualistic liberal values such as the market, competition and merit were lower and showed greater dispersion than those for such traditional values of the social-communist left as equality and labour, and more recently the environment.

At the first national congress of the PD, held when Bersani was elected secretary two years after the party's founding, average scores for competition and the market were 6.9 and 6.5, against much higher scores for labour (9.3) and equality (9.2). When Renzi became secretary four years later at the second congress, competition and the market ranked somewhat higher, averaging 7.3 and 7.2, though equality and labour continued to lead with average scores of 9.1 and 9.4. This significant albeit limited improvement, which seemed to herald a major change in the attitudes of the party's core, was due both to the new leadership's liberal-democratic vision and to the entry of new recruits whose political culture owed very little to the social-communist tradition. But it was not to last. Among the delegates to the third congress, elected when Renzi won his second term as secretary in 2017 (though his leadership had been irretrievably tarnished by the defeat in the 2016 constitutional referendum), the average score for competition dipped back down to 6.8, and only support for the market remained substantially stable at 7.4. Though the period of Renzi's leadership signalled the party's sharpest break with the past, equality and labour were still considered the most important values, with average scores of 9.4 and 9.5 respectively. And this virtually unchallenged dominance was unshaken even when concern for the environment, a quintessentially Post-Materialist value, burst onto the scene: pressing though the issue was, it was unable to rise above an average score of 8.8. With the fourth congress and Zingaretti's election to the secretaryship in 2019, the equality/labour/environment trio scored highest, averaging 9.5, 9.6 and 9.3 (De Luca and Fasano 2019). Competition and the market dipped again, the former to 6.4 on average and the latter to 7. At the fifth and latest congress held this year, when Schlein gained the secretaryship, average scores for competition plummeted to 4.9 and 6.5. This was contrasted by further solid gains for equality (9.2), the environment (9.3) and labour (9.7), which seem to be the pillars of the meshed political culture that legitimizes the new leadership.

The situation can be brought into sharper focus by looking at the percentage of delegates at each congress who expressed a strong belief in the surveyed values.<sup>6</sup> Here the comparison between values of the social-communist tradition and values reflecting individualistic and liberal views is even more in favour of the former. The percentage of delegates with a strong belief in equality and in labour ranges from 75 to 85 per cent and from 79 to 94 per cent respectively. Far fewer believe strongly in competition and the market. Believers in competition accounted for one quarter of the delegates in the 2013 survey, at the time of Renzi's first election to the secretaryship, and in the other surveys varied between 18 and 14 per cent, hitting bottom in the current assembly with a meager 6.6 per cent. One fifth of the respondents in the 2013 poll were believers in the market, while the figure ranged from 18 to 13 per cent in the other surveys.

Merit is a value that has trodden a somewhat more linear path over the years: despite carrying individualistic connotations closely linked to the need for self-enhancement, it nevertheless seems have ties to an idea of justice that colours how it is perceived. At least between 2009 and 2019, the delegates invariably regarded it positively, assigning scores averaging from 8.4 to 9. But the current pool of delegates elected together with Schlein takes a dimmer view with an average of 6.8, a downward trend that after Renzi's two terms as secretary seems destined to continue.

#### **4. New post-materialism values and old political party**

We can conclude that the transformations of the main party of the Italian left, from the Bolognina turn and the foundation of the PdS to the rebranding as the DS and down to today's PD, has not had major repercussions or brought substantial changes, at least from the standpoint of values, i.e. the complex of norms and principles underlying its orientations and attitudes. In the collective imagination of the party's core group, the market, like the idea of competition and to some extent that of merit, still has largely negative connotations. Renzi's leadership – which at the time seemed likely to shift the party's political culture towards a liberal-democratic ethos – took a slightly more positive view of these three values. But this change had limited impact, not enough to bring about a more general embrace of new values. In the final analysis, the Italian left – and in particular its main party, which as such should also be the expression of a more tangible culture of government – has responded only partially to the needs, and the corresponding values, brought by the social changes that have produced a society of mass individualization (Cerutti 2014). In addressing the values that channelled the individualistic drive towards a form of self-transcendence, the left has ended by emphasizing a universalistic interpretation of civil rights, gender-equal opportunities, environmental protection and peace. But it has

failed to heed the call for greater attention to self-enhancement, merit, competition and the market.

## Notes

1. Here we adopt the conceptual and theoretical framework advanced by Melucci (1982), who defines identity, be it individual or collective, as a complex system of relationships and representations on two levels. The first of these levels, which concerns people's capacity to differentiate themselves from their environment and maintain this difference over time, corresponds to a process of 'individualization'. This level concerns people's capacity to feel themselves part of a common unity with their environment, identifying with it via a strong sense of affinity or kinship, and corresponds to a process of 'identization' which takes place through the reciprocal recognition of belonging to a group. Analytically, individualization and identization are the two complementary poles of identity as a relational and social construct. For our purposes here, 'potential for individualization' refers to the dynamic connotation of individuals' identity in the process whereby they gradually become autonomous (Melucci 1982, 65).
2. Between the 1980s and 1990s, the idea took hold in the major democratic countries that public administrations are incapable of meeting even their citizens' most basic needs. The services that are actually offered fall far short of the burgeoning demand for public services generated by the explosion in the populace's needs and expectations. What is called into question here is the relationship of trust between citizens and public institutions, the foundations of the 'social contract' between the parties. This problem cannot be solved simply through technical and legal tweaks in how powers are defined or by redistributing resources among the various levels of government: building a new relationship between citizens and the State calls for a thorough rethinking of the methods and forms of public action (Martinelli 1996).
3. Immigration is the ultimate wedge issue. Put bluntly, vilifying migrants, whether at the top of your lungs or with more articulate arguments, is a vote-getter. Moral, social and political majorities come together, and large chunks of society from all social strata are increasingly likely to support the so-called anti-foreigner parties or those that are highly sceptical about hosting immigrants in the country. The issue, in any case, does not affect Italy alone, but roils almost all of the countries in the liberal democratic tradition. This new social rift now spawning new political parties and movements has to do with the scope of the immigration issue. Two major topics cutting across party lines featured prominently in the latest electoral campaigns: immigration and the European Union. Without overshadowing the traditional left-right cleavages, these issues work alongside them, at times widening and at times narrowing the gap (Kriesi 1998). Moreover, while it is true that elections at all institutional levels and in all liberal democratic states reflect dynamics peculiar to their own national, regional and local context, they nevertheless show certain trends or signals that carry considerable significance for our societies' present and future, and for the effects elections have on every government's immigration policy. From the supranational level to that of local administrations, immigration splits public opinion and political parties, as well as figuring largely in the decision-making process (see Pasini and Regalia 2023).
4. As Ferrera rightly noted (1998, 79–80), 'we now speak of targeting, or the adoption of a more selective approach in delivering social services. This is an

option at the centre of today's welfare reform debate in all countries, but it is interpreted differently, and encounters different obstacles, in each country (or at least in each family of countries), depending on the current welfare regime'. As regards solidarity, its models and empirical consequences, in addition to the classic text by Martinelli, Salvati and Veca (2009), see also the extensive comparative study *Solidarity in Health and Social Care in Europe*, edited by Arts, Ter Meulen and Muffels (2001); for a descriptive and normative analysis of the concept and the situation in Italy, see Pasini and Reichlin (2001) and Gori and Pasini (2001).

5. See the Surveys of Department of Social and Political Sciences, Università degli Studi di Milano, under the coordination of Luciano M. Fasano and Paolo Natale. These polls were conducted in the years 2009, 2013, 2017, 2019 and 2023, corresponding to the election of PD National Assembly.
6. For this purpose, surveyed delegates who assigned scores of 9 and 10 to a given value were considered to believe strongly in that value.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Notes on contributors

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