

## Book Reviews

Anna Cento Bull, *Italian Neofascism: The Strategy of Tension and the Politics of Nonreconciliation*, New York: Berghahn, 2011, pp. 196, pb £16, ISBN 978-0-85745-174-3, hb £53, ISBN 978-1-84545-335-0.

The work of Anna Cento Bull appears at an important moment for studies of contemporary Italy. The political and social developments peculiar to the peninsula have become a source of increasing scholarly interest in the country, studies having become especially numerous in the last few decades. In order to understand Italy it is crucial to analyse one of the most troubled and difficult moments of its republican history: the 1970s and early 1980s.

The work of Anna Cento Bull reconstructs the most important events of those years by trying to shed light on a very important issue: the lack of a real process of reconciliation between the different actors involved. The book is focused on the extreme right-wing movements because the main culprits of the massacres perpetrated by these groups are still unknown to the public. The main thesis of the author is that if it has not been possible to establish the truth by judicial means, then it is important to write a full history of those years in order thus to gain an understanding of political and social processes of reconciliation. Based on an enormous volume of judicial documentation and on interviews, the book gives us not only a description of the context but also the point of view of extreme right-wing groups and organisations about years that so painfully marked Italian history. The book has two main parts: one focuses on reconstruction of the political context and a second one focuses on the collection of interviews.

The analysis of the long and complicated period of Italian history that is provided in the first part is very important and represents the fruits of a task that was by no means easy: the number of events is enormous, and even while focusing, as it does, on the main ones – events that involved the extreme right-wing groups – and on the interconnections among events and groups, the work done by Anna Cento Bull is remarkable. Second, the reason why this first part of the book represents a significant point of reference for those wanting to understand post-war Italian history is its

successful analysis of the political changes that occurred during those ten years.

At the same time if a word of criticism is justified, then it concerns the social and cultural aspect of the transformations marking that dark period. In terms of literature, a brief consideration of the work of Degli Innocenti (2006) or of Crouch and Pizzorno (1979) could have helped the author in describing the social background to the events she discusses. The intention of the book was of course different and in pointing to the lack of a political process that could have resolved a number of issues in Italian politics the book achieves its goal. Another crucial reference the author neglects is Battini (2003) which discusses the lack of a real trial of the Fascists after the end of World War II in Italy. The treatment of documentation from Italian archives, which in 2007 were already available, is sometimes patchy. The Italian Central Archive in Rome holds important documentation confirming that there was an international dimension to the extreme right-wing groups. Such documentation together with the book by Parlato (2006) could have given the author a wider range of perspectives. My criticism is based on the conviction that, while the documentation of the Commission on massacres, representing the core of the author's sources, is very important, the composition of the Commission, as the author emphasises, was designed to provide representation for all the main political parties of the time. In my opinion therefore it is a kind of secondary source.

The second half of the book is dedicated to the analysis of collected interviews. The author interviewed leading members of different extreme right-wing groups. Some of them are now members of Parliament or occupy other public positions; others have spent many years in jail for the crimes they committed. The core intention of this part is to describe the perception of the extreme right-wing groups' militants in order to show why, from their point of view, a process of political reconciliation is impossible. This is the most cogent part of the book. The author has, in fact, been able to piece together the different points of view of the militants she interviewed, and to show how they have changed over the years. The interviews represent today a crucial tool and a very important source of material for understanding groups that were, and to some extent still are, present on the political terrain occupied by the right wing in Italy. The author describes the feeling of exclusion still current among the extreme right-wing militants, giving us a better understanding of the ideas extant and debated among them. The feeling of exclusion and of resistance to the rest of the world expressed by these militants took shape as an epic narrative about the political field and as a very important element in the process of identity construction. In this sense a very crucial point emerges from the interviews and that is, a perspective on political involvement that sees it as a struggle against a society and a political system that had been conquered by the left. So the sense of exclusion and the struggle against the

communists emerge as the two main factors that still make a policy of reconciliation quite impossible according to the right-wing groups' former militants.

To conclude we can say that the book is an important tool for understanding the political situation of contemporary Italy. The fracture that the author points to is very real, and the line of reasoning present in the book's conclusion contributes much to the explanation of the problems of the Italian political system.

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Simon Martin, *Sport Italia: The Italian Love Affair with Sport*, London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011, pp. 300, hb £22.50, ISBN 978-1-84511-820-4.

Simon Martin's new book is a bold attempt to weave what he calls Italy's 'love affair with sport' into a telling of national history. The choice of the term 'love affair' is interesting; presumably Martin, an established authority on Italian football, considered alternatives, such as 'passion', 'devotion', or simply 'love' [of]. I imagine he rejected the first as too intense and possibly passing, the second as too spiritual, and the third as too generic, especially considering Italy's stereotypical image as the land of love. So 'love affair' it is and a remarkably enduring one he shows it to be. Martin fits sport in to his narrative in many different ways, sometimes predictably (one cannot avoid going into key events such as Italy's four world cup wins, no matter how well documented, not least by Martin himself, elsewhere), but sometimes in unexpected and illuminating ways. He gives ample space to politics, an unavoidable decision given Mussolini's place as '*primo sportivo d'Italia*' and the Fascist uses of sport, and, more recently, Berlusconi's usage of sporting imagery, associations and loyalties. Sport, he argues, has always been highly politicised in Italy and that is a key part of the way Italians have seen it. Virtually every mass political force has had a sports dimension up to and including the Northern League and these are documented and acutely explored.

The author's primary theme is the contribution of sport to national belonging, i.e. the bonds linking people to nation, rather than any loose idea of national identity. He analyses this very well, tracking not only triumphs but also disasters, analysing their capacity to forge common bonds of feeling. He focuses on the most prominent sports: football and cycling, giving less space to motor racing and tennis, and none at all to fencing or sailing (areas in which Italy's record at international competitions including the Olympics is not bad at all). He makes a good case for his choices, regarding fencing in particular as a niche activity lacking the capacity to move hearts and shape minds.

I was impressed by many of the episodes and individual cases, some of them completely forgotten, that Martin unearths. He dwells on Primo Carnera, briefly world heavyweight boxing champion, taken up by the Fascists and dropped quickly after he was defeated by Joe Louis, but also gives us Leone Jacovacci – one of Italy's first black sportsmen, who was middle-weight champion in 1928. He also explores a (for me) unknown side of 1968: the conflicts that racked the Higher Institute of Physical Education (ISEF), whose younger members objected to the second-class status given to their profession and the neglect of school sports facilities in the post-war era.

In this rich and unusual history, Martin gives significant attention to the role of ethnic minority sportsmen and women, who have rendered visible their communities of origin and helped project their problems into the public sphere. He is less good on gender, paying significant attention to women and sport only in relation to the Fascist period. There is certainly more to be said on this and on the place of sport in the gendering of the nation more generally. But, together with John Foot, Martin has been the only English-speaking scholar up to now to pay any serious or sustained attention to Italian sport. He has opened up a field and presented ways of looking at history and politics that others will develop further.

This accessible book is ideal reading for students seeking to understand an important cultural context of Italian politics and deserves to feature on reading lists for courses of both History and Politics.

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Susannah Verney (ed.), *Euroscpticism in Southern Europe: A Diachronic Perspective*, London and New York: Routledge, 2012, pp. 214, hb £80.00, ISBN 978-0-415-44828-4.

The discourse and imagery of euroscpticism is too often simply seen as belonging to abusive Brits and sullen Scandinavians, a world of opt-outs, re-run referenda and “we won the war.” Susannah Verney's thoughtful collection (based on a special issue of *Southern European Society and Politics*) shows up the fallacy of such a view and reminds us that even as the streets of Athens are filled with unrest, euroscpticism and opposition to the European Union (EU) has a long tradition in Southern Europe, including Italy.

By taking the long perspective and considering the pre-Maastricht era, the authors of the various country-based chapters have been able to pull out a number of cross-national characteristics in the way that more critical voices have emerged in the region. In particular, they highlight the way that the Maastricht Treaty marked the end of a period of rather exceptional

pro-integration sentiment in both elites and publics: 'Europe' has always been more conditionally accepted than we usually like to think. Maastricht enabled the rise of scepticism at various points on the political spectrum, albeit interplaying with the specific political debates in individual countries.

Of particular interest to readers of the *Bulletin* is Lucia Quaglia's chapter on Italian euroscepticism. Quaglia notes the impact of economic factors on changing popular attitudes, a dimension which does not bode well for the future development of scepticism in the country, especially given the emergence of strategically sceptical parties. The historic image of the EU as Italy's saviour might still hold some value, but Quaglia is right to point out that this cannot be the whole picture, particularly at a time when poor economic performance, continued exposure to international competition and imposed domestic reforms are in full effect. With the historic shift of scepticism from left to right in the country and the rise of neo-liberal critiques of integration, this raises the potential for an even more painful period of adjustment in the post-Berlusconi era.

More generally, the book gives much pause for thought about the nature and the impact of European integration on national political systems. The combining of party political and public opinion is relatively rare in such studies, and their interaction is spelt out through the entire collection here. Whether we understand scepticism and opposition as ideological or just strategic, the authors pointedly remind us that the automaticity of integration is illusory and that the case for the EU is one that must not only be made, but re-made again and again. Thus the collection is also of real value to those working for or on the EU itself, for it illustrates vividly the continued need to maintain a clear dialogue between 'Brussels' and individual member states.

The book is also a valuable data resource for those working in the field, especially for comparativists looking to access materials on less-familiar case studies. In addition to the more obvious cases of Italy, Spain and Greece are added chapters on Portugal, Cyprus, Malta and Turkey, as well as a capstone piece pulling together common themes. These chapters offer up particular insights, not least those relating to the 'accession effect', whereby popular support drops around the time of accession (due to the crystallisation of costs), before rebounding several years later, as membership becomes normalised. While this effect has been witnessed in all the countries studied, it also carries the important lesson that the profile of European integration is typically not high for most people, most of the time, and when it is raised they do not always like what they find. Thus the trope that solely through better knowledge of the EU we will achieve more support is shown to be much less certain than it was.

Verney and her colleagues offer a timely set of conclusions that speak very clearly to the current Euro-zone crisis, even if they do not directly address it (the research pre-dating it). While Southern Europe might not

currently present a major 'constraining dissensus' to European integration, it does still highlight the way in which support can turn to opposition in relatively short-order. The depth of popular preferences is much shallower than many would like to think (on both sides of the debate) and politicians and academics alike would do well to reflect on the continuing conditionality of the integration process. As the events of the Euro-zone crisis have demonstrated so clearly, the Europe-wide coordination of political and economic governance cannot be taken for granted.

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Mauro Fotia, *Il consociativismo infinito: Dal centro-sinistra al Partito Democratico*, Edizioni Dedalo: Bari, 2011, pp. 294, hb € 16,00, ISBN 978-88-220-6318-2.

This is a very interesting book, one whose main value lies in the ability of the author to draw on the approach of *consociativismo*, practised by Italian political elites since the war, to piece together the dynamics of the relationship between government and opposition. The volume consists of six chapters the first of which is devoted to analysis of the theoretical concepts used throughout the book: *consociativismo*, centrism and opposition. The author offers a detailed and critical reading of the literature on these notions, emphasising their relevance to analysis of the dynamics of change in Italian politics. Having defined the concepts, Fotia reconstructs the political events that have marked Italian history since the end of the war. The second chapter is devoted to the role of Aldo Moro, who is depicted as a very tenacious political mediator, one who played a key role in coordinating the different factions of the Christian Democratic Party (DC). His Catholic identity was crucial in guiding his political approach: 'Moro is a man skilled in the arts of mediation [...] a hand held out to the most distant and antagonistic groups' (p. 107). His main aim was to broaden the democratic base of the government, so as to allow the Cabinet to represent a wider range of voters and parties. Within such a framework, the DC was meant to have the key role of holding together in a coalition a system of alliances, drawing on the principles of consociational democracy. In this sense, Moro is understood as the principal interpreter of the consociational approach as applied to Italian politics.

In the third chapter, Fotia explores other Italian political figures who inspired and practised *consociativismo* and its convergence towards the centre, focusing in particular on Dossetti, for whom the approach represented an essential tool for the regeneration of Italian society. In his view, this could be achieved only through a 'harmonisation of all social classes at higher levels of economic well-being which, able to emancipate

them from all servitudes, were intended to provide a staging post towards further cultural and moral elevation. To that end, the political forces with wider popular support (the Christian Democrats, the Italian Communist Party and the Italian Socialist Party) [had to] work together, leaving aside all ideological disagreements' (p.87). Drawing on the problem posed by Dossetti, Moro in his turn played the role of the 'prudent and patient politician who interprets both events, and the tendencies of the various forces involved, and agrees to be himself a tool for settling (or avoiding) conflicts' (p.126). In spite of this, the experiment of the centre-left governments failed. As shown by the growing tendency towards the colonisation of government offices by the main political parties, the centre-left coalition worked merely from the point of view of parties' organisational strategies—but it did not succeed in developing the institutional reforms so much needed in Italy. Specifically, the author points out the inability of the Socialist Party (PSI) and the DC to agree on an effective strategy for reform. 'Lacking a model of society to develop and put into practice, the prevailing feeling was a widespread fear of the forces of innovation, as these could get out of control, throwing into question established political relations and their consociational interaction' (p. 129). As Fotia concisely summarises, 'the centre-left project lent itself to the political stabilisation of the country, achieved through a convergence of the majority towards the centre' (p.129). The elections of the 1960s saw the DC facing its true antagonist: the PCI. The author emphasises how the consociational project pursued by Moro emerged with force here: although the PCI and DC remained two opposing and largely irreconcilable political actors, the need to preserve the democratic system required the two parties to reach an accommodation. From this perspective, the 'historic compromise' was intended as the end point of the traditional cooperative behaviour characterising both the PCI and the DC, and ensured compliance with civil and constitutional rules. However, the process of convergence came to a halt with Moro's kidnapping and assassination. The third chapter ends with a section eloquently entitled 'The *pentapartito*, or *consociativismo* as conflict in disguise' (p.148). Here, Fotia emphasises the growing detachment of the PSI from its socialist ideals. Crucially, by securing for itself the highest positions of power within the five-party governments, the PSI minimised the role of ideology in inter-party dynamics.

The last two chapters of the book focus on the Second Republic. The socio-political changes, which culminated in the fall of the Berlin Wall, gave rise to new paradigms for political parties' strategies. Ostensibly, this required setting aside the old grounds of political conflict—such as ideology. This, in fact, seemed no longer to be an efficient tool, especially for political parties opting for new strategies of mobilisation. Hence, in this period, Italian politics were increasingly marked by significant neo-centrist pressures on both sides of the political spectrum. In addition, in dealing

with the Second Republic the book sheds light on one of its main protagonists: Silvio Berlusconi. Looking at Moro and Berlusconi, Fotia reiterates that 'the distance between the two politicians is of a qualitative nature and is based on a stark difference, which does not lend itself to comparison' (pp. 191-192); but he reflects on Moro's influence on Berlusconi's consociational approach. The reorganisation of the Italian party system into two broad alliances of the centre right and centre left (the Freedom Alliance and the Olive-tree Coalition) enabled the two coalitions to replace the traditional 'imperfect two-party system', creating a centripetal realignment able also to include the political extremes. Within this framework, Berlusconi emerged as the irrefutable winner, mainly due to his strong leadership (evident at party, government and electoral levels). Such a trait was crucial in allowing Berlusconi to bring together (in the Freedom Alliance) such ideologically distant parties as the Northern League, the National Alliance, and (until 2006) the last surviving heir of the Christian Democratic tradition, the Union of Christian Democrats and Centre Democrats (UDC), led by Pierferdinando Casini.

On the other hand, focussing on the left in Chapter 6, Fotia finds in Romano Prodi the real exponent of Moro's teachings. Like Moro, Prodi pursued a strategy of political convergence aimed at including the most extreme wings of the left in a broad coalition, in the attempt to induce them to shift towards the centre 'understood as a place of public interests' (p. 210). In this sense, the birth of the Democratic Party (PD) represented the culmination of Prodi's centrist strategy. Undoubtedly, the party was (and still is) marked by considerable ideological and political diversity: 'certainly the PD is a merger of two previous parties: the Democrats of the Left and Democracy is Freedom - The Daisy, although the two did not have a single and clearly defined identity. Instead, they had two 'half-identities' – because their distinctive characteristics had their roots in the Italian Communist Party and in Christian Democracy respectively. However, two half-identities do not make a 'whole identity', and much less a new identity' (p. 230). Hence, the PD ended up being trapped in the attempt to give voice to different identities, confusing and disorienting both members and voters in the process.

Overall, in this book *consociativismo* is understood as an integral part of Italian political processes. Italian politics is marked by episodes of real *trasformismo*, and its history is dotted with examples of retreats from partisan views in favour of compromises and shifting alliances, so as to enable the formation of more or less stable governments. This explains why the centre has increasingly become the political space in which the demands raised by the different parties converge. The centre is therefore a place of compromise, where alliances between government and opposition are more or less openly established. However, ties of such a nature may end up compromising the democratic process, affecting the dynamics of



power alternation. In this sense, the notion of ideology plays a crucial role in the book. The author often reiterates how in the Italian political system ideology and the natural conflict between contrasting world-views are notably 'put in the background, if not left aside, so as to create space for the emergence of collaborative projects' (p. 62). Obviously, in the author's view, *consociativismo* is not negative in itself, but it does become harmful when it impinges on democratic dynamics, producing paths of convergence that hamper alternation between government and opposition. In conclusion, the book is helpful for those who want to understand current Italian political processes from the point of view of both inter-party and intra-party dynamics. The author shows accurately and clearly the linkage between the First and Second Republics, finding in *consociativismo* and centrism the most efficient clues to the riddle of Italian politics.

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Pieter Vanhuysse and Achim Goerres (eds), *Ageing Populations in Post-Industrial Democracies: Comparative Studies in Policies and Politics*, New York: Routledge, 2012, pb \$125.00, pp. 272, ISBN 978-0-415-60382-9.

As Martin Kohli argues in his comment on the volume edited by Pieter Vanhuysse and Achim Goerres, the politics of ageing societies is finally being discovered as a field worthy of serious attention. The two scholars have assembled a wide-ranging collection of comparative essays, covering pension politics and regimes, spending patterns, pensioner parties, family policy and intergenerational justice. The book is not without flaws: the excessive variety of the topics covered and consequent lack of a common thread is but one. It represents, however, a good overview of where the field of study is headed and what its hot topics are.

Possibly the most innovative contribution is Seán Hanley's (to my knowledge unprecedented) study of pensioner parties in 31 Western and Eastern countries. In contrast to his previous work on the topic, the author has ventured to employ qualitative comparative analysis, a method that has not produced very exciting results in its 25 years of existence (and the author admits that his findings are suggestive rather than conclusive). He distinguishes between the determinants of pensioner party success in Western and Eastern Europe. In the former, adequate levels of self-organisation of older people and high levels of welfare spending have to be combined with high demand for new, usually protest parties. In Eastern Europe, instead, high welfare spending on the elderly necessarily requires adequate levels of civic infrastructure for older people, without which organisation is impossible. Among others, Hanley notes that three of the most successful pensioner parties in the world have appeared in ex-

Yugoslav countries. That no dummy variable was employed to capture this geographic peculiarity is a (minor) shortcoming of this study.

In a somewhat similar vein, Jennifer Sciubba compares a range of party platforms and labour policies in three ageing societies, namely Germany, Italy and Japan. Interestingly, despite various similarities, parties in the three countries exhibit very different strategies in their appeals to age groups. All of Germany's and some Italian parties make appeals to particular age groups, and all Japanese and other Italian parties appeal across the board. Her explanation is that appealing to niche interests helps parties in competitive systems to reach electoral thresholds, but does not pay in limited party systems, such as Japan's. As for the outcomes, Sciubba's analysis shows that Germany (Hartz IV), Italy (Biagi laws) and Japan are all tapping into underutilised segments of their labour markets and have also been capable of imposing deep cuts in the entitlements of the retired population. However, a firm linkage between the two subjects dealt with in the chapter is not clearly established.

The chapter by Martin Hering focuses on the politics of retirement-age increases in Germany and the UK. Despite obvious institutional differences in both their pension and decision-making systems, the author finds remarkable similarities in the way increases have been achieved, stressing the importance of having independent expert commissions as agenda-setters. These shifted attention to the simultaneous problems of fiscal sustainability and the rather alarming risk of the resurgence of poverty in old age, while asserting that one way of killing two birds with one stone was to increase the statutory retirement age. Success of the reform then depended on two favourable conditions: a grand reform coalition – the author goes so far as to state that it serves as the functional equivalent of concentrated power in pension reforms – and the extensive use of traditional blame-avoidance tactics, such as delayed and gradual implementation, compensation and exemption. The chapter, however, ends on a negative note: the two reforms are not based on principles of intergenerational fairness, due to a lack of political consensus, uncertainty about future demographic projections, a focus on fiscal sustainability and an unwillingness automatically to link the retirement age to rising life expectancy.

Taking up again the blame avoidance argument, Tepe and Vanhuyse study the politics of timing and alarm bells, testing three political hypotheses: partisanship – left wing governments delay cutbacks; electioneering – cutbacks are implemented only at the beginning of a term in office; institutional rigidity – concentrated executives anticipate cutbacks. Either due to the small number of cases available or to the methodology chosen (event history analysis) or both, the empirical results lack robustness and none of the hypotheses is firmly confirmed or disconfirmed, leaving the reader wondering.

The chapter by Mehmet F. Aysan tests the existence and institutional continuity of traditional welfare regimes (Liberal, Social-democratic, Continental and Southern European) employing cluster analysis, as opposed to Esping-Andersen's OLS regression methods. The author largely confirms previous results and shows that path-dependency plays a significant role in current reforms. The second part of the chapter is devoted to the analysis of gender and generational inequalities within these systems, again confirming established wisdom. Here, the traditional familial role of women – and consequent career interruptions – as well as a bias against youth employment play a significant role in Southern, and slightly less so in Continental European welfare states. Whereas Social-democratic regimes fully cater to women and the young, the salience of gender and generational fairness is lowest in Liberal countries, despite high and persistent inequalities in retirement.

In his interesting chapter, Juan Fernández analyses the generosity of standard and minimum pensions in 21 OECD countries in 1980 and 2002, employing uniform risk biographies yielding comparable synthetic replacement rates. The findings are a useful extension of the growing literature on the dualisation of labour markets (in Western countries), showing that the elderly are politically represented only if they have contributed significantly to social insurance schemes. In fact population ageing is associated with more generous standard pensions, leaving much less space for increasingly meagre minimum pensions, which are awarded to people who have not contributed throughout their working lives.

Pieter Vanhuyse and Achim Goerres study welfare-state characteristics and attitudes towards the family of people under 45 in 21 OECD countries, presenting a two-staged approach to popular support for public childcare. First, support is conditional on the type of welfare-state arrangements for the family. They hypothesise that the young in a dual-earner family policy model (Scandinavia) support public provision more than in the traditional (Continental Europe) and contradictory regimes (post-socialist, transition countries), followed at a great distance by the market-oriented family policy model, where liberalism dominates (Anglo-Saxon countries). Second, support is not entirely egoistically driven, but depends on attitudes towards the family. If the latter proposition finds some evidence in the quantitative study, the former puzzles the two authors. In fact, only liberal welfare states fail to elicit support for public provision, whereas the other three behave very similarly. This may be a theoretical misspecification. Socialisation in a welfare state is indeed important, but so are its negative characteristics: the traditional and transitional models of welfare capitalisms were in deep crisis in the early 2000s (when the surveys were conducted) and, hence, a younger generation unable to find jobs and consequently to rear children may increasingly look to the state to support family policy.

Jonas Edlund and Stefan Svallfors present an interesting comparison between two only seemingly similar welfare states, the US and the UK, evaluating the attitudes of their citizens towards redistribution according to class and age cohort. The starting point of the study is that across OECD countries some sort of attitude convergence has happened in the past two decades. The US and the UK are interesting because in the former there has been a rise in the perceived desirability of income equality and in the latter intolerance towards generous unemployment benefits is increasing. Interestingly, the authors' study shows that post-conservative cohorts (post-Thatcher and Reagan) display lesser differences in the values attached to the welfare state. However, the chapter provides only a speculative explanation, based on Iversen and Wren's trilemma of the service economy.

In his chapter, Andrej Kokkonen analyses the effect of family policies on fertility, a rather contentious relationship, where evidence has been mixed at best. By using data from the second and third European Social Surveys, Kokkonen presents convincing evidence that there is an indirect, positive effect of dual-earner policies on total fertility. Since relatively few children are born outside unions in Europe (and given the stability of dual-earner policy, and hence close association with gender norms), dual-earner policies positively affect the likelihood that working women live in unions and, hence, indirectly increase their fertility. The author makes a strong case for micro-level studies on the links between policies and fertility to look also at how policies affect women's decisions to live in union with partners.

Finally, in the last chapter, Robert Hudson gives a very interesting – and succinct – account of the US welfare state and its exceptionalism, even within the liberal camp. The elderly, being freed of labour-related strictures of self-reliance, individualism and free markets, have obtained a privileged position in US welfare, albeit a position that is modest comparatively. Hence, by virtue of their swelling numbers and deserving status they have transformed themselves from being a dependent group to an advantaged one. Recently, however, a second transformation seems to have begun: seniors understood collectively may be shifting from an advantaged group to contenders (for scarce resources), that is, an interest group wielding great power but the legitimacy of whose access to wealth has been increasingly questioned by the working population.

In sum, the volume edited by Vanhuysse and Goerres formulates a number of questions whose salience is on the rise in the wake of the third decade of 'permanent austerity' and the consequent intensification of the demographic challenge. Is there a mounting generational cleavage influencing party politics in Western and Eastern countries? Do the traditional worlds of welfare capitalism still display goodness of fit with respect to the current situation? Have politicians responded to the

demographic emergency through traditional blame-avoidance tactics? What are the lines along which segmentation in the labour market and in the welfare state run in the twenty-first century? Rather than providing definitive answers, the contributors provide stimulating thoughts for reflection, setting the agenda for future research on the politics of ageing.

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Valentina Reda, *I sondaggi dei presidenti. Governi e umori dell'opinione pubblica*, Milano: Egea, 2011, pp. 195, pb € 19, ISBN 978-88-8350-171-5.

The aim of *I sondaggi dei presidenti* written by Valetina Reda is to provide a comprehensive explanation of the kinds of approach to polling taken by presidential heads of State in democratic regimes. In other words, Reda seeks to uncover the relationship between presidential leadership, democracy and public opinion over time by focusing on the experience of the US, France and Italy. To do that, she argues that the evolution of the relationship has given rise to the phenomenon of *sondocrazia* (or 'rule by opinion polls'). The latter does not, for the author, represent a negative and/or distorted effect of democracy as much as a strengthening of the important role of polls as a mirror of public opinion. With this in mind, and in order to pursue her aim, in the first chapter Reda provides an in-depth analysis of concepts such as the management of public opinion and image marketing. In other words, Reda's argument is about the role of public opinion in democratic regimes and the function of opinion polls as the only fast method to obtain an up-to-date snapshot of public opinion. In light of that, she explains the importance of public opinion to governance and to producing the best policy-making possible on the basis of what citizens want. Given this, the argument starts from the assumption that the crucial issue concerns political decision-making in light of citizens' preferences. In other words, monitoring public opinion means checking citizens' support in order to evaluate the performance of politicians themselves.

As mentioned, to explain the relationship between the leadership of presidents and the role of opinion polls in politics, Reda focuses on three countries: the US, France and Italy. The second chapter of the book considers the American experience, which represents the most important example from the point of view of understanding when, where, and how opinion polls began to be used and started to play a role in politics. Thanks to a scrupulous effort of historical reconstruction, Reda sheds light on how opinion polls have always been used by American presidents since the beginning of the twentieth century. She also points out that there were several ways to approach and manage opinion polls. Despite the narrow, direct and private relationship between polling and American presidents, it

never become institutionalized due to the fear and suspicion that it could be transformed into a means of public, institutional, limitation on popular sovereignty which is considered, in particular in the American system, as the 'last tribunal', or the final voice, concerning the *res publica*. In the third chapter, Reda analyses the French experience pointing out that it has been twofold: private and public at the same time. Therefore, over time the French system has institutionalized the monitoring of public opinion, despite all the issues involved, in order to make it visible. The real purpose is to allow citizens to exercise control in place of public institutions which might otherwise do so. In contrast, as described in the fourth chapter, the Italian experience is very different from those of America and France, representing a distinguishing case. In other words, in the Italian case the two ways in which opinion polls are used are mixed together: on the one hand, the president has personal access to polling, and on the other there are official channels through which citizens can access poll results using an institutional website managed directly by a governmental agency.

To sum up, this book provides an in-depth analysis of opinion polls in politics and of the kinds of approach politicians, and in particular presidents, have taken over time – rather than providing evidence about the effects, implications and influence of opinion polls on leadership and policy-making on the one hand, and voting behaviour on the other. From this perspective, the limit of Reda's approach is represented by the lack of a definition of *sondocrazia*, which in light of the historical reconstruction seems to be one of most important phenomena to investigate at the beginning of the book. In the end, the choice of the countries to investigate has been a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the depth of the differences between them has allowed Reda to highlight several of the ways in which opinion polls are used given the features of the democratic regime in which they are employed, and in particular, to explore their varied use as a mirror to observe trends in public opinion and/or the extent of support for leaders. On the other hand, the three countries have had very different experiences with opinion polls in terms of traditions and implications for policy-making, thus making it difficult for the reader at certain points to follow the author's argument.

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