



# Global Nonviolent Action Database

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## Italian students protest austerity education reform (Gelmini Decree), 2010

**Time period notes:** *It is unclear when in 2010 Education Minister Mariastella Gelmini proposed this new austerity education reform bill. The clear beginning date is for the start of non-violent protests on 9 October 2010.*

9 October

2010

to: 23 December

2010

**Country:** Italy

**Location Description:** *Protests occurred throughout cities in Italy*

### Goals:

To block the passage in the Italian Parliament and enactment into law of the austerity education reform bill, the Gelmini Decree, proposed by Italian Education Minister Mariastella Gelmini.

## Methods

### Methods in 1st segment:

- 038. Marches

### Methods in 2nd segment:

### Methods in 3rd segment:

### Methods in 4th segment:

- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 016. Picketing
- 037. Singing
- 038. Marches
- 162. Sit-in
- 171. Nonviolent interjection
- 173. Nonviolent occupation

### Methods in 5th segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 037. Singing
- 038. Marches
- 171. Nonviolent interjection

### Methods in 6th segment:

- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 015. Group lobbying
- 019. Wearing of symbols
- 037. Singing
- 038. Marches
- 171. Nonviolent interjection

## Classifications

### Classification:

Defense

### Cluster:

Economic Justice

### Group characterization:

- parents
- researchers
- students
- teachers

## Leaders, partners, allies, elites

### Leaders:

Not Known

### Partners:

Researchers and Teachers at Italian Universities

### External allies:

Parents of Italian Students, Unione degli Universitari (Federation of Syndicalist student group), Rete degli Studenti (Student Network), the Italian Labor Union

### Involvement of social elites:

Antonio Di Pietro of the Italy of Values Party, Pier Luigi Bersani of the Democratic Party

## Joining/exiting order of social groups

### Groups in 1st Segment:

- Teachers (Enter)

### Groups in 2nd Segment:

### Groups in 3rd Segment:

### Groups in 4th Segment:

- Pier Luigi Bersani (Enter/Exit)

- Researchers (Enter)
- Rete degli Studenti (Enter)
- Teachers (exit)
- Unione degli Universitari (Enter/Exit)

**Groups in 5th Segment:**

**Groups in 6th Segment:**

- Antonio Di Pietro (Enter/Exit)
- Italian Labor Union (Enter/Exit)
- Parents (Enter/Exit)
- Researchers (Exit)
- Rete degli Studenti (Exit)

**Segment Length:** *Approximately 12 days*

## Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

### **Opponents:**

Education Minister Mariastella Gelmini, Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, Confindustria, the Conference of Rectors of Italian Universities, Gianfranco Fini of the Future and Freedom Party, Renato Schifani of the of Freedom Party

### **Nonviolent responses of opponent:**

Not Known

### **Campaigner violence:**

24 November 2010 - Students threw stones and eggs at Parliament building

30 November 2010 - Protests became momentarily violent when some protesters attacked police blockade preventing them from entering Parliament by throwing eggs, vegetables, bottles, and smoke bombs at police

30 November 2010 - A group of protesters attempted to flip a parked and occupied police van

22 December 2010 – Clashes occurred between students and police in Palermo as students threw stones and bottles at police in an attempt to enter a government building

### **Repressive Violence:**

24 November 2010 - Students in Rome forced their way through the main doors of the Italian Senate to enact a sit-in, resulting in clashes between police and protesters, injuring 15 students and 8 police officers

24 November 2010 – Students, who threw stones and eggs at the Parliament building and attempted to enter, were faced with resistance from riot police

24 November 2010 - 2 students were arrested

25 November 2010 - In Milan, students clashed with police during an attempt to occupy the metro system

25 November 2010 - Clashes occurred between police and students in Florence, resulting in 1 student injured

30 November 2010 - In response to an attempt by a group of protesters to flip a parked and occupied police van, riot police used tear gas on protesters

22 December 2010 - Clashes occurred between police and protesters in Milan

22 December 2010 - In response to students in Palermo throwing stones and bottles at police in an attempt to enter a government building, riot police used tear gas, injuring at least two Italian students

## Success Outcome

### Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

1 point out of 6 points

### Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

### Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

### Notes on outcomes:

Towards the end of the campaign against the education reform bill, the size of the protests grew up to 50,000 students protesting, so the campaign was successful in gaining support and awareness. The Italian Press reported that the education reform bill passed in Parliament and enacted into law was not as stringent as the initial proposed education reform bill because of some amendments made to the bill in Parliament. Thus, the protesters were successful in gaining support for some amendments to the education reform bill, although information for the specific amendments was not available so it is unclear how successful the protesters were in amending the education reform bill. The education reform bill passed in Parliament and enacted into law was not appealed and still remains in place. After this education reform bill in 2010, the Italian government continued to propose additional austerity driven education reforms. In response, Italian University students continued to organize and protest. In both 2011 and 2013, Italian University students led marches, demonstrations, and protests against proposed education reforms and called for the Italian government to increase spending on education.

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In 2010, Italy faced high levels of public debt due to a financial crisis. The Italian economy was near 2 trillion euros in outstanding debt and by 2011 the debt was projected to continue to rise. Thus, the Italian Parliament enacted austerity policies, which are utilized to decrease debt during unfavorable economic circumstances. As a component of Italy's austerity policies, Education Minister Mariastella Gelmini proposed what became known as the "Gelmini Decree," an education reform bill with education budget cuts of 9 billion euros and the loss of 130,000 jobs in the education sector. The education reform bill reduced the quantity of university courses, merged smaller universities, decreased the length of rectorships, decreased grant funding, created spending cuts for and time limits on research, altered the admissions and hiring process by creating non-tenure employment for researchers, and expanded the private sector's power in Italian state universities by hiring non-academic university deans.

Education Minister Gelmini openly stated that the reforms were necessary because the universities were on a path leading to bankruptcy. Gelmini noted her reform policies would ultimately streamline the costly university system by supporting exemplary universities and closing universities running deficits, increasing hiring and applicant transparency, and fostering efficiency and a more merit based system. Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi insisted the proposed reforms would save Italy needed funds while also increasing the efficiency of the education system. Confindustria, an Italian employer's federation, the Conference of Rectors of Italian Universities, Gianfranco Fini of the center-right Future and Freedom Party, and Renato Schifani of the center-right People of Freedom Party all supported the education reform bill.

Students and other protesters believed the proposed education reform bill would decrease the quality of education in Italy. Because of previous austerity measures, Italy already spent less on education than other developed countries. Students insisted the universities were greatly under-funded and worried that changes in the hiring process would lead to unfilled positions and that privatization of the universities would decrease research opportunities. In addition to students, parents, teachers, and researchers, Antonio Di Pietro of the Italy of Values Party, Pier Luigi Bersani of the Democratic Party, Unione degli Universitari (Federation of Syndicalist student group), Rete degli Studenti (Student Network), and the Italian Labor Union, representing 500

researchers and 300 professors, all opposed the education reform bill.

On 9 October 2010, thousands of students and teachers marched throughout Italian cities protesting the education reforms. On 17 November 2010, students in key Italian cities organized over a hundred rallies. On the same day, students also protested in Rome outside the Parliament building and protesters marched throughout Florence and Rome setting off flares. On 18 November 2010, student associations Rete degli Studenti and Unione degli Universitari released a statement opposing the reform bill and supporting the utilization of funds for university buildings and scholarships.

On 24 November 2010, an estimated 3,000 University of Pisa students blocked runways, terminals, and traffic at the airport of Pisa. Students in Rome forced their way through the main doors of the Italian Senate to enact a sit-in, resulting in clashes between police and protesters, injuring 15 people and 8 police officers. Outside the Senate, students chanted, "Give us our future back" and "No Cuts." Some students threw stones and eggs at the Parliament building and tried to enter but faced resistance from riot police. In total, tens of thousands of students, teachers, and researchers protested throughout Italy in more than 50 cities, occupying 44 of 66 public universities, picketing, and disrupting classes. Two students were arrested in the city of Padua. Pier Luigi Bersani of the Democratic Party united with students and teachers protesting on the roof of a building where architecture was taught in Rome.

25 November 2010, tens of thousands of Italian students for the second day protested in cities across the country, while Parliament voted on proposed amendments to the education reform bill. Two thousand students marched in the city of Pisa, forming a human chain around the Leaning Tower of Pisa and blocking tourists from entering. An estimated 20 students occupied the Leaning Tower of Pisa, hanging a banner reading "No to the Gelmini Reform" from the top tier of the tower. In Rome, some students climbed over the turnstiles of the Colosseum, hanging a banner reading "No Cuts, No Profit," from the second tier, and students marched around the Colosseum chanting and holding banners stating "No Profits off Our Future" and lighting red smoke flares. Outside of Parliament, hundreds of students waved banners and lit smoke flares, chanting, "We will block this reform." In Milan, students clashed with police during an attempt to occupy the metro system. In Florence, clashes occurred between police and protesters, injuring one student. However, protests in general remained peaceful. In Florence, Milan, Cagliari, Ancona, and Turin, at over a dozen universities, researchers slept on the roofs in protest. In Turin, students occupied the Mole Antonelliana. In Palermo and Sicily, students blocked traffic and railway tracks and lit smoke bombs.

During the protests on 25 November 2010, the Italian Parliament voted in favor of some amendments to the education reform bill, a defeat for Berlusconi's government. Gelmini stated that if substantial amendments to the education reform bill were passed, she would withdraw the proposed education reform bill. Pier Luigi Bersani from the Democratic Party called for the elimination of the education reform bill. The final vote on the education reform bill from the Chamber of Deputies, the Lower House of Parliament, was postponed to 30 November 2010. On 26 November 2010, students protested for another day using similar tactics against education reform.

On 30 November 2010, students rallied in major cities across Italy. In Rome, where legislators were voting on education reform, around 50,000 students marched in opposition on what became known as "Block Everything Day," but were stopped by police in the area around Parliament. Students blocked roads, railway tracks, and main traffic areas in Rome bringing the city to a standstill. Outside of Parliament, students chanted and waved banners. Protests momentarily became violent when some protesters attacked the police blockade preventing them from entering Parliament by throwing eggs, vegetables, bottles, smoke bombs, and fireworks at police. A group of protesters attempted to flip a parked and occupied police van and in response riot police targeted the students with tear gas. Student protests also occurred in Milan, Naples, Palermo, Pisa, Turin, Tuscany, Bari, and Venice, where traffic and railway tracks were blocked. Overall, the protests resulted in no reports of major injuries or damage. On 3 December 2010, the Chamber of Deputies, the Lower House of Parliament passed the education reform bill. The Senate, the Upper House of Parliament, was scheduled to vote on the education reform bill on 22 December 2010.

On 22 December 2010, thousands of students in addition to parents and researchers protested throughout Italy against education reform. In the city of Palermo, thousands of demonstrators paraded through the streets holding posters with the names of renowned books as shields and some protesters wore helmets. Clashes occurred in Palermo between students and police when a

group of students threw stones and bottles at police in an attempt to enter a government building. In response, riot police utilized tear gas against protesters, injuring at least two students. Clashes occurred between protesters and police in Milan. Demonstrations and blockades of traffic occurred in Milan, Venice, Perugia, and Turin. In Rome, students sang, "If they block our future, we will block the city," while marching through the streets and the primary highway in Rome, stopping traffic. Students in Rome took steps to show their peaceful intent, by carrying flags and banners depicting non-violent slogans and some protesters painted their hands white to represent peace. Protests remained peaceful by avoiding the city center, which had significant police presence and blockades. In the afternoon of 22 December 2010, members of the Italian Labor Union joined the protesters. Rete degli Studenti issued a statement asking for the Senate's blockage of the education reform bill. A few student protesters met with Italian President Giorgio Napolitano, appealing to him to not sign the education reform bill into law. Napolitano could block the education reform bill by refusing to sign it.

22 December 2010, the Senate delayed the voting on the education reform bill due to the great number of oppositions in the Senate until the afternoon of 23 December 2010. On 23 December 2010, the Senate voted to approve the education reform bill proposed by Gelmini, passing with 161 votes to 98 votes with six abstentions. Italian President Napolitano signed the education reform bill into law, but maintained his desire to keep a conversation going with students. Education Minister Gelmini spoke out in response to the passage of the education reform bill stating the considerable opportunities students would receive with these reforms to the universities. Antonio Di Pietro, the leader of Italy of Values Party, responded to the passage of the reform by stating that it "deregulates the right to study." Italian university students, who organized all of the protests against the education reform bill, asserted their intent to proceed with future mobilizations after the passage of the education reform bill into law.

## Research Notes

### Influences:

The 2010 protests were influenced by the 2008 Italian University student protests to the education reform bill proposed by Education Minister Gelmini to cut a total of 87,000 teaching jobs and 44,500 administrative posts at state schools within the next three years. (1) Although it occurred at the same time, Italian University students could have been influenced by the thousands of university students in London who rallied on 24 November 2010 against increases in university tuition fees. (1) The campaign by Italian University students in 2010 influenced protests by Italian University students in 2011 and 2013 against additional austerity education reforms. (2)

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