

## **Postmodern Mayors: The 2011 Local Elections in Milan and Turin in and beyond the Media**

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*Abstract: This article presents and discusses the results of the data monitoring carried out, with regard to the 2011 municipal election campaign in Milan and Turin (March 7 and May 29), by the Observatory on Political Communication. The research, aimed at studying the impact of the campaign in the local and national arenas, is focused mainly on two aspects: (a) the political communication strategies implemented by the leading mayoral candidates, (b) the analysis of campaign coverage by the media. From this perspective, the election campaigns in Milan and Turin offer themselves as informative cases for investigating – in relation to the strategies and communication techniques adopted and the different roles played by political journalism – how politics and the media are interrelated. On the one hand, in Turin the election was marked by the confirmation of the existing distribution of political power, low levels of media coverage and the relevance of local specificities. On the other hand, in Milan media interest and coverage of the election campaign was high, because of the symbolic meaning of the competition, which extended beyond the boundaries of the municipality, and the fact that the Italian Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi, was personally involved. In both cases analysed, the winning candidates conducted postmodern campaigns that sustained a significant degree of citizen involvement in the electoral competition.*

*Keywords: media coverage, municipal election, political journalism, political leadership, postmodern campaign*

Taking place according to schedule, the local elections of 2011 were held against a background of declining support for Silvio Berlusconi and his government (whose ratings had in April plummeted to 23 percent),<sup>2</sup> and a significant decline in the consumer confidence index (thanks to the effects of the economic crisis – for strategic reasons long denied by the Government (Roncarolo, Cepernich and Caruso, 2012) – on ordinary citizens).<sup>3</sup> In this context, what was a midterm election acquired a

significance that was more than local and seemed likely, from the start to have the connotations of a national-level contest. In fact, the number of electors involved – about thirteen million or a quarter of the Italian electorate – and the importance of the principal cities where the elections were held (Milan, Turin, Bologna and Naples) led Silvio Berlusconi to transform the vote into a kind of referendum on the performance of his executive by himself standing as a candidate in Milan, occupying first place on the list presented by his party, the People of Freedom (Popolo della Libertà, PdL) (Braghiroli, 2011).

The election campaigns were therefore subject to two, in many ways opposing, influences. The nationalisation of the poll gave rise to a contest between front-line politicians which resulted in communication being centralised and built on the kinds of televised discussions typical of those campaigns that Pippa Norris (2000) calls ‘modern’. At the same time, however, at the local level, the fact that these were council elections and mayors were directly elected meant that centre stage was occupied by these candidates and the needs of the locality. This gave rise to typically ‘postmodern’ strategies of communication that combined the logics of broadcasting and narrowcasting by using the web as a vehicle for mobilising people, using interpersonal forms of communication and stimulating citizens’ active participation (Blumler and Kavanagh, 1999; Farrell and Webb 2000; Norris, 2000; Gibson and Römmele, 2001).<sup>4</sup> From this perspective, the election campaigns in Milan and Turin offer themselves as informative cases for investigating – in relation to the strategies and communication techniques adopted and the different role played by political journalism – how politics and the media are interrelated.

Milan, Silvio Berlusconi’s birthplace and for decades a stronghold of the centre right, saw outgoing mayor Letizia Moratti defeated at the hands of Giuliano Pisapia even though the Prime Minister campaigned explicitly on Moratti’s behalf.<sup>5</sup> Pisapia was a challenger whose selection as the centre-left candidate had come as a surprise;<sup>6</sup> a candidate who achieved an historic victory after twenty years of centre-right government of the city; a candidate who brought a new atmosphere to the campaign, among the signs of which was a high level of turnout among the young and the success of the left in districts that had historically favoured the right (Colloca and Passarelli, 2011).<sup>7</sup>

Turin is in many ways the mirror image of the Lombard capital. Governed by centre-left mayors without a break since 1993,<sup>8</sup> the Piedmont capital seemed promising for the outgoing coalition in 2011 as well. Piero Fassino, member of the Democratic Party (Partito Democratico, PD) was chosen as the centre left’s candidate through coalition primaries.<sup>9</sup> He combined a national-level political profile having been general secretary of the PD’s predecessor, the Democrats of the Left (Democratici di Sinistra).

He had close ties to the city and started out as the strong favourite. In comparison, his rival, Michele Coppola, a regional councillor in charge of cultural affairs was a weak candidate. He was not well known and was unpopular with some in his own party. In this situation, Fassino had no difficulty in being elected at the first round of voting, thanks too to the endorsement of the outgoing mayor, Sergio Chiamparino.<sup>10</sup>

Comparing the two contests provides an opportunity to reflect on the evolution of local election campaigns and their mediatisation. With this in mind, the analysis offered in this article has two parts to it: first, the strategies of the principal candidates are discussed and then the analysis focuses on the characteristics of the coverage given to the election campaign. We investigate four hypotheses, two concerning the behaviour of the candidates (a-b), two the system of the media (c-d):

a) following a period of transition, the characteristics of local election campaigns are now mainly postmodern;

b) in situations where the peculiarities of the locality are important, a higher media profile for campaign events and statements is insufficient to bring victory to a candidate;

c) although the local media have characteristics distinguishing them from the mainstream national media, in the case of election campaigns the criteria of selection and hierarchy seem similar, centred, as they are, essentially on the game frame and the horse-race aspects of the campaign;

d) political positioning and involvement depends principally on two factors: the competitiveness and antagonism of the campaign; the extent to which the local campaign is nationalised.

### **The candidates' strategies in Turin and Milan**

Local election campaigns - it has been shown - are subject more than others to the influence of the distinctive features of the locality (Diamanti, 2009), and they have become an arena in which the ability of leaders and candidates to exploit the instruments of post-modern campaigning has become increasingly important. Standing as a mayoral candidate requires having an integrated approach to the different media. It also requires strategies based on communication with at least three different audiences: large interest groups; networks of political and voluntary-group activists; the general public (Marletti, 2011). If the aim of all candidates is to mobilise the largest possible proportion of their potential voters, the strategies adopted by those competing for control of the municipality must take account of three different objectives: first, to obtain a consistent level of media coverage, as much as possible of which is favourable; then to implement a busy schedule of face-to-face meetings that successfully establish a strong relationship between voters and the candidate; finally, to induce citizens to be active and to participate in the election campaign. The

features initially distinguishing the strategies of the principal candidates in this round of elections concerned precisely these objectives.

In Milan, the uncertainty of the outcome stimulated a high level of activity on the part of the two contenders who were each involved in an average of four to five campaign events and statements per day, while the high level of conflict between them attracted the attention of the media by virtue of the opportunity it gave for horse-race coverage of the contest and by virtue of the enormous symbolic significance of what was at stake. The state of substantial equilibrium between the two candidates must however be seen in the light of two features that considerably changed its significance. In the first place, from his position as challenger Pisapia managed to close the gap with the incumbent candidate, Moratti, both in terms of meetings and election messages, and in terms of visibility. In addition, though similar in quantitative terms, media coverage of the candidates showed notable qualitative differences: as polling day drew closer, the campaign news, and the frames used to report it, became increasingly favourable to Pisapia and decreasingly favourable to Moratti.

*Table 1: Total number of campaign events and statements*

	Milan		Turin	
	Pisapia	Moratti	Fassino	Coppola
Events	174	164	155	127
Statements	173	197	59	56

In Turin, by contrast, the greater certainty of the outcome and the absence of an incumbent candidate had the opposite effect: there was a less intense campaign schedule and a rather modest degree of media attention. In the Piedmont capital, the centre-left candidate, Fassino, was involved in a larger number of events and statements during the campaign (Table 1), while on the centre right Coppola stood out for the greater impact of his campaign communications (Table 2). The principal explanation for this difference lies in the different positions from which the two candidates started: Coppola continued, for all of the ten weeks analysed, to search for media visibility in order to narrow the awareness gap with respect to his adversary and to gain credibility as the candidate of the entire centre-right coalition. Fassino, by contrast, preferred to establish the credibility of his connections with the city by concentrating on the selective mobilisation (and re-mobilisation) of city activists' networks through face-to-face meetings in the locality.

*Table 2: Maximum media visibility of campaign events and statements<sup>11</sup>*

	Milan		Turin	
	Pisapia	Moratti	Fassino	Coppola
Events	4.5	3.9	2.0	2.9
Statements	4.7	5.6	4.4	4.8

The two competitors adopted different strategies from the outset, well aware, as they were, of the different challenge they each faced. Fassino is a leader with a national-level profile who had no need to raise voters' awareness of him and who, thanks to the primaries, had also obtained the clear endorsement of the centre-left electorate. The principal objective of his communication was therefore to establish a connection between himself and the performance of the outgoing mayor who, according to the governance polls of IPR Marketing, was one of the most popular mayors in the country;<sup>12</sup> to re-establish his ties with the city; to be perceived as a local candidate rather than one imposed on the locality by the national leaders of his party; to offer a programme that would be perceived as innovative. Coppola found himself in a position that was in many ways antithetical: he was a young, local politician who in October 2010 was known to only 27.3 percent of respondents;<sup>13</sup> he was competing in a city where the centre-right had traditionally not been strong; he did not enjoy the full support of the coalition he was seeking to represent. Unlike his rival, he needed to use the campaign to raise his profile in an attempt to establish his claim, among centre-right voters, to be an authoritative aspirant to the position of first citizen.

Over-time change in levels of media exposure (Figures 1 and 2) enable us to understand better the differences between the four candidates in their involvement in events and statements capable of obtaining coverage by the local media.

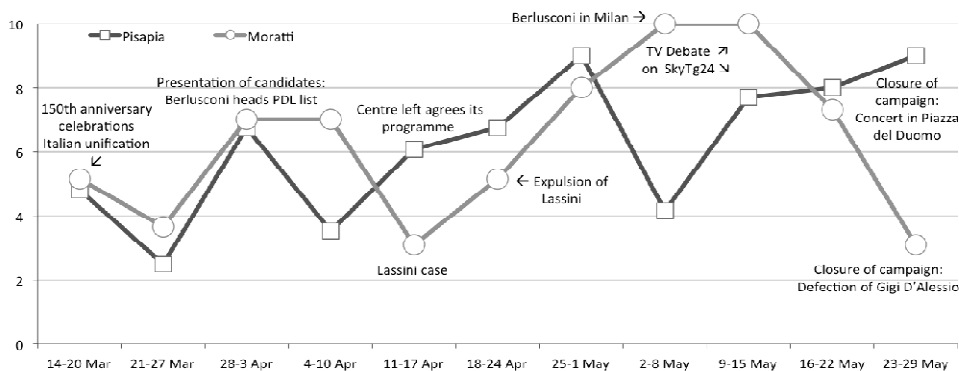
In Milan, the campaign in the media went through three distinct phases: initially, attention was focussed principally on Letizia Moratti who enjoyed visibility by exploiting her position as the incumbent mayor. Starting from the fifth week of observation (11-17 April), with the start of the official campaign period, the two candidates initiated a series of bitter conflicts that spilled over into episodes of negative campaigning and high degrees of conflict. Finally, after the outcome of the first round of voting, which was favourable to the centre left, the last two weeks saw the collapse of Moratti and the triumph of Pisapia in terms of media exposure as well as (in the end) in terms of votes.

Going into more detail we can see that from 14 March to 17 April, the centre-right candidate sought to take advantage of the so-called 'incumbent effect', exploiting strategically all the symbolic and actual resources available to her. The daily administrative activity (such as the Council's

approval of the budget on 24 March); the local repercussions of national-level events (such as the reception of refugees from Libya); the management of local projects of national significance (the organisation of Expo 2015 and the official celebrations of the 150th anniversary of Italian unification); the inaugurations and official ceremonies (especially the opening of new stations on the underground network): all these obtained ample visibility and gave evidence of the mayor’s effort and efficiency. By contrast, with the exception of the official presentation of the electoral lists (28 March – 3 April), Pisapia’s local campaign activities, numerous and widespread as they were, obtained little coverage in the local media in this phase.

Once Letizia Moratti stepped out of her institutional role, then began the conflict with Pisapia that marked the beginning of the second phase (18 April-15 May). This was a phase full of memorable episodes, widely covered by the media, when the visibility gap began to close (and in some weeks to be reversed in favour of Pisapia). But regardless of the media coverage, Moratti ended the period with a profile that had been weakened. Three events above all made this clear: the ‘Lassini case’<sup>14</sup> which divided the centre-right coalition and undermined Moratti’s authority as a leader; the convention attended by Silvio Berlusconi held at the Palasharp (on 7 May) when the Prime Minister, in attacking the Milanese judiciary (referring to them as ‘a cancer’) and Pisapia himself (calling him ‘a mayor for the insane’) ended up by putting Moratti and the city’s problems in the shade; the television debate broadcast on SkyTg24 on Tuesday 10 May, in which Moratti, taking advantage of her right to have the last word (with no right of reply for her opponent), falsely accused Pisapia of extremism and of having been pardoned in a case of vehicle theft. Public recognition of the falsity of these suggestions was the source of bitter conflict within the PdL and the Northern League (Lega Nord, LN) and ended up weakening the centre-right candidate still further.

**Figure 1: Giuliano Pisapia and Letizia Moratti: maximum media visibility (weekly average)**



Finally, the two weeks of the campaign leading to the run-off ballot (from 16 to 29 May), saw Pisapia consolidate his position of advantage: in the media, the statements and the policies of the centre-left's candidate displaced those of his adversaries with the peak of his visibility coming on the occasion of the outdoor concert in Piazza Duomo on 27 May marking the end of the campaign period.

In Turin too, the last ten weeks of the campaign could be divided into three distinct phases: in the first, the contestants were busy organising their campaign teams and cementing relations with their allies, so that in terms of communications there was almost nothing – aside from the occasional statement – until the official launches of the campaigns (from 21 to 27 March). The characteristics of these events appear to exemplify the different approaches of the candidates to the matter of communication: Fassino began his campaign through the web, relying, from the start on vehicles for the mobilisation and activation of the electorate from below; the launch of Coppola's campaign in contrast coincided with Prime Minister Berlusconi's visit to the city – marked by strong protests at the scene of the event – and with the investiture he performed for the regional councillor.

The second phase of the campaign coincided with the month of April, a period marked by the initial skirmishes between the candidates, the finalisation of candidatures for the council, one or two impromptu events such as the controversy over the decision of the Piedmont regional authorities to withdraw support for the Turin Gay Cinema Festival, or Coppola's participation in the Fiat shareholders' meeting in his capacity as the holder of 'a very small' quantity of the company's stocks (*La Stampa*, 31 March 2011).

Finally, in the last three weeks, the contest caught fire thanks to the presence of a number of national-level leaders and a growing number of meetings and public statements. Notwithstanding this surge, the campaign was characterised by a low level of conflict, a lack of major controversial issues and by media coverage which – thanks to the large advantage enjoyed by Fassino in all the opinion polls<sup>15</sup> – appeared rather thin.

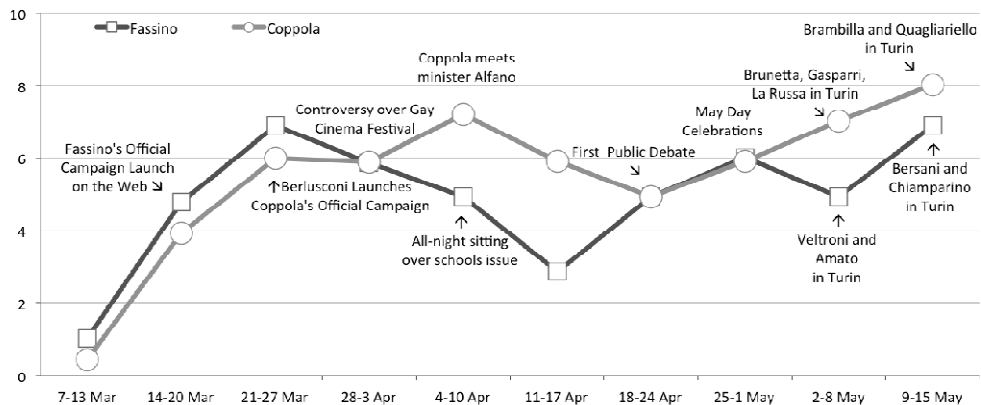
With regard to media exposure of the two campaigns, then, the week-by-week changes in the index of visibility confirm that there was more coverage of Coppola's campaign, which from the fourth week, always had more attention than Fassino's, thanks too to especially benevolent coverage on the part of the Piedmont regional news broadcaster, TGR Piemonte (*La Stampa*, 6 May 2011).

The visibility enjoyed by the PdL candidate seemed to be connected to two factors in particular. On the one hand, an explicit part of his strategy was the holding of one highlight event every week involving especially endorsement by a national-level politician<sup>16</sup> or the launch of new policy proposals for the city.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, the weakness of the PdL

candidate, it must be remembered, often exposed him to criticisms or political-journalistic controversies which he became involved in despite himself: the Piedmont regional president, Roberto Cota, was very tepid in his attitude towards the councillor and gave public demonstration of his support only a week before the vote, while Roberto Rosso, member of Parliament and high-profile spokesperson for the local branch of the PdL gave an interview on the 10 May in which he predicted that Coppola would be defeated (*La Stampa*, 10 May 2011). Coverage was not, therefore, always favourable and on the contrary in some cases the distorting effects of journalists' mediation undermined the impact of the events planned by the candidate's staff. Good examples were Silvio Berlusconi's interventions, which systematically obscured the PdL candidate instead of raising his profile, or the interventions of Roberto Cota whom journalists considered to be the most authoritative representative of the centre right. Therefore, Coppola's policy proposals, though reported in the local press and in regional news broadcasts, were often subordinated or counter-posed to those of other representatives of his coalition.

Fassino too – though for different reasons – found that he was not the only representative of his coalition under the media spotlights. On the contrary, he had to share the limelight with the outgoing mayor, Sergio Chiamparino, who, until the endorsement of 9 May, performed his functions actively, utilising the execution of all his institutional obligations, and his attendance at national-level meetings, to highlight and extol, in an autonomous fashion, his own performance.

**Figure 2: Piero Fassino and Michele Coppola: maximum media visibility (weekly average)**



A second aspect that allows us to clarify the differences between the strategies adopted by the four candidates concerns, lastly, the audiences for



their communication efforts. In particular, drawing on the three-fold division suggested by Marletti (2011), campaign events could be divided, according to their targets, into those aimed at: a) political representatives and large interest groups; b) associations and small sectoral interests; c) the general public. Unlike the previous indicators, this one captures certain similarities between the candidates of the centre left and the centre right here analysed.

While all devoted much attention to the public generally (though rallies, walkabouts, fetes and so on), it is apparent that one of the strong points of both of the victorious candidates of the centre left concerns the attention given in their schedule of campaign activities to the concerns of specific localities and to the small interest groups: Pisapia (39.1 percent) and Fassino (47.1 percent) devoted a large number of their meetings to efforts to establish dialogue with a wide variety of associations (from those representing economic sectors, to those promoting social causes or speaking for cultural activities) meeting citizens in one district after the other. By contrast, Moratti (16.5 percent) and Coppola (22.8 percent) devoted more attention to political representatives and the large organised interests.

Pisapia's campaign in Milan was more successful than the others in achieving its objective of involving ordinary citizens in the election battle. Beginning from the primaries, he started out with activity on the ground and on the web in order to get close to his audience and to project the image of 'a kind mayor' (as his campaign slogan sought to dub him). The involvement of citizens was not merely symbolic: over a thousand people contributed to his city project, meeting voluntarily over a two-month period at his Programme Workshop (*Officina del programma*). Consistently with the strategy of closeness, Pisapia spent a great deal of time in the streets and the several districts of the city: of the events in which he participated 61 of the 173 were public engagements that brought him in direct contact with ordinary voters. Significantly, this activity was flanked by the very detailed work of his supporters' committees. In addition to the campaign conducted, top-down, by the candidate himself, there was a bottom-up campaign organised by the nine Committees for Pisapia, one for each district of the city, which came together to organise events and produce campaign materials in an autonomous fashion.<sup>18</sup> Not counted in Table 3 because they were formally independent of Pisapia's campaign, the initiatives of the committees - of which there were 137, 24 of them in the two weeks that preceded the second round - made a further contribution to Pisapia's efforts to get close to ordinary voters as they engaged with the specific problems peculiar to each district. Though they retained a high degree of autonomy (on only 20 occasions did Pisapia attend events organised by the committees), their initiatives became an integral part of

the election campaign to the extent that they were always advertised on the candidate's official web site.

*Table 3 : Distribution of campaign events according to target audience*

		Milan		Turin	
		Pisapia	Moratti	Fassino	Coppola
Political	reps/large	13 (7.5%)	27	15 (9.7%)	29
organised interests			(16.5%)		(22.8%)
Associations/small	sectoral	68	36	73	55
interests		(39.1%)	(21.9%)	(47.1%)	(43.3%)
General public		93	101	67	43
		(53.4%)	(61.6%)	(43.2%)	(33.9%)
<i>Total</i>		174	164	155	127
		(100%)	(100%)	(100%)	(100%)

Finally, a feature of the campaign only partially considered in this analysis – one which cannot, however, be ignored – concerns the role played by the web and by the on-line social networks. Although all the candidates had a web presence, only Pisapia's campaign seems to have exploited fully and effectively the opportunities for interaction between electors and the candidate offered by the new media. The web was, in fact, crucial, on the one hand, in facilitating the organisation and mobilisation of electors off line, and on the other in sustaining 'generative campaigns'. Through user-generated contents that were perfectly integrated with, if not the same as, Pisapia's official messages, these helped to reduce the visibility gap separating Pisapia and Moratti and made an active contribution to the development of a new climate of opinion.

### **Between the nation and the locality: News coverage of the 2011 elections**

The outcome of the 2011 local elections viewed from the perspective of newspaper coverage confirms some of the findings of earlier investigations (Marletti, 2007; Belluati, 2010), but highlights certain novel aspects.

Although the 1995 reform<sup>19</sup> began a gradual transfer of competences and functions to local administrations (De Luca, 2004), and although the 2009 law of delegation instituted a regime of fiscal federalism, political interest in local elections has remained limited, or they have been viewed, at best, as an opportunity to measure public support, mid-term, for the policy initiatives of the government in office (Bellucci, 2006, 2012). Following a series of electoral cycles in which local contests had seemed to accelerate the process whereby political communication was becoming post-modern (Vaccari, 2004; Marletti, 2007), the change in the electoral law

for Parliament, which de facto neutralised the territorial dimension, and the drive towards the presidentialisation of politics carried forward by Berlusconi in government (Calise, 2005, 2010) drew the attention of the media back to more centralised forms of political communication.

A cognitive short circuit was created between national and local coverage that deserves to be explained. The local media, though closer to the issues of the area and potentially able to engage more fully with them, were in fact less able to offer perspectives of their own. For the local media, an election issue became significant only if it had some national repercussion. This emerges clearly from a comparison of the data concerning coverage in the cases of Milan and Turin. In the former city, thanks to the evidence provided by the first-hand presence of Silvio Berlusconi (who, it will be recalled headed the list of his party's council candidates), local news organisations were very attentive and active. In Turin, where, on the other hand, the election campaign was less sensationalised and the outcome was more certain, local news coverage remained colder and more detached. Despite the fact that local newspapers reported campaign events in both cities, they were unable to construct interpretative frames that were autonomous of those of the national press. For example, in Milan, the climate of opinion favouring Pisapia was created by the mobilisation of young activists and representatives of the city's cultural life. While this was a key feature of the campaign conducted through the web,<sup>20</sup> the mainstream media were instead focused on the performance of Berlusconi and the gaffes of Moratti. Electoral coverage in the Turin newspapers, on the other hand, conveys the image of a campaign that was not very lively, one lacking in initiatives – when in fact, as we have seen in the preceding section, the candidates were engaged in very intense and meticulous activity on the ground.

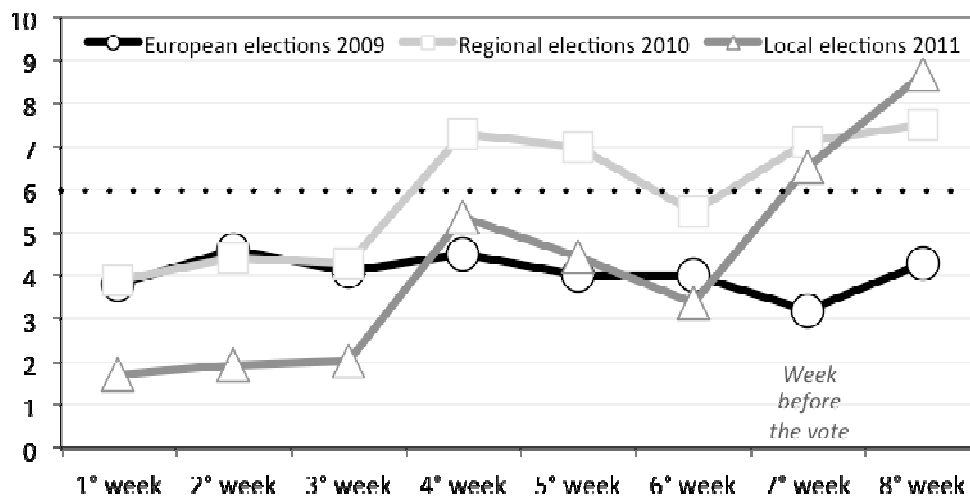
One also has the impression, analysing local coverage of the 2011 council elections in Milan and Turin, that the 'polarised pluralist or Mediterranean model' – characterised by a press aimed at elites, lacking autonomy and closely tied in with the political system (Hallin and Mancini, 2004), one supposedly typical of the Italian case – is not perfectly applicable to analysis of the systems of representation of the local media. Milan and Turin once again present contrasts. In the first case the left-right cleavage was reflected in the local news organisations which became veritable platforms for the candidates (*la Repubblica* becoming the mouthpiece of Pisapia, *il Giornale* that of Moratti). In Turin what is striking is the tepidness of the support of editors for the political tendencies they were associated with. The newspapers that were most clearly aligned politically (*la Repubblica* to the left and *il Giornale* to the right) gave attention to the election campaign that was routine in nature. As we shall attempt to show through analysis of our data, local coverage of the campaign was undoubtedly influenced by the national situation but the quality of

relations between the local media, and political actors, was also important. In this respect it is possible to discern the autonomy of local media systems in the processes of news-making – which, however, can become a weak point if a capacity to recognise the frames is missing.

*Careless national coverage*

The first part of the research carried out by the Political Communication Observatory of Turin tracked the extent of the coverage given to the 2011 local elections by the first four of the major Italian dailies.

**Figure 3: Index of national newspaper coverage of 2009 European, 2010 regional and 2011 local elections**

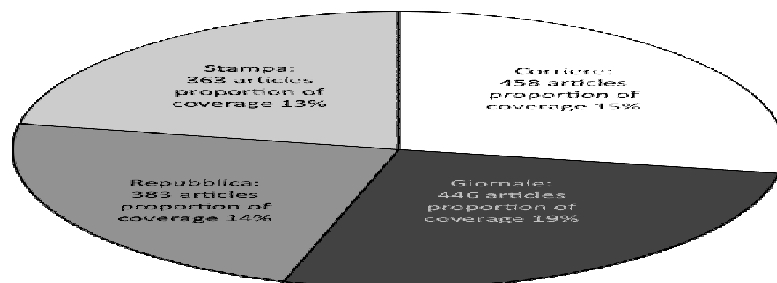


Looking at the situation over the seven weeks leading up to polling day<sup>21</sup> one can see how little interest there was in the 2011 local elections on the part of national journalists<sup>22</sup> especially in the early phase. During the initial weeks the issue received less attention on the part of journalists even than the 2009 European elections. It must be remembered however that the period examined was marked by particularly significant events such as the outbreak of the civil war in Libya and the refugee emergency on the island of Lampedusa, but that does not fully explain the overall lack of attention on the part of the national media especially bearing in mind the high profile of some of the contests like those in Milan and Naples. As had already happened in the case of the 2010 regional elections, however, media interest was aroused when Berlusconi ‘took on board’ the situation, thus transforming the municipal elections into a national issue. At that point, then, the national media began to follow events more closely, to the extent that during the last week of the campaign they exceeded the high-

water mark and definitely became the principal news item on the political and media agenda. The growth of interest of the national-level media was especially marked in relation to the uncertainty surrounding the outcomes in Naples and Milan and the consequences they might have for politics at the national level.

In seeking to outline the editorial approach of each newspaper to the local elections (Figure 4) we can highlight a range of different journalistic slants. The first concerns the newspapers' ability to thematise the issue of the elections. *Corriere della Sera*, the most authoritative of the daily newspapers, stands out for the greater in-depth analysis it provided on the potential national consequences of the local elections.

*Figure 4: Incidence for each newspaper of articles devoted to the elections*

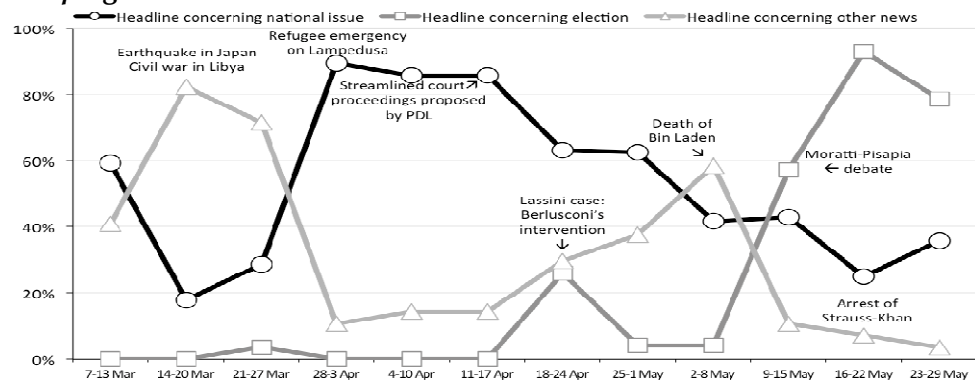


The Turin daily, *La Stampa*, though faced with its own local competition, was less interested both at the national and local levels, in the elections. There were several reasons for this, above all the new approach of the paper, which is attempting to give greater space to national and international events given that it is considered by many to be too regionally oriented.

The second feature of the approaches taken by the dailies in their election coverage concerns political partisanship. On this front *Il Giornale* and *la Repubblica* opposed each other. The Milanese daily, owned by the Berlusconi family, was much concerned with its 'own' local elections and gave ample space to the activities of the Prime Minister and his candidates, especially once the national political significance of the vote in Milan and Naples had been declared. In absolute terms *Il Giornale* was the newspaper with the largest proportion of articles reporting the elections as national events, all mentioning and emphasising the actions of the centre-right candidates while sharply criticising their challengers. *La Repubblica*, on the other side, continued to pursue an editorial strategy that was critical of Berlusconi, insisting that the elections might mark the beginning of his political decline. The interpretative frame that more than any other characterised coverage of the election was, once more, the tendency of the

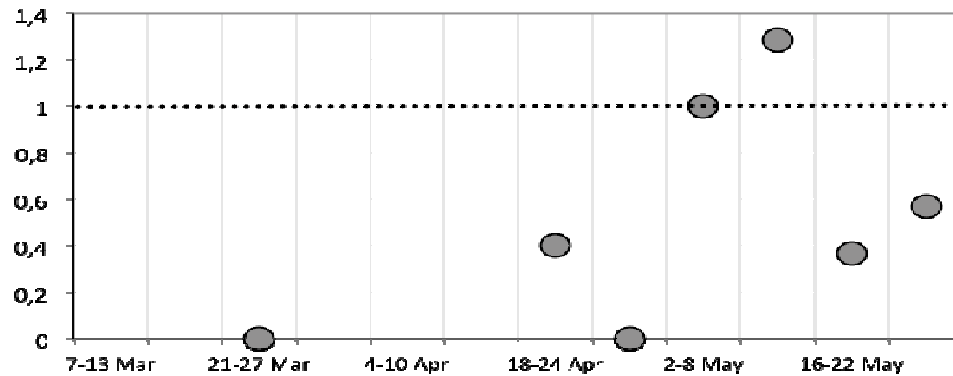
media to attribute to it national significance. The impact of the campaign on national-level politics and on the stability of the Berlusconi-led coalition gave rise to interpretations of the outcome that saw it mainly as something of relevance for political relationships at the centre, ignoring its local effects and the political changes that might flow therefrom.

**Figure 5: Front-page headlines of daily newspapers during the election campaign**



The strongly national character of the interpretive frame employed by journalists covering the municipal elections is highlighted by a more detailed analysis of the predominant frame (local or national) adopted in the newspapers' front-page headlines.<sup>23</sup> Though these were local elections, the semantic framing of the campaign events highlights how little scope there was for the deployment of local frames. Only towards the end of the campaign, when it became clear that the outcomes in the cities might not confirm to expectations, did the specific features of each of the contests emerge.

**Figure 6: Local versus national in the frames adopted for newspapers' front-page headlines\* (weekly averages)**

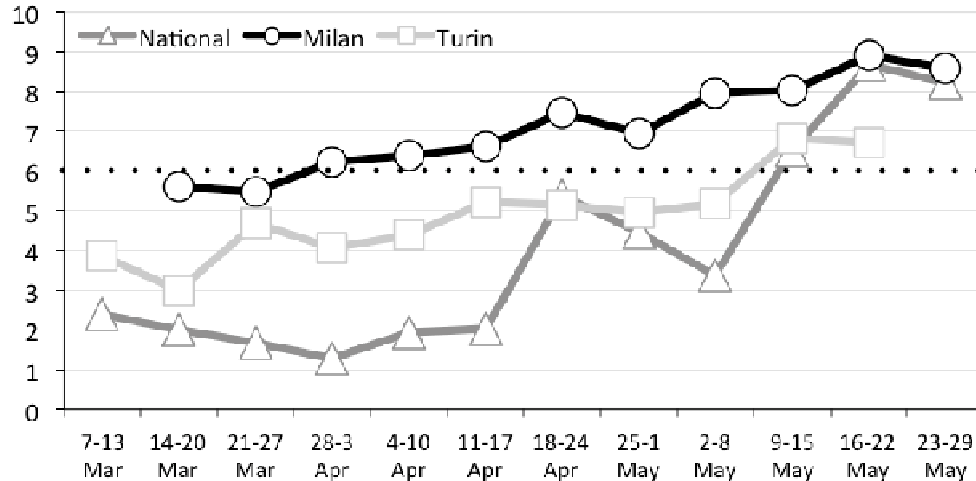


\*(index >1 local frame; < national frame)

*Local coverage makes a difference*

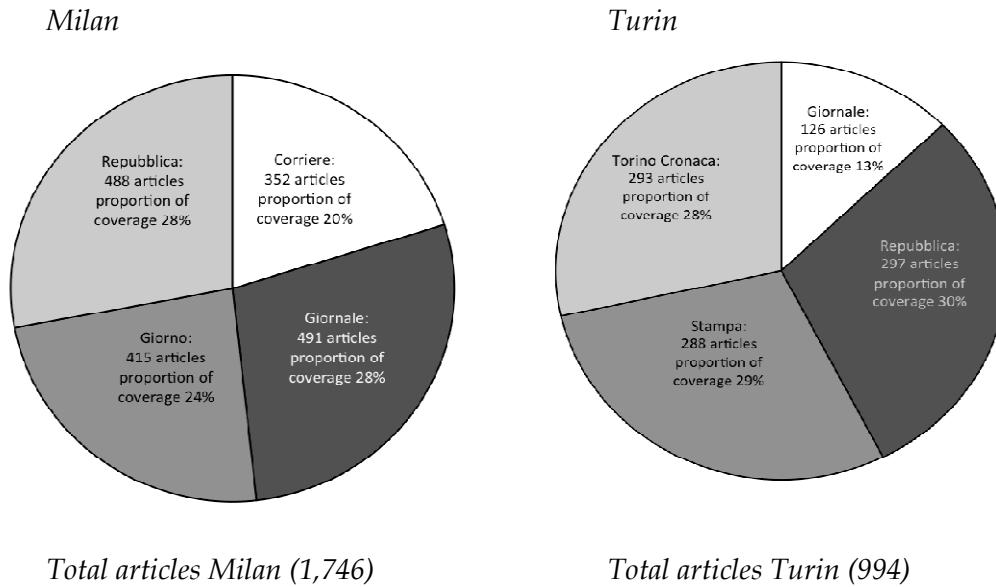
Systematic analysis of the coverage of the Milan and Turin elections was carried out from the period from 7 March until 29 May, the date of the second round of voting (though coverage of the Turin election stopped the week before because Piero Fassino was elected at the first round). The analysis concentrated on articles appearing in four dailies chosen for the size of their circulations in the cities; their political leanings, and the presence of local editorial offices. In the case of Milan we chose to analyse *Corriere della Sera*, of the Mondadori group of publishers, a traditional newspaper of the Milanese bourgeoisie; *la Repubblica* for its leanings towards the left; *Il Giornale*, owned by the Berlusconi family and aligned with the right, and *il Giorno*, now a tabloid focused on the city, one with a notably down-market, mass-readership, profile. In the case of Turin, on the other hand, we analysed *La Stampa*, the daily owned by the FIAT group, known for its focus on the city; *la Repubblica*; *Il Giornale* (chosen for the same reasons as in the case of Milan), and *Torino Cronaca* (chosen as a tabloid newspaper).

**Figure 7 Index of local newspaper coverage of the 2011 local elections: Milan and Turin compared**



Although the selections were different, a comparison of the national and the local confirms the low level of national interest, while showing that coverage in Milan and Turin was very different. While reporting of the campaign in the Lombard capital took off immediately, in the case of Turin it was not until the first days of May that many signs of the election could be found in the coverage of the local newspapers.

Figures 8 and 9: Incidence for each newspaper of articles devoted to the elections



When combined, the quantitative and qualitative data have made it possible to outline more precisely the editorial profile of each newspaper, allowing the contrasts in approach to reporting to emerge in each case. In Milan, *Il Giornale*, which supported the PdL, gave a great deal of attention to the election in both its national and local sections, highlighting the (small number of) successes of outgoing mayor, Moratti, and conducting an intense negative campaign against Pisapia and Moratti's other adversaries. Conversely, *la Repubblica* gave a great deal of support to Pisapia, especially in its local section.<sup>24</sup> The newspaper almost became the official mouthpiece for the centre-left candidate, transposing its opposition to Berlusconi at the national level into an 'anti-Moratti' stance at the local level.

The local section of *Il Corriere della Sera* gave less attention to the campaign but its coverage was more balanced. The smaller number of articles published in the local section was compensated by a large amount of national news. The editorial line could be defined as: a) 'institutional', more attentive to the dynamics of campaigning and to electoral strategies, and less attentive to the conflicts between the candidates; b) fair, because it also gave space to the other candidates; c) generally *super partes*, committing itself to Pisapia only a week before the run-off ballot.

Finally, *il Giorno* showed great interest in the elections, providing coverage that was decidedly populist and anti-political in tone. Offering a clear example of the kind of treatment typically given to politics by a tabloid, this newspaper deployed a journalistic frame that was decidedly more 'pop' than the others, covering the events of the election only from



the point of view of the controversy they provoked and pointing its finger above all at waste in politics; the costs of the campaign; the security of city residents; travellers' encampments.

The Turin newspapers too showed significant differences. Evidence of the lower level of interest in the election was the fact that the articles published in the 11-week period covered by the analysis came to 994, almost half the number (1,746) for the Milan case. In contrast to the latter, in the case of Turin, the political division between *la Repubblica* and *il Giornale* was not apparent in conflict between them. Coverage in *la Repubblica*, though its political orientation continued to be markedly left wing, was clearly influenced by the tense relations with the outgoing administration despite the efforts of Fassino to repair them. The local editorial office of *Il Giornale*, is a news organisation with political leanings somewhat independent of the PdL, one that is 'controlled' by a party faction closely associated with the former Piedmont regional president, Enzo Ghigo, who did not support the candidature of Michele Coppola. Therefore, conflict from the point of view of political opposition expressed through the newspapers, was very subdued. What was striking, rather, was the attitude of detachment taken by *La Stampa*, the daily paper of Turin, which did not take sides in the election and gave little coverage to the campaign. The reason might be that the outcome was so certain as not to arouse the interest of editors, implicitly reconfirming a position of confidence in the prospect of continuity in the political colouring of the local authority. The other possible explanation is that as Turin was at the centre of the celebrations for the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Italian unification, the newspaper preferred to provide coverage of a more 'institutional' hue. The last newspaper analysed, *Torino Cronaca*, confirmed its popular inclination, its more sensationalistic style of journalism, even though, in the elections, starting a column dedicated to interviews and election promises became the favoured vehicle of many of the minor-party candidates unable to influence the media agenda. This feature made a further contribution to the daily's profile as a heavily popularised newspaper, one whose approach closely reflected the classic paradigms of news presentation represented by tabloids (Connell, 1998). The climate of opinion of the campaign period was accurately reflected by the issues focused on in the local coverage of the campaign.

There was a further important difference. In Milan, a greater role was played by the candidates' programmes and the campaign events, in terms of which the two contenders were sharply distinguished. The feature that more than any other distinguished the competition in Milan, however, was the negative campaigning, carried on especially by the centre right against Pisapia, who was accused of having stolen a car in his youth (an episode for which he had been acquitted) and of wanting to turn Milan into a homeland for Roma people.<sup>25</sup> The controversies surrounding the above-

mentioned Lassini case, the fact that Berlusconi had insisted on heading the electoral list, and the fact that irregularities had been discovered in connection with the electoral lists presented by the PdL, all gave a certain significance to the issue of the candidatures. Meanwhile, another important theme was the endorsement given in certain cultural, religious and business quarters to the candidature of Pisapia.

In Turin, discussion of the campaign in the local press was more routine. The (small number of) election promises were the most discussed issue even though the two contenders often had positions that were not completely in conflict, Coppola's promises largely aping those of Fassino and differing only in terms of details. The effect of this, however, was to give legitimacy to the outgoing administration and to the candidate nominated for the succession. Coppola gained more attention from campaign events (driven, it was suggested, by the need to close the gap with his rival) and less from discussion of the election's likely consequences and the post-Chiamparino period. Confirming the predictability of the outcome, local debate explicitly focused more on the fact that Fassino was able to guarantee reliable continuity in the administration of Turin than on the ability of Coppola in his turn to do it.

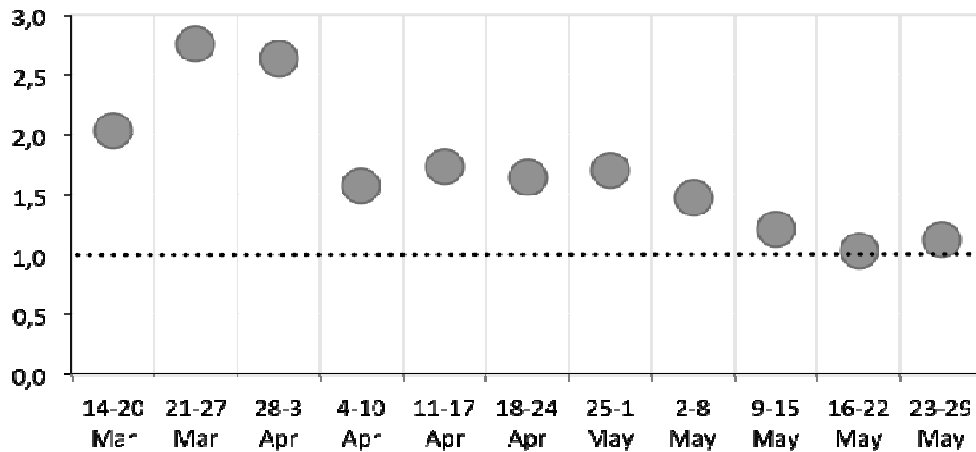
**Table 4: Election themes in local coverage**

<i>Milan</i>			<i>Turin</i>		
<i>(multi response)</i>	<i>Tot</i>		<i>(multi response)</i>	<i>Tot</i>	
<i>Programmes and policies</i>	552	32%	<i>Programmes and policies</i>	232	23%
<i>Campaign events</i>	335	19%	<i>Campaign events</i>	206	21%
<i>Disputes and negative campaigning</i>	264	15%	<i>Political commentary</i>	170	17%
<i>Alliances</i>	186	11%	<i>Election consequences</i>	165	17%
<i>Political commentary</i>	185	11%	<i>Lists and candidatures</i>	124	12%
<i>Lists and candidatures</i>	180	10%	<i>Voting information</i>	66	7%
<i>Election consequences</i>	109	6%	<i>Alliances</i>	55	6%
<i>Voting information</i>	86	5%	<i>Disputes and negative campaigning</i>	34	3%
<i>Endorsements</i>	69	4%	<i>Endorsements</i>	27	3%
<i>Opinion polls</i>	39	2%	<i>Par condicio/election news</i>	17	2%
<i>Abstentionism</i>	8	0%	<i>Opinion polls</i>	16	2%
<i>Par condicio/election news</i>	7	0%	<i>Abstentionism</i>	3	0%
<i>Electoral law</i>	2	0%	<i>Electoral law</i>	1	0%
<i>Other</i>	113	6%	<i>Other</i>	13	1%
<b>Total articles</b>	<b>1,746</b>		<b>Total articles</b>	<b>994</b>	

Comparing the amount of space devoted to the two candidates in the local news reports reveals another difference between Milan and Turin. The

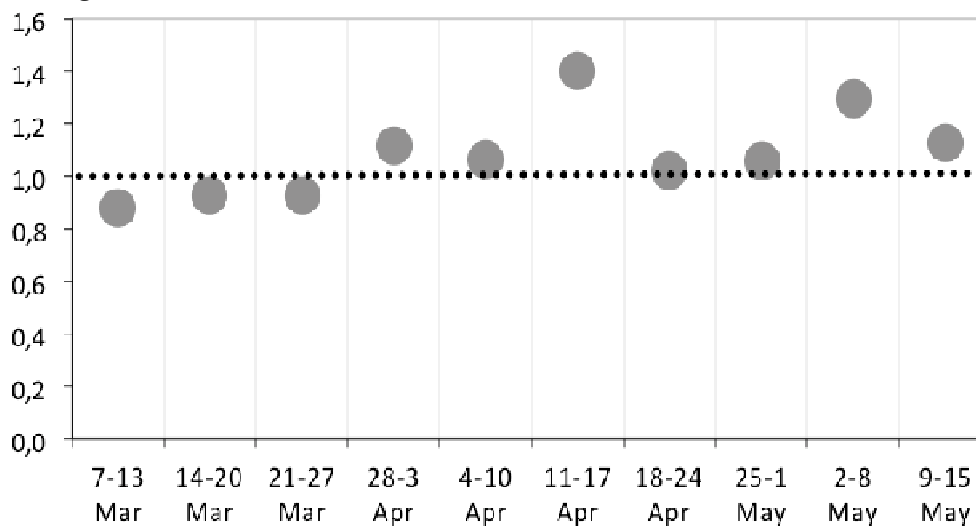
relationship between the number of articles mentioning Letizia Moratti each day and those mentioning Pisapia is especially unequal in the initial phase when the outgoing mayor could enjoy the advantage of incumbency. Just before the vote, however, the challenger recovered much in terms of visibility while the outgoing mayor lost ground thanks too to a campaign marked by many communication mistakes.

**Figure 10: Comparison of the visibility of Moratti and Pisapia (weekly average) \***



\*no. of articles mentioning Moratti/ no. of articles mentioning Pisapia (>1 prevalence of pieces mentioning Moratti < 1 prevalence of Pisapia)

**Figure 11: Comparison of the visibility of Fassino and Coppola (weekly average) \***



\*no. of articles mentioning Fassino / no. mentioning Coppola (>1 prevalence of articles mentioning Fassino < 1 prevalence of Coppola)

In Turin, Piero Fassino enjoyed more exposure in the local press than Coppola even if at the beginning that latter attempted to stage a recovery. Overall, the visibility of the PdL candidate lacked autonomy in the sense that news reports usually mentioned him when he was brought up by his opponent rather than the reverse. In addition, Fassino was able to exploit exclusive abilities deriving from his experience as a national politician (he often appeared in background articles not directly focused on the elections).

A final piece of analysis of the coverage involved considering the words used in the titles of the articles featuring the elections in the local sections, considering them as a semantic indicator of the visibility of the main campaign themes and actors. The first 50 recurring words were used to build word clouds which gave an indicator of the overall political meaning of the two electoral contests.

Figure 12: Semantic summary of the campaign in Milan



Figure 13: Semantic summary of the campaign in Milan



In Milan, after the names of the two candidates the most frequently occurring words referred to the semantic universe of the centre right (PdL, Lega, Berlusconi, Bossi, Formigoni, Lassini and Salvini), less so to the centre left. The main local issues of contention were the Expo and the Ecopass (the charge on motorists driving into the centre of the city). What stood out, however, was a cluster of words making up a variegated local lexicon (Milano, città, milanesi, Comune, Duomo, periferie, quartieri, residenti, cittadini, famiglie, associazioni, [city, Milanese, municipality, cathedral, suburbs, districts, residents, citizens, families, associations] Navigli). What Pisapia successfully understood and what Moratti was unable to grasp, was that a new kind of urban identity was growing up from below.

In Turin on the other hand the words most frequently appearing in the titles of articles concerning the elections, besides the names of the two candidates were: Torino and Chiamparino. The first conveyed the strongly local flavour of the elections. The high profile of the outgoing mayor on the other hand was due to recognition of the important role he had played in managing the affairs of the city and in local politics. The remainder of the words convey little of the character of the campaign, revealing above all the low profile it occupied in local news reporting.

## Conclusions

The local elections of 2011 showed themselves to be an arena for trying out new forms of integrated communication bringing together old and new media, for developing innovative forms of participation, involvement and mobilisation of citizens. And the approaches of Fassino and Pisapia were characterised principally by this feature enabling them to develop typically 'postmodern' communication strategies, capable of conveying political messages to the best advantage, and to reach and mobilise their potential voters.

In a climate strongly influenced by the economic crisis and a level of confidence in the parties that had gone down to a record low,<sup>26</sup> the winning strategies were those that had at their centre the missing link between citizens and politics, renewing, through the web and the initiatives on the ground, the candidates' abilities to attend to and place on their agendas the demands being expressed by the surrounding society. Exposure through the mainstream media – typical of modern, nationally focused and passive campaigns – is only one of the many conditions necessary for success in mobilising voters. One of the strong points of the two centre-left candidates emerging victorious from the electoral contest concerns the important place that was occupied, in their campaigns, by activities on the ground: coordinating and promoting, via the web the schedule of their meetings,

Fassino and Pisapia devoted a large proportion of their time to variegated world of voluntary associations, meeting voters in one district after another.

The main results of the analysis of the news coverage on the other hand lend themselves to two different interpretations. With regard to national news coverage, the 2011 municipal elections confirmed that: a) this set of elections was given little attention by the media until the Prime Minister 'nationalised' the issue by transforming it into a test of his leadership; b) overall, journalists paid little attention to the elections in the four most important cities, with the exception of the cases of Milan and Naples, and only after the first round brought heightened media interest did attention grow decisively; c) in general news frames were heavily nationally oriented, once again subordinating local to national frames.

Regarding the local news coverage it has been possible to establish that: a) the criteria of selection and hierarchy appeared to be subordinate to those of the mainstream national media centred substantially on the game frame and on the presence of well-known politicians; b) local reporting of the campaigns offered coverage that was, above all, of a routine nature, little interested in in-depth analysis or interpretation; c) the interest of local journalists was aroused above all when the election campaigns were 'nationalised' and became significant for politics at the centre; d) currently, at the local level, the relations between the media and the political systems were influenced more by criteria of proximity and the defence of local interests than by traditional political cleavages.

Postmodern mayors - placing the demands of the locality and citizens at the centre of their attention - have suggested to national-level politicians a possible way of clearing the poisoned anti-party atmosphere of the current political situation. If postmodern campaigns come to characterise national politics too, restoring the capacity of local representatives and ordinary voters to make themselves heard, then local news-gathering - which has abdicated its role as advocate in favour of the adoption of large, national frames - will more easily mediate relations between civil society and the political system, articulating and placing at the top of the political agenda the key issues that must be faced by Italian cities in times of crisis.

*Translated by James L. Newell*

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Marinella Belluati wrote the third section, Giuliano Bobba the second. The introduction and the conclusions were written jointly.

<sup>2</sup> In contrast, having just taken office, in June 2008, the popularity of the Berlusconi government was 56.1 percent. Source: CIRCaP archive-University of Siena.

<sup>3</sup> In April 2011, confidence about the future (future climate) fell below 90 percent, while from August, the consumer confidence index plummeted and then stabilised at less than 100. The confidence index measures the optimism/pessimism of consumers. It can be broken down into confidence about the economy and personal circumstances or, alternatively, the present and the future. Figures are transformed into an index on the basis of the data for 2005 (=100). Source: [www.istat.it](http://www.istat.it) (accessed 5 April 2012).

<sup>4</sup> On the concept of the postmodern campaign as applied to the Italian case see: Vaccari (2004), Grandi and Vaccari (2007), Vaccari (2008), Marletti (2007), Gibson, Lusoli and Ward (2008).

<sup>5</sup> Despite the support of national leaders, Moratti was unable to obtain the wholehearted support either of her party's allies, the Northern League (Lega Nord, LN), or of the influential president of the Lombard Region, Roberto Formigoni (PdL), who had held office uninterruptedly since 1995.

<sup>6</sup> About 77,600 took part in the primaries which were held on 14 November. Pisapia representing 'the Left, Ecology and Freedom' (Sinistra Ecologia Libertà, SEL) was elected with 45.4 percent of the vote ahead of Stefano Boeri of the Democratic Party (Partito Democratico, PD) who obtained 40.2 percent. For an in-depth analysis see Seddone and Valbruzzi (2012).

<sup>7</sup> At the second round, Pisapia was elected with 55.1 percent of the vote. At the first round the centre-left candidate had obtained 48.1 percent, Moratti 41.6 percent. Turnout was 67.5 percent (or just over 670,000) at both rounds. Source: [www.interno.it](http://www.interno.it) (accessed 5 April 2012).

<sup>8</sup> Since the electoral law has provided for mayors to be directly elected, the successful candidates have been Valentino Castellani (who held office from 1993 to 2001) and Sergio Chiamparino (in office 2001 from to 2011). The term of office, was originally four years and then extended to five years with the passage of legislative decree no. 267 of 2000.

<sup>9</sup> 53,185 took part in the primaries held on 27 February 2011. Winning 55.3 percent of the vote Fassino (PD) beat Davide Gariglio (also of the PD) who won 27.4 percent. For an in-depth analysis see Seddone and Valbruzzi, 2012.

<sup>10</sup> Fassino won the first round with 56.7 percent of the vote. Coppola took 27.3 percent. Turnout was 66.5 percent (or just over 470,000). Source: [www.interno.it](http://www.interno.it) (accessed 5 April 2012).

<sup>11</sup> The index of media visibility measures the exposure in the local daily press and in regional news broadcasts given to events and statements initiated by the candidates. For an in-depth analysis see the methodological note contained in the appendix.

<sup>12</sup> Sergio Chiamparino's approvals ratings were always above 66 percent, reaching a high of 75 percent in 2008. Source: Governance Poll 2008, Governance Poll 2010, available on line: [www.iprmarketing.it](http://www.iprmarketing.it) (accessed 5 April 2012).

<sup>13</sup> Piero Fassino in contrast was known to 78.3 percent. Opinion poll results published in *la Repubblica* and *La Stampa* on 15 October 2010. Survey conducted by GM&P for Segreteria nazionale PD.

<sup>14</sup> Roberto Lassini, a candidate fielded by the PdL, put up posters containing the slogan *Via le BR dalle Procure* (Get the Red Brigades out of the prosecutors' offices!). The incident acquired national-level notoriety and provoked sharp reactions even within the centre right. Notwithstanding the controversy, the candidate refused to step aside but won only 872 votes. Source: [www.interno.it](http://www.interno.it) (accessed 5 April 2012).

<sup>15</sup> The biggest gap between Fassino and Coppola – 54 to 35 percent – was registered on 16 March (Contacta), the smallest – 49.5 to 37.0 percent – on 29 April (IPR Marketing). Source: [www.sondaggipoliticoelettorali.it](http://www.sondaggipoliticoelettorali.it) (accessed 5 April 2012).

<sup>16</sup> On 13 March, Berlusconi spoke, by telephone, to a PdL rally and on 21 March attended the adoption meeting for Coppola in Turin. This was followed, in April, by visits to the Piedmont capital by ministers Angelino Alfano, Renato Brunetta, Maurizio Gasparri, Ignazio La Russa and Michela Brambilla.

<sup>17</sup> The call for additional funding for the Teatro Regio, for example, took up the first three weeks analysed. This was followed by the idea of appointing volunteers as police officers in order to improve safety in the city's districts, announcement of the promise of free wi-fi access in 150 of the city's squares, the meeting with the president of Expo 2015 and the promise to bring three million tourists to Turin.

<sup>18</sup> The committees stimulated the setting up, in turn, of still others, all organised as *Comitati di quartiere* (district associations). Cfr. [www.cittadinixpisapia.it](http://www.cittadinixpisapia.it) (accessed 5 April 2012).

<sup>19</sup> The reform was embodied in law no. 43 of February 1995 (and dubbed the 'Tatarellum' in the press after the parliamentarian Pinuccio Tatarella, of the National Alliance (Alleanza Nazionale), who sponsored it). The law established a new electoral system for the ordinary-statute regions (subsequently adopted by three of the special-statute regions also) and reformed the regional system of government along majoritarian and presidential lines.

<sup>20</sup> The internet postings of young activists, not fully under the control of Pisapia's staff, were a valuable resource, generating spontaneous support, which strengthened Pisapia's campaign (Mascheroni and Murru, 2011).

<sup>21</sup> In order to make the two cases comparable, it was decided not to continue analysis of the coverage beyond the first round, because in Turin there was no run-off ballot.

<sup>22</sup> Overall, during the 12 weeks of the campaign, 1,650 articles about the local elections were published out of a total of 10,851 (equal to 15 percent of the total). From 9 May, the proportion rose to 70 percent.

<sup>23</sup> It was decided to analyse the opening headlines because these represent the principal frames used to define the most important events of the day both as reported by a specific newspaper and for the media generally.

<sup>24</sup> Cinzia Sasso, whom Giuliano Pisapia married during the course of the campaign is an important correspondent for *la Repubblica*.

<sup>25</sup> As Umberto Bossi thundered during the course of the campaign, "Milan will not be a gypsy town!"

<sup>26</sup> In 2011, the proportion claiming to have a very great deal or a great deal of confidence in the parties was 3.9 percent (whereas in 2010 it had been 7.7 percent). Cfr. "Rapporto su gli Italiani e lo Stato 2011", published by Demos & Pi, available at: [www.demos.it](http://www.demos.it) (accessed 5 April 2012).



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## **Appendix** **Methodological note**

### *Period of analysis*

Milan 8/03/2011-29/05/2011; Turin 01/03/2011-22/05/2011.

### *Principal investigators and associates*

The research - directed by Marinella Belluati and Giuliano Bobba - made use of two research units: the Milan group was coordinated by Giovanna Mascheroni, Marina Villa and Paolo Carelli of the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore; the Turin group was coordinated by Marinella Belluati and Giuliano Bobba of the Università di Torino.

### *Analysis of candidates' strategies*

With regard to campaign strategies, the investigation recorded the events and statements associated with each of the candidates monitored, and it defined an index of media significance (*indice di rilevanza mediatica*, IRM), beginning with the observation of three distinct arenas: web sites, local pages of the daily press and the evening editions of regional news broadcasts (TGR). Starting from the

campaign schedules and from the coverage offered by the various media outlets, for each candidate each of the events and each of the statements not directly connected to them were recorded. Statements included all the declarations made by the candidates from 1 March 2011 and reported by at least one of the media outlets analysed. Analogously, events included all of the public election appearances – public meetings, debates, rallies, press-conferences – made by each candidate.

The statements and events that were made or took place during the survey period are thus the units of analysis on the basis of which the index of media significance has been calculated. This measures the degree of attention paid by the media to the campaign events and the extent to which they were broadcast to the media's potential audiences. The index is constructed on the basis of two indicators: a) presence or absence within the sources considered; b) the amount of attention given by the news item to the event or statement in question.

The presence/absence indicator gives each event (EV) or statement (ES) a score, weighted for the various sources in accordance with the sizes of their audiences (Table 1), on a scale from 0 (absent from all the sources) to 5 (present in all of the sources). In addition, each EV or ES was given a score designed to capture its significance: high=2, low=1. Two criteria were used to determine significance, first, the exposure, high or low, given to the EV or ES: mention on the home page of the web site or only in other sections as an agenda or news item; size of the article; a report with pictures and the presence of the candidate or simply an item mentioned by the news reader. Second, the degree of centrality of the EV or ES to the news item was measured: an item that focused on a single candidate versus an item that focused on the campaign generally and mentioned, among other things, the EV or ES in question. Index scores were thus calculated by applying the following formula:

$$\text{IRM EV}_n \text{ or ES}_n = (\text{Presence} * \text{Significance}) = (\text{Pres web site} + \text{pres daily paper}_1 + \text{pres daily paper}_2 + \text{daily paper}_3 + \text{pres TGR}) * (\text{Sig web site} + \text{sig daily paper}_1 + \text{sig daily paper}_2 + \text{sig daily paper}_3 + \text{sig TGR})$$

Besides the candidates' web sites and the two TGR, those for Piedmont and Lombardy, the newspapers having the largest circulations in the two regions were chosen, namely, *La Stampa* in the case of Turin, *Il Corriere della Sera* in the case of Milan, *la Repubblica* and *Il Giornale* in the case of both cities.

Once the IRM had been calculated for every EV or ES, the data were aggregated and used to calculate a daily and weekly average (equal to:  $\sum \text{IRM} / \sum \text{EV} + \text{ES}$ ) and the maximum IRM, that is the highest IRM attributed to the candidate over the given period (day or week). Through these indices, and from the qualitative analysis of the events and statements identified, it was possible: a) to establish what kind of media echo the statements and events gave rise to in the various media arenas; b) to compare regularly the outcomes of the candidates' communication activities; c) to establish the types of events and statements that receive the greatest visibility and significance within each media arena; d) to clarify the national or local significance of the campaign; e) to identify the audiences the candidates were attempting to reach.

*Table a: Sources analysed and sizes of audiences*

	Turin	Audience	Milan	Audience
Web sites	pierofassinosindaco.it	6,667	pisapiaxmilano.com	116,037
	michelecoppola.it	981	letiziamoratti.it	41,072
Daily newspapers (local pages)	<i>La Stampa</i>		<i>Corriere della Sera</i>	
		172,869		185,225
	<i>la Repubblica</i>	23,127	<i>la Repubblica</i>	63,921
	<i>Il Giornale</i>	12,519	<i>Il Giornale</i>	49,775
Televised news broadcasts	TGR Piemonte		TGR Lombardia	
		581,191		980,873

Source: The figures for the newspapers show their circulations in each region in 2010 according to ADS ([www.adsnotizie.it](http://www.adsnotizie.it)); the viewing figures for the TGR are for the first three months of 2009, according to Auditel ([www.auditel.it](http://www.auditel.it)); the figures for the web sites, updated to 10 November 2011, show the number of 'likes' received by each candidate on their Facebook pages, links to which were provided on the home pages of their personal web sites.

#### *Analysis of the coverage*

With regard to the flows of information, the survey was conducted on two levels: 1) the national level, which took into consideration the visibility given to the local elections by the four most important newspapers, chosen on the basis of their circulations, their representativeness and their political leanings, that is, *la Repubblica*, *Il Corriere della Sera*, *La Stampa*, *Il Giornale*; 2) the local level, which focussed on the local pages of the newspapers with the largest circulations in Turin (*La Stampa*, *la Repubblica*, *Il Giornale*, *Torino Cronaca*) and Milan (*la Repubblica*, *Il Giornale*, *Il Corriere della Sera*, *Il Giorno*). The choice of these newspapers was dictated by the fact that they dedicate local sections to each of the two cities and together are the newspapers most widely read in each city.

The analysis of coverage was predominantly quantitative and it resulted in two series of observations – an index of national visibility (*il barometro di visibilità nazionale*, BVN) and of local visibility (BVL) – and a survey of the agendas of the local newspapers.

1) The indices of national and local visibility reveal the degree of importance and salience given to the issue by each of the most important dailies. As such they represent a synthetic index of visibility that utilises research methods already deployed to study the 2009 European elections (Belluati and Bobba, 2010) and the 2010 regional elections (Belluati, 2011). Deployed daily, the instrument was constructed by taking account of the following indicators designed to reflect the principal strategies of news-making with respect to the visibility of the news in each paper:

I. (A) *attention* or the number of articles devoted to the election issue as a proportion of the total number of articles published in the sections of the newspaper regarded as pertinent to the analysis, expressed on a scale from 0 to 3

(where 0 = no articles; 1 = up to 24 percent; 2 = from 25 al 49 percent; 3 = 50 percent and above).

II. (C) *centrality* or the number of articles in which the election is central as a proportion of the total number of articles devoted to the elections, expressed on a scale from 0 to 3 (where 0 = no articles; 1 = up to 24 percent; 2 = from 25 al 49 percent; 3 = 50 percent and above).

III. (AP) *depth of analysis* or the extent to which the election issue is thematised measured as the number of editorials, comments and background articles devoted to the issue as a proportion of the total of such articles appearing in the newspaper, expressed on a scale from 0 to 2 (where 0 = up to 24 percent; 1 = from 25 al 49 percent; 2 = 50 percent and above).

IV. (PP) *front page* or the extent to which the election issue is present on the front page taking account of the articles' format (where 0 = absence of any front-page mention; 1 = mention in a front-page article; 2 = mention in an editorial of comment piece appearing on the front page).

The sum of the scores deriving from each indicator (A+C+AP+PP) was used to score the national and local pages in terms of a summary index that varied from 0 to 10 where 0 means that there were no articles referring to the election issue in the relevant edition of the newspaper and 10 represents the highest possible level of presence (meaning that the issue was given significant coverage; the articles published were highly pertinent; the election issue that day was thematised in a very significant way and it received ample attention on the front page).

Scores were interpreted by analogy with marks given in school reports, considering 6 to be a 'bare pass' in terms of the visibility of the election issue in an edition of the newspaper. The daily scores made it possible to trace the changes in the weekly and monthly scores for each of the newspapers analysed. The reliability score (Singletary, 1994) – no. of items to be coded / no. of items coded differently – was 0.85 (min 0 max 1).

2) The survey of the agendas of the local newspapers in contrast, took as units of analysis articles in the papers' local sections in which the election issue was central and salient. The object was to capture the main features of public discussion of the campaigns going on at the level of the city. At this level, local news itself helps to establish the terms of political debate. For the purposes of analysing the newspapers' agendas, a quantitative approach was adopted. Having been selected, the articles were classified in terms of: date; title, type of article (report, comment, interview, insert, letter); presence in the article of references to the principal competitors; the campaign themes considered. Inter-coder reliability was 0.77 (min 0 e max 1). A more detailed analysis of the front pages and the topics referred to in the opening headlines was also carried out using techniques of descriptive analysis. The titles of the articles were surveyed using a lexical analysis programme enabling the construction of word clouds which in turn made it possible to pinpoint the semantic characteristics of the news coverage devoted to the elections.