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Dissent under Pressure: Legislative Restrictions, Pro-Palestinian Protests, and Government Discourse in Italy

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Abstract. This chapter investigates the changing landscape of protests and civic freedoms in Italy within the context of a broader decline in democratic openness across Europe and Western countries. After outlining recent protest waves in Italy – including labor disputes, climate activism, feminist mobilizations, and prison uprisings – the analysis considers how legislative measures, especially the security decrees enacted by the Meloni government have been criticized for limiting the right to assemble and political dissent. Particular focus is given to protests in support of the Palestinian people, which have been significant in scale, intersectionality, and faced repression and delegitimization worldwide. By examining government discourse during the 2025 Global Sumud Flotilla mission and its interception, the work illustrates how narratives have been used to discredit protesters and criminalize dissent. It concludes by questioning whether these repressive tactics threaten Italy's democratic foundations or if they might ultimately foster new, more inclusive forms of collective action.

Keywords: Freedom of Protest; Civic Space; Pro-Palestinian Protests; Security Decrees; Democratic Erosion.

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1. *An overview of the latest protests in Italy*

Between January and February 2026, clashes occurred between police and protesters involved in the eviction of the Askatasuna social center in Turin (Il Post, 2026). Similar confrontations took place during protests against the Olympic Games and the presence of US ICE and the US government in Milan (Redazione Milano, 2026). These events evoked images from the past, reminiscent of the anti-globalization protests of the 2000s or even the contentious politics of the 1960s and 1970s. In recent years, Italy has seen numerous demonstrations and protests, driven not only by various national, European, and global crises but also reflecting broader social and political tensions.

As Della Porta and Lavizzari (2022) describe, between April 2020 and December 2021, the protest cycle during the Covid-19 pandemic was marked by two distinct waves: the first mainly against specific lockdown measures, and the second focused on protests against the vaccination campaign and certificate. Since the 2008 economic crisis, protest surges have been closely linked to reforms, and pandemic containment measures did not significantly reduce labor protests. This period also saw increased participation from professional organizations and non-worker groups, alongside traditional union federations and grassroots unions (Pilati, 2025). The protests often involved cross-movement coalitions, strikes, and private sector labor protests (Dinev et al., 2025).

Moreover, the Non Una di Meno movement, an intersectional and trans-feminist movement active in Italy since 2016, continues to organize marches and demonstrations on key dates like November 25, the Global Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, and March 8, the International Women's Strike. These events are in response to ongoing

femicides in the country and advocate for greater rights, gender equality, and measures to combat gender-based violence. At the same time as progressive protests occur, however, reactionary ones call for cultural sovereignty, anti-gender and masculinity norms, and reject incorporating immigrants, LGBTQI+ individuals, and women's rights, amid a climate of insecurity where right-wing parties are gaining support. Both types of protests challenge the existing societal system and call for change, challenging the status quo (De Cristofaro and Pellegrini, 2025).

Other protests have occurred in prisons, which for years have suffered from overcrowding and "inhuman and degrading" (Antigone, n.d.) conditions. This situation has led to numerous cases of self-harm and suicides, violating Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights, as cited in the petition and denounced in various reports by the Antigone Association. In March 2020, the suspension of visits and restrictions due to the pandemic worsened the situation, sparking over 40 protests and thirteen deaths. However, these issues have not resulted in structural reforms, even under progressive government coalitions (Gonnella, 2025), and in June 2025, protests erupted in prisons across several cities over overcrowding, extreme heat, and the lack of cooling options, creating difficult conditions for prison workers as well (Associazione Antigone, 2025).

As in many other countries, protests have been held in favor of climate justice, especially by younger generations. Looking back over the last 30 years, Andretta and Imperatore (2023) note how environmental protest campaigns have increased over time, though with different repertoires of action among the activists, characterized by a "combination of levels of informality, organizational destructuring, and disruption that have emerged as increasingly prevalent" and "more subject to coercive

intervention by the state" (p. 78, translated by the author). Recent protests by Ultima Generazione, Fridays for Future, Extinction Rebellion, and Greenpeace have polarized the debate through mainly non-violent, creative, and provocative actions – such as vandalizing artwork and blocking roads – aimed at grabbing media attention. In response, media outlets have focused on the conflict, often portraying protests negatively and shifting attention to the acts of protest rather than their underlying motivations. This has resulted in some newspapers adopting demonizing counter-narratives that belittle or generalize the movements' demands and proposals (Binotto and Terrana, 2025).

Finally, as we will observe later, protests by students and university staff increased in strength between 2023 and 2024, supporting the Palestinian people and urging boycotts in response to the Gaza genocide. These protests were typically met with police repression and often accompanied by false accusations of anti-Semitism, similar to what has occurred in other countries (Cini and Piazza, 2025).

2. *Legislative tools to regulate and repress dissent: protest as a public order problem and security threat*

Articles 17 and 21 of the Italian Constitution establish the right to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression. The right to peaceful assembly is described by the OHCHR (2026) as:

> the right to hold meetings, sit-ins, strikes, rallies, events or protests, both offline and online. It serves as a vehicle for the exercise of many other rights guaranteed under international law, with which it is linked intrinsically and that form the basis for participating in peaceful protests. In particular this

> concerns the rights to freedom of expression and to take part in the conduct of public affairs (OHCHR, 2026).

Freedom of opinion and expression are also protected in Article 19 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Moreover, the right to collective action is guaranteed by European law through Article 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, Article 6, paragraph 4, of the European Social Charter, and Article 28 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (Forlivesi, 2025).

However, these rights should not be taken for granted. As noted by the CIVICUS Monitor Report in 2024, globally:

> protests to show solidarity with people in the OPT and climate change and environmental protests were particularly targeted, including through bans, disruption of protests and arrests of protesters, among other tactics to discourage people from gathering to have their voices heard (CIVICUS Monitor, 2024, p. 9).

In July 2022, Amnesty International launched the appeal "Protect the Protest" to remind governments that peaceful protests are not a threat but an opportunity. Amnesty International Italia, in a call to the Government expresses concern

> over attempts in recent months to limit people's right to freedom of peaceful assembly through, for example, cases of excessive or unnecessary use of force by police forces, denigrating and criminalizing rhetoric against activists and protesters, and the adoption of measures that appear to be aimed at discouraging activism and participation in protests (e.g. Law no. 80 of 9 June 2025, the so-called "Security Decree", Law no. 199 of 30 December 2022 on the prevention and fight against illegal gatherings, and Law no. 6 of 22 January 2024 on

> the defacement of cultural heritage) (Amnesty International Italia, n.d., Il testo dell'appello, translated by the author).

In fact, the 'security decree' follows other measures adopted during the Meloni government denounced to be targeting freedom of peaceful assembly and dissent, including the so-called 'anti-rave decree law' (CIVICUS Monitor, 2022), the 'eco-vandals' law, and the so-called 'gag law', which has been accused of limiting press freedom and the right to be informed (CIVICUS Monitor, 2024b).

Heavily criticized by jurists and associations, the Meloni government's security decree was officially approved by the Senate on June 4, 2025, and enacted into law on June 9 (Law No. 80 of June 9, 2025). It sparked concerns both nationally and internationally regarding freedom of expression and peaceful assembly in Italy:

> presented by Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni as a vital step forward in the protection of vulnerable citizens and law enforcement, the decree has been widely condemned by critics as an excessive crackdown on civil disobedience and public assembly (International IDEA, 2025).

Between 2024 and 2025, numerous associations, opposition parties, civil society groups, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights Michael O'Flaherty, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, and multiple UN Special Rapporteurs voiced concerns about the bill's provisions.

Criticisms from jurists have arisen both from the perspective of the use of the emergency decree-law – something not only used by the Meloni government –, which is both seen as inadequate for providing criminal sanctions for significant social issues and for overtaking the legislative role of the

Parliament, and from its specific content (Morrone, 2025; Dolcini, 2025; Zirulia, 2025; Forlivesi, 2025; Lonati and Melzi d'Eril, 2025). Specifically, they criticize the criminalization of political dissent through new offenses such as possession of terrorist material – which could be used to criminalize dissent on politically sensitive issues or even those conducting research activities –, the introduction of aggravating circumstances for damage caused during demonstrations or graffiti, and a new crime of road and rail blockades – clearly aimed at targeting specific types of protests, especially environmental demonstrations, indicating a certain intolerance for spontaneous collective dissent or actions involving outsiders.

The addition of aggravating circumstances and the new crime of rioting in prisons and detention centers for irregular migrants is seen as further restrictive of the right to protest for people already deprived of their freedom and living in harsh conditions, tending to criminalize social conflict and non-violent dissent. The Antigone Association, which monitors prison conditions, calls it the "greatest attack on the freedom of protest in the history of the Republic" (translated by the author), highlighting its impact on eco-activists, foreigners, opponents of major projects and workers' pickets, squatters, housing rights advocates, NGOs, sea rescue groups, prisoners, Roma communities, the light hemp supply chain, and activists across the board (Prencipe, n.d.). Moreover, Zirulia (2025) states that the decree aims to achieve two additional goals: "criminal repression of forms of hardship, poverty, and social marginalization" and "strengthening criminal protection for law enforcement" (p. 2, translated by the author), thereby creating a protective shield and once again targeting specific groups and movements. Together with the criminalization of political dissent, these three interconnected objectives, which are mainly preventative, would suggest a slowdown in breaking free from

the legacies of an illiberal past. Additionally, Lonati and Melzi d'Eril (2025) point out that this decree-law signifies an inversion of the constitutional paradigm that viewed the person as central and the executive as serving them, shifting instead towards allowing the executive to act freely while marginalizing the individual and subordinating them to the priorities of power.

Finally, a new security decree took effect on February 25, 2026, introducing measures on bladed weapons, youth violence, demonstrations, and law enforcement agencies. Regarding public demonstrations, a 12-hour preventive detention has been introduced, as well as stricter bans on access to sensitive urban areas and for individuals previously convicted of street violence (Redazione Wolters Kluwer, 2026). Released shortly after recent events involving protests, Della Ragione (2026) suggests this decree reflects a "confirmation of the widespread recourse to penal and sanctionary measures" (translation by the auhor), which seems at odds with the principle of criminal law as a last resort.

3. *The Protests for Palestine*

Recent protests supporting the Palestinian people present a notable case for examining freedom of protest. These demonstrations have occurred worldwide across Western and non-Western countries and have faced specific repression and delegitimization of participants. According to CIVICUS (2024a), nearly 10 percent of all recorded civic space violations in 2024 involved Israel, the OTP, and expressions of solidarity with the Palestinian people. Especially since October 7, 2023, following Hamas's attack and subsequent Israeli escalations in Gaza and Palestinian territories, protests for Palestine have been spreading globally. These protests involve various actors

and intersecting struggles related to the Palestinian issue. Participants have faced accusations of anti-Semitism and support for terrorism in several Western countries, often used to discredit protests and dissent. This instrumentalization has targeted migrants, descendants, and progressive, anti-racist groups, aiming to exclude those perceived as enemies of Western civilization, contributing to what Donatella della Porta describes as a 'moral panic' (Della Porta 2025 and 2024).

As reported by CIVICUS (2024a), in the US, pro-Palestine student protests with university encampments have resulted in restrictions on peaceful assembly, including over 3,200 arrests or detentions, punitive federal laws, restrictive university policies, and suspensions of students' chapters of Students for Justice in Palestine, often due to accusations of anti-Semitism and pressure from donors. Similar restrictions have occurred in numerous other countries – including France, Germany, Italy, Brazil, and others – with bans justified as 'security concerns', excessive use of police force – such as the use of batons, pepper spray, police dogs, and bulldozers at the University of Amsterdam in May 2024 –, removal of student encampments – as seen in Poland and Portugal – and arrests of activists, journalists, and even minors – as in Bahrain and Germany. Freedom of association has also been impacted by the suspension of funding to UNRWA and Israeli and Palestinian civil society organizations (CSOs) in several countries, and CSOs focusing on OTP have faced investigations and surveillance. Journalists killed in Israel – over 180 –, threats, vilification, dismissals for media coverage of human rights violations or in solidarity with Palestinians, the conflation of criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism and terrorism, restrictions on symbols like the keffiyeh scarf or slogans, and reprisals against activists, academics, and artists have been reported as restrictions of freedom of expression in various countries worldwide (CIVICUS, 2024a, pp. 14-16).

In Italy, protests in solidarity with Palestine – as della Porta et al. (2025) point out – have been persistent over time and very widespread across the entire country. Similar contentious actions have been spreading across nations, such as the movement of student encampments from the USA to other European and Western countries. These protests include student encampments, academic boycotts requesting the suspension of relations with Israeli universities and Italian companies involved in military or energy sectors, petitions, leafleting, and other awareness campaigns, as well as flash mobs, symbolic actions, road blockades, occupations, and demonstrations. A broad and diverse network of actors has been involved in these protests, including student groups, diaspora communities, trade unions, political organizations, religious groups, and civic associations. Students and young people have primarily led these efforts, with most protests originating from schools and universities in autumn 2023, mainly driven by left-wing student collectives and university-based organizations (Andretta and Imperatore, 2025).

The wave of protests supporting the Palestinian people was also marked by a strong sense of intersectionality, involving professionals, struggles, associations, and movements. Besides students, the protests included precarious researchers, professors, and university administrative staff, as well as various other professionals, forming cross-sector alliances within and outside universities. Past discourses and struggles converged in the fight for the Palestinian cause – from peace movements to anti-austerity protests, feminist, transfeminist, environmental, and LGBTQ+ movements – leveraging existing networks and organizations while also criticizing Israel and allied Western countries, in a coalition with student movements reminiscent of those from the 1960s and 1970s. Furthermore, as Della Porta et al. (2025) points out, these pro-Palestinian movements, quickly led by Young Palestinians and supported significantly by BDS

(Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) and other longstanding pro-Palestinian groups, second-generation activists, and racialized and migrant workers, have helped incorporate anti-racist and decolonial perspectives into peace movements, "thus serving as a critical space for emerging communities to assert their rights to exist and challenge the persistent colonial attitudes that continue to shape their lives in Europe" (della Porta et al., 2025, p. 251). Finally, since the protests on university campuses in the United States, the repression of pro-Palestinian demonstrations has intersected with the US government's effort to control teaching and research freedoms. Meanwhile, several Italian universities have called for ending collaborations with Israeli institutions, linking research work and academic freedom closely with dissent.

4. *Government Narratives and Delegitimization of Protestants Discourse During the Global Sumud Flotilla Mission*

It is interesting to analyze government discourses – or those of its members – during the voyage of the Global Sumud Flotilla (GSF) in 2025 – a coalition of international organizations and civil society composed of approximately 500 activists from over 44 countries, which set sail with the aim to break the siege and deliver humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip – and its interception and consequent arrest of the activists by Israel, as it is a period when street protests and both national and international media attention intensified.

Having started deploying activists and supplies, initially from the ports of Barcelona and Genoa in late August 2025, the mission of the GSF – not the first Flotilla, but the largest so far, with parliamentarians, politicians, and both national and international public figures (Newell, 2025) and supported by

widespread civil society participation – drew media and public attention. Social media also played a significant role in highlighting the boats' journey and its participants, leading to a large turnout among the Flotilla's so-called 'ground crew', which included activists, unions, students, and ordinary citizens who kept the spotlight on Gaza and the Flotilla as well as Israel's potential reactions, by sharing posts and information, actively participating in marches, and blocking roads, trails, and ports.

On September 19, 2025, strikes and demonstrations across Italy called by the CGIL occurred, preceding the general strike organized by the USB for September 22. These protests demanded "the need to stop all military intervention in the Strip, guarantee humanitarian corridors, secure the civilian population, support and guarantee the security of all ongoing humanitarian missions, including the Global Sumud Flotilla, as immediate priorities" (CGIL, 2025, translated by the author).

They also called for the suspension of trade and military agreements with Israel, urging governments and international institutions to stop the situation. Faced with the ongoing genocide in Gaza, continued occupations in the West Bank, the blockade of humanitarian aid causing starvation deaths, and Israeli military threats against GSF ship – carrying also Italian citizens – denouncing the inertia of the Italian government and the European Union in dismissing terrorism accusations against the crew and refusing to adopt effective sanctions or suspend relations with Israel, the USB declared a general strike for the 22nd (USB, 2025). Additional large protests occurred on October 2 and 3, following Israel's seizure of the GSF crew in international waters, with the COBAS calling for a general strike across all private and public sectors on October 3 (COBAS, 2025).

Defense Minister Guido Crosetto, in the government's urgent briefing to the Chamber of Deputies regarding the attacks that occurred within the Global Sumud Flotilla on September 25, 2025, following an attack on vessels in international waters south of Crete on the night of September 23-24, announced the deployment of the Italian Navy frigate Fasan and insisted that aid be delivered to Cyprus. He states that the Italian Government strongly condemns the attack on civilian vessels in international waters and recalls the fundamental values of the Republic:

> respect for international law, the protection of human life, the defense of freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. I have already publicly reiterated that in a democracy, any demonstration and form of protest must be protected when it is conducted in compliance with international rules and law and cannot be suppressed with violence (Crosetto, 2025, transcribed and translated by the author).

On the same day, Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni commented on Agorà broadcast on Rai 3, saying that she condemns the incident and that the Fasan ship is authorized to approach to provide rescue and assistance if necessary. However, she was keen to reiterate her opinion on the matter, referring to the GFS: "all of this is gratuitous, dangerous, irresponsible" (Meloni, 2025a, transcribed and translated by the author).

In his speech to the Chamber of Deputies on October 2, 2025, addressing the Government's communication on recent developments in the Gaza Strip, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Antonio Tajani (2025), emphasized the importance of condemning all forms of anti-Semitism. He specifically condemned those who call for the destruction of the State of Israel "from the river to the sea", a slogan that has evolved in meaning over the decades but is also

currently used heavily by Palestinians and protesters ("*from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free*") to demand an end to violence, call for peace, and advocate for an independent Palestinian state that includes the Gaza Strip and the West Bank (Il Post, 2023). Also on October 2, while boarding operations were still underway, Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, who stated they would do everything possible, added that despite their efforts, she believes:

> all this will bring no benefit to the Palestinian people. On the other hand, I understand that it will bring a lot of inconvenience to the Italian people. [...] For an issue that seems to me to have little to do with the Palestinian issue and a lot to do with Italian matters, the unions are explaining this to us, because I would have expected that at least on an issue they considered so important, they would not have called a general strike on Friday, because the long weekend and the revolution do not go together (Meloni, 2025b, transcribed and translated by the author),

aiming to discredit the actions of the Flotilla, trade unions, and those participating in demonstrations and strikes in general.

On September 23, Matteo Salvini, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Infrastructure and Transport, and leader of the Lega, commented on the violence at Milan's Central Station during a Gaza solidarity strike that occurred the day before, suggesting as the Lega that all those organizing demostrations pay a deposit into personal bank accounts (Salvini, 2025a). He reiterated this idea on October 2 in an Instagram video, which sounded more like a threat:

> Now someone is exaggerating. Even in these minutes, clashes between protesters and police in Alessandria, train traffic blocked in Livorno with people lying on the tracks. These are not pro-Pal, these are pro-chaos. Today, the Guarantee Commission declared the strike called by the CGIL and ultra-

> left for tomorrow illegitimate. Landini seems to ignore it and carry on. Anyone who, I appeal to workers, damages and brings the country to a standstill in the name of an illegitimate strike will pay the consequences. More: since the law that provides for sanctions for who organizes and participates to illegal strikes dates back to 1990, and has ridiculous penalties, I have brought to the Council of Ministers to update these rules and these sanctions to 2025 because those who make mistakes pay. [...] (Salvini, 2025b, translated by the author).

While also wanting to show as reliable, these discourses reveal two main trajectories: one involves using anti-Semitism concern rhetoric to divert attention, and the other one appears aimed at discrediting and criminalizing protest. While the use of the first one may seem historically at odds, Nicola Guerra (2026) notes that contemporary far-right pro-Zionism in Italy and across Europe did not emerge solely from recent Islamophobia but has deeper origins. It is rooted in Cold War anti-communism, which views Israel "as a bulwark against Soviet-backed Arab nationalism, and later as a vanguard against Islam" (p.1), as well as in radical Westernism and admiration for ethnonationalist militarism. Secondly, regarding the rhetoric emerging from Meloni and Salvini's discourses and from the Lega proposal, it should be considered, as Rossella Selmini and Anna di Ronco (2023) note, that, beyond criminal repression, protesters face increased administrative sanctions and fines. And although these sanctions may appear milder, they effectively criminalize dissent, disproportionately impacting vulnerable groups. Ultimately, this criminalization occurs not only through laws but also through public and media narratives that portray social movements as threats, delegitimize their demands, and justify punitive measures.

5. *On actual and future protests*

The CIVICUS Monitor (2025) reports that the proportion of the European and Central Asian population living in countries with open or narrowed civic spaces has collapsed from 58.3% in 2019 to 26.5% in 2025. Countries such as France, Germany, and Italy saw their ratings decline from 'narrowed' to 'obstructed'. Globally, the right to protest faces ongoing challenges, even in long-standing democracies. This freedom intersects with many other rights, rooted in constitutional principles and international law, including freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. And, as demonstrated by protests supporting the Palestinian people, it is also closely linked to academic freedom.

In the past few years, Italy has witnessed a variety of protests: against measures to contain the pandemic, for climate change, and against gender-based violence; protests in prisons; demonstrations for international situations, such as the one in Iran or in the Gaza Strip; and protests against evictions. Last but not least, the organization of a 'Remigration Summit' by the far-right in the province of Milan in May 2025 and 2026 led to counter-mobilizations. Among these, the protests in support of the Palestinian people after October 7, 2023, are an interesting case to examine, as they have occurred in several countries around the world, with attempts to repress and discredit protesters, including in Western democracies, from crackdowns on US university campuses to several European countries. They also featured, at the national level, especially during the Global Sumud Flotilla mission, remarkable participation from the people and specific reactions from the Italian government.

During the Meloni Government, since 2022, various legislative measures have been introduced, from decrees targeting rave parties to those against damaging cultural

heritage, as well as security decrees approved in 2025 and 2026. Although rethorically justified by security concerns or the need to protect public property, these measures seem to often specifically impact certain groups and social movements, ultimately limiting foundamental freedoms such as of expression, dissent, peaceful assembly, and protest. The frequent use of decree-laws – not only used by this government – especially in situations lacking clear urgency, alongside the security provisions they contain, indicate an increased dominance of the executive branch, a shift that risks undermining citizens' capacity to challenge governmental actions.

Moreover, as Donatella della Porta (2025) notes, repression isn't limited to state policing; it also includes law-and-order alliances among politicians, mass media, and counter-movements, which exert a form of soft repression. In the context of pro-Palestinian protests across many Western countries, including Italy, "far-right groups and media outlets have often played an important role [...] as a supposed 'countermovement', by embracing narratives of support for Israel as a part of a wider anti-muslim discourse" (p. 4). Analyzing speech by Italian government members during the 2025 Global Sumud Flotilla mission and Israel's subsequent arrest of aboard activists – during a time of frequent, well-attended protests and disruptions via road, rail, and airport blockades – the government's efforts to dismiss and discredit protesters and their motives are evident. Consistent with Western moral panic, anti-immigration and Islamophobic policies by the far-right, frame these protests as anti-Semitic, they accuse protesters of disrupting and harming Italians, and allege that trade unions aim to do so on Fridays to extend the weekend. Matteo Salvini's Lega's proposal to introduce a bail also contributes to criminalizing the protests. While maintaining radical ideological positions, these discourses

appear both coherent with and functional to the gradual introduction of legal restrictions, thus reflecting a balance between change and continuity from the past that Pedrazzani and De Giorgi (2025) have also identified as characteristic of the Meloni government in other areas.

At last, what can be noted is that actual protests are marked by a strong intersectionality and are likely to continue this trend. This includes overlapping struggles such as climate change, feminism, war, colonialism, and global capitalism. The Palestinian cause especially highlights this intersection of oppressions, as noted on the GSF website, which states that they raise "against apartheid, racism, imperialism, colonialism, ecocide, and all systems of oppression" (Global Sumud Flotilla, n.d.). There is also intersectionality among the participants and organizations involved: protests include a wide range of actors, including universities, trade unions, civil society groups, and workers from various sectors; individuals from diverse backgrounds, both in national protests and within the GSF; and old and new networks. Finally, intersectionality spans different levels of protest, targeting the national government, the European Union, and the international arena. In this context, unions have shown to still be vital social actors, and the protests for Palestine and the Global Sumud Flotilla have likely reactivated people on major issues such as peace, social justice, civil rights, and the environment (CENSIS, 2025), with large participation and a strong youth protagonism (Andretta and Imperatore, 2025).

As many of these issues remain unsolved, a few questions about the resilience of democracy can be asked: will this cycle of protests lead to an increase in democratic tools, or will restrictive mesures dominate? Will the new laws cause escalation or spark new forms of dissent? Will pro-Palestinian protests offer a new space for political actors from different

groups – such as young people, second-generations and migrants – or their stigmatization will prevail? Repressive practices certainly affect the country's democratic stability. However, protests can counterbalance. In Tarrow's words (1989), "in the popular culture of capitalist democracies, it is common for people to associate disorder with breakdown and to link 'system support' with stability" but historically popular disorder has much more often accompanied the birth or expansion of democracy and "where there is a consensual basis for democracy and elites are not united around an anti-democratic project [...] disorder and democracy are not opposed" (p. 347).

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"If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change." Tancredi's celebrated maxim in *The Leopard* has long served as the master key to Italian politics: a country where every rupture seems to dissolve into continuity, every revolution into restoration. But does the formula still hold?

Since October 2022, Italy has been governed by the first executive in the history of the Republic led by a party with roots in the post-fascist tradition — an experiment watched with alarm, curiosity and hope across Europe and beyond. Three years on, the balance sheet confounds both the catastrophists and the reassured. The most stable government in decades has completed none of the institutional reforms it promised; yet Italian democracy has quietly shifted — in the governance of dissent, the control of public media, the externalisation of migration, the symbolic politics of culture and memory.

Drawing on original survey research and in-depth analyses of foreign policy, environmental commitments, protest and cultural institutions, this volume charts the transformation of Italian democracy within a world in disorder: multiplying wars, a deepening global democratic recession, a transatlantic alliance in turmoil. Its thesis is captured in a single formula: hybrid Italy — a democracy in which institutional continuity and illiberal drift coexist, and in which Tancredi's maxim now runs in reverse. Everything stays the same, precisely so that things can change.

A book for anyone seeking to understand not only where Italy is going, but what its 'laboratory' reveals about the future of democracy in Europe.

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HYBRID ITALY
A Democracy amid Global Disorder

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