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The Meloni government: consolidation and a return to politics

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ABSTRACT

The Meloni government during 2024 was characterized by unexpected stability and consolidation of its political dominance. The year 2024 marked a return to ‘politics in the strict sense’, following years of anti-politics and technocratic governance, but with a government embodying a sui generis coalition, characterized by limited competition both within and outside government. Factors contributing to the government’s stability included Meloni’s firm grip over her party, Fratelli d’Italia’s electoral dominance, the strategic pursuit of major reforms that were vital to each of the coalition parties, and a pragmatic approach to foreign policy and societal demands. However, by year’s end there were several challenges emerging that could yet test the coalition’s unity, including: the return of austerity measures, the uncertain fate of reforms, the underperformance of major investment programmes, and the pressure from upcoming elections.

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Introduction

In accordance with a long-standing tradition, 2024 concluded with the President’s annual end-of-year speech. In his tenth such address, Sergio Mattarella reflected on the high and low points of the year and outlined key priorities for the future. While his speech was addressed to all Italian citizens, many of his remarks could be interpreted as subtle messages to the Government. His emphasis on patriotism – a term frequently used by Giorgia Meloni and her party but framed here as an inclusive rather than exclusionary concept – and his reference to the upcoming 80th anniversary of Italy’s liberation from Fascism served as direct signals to the Government, reinforcing the importance of upholding the anti-Fascist values enshrined in the Italian Constitution. Despite these pointed remarks and implicit criticisms, and despite ongoing challenges at the year’s end,¹ 2024 can largely be seen as a successful year for the Italian government – particularly for its leader, Giorgia Meloni. Named by *Politico.eu* as the most powerful leader in the EU,² Meloni demonstrated her ability to navigate challenging

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political terrain, strengthening both her government's position and her own leadership, both within the coalition and on the international stage.

Political observers and analysts have suggested several explanations for the Government's unexpected stability. These include the opposition's failure to present a viable alternative; the normalization of both the main coalition party, Fratelli d'Italia (Brothers of Italy, FdI) and Giorgia Meloni herself (see Giordano and Antonucci 2023), and the party's ability to capitalize on its absence from government during the populist decade (Moury and Pritoni 2024; Vassallo and Verzichelli 2023). This allowed FdI to remain untainted by the shortcomings of previous administrations, including those led by populist or technocratic coalitions – such as the Conte I and Draghi governments – in which its governing partners, Forza Italia (FI) and the Lega (League), had participated.

We interpret the political developments of 2024 as indicating that the consolidation of the right-centre governing coalition was, at least in part, driven by the centralization and personalization of power around the Italian Prime Minister. Emerging as the undisputed leader, she maintained party and coalition unity largely through her personal projection of authority. Throughout the year, FdI consistently outperformed all other parties, further reinforcing Meloni's dominance.³ As a result, the Prime Minister remained largely unchallenged – not only within her party and coalition but across the entire Italian political landscape, as we will illustrate. We argue that this concentration of power and decision-making has been the key factor holding the Italian government together.

We argue that in its second year, the Meloni government represents a unique form of coalition government—one in which the typical dual electoral competition within coalitions (Sozzi 2024) remains largely dormant, as executive power is firmly concentrated in Meloni's hands. While differences have emerged among the three main coalition parties, they have not significantly undermined the Government's cohesion. For instance, Salvini sought to distinguish himself from FdI by promoting a more explicitly far-right agenda during the campaign for the June European Parliament elections and by taking independent stances on issues such as the third mandate for regional governors, and on foreign policy. FI, too, diverged from the coalition's electoral programme on matters related to citizenship and civil rights. However, when it came to key moments – such as passing legislation, or managing scandals involving senior government figures – the coalition remained united. The result was that other coalition leaders were overshadowed, with Matteo Salvini's League suffering electorally.

Beyond the coalition's stability, we also observe a clear tendency within the Government to pursue large-scale reforms. This pattern is typical of Italian governments with strong parliamentary majorities, such as Berlusconi's second government (2001–2006) and Renzi's administration (2014–2016). Several factors explain this approach. First, as we will discuss, there was a need to balance the interests of the coalition's three distinct factions. Second, the Government sought to bring about a shift from a parliamentary to a presidential form of government – an objective central to FdI since its founding in 2012. As Baldini et al. (2022) highlight, the party has long framed this reform as a means of restoring 'sovereignty stolen from the hands of the people' through the leadership of a strong political actor, whether a man or a woman (Baldini et al. 2023, p. 397). Finally, prioritizing major reforms also served to reinforce the Government's image as proactive

and capable of delivering significant change. Up until the end of 2024, the Government largely benefited from its reform agenda. However, history suggests that large-scale reforms, once they reach critical junctures, can just as easily destabilize governments. Early signs of such challenges are already emerging in relation to these reforms.

We will illustrate these arguments by examining three key developments. The first is the electoral performance of FdI compared to its coalition partners in both the June 2024 European elections and the seven regional elections held between February and November (Emanuele and Garzia 2025). The second is Meloni's successful consolidation of her profile as a credible partner for foreign leaders, achieved through her participation in international fora such as the G7, through the strategic strengthening of bilateral relationships with key international partners, and through bold – sometimes unexpected – foreign policy decisions. This transformation led to a striking shift in her international standing: [i]n less than a decade, the leader of the right-wing Brothers of Italy party has gone from being dismissed as an ultranationalist kook to being elected prime minister of Italy and establishing herself as a figure with whom Brussels, and now Washington, can do business⁴ (Hanau Santini and Baldaro 2025; Pirozzi 2025). The third is Meloni's ability pragmatically to manage a coalition with divergent priorities – particularly on human rights, foreign alliances, and liberal-democratic values – by aggressively advancing controversial reforms that catered to the core interests of each coalition party (Bianchi and Prota 2025; Castellani 2025; Lupo 2025).

All of this has been accomplished despite ongoing societal challenges – from the disconnect between government positions and public sentiment on the wars (Angelucci and Isernia 2025) to the failure to implement effective policies against the alarming rise in gender-based killings (Degani 2025). However, the successes of 2024 may not be enough to shield the Government from mounting challenges ahead, including pressures both within and outside the coalition. In the final section, we examine the key factors that have allowed the Government to maintain stability despite these difficulties, before offering our concluding reflections.

Electoral consolidation and public support

To survive and succeed, political parties – whether in opposition or government – must, above all, win elections whenever and wherever they take place. In 2024, Giorgia Meloni and FdI faced both a challenge and an opportunity in this regard, at both the supranational and subnational levels. The outcomes of these elections ultimately reinforced the Prime Minister's position. The electoral highlight of the year was the European Parliament election in June. Governing parties often risk being punished by voters in these so-called 'second-order' elections, where citizens feel free to vote according to their consciences, knowing the results are unlikely to have immediate consequences for the national government. However, as Emanuele and Garzia (2025) argue, the 2024 European Parliament elections in Italy defied several key assumptions of second-order election theory. Rather than suffering a decline in support, the governing parties – especially FdI – experienced the opposite. Three key factors stand out.

First, the election confirmed FdI's definitive rise as the dominant force on the right, replacing the League. If compared to the 2019 European elections, in which FdI secured just 6.4% of the vote, the 2024 results appear nothing short of dramatic.

However, this shift had already taken place in the 2022 national elections, with the 2024 results marking further consolidation, as the party gained nearly three percentage points compared to 2022. FdI secured 28.8% of the vote – what Emanuele and Garzia (2025) describe as the highest vote share ever recorded for a post-fascist party in Italy – raising its share within the coalition from 59.3% to 60.4%. Second, the governing bloc as a whole grew from 43.8% to 47.6%. Third, centrist parties saw their vote shares decline, reinforcing the growing bipolarity of the Italian party system and highlighting the increasing importance of leadership within the right-wing coalition.

While low voter turnout may indicate that some discontented voters opted for abstention rather than protest voting, it does not alter the central conclusion: the election reaffirmed the dominance of FdI, the stability of the Government, and Prime Minister Meloni's leadership. The regional election results, however, were more mixed. The Partito Democratico (Democratic Party, PD) strengthened its hold on Emilia-Romagna and narrowly defeated the centre-right in Umbria, unseating the incumbent League president. Meanwhile, FdI retained the presidency of Abruzzo; FI held onto Piedmont and Basilicata, and in what was considered the most significant test of Government support – the Liguria election – independent centre-right candidate, Marco Bucci, secured victory. His win was particularly notable given that the election had been triggered by the arrest and resignation of his centre-right predecessor, Giovanni Toti, on corruption and illicit financing charges. Overall, for a governing coalition, the 2024 regional elections could not be seen as a setback.

While FdI maintained its strong position in electoral terms, its strength was also reflected in opinion polls throughout the year. On 18 January, 28.7% of those expressing a voting intention named the party – compared to 19.3% for its main rival, the PD. By 27 December, these figures had increased to 29.6% for FdI and 23.3% for the PD. The narrowing of the gap by the PD can largely be attributed to the decline in support for the Movimento Cinque Stelle (Five-star Movement, M5s), which fell from 15.9% on 23 May to 10% on 9 June, a decline from which it has not since recovered. This maintenance of support is a significant achievement for a governing party. This trend is also evident in the coalition's overall support. When the Meloni government was formed in October 2022, the right-centre coalition had 44.2% support. By 18 January 2024, this had risen to 46.2%. It increased further to 46.4% by the European elections, and reached 48.1% by the end of the year (<https://www.youtrend.it/2024/12/20/supermedia-youtrend-agi-fdi-al-288-pd-al-235/>).

Finally, these figures contribute to Giorgia Meloni's consistently high and stable approval ratings as Prime Minister. Since taking office, her approval ratings have remained above 40%, a trend that continued throughout 2024, ending the year at 40%, placing her 8th in the Morning Consult World Leaders ranking of approval ratings. It is also worth noting that in the European elections, Meloni ran a highly personalized campaign, adopting the slogan 'with Giorgia' and insisting that her name appeared on the ballot even though she was not a candidate. This strategy paid off. As she remarked just before a G7 meeting in June, 'I'm proud that we are heading to the G7 and Europe with the strongest government of all'. In saying this, she was seeking to draw attention to the fact that she was the only G7 leader not to have suffered a loss in the elections. In short, the consolidation of Meloni's position, both electorally and in terms of public

approval, has been driven primarily by her personal leadership and charisma. This has placed her in a position of considerable strength.

Meloni on the world stage

Fdl's rise to power as the majority party, and Giorgia Meloni's appointment as Prime Minister in October 2022, were pivotal moments that captured global attention. There was considerable anticipation and concern over how an heir to Italy's Fascist Party would lead the nation both within the European Union and on the international stage. As Moury and Pritoni (2024) have argued, this represented a clear example of the tension between 'responsiveness' (meeting the expectations of the electorate) and 'responsibility' (the realities of governing), a distinction first outlined by Peter Mair (2009). Assessments of Meloni's leadership have generally suggested a greater emphasis on 'responsibility' than on 'responsiveness' (Moury and Pritoni 2024), and a tendency towards continuity with the previous Draghi government rather than substantial change (Genovese and Vassallo 2023). In fact, Meloni's approach to international relations was pragmatic rather than ideological from the outset (Fasola and Lucarelli 2024), a stance that, according to Pirozzi (2025) and Hanau Santini and Baldaro (2025), persisted into 2024.

The combination of continuity and pragmatism in Italian foreign policy is best understood from the long-term perspective of the three key pillars: Atlanticism, Europeanism, and 'Mediterraneanism' (Hanau Santini and Baldaro 2025). In 2024, Italy maintained a strong pro-US Atlanticist position, particularly regarding the major conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza. However, in relation to the Gaza conflict, there was a rhetorical shift, with Italy adopting a tougher stance towards Israel, driven by concerns over the growing loss of Palestinian lives.

Italy's Europeanism in 2024, particularly its relationship with the EU, was shaped by three main themes: a cautious approach to economic and budgetary policies; strong continued support for Ukraine in its conflict with Russia, and efforts to reshape European policies on the migration crisis (Pirozzi 2025). While there were few policy differences in Italy's European stance, a key development was the strengthening of personal ties between Prime Minister Meloni and key EU leaders, including European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Parliament President Roberta Metsola. This blend of responsible policy actions and the cultivation of close personal relationships helped Meloni surmount challenges, such as divisions within Italy's governing parties over the re-election of the European Commission President and international controversy surrounding accusations of war crimes in Gaza against Benjamin Netanyahu.

It could be argued that Atlanticism and Europeanism serve more as constraints than opportunities for Italian governments, as demonstrated by the swift dissipation of concerns about Italy's foreign policy under a far-right administration (Hanau Santini and Baldaro 2025). Not only have those fears proven unfounded, but the actions of Meloni's government have reflected strong continuity with Italy's foreign policy traditions, particularly those of previous right-wing administrations. What became increasingly evident in 2024 was Meloni's recognition that Italy's influence, authority, credibility, and reputation are enhanced – not diminished – by aligning with broader Atlantic and European positions, rather than attempting to pursue an independent path

or break with tradition. Meloni's international credibility and recognition were evidently bolstered by this approach. Crucial to making all of this possible was Meloni's and her party's ability to maintain a largely united front within the Government.

The one arena of Italian foreign policy where creativity is possible is the Mediterranean, and here the Meloni government took to broadening its approach to Africa through launching the Mattei Plan early in 2024. As Hanau Santini and Baldaro (2025) point out, this was as much a rebranding exercise as a new initiative, since increasing visibility in Africa has been a feature of successive governments in the past 15 years, originally prompted by the 2008 economic crisis and immigration. The Meloni government viewed the rebrand/relaunch as an opportunity to enhance its influence and status by engaging with various institutions and governments and projecting greater visibility in an area that is relatively low risk from the perspective of meeting resistance from competing interests (especially with France already reducing its presence there). While funding for the Plan has been identified, its broader goals clarified and the initial projects agreed, it remains in its infancy in terms of implementation. Yet, the plan itself and the way it has been structured is, as Hanau Santini and Baldaro (2025) argue, as much about politics and the reinforcement of the personal authority of Meloni over foreign affairs as it is about policy. And this is a signal point about 2024: that the international events demonstrated how a world that has become characterized by deep conflicts and wars raises the stakes for prime ministers and presidents, introducing both risks and opportunities in relation to their own standing and reputations. Foreign affairs tended to dominate the year, and Meloni demonstrated, overall, a reasonably astute grasp of how to handle the positioning of her government and country in such a way that it enhanced her own stature both nationally and internationally.

The quest for big reforms

Governments with large majorities and strong approval ratings must take advantage of their legislative and policy-making capacity before their popularity declines or their majority shifts – something that can happen much more quickly than many prime ministers expect. This often involves focusing on the 'big reforms' outlined in the governing party's election manifesto. Designing, promoting, and building momentum behind these reforms typically creates the image of a strong, stable government fulfilling its mandate by enacting change. In this way, the reform agenda can have a consolidating effect. However, as history has shown (e.g. the Berlusconi and Renzi governments' experiences with institutional reform), this momentum can shift when reforms reach critical stages, potentially backfiring. In 2024, the Meloni government followed this consolidating path, and despite signs of challenges ahead by the end of the year, it was still benefitting from the momentum generated by its reform agenda.

The big reform agenda consisted of three key initiatives: first, the '*premierato*', a proposal to shift Italy's form of government from a parliamentary to a presidential system; second, '*autonomia differenziata*' ('differentiated autonomy'), a reform aimed at devolving significant powers to the regions; third, reform of the justice system. Each of these reforms addresses a core concern of one of the main coalition parties – FdI, the League, and FI, respectively. Taken together, they do not seem to stem from a single, unified vision. Although the reforms were pursued

simultaneously, each faces its own set of challenges and opposition, and their eventual outcome remains uncertain.

The stated goals of the constitutional reform launched in November 2023 are to overcome some of Italy's historic problems of governance (the instability of governments, the volatility of parliamentary majorities and lack of party loyalty of members of parliament) and to make the democratic link between citizens and policy outcomes stronger. The approach has been to try and change relatively little (in terms of specific constitutional provisions) to achieve significant reform. As Lupo (2025) makes clear, the reform aims to achieve principally two things: the direct election of the Prime Minister (the so-called *premierato*), and the award of a premium to the majority party. Other aspects need also to be changed to make render such a system operational, including how parliament can be dissolved and the nature of the electoral system.

As noted earlier, advocating a constitutional reform that creates a direct connection between a strong individual leader and the electorate is central to FdI's political identity. However, pursuing such a reform is a highly ambitious endeavour. It reflects a long-standing tradition in Italy dating back to the 1980s. Despite some successful reforms – such as those concerning regional government – no effort has succeeded in radically transforming Italy's political system (Bull 2015). Furthermore, such attempts have led to the collapse of several governments, including the one led by Renzi, whose hold on office had appeared secure.

In 2024, the proposed reform began its journey through Parliament and was approved by the Senate in June, albeit with significant amendments. However, the reform became stalled in the Chamber of Deputies. As argued by Lupo (2025), one year after its presentation in the Senate and six months after moving to the Chamber, it remains uncertain whether it will undergo further modifications. After a three-month pause, it will need to undergo a second round of deliberation in both chambers. By the end of the year, the idea of the *premierato* still held its place as a flagship far-right reform, but its future remains uncertain. Even if the reform is approved by Parliament, if it fails to secure a two-thirds majority, it will trigger a referendum, introducing new challenges for both FdI and the Government.

The second major reform, introduced by Law No. 86/2024 in June 2024, concerns the establishment of 'differentiated autonomy' for ordinary statute regions. Throughout the year, this reform received relatively little attention in public debates and the media. The law allows regions to negotiate with the national government to devolve selected competences through a bilateral agreement, or *intesa*. These competences can be chosen from a list of 23 areas, including the 20 concurrent competences outlined in Article 117(3) of the Italian Constitution, as well as 3 national competences: justices of the peace, general education standards, and cultural heritage and environmental policies. This law proposes a form of asymmetrical federalism, which could potentially worsen the existing disparities between Italian regions in crucial sectors like healthcare, education, transportation, and energy. Since 17 of these competences can only be transferred if the national government approves compulsory *livelli essenziali di prestazione* (minimum levels of service provision, LEP), a key challenge of the reform lies in defining these levels and establishing the standard unit costs required to meet them.

The future of the law remains uncertain. While the Constitutional Court ruled that the referendum to abolish the law was inadmissible, Bianchi and Prota (2025) note that, in ruling No. 192/2024, the Court effectively dismantled the law's foundations, signalling the need for

substantial revisions. The Court reaffirmed Italy's status as a unitary state, emphasizing that regionalism, as outlined in Article 116, should be cooperative rather than dualistic in nature. It also reiterated the central role of the Italian Parliament in defining the minimum performance levels (LEP), and underscored that regional authorities must justify their requests for additional competences, specifying particular competences rather than broad subject areas. Furthermore, the Court stressed the importance of implementing and properly financing the national equalization fund, as stipulated by the Italian Constitution, and the obligation of all regions to contribute to public finance goals. The Court's comments echoed concerns previously raised by commentators, such as Viesti (2024), who warned of the risk of transforming subsidiarity into a 'secession of the rich'. Given the extent of the changes needed to align the reform with the Court's principles, the path forward for the Minister for Regional Affairs Roberto Calderoli's proposed reform appears challenging.

The final, and perhaps most controversial, reform concerns the judicial system. One of the proposals in the coalition government's manifesto was to divide the career trajectories of judicial personnel into two separate paths: one for prosecutors and another for judges (point 3: 'Reform of justice and the judicial system: separation of careers and reform of the Higher Council of the Judiciary'). To implement this, Justice Minister Carlo Nordio introduced a constitutional reform bill, which was approved in May 2024 (Guarnieri 2024). The bill includes three key provisions: first, the creation of two separate Higher Councils, one for judges and one for prosecutors; second, a system of random selection (*sorteggio*) of the members of these Councils, although the bill does not specify who would be eligible to be selected (whether it would include all judicial personnel, or only those with certain types of experience); and third, the establishment of a Supreme Disciplinary Court that would oversee all three branches of the judiciary: ordinary, administrative, and financial.

The stated goals of the reform are to strengthen the independence of judges from prosecutors and to depoliticize the judiciary by reducing the influence of political factions within the professional body for judicial personnel, the Associazione Nazionale Magistrati (National Magistrates Association, ANM). However, the bill faced strong opposition within the judiciary, whose members see the separation of careers as a potential avenue for government influence over prosecutors and a threat to the judiciary's independence and autonomy. As a result, the constitutional reform, along with other related measures such as abolition of the offence of abuse of office in August 2024 (Law 114/2024), prompted the ANM to declare a mass protest by the end of the year.⁵ The ANM also expressed concerns about an overall climate of 'intimidation' of the judiciary, citing the Government's overt criticism of, or challenges to, rulings it disagreed with, such as the decision on Albanian migrant centres and the politicization of trials involving senior government figures. Given the lack of success of previous judicial reforms and the possibility of a referendum on the constitutional bill, it remains uncertain whether Nordio's reform proposal will ultimately be realized.

An ambiguous attitude towards societal demands

The Government's proactive stance on major reforms, its legislative agenda, and the implementation of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) contrasted with a more controversial approach to other issues, where there were significant differences

between its actions and the perceived views of the wider public. In these instances, the Government took a more subdued approach, either working behind the scenes or politicizing the issues to further its strategic objectives.

A clear example of this approach is the Government's management of military support for Ukraine. As Angelucci and Isernia (2025) note, the commitment to Ukraine remained strong throughout most of 2024, despite reservations from the League and a significant disconnect with the views of FdI voters and local leaders. The Government adopted an 'obfuscation' strategy, keeping the issue out of public discourse and depoliticizing it as much as possible. This strategy was accompanied by limited transparency regarding the actual scale of the support, which, according to international sources, was lower than that of comparable countries. The mismatch between the Government's pro-Ukraine stance and the opinions of FdI voters and local leaders highlighted Meloni's ability to communicate Government actions in line with the prevailing sentiments of her audience. It also reaffirmed what has been previously observed about the FdI's decision-making style: a *modus operandi* marked by relatively little internal pluralism, where 'internal discussions do not significantly impact key decisions', and 'the leader holds a dominant position, with power ultimately resting with Meloni and her inner circle' (Melito and Zulianello 2025, 21). In other words, the handling of support for Ukraine illustrates the position of a leader who can confidently act contrary to the prevailing views of her/his supporters, without fear of electoral backlash or a weakening of party unity. However, it remains to be seen whether this 'obfuscation' strategy will continue, and if so, whether it will remain effective with Donald Trump elected as President of the United States.

The Government's pragmatic approach was also evident in its handling of mass demonstrations against femicides. It is important to note that 2024 saw a significant increase in strikes and protests. According to the Commissione Garanzia Sciopero (Strikes Guarantee Commission), 2024 set a record for strikes, averaging 51 per month.⁶ Demonstrations were also frequent, with over twelve thousand held – an increase of 9.5% compared to 2023.⁷ While only about 2.5% of these (318) led to public order issues, the Government responded with a repressive approach, proposing Bill No. 1236/2024, which included provisions related to public safety and the protection of service personnel. By the end of 2024, the bill was still stalled in Parliament. It proposed several restrictions on the right to peaceful protest, raising concerns among opposition parties and civil society groups who viewed it as overly restrictive and potentially opening the door to abuses of power through arbitrary enforcement. The bill even prompted the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights to send a detailed letter to Senate President, Ignazio La Russa, highlighting its problematic aspects and the areas in which it conflicted with the European Convention on Human Rights.⁸

The demonstrations against violence towards women and femicides mobilized the Italian public in 2024 across various sectors (Degani 2025). The catalyst for this movement was the November 2023 murder of Giulia Cecchettin, a student at the University of Padua, by her classmate and ex-boyfriend, Filippo Turetta. While this case was just one among many femicides, it garnered significant media attention and sparked mass protests nationwide. However, the impact of these demonstrations was limited. They did not lead to a deeper political understanding of the social and cultural roots of the issue. As Paola Degani (2025) points out, the case primarily fuelled a stronger punitive response, focusing on punishment rather than prevention, and addressing the problem without addressing its

underlying causes. This response was almost inevitable given that the Government views women primarily as mothers and homemakers, in line with traditional family values. Degani also shows that the decision to refer to Prime Minister Meloni as *‘il Presidente’* instead of *‘la Presidente’*, as Italian grammar would suggest, reflects a broader belief in women’s inferiority to men. Meanwhile, the Government capitalized on the issue’s prominence by politicizing it to strengthen its anti-immigration narrative, despite the fact that in most cases of abuse and femicide, the perpetrators are Italian citizens.

Explaining stability and consolidation

While the overall stability of the Government and the consolidation of its position in 2024 should not be overlooked, it faced several significant challenges. One such issue arose within the ministerial team, the resignation in September of the Minister of Culture, Gennaro Sangiuliano, a member of FdI and former Movimento Sociale Italiano (Italian Social Movement, MSI) member, following allegations that he had abused his position in promising a consultancy contract to his lover. This could have become a major scandal, as it directly contradicted the traditional family values championed by Meloni and undermined her image as an ‘outsider’ offering a ‘new,’ ‘clean’ approach to politics, an image she sought to reinforce by declaring, ‘I cannot be blackmailed’. Despite receiving extensive media attention, the scandal was swiftly contained, with the minister being replaced and publicly apologizing on television to his wife.

Other serious incidents that threatened to disrupt the Government but that were contained, included legal cases against senior members of FdI, such as Tourism Minister Daniela Santanché, who faced trial for aggravated fraud against the State, and Justice Undersecretary Andrea Delmastro, who was brought to court for leaking confidential government information.⁹ None of these ministers felt compelled to resign; Meloni continued to support them; the coalition parties raised no objections, and the opposition was largely ignored.

The Government also faced criticism for the growing climate of intimidation against journalists and for FdI’s control over the state broadcasting network, Radiotelevisione Italiana (Italian Radio and Television, RAI), which led to an exodus of prominent journalists to private broadcasters. The issue of press freedom in Italy was highlighted by the European Commission in its 2024 Rule of Law Report (European Commission 2024).

Despite the controversies, internal challenges, and a difficult external environment, the Government’s legislative record in 2024 was impressive. By the year’s end, Parliament had approved 83 laws, the majority of which were introduced by the Government. This was more than the numbers introduced by previous administrations, but was achieved through a heavy reliance on decree laws and votes of confidence (to which the Government had recourse on 32 occasions, in most cases in both chambers simultaneously).¹⁰ Furthermore, when laws were debated in Parliament, most of the amendments discussed were ones proposed by the governing coalition itself, limiting the opposition’s ability to make an impact.¹¹ In short, Meloni managed to lead the Government decisively and maintain a unified coalition. The reasons for this are five-fold.

First, in a rapidly changing and uncertain geopolitical environment – including the uncertainty surrounding the US election outcome and the evolving crises in the Middle East and Ukraine – combined with a persistently weak economic climate, Meloni and her coalition benefited from the absence of a credible political alternative. The opposition parties – the PD, the M5s, Alleanza Verdi e Sinistra (Green-Left Alliance, AVS), and + Europa – struggled to mount an effective challenge both inside and outside Parliament. The PD, in particular, remained focused on ‘ethical questions, which merely helped to reinforce media framing of it as a cosmopolitan and elitist minority’ (Newell 2023, 389).

Second, in what Chiaramonte et al. (2022) describe as a deinstitutionalized party system – marked by high voter volatility, widespread disillusionment and abstention, and fragile parties that ‘struggle to establish or maintain social roots, as well as to build lasting political alliances’ (p. 330) – FdI managed to consolidate and expand its electoral dominance. This was evident in the European Parliament elections, where it maintained its position as the coalition’s leading party by a wide margin. Its supremacy was further reinforced in regional elections and consistently confirmed in polling throughout 2024, with support rising from 27% at the start of the year to 29–30% in the latter half. These electoral successes and sustained public approval secured Meloni’s party an undisputed position of authority within the coalition, particularly at the expense of the League, which suffered significant losses compared to the 2018 general elections and the 2019 European elections.

A third factor is Giorgia Meloni’s firm grip on FdI, which has evolved into a highly personalized party (Melito and Zulianello 2025; Vassallo and Vignati 2024; Ventura 2022). As Puleo, Carteny, and Piccolino (2024) show, voter shifts towards FdI in the 2022 general elections were largely driven by positive perceptions of Meloni’s leadership. The same likely applied to the 2024 European elections, where she simultaneously held the roles of domestic government leader and a key figure within one of the main party families in the European Parliament. This dual position allowed her to maintain a strategically ambiguous stance – balancing between Euroscepticism and European pragmatism – broadening her appeal to a diverse electorate. The party’s personalization was facilitated by two key factors: first, a modernized, populist communication style (Baldini, Tronconi, and Angelucci 2022), heavily reliant on social media (Ventura 2022); and second, a traditional internal structure characterized by a pyramidal, highly hierarchical organization, where ultimate authority ‘has always rested with the leader’ (Vassallo and Vignati 2024, 108; see also Melito and Zulianello 2025). As a result, with a loyal inner circle and a unified party, Meloni remained unchallenged from within, enabling her to dictate both the party’s and, by extension, the coalition’s political direction.

Fourth, a crucial factor in maintaining the Meloni government’s unity throughout 2024 was substantive policy alignment. Beyond the procedural use of confidence votes, the coalition remained cohesive by advancing key reforms that catered to the distinct priorities of each party: the *premierato* for FdI; regional devolution for the League; the justice-system reform for FI. Despite internal differences on major issues – both external, such as the response to Russia’s aggression against Ukraine, and domestic, such as economic policy or the eligibility of regional governors for a third term – the Government held together because each party had a significant, even existential, stake in its success.

Finally, the Government benefited from a favourable public spending environment, bolstered by resources from the EU's multi-annual budget and the Next Generation EU (NGEU) plan. Unlike its predecessors, which faced severe constraints due to high levels of public debt, the coalition operated within a relatively accommodating fiscal framework, allowing it to minimize trade-offs between policy priorities and manage territorial demands with greater flexibility. However, looming challenges remain. The strict deadlines associated with the EU funding, combined with the reintroduction of fiscal constraints under a revised Stability and Growth Pact (SGP), could pose problems in the future. The implementation of Italy's NRRP has been sluggish – by the end of 2024, only about 30% of the allocated funds had been spent. Progress on the EU's cohesion policy has been even slower, with just 5% of programmed resources having been utilized (Ministero dell'Economia e delle Finanze 2024). With spending deadlines set for 2026 and 2027, the risk of losing unspent funds is substantial. On this front, Meloni secured a significant political victory with the appointment of Raffaele Fitto, the former Minister for EU Affairs, Cohesion Policies and the NRRP, as Executive Vice-President of the European Commission, overseeing the NGEU plan and EU cohesion policy. This was an especially notable achievement given that Meloni did not support the von der Leyen II Commission. However, whether Fitto's position will lead to a more flexible approach to the strict NRRP deadlines, and to cohesion policy, remains uncertain.

Conclusion

The first two years of the Meloni government, and particularly 2024, marked a return to 'politics in the strict sense' after the years of anti-political and technocratic governance (represented by the M5s-led and the Draghi governments respectively). This shift was characterized by a strong, electorally successful coalition and a more centralized, personalized, and, to some extent, authoritarian style of governance. Key features included marginalization of the opposition, shrinking space for public debate both inside and outside Parliament, and limited deliberation within the coalition and within parties. This approach aligns with Giorgia Meloni's image as *una leader politica pura* (a 'purely political leader', Vassallo 2024, 129). In short, 2024 confirmed the status of the Meloni government as a coalition that was both stable and *sui generis*. Traditionally, coalition governments involve a dual electoral competition – against opposition parties and among coalition partners (Sozzi 2024, 94). However, in the present case, competition within the coalition has remained largely dormant – at least for the time being. That said, whether this stability will last until the end of the current parliamentary term remains uncertain. Several challenges could expose underlying tensions within the coalition. These include the return of austerity measures under the SGP; the uncertain fate of major reforms central to each coalition party; the likely underperformance of the NRRP and cohesion policy programmes, and the pressure of upcoming electoral contests. Any of these factors could bring latent frictions within the governing alliance to the surface.

Notes

1. Including the arrest in Iran of journalist Cecilia Sala, who would be released on 8 January 2025.

2. <https://www.politico.eu/list/politico-28-class-of-2025/giorgia-meloni/>.
3. <https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/italy/>.
4. Ibidem.
5. <https://www.associazionemagistrati.it/doc/4505/dal-governo-atti-intimidatori.htm>. and <https://www.associazionemagistrati.it/doc/4510/la-politica-vuole-solo-poter-controllare-i-pm.htm>.
6. <https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/scioperi-51-mese-2024-record-10-gennaio-nuova-giornata-nera-trasporti-AG2ieI2B#>.
7. <https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/politica/altro-che-repressione-record-cortei-e-violenze-2418115.html>. Protests focussed on a variety of issues: from political themes (4,602) to employment (4,186), to the international conflicts, particularly the Palestinian crisis (1,873).
8. Council of Europe, Commissioner for Human Rights (2024) Letter to Hon. Ignazio La Russa, President of the Senate of Italy, Ref: CommHR/MOF/sf 206–2024, Strasbourg 16 December 2024, <https://rm.coe.int/letter-to-president-of-the-senate-italy-by-michael-o-flaherty-council-/1680b2e8d7>. This is a particularly striking passage: ‘It is my view that these provisions, which introduce offences that are defined in vague terms, and include other severe restrictions, create room for arbitrary and disproportionate application, affecting activities that represent a legitimate exercise of freedom of peaceful assembly or expression. In particular, by providing for the imposition of significant prison sentences merely for participating in demonstrations that may not have been violent or caused damage, Bill 1236 imposes restrictions that may not be consistent with the requirements of the Convention. It also creates a chilling effect on the legitimate exercise of public freedoms, which authorities must take into account when designing legislative measures’.
9. He would be sentenced on 20 February 2025 to 8 months and banned from holding public office for one year.
10. <https://www.openpolis.it/lo-stato-di-emergenza-e-finito-ma-continuano-a-proliferare-i-decreti-legge/>.
11. <https://www.ilpost.it/2024/12/31/parlamento-2024-leggi-numeri-cifre/>.

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