

When National or Local? The Dual Climate of Opinion in the Italian Regional Elections

Marinella Belluati
University of Turin

Abstract: Local elections in Italy have, for some time, been closely analysed because their importance in the electoral cycle has been heightened by voting-system changes that have increased the significance of sub-national levels of government. The regional elections of 2010, here examined in terms of the way they were covered in Italian national daily newspapers were, however, subject to media discussion that was dominated entirely by national issues, which obscured local issues and parties, and relegated to the background what was really at stake in these contests. The aim of this article is to verify empirically the existence in Italy of a state of permanent campaigning supported by news coverage which tends mainly to concern itself with the affairs, public and private, of Silvio Berlusconi and his governing majority. However, local politics have continued, in a less obvious but significant way, to structure the climate of opinion.

Keywords: local election, climate of opinion, media coverage, local dimension

For almost twenty years in Italy the traditional political parties have been undergoing a profound crisis caused by internal structural changes but also by changes in the relationship between politics and society. Against this background local politics have often furnished evidence of a growing political and social significance (Bauman, 2003) and shown an autonomous potential to determine which issues and actors dominate the political agenda.

In 1995, a reform of the electoral law for regional elections¹ initiated a gradual process of transfer of competences and functions from the central state to sub-national levels (De Luca, 2004). From then on, Italian voters were able to elect directly the chief executives of municipalities, provinces and regions, the three levels of sub-national government provided for by the Constitution.

The electoral-system change altered the relationship between centre and periphery in two ways: first, by giving the sub-national authorities a new role, one more autonomous and independent of central government, reflecting a process of regionalisation of public policy-making (Baldini and

Vassallo, 2000); second, by strengthening the links between the localities, and voters, who could now vote for candidates directly.

The local context has thus become a symbolic space, with the potential to change the way in which people relate to politics and to represent the “civic element” of post-modern democracy (Marletti, 2007), showing the extent to which political strategies and logics of communication are increasingly intertwined (Norris, 2000). In contrast with the past, local election campaigns in Italy are now bound up with the electoral cycle and are part of a strategy of permanent campaigning (Blumenthal, 1980; Ornstein and Mann, 2000) that takes in both national and local levels. Following a series of local elections all of which confirmed the validity of this perspective (Marletti, 2007), in 2010 there was a new round of elections which somewhat undermined it.

The local elections of 2010 have, from the point of view of political communication in Italy, become an important object of study, for three reasons. The first is that they involved a large number of voters and a number of important regions.² The second is that the outcome of the vote was a test of the popularity of the Berlusconi government, whose term of office was at the half-way stage (Bellucci, 2009), but also of the popularity of the Opposition parties, which were in control of many local authorities. The third is that for a number of years politics have been dominated by a prime minister whose public and private affairs are often in the foreground (Vaccari, 2009; Cepernich, 2010) and this situation has significantly changed the relationship between the media and politics in Italy (Roncarolo, 2008).

From this point of view, our research into the campaign agendas of the principal Italian daily newspapers (*Il Corriere della Sera*, *Il Giornale*, *La Stampa* and *la Repubblica*) enables us to establish the extent to which, faced with an electoral challenge involving candidates seeking to become the presidents of major Italian regions, the media set the terms of political debate. Eight weeks of systematic monitoring of news coverage (seven weeks before the vote and one week afterwards) unfortunately confirmed that political debate remained strongly focussed on the affairs of Berlusconi, as had already happened in the case of the European elections (Belluati and Bobba, 2010), and framing of the campaign shifted from the regional to the national level.

Political campaign communication in Italy seems clearly to show the persisting effects of a “catchall leader” who deliberately, through unscripted comments and gaffes, or involuntarily, when caught up in scandal or controversy, remains at the centre of attention. From this point of view, the suggestion that local elections have acquired growing importance within the framework of the exchanges between centre and periphery, would seem to be disconfirmed. From another perspective, the suggestion appears to retain its validity. The investigation we carried out

into local news demonstrates that the local campaigns had an important impact, confirming the resistance of local politics to centralising tendencies.

In light of these considerations, observation of the way the election campaign was covered by the major Italian daily newspapers has served to highlight the existence of a dual climate of opinion (Noelle-Neumann, 1977) dominated at the national level by a one man show, but with local issues dominating the agenda at sub-national levels. This is insufficient on its own to explain the outcome of the vote, but it does highlight the fact that opinion tendencies are not just a reflection of exposure to the major channels of information, but reflect the interaction of many debates taking place on a number of different levels.

The research

At the time of the 2010 regional elections, Turin's Osservatorio sulla Comunicazione Politica monitored coverage of the campaign, from 8 February to 4 April 2010, by carrying out two pieces of research. The first, focussed on the national dimension, considered all the articles dedicated to the regional elections that were published in the national news sections of the four principal Italian dailies: *il Corriere della Sera*, *la Repubblica*, *La Stampa* and *il Giornale*. The second, directed more at studying the local aspects of the election campaign, involved an in-depth analysis of the coverage offered through the local pages of the daily *la Repubblica*, the only newspaper to have editorial offices in the regions we chose to examine: Lazio, Piedmont and Puglia.³

The two strands of the research analysed how coverage of the election unfolded, and the relative amount of attention given to it by each of the dailies, in the seven weeks that preceded the poll and in the week after, using a type of content analysis. This allowed measurement not only of the overall amount of attention, expressed by the number of articles published, devoted to the election, but also of the strategies chosen by each daily for giving it visibility. Each paper was given a visibility score using a summary index, applied daily, which had been used at the European elections of 2009 (Belluati and Bobba, 2009; Roncarolo, 2010). This enabled measurement of the salience and visibility given each day by each paper to the regional elections in the sections they devoted to national news. The index is composed of four dimensions: campaign articles as a proportion of the total number of articles published; the degree of centrality of the election in each of the articles; analysis pieces; presence on the front page. This made it possible to give each individual edition of the papers a score from 0 to 10 and to compare them for the entire period of the research.

In order to capture better the various local campaign communication strategies and compare them with the national strategy – aware that the rules of the national agenda contrast with the local ones (Bianda, 2006) – we

decided to analyse, for the same period, three regional contests as covered in sections devoted to local news. We also decided to investigate the coverage of the three regional editions of *la Repubblica*, including Lazio, Piedmont and Puglia.⁴

We should explain that it is usual for many newspapers, within the national edition, to carry a separate section devoted to local information, which differs according to region and is prepared by local editorial staff. This section can be considered de facto a newspaper in itself, with its own front page and thematically organised sections. What differs is the content and the rules governing the production of news, which are decidedly more local.

The index scores were combined with an analysis of the coverage with a view to reconstructing and classifying the prominent events, themes and developments of the campaign period and to capture the climate of opinion. Finally, we undertook a lexical analysis of the titles of all the selected articles in order to capture the prevalent kind of linguistic framing.

The catch-all leader: The ubiquity of Berlusconi in the national news coverage

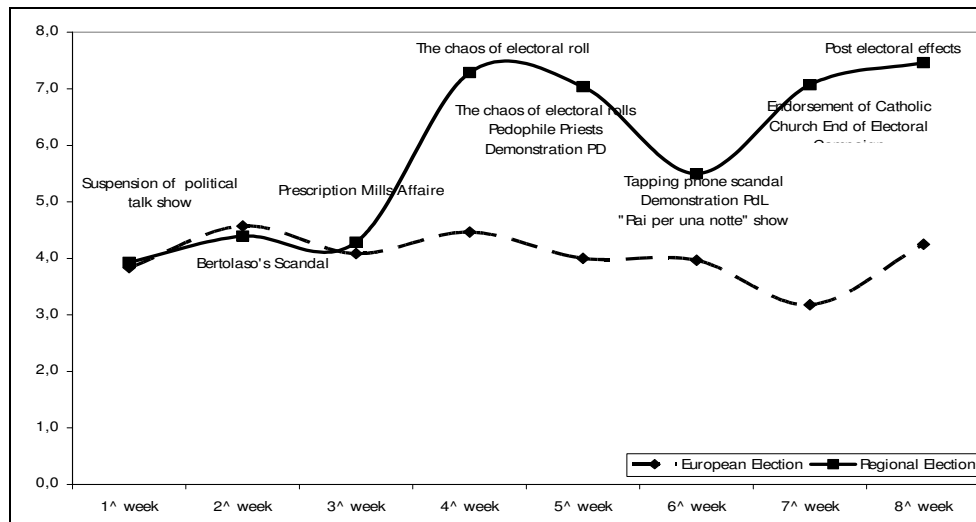
From an analysis of change in the national index scores,⁵ the first thing that becomes apparent is the rather limited visibility of the campaign, with a considerable increase a few weeks before the vote,⁶ as also happened in the case of the European elections of 2009. Both were second-order elections (Reif and Schmitt, 1980; Holtz-Bacha and Kaid, 1995) in which political interest at the national level seemed limited, but on its own this offers an incomplete account of the 2010 campaign. It has already been mentioned that regional elections in Italy constitute a particularly significant arena for political battles and battles over the redistribution of power resources. In this specific election, the political climate was quite heated, especially in some important regions.⁷

Another issue that might have been expected to be salient in the regional election campaign but was not, was the Government's decision to apply to all political discussion programmes the rules of the *par condicio* law.⁸ Following this decision, the private television broadcasters appealed to the Regional Administrative Tribunal (TAR) which found in their favour thus allowing the broadcasting of election-related current affairs to resume before the election campaign came to an end. RAI, the Italian public-service broadcaster for radio and television, decided not to take account of the ruling and did not resume such broadcasts, while the television networks belonging to Mediaset (owned by the Berlusconi family) reduced the number of programmes offering analysis to a minimum. The private television network La7, owned by Telecom Italia, and the SKY satellite channel owned by Rupert Murdoch remained the only national-level

broadcasters to offer discussion of the elections and campaign issues. This episode soured relations between the Government and the news media, which protested strongly and on 25 March organised a huge televised event, *Rai per Una notte* (attracting a 13 percent audience share), hosted by Michele Santoro, an anchorman openly hostile to Berlusconi, with the participation of several important Italian journalists.⁹ Despite this, the news remained in the purview of the media for a few days only and did not provoke any significant political reactions.

The campaign atmosphere, it must be said, was punctured by the outbreak of a number of scandals, such as the one surrounding public works contracts involving Guido Bertolaso, head of the Department for Civil Protection, and the so-called “*cricca*”¹⁰, and the one, within the People of Freedom (Popolo della Libertà, PdL), involving allegations of corruption which lead to judicial investigations into the activities of the party’s coordinator, Denis Verdini. The election campaign was also marked by the latest episode in the long-running saga surrounding the Prime Minister’s legal difficulties associated with lapse of the corruption trial involving the British barrister David Mills. There is no doubt that many of these incidents, though not directly connected to the election campaign, contributed to the political framing of that event.

Figure 1: Regional and European elections: visibility indices compared



The index of visibility (Figure 1) shows clearly that the national newspapers did not show much interest in the regional elections. At least until the fourth week of the analysis, the election campaign occupies a decidedly limited place on the agenda of the national dailies. This lack of interest was certainly influenced by Silvio Berlusconi’s initial desire not to

join the fray personally. On 1 March however news broke of the chaos resulting from the irregularities surrounding the presentation of the electoral lists in Lazio and in Lombardia¹¹ and the election campaign took centre stage in all the national media. From that moment on the index shows growing attention to the electoral contest generally, even though it has more to do with the consequences of the “list chaos” and the reactions of a prime minister obliged again to take personal charge of the situation than it does with issues connected to the local campaigns.

A final issue to make its appearance in the election campaign was the stance taken by the Catholic Church which, on the eve of the vote invited believers to abstain from voting for parties that supported abortion and euthanasia. This appeared to be a clear message of opposition to the candidates of the centre left, Emma Bonino and Mercedes Bresso (standing in Lazio and in Piedmont respectively), who were viewed critically by the clergy and by some of the public for their secular positions on these issues.

A number of analyses of the data confirm that journalistic coverage of the campaign was not consistent. Taking into account the leading articles (Table 1), the most salient news item in each issue, and the first pages (Table 3) it emerges that if the national newspapers attended to the elections, then essentially they began to do so following rejection of the lists in Lombardia and in Lazio. From that moment on the newspapers, and especially *il Giornale*, a daily with close connections to the PdL, significantly increased the amount of attention given to the campaign, in the case of *il Giornale* seemingly to defend its preferred party and to attack its political opponents (Table 2). During the course of these skirmishes the conflict with *la Repubblica* came once more to the fore, *la Repubblica* occupying a position close to the centre of the political spectrum (though without being the mouthpiece for any party) and expressing a well-known hostility towards Berlusconi. The stance taken by *Il Corriere della Sera* in relation to this climate should be highlighted: in seeking to occupy a position *super partes*, it has in recent years sought to become a point of reference for political analysis in Italy (Caruso, 2010). *La Stampa* stands out for the much smaller number of articles it carried as compared to the others, but also for the depth of its analysis, as suggested by the number of its leaders. This reflects a change in the newspaper’s general orientation, one now less focused on reports and more on information in-depth.

Table 1: Leading articles devoted to the elections in the 56-day period analysed

Newspaper	Days (N)	%
il Corriere della Sera	26	46%
il Giornale	27	48%
La Stampa	24	43%
la Repubblica	24	43%

Table 2: Articles on the regional election campaign published in sections devoted to national news

Newspaper	8-14 Feb	15-21 Feb	22-28 Feb	1-7 Mar	8-14 Mar	15-21 Mar	22-28 Mar	29 Mar	4 Apr	Total
<i>il Giornale</i>	48	31	24	129	144	51	60	171		658
<i>Il Corriere della Sera</i>	14	33	41	92	99	54	99	169		601
<i>La Repubblica</i>	22	30	33	64	52	60	86	111		458
<i>La Stampa</i>	22	33	25	79	70	53	66	61		409
Total	106	127	123	364	365	218	311	512		2.126

Table 3: Presence of the regional elections on the front pages of national dailies

Newspaper	8-14 Feb	15-21 Feb	22-28 Feb	1-7 Mar	8-14 Mar	15-21 Mar	22-28 Mar	29 Mar	4 Apr	Total
<i>Il Corriere della Sera</i>	3	2	2	7	7	3	6	6		36
<i>il Giornale</i>	1	3	2	7	7	2	7	6		35
<i>La Stampa</i>	2	3	2	7	5	4	7	6		36
<i>La Repubblica</i>	1	4	2	7	6	6	7	7		40
Total	7	12	8	28	25	15	27	25		147

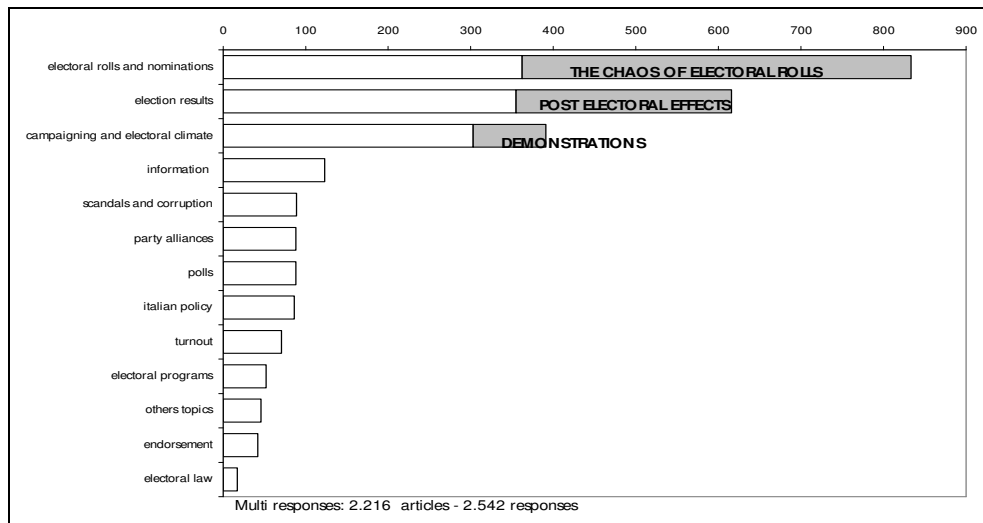
Table 4: Opinion pieces on the elections

Newspaper	8-14 Feb	15-21 Feb	22-28 Feb	1-7 Mar	8-14 Mar	15-21 Mar	22-28 Mar	29 Mar	4 Apr	Total
<i>Il Corriere della Sera</i>	2	2	4	17	11	3	19	33		91
<i>il Giornale</i>	8	1	1	19	30	7	4	18		88
<i>La Stampa</i>	7	5	5	14	25	38	15	11		120
<i>La Repubblica</i>	3	6	2	10	8	12	25	15		81
Total	20	14	12	60	74	60	63	77		380

Analysis of the campaign themes (Figure 2) shows that the issues given most attention were those surrounding the candidatures, with large amounts of the space being given to the irregularities associated with some of the lists, and to the subsequent disputes. In a few cases, despite the significance of some of the local contests, the national papers devoted space to candidatures which, beyond the regions concerned, were not explained in any detail to a broader audience.

Our analysis was continued for a week after the vote, and this is why the second issue, in terms of articles, was the debate around the future of the political alliances on the centre right, where the understanding between Berlusconi and Fini had already begun to break down and where the alliance with the Northern League was causing concern. But the centre left too was engaged in self-reflection following the loss of such important regions as Piedmont, Campania and Lazio. Overall, with the exception of one or two events such as the visits of major party figures, local campaigning tended to remain in the shade with appeals to the “piazza”¹² and strategies of going public tending to dominate media attention.

Figure 2: Campaign themes covered nationally



Overall, there were few references to the election platforms or to the local issues which should, rather, have been at the centre of public discussion in the newspapers. This is indicative of an underestimation of what was actually at stake in the election and of the spasmodic attention of journalists to Berlusconi who again showed that he could remain at the centre of media coverage. Given such a situation, it was only a few days before the vote that politicians and consequently the news media woke up to the real

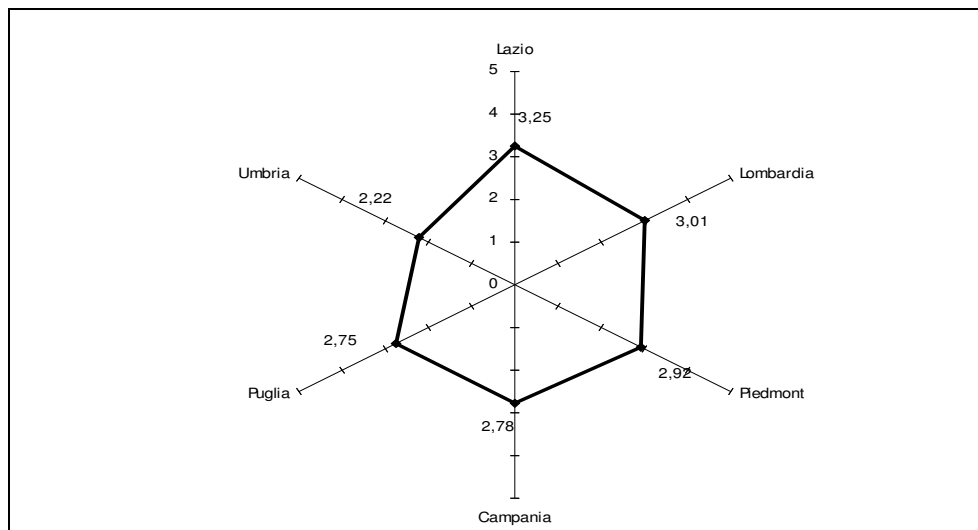
danger of a fall in turnout and attempted, through a series of public appeals to limit its effects.

Against this general background, we attempted to gauge the visibility of local politics. Of the 2,126 national articles overall devoted to the regional elections we therefore selected 1,153, those, in the national sections, which went into more of the detail of certain local contests chosen from among the most important: Piedmont, Lombardia, Umbria, Lazio, Puglia and Campania. In order to compare the data we constructed a daily “competition index” (Figure 3) using it to evaluate the salience of the local contests in the newspapers. The index (which ranged from 1 to 5)¹³ enabled us to measure the presence of each individual competition: the higher the score, the greater was the public recognition given by the news coverage to the national importance of the case in question. On the assumption that the media can influence the relative importance and the salience of issues brought to the public’s attention (Shaw and McCombs, 1977), we used this index to measure the agenda-setting effects of some of the regional elections.

Figure 3 confirms that the only local competitions to arouse more than a marginal degree of interest nationally were those involved in the controversy surrounding the presentation of the lists (i.e. Lazio and Lombardia). Other competitions meanwhile were, despite these circumstances, almost completely ignored. What is particularly striking is the lack of interest in the case of Nichi Vendola, “the Obama of southern Italy”, a very interesting politician with a well-developed ability to communicate both via the traditional media and through the medium of social networking. The other cases we examined too had unusual characteristics and might thus have attracted journalists’ attention but it was not to be because media logic (Altheide and Snow, 1979) defined other aspects of the campaign as having greater priority.

Another of the research findings concerns the orientation of articles, where we distinguished between cases where discussion of the local campaign took place within a national framework (i.e. where the elections were treated as national events), and those where they were framed in terms of their local impact.¹⁴ Overall, the results show that coverage of the election used the campaign for the purposes of discussing national politics (with 1,508 articles falling into the first category, as compared to 618 in the second). Further analysis of the local framing, though it was secondary, suggests, however, that editorial offices are very attentive to this dimension, now a well-established aspect of the logic of newsmaking. Each newspaper considered the local dimension differently, however, thus confirming that it is an important arena of discussion.

Figure 3: The weight of local cases in national news coverage



It was interesting to discover that *il Giornale*, owned by the Berlusconi family and officially aligned with the PdL, had a greater tendency to give its articles a local frame than the other newspapers – due mainly to the fact that most of its readers come from the North where the issue is most salient and where competition with the localism of the League is strongest. In their different ways, however, the other newspapers too gave indications of the adoption of a “go local” strategy. *Il Corriere della Sera*, for example, gave much space to the devolution issue, reflecting broadly on the success of the League and on the “Vendola model”. *La Repubblica*, as we shall see in more detail later, instead chose to adopt a dual editorial strategy by separating the two arenas and leaving discussion of local matters to the regional sections of the paper. *La Stampa*, a newspaper owned by the FIAT group with the distinctive feature of being the most local of the national newspapers, gave less attention to the regional elections overall, instead giving a great deal of in-depth attention to the case of Piedmont, which remains its region of reference.

Overall, the coverage of the principal national dailies gave little attention to the local significance of the regional election campaigns of 2010. National newspaper discussion is heavily skewed towards national perspectives dominated by the affairs of Berlusconi. From this point of view the linguistic styles used by the newspapers during the campaign period are highly significant. The semantic domain of newspaper discussion during the campaign is even more apparent. Using linguistic processing software¹⁵ to measure the frequency of appearance of the words used in the 2,126 titles of the articles appearing in the papers’ national sections, we are left in no doubt that the Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and the affairs of the PdL dominate newspaper discussion (Figure 5).

Figure 4: Newspapers' local framing

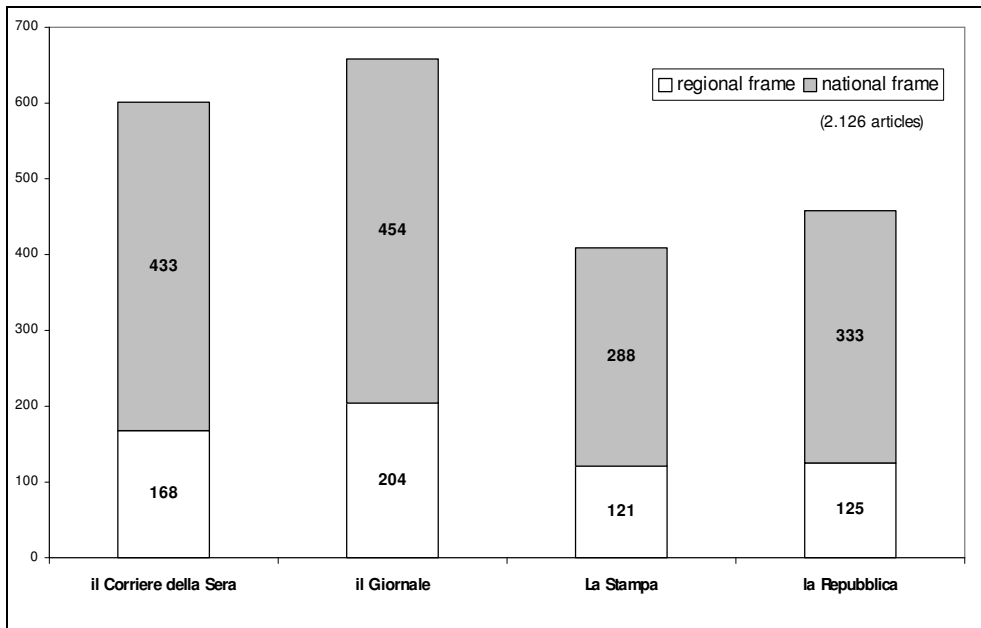


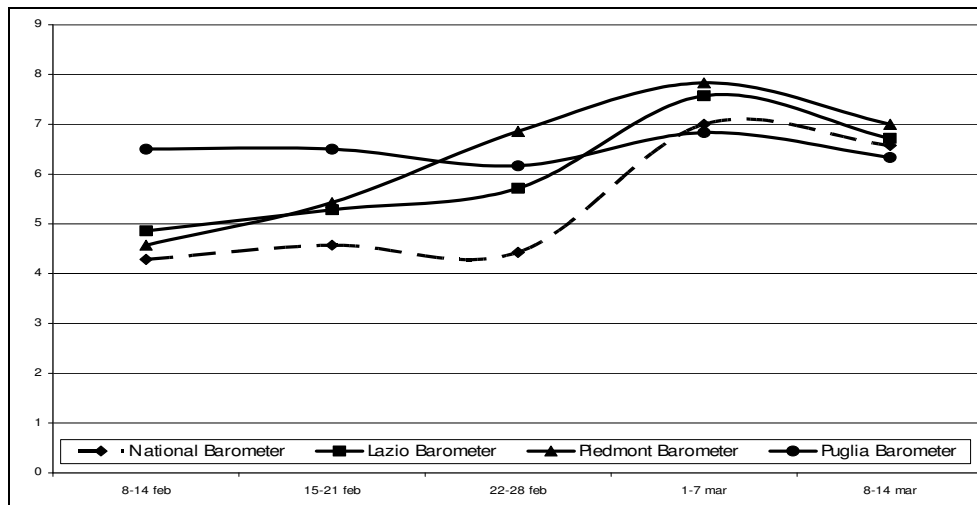
Figure 5: The 50 most frequently used words in the titles of election campaign articles in the newspapers analysed (2,156 articles)



The come-back of the locality

Viewed from a national perspective, the regional elections confirmed that sub-national politics have little power to grab media attention despite the fact that centre-periphery relations have always been a significant political and economic issue in Italy. Consequently, the traditional, unlike the new media seem unable to thematise the delocalisation drives emerging from society (Meyrowitz, 1985) or to give voice to the “glocalisation” aspects of social (Robertson, 1992) and cultural (Appadurai, 2001; Massey and Jess, 1995) change. For this reason the system of local news reporting remains crucial to the process of construction of political and geographical identities. In Italy, it must be remembered, a tradition of local journalism has survived, one that meets the greater need for local information characteristic of an age that is increasingly globalised (Sorrentino, 2006). Driven by the assumption that the election campaign in each region was also visible in other arenas we also examined the pages *la Repubblica* daily devoted to local news in three regions: Piedmont, Lazio and Puglia.¹⁶

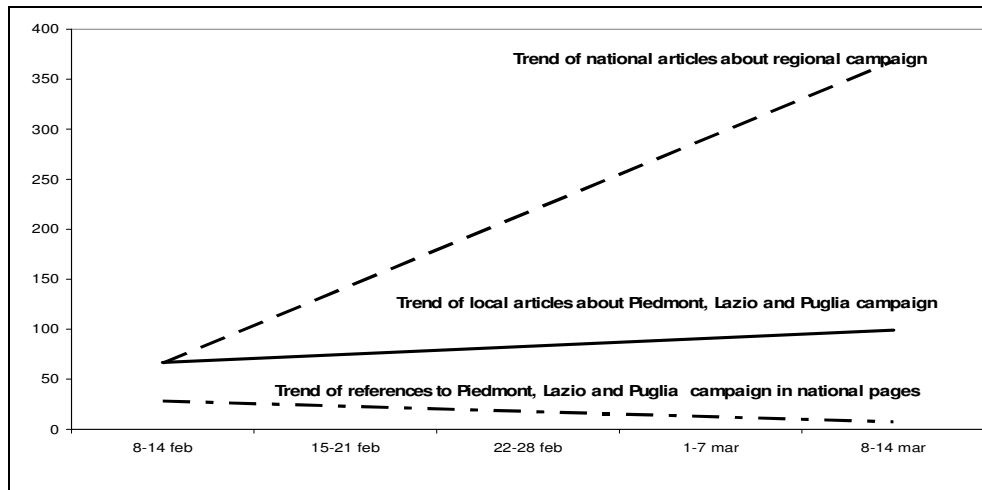
Figure 6: Index scores for the local pages of *la Repubblica*



The structure of the local editions recalls that of the national newspaper, and it was therefore possible to measure and compare the visibility of the three regional elections using our index (Figure 6). The most significant thing to emerge from this is that the local visibility of each of the election campaigns is greater than the overall national visibility. Even though this was to be expected given that the salience of a regional election increases the closer one gets to the voting context, it shows the commitment of the local editorial offices to a greater consideration of their elections through the adoption of a more locally-based perspective. Readers of *la Repubblica* in

Piedmont, Lazio and Puglia thus had available to them dual coverage: one focussed on national politics, concerned with the affairs of Berlusconi and related conflicts, and a local one where the election campaign was returned to the centre of attention in news reporting and political discussion.

Figure 7: Nationalisation versus localisation of competitions (weekly averages)

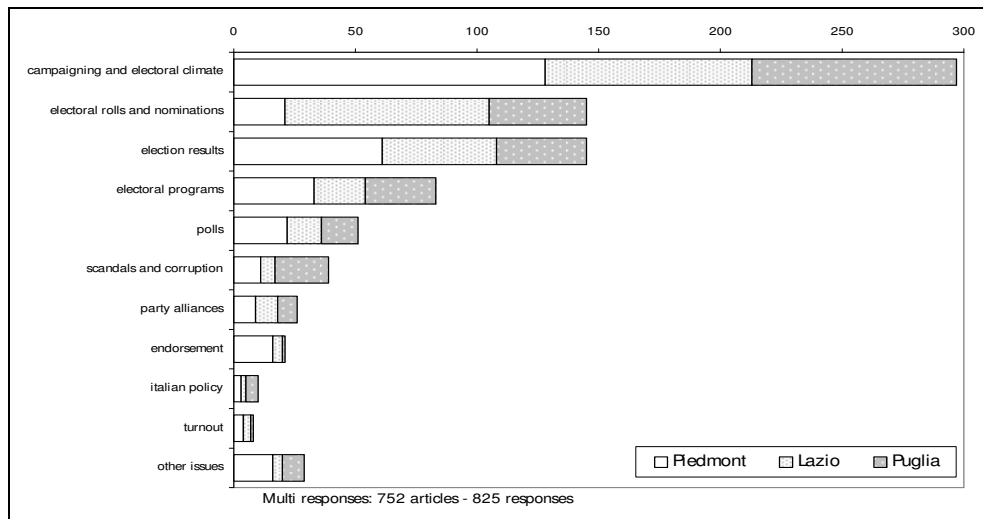


The presence of this dual reporting perspective within the newspaper can be seen in Figure 7, which reflects what happened throughout the country. While there was a large overall increase in the number of articles dedicated to the regional elections in the national news sections, there was a steady decline in the number of articles in these sections dedicated to the three regional elections. This took place concomitantly with a large increase in the number of articles devoted to these elections appearing in the local sections. This means that while national political news reporting steered the focus of the election towards the affairs of Berlusconi and his conflict with the judiciary, “forgetting” the actual substance of the regional contests, local political news reporting re-established the proper perspective on the campaign. De facto the informed voter was positioned within two opinion circuits (Noelle-Neumann, 1977), each of which certainly performed different functions in terms of information provision, but which offered two contrasting perspectives from which voters could make their choices.

The election issues reported in the local pages provide another clear indicator of the greater potential of local news reporting to consider the campaign. While at the national level the regional election campaign was presented as a power conflict, especially over the selection of candidates, at the local level the elections were considered in a more complex and dynamic way because the competitors, the campaigning and debate over

the election platforms reappeared in articles. From an analysis of the campaign events as reported in the local articles, it emerges that there are three different types of local orientation in Italy, in the north, in the centre and in the south of the country, each marked by a different relationship with the national authority and by specific features of its own, features that deserve further investigation.

Figure 8: The local issues



The existence of a system of dual coverage is also apparent from a lexical analysis of the titles of articles published in the local editions. Using the linguistic analysis programme, Wordle, to process the titles of the local articles, we were able to produce three figures (9, 10 and 11), one for each of the contests analysed. From the frequency of appearance of the words used it is immediately apparent that local news reporting was more successful in focussing on discussion of the election, giving visibility to the actors and issues driving local debates. With the benefit of hindsight it is worth remarking that the words most frequently used in the titles of the articles devoted to each of the regional campaigns not only conveyed better the nature of political relations within the local context, but they also predicted the outcomes of contests believed to be uncertain right up until the last minute. Obviously the issue is more complex than that because one would have to take account of the climate of opinion and of they ways in which the media, politics and public opinion influence each other, something that is beyond the scope of this study.

Figure 9: Words in the titles of articles reporting the campaign in Piedmont



Figure 10: Words in the titles of articles reporting the campaign in Lazio



Figure 11: Words in the titles of articles reporting the campaign in Puglia



Conclusion

Comparison of the two contrasting styles of reporting associated with the 2010 regional election campaign in Italy has revealed the existence of a dual process of framing. On the one hand we have the “Berlusconisation” of Italian politics, on the other there is the pressure deriving from the localities. Voters, whose choices are in part structured by the media, found themselves confronted with two sets of information, often counter posed to one another. Which of them will have been the most influential remains an open question though the results suggest that the influence of place is far from being without significance in processes of political representation.

What, however, is striking is that, on the one hand, news reporting nationally focuses entirely on the “adventures of the *cavaliere*”; on the other hand, there is a system of local news reporting that places a block on these hegemonic tendencies.

In the face of regional campaigns that should have been focused on specific localities, it was more than ever apparent that national-level political actors were unwilling to give up any of their power of domination. The risk this involves for the Italian political system is the possible growth of anti-political sentiments, and with them a decline in turnout and the generation of new forms of populism (Mastropaolo, 2005).

Notwithstanding the tendency of political communication in Italy to personalise conflict, place, as a cognitive criterion, has not lost its potential to influence political developments. This is demonstrated by the fact the League has become increasingly well rooted in the regions of the North. Meanwhile, the Vendola model shows that in the South another type of localism, one contrasting with the welfarist kind, is taking root. But even in a region like Lazio, where the influence of the capital is very strong, there is evidence that location still counts, the victory of the PdL having come about thanks precisely to the vote of the provinces far away from Rome.

Translated by James L. Newell

Notes

¹ The system governing elections to Italian regional councils (law no. 43) came into force in 1995 and stipulated that regional presidents would be directly elected in a single round of voting. Regional councils are elected at the same time as presidents in accordance with a hybrid system which is proportional for the most part, but which includes a majority premium as a minor element.

² The elections involved thirteen of the most important Italian regions out of 21 and about 41 million Italian citizens.

³ This work was carried out, in spite of the lack of public funding for research, thanks to the dedication of the group of scholars affiliated to the Osservatorio della Comunicazione Politica di Torino directed by Franca Roncarolo.

Special thanks are due to the students enrolled on the programme of studies leading to the degree in Public and Political Communication of the Faculty of Political Sciences and to the doctoral students of the Department of Political Studies who gathered the data: Francesco Cannone, Vania Cicciozzi, Donatella Natta, Nelma Tatiana Neves and Lucia Sternativo.

⁴ The choice of a newspaper tending to the left is due to the fact that this is the only national daily newspaper that has editorial offices in the three regions we chose to analyse.

⁵ Overall, 225 issues and 2,126 national-level articles were analysed, reliability testing using the Holsti Formula giving a score of .6 in the first case and .85 in the second.

⁶ Election campaigns in Italy officially begin 30 days before polling day, though the political competition in and beyond the media begins, *de facto*, long before.

⁷ In Piedmont the outgoing president, Mercedes Bresso, of the Democratic Party (Partito Democratico, PD) regained the party nomination against a divided regional secretariat and lost by 3,000 votes to the centre-right's candidate, Roberto Cota, of the Northern League. In Piedmont, the outcome of the election remains uncertain because following an appeal by the centre left on the grounds of alleged irregularities in the composition of some of the electoral lists, the Regional Administrative Tribunal ordered a recount of the ballot papers considered dubious. In Lombardia, Roberto Formigoni of the People of Freedom (Popolo della Libertà, PdL) stood again winning for the fourth time despite continuing conflicts with the Northern League, his party's governing ally. In Veneto, Luca Zaia of the Northern League became president, winning the face-off within the PdL and forcing the outgoing president, Giancarlo Galan to withdraw his candidacy though he enjoyed wide support among voters. In Lazio, the candidature of Emma Bonino of the Radical Party, which failed by a few votes in competition with the PdL's Renata Polverini, was accepted unwillingly by the regional branch of the PD which gave her little support in the campaign despite the fact that she was always in front in the initial opinion polls. In Puglia, the outgoing president, Nichi Vendola (Sinistra e libertà) won primary elections against a PD candidate supported by Massimo D'Alema's faction and went on to win the main election. In the same region, the centre right was divided leading it to field two candidates, one of which - Rocco Palese (PdL) - was so weak he was opposed by Berlusconi himself, the other of which - Adriana Poli Bortone of the Union of the Centre (Unione di Centro, UdC) - had strong local roots. Stefano Caldoro (PdL) snatched the Campania region from the PD by beating Vincenzo De Luca, who succeeded as the party's candidate his declared internal rival, the controversial outgoing president, Antonio Bassolino. In Umbria, following bitterly fought primary elections, the PD finally decided on the candidature of Catiuscia Marini, supported by the outgoing president and victorious by a handsome margin against the PdL's Fiammetta Modena.

⁸ The *par condicio* law (no. 28/2000) establishes the criteria to which all Italian television broadcasters must conform in the interests of guaranteeing appropriate visibility to all parties and/or political movements. The law stipulates that political organisations must be given equal amounts of air time within the framework of current affairs programmes independently of their electoral support. If applied to

talk shows and documentaries, such a rule would have made the programmes impossible to organise.

⁹ The event was billed, by the press release, as “a work-to-rule in defence of freedom of the press and of information”. It was broadcast live by SKY and by a number of local television stations, and broadcast through live streaming by Repubblica TV.

¹⁰ The term “*cricca*” was used by public prosecutors in reference to their investigations into a business cartel which organised a system of control over the allocation of public works contracts. The investigations led to the resignation of Claudio Scajola, the minister for economic development in the fourth Berlusconi Government, as well as to a series of arrests of personalities close to the head of the Department for Civil Protection and of entrepreneurs with connections to the Government.

¹¹ A number of the PdL’s electoral lists in Lazio and in Lombardia were excluded by the Regional Administrative Tribunal following the discovery of irregularities in the way they had been presented and in collection of the signatures necessary for their authentication. After several days of tension, despite the action of the President of the Republic in signing an Interpretive Decree to enable the lists to be accepted, the court’s decision was revoked in Lombardy but not in Lazio, the region in which Rome is located, provoking bitter conflict between the Government and the judiciary.

¹² On 13 March 2010, the parties of the centre left sponsored demonstrations throughout the country, “In defence of democracy, legality and employment; supporting due process; opposing gimmicks; in order to win”. On 20 March, the PdL organised a large demonstration in Rome of the “party of love” (as Berlusconi himself called it) to protest against the elimination of the lists in Lazio. On that occasion Berlusconi made all the PdL candidates for the regional elections swear public allegiance to him and to the party.

¹³ The highest daily score (5) was assigned to a regional campaign when it was reported on the newspaper’s front page and was discussed in depth in comments and interviews carried in other sections of the paper; the lowest score (1) was given when it attracted only a brief article.

¹⁴ The concept of framing is used in the analysis of communication to establish the cognitive frameworks relied upon to make sense of a text (Goffman, 1974). Each article was classified in terms of a dichotomous variable which distinguished between the national and the local framing of discussion.

¹⁵ The titles of the 2,156 articles were processed using Wordle, a lexical analysis programme which enabled us to measure the number of times words appeared and to build a word cloud using the 50 most frequently appearing. We decided to carry out the analysis only on the titles bearing in mind that they use a targeted and more selective kind of language in order to capture readers’ attention.

¹⁶ In Italy, all most important national dailies, in the different regions, have a section devoted to local information. To ensure the availability of uniform and comparable data, the analysis was confined to the local editions of *la Repubblica*, which has editorial offices in all three of the Regions considered.

References

- Altheide, D.L. and Snow, R.P. (1979), *Media Logic*, London: Sage.
- Appadurai, A. (2001), *Modernità in polvere* (new ed.), Rome: Meltemi.
- Baldini, G. and Vassallo, S. (2000), *Elezioni, assemblee e governi regionali, 1947-2000*, Bologna: Maggioli.
- Bauman, Z. (2003), *Voglia di comunità*, (new ed.), Bari: Laterza.
- Belluati, M. and Bobba, G. (2009), "L'Europa c'è! E la campagna elettorale? Elezioni europee 2009 e ciclo della notizia", *Comunicazione Politica*, 10 (3), pp. 433-449.
- Belluati, M. and Bobba, G. (2010), "European elections in Italian media: between second order campaign and the construction of a European public sphere", *CEU Political Science Journal*, 2, pp. 160-186.
- Bellucci, P. (2009), "Election cycles and electoral forecasting in Italy, 1994-2008". *International Journal of Forecasting*, 26 (1), pp. 54-67.
- Bianda, E., (2006), "Territorio, comunità e giornalismo locale", in C. Sorrentino (ed.), *Il campo giornalistico. I nuovi orizzonti dell'informazione*, Rome: Carocci.
- Blumenthal S., (1980), *The Permanent Campaign*, New York: Simon and Shuster.
- Caruso L. (2010), "Eletti a far cosa? Immagini della rappresentanza europea sul Corriere della Sera", *Comunicazione Politica*, 11 (1), pp. 115-123.
- Cepernich C. (2010), "Al centro della scena. Campagna elettorale e campagne stampa intorno agli "inciampi" pubblici e privati di Silvio Berlusconi", *Comunicazione Politica*, 11 (1), pp. 67-80.
- De Luca, R. (2004), *Cambiamenti istituzionali e consenso: i nuovi sistemi elettorali regionali*, Soveria Mannelli: Il Rubettino.
- Goffman E., (1974), *Frame Analysis. An essay on the Organization of Experience*, Boston: Northeastern University Press.
- Holtz-Bacha, C. and Kaid, L.L. (1995), "Television spots in German national elections: content and effects", in C. Holtz-Bacha and L.L. Kaid (eds), *Political Advertising in Western Democracies: Parties and Candidates on Television*, Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Marletti C., (ed.) (2007), *Il leader postmoderno*, Milano: FrancoAngeli
- Massey, D. and Jess, P. (eds) (1995), *A Place in the World? Places, Cultures, and Globalization*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mastropaolo, A., (2005), *La mucca pazza della democrazia. Nuove destre, populismo, antipolitica*, Turin: Bollati Boringhieri.
- Meyrowitz, J., (1985), *No Sense of Place. The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behaviour*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- Noelle-Neumann, E. (1977), "Turbulences of the Climate of Opinion. Methodological Application of the Spiral of Silence", *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 8, pp. 143-158.

- Norris, P. (2000), *A Virtuous cycle. Political Communication in Post-industrial Society*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ornstein, N. and Mann, T. (2000), *The Permanent Campaign and its Future*, Washington: American Enterprise Institute.
- Reif, K. and Schmitt, H. (1980), "Nine Second-Order National Elections: A Conceptual Framework for the Analysis of European Election Results", *European Journal of Political Research*, 8 (1), pp. 3-45.
- Robertson, R. (1992), *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture*, London: Sage.
- Roncarolo, F. (2008), *Leader e media. Campagna permanente e trasformazioni della politica in Italia*, Milan: Guerini Associati.
- Roncarolo, F. (2010), "Voting for Europe. La campagna per le Europee 2009", *Comunicazione Politica*, special issue, (11) 1.
- Shaw, D.L. and McCombs, M.E. (eds) (1977), *The Emergence of American Political Issues: the Agenda-setting Function in the Press*, St. Paul: West Publishing Company.
- Sorrentino, C. (2006), *Il campo giornalistico. I nuovi orizzonti dell'informazione*, Rome: Carocci.
- Vaccari, C., (2009), "La logica politica dei media, i casi Berlusconi' e il voto del 2009", *Polena*, 3, pp. 29-64.