

Protest in Italy during the 1990s¹

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Introduction

The 1990s are judged as one of the most complicated times since the constitution of the Italian Republic. Authors have spoken of the 1990s as *revolutionary years*, referring to the deep crisis that contemporaneously involved the political parties, the political class, the institutions and the state².

What many define as the *Second Italian transition* had its political outcome in the 1994 national election, which certainly cannot be classified as an ordinary political event. At this election the party system of the First Republic totally collapsed. The DC (Christian Democracy), the party that had dominated all post-war coalitions, obtained only 16 percent of the votes - after having changed its name to the Popular Party and having split several times. Other parties, such as Craxi's Socialist Party and the small centre political parties (Liberals, Republicans and Social Democrats) virtually disappeared from the scene. Of the old established actors, only the post-communists, the Pds, maintained a significant share of votes (20 percent); nonetheless, they failed to take the place of the (discredited) dominant parties in governing the Country. The facts are well-known: two new political actors, with predominantly populist right-wing profiles, affirmed themselves at this election – the Northern League and a brand new party, Forza Italia, led by Silvio Berlusconi.

As often stressed, the success of these new actors consisted in their ability to *ride* the growing citizen discontent with the existing system. Moreover, thanks to their newness and a still

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² Much has been written about these years and the various factors that influenced the Italian regime crisis, among others: Diamanti 1995; Morlino 1995; Massari 1996; Gundle and Parker 1996; Biorcio 1997; Bull and Rhodes 1997; Bufacchi and Burgess 2001; Pasquino 2002.

rather flexible organisation and ideological structure, these actors had less difficulty than the established ones in addressing a new set of demands that were emerging at the societal level.

Perhaps it is worth immediately underlining that the emergence of these actors is by no means comparable to the *single-issue* parties that had arisen in earlier decades, such as the Green Party. Neither the Northern League nor Forza Italia was the outcome of mobilisation, nor was one of the main agents behind the several upsurges that erupted in different sectors of society at more or less the same time. Rather than *sponsoring* protest, in fact, these actors *collected* the various sources of resentful³. Of course, this does not mean that in doing so they did not contribute in any way to the production and reproduction of the citizens' dissent. Indeed they did, but their actions – at least until the 1994 national election – remained largely centred on the electoral arena.

As I will argue, protest during the '90s took different forms and involved different actors, even ones that, in the past, had not used to embark in direct actions against the political class and the government's decisions. The characteristics of protest, though, changed drastically over time, not only with regard to its magnitude. The issues at stake, the territorial dimension of protest and the actors behind mobilisation shifted during these years.

This paper documents the transformation in the intensity and the forms of non-conventional political participation in Italy from 1988 to 1997. I draw my main empirical evidence from articles published in the national news sections of the major Italian daily *la Repubblica*. Sampling criterion was 50% of the total issues, evenly distributed across seven days of the week⁴. My interpretation of the evolution of conflict and mobilisation will look at both the

³ Discussing about the Northern League's success over the 90s, Ilvo Diamanti, for example, using a quite helpful metaphor, compared this political actor with a driver of a bus whose passengers are people carrying different motivations. The ability of this actor consisted in driving and stopping the coach where it was most convenient for its aims (Diamanti 1995:87)

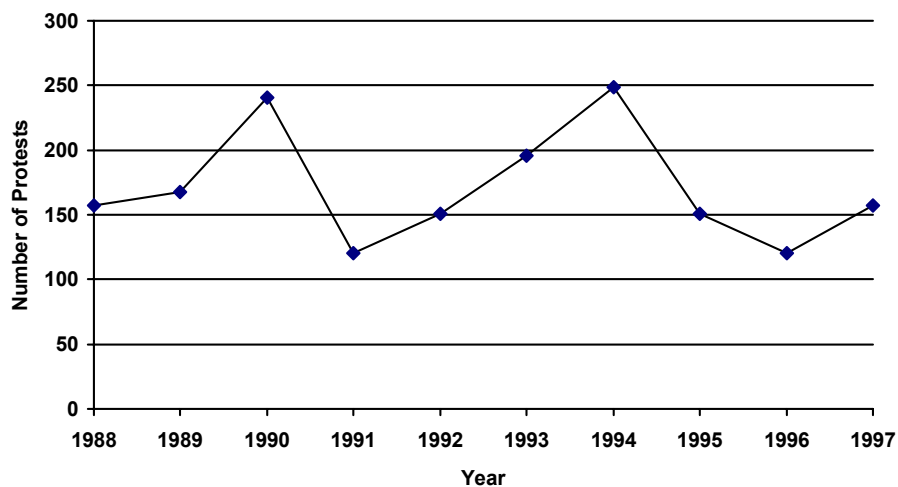
⁴ My approach draws upon Protest Events Analysis concepts and techniques. Following the pioneering work of Charles Tilly (Tilly 1978), PEA has become an accepted research method in the study of collective action, protest and social movements. Despite its limitations and imperfections (Danzer 1975; Snyder and Kelly 1977; Franzosi 1987; McCarty, McPhail and Smith 1996; Muller 1997) this method provides researchers with extensive and systematic sets of data on protest activities and their different components and dimensions. Data sets constructed on the basis of specifically selected press sources and/or archival databases – such as police and municipal records, and/or movements' documents - allow both quantitative and qualitative aspects of protest actions to be studied over time and large geographical areas (Rucht et al. 1998).

internal processes of the changes within social movements and at the transformations in broader Italian politics.

1. The time of protest and the issues at stake

Figure 1 documents the change in the intensity of protest actions that developed in Italy between 1988 and 1997, according to my findings. In total I have coded 1710 protest events. As illustrated, during these ten years protest showed two peaks: the first one in 1990 and the second in 1994. Already rather high at the beginning of my analysis, protest magnitude presents a positive growth until 1990, and decreases drastically the following year. After 1991, the tendency is inverted and protest steadily increases, to culminate with the second peak in 1994 (Fig.1).

Fig 1 Evolution of conflict. Italy 1988-1997



Protest during the years covered by this analysis regarded a wide range of issues. Table 1 gives a *static* idea of the several problems at stake. Protest events were aggregated in 11 larger *protest issue domains*⁵. In order to facilitate the reading of the findings – following Tarrow’s

⁵ It is important to underline that, unlike other researchers (see for example Kriesi et al. 1995), I have preferred not to talk about ‘movements’ but rather about ‘protest issues domains’. From an analytical standpoint, in fact, to equate the study of protest with the study of social movements can be not only incorrect but also misleading. While it may be true that social movement tend to

work (Tarrow 1989) – I have grouped the different matters into three *protest sectors*: political, economic and social.

In particular, as it is possible to see, among protest related to economic issues the largest share of events regarded more traditional *materialistic* matters, such as jobs and earnings (23,4%). Within this area of conflict the share of protest that exploded around problems related to public finance⁶ (19,3%) was also quite significant. On the other hand, the share of events concerning European Union policies was decidedly lower (3,2%), and interested mainly milk producers who instigated a quite massive protest campaign against the EU fines for overproduction in 1997.

Tab 1: The issues of protest

Issue	N	% of the total PEs	% of 'protest sector'
Political corruption	97	5,7	37,2
Secession	59	3,5	22,6
Support/opposition of government Reform	57	3,3	21,8
	48	2,8	18,4
• Political issues	261	15,3	100
Job and earnings	400	23,4	51,0
Public finance	330	19,3	42,1
European policy	54	3,2	6,9
• Economic issues	784	45,8	100
New Social Issues	328	19,2	40,3
Law and order	153	8,9	18,8
Education	196	11,5	24,1
Non-European immigration	110	6,4	13,5
Other	27	1,6	3,3
• Social issues	814	47,6	100
Total*	1859	108,7	

*Note that some events seemed to be ascribable to more than one 'protest sector', this explains why the total of 'issues' is higher than the total of protests collected.

Of protest concerning social issues, *New Politics* matters – such as those linked to the abolition of nuclear energy, disarmament and various ecological problems – were responsible for

protest, it is nevertheless important to stress that not all protests are conducted by social movements. As Rucht et al. claimed “Social movements are both more and less than a mere aggregation of protest events. They are more because a certain degree of organisational and strategic interconnection is necessary for a series of events to be classified as a social movement. At the same time, social movements are less than a mere aggregation of protest events because not all protest events can be ascribed to social movements” (Rucht et al. 1998: 17).

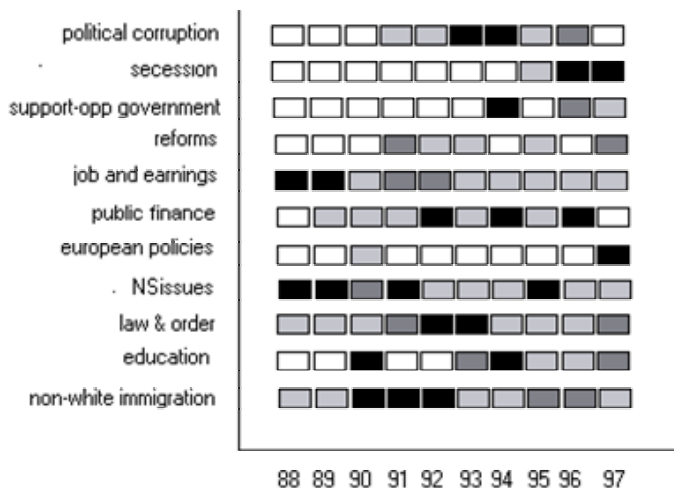
⁶ Under this label I have considered both: protest in favour of a lower taxation, as well as events organised against the cuts in public spending.

the largest share of events within this protest sector, and for 19,2 percent of the total PEs recorded (third column of the table). Besides these issues, a rather conspicuous number of PEs refer to mobilisation concerning school and university problems (11,5%). The shares of actions that regarded law-and-order (8,9%), and non-European immigration (6,4%) are lower, though still significant.

During the '90s, citizens and groups still mobilised around problems related to political corruption (5,7%) and in order to express solidarity with political leaders or parties (3,3%). Moreover, some groups protested to call for the redefinition of the territorial assessment of the Italian State: in some cases asking for a greater decentralisation of power, in others calling for federalist reform and in the most extreme cases threatening secession (3,5%).

Issues varied widely over the decade under investigation. In particular, looking at Fig. 2 below it is possible to see that protest concerning certain matters concentrated within the central years covered by the analysis, while others were more dominant at the end or at the beginning of the period. The data collected seem to suggest the existence of three different phases, which correspond to important shifts that occurred in the political system.

Fig 2: The development of the different issues over time. Italy 1988-1997



(i) Phase 1 - from 1988 to 1990 - the years preceding the Italian regime crisis, characterised by the dominance of protest around issues concerning jobs and earnings, eco-pacifism, immigration and education;

(ii) Phase II - from 1991 to 1994 - actually coinciding with the crisis of the Italian regime, marked by a growth in the number of protests over issues such as public finance, law and order, immigration, and political corruption;

(iii) Phase III - from 1995 to 1997 - the years immediately after the constitution of the new party system, characterised by a new wave of protest over issues regarding public finance, an increase in protest over eco-pacifist matters, the farmers' upsurge and the *Northern League's secessionist revolt*.

These findings suggest the existence of a close relationship between unconventional and conventional politics, substantially confirming the importance of analysing political and social contention by taking a close look at the *interplay* between the various actors operating within the political system (Tarrow 1989; Maguire 1995). I will resume this topic in the last part of this paper; before then, I will turn my attention to some characteristics of protest.

2. Some traits of protest

In the following sections I will illustrate some basic traits of mobilisation by looking at a number of properties. These include: the social characteristics of protesters, the territorial dimension of the various actions coded, and *protest mobilising structures* (i.e. the organisations sponsoring or leading the various events). For each property I have traced the evolution over time by looking at the three phases identified above: 1988-1990, 1991-1994, and 1995-1997.

2.1 *The social characteristics of protesters*

Table 1 identifies the main social actors involved in the events recorded. According to my findings, students and workers were the actors that resorted most often to the *strategy of the street*. As the table below shows, students' (student and youth) presence amounts for 16,6% of the total presence of actors found through the article analysis, while that of workers in industry for 13,1%. The share of tertiary sector employees also appears rather high. When lumped

together, white collars and tertiary sector employees represent 9,4% of the total groups recorded. Professionals represent (5,7%), followed by other occupational groups like the independent middle class (4,3%) and the farmers (3,3%). Among the recorded actors, the least active during the period under investigation were the private white-collar workers (0,9%), the senior citizens (0,8%) and the unemployed (0,6%).

Tab 2: Social characteristics of protesters

	N	%
Students	245	14,3
Youth	40	2,3
Workers in industry	224	13,1
Worker in public sector	69	4,0
White collar public	92	5,4
Professional	98	5,7
Craft/trade	74	4,3
Farmers	57	3,3
White collar private	15	0,9
Senior citizens	13	0,8
Unemployed	10	0,6
Unknown	813	47,5
Total*	1750	102,3

*Note that the total percent is higher than 100 because some events involved more than one actor

However, as Table 1 illustrates, *group-based cleavage* analysis does not exhaust the number of PEs found through the examination of the newspaper articles. In fact, in almost one half of the total actions recorded (47,5%) no specific actor was mentioned. In these cases, protest actions were characterised by the great heterogeneity of participants, who came together in order to support or to oppose a certain issue.

These findings confirm what students of contemporary movements have frequently claimed: unconventional mobilisation has changed considerably in relation to the identities of the actors involved in protest actions. As often stressed, protest is increasingly characterised by an extreme fluidity: individuals engaging and disengaging according to circumstances and, above all, outside traditional *group-based cleavages*.

Yet, during the period under analysis, the absence of a recognisable social or economic actor did not regard only matters usually associated with *New Politics* demands. As discussed earlier, during these ten years Italian citizens also mobilised against the Mafia and petty criminality, over

issues regarding non-European immigration and against political corruption. Moreover, several protest were organised in order to oppose (or support) the government or political leaders, to call for certain reforms and to push for a redefinition of the territorial assessment of the Italian State.

As is possible to see in Table 3, these actions were also sponsored by groups whose identity was not based (at least not principally) on their social or occupational status; moreover, with the exception of anti-Mafia protest - which, as many researches have pointed out, was supported by a social coalition typical of leftwing/progressive movements (della Porta 1996; Andretta 1999) - several of these grievances were often associated with moderate (or rightwing) sectors of the population (Biorcio 1997; Kitschelt and McGann A.J. 1997).

Tab 3: Actors by issues (column %)

	Political corruption	Secession	Supp.-opp. Gov.	Reforms	Jobs and earnings	Public finance	EU policies	NS issues	Law & order	Education	Immigration	Others	Tot %
Students	21,6	0,0	5,3	2,1	0,5	14,8	0,0	8,2	9,8	92,3	2,7	0,0	14,3
Workers in industry	4,1	0,0	0,0	0,0	39,0	26,7	0,0	0,6	3,9	2,0	0,0	0,0	13,1
Professional	4,1	0,0	5,3	8,3	9,0	7,6	0,0	3,4	3,9	1,0	1,8	40,7	5,7
White-collar pub.	2,1	0,0	0,0	0,0	20,8	2,1	0,0	0,3	0,0	2,6	1,8	0,0	5,4
Worker in pub. sector	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	16,3	1,2	0,0	0,6	0,7	0,0	0,0	3,7	4,0
Craft/trade	1,0	0,0	3,5	0,0	6,3	8,2	0,0	2,1	6,5	0,0	3,6	0,0	4,3
Farmers	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,5	0,9	96,3	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	3,3
Youth	1,0	0,0	0,0	6,3	0,0	0,0	0,0	5,5	4,6	1,5	7,3	0,0	2,3
White collar private	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	3,5	0,0	0,0	0,3	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,9
Senior citizens	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	6,7	0,0	0,3	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,8
Unemployed	1,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	1,8	0,0	0,0	0,3	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,6
Unknown	64,9	100	87,7	83,3	4,3	34,5	3,7	83,5	72,5	3,1	85,5	55,6	47,5
Total	97 (5,7)	59 (3,5)	57 (3,3)	48 (2,8)	400 (23,4)	330 (19,3)	54 (3,2)	328 (19,2)	153 (8,9)	196 (11,5)	110 (6,4)	27 (1,6)	

As Table 4 shows, the involvement of the different actors changed drastically over the years. In particular, students were more active during what I have indicated as Phases I and II. Similarly, the participation blue collar workers was higher between 1988 and 1994 and lower during the last years covered by the analysis. The protest presence of tertiary sector employees was concentrated during the first phase and the last one. Craft and trade protest was evenly distributed over the three phases, while farmers were active in the very last years of the period analysed. Finally, actions not ascribable to any specific social-economic actors tended to increase steadily over the years.

Tab 4: Actors by three different periods (column %)

	Phase I (1988-1990)	Phase II (1991-1994)	Phase III (1995-1997)
Students	12,9	19,8	7,0
Youth	2,7	3,2	0,5
Workers in industry	15,7	15,6	5,4
Worker in public sector	7,2	2,2	2,8
White collar public	5,7	4,5	6,5
Professional	5,7	4,9	7,2
Craft/trade	4,2	4,5	4,2
Farmers	1,2	0,6	10,7
White collar private	1,4	0,8	0,2
Senior citizens	1,6	0,6	0,0
Unemployed	0,9	0,6	0,2
Unknown	42,0	46,8	56,1
Total	573	745	432
%*	101,2	104,1	100,8

*Note that the total percent is higher than 100 because some events involved more than one actor

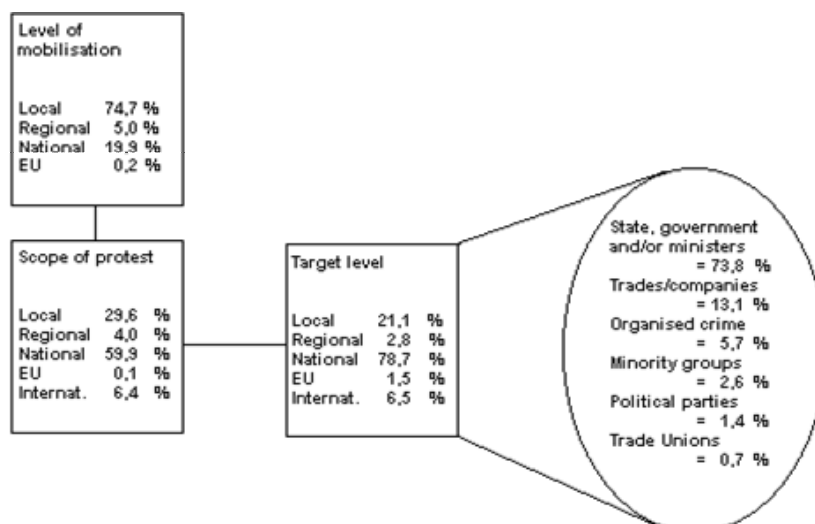
All in all, the analysis of the social characteristics of the actors involved in the conflicts recorded indicates that protest that emerged over the 1990s did not have at its heart any single class or social force, but, on the contrary, a multiplicity of different actors who mobilised to pursue different, and in some cases opposite, goals.

2.2 *The territorial dimension of protest*

Another rather interesting feature of the contention that erupted during this period emerges when the territorial dimension of protest is taken into account. By looking at the level of mobilisation of protesters, together with the scope and targets of their actions, it in fact becomes evident that protest during the '90s was mainly conducted at the local level. As Fig. 3 shows, almost 75 percent of coded events regarded mobilisations that were organised locally. Yet despite its mainly *local base*, protest frequently had a *national scope* (59,9%) and *national targets* (78,7%).

Protesters addressed national political institutions above all (73%). However, as illustrated in the figure below, several actions were also directed against private companies and business operators (13,1%), organised crime (5,7%), minority groups (2,6%), political parties (1,4%) and workers' unions (0,7%).

Fig 3: The territorial dimation of protest



The territorial dimension of protest changed quite significantly over time. As Tab. 5 shows, interesting differences emerge when considering the protest of this decade according to the three phases identified at the beginning of the paper. In particular, with regard to the *level of mobilisation* of protesters, my findings reveal that local actions (i.e. actions initiated by groups acting locally) were significantly higher during the second phase, thus during the years of the *Italian crisis*. Moreover, one should note the evident growth in regional and national actions during the third phase.

Both the scope of mobilisation and the target levels tended to vary over time. Protest addressing local issues was substantially higher in the first phase than in those following. A pronounced increase in protest addressing national issues was noticed during the period 1991-1994, and this trend seems to continue in the last years. Moreover, between 1995 and 1997, a clear increase occurred in mobilisation that rose around regional and international issues.

The target levels varied, too. The relevance of local targets drastically declined in the second and third phases, while the role of national actors increased. Moreover, one should note that in the last phase there was a considerable growth in protest addressing foreign actors.

Tab 5: Level of mobilisation, scope and targets of protest for the three phases

	Level of mobilisation			Scope of protest			Target level		
	I Phase	II Phase	III Phase	I Phase	II Phase	III Phase	I Phase	II Phase	III Phase
Local	73,3	79,5	68,7	43,3	26,5	16,8	26,7	20,7	14,5
Regional	2,8	3,9	9,6	2,1	2,4	9,1	4,8	1,4	2,6
National	23,1	16,3	21,7	50,8	65,1	63,1	72,2	82,9	79,9
EU	0,5	-	-	0,4	-	-	1,2	0,4	3,5
International	0,2	0,3	-	3,4	6,0	11,0	3,4	6,0	11,4
Total*	566	716	428	561	703	428	562	715	428
%**	100	100	100	100	100	100	108,3	111,4	111,9

* The totals for the different phases do not correspond because of some missing information about the scope or target level.

** In the case of the target level, percentages do not sum to 100 because some protests had more than one target, and therefore more than one target level.

It is nevertheless important to stress that the trend observed in the territorial dimension of protest should be considered with extreme caution. One must bear in mind that the data just presented do not represent the activities of the same sets of protest actors. Levels of mobilisation, scopes and targets (and target levels) differed substantially among the various issue domains.

Looking at the *territorial dimension of protest* within the different areas of conflict it is possible to attempt a classification of the different domains into *backyard*, *local* and *national*.

- Backyard: protest domains that see the prevalence of events led by groups acting locally, pursuing local goals and targeting local actors or institutions;
- Local: conflict areas where there is a clear dominance of protest that, although having a local base, regards national issues and addresses national actors/institutions;
- National: protest issue domains where protest events are carried out at the national level, strive towards national goals and have a national target.

Taking into account this distinction, looking at the Table 6 below it is clear that, although protest during the years under investigation was predominantly conducted locally, few areas of conflict were purely *localist*. The majority of backyard actions were characterised by protest over law-and-order issues, non-European immigration and issues related to new politics issues (in particular environmental protest).

Tab 6: Levels of mobilisation, scopes and targets of protest for different issue domains

		Political corruption	Secession	Supp.-opp. Gov.	Reforms	Jobs and earnings	Public finance	EU policies	NS issues	Law & order	Education	Immigration
Level of mobilisation	Local	74,2	67,8	89,5	64,6	60,0	73,9	50,0	77,1	86,9	93,4	90,9
	Regional	3,1	27,1	-	2,1	3,5	6,1	31,5	2,1	3,3	2,0	1,9
	National	22,7	3,4	10,5	33,3	36,5	20,0	18,5	19,5	9,8	4,6	7,3
	EU	-	1,7	-	-	-	-	-	0,6	-	-	-
	International	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0,6	-	-	-
Scope of action	Local	5,2	1,7	33,3	16,7	38,0	8,2	-	43,4	42,0	5,6	78,2
	Regional	1,0	76,3	-	-	1,8	2,1	-	1,5	2,2	1,5	-
	National	93,8	22,0	64,9	81,3	60,3	89,4	100	23,4	53,6	92,9	21,8
	EU	-	-	-	2,1	-	-	-	0,3	-	-	-
	International	-	-	1,8	-	-	0,3	-	31,4	2,2	-	-
Target level	Local	2,1	-	28,1	8,3	25,4	5,8	-	24,7	32,7	4,1	77,8
	Regional	-	18,6	-	2,1	1,3	1,8	-	6,7	-	1,0	0,9
	National	101	81,4	75,4	93,8	87,7	94,8	42,4	49,4	95,4	96,4	25,0
	EU	-	-	1,8	-	-	0,3	92,6	0,3	-	-	-
	International	-	-	-	2,1	1,0	0,6	-	30,2	2,0	-	-
Tot		97	59	57	48	400	330	54	328	153	196	110
%		100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

The predominance of local actions relative to the total PEs recorded seems, therefore, only partially the result of a *protest force towards localism*. As I will discuss, the territorial dimension of protest appears to be related more to another characteristic of the mobilisation exploded over these years: its spontaneity. In fact, in absence of an organisational infrastructure able to coordinate mobilisation at the national level (that may be either a national organisation or a network of organisations able to coordinate nationally), it is clear that protest will most likely remain local.

2.3 *Protest mobilising structures*

As Table 7 shows, during these years protest was characterised by a mix of spontaneous and fairly institutionalised actions. In nearly half of the actions recorded (43,7%), it was not possible to determine any specific organisation sponsoring or leading the protest.

Regarding the named groups most often found in protest actions, one of the most interesting findings is the rather pronounced presence of political parties (24,2%). This finding assumes even greater relevance considering that these actors' participation in protest politics was four times lower (6%) during the cycle of mobilisations that developed in Italy between the late '60s and the mid '70s (Tarrow 1989). Moreover, during these years political parties' involvement in

unconventional actions did not regard only leftist parties (7,8%) or the ones I have labelled as *parties close to social movements*⁷ (6,3%) - traditionally more engaged in protest politics. Often the centre-right parties (5,7%) and the Northern League (4,4%) also led or sponsored non-conventional actions.

Tab 7: Organisations sponsoring or leading protest (column %)

	N	%	
Unorganised	743	43,7	
Left-wing parties	134	7,8] 24,2
Right-wing parties	97	5,7	
Northern League	76	4,4	
Parties close to SMs	107	6,3	
Confederate Unions	695	40,6	
COBAS	188	11,0	
Businesses organisations	90	5,3	
Farmers organisations	45	2,6	
SMOs	221	12,9	
Citizen committees	220	12,9	
Others	24	1,4	
N*	2664	154,6	

*Note that the total percent is higher than 100 because some events involved more than organisation.

Among civil society organisations, confederate trade unions were the most active (40,6%), although the share of protest led or sponsored by rank-and-file workers' associations was quite relevant (11%). Business organisations (5,3%) and farmers' organisations (2,6%) also utilised street protest in order to protect the interests of their adherents. Finally, a considerable presence was represented by the formal citizens' organisations (12,9%) - usually in the literature regarded as social movement organisations (SMOs) - and of loosely structured local groups, in the table labelled as *citizen committees* (12,9%).

The distinction between the last two kinds of organisations is quite an important one. Unlike the SMOs, *citizen committees* generally concentrate on issues concerning small territorial areas; their level of mobilisation does not usually exceed their immediate neighbours or street, a fact that justifies why they have become known in literature also as NIMBY (Not in My Back Yard)

⁷ Under this label I have coded the Greens, the Radical Party and the Network.

groups. As several authors have stressed, although citizen committees may be elements of a social movement, they need not be. In this regard, it has often been pointed out that, if compared to social movement organisations that emerged during the '70s and the '80s, citizen committees are characterised by their rather narrow and materialistic motivations (della Porta and Andretta 2001). Moreover, although citizens' action groups might share the same concerns, coming from being around the same matters, they tend to remain rather autonomous. Therefore, though citizen committees share several features with SMOs, such as the use of protest and a loosely structured organisation, they cannot be immediately equated with them. The latter are, in fact, characterised by a more explicit ideological direction, or tendency (Diani 1992); citizens committees, on the contrary, often remain reactive and autonomous collective actors whose members' identities often relate only to the issue in question (Bauman 1999). In other words, the long-term significance of this type of collective actor does not consist in the articulation of a specific identity, but more in the flexibility of their organisations and in the use that these actors make of non-institutionalised forms of actions. As Klingemann and Fuchs pointed out: "[...] because of their organisational flexibility and openness to all manner of issues, [citizens committees] are a specifically modern form of collective actor. From the citizen's perspective, they allow efficient interest representation under time constraints; from the perspective of the political system, they are collective political actors which are capable of adapting more quickly than formal organisations to the changing constellation of problems" (Klingemann and Fuchs 1995:19).

The roles played by the different actors varied considerably from one issue to another. As Table 8 illustrates, protest domains were characterised by different levels of spontaneity or organisation. Events related to political corruption, law and order, non-European immigration, education (student protest), NS-issues, jobs and earnings represent an unquestionably higher share of unorganised PEs compared to protest that emerged to oppose/support governments' decisions, to push for certain reforms, to oppose fiscal and EU policies (farmers' protest) or to call attention to the secessionist issues present in the north of the country. In all these last cases, the table below shows that protest was usually sponsored or led by well-established organisations. Moreover, the total percentages given in Table 8 demonstrate to what extent various issues were supported by different kinds of organisations.

Tab 8: Organisations sponsoring or leading protest by issues (column %)

	Political corruption	Secession	Supp.-opp. Gov	Reforms	Jobs and earnings	Public finance	EU policies	NS issues	Law and order	Education	Immigration	Others	Tot %
Unorganised	54,6	10,2	28,1	14,6	45,3	30,0	25,9	42,4	53,6	81,6	50,0	44,4	43,7
Leftist parties	29,9	3,4	15,8	10,4	2,0	8,5	0,0	14,0	9,8	4,6	2,7	11,1	7,8
Rightist parties	6,2	3,4	40,4	12,5	0,5	9,1	0,0	3,7	3,3	2,0	9,1	3,7	5,7
Northern League	11,3	47,5	1,8	0,0	0,0	1,2	29,6	0,3	5,2	0,0	7,3	3,7	4,4
Parties close SMs	20,6	1,7	5,3	43,8	0,5	0,3	0,0	14,6	5,9	1,0	1,8	11,1	6,3
Conf. Unions	7,2	11,9	5,3	0,0	80,0	113,6	1,9	7,0	32,7	2,6	18,2	0,0	40,6
COBAS	2,1	0,0	0,0	2,1	27,8	18,2	9,3	1,2	3,3	2,6	1,8	11,1	11,0
Business org.	1,0	1,7	5,3	2,1	5,3	15,5	7,4	1,2	2,6	0,0	2,7	0,0	5,3
Farmers' org.	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	1,2	72,2	0,3	0,7	0,0	0,0	0,0	2,6
SMOs	4,1	1,7	14,1	25,0	1,0	3,9	0,0	39,3	9,2	9,7	19,1	22,2	12,9
Citizen comm.	16,5	33,9	28,1	25,0	3,3	3,6	5,6	14,6	20,3	13,3	26,4	18,5	12,9
Others	1,0	1,7	0,0	12,5	0,5	0,0	0,0	2,4	2,6	0,5	0,9	0,0	1,4
Tot	5,7 (97)	3,5 (59)	3,3 (57)	2,8 (48)	23,4 (400)	19,3 (330)	3,2 (54)	19,2 (328)	8,9 (153)	11,5 (196)	6,4 (110)	1,6 (27)	

Interesting shifts occurred in the mobilising structures of protest during the three phases into which I have divided the decade under investigation. Table 9 indicates that unorganised protest was markedly higher during the first two phases (1988-1990; 1991-1994), while it sharply decreased in the last years. With regard to political parties, the role of the Old-Left parties was more pronounced at the beginning of the analysis rather than towards its end. Instead, an inverse trend characterised the involvement of the so-called *parties close to SMs*. The percentages regarding the direct involvement of the rightwing parties and of the Northern League in protest actions should also be noted. The role of these parties was particularly pronounced in the very last years of the analysis.

Regarding the civil society organisations, it is clear that the role of the three trade union confederations was greater during the first two phases and smaller in the last years. The participation of the rank-and-file organisations followed a more oscillatory trend, being more active in the first and the last phases. The presence of craftsmen/tradesmen's organisations in protest actions peaked during the years 1991-1994, while the participation of farmers peaked in the years 1994-1997. Finally, the role of SMOs was particularly pronounced during the first and last phases, while citizen committees appear to have grown steadily over the decade.

Tab 9: Organisations sponsoring or leading protest by phase (column %)

	I Phase (1988-1990)	II Phase (1991-1994)	III Phase (1995-1997)
Unorganised	48,2	49,7	27,6
Left-wing parties	9,4	8,2	5,1
Right-wing parties	2,7	5,0	10,7
Northern League	0,4	3,1	12,1
Parties close to SMs	4,9	5,9	8,6
Confederate Unions	48,8	45,9	21,0
COBAS	10,6	9,2	14,5
Business organisations	3,5	6,7	5,1
Farmers' organisations	3,7	0,3	5,1
SMOs	12,9	10,9	16,4
Citizen committees	9,5	11,2	20,1
Others	1,4	1,3	1,6
N	566	716	428
%*	156,0	246,5	147,9

*Note that the total percent is higher than 100 because some events involved more than one organisation.

3. The dynamic of protest

During the years in question, protest involved various actors who mobilised to pursue different, and often opposite, goals. As seen, not only the magnitude, but also the internal characteristics of protest varied widely over the years. In this last part of the paper, I will advance some hypotheses about the evolution of mobilisation over time by examining the changes in the patterns of interactions between the different actors involved in the PEs recorded during the three identified phases. In order to do this, I have borrowed from Berman and Everett the basic idea of using the inherent duality of protest - the fact that named groups are involved in specific issues – to trace models of group-to-group relations defined by intersecting issues (Berman and Everett 1993).

The phases are already noted: the first one, from 1988 to 1990; the second one, from 1991 to 1994; finally, the last one covering the years immediately after the constitution of the new party system: from 1995 to 1997.

3.1 *The first phase (1988-1990)*

During the period in which my analysis began, the number of protests was clearly above average. But, as discussed earlier, between 1988 and 1990 the bulk of actions concentrated around few matters. This was a time when mobilisation over the so-called *new issues* reached its maximum level of contention (Giugni 1999). Third sector employees carried out repeated actions. This tertiary conflict peaked at the turn of the decade⁸. Student protest enjoyed a pronounced, though ephemeral resurgence. Yet, the end of the '80s was also marked by a growing mobilisation around matters that were to become increasingly salient in the following years: in particular, a notable number of PEs recorded regarded problems related to non-European immigration and public finance.

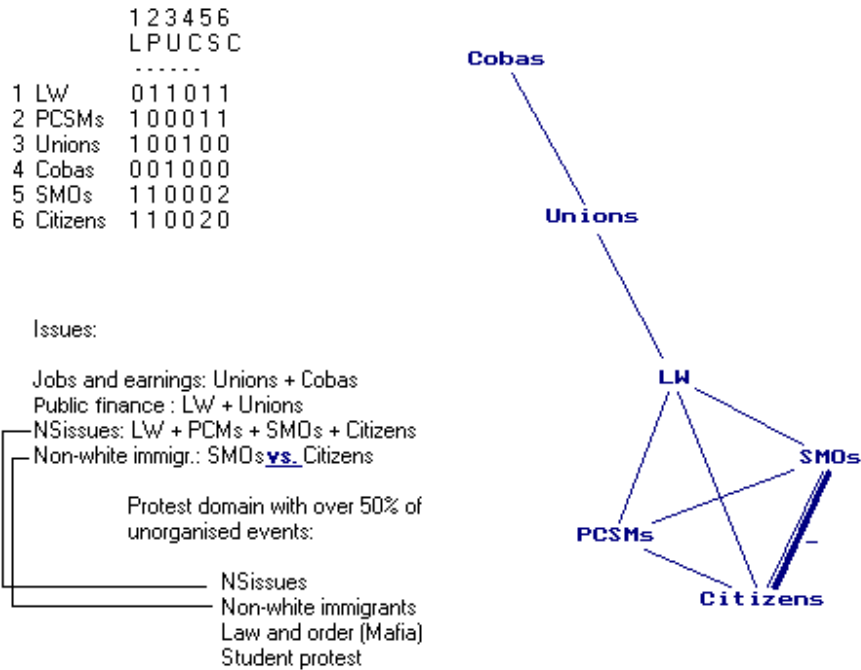
As Fig.4 shows, during this first period, unconventional mobilisation mainly involved actors from the left: Old Left and New Left parties, workers' unions, and SMOs. The presence of the so-called citizens committees, however, was also relevant. As the group-to-group relations defined by intersecting issues shows, several actors identified in this analysis were active in more than one protest issue domain. The convergence of multiple actors around certain issues clearly underlines that some matters held more central positions within the *protest system*, while others remained fairly marginal. This was particularly true in the case of traditional jobs and earning conflicts and in the case of students protest.

During these years the confederate unions participated in two main areas of contention: protest over jobs and earnings - where, nevertheless, especially in the service sector, a greater role was played by the several rank-and-file organisations (the so called COBAS); and mobilisation, together with Old Left parties, regarding public finance – which, precisely during these years, started to assume a certain degree of salience⁹.

⁸ Note that the data obtained through the analysis of the newspaper articles are consistent with the official statistics reporting the number of strikes in industry and services (ISTAT).

⁹ Contention over public finance was virtually absent throughout the so-called First Republic (Sartori et al. 1963; Massari 1995; Bellucci 1997). As often underlined, for decades in Italy the political party machines had managed to keep together different factions of society through the emphasis on ideological division and through the establishment of a clientelistic system, which had functioned as the core of particularistic ties between civil society and the political parties (Morlino 1995). At the base of the increasing conflictual potential of problems related to fiscal redistribution, there was the strain posed, on one hand by the acceleration of the global economic competition, and on the other by the process of European integration. Both processes weighed

Fig 4: The structure of group relations, 1988-1990



While having clearly withdrawn from *Old Politics* issues, the Old Left parties often engaged – together with the New Left, SMOs and various local citizen groups – in conflicts regarding eco-pacifist matters, thus showing their determination to recapture some of the political space lost in civil society. The convergence of multiple actors regarding these issues appears quite consistent with the argument which sustains that the peak of mobilisation over a given issue is usually the result of increasing competition among *new* and *old* organisations (Tarrow 1989).

Established social movement organisations also constituted the *organisational base* for mobilisation against growing racism and racist intolerance. During these years, a considerable number of violent attacks carried out by anonymous groups against immigrants and other minority groups were recorded. Furthermore, citizens started organising *committees* to oppose the plans of local authorities to integrate or assist immigrants.

considerably upon the capacity of the national government to choose domestic policies that could to balance labour-capital interests.

3.2 *The second phase (1991-1994)*

The years of the Italian regime crisis were characterised by the intensification or fragmentation of protest over several issues. Contention spread over a wider range of matters and extended to groups which had not previously embarked in unconventional politics. As discussed earlier, mobilisation during these years showed a significant increase around issues such as public finance, political corruption, non-European immigration and public order.

The group-to-group relations defined by intersecting issues illustrated in Fig. 5 reveal that the structure of protest had radically changed. First, mobilisation over public finance during these years also involved business organisations. Although acting from radically different standpoints, together with trade unions the autonomous middle class often used protest in order to manifest their opposition to certain fiscal reforms¹⁰.

These years moreover were marked by a quite high number of protests carried out by workers in industry. Despite this, blue-collar mobilisation still remained mainly spontaneous and unorganised in this phase. As the figure above shows, a lower percentage of spontaneous actions characterised New Politics issues compared to Phase I, a finding that clearly indicates a trend towards the *institutionalisation* of this area of conflict. At the beginning of the '90s, eco-pacifist mobilisation appeared to be a rather consolidated and distinct policy area – which may explain the downturn observed in eco-pacifist contention recorded from the early '90s onwards (Diani and Forno, 1999).

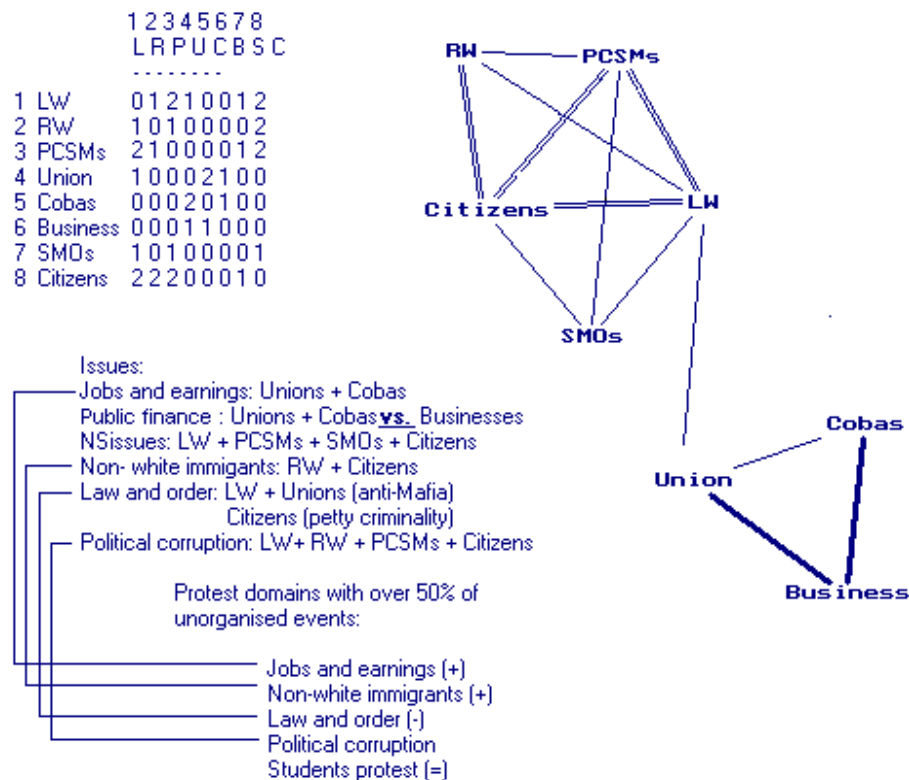
This period also observed an intensification of anti-Mafia mobilisation, guaranteed, above all, by the support anti-Mafia organisations received from well-institutionalised actors¹¹. Instead, the organisational evolution of protest against non-European immigration and petty criminality was fairly different. Though protest in these sectors seems to have remained predominantly

¹⁰ Between 1992-1993 a series of substantive fiscal reforms were launched by the two technocratic governments Amato (1992) and Ciampi (1993). In particular these reforms aimed at: (i) a reduction in labour costs - with the sterilisation of wage indexing system (the *scala mobile*) during the summer of 1992, and its abolition in 1993; (ii) greater controls against fiscal evasion - with the introduction of the *minimum tax*; (iii) substantial cuts in the social security system and a reform of public employment towards a privatisation of part of the public sector.

¹¹ In 1992 anti-mafia mobilisation reached its maximum point (Andretta 1999). This was the year when the Mafia murdered two of the chief judges in the anti-Mafia pool. In 1992, mobilisation observed a substantial increase in the participation of leftist parties and unions, along with certain new organisation as the Network – the political arm of the anti-Mafia movement, founded in 1989 (della Porta, 1996)

spontaneous (or loosely organised), a greater involvement in protest activities by right wing parties can be noted (in particular the post-fascists AN – National Alliance).

Fig 5: The structure of group relations, 1991-1994



Finally, it must be noted that the widespread mobilisation that burst onto the scene in coincidence with the *Tangentopoli* (Kickback City) enquiry was overwhelmingly spontaneous. This suggests that, overall, protest around this issue did not have at its heart any specific political actor or strategy, nor did it produce any new organisations¹².

¹² Citizens' mobilisation against political corruption increased significantly only about a year after the beginning of the juridical investigations. In particular, public mobilisation erupted in reaction to Conso's decree, which attempted to pass a reduction in sentences for illegal financing of political parties. In this case, citizens spontaneously demonstrated to encourage the actions of the judges. As in the case of Di Pietro, the judge became the symbol of the investigations. Citizen disapproval exploded again a few months later against the government's decision not to undertake a legal proceeding against Craxi. Even in this case mobilisation remained largely spontaneous, and in the few articles that mentioned organisations, the presence of political parties was reported. In fact, a clear dominance of political parties (from the left-wing) in anti-

3.3 *The third phase (1995-1997)*

The years immediately after the 1994 election were marked by a substantial decrease in the share of spontaneous actions and by a greater involvement of rather well established organisations in protest activities. The electoral affirmation of the so-called *entrepreneurs of the Italian crisis* (Diamanti 1995) seemed, in fact, to have *reabsorbed* a large part of the discontent that had exploded in various sectors of society¹³ between 1992 and 1994.

The establishment of the new party system, however, opened a new phase in which political parties (especially right-wing ones) needed to *consolidate* their position in the newly emerging political space. This is one possible explanation for the increase in direct participation in protest politics by these political parties¹⁴. As Fig.6 shows, the role of these parties was particularly dominant in issues regarding public finance, immigration and law and order.

The assumption of office, for the first time since 1945, of a government that had a clear free-market orientation and that was not sympathetic to organised trade unions seems to have also fostered the conditions for a greater convergence between the three confederate trade unions. During the few months of Berlusconi's government, the Old Left parties often supported the unions' actions¹⁵. On the other hand, especially after the 1996 election (and therefore after the affirmation of the centre-left coalition), right-wing parties directly sponsored a significant

corruption protest was recorded in fact only in coincidence with another decree, Biondi's decree, named after the Justice Minister in Berlusconi's cabinet who launched it; thus this event happened after the establishment of the new party system. The rather marginal role that established parties, and in particular the Pds, played in anti-corruption mobilisation was the topic of several discussions (see Ginsborg 1996).

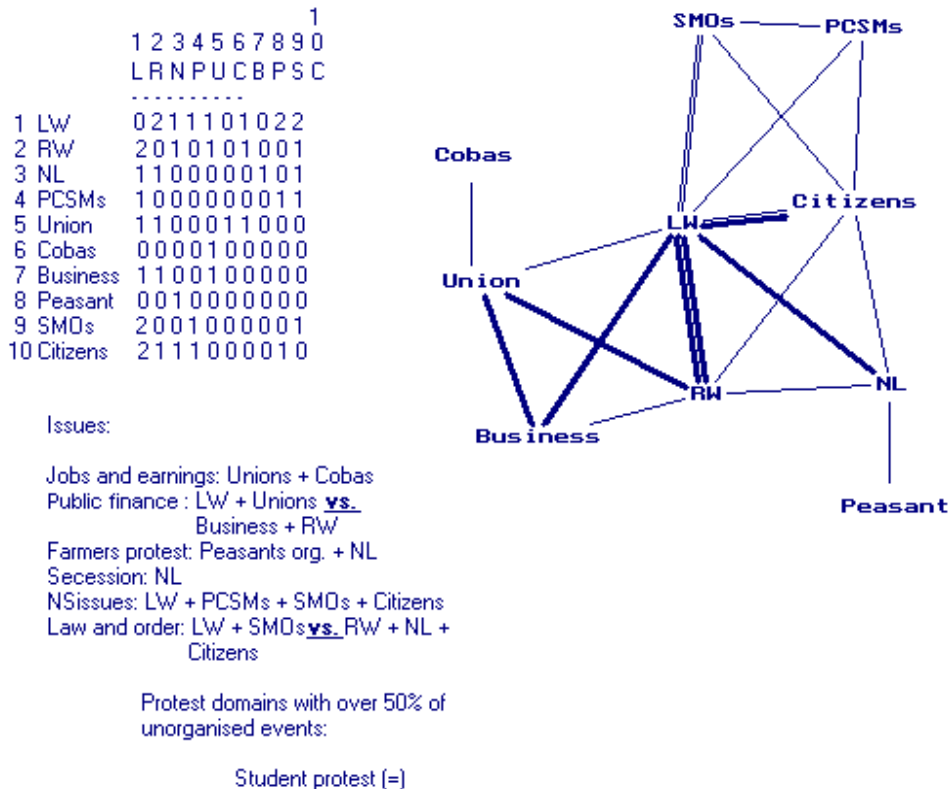
¹³ The share of spontaneous actions passed from 49,7% between 1991 and 1994 to 27,6% between 1995 and 1997 (see Table 9). In particular, it is quite interesting to note that mobilisation against political corruption virtually disappeared.

¹⁴ When the political space is very mobile, as in the case of periods immediately after deep political changes, parties need on the one hand to seek a new image and new strategies, and on the other hand to mark out their political niches (Pridham and Lewis, 1996).

¹⁵ The establishment of the right-wing government led by Berlusconi and its attempt to reduce the welfare state provisions provoked a sort of boomerang effect since the confederated unions regained a degree of influence over public opinion that they had not enjoyed for years. The autumn of 1994 witnessed a massive and unexpected upsurge in collective mobilisation – which involved manual workers, students, senior citizens, and professionals, and which culminated in a national demonstration in mid-November that saw over one and a half million people parade through Rome. At that time, this was judged as the largest single demonstration of the post-war period.

number of actions calling for privatisation, lower taxation, and a reduction in government social spending,

Fig 6: The structure of groups relations, 1995-1997



A rather similar system of alliance-opposition seems to have also emerged around problems linked to law-and-order and immigration, where the co-presence of rightist parties, NL and citizens committees sort of *mirrored* a greater *convergence* between leftist parties and the various organisations active in the so-called *third sector*. The presence of these actors in protest activities clearly weighed upon the *territorial dimension of protest*, contributing at least partially to the *nationalisation* of protest I observed earlier. A final example of political parties' participation in protest activities is the prompt attempt made by the Northern League to co-opt the *farmers' revolt* in 1997.

All in all, as the group-to-group relations defined by intersecting issues shows, at the end of 1990s not only the party system, but also the *protest system* had become bipolar, and it seemed to be precisely this at the base of the *Northern League's secessionist revolt*. In fact, after Berlusconi

entered the political scene, the NL found itself pressed from one side by its concurrence with FI and from the side by the neo-fascist AN. Bossi needed to radicalise the constitutive – and distinctive – elements of the League’s identity to impede the dissolution of his own party¹⁶. He eventually abandoned the secessionist strategy forming a new alliance with the ever rival-ally FI and AN, which gave to the CDL (House of Liberty) a new victory at the last national election held in 2001 (though this lies outside the period covered by the analysis).

4. Conclusion

There are several aspects of the protest that emerged during these years that are particularly worthy of attention. The first regards the extension of contention over a much longer list of issues than in the past. Protest during these years erupted over matters well beyond the traditional *Old* and *New* political demands. Another important aspect concerned the actors actually involved in protest politics. Mobilisation during these years also spread among sectors of society which hadn’t previously resorted to the *strategy of the street* to advance their claims and/or protect their interests. Protest during these years also differed from that of earlier periods in Italian history with regard to its *territorial dimension* and *mobilising structure*.

Concerning this last aspect, two things emerged quite clearly. On one hand the mobilisation that exploded around certain matters in this decade remained largely spontaneous or loosely structured: thus, it was unable to give rise to any autonomous and specific organisation(s) that could have given a certain continuity and unity of action to the various struggles. On the other hand, protest was often the outcome of very well established actors, which – although being able to mobilise quite large numbers of people – substantially failed to produce any continuing community-based actions. In other words, the evolution of protest over time during this decade hardly recalled that of movements emerging as sustained, large-scale collective challengers to authorities.

As this analysis evidences, one possible explanation for this non-emergence of an actual movement could be sought in the specific political circumstances that characterised the years of

¹⁶ This explanation is frequently advanced also to explain the withdrawal of the NL from the right-wing coalition, a withdrawal that caused the crisis of the (short-lived) Berlusconi government (Biorcio 1996; Diamanti 1996a).

the so-called *Second Italian transition*. During this decade, the *political opportunity structure* (Eisinger 1973) most likely changed too quickly to enable the constitution, or consolidation, of substantial ties among groups protesting actively to pursue similar goals.

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