

that the sole intervening variable were the judicial investigations. Most likely the old centrist parties, though weakened, would still be around today and the centrist coalition would have survived perhaps trying to make some deals either with the Lega or most likely with the PDS. In any case the scenario would have been one of uncontrolled fragmentation. Fragmentation had already shown a steep upward trend since 1976 and it had jumped significantly between 1992 and 1994. Moreover, Berlusconi and its new creation – Forza Italia – would not have come on the scene.

Even more difficult it is to guess what would have happened if the only intervening variable had been the change in the electoral system. In such a case the electoral decline of the DC and the PSI would have been less marked. It would have been even less likely that Berlusconi would have stepped in. But would the PSI and the DC create a pre-electoral coalition instead of their usual post-electoral coalition? Or would the PSI have tried to create such a coalition with the PDS? And would the DC have bridged the divide with the Lega and the MSI and tried to form a center-right coalition as Berlusconi did in 1994? These questions have no answer. But they help us to better understand the odds against a bipolar restructuring of the Italian party system. At least in the short term. It is difficult to imagine the old DC allying itself with the League and the MSI. It is equally difficult to see the PSI of Bettino Craxi doing the same with the PDS. As it happened, the combined effect of the judicial investigations and the electoral changes created on the one hand a

⁷This is the major heir of the Italian Communist Party (PCI).