POLIDEMOS

VALERIO ALFONSO BRUNO
AND DANIELA CATERINA
(edited by)

THE ITALIAN RIGHT TODAY

Narratives, Ideologies, Policies

EDUCatt

The Italian Right Today

Narratives, Ideologies, Policies

EDITED BY
VALERIO ALFONSO BRUNO AND DANIELA CATERINA

EDUCatt
Milano 2024

UNIVERSITÀ CATTOLICA del Sacro Cuore

POLIDEMOS

Centro per lo studio della democrazia
e dei mutamenti politici

© 2024 **EDUCatt** – Ente per il Diritto allo Studio Universitario dell'Università Cattolica
Largo Gemelli 1, 20123 Milano – tel. 02.7234.22.35 – fax 02.80.53.215
e-mail: editoriale.dsu@educatt.it (produzione); librario.dsu@educatt.it (distribuzione)
web: https://libri.educatt.online/
Associato all'AIE – Associazione Italiana Editori
ISBN: 979-12-5535-333-1

Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore contributed to the funding of this research project and its publication. This publication is made within the project "The clash of narratives. The representation of the future in popular culture and traditional media and its political use" – D.3.2 - 2020 – PI: prof. Damiano Palano.

This publication is also supported by the Department of Political Science of the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore

copertina: progetto grafico Studio Editoriale EDUCatt.

Polidemos (Centro per lo studio della democrazia e dei mutamenti politici) dell'Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore promuove e svolge ricerche sui mutamenti nei sistemi democratici, sulle trasformazioni nelle concezioni della democrazia e sulla dimensione internazionale della democrazia. **Polidemos** promuove la discussione sulla democrazia operando a più livelli: al livello della ricerca accademica, mediante ricerche originali sul tema dei mutamenti democratici, considerato da differenti prospettive disciplinari e con un'ottica multi-interdisciplinare; al livello della discussione pubblica, mediante prodotti editoriali ed eventi pubblici; al livello della più ampia divulgazione, disseminando i risultati delle proprie ricerche mediante iniziative rivolte a organizzazioni della società civile, insegnanti e cittadini interessati.

Polidemos (Center for the study of democracy and political change) of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart promotes and carries out research on changes in democratic systems, on transformations in conceptions of democracy, and on the international dimension of democracy. **Polidemos** promotes the discussion of democracy by operating at multiple levels: at the level of academic research, through original research on the subject of democratic change, considered from different disciplinary perspectives and with a multi-interdisciplinary perspective; at the level of public discussion, through editorial products and public events; and at the level of the broadest discussion, disseminating the results of their research through initiatives aimed at civil society organizations, teachers and interested citizens.

Direttore / *Director*
Damiano Palano (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore)

Comitato direttivo / *Steering Committee*
Barbara L. Boschetti (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore), Luca G. Castellin (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore), Martino Mazzoleni (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore), Damiano Palano (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore), Vittorio Emanuele Parsi (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Aseri), Andrea Santini (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore)

Comitato editoriale / *Editorial Board*
Valerio Alfonso Bruno (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore), Antonio Campati (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore), Daniela Caterina (Huazhong University of Science and Technology), Samuele Mazzolini (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia)

Table of contents

Introduction

VALERIO ALFONSO BRUNO[1] AND DANIELA CATERINA[2]

Focusing on *the Italian Right today* – and advancing fine-tuned analytical instruments to grasp its multilayered complexity – is no easy task. It features a triple challenge – one for each term composing this phrase. Zooming in on *the* Italian *Right* today presupposes, in the first place, a basic consensus on – or, at least, a widespread common understanding of – "the Right" as a contemporary political force. We would thus need a conception able to encompass the astonishing proliferation of definitions attached to this political subject: "far-right" (Jupskås and Leidig, 2020; Mudde, 2019; Pirro, 2023), "conservative right" (Giubilei, 2020; Vassallo and Vignati, 2023), "extreme right" (Ignazi, 2014), "extreme right 2.0" (Forti, 2021), "radical right" (Rydgren, 2018), "centre-right" (Bruno, 2022; Hanley, 2020), "right-centre" (*destra-centro*) (Improta and Trastulli, 2022), "populist right" (Bornschier and Kriesi, 2012; Finchelstein, 2019; Mudde, 2016; Palano, 2021), "populist radical right" (Albertazzi and Vampa, 2021), "sovereignist right" (Basile and

[1] Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, valerioalfonso.bruno@unicatt.it.
[2] Huazhong University of Science and Technology, caterina@hust.edu.cn.

Mazzoleni, 2020; Scopelliti and Bruno, 2022), "techno-sovereignist right" (Gressani, 2022; Maglione, 2021).

This polyphony – often quickly ushering into a cacophony – of definitions is even reinforced if, in the second place, we look at the *Italian* Right today. For decades, in academic literature and public debate alike, Italy has been labelled a highly prolific political laboratory worldwide – often anticipating socio-political trends whose echo easily transcends the boundaries of the Italian Peninsula (Campati, 2022; Vampa, 2023). This evidence endows scholars with a considerable potential to observe unprecedented dynamics in the Italian context. The studies on Italy as a laboratory of (diverse streams of) populism are a case in point in this respect (Palano, 2024; Vampa, 2023), just like studies on the personalisation of (party) politics (Musella, 2020). However, the *lab*-label also entails a non-negligible risk, pushing researchers and political commentators alike to fall into the trap of the "anomaly" scheme, which would relegate the Italian laboratory as quintessentially diverse to the field of non-comparable case studies.

Focusing on the Italian Right *today* eventually increases the complexity of our task because of our nonstop exposure to an acceleration of events at the national, European, and global levels, which seems to force us into a fragmentary and episodic observation style. How do we take a distance from such a spiral of events that seems to turn the Right into a more than ever-moving target we cannot grasp? By way of example, at the time of writing, in just a few weeks, the 2024 European Parliament (EP) elections marked considerable gains for far-right parties across various countries – most notably, France, Austria, Germany and Italy, where Giorgia Meloni's party Brothers of Italy – although in the context of unprecedented abstentionism rates – has confirmed the winning performance of the previous national elections (Wax, 2024). Albeit not dramatically altering

EP's balance of power, due to the confirmed political weight of the centre-right European People's Party, the increased representation and influence of these far-right parties preannounces a growing impact on future policy decisions at the European level. For sure, the 2024 EP elections have already left an enduring mark in intra-European relations, pushing France into significant domestic political upheaval. President Macron reacted to the substantial electoral victory of the far-right National Rally by dissolving the National Assembly and calling for snap parliamentary elections to defy Le Pen's party overtly. Although the victory of the left-wing coalition eventually supported Macron in winning its "huge gamble" (Capoccia, 2024) to block the National Rally's ascendance, the European echo unleashed by French developments is more polarised than ever (Vox, 2024). In the meanwhile, European dynamics take place against the background of an over-heated US electoral campaign that has reached a peak of domestic tension with the shooting attack against Donald Trump at a rally in Butler on 13 July 2024 (Levenson, 2024). The polarisation between Trump's supporters – viewing him as a martyr – and detractors – fearing an even more violent escalation – is likely to increase and consolidate the attack as a highly relevant turning point in the run to the presidential elections.

This accelerated chaining of right-wing-related events at various levels necessarily also impacts our understanding of the Italian Right today. In a way, it leaves us – scholars and simple observers alike – with the uncomfortable, helpless feeling that "a proper understanding" will always remain out of reach. In this context, the present volume makes a – however limited but crucial – attempt at countering such a powerless feeling. It collects the contributions presented during a study day on

the Italian Right organised on 3 May 2023 by the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan and the Polidemos Center for the Study of Democracy and Political Change. Ironically, in light of our discussion so far, this historical grounding might look like prehistory. None of the developments sketched out above were in sight; among others, Silvio Berlusconi – the absolute protagonist and "architect" of the right-wing political space in Italy's Second Republic – was still alive. Yet, as the following contributions show, some crucial overarching themes about the Italian Right today urge a reflection without remaining chained to the hyper-quick developments of today's global scenario. From different perspectives and analytical foci, through various instruments and research strategies, the five contributions of this collected volume show that focusing on *the Italian Right today* – with an eye to its *narratives*, *ideologies* and *policies* – is a task we cannot postpone, asking for innovative efforts to think outside the box and free us of disciplinary shackles. In different forms, the following contributions point to three overarching issues in this respect: first, the conceptual and definitional implications of focusing on the Italian Right today; second, the conceptualisation and study of its relationship with the past; and, finally, the attention to concrete policies – in a feedback-chain with the issue of consensus.

Concepts and definitions – The polyphony of terms constellating the study of the Right as a political subject is no trivial question. Nor can it be reduced to a matter of "belonging" to one school of thought or another. The contributions in this volume – in particular, the chapters by Bruno and Scopelliti, respectively – review the complexity of this never-ending conceptual and terminological debate, providing instruments to orientate in the choice – and understanding of the related implications – of specific terms to investigate the Italian Right today. Drawing on an insightful op-ed by Steven

Forti (2022), which further expands on some key arguments of his work "Extrema derecha 2.0. Qué es y cómo combatirla" (Forti 2021), we could condense this conceptual and definitional chaos into a problematic relationship: that is, the troubled linkages of "the Right" with the concept of *populism*. No doubt, addressing and studying the Right in relation to populism has exponentially increased the tons of ink spilt on these issues. But how productive has such a conceptual marriage been? The boom of populism studies – and the fortunes of Cas Mudde's definition of populism as a "thin ideology" (Mudde, 2004) – is paradigmatic in this respect. How much has our understanding of the Right profited from its linkage with populism, or has this latter concept ended up becoming an obstacle in disentangling the complexities of today's Right – with an eye to its (self-)narratives and ideolog*ies*? The contributions of this volume provoke us with these (open) questions, paving the way to the still largely unexplored possibilities of a morphological approach (Freeden, 2013) to the *plurality* of ideologies featuring the (Italian) Right. Following a suggestion by Anselmi (2023), this move is crucial in disentangling the seeming iron nexus between populism and right ideology and turning the relationship between the two into an *empirical* question that requires geo-historically sensitive investigations.

Relation with the past – A second overarching issue emerging from the volume is the contentious and troubled relationship of the Italian Right today with the past. No surprise, *fascism* represents here the elephant in the room. In a way, the consolidated marriage between the study of the Right and the study of fascism features a similar ambiguous dynamic as in the case of "the Right & populism" discussed above: on the one hand, a proliferation of scholarly attention and public debate; on the other, a limitation of the – potentially much broader – analytical horizon (see Forti 2022). To be sure, the question of a fascist heritage – with all its burden of ideologi-

cal ambiguity (see Bruno, this volume) and mainstreaming of (too) extreme legacies (see Scopelliti, this volume) remains crucial. However, the present volume broadens the scope of that "past", which could be highly insightful for understanding the Italian Right today. In particular, the chapter by Cozzolino takes up this challenge, showing us the multilayered complexity of a focus on the ideological, institutional and policy features of Thatcherism – and its promising potential in disentangling the various facets of Giorgia Meloni's political-economic project. Using the historical analogy with Thatcherism as an entry point into a more articulated vision of the past – and thus *beyond fascism* – the present volume hence paves the way for further comparisons within the range of Italy's more recent past. The current boom of literature on the legacies of Berlusconism, for example, is a case in point in this respect, as it kicks off a new wave of studies about the Italian Right today in relation to the afterlives of Berlusconi's cultural and especially political-economic project (see among others, Caterina et al (forthcoming); Orsina, 2023).

Policies (and consensus) – Last but not least, the volume's focus on the Italian Right today reinstates the centrality of in-depth investigations with an eye to agenda setting and policy making. In this sense, the exceptional standing of Italy's political laboratory – with the right-centre coalition guided by Giorgia Meloni's Brothers of Italy in power – is a privileged standpoint of observation. An exclusive focus on (self-)narratives and ideologies runs the risk of ushering into discursive reductionism if it is not counterbalanced by a study of the policies – and wide-ranging structural and (envisaged) constitutional reforms – featuring the Right in government. As the contributions in this volume show, such a policy focus is central for several reasons: to achieve a fine-grained understanding of the specific political-economic project of the Melonian Right in a

global scenario at the apex of neoliberal tendencies (see Cozzolino, this volume); to reach a more grounded assessment of how "contagious" specific political forces within the right spectrum are (see Napoletano, this volume); but also to gain a more empirically founded understanding of the reasons for main shifts and turns in levels of Euroscepticism within the right-wing camp (see Zubani, this volume). Also in this third respect, the present book thus aims to provide food for thought by reinstating the centrality of narratives, ideologies *and policies* in the study of the Italian Right today. This way, the volume paves the way to cross-fertilisations among various (sub-)disciplines in sociology and political science to gain a more granular understanding of the feedback chain linking dynamics of (self-)representation, effective policy decisions and consensus underpinning the Italian Right in power today.

Spanning these macro-themes – concepts and definitions, relation with the past, policies (and consensus) – the five contributions of this edited volume will concentrate on the following aspects.

In **Chapter 1**, Valerio Alfonso Bruno focuses on Giorgia Meloni's FdI to investigate how the party has drawn on an ambiguous balance of souverainism and conservativism. After presenting these two ideologies – by discussing their features, differences and (potential) points of contact – Bruno illustrates how *both* souverainism and conservativism feature a long-standing process of normalisation through which FdI has tried to distance itself from its neo- and post-fascist origins – yet without cutting those roots. Taking the tricolour flame, the controversial symbol of the party, as an entry point into the discussion of FdI's ideological ambiguity, Bruno shifts the analysis from a merely rhetorical and symbolic level to the

policy level. As the author shows, Meloni's ambiguity is mirrored in a very diverse policy stance in the international and domestic arena, respectively. Since taking office in September 2022, Bruno argues, Meloni has rarely abandoned a moderate path in relationships with European partners, regional and international allies, and global financial institutions. Contrary to this path of minimal international and diplomatic friction, Bruno dwells on Meloni's radical stance in domestic policy-making, resulting in an increasing polarisation of the country's electorate and pushing for contentious projects of constitutional reform towards an unprecedented strengthening of executive powers in the hands of the prime minister.

In **Chapter 2**, Adriano Cozzolino sheds innovative light on the nexus of narrative, ideology, and policy at the core of Meloni's governing experience by advancing a diachronic comparison with the Thatcher government in England. As Cozzolino shows, the qualitative method of historical analogy is a valuable research instrument in this respect, enabling an investigation into a current phenomenon (the *tenor*) by interpreting historical facts (the *vehicle*). Through the prism of historical analogy, the chapter shows Thatcherism as a compelling vehicle thanks to the wealth of perspectives in the anglophone debate over its interpretation running throughout the 1970s-1980s. Cozzolino carefully reconstructs two prominent adverse positions in this debate, showing their respective strengths: on the one hand, as epitomised in the notion of "Authoritarian Populism", the focus of Stuart Hall and colleagues on Thatcherism's ideological dimension and its ability to craft a cross-class consensus; on the other hand, the attention Bob Jessop and colleagues put onto the institutional and political economy dimension of Thatcherism, as epitomised in its "Two Nations Project". This latter constitutes a key entry point for Cozzolino to interpret current tendencies in the

Meloni government, such as its landmark reform of the "citizens' income" (*reddito di cittadinanza*) along a pattern of *producerism*, leading the author to sketch out an encompassing research agenda to disentangle the spheres of ideology, policy and institutions towards a more fine-tuned understanding of the political project of the Melonian far-right.

In **Chapter 3**, Anna Grazia Napoletano expands the analytical scope of the book in the study of ideological elements and policy decisions within the right-wing political space – and beyond. Napoletano reconstructs the state of the debate over populists and their relationship to democratic procedures, introducing the argument of populism in power as a "contagious" phenomenon influencing the policy agenda and ensuing policy measures – most notably, with an eye to (exclusionary) immigration and integration policy. In the chapter, Napoletano extends the study of populist contagion beyond the consolidated focus on radical right populist parties (RRPPs) by narrowing down on the case of the Five Star Movement (5SM) and its main coalition partners, that is, the League in the Conte I government (2018-2019) and the Democratic Party in the Conte II government (2019-2021). Merging qualitative analysis, spatial approach, and Chapel Hill expert survey, Napolitano's analysis investigates whether the Italian case confirms the primary trend of RRPPs' topics as the most contagious ones. The results broadly confirm this trend, showing how, from 2014 to 2019, 5SM mainly remained loyal to its inclusionary stances in economic redistribution and environmental protection yet experienced a substantial drift towards stricter positions on immigration issues. The League's influence on the 5SM thus seems remarkable in this respect. At the same time, Salvini's party drifted towards even more exclusionary positions – in line with the exclusionary positioning of Meloni's Brothers of Italy.

Adding a further key fragment to our study of the Italian right today, in **Chapter 4**, Alessio Scopelliti looks at its peculiar intermeshing of narrative, ideology and policy through the prism of the normalisation – "mainstreaming" – of the far-right Europe-wide. The results of the latest European Parliament elections in May 2024 further underpin Scopelliti's considerations on a wide-ranging consensus for and acceptance of far-right parties from a demand-side perspective across Europe. Drawing on this compelling evidence, the author explores the normalisation of far-right narratives and ideologies as a main implication of such electoral success. To this end, Scopelliti first engages in a detailed discussion of the plethora of – often chaotically overlapping – definitions in usage to grasp the specificity of the "far-right", an umbrella term encompassing both the concepts "radical right" and "extreme right". On this basis, the author moves to the contentious definition of "mainstreaming", laying bare its characteristics, ambiguities and complexities. Scopelliti thus discusses the three principal approaches adopted to grasp the diffusion – and normalisation – of far-right ideas in diverse social contexts: i) the *cultural* approach, stressing the centrality of popular culture as a medium to spread such ideas; ii) the *rational* approach, pointing to the deliberate development of (political) strategies to appear less "extreme" to one's constituency; and iii) the *institutional* approach, which, among others, foregrounds the European (proportional) electoral system as a powerful instrument of normalisation. Exemplary illustrations of these various mainstreaming approaches in the French and Italian cases point to the implications of these tendencies and potential risks further undermining the current precarious standing of our pluralist liberal democracies.

In **Chapter 5**, Matilde Zubani completes the book's journey through the narratives, ideologies, and policies of the Italian

right today by zooming in on a recent critical juncture, such as the 2020-2021 peak of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this context, Zubani focuses on the attitude towards the EU by two key parties in Italy's right-wing bloc: the League and Brothers of Italy. Starting from an in-depth discussion of the emergence, twists and turns of right-wing Euroscepticism in Italy, the author engages with a detailed reconstruction of the critical juncture and, most importantly, the initial European response to such an unprecedented health crisis with severe economic and political implications. Zubani shows how this latter provided a highly fruitful terrain for a proliferation of right-wing narratives on the EU and, more specifically, its role as a crisis manager in a context of increasing disillusion and Euroscepticism among European and especially Italian citizens. The chapter presents the key insights from a qualitative framing analysis of Tweets by the leaders of the two observed parties, Matteo Salvini and Giorgia Meloni, respectively. Some key differences emerge from the comparison of the two leaders. In quantitative terms, EU references in Meloni's digital space have been significantly lower than in Salvini's; moreover, Salvini addressed the EU in a broader and more diversified range of narratives, while Meloni mostly attacked the EU concerning the protection of national interest. However, these discrepancies notwithstanding, Zubani shows how Euroscepticism acted as a powerful glue between right-wing populist parties – independently of their positioning as a party in the government coalition (as the League in the Draghi government) or in opposition (as Brothers of Italy throughout the observed timespan).

In sum, far from exploiting the full potential of research on the Italian Right today, the five chapters introduced above aim to feed an ongoing debate that can transcend academic

reflections and enter public opinion, providing fresh analytical instruments to make sense of our present. The ideological ambiguity of the Right (Bruno), a consistent merger of ideological components and policy decisions against the background of accelerated neoliberalism (Cozzolino), influence on agenda setting and exclusionary/inclusionary issues (Napoletano), multilayered mainstreaming of extreme ideological and political elements (Scopelliti), as well as the consolidation and continuous adjustment of Eurosceptical positions (Zubani) – to mention few highlights out of the following chapters – are here to stay, and point to relevant trends requiring further cross-disciplinary avenues for research to make sense of the Italian Right today – *and tomorrow.*

References

Albertazzi, D., & Vampa, D. (Eds.). (2021) *Populism and new patterns of political competition in Western Europe*. Routledge.

Basile, L., & Mazzoleni, O. (2020) Sovereignist wine in populist bottles? An introduction. *European Politics and Society, 21*(2), 151-162.

Bornschier, S., & Kriesi, H. (2012) The populist right, the working class, and the changing face of class politics. In *Class politics and the radical right* (pp. 10-30). Routledge.

Bruno, V.A. (2022) 'Centre right? What centre right?'Italy's right-wing coalition: Forza Italia's political 'heritage' and the mainstreaming of the far right. In *Populism and Far-Right. Trends in Europe* (pp. 163-195). Polidemos-EDUCatt.

Campati, A. (2022) *La distanza democratica. Corpi intermedi e rappresentanza politica*. Vita e Pensiero.

Capoccia, G. (2024) 'French elections: did Macron's gamble pay off?', *The Loop*. Available at: https://theloop.ecpr.eu/french-elections-did-macrons-gamble-pay-off/ (Accessed: 19 July 2024).

Caterina, D., Cozzolino, A., Gasseau, G. & Monaco, D. (forthcoming) 'A lasting legacy? A critical political economy perspective on Berlusconism and its afterlives'. In A. Bieler & Maccarrone V. (Eds.). *Critical political economy of the European polycrisis*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

Finchelstein, F. (2019) *From fascism to populism in history*. University of California Press.

Forti, S. (2021) Extrema derecha 2.0. Qué es y cómo combatirla. Siglo XXI.

Forti, S. (2022) 'Estrema destra 2.0: dalla normalizzazione alla lotta per l'egemonia', Le Grand Continent, 24 June. Available at: https://legrandcontinent.eu/it/2022/06/24/estrema-destra-2-0-dalla-normalizzazione-alla-lotta-per-legemonia/ (Accessed: 19 July 2024).

Freeden, M. (2013) 'The Morphological Analysis of Ideology'. In M. Freeden, L. Tower Sargent & M. Stears (Eds.). *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies* (pp. 115-141). Oxford University Press.

Giubilei, F. (2020) *Giorgia Meloni: La rivoluzione dei conservatori*. Giubilei Regnani editore.

Gressani, G. (2022) 'Giorgia Meloni does not represent the return of fascism, but the emergence of a new political model', *Le Monde*, 27 September. Available at: https://www.lemonde.fr/en/opinion/article/-2022/09/27/giorgia-meloni-does-not-represent-the-return-of-fascism-but-the-emergence-of-a-new-political-model_5998321_23.html (Accessed: 19 July 2024).

Hanley, S. (2020) Getting the right right: redefining the centre-right in post-communist Europe. In *Centre-right parties in post-communist East-Central Europe* (pp. 9-27). Routledge.

Ignazi, P. (2014) The extreme right in Europe: a survey. In *The Revival of Right Wing Extremism in the Nineties* (47-64). Routledge.

Improta, M., & Trastulli, F. (2022) 'Anatomia del «destra-centro» italiano', *Analisi*, Settembre 2022, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. Available at: https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/rom/19555.pdf (Accessed: 19 July 2024).

Ioanes, E. (2024) 'France's elections showed a polarized country. France held back the far right. No one knows what's next', *Vox*, 9 July. Available at: https://www.vox.com/explainers/359421/france-elections-new-popular-front-macron-le-pen-melenchon (Accessed: 19 July 2024).

Jupskås, A.R., & Leidig, E. (2020) *Knowing what's (far) right.* C-REX – Center for Research on Extremism, University of Oslo. Available at: https://www.sv.uio.no/c-rex/english/groups/compendium/c-rex-compendium-print-version.pdf (Accessed: 19 July 2024).

Levenson, M. (2024) 'What we know about the assassination attempt against Trump', The New York Times, 18 July. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/article/shooting-trump-rally.html (Accessed: 19 July 2024).

Maglione, G. (2021) Techno-sovereignism: the political rationality of contemporary Italian populism. *Theory and Society*, *50*(5), 791-813.

Mudde, C. (2004) The populist zeitgeist. *Government and opposition*, *39*(4), 541-563.

Mudde, C. (Ed.). (2016) *The populist radical right: A reader.* Taylor & Francis.

Mudde, C. (2019) *The far right today.* John Wiley & Sons.

Musella, F. (2020) The personalization of Italian political parties in three acts. *Contemporary Italian Politics*, *12*(4), 411-424.

Orsina, G. (2023) *Il berlusconismo nella storia d'Italia.* Feltrinelli.

Palano, D. (2021) Inventing "populism": Notes for the genealogy of a paranoid concept. *Genealogy*, *6*(1), 2.

Palano, D. (Ed.). (2024) *Il futuro della democrazia italiana Politica e società al tempo del governo Meloni*. Polidemos-EDUCatt.

Pirro, A.L. (2023) Far right: The significance of an umbrella concept. *Nations and Nationalism*, *29*(1), 101-112.

Rydgren, J. (Ed.). (2018) *The Oxford handbook of the radical right*. Oxford University Press.

Scopelliti, A., & Bruno, V.A. (2022) Restoration of Sovereignty? Interpretative Lectures of Sovereignism beyond Nationalism and Populism. *Soft Power*, *9*(18), 22-22.

Vampa, D. (2023) *Brothers of Italy: A New Populist Wave in an Unstable Party System*. Springer Nature.

Wax, E. (2024) 'Who won, who lost and who screwed up in the EU election', Politico, 10 June. Available at: https://www.politico.eu/article/european-election-results-emmanuel-macron-ursula-von-der-leyen-giorgia-meloni-far-right-socialists-peter-magyar-roberta-metsola-olaf-scholz-greens-viktor-orban-matteo-salvini/ (Accessed: 19 July 2024).

Fratelli d'Italia's Sovereignism and Conservativism. Notes on Ambiguity and Normalisation

VALERIO ALFONSO BRUNO[1]

Abstract. The chapter focuses on Fratelli d'Italia's sovereignism and conservativism. In particular, how those two ideologies have been used, often in an ambiguous way, to frame a normalisation process that aims at balancing continuity and distance from the party's neo and post-fascist roots. The party's symbol, the tricolour flame, is very emblematic in this regard. In the chapter, we namely argue how such ambiguity, far from being merely symbolic or preserving a tradition, characterises the policies of the current Meloni government both at the domestic and international levels. Almost two years after taking office, the government has embarked on a path of minimal friction with the institutions of the EU, its regional and international allies (NATO, in particular), alongside financial markets. The path of seeking moderation at the international/regional level has rarely been abandoned. In contrast, the government led by Meloni has often been radical at the domestic level, pursuing both radical policies based on symbolic "culture wars" to polarise the Italian electorate and more structural and in-depth reforms, such as the constitutional reform of *premierato.*

Keywords: Fratelli d'Italia; Meloni; sovereignism; conservativism; ideology; ambiguity.

---

[1] Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, valerioalfonso.bruno@unicatt.it.

Introduction

In a short opinion piece appeared in 2021 on the topic of the historical and ideological roots of *Fratelli d'Italia* (FdI), Bruno, Downes, and Scopelliti rhetorically asked the following: "Post-Fascism in Italy: 'So Why This Flame, Mrs. Giorgia Meloni?'" (Bruno et al, 2021). The flame referred to by the authors is the *fiamma tricolore* (tricolour flame), a well-known neofascist symbol. Originally, the *fiamma tricolore* was the symbol of the *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (MSI), established on 26 December 1946 by Giorgio Almirante and other veterans of the short-lived Italian Social Republic (*Repubblica Sociale Italiana*, from 23 September 1943 to 25 April 1945). The symbol has always been evocative and powerful, passing through the years and the minds of the Italian electorate, similarly to the crusader shield of the Christian Democracy party and the hammer and sickle of the Communist party. That logo is indeed recognised by the Italian electorate as a "tacit connection with the fascist regime while referring to the 'cult of the dead' and the funerary imagery providing a potential space both for memory investments and emotional projections" (Bruno et al, 2021).

After almost eighty years, the *fiamma tricolore* is still there, appearing on the party logo(s) used by FdI. For instance, on the occasion of the election for the 2024 European Parliament, it appears right in the middle of FdI's registered logo, below the names of the party leader Giorgia Meloni and of the party itself, between the writings "*sovranisti*" and "*conservatori*" (figure 1):

Figure 1: The registered logo of FdI for the European Parliament election of June 2024. It displays the name of Giorgia Meloni upward, with the classic logo of FdI with the *fiamma tricolore* in the centre. On the left, it states "*sovranisti*", while on the left, it displays "*conservatori*". Source: https://www.fratelli-italia.it/logoeuropee/

When asked about the possibility of removing that symbol from its logo, Meloni and other FdI fellows have been very clear on their contrariety: the flame represents continuity with MSI and AN (Fatto Quotidiano, 2024). Yet, FdI has often claimed to be a post-ideological or even non-ideological party (Newth, 2024). In this sense, ambiguity is an element deeply present in the party, as it will now be argued.

2. *On the ambiguity of Fratelli d'Italia*

Ambiguity pertains to FdI's entire historical and ideological past, from the MSI to *Alleanza Nazionale* (AN), and this has been particularly visible since the Fiuggi turning point. In this sense, the "balancing game" of distancing the party from its (neo)fascism while, at the same time, remaining in that grey area composed of illiberal and extreme-right constituencies must be analysed.

The majority of the works available on FdI agree the party comes from a specific tradition, usually referred to as "post-fascist", a label often structured as a hendiadys, i.e. post-fascist/neo-fascist (see, for instance, Angelucci et al, 2024; Vampa, 2023). Some scholars, however, use it to describe FdI's specific and unique roots in the MSI. Newth (2022) and Newth and Maccaferri (2022), starting from the political history of the *Lega Nord* to the current *Lega*, argue post-fascism as a *sui generis* political logic used by far-right parties and leaders, thus not only by FdI, in order to allow the mainstreaming/normalisation of fascist and neo-fascist ideas and theories while at the same time defining themselves as "post-ideological": fascism as an ideology belonging to the past and not existing anymore. Other scholars prefer to abandon this specific debate, rather preferring to talk of a-fascism (Vassallo and Vignati, 2023). In this sense, Vassallo and Vignati (2023) consider FdI a fully-fledged conservative party with some nationalist features and some excessive tolerance of conspiracy theories. Vampa (2023) speaks of post-fascist tradition upon which has been built a prismatic sovereignist ideology alongside key elements of the populist radical right, such as nativism and authoritarianism; Broder (2023) describes FdI as the "grandchildren of Mussolini", arguing the MSI up till the *svolta di Fiuggi* represented a neo-fascist party while FdI itself could be best described as post-fascist[2].

[2] In particular, Broder has pointed at the historical process of gradual equivalence, implemented over decades by far-right actors in Italy, between anti-fascist resistance and fascism, with the relative trivialisation of the first in favour of the second, that has allowed a party to define itself as conservative while clearing and normalising characters, slogans and theories (once real taboos). The distancing from fascism and neo-fascism by FdI through

Broder (2023) also contends that FdI managed, over the past ten years, to skilfully construct an organisational and political device capable of thoroughly clearing several fascist and neo-fascist tropes. These have been cleverly "sold" as conservative and post-fascist (in the sense of post-ideological), bringing to completion a long process which had in Berlusconism a crucial moment. The process aims at "pacification" or, in other words, at equating anti-fascist resistance with (neo-)fascism through a trivialisation of the former. This process, a sort of "conflict over memory", is, according to Broder, more about the present than about the past, as it fits into global dynamics and trends that touch on contexts that it would be presumptuous to deem solely Italian or European, as Trumpism and the case of Bolsonaro in Brazil have shown in recent times. According to Newth (2024), those narratives are now mainstream and hegemonic as the defence of the white people (often defined as the "silent majority"), which would be at risk of ethnic substitution plan, the protection of the traditional family and lifestyle by the unique and globalist thinking of the left-wing elites, the rescue of overtaxed small businesses against the threat of the conspiracies by the international finance or the invasions of the immigrants. Thus, FdI would "oscillate" between different possible postures and ideological characterisations, particularly between conservativism and (populist) radical-right or between radical-

---

the articulation of the post-fascist logic or that of the conservative party did not determine a proper and univocal abandonment of the relative semantic sphere of that tradition, which in any case must in a certain way be continuously nourished. In synthesis, in the category of post-fascism fall several important elements, which often are combined ambiguously.

right and extreme-right positions. Likewise, Meloni's party would be distinguished by the mix of old and new (Vampa, 2023; Ventura, 2022) for being a "rooted newcomer" (Baldini et al, 2023) that is, however, grafted into a very well-defined tradition (Vassallo and Vignati, 2023) and also for being able to pursue, in parallel, a radical path sympathetic of conspiracists and *nostalgici*, or even radicalisation (Donà, 2022; Puleo and Piccolino, 2022) along with a more institutional and reassuring path (particularly vis-à-vis the EU institutions, NATO and other allies, the financial markets, etc.) that it seeks to define somehow as conservative (Giubilei, 2020)[3].

At this point, we may ask if, in its first decade (2012-2022), FdI has gone through a path of moderation or it has radicalised, and if something similar can be said for Italy's right-wing bloc as a whole. Donà (2022) argues that the party, starting from a more moderate stance soon after its foundation in late 2012, embarked on a different path towards national conservatism and progressive radicalisation, while Castelli Gattinara and Froio (2021) consider this as a process concerning the right-wing bloc as a whole. Among others, Albertazzi et al (2021) have argued that these trends concern more a reshuffle of power and roles within the Italian right-wing camp than an actual process of radicalisation of Italian politics. Puleo and Piccolino (2022) remark on the discontinuity associated with FdI, with the party having accomplished a major ideolog-

[3] The difficulty in distinguishing elements of right-wing extremism from more "mainstream" elements, albeit always marked by populist, radical, and illiberal tendencies, is an inherent feature of the concept of "far-right", as Pirro (2022) has pointed out concerning the pros and cons of this latter term.

ical rebranding, positioning itself as radically different from the mainstream centre-right and the post-fascist tradition of the Italian Right. Vampa (2023), in particular, has reiterated the support for the "inclusion-moderation" thesis convincingly, yet pointing out that the incursions of populist parties, including FdI, have been profoundly affecting the very quality of democracy in Italy, which now appears more fragile than ever, adding, in particular, the worrying phenomenon of abstentionism[4]. Bruno, Downes and Scopelliti (2024) have argued that although some critical elements of radicalism have been present within Italy's right-wing bloc since Silvio Berlusconi's beginning of the political journey in 1994, starting from 2015-2018, the bloc has become more radicalised.

May we say that, with FdI, there is a return of ideology during a historical period that is now considered post-ideological? Indeed, FdI and its ideological frame of reference fits within a broad process that is often referred to as "cultural wars" and "cultural backlash" to certain types of neoliberal policies (see, for example, Anselmi, 2023; Di Gregorio, 2019; Diletti and Mongiardo, 2022). Meloni and her FdI fellows have often proudly exhibited coherence while in opposition, as during the Draghi executive in 2021-2022. The Meloni government often backs its decisions in terms of policies as deriving from a "political government", and its values as the values of a well distinct political culture, well distinct political and historical roots, even when asked to remove the *fiamma tricolore* from its logo (Bruno et al, 2021; Fatto Quotidiano, 2022). There is, of course, pragmatism in FdI, yet it is quite different from mere opportunism.

[4] We may add Italy's anomalous continual recourse to technocratic executives (see Giannone and Cozzolino, 2023).

3. *Between radicalism and moderation?*

Almost two years after taking office, the Meloni government has embarked on a path of minimal friction with the European Union (EU) institutions, its regional and international allies (NATO, in particular), and global financial markets. The path of seeking moderation and low profile at the international/regional level has rarely been abandoned. This follows the agenda proposed and implemented by Italy's previous government led by Mario Draghi (Albertazzi and Vampa, 2024; Bruno and Fazio, 2023; Vampa, 2023). When the path of moderation was abandoned, the government quickly retraced on its steps, as in the case of the famous one-time tax on Italian banks' extra-profits in August 2023, which provoked turmoil on the country's benchmark stock market index, heavily composed of banks, and great disappointment by the European Central Bank (ECB) and the European Commission (EC). To complement moderation, particularly at the European level, FdI has been extremely active in crediting itself as a possible mediator between two different political sides in Europe: the populist radical right and the far-right on the one hand, and the moderate pro-European right, usually falling under the European People's Party (EPP), on the other hand.

In contrast to such "moderation" at the regional and international levels, the most right-wing government in Italy's republican history has often been radical at the domestic level in terms of both public narratives and policies. Domestically, the current Italian government has strategically pursued both: (a) radical and divisive policies based on symbolic "culture wars" to polarise the Italian electorate; (b) more structural and in-depth reforms, as the constitutional reform labelled "*premierato*" (Albertazzi and Vampa, 2024). We can provide some examples of relevant domestic policies already passed or in the pro-

cess of passing: the citizens' income (*reddito di cittadinanza*) supported in the past by the Five Star Movement was made the subject of significant restrictions, while there is a debate over the "*quota 103*" pension scheme; in the frame of the budget law (*legge di bilancio*), a tax amounting to 2.000 euros was introduced as a one-time fee for non-EU nationals so that they can take advantage of the national health care system; on illegal immigration, the government passed a law that tends to criminalise NGOs supporting illegal immigration; in the frame of judiciary reform (the so-called *riforma Nordio*), there are currently discussions on the downsizing of the crime of "abuse of office," wiretapping, and the introduction of new criminal offenses; the government wants to grant free access to counselling centres to anti-abortion organisations, tendentiously called "pro-life" or "pro-choice", and, more importantly, also intends to actively fund them with funds from the PNRR (*Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza*). However, the dossier on which the Meloni government has decided to take a big risk and bet heavily is the so-called "*premierato*" (Bruno, 2024) – a constitutional reform putting the credibility of this government particularly at stake. As Albertazzi and Vampa argue (2024), "[t]he government's plan to reform the Constitution and introduce the direct election of the prime minister – a provision that does not exist anywhere else in the world – is a case in point. The governing majority is pushing through this reform amidst criticism that it would endanger the checks and balances existing in the country. More specifically, it would weaken the role of the President, a crucial guarantor in Italy that the Constitution is constantly upheld." In exchange for this crucial reform, Salvini would demand the so-called *autonomia differenziata* ("differentiated autonomy") in return, which involves defining understandings between the state and those regions that seek differentiated autonomy in the 23 subjects listed in the measure,

including health protection. We also find education, sports, environment, energy, transportation, culture, and foreign trade among the other subjects. Limiting ourselves to the public policies mentioned above, it is possible to converge on the observation that the current Italian executive is playing a game that is anything but moderate domestically.

4. *Sovereignism and conservatism*

As mentioned above, FdI's official logo for the 2024 EP election carries the terms "sovereignist" and "conservatives." What is thus the sovereignism and conservatism that FdI refers to, and, most importantly, where does the need to inscribe them in the logo come from?

FdI's sovereignism is not just about the instrumental frame of the "Nation taking back control over sovereignty and power" or a sort of nationalism for the EU sui generis framework. Instead, it is an ideology immersed in the past that emphasises a "nostalgic return" to sovereignty when the nation, in this case Italy, supposedly had control over its politics. The other side of the coin here is ressentiment, alongside victimisation, vis-à-vis sources "threatening" to take powers away from the nation. The hostile entities may assume a variety of forms: supranational institutions and bureaucracies such as the European Commission (EC); global financial markets increasingly controlling the nation's public debt; the Left and the technocratic elites, who would continually plot to control the government without going to elections or even overthrow governments

democratically elected by the people; or globalisation, understood as a single progressive thought directed at erasing Western culture, its values and traditions[5]. Beyond the considerations on the nature of FdI's sovereignist ideology, the fact that the party opted to even inscribe it in the logo for elections at the European level should provide some food for thought.

On the other hand, the conservativism of FdI is a mature fruit, a "landing place" this party came to only in recent years. If the elements of the sovereignist ideology are *in nuce* already as original hallmarks of FdI (partially overlapping with the debate, which we will see later, on post-fascism and neo-fascism), conservativism rather relates to FdI's recent search for "rebranding". Not surprisingly, FdI's conservatism can be understood as the natural end of the process of normalisation of the "Italian post-fascist right wing", started with the 1995 "*svolta di Fiuggi*"[6]. In this sense, FdI's conservativism, we argue, could be understood as the process of normalization of the post-fascist Right, started with the 1995 *svolta di Fiuggi*, inter-

[5] In fact, it is possible to say that through the sovereignist ideology the radical right has also incorporated the "classic" polemical goals of the radical left, such as globalisation.

[6] This event marked the transformation of the MSI, established in 1946 following the end of World War II, into *Alleanza Nazionale* (AN) under Gianfranco Fini's guidance. Fiuggi is a small town with a population of around ten thousand in the province of Frosinone, about seventy kilometres from Rome. It served as the venue for the final MSI national congress and the constituent congress of the newly-formed AN on January 27, 1995. In Fiuggi, the secretary of the emerging party declared an official separation from fascism and those ambiguities that had defined MSI in its earlier days. This shift signalled a move towards embracing a fully republican and democratic right-wing ideology and marked the official beginning of the post-fascism era (Bruno et al, 2024).

rupted by Fini's mistake of repudiating its roots and identity. Together, these two ideological and programmatic components, the sovereignist and the conservative, represent FdI's strategic "compromise", at the national and at the European/international level, between a more radical, belligerent and polemical soul (sovereignism) and the more conciliatory and moderate soul, an expression of "traditional" values.

a. Sovereignism

Now, we should focus more at length on these two elements. We can start with FdI's sovereignism. The theme of limited sovereignty lies at the heart of FdI's ideologies (Scopelliti and Bruno, 2023). Differently from populism, it does not emphasise the role of corrupt elites in taking away popular sovereignty but instead calls for greater centrality to be recovered through disintermediation from democratic institutions, primarily the parliament, and blank delegation to the leader of the day (the strongman with authoritarian traits), sovereignism focuses more sharply on the sovereignty of the nation, limited by constraints that would tend to be imposed from outside. The term "sovereignty" is to be understood here not in a precise and consistent way but rather as a more or less concrete and more or less idealised place and time in which the people and the nation considered themselves the holders of political power, having complete control over a given territory, its borders, policy-making, etc. In this sense, it is understandable how sovereignism develops in constant opposition to phenomena such as globalisation and Europeanisation, including their respective elites, which would have taken original sovereignty away from the people and the nation. The discourses presented by populism and sovereignism have, on closer inspection, fundamental points of contact, starting with the focus on cor-

rupt elites in cahoots with supranational institutions and bureaucracies or financial markets, seen as guilty of plundering sovereignty. Indeed, both sovereignism and populism frame their political discourse in terms of "reclaiming" lost sovereignty from globalised elites unconcerned about the people's needs, if not outright hostile to them. However, if in populism, the figure of the leader is that of a "spokesman" for popular demands and demands for the defence of the people, in the sovereignist narrative, the leader takes on demands for a return to sovereignty in the name of predominantly the nation, emphasising less strongly the role of the people.

Of course, in practice, it is understandable that, especially at the level of right-wing populism, there is much overlap between populist and sovereignist discourse (Basile and Mazzoleni, 2021; see especially Verzichelli, 2021). It is often impossible to separate the two positions regarding the approach and articulation of discourses, narratives, themes and, ultimately, ideologies. While it is undeniable that the bottom-up demands associated with sovereignism refer to a growing demand for sovereignty (vis-à-vis the summarily characterised globalisation, European Union or corrupt elites), these are undoubtedly traceable to some of the central themes of populism. We can say that what distinguishes sovereignty from populism, but also from nationalism, is the rather vague idea of restoring a lost sovereignty. Sovereignty has features in common with nationalism and populism, and unlike them, however, it emphasises a "return", even a vague one, to sovereignty located in the past (Bauman, 2017). The discourse framed by sovereignism also has some traits in common with populism. Both sovereignism and populism frame their political discourse in reclaiming lost sovereignty from globalised elites presumably insensitive to demands supposedly coming from the people (Scopelliti and Bruno, 2022, pp. 196-197).

Vampa (2023) emphasises the role of sovereignism concerning the ideological structure of the party. In particular, Vampa focuses at length on the relation between sometimes overlapping ideological features in FdI, including populism, right-wing nationalism and conservativism. Sovereignism, alongside nativism, authoritarianism, and populism, would form an ideological diamond (Vampa, 2023). He advances an interesting argument about specific ideological features in FdI and their articulation, suggesting that: "[t]he aim of the heirs of the MSI and AN was to (re-)launch a conservative rather than populist project, but this had to come to terms with a new political reality increasingly dominated by anti-elitist rhetoric and the centrality of the 'will of the people'. The concept of 'sovereignism' would thus enrich the nationalist tradition of the radical right with a new emphasis on the principle of 'popular re-empowerment' ('taking back control') that connects the people to the nation state". (Vampa, 2023, p. 16). And as Vampa adds on the linkages between populism, nationalism and sovereignism, in particular within the sui generis context provided by the EU: "[i]n the European context, the concept of national community can be used to challenge supranational integration processes [...]. Thus, populism, in addition to focusing on the domestic arena, tends to evolve into sovereignism when – combined with nativism and authoritarianism – it aims to assert the primacy of the national interest (emanation of the will of the people) against alleged global threats" (Vampa, 2023, pp. 17-18)[7].

[7] According to Vampa (2023, pp. 33-34) "the theme of sovereignism, linked to the assertion of people-based national primacy in the international context

As we have mentioned, the theme of "taking back control" to (a) the nation and (b) the people cannot be easily distinguished, making the task of identifying and isolating elements belonging to sovereignism and populism rather complex. If it is certainly true, like Vampa argues (2023, p. 127), that the EU, with its supranational features, is particularly relevant for this kind of ideology and discourses, that should not be limited to it. We simply need to consider the famous Trumpian slogan "MAGA", that is, Make America Great Again, as an important example of the ideology of "taking back control" and "popular re-empowerment". The themes of nostalgia and of the nation wanting to return to its "golden age", may it have actually happened or not, influence the discourse of this type of ideology, as some prominent sociologists have well understood, as Zygmunt Bauman (2017) and Colin Crouch (2019).

Scopelliti and Bruno (2022) argue that sovereignism has features in common with nationalism and populism and that, unlike these, it places its emphasis on a "return", even a vague one, to sovereignty placed in the past: in this sense, it is interesting the focus on some insight related to Bauman's notion of *retrotopia* as an "ideal shelter" situated in the past. What is important is not whether that past was really a place where the people or the nation possessed sovereignty (understood in the most generic sense) but rather the ability of the sovereignist leader to evoke a kind of

---

(particularly that of the EU), is present in all election documents submitted from 2013 to 2022. Yet FdI's Euroscepticism radicalised in 2014-2018 and then returned to more conciliatory positions from 2019. Moreover, sovereignism has a clear economic dimension that is expressed in a protectionist and at times strongly anti-globalist vision". See on this also the excellent works by Ivaldi and Mazzoleni (2020) and Mazzoleni and Ivaldi (2022).

nostalgia for a place and time. In this sense, it is understandable how much the ideology of sovereignism, if we want to speak of ideology, has elements in common with nationalism and populism (see on this Mueller and Heidelberger, 2020). In an article that appeared in 2019, Colin Crouch argued about pessimistic nostalgia and the role of the past:

> [i]t is fairly easy to explain why the early 21st century is becoming one of the periods in which pessimistic nostalgia is successfully weaponised, at least in the western world. First, the move of the advanced economies into post-industrialism has produced considerable upheaval, removing what seemed to have been certainties from many people's lives. While automation and robotisation are probably the main causes of the decline in industrial employment, globalisation has also been involved, which provides some useful 'foreigner' targets among both developing economies and immigrants. Second, the financial crisis of 2007-8 showed another dark side of the internationalisation of the economy, and suggested that public authorities were unable to keep economic life secure. Until that moment, even many people who might have felt left behind in various ways could at least count on becoming a little better off each year. That is no longer the case. Third, waves of immigrants and refugees coming into the western world from poorer countries have provided easy targets for those feeling a need to restrict access to the good things of life in a declining world. [...] These sources of insecurity and declining trust in the capacity of public authorities to ensure stability have appeared after a prolonged period of dominance by liberal attitudes, favouring the admission of various kinds of 'outsider': the formation of multicultural societies; the entry of women into spaces previously reserved to men; a growing role for international organisations in what many people had believed to be their 'sovereign' national affairs. (Crouch, 2019).

Alongside the weaponisation of pessimistic nostalgia, a key feature of sovereignism – and right-wing populism – is political victimisation and the "rhetoric of ressentiment" (Armaly and Enders, 2021; Kelly, 2020; Salmela and Von Scheve, 2017). In this sense, the role of emotional roots concerning perceived victimhood and ressentiment deserves more in-depth research. Just as in recent American politics, pessimistic nostalgia and political victimisation are key traits of FdI. We can now provide an example of that. At a rally in the Sicilian city of Catania on 29 August 2022, during the campaign for the vote for the general election of Italy, Meloni said: "I dream of a nation where people who for so many years had to keep their heads down, perhaps pretending that they thought differently, or else they would all be kicked out, can say how they think and not lose their jobs because of it!". And few moments later she added: "I am sorry, I always try to be more placid, when they then take pictures of me with swollen veins, but you know I am from the Garbatella [nda: a neighbourhood of Rome], every now and then the soul comes out." (You Tube, 2022). Now, beyond the many intended ambiguities of this passage, it is easy to note the role of political victimisation: the references to people allegedly having to "keep their heads down" or people who "cannot talk because otherwise they would lose their jobs."

b. Conservativism

Having analysed the role of sovereignism (and populism) in FdI's ideology, we now move to conservativism. As we have seen above, FdI's leader is currently chairing the European Conservatives and Reformists Party (ECR) (yet the latter term, quite eloquently, is rarely mentioned in FdI's communication). In the logo for the 2024 EP election, FdI decided to add "*conservatori*", alongside "*sovranisti*". Thus, we should now provide some definitions of "conservative" and also ask what FdI mean

by conservative ideology. In a lengthy interview appeared in January 2022 for the newspaper Tempi, Meloni stated:

> This is a time in which everything that defines us is under attack. The real clash today is between the globalist option and the identitarian and conservative option. [...] I think a party that manages to speak to all potential Italian conservatives is a majority party. I think the majority of Italians share the perimeter of reference values that Fratelli d'Italia brings forward. [...] To be conservative is to stand up for what you love, to stand up for who you are. If we did not live in this time, this should be considered a triviality. And instead, this defence today has become a priority, a revolution. Because this is a time in which everything that defines us is under attack. The real clash, today, is between the globalist option and the identitarian and conservative option. Globalism, to which the left has lent itself as an army, is an attempt to homogenise everything: peoples, traditions and roots, in the interest of big lobbies. The goal of homologation is the construction-perhaps in a laboratory-of a single human prototype, a single large consumer, a single marketable product.

The historian of political ideas Richard Bourke (2018) has written about how hard the task of defining conservativism is. Citing scholars like Noël O'Sullivan and John Greville Agard Pocock, he observes that "a general history of conservative doctrine could never be written since 'too many minds have been trying to "conserve" too many things for too many reasons'". And, he continues, "[t]here is an additional problem with the idea that conservatism simply conserves: as a definition, it captures everything and nothing. Just about every political programme is disposed to preserve something. Even anarchism aims to maintain its preferred values, if not the state as a vehicle to secure them. Moreover, if conservatism is defined in terms of the impulse to preserve, then conservative

movements dedicated to radical change are excluded. However, self-designating conservatives have often been revolutionary in temper."[8] (Bourke, 2018, p. 449).

We can relate tBourke's last passage to a book written in 2020 by Francesco Giubilei and titled *Giorgia Meloni. La rivoluzione dei conservatori.* According to Giubilei, the rising consensus of Giorgia Meloni and FdI in recent years is accompanied by a positioning of the party that, while holding firmly to its right-wing roots, embraced the conservative galaxy. The entry into the ECR European group and Meloni's subsequent election as the president of the ECR marked the beginning of a new political season for the construction of a great Italian and European conservative right. "The Conservative Revolution" thus follows Meloni's own political journey – from militancy to her role as Minister for Youth (2008-2011) to become one of the most supported political leaders in contemporary Italy. Giubilei argues that Meloni has actualised the lesson of Tatarella by expanding her party and opening up to new worlds without forgetting her origins.

[8] Bourke also uses Freeden's morphological approach in relation to the conservative ideology, arguing that: "Michael Freeden has written that conservatism has basic 'morphological' features. What he means is that the ideology can be identified in terms of its principles, or what Freeden calls its 'core concept'. This ultimately comprises a dedication to 'gradual and organic change'. The claim here is that conservatism is not merely a disposition. It is certainly not reducible to a desire to conserve. Instead, it involves an intellectual commitment to the prudent management of change. Yet patently this criterion applies to reforming liberalism and socialism. In each case an effort is made to ensure that political change is made safe. This might require it to be gradual, or even organic, in nature – if 'organic' implies the pursuit of change by capitalising on embedded institutions and values." (Freeden, 1996: 333-336).

Giuseppe "Pinuccio" Tatarella was among the founders of *Alleanza Nazionale* and a member of the parliament for two decades, first from the ranks of the MSI and then in Fini's party; in 1994 he served as deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Telecommunications in Berlusconi's first government. A skilled mediator, Tatarella is remembered as the symbol of a new *destra di governo*, "normalised" and "moderate". He was among the ideologues of the "*svolta di Fiuggi",* ending the isolation of the right, which had been kept on the margins of democratic life, believing the time had come for the great conservative right to arise. This renewal was to be brought about by the new right, the protagonist of the great global transformation, which would change the traditional order imposed by the "iron curtain" and bloc politics. The birth of AN, of the "*Polo delle Libertà*" as a coalition and its ensuing victory in the 1994 general election paved the way for that development bringing, three decades later, a figure like Meloni to become Italy's Prime Minister.

According to the "conservative revolution" account, therefore, the conservative project would be nothing more and nothing less than the continuation of a "normal post-fascist right-" process, undertaken as early as in the late 1980s and then concretised with the Fiuggi turn in 1995. However, Fini would have made the mistake of forgetting the origins of this project, slipping because of what Meloni (2021) calls the "*sirene del pensiero unico*"[9] – pushing him towards the Left and globalisation to veer toward a modern right, guilty of repudiating its past.

---

[9] On the use of "*pensiero unico*" and other keywords used by populist radical right parties in Italy, including "*globalizzazione*","*globalizzazione forzata*" and "*politicamente corretto*", see Bruno (2022).

5. *Conclusions*

In conclusion, we take the move from some of Freeden's considerations on political ideology. Freeden (1998) has argued that ideology, as a set of ideas and attitudes shaping understandings or misconceptions of the social and political world, is key to justify a collective action to preserve or change political practices and institutions. Thus, the concept of ideology (Freeden 1996; 1998) is split almost irreconcilably between two major meanings. The first is pejorative, denoting particular, historically distorted (political) thought that reinforces certain relationships of domination. The second is a non-pejorative assertion about the different families of cultural symbols and ideas human beings employ in perceiving, comprehending and evaluating social and political realities in general, often within a systemic framework. Traditional definition of ideologies, which sees the latter as "static belief systems" and instead bases the analysis on modern semantics. Just like languages, ideologies consist of certain concepts whose meaning may change and evolve over time. The specific relations between ideological concepts may be analysed by being set in their respective semantic fields. Each ideology may be seen as having both "core" and "peripheral" (or secondary) concepts. Concepts may gain or lose importance over time.

By studying the conceptual evolution of ideologies, Freeden observes that the relative "political success" of an ideology depends on its ability to impose the belief that its own conceptual definitions are the "correct ones."[10] In this sense, Italy may be considered as an extremely successful case

[10] On this see also Anselmi (2023).

of populist radical right parties (PRRPs) and far-right parties imposing their values and beliefs as the new "common sense"[11], alongside a gradual but constant change of the political and institutional of the system *from within*. As Albertazzi and Vampa (2024) recently argued, "[r]esearch on democratic backsliding highlights the fact that, once in power, populist radical right leaders can bring about systemic shifts gradually and incrementally, almost imperceptibly. It took more than a decade of uninterrupted power for Viktor Orbán to implement his radical and authoritarian agenda. Hence, while it may be true that there has been no backsliding in Italy so far, it is also the case that Meloni has been in post for less than two years." Similarly, Bruno (2023), commenting on the late 2023 elections held in Argentina and the Netherlands, has warned that it is not enough to focus political analysis on the electoral performance of the far right, as is often the case. Instead, it is essential to add the awareness that, beyond the more or less positive results at the ballot box, the political fact is the transformation of a political system "from within." In this respect, liberal democracies have recently often been referred to as forms of government with adequate "antibodies" to deal with possible democratic backsliding or regression. The infiltration of fundamental far-right ideological elements into mainstream politics, to the point where they are seen as somewhat "normal," is a significant risk. This shift encompasses extreme positions ranging from nativism to white supremacy and from conspiracy theories to anti-Semitism and

[11] On common sense, cultural hegemony and the far-right political discourse in Italy, Newth (2022, 2024), Newth and Maccaferri (2022) and Broder (2023).

Islamophobia. There is a worrying possibility that an event in the coming years could provide fertile ground for an outbreak of violence fuelled by right-wing extremist groups. In this sense, to return to the antibody metaphor, it is worth asking whether today's liberal democracies are capable of recognising the increasingly normalised features of right-wing extremism as pathogenic and foreign bodies.

By way of conclusion, could we thus say that the whole debate about ideological party roots (fascist, post-fascist, neo-fascist) is pointless? Or is the threat of democratic backsliding or models of illiberal democracy without any foundation? In a brilliant op-ed that appeared on *El Pais* in mid-February 2024, Albertazzi and Vampa argued that beyond the interpretations that insist on fascist/neo-fascist roots and the risk of democratic backsliding, and those that, on the contrary, would indicate great moderation. In their words:

> Research on democratic backsliding highlights the fact that, once in power, populist radical right leaders can bring about systemic shifts gradually and incrementally, almost imperceptibly. It took more than a decade of uninterrupted power for Viktor Orbán to implement his radical and authoritarian agenda. Hence, while it may be true that there has been no backsliding in Italy so far, it is also the case that Meloni has been in post for less than two years. The government's plan to reform the Constitution and introduce the direct election of the prime minister – a provision that does not exist anywhere else in the world – is a case in point. The governing majority is pushing through this reform amidst criticism that it would endanger the checks and balances existing in the country. More specifically, it would weaken the role of the President, a crucial guarantor in Italy that the Constitution is constantly upheld. Moreover, beneath the surface of what seems to be a shift to the centre, some tensions can be identified between Meloni and her party, and also between domes-

> tic and international positions. While Meloni now presents herself as a figure of continuity with past governments by relinquishing most of her past radical demands, notable members of her party have continued to openly embrace less moderate positions. (Albertazzi and Vampa, 2024)

References

Albertazzi, D. and Vampa, D. (2024) 'Playing Both Sides at Once: Giorgia Meloni in Government'. *El Pais*. Available at: https://agendapublica.elpais.com/noticia/19071/playing-both-sides-once-giorgia-meloni-government.

Albertazzi, D., Bonansinga, D., and Zulianello, M. (2021) 'The right-wing alliance at the time of the Covid-19 pandemic: all change?'. *Contemporary Italian Politics*, *13*(2), pp. 181-195.

Angelucci, D., Baldini G., and Soare, S. (2024) 'Fratelli d'Italia, radici e dinamiche di un successo annunciato'. In A. Chiaramonte and L. De Sio (Eds.). *Un polo solo. Le elezioni politiche del 2022*. Bologna: Il Mulino.

Anselmi, M. (2023) *Ideologie politiche*. Milano: Mondadori Università

Armaly, M.T., & Enders, A.M. (2021) ''Why me?' The role of perceived victimhood in American politics'. *Political Behavior*, pp. 1-27.

Baldini, G., Tronconi, F. & Angelucci, D. (2023) 'Yet Another Populist Party? Understanding the Rise of Brothers of Italy'. *South European Society and Politics*, pp. 1-21.

Basile and O. Mazzoleni (Eds.) (2012) Sovereignism and Populism. Citizens, Voters and Parties in Western European Democracies. London: Routledge.

Bauman, Z. (2017) *Retrotopia*. London: Polity Press.

Bruno, V.A., & Fazio, F. (2023) 'Italian Governments and Political Parties Vis-a-Vis the War in Ukraine'. In Mihr, A. and Pierobon, C.

(Eds.), *Polarization, Shifting Borders and Liquid Governance: Studies on Transformation and Development in the OSCE Region* (pp. 265-283). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland.

Bruno, V.A., Downes, J.F. and Scopelliti, A. (2021) 'Post-Fascism in Italy: 'So Why This Flame, Mrs. Giorgia Meloni?''. *Culturico*. Available at: https://culturico.com/2021/11/12/post-fascism-in-italy-so-why-this-flame-mrs-giorgia-meloni/.

Bruno, V.A., Downes, J.F. and Scopelliti, A. (2024) *The Rise of the Radical Right in Italy. A new balance of Power in the Right-wing Camp.* Ibidem Verlag/Columbia University Press.

Bruno, V.A. (2024, 25 June) Italy: a 'post-fascist' assault on democratic checks. *Social Europe*. Available at: https://www.socialeurope.eu/italy-a-post-fascist-assault-on-democratic-checks.

Bruno, V.A. (2023, 4 December) Far-Right Triumphs in Argentina and The Netherlands Highlight Systemic Risks to Democracies. *OxPol – The Oxford University Political Blog*. Available at: https://blog.politics.ox.ac.uk/far-right-triumphs-in-argentina-and-the-netherlands-highlight-systemic-risks-to-democracies/.

Bourke, R. (2018) 'What is conservatism? History, ideology and party'. *European Journal of Political Theory, 17*(4), pp. 449-475.

Broder, D. (2023) Mussolini's Grandchildren: Fascism in Contemporary Italy. London: Pluto Press.

Castelli Gattinara, P., and Froio, C. (2021) 'Italy: the Mainstream Right and its Allies, 1994-2018'. In T. Bale and C. Rovira Kaltwasser (Eds.) *Riding the Populist Wave. Europe's Mainstream Right in Crisis.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 170-192.

Crouch, C. (2019) The 'left behind' and pessimistic nostalgia, *Medium*, 3 September 2019. Available at https://medium.com/whose-society-whose-cohesion/the-left-behind-and-pessimistic-nostalgia-d5828833c280.

Di Gregorio, L. (2019) *Demopatia: sintomi, diagnosi e terapie del malessere democratico*. Soveria Mannelli: Rubettino.

Diletti, M., & Mongiardo, M. (2022) 'La polarizzazione ideologica negli Stati Uniti, fra americanismo e guerre culturali'. *Quaderni di Teoria Sociale, 1*(2), pp. 23-23.

Donà, A. (2022) 'The rise of the Radical Right in Italy: the case of Fratelli d'Italia'. *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 27 (5), pp. 775-794.

(Il) Fatto Quotidiano (2022, 12 August). Liliana Segre e Pd chiedono a Meloni di togliere la fiamma tricolore dal simbolo di Fdi: "Partiamo dai fatti, non dalle parole". Available at: https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2022/08/12/liliana-segre-e-pd-chiedono-a-meloni-di-togliere-la-fiamma-tricolore-dal-simbolo-di-fdi-partiamo-dai-fatti-non-dalle-parole/6760622/.

(Il) Fatto Quotidiano (2024, 31 May). Meloni: "La fiamma nel simbolo di Fdi? Continuità con il Movimento sociale e An". Available at: https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2024/05/31/meloni-la-fiamma-nel-simbolo-di-fdi-continuita-con-il-movimento-sociale-e-an/7570035/.

Freeden, M. (1996) *Ideologies and Political Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Freeden, M. (1998) Ideology. In *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy Online*. London: Routledge.

Freeden, M. (2013) 'The Morphological Analysis of Ideology'. In M. Freeden, L. Tower Sargent & M. Stears (Eds.). *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies* (pp. 115-141). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Giannone, D., and Cozzolino, A. (2023) *La democrazia dei tecnocrati: Discorsi e politiche dei tecnici al governo in Italia*. Milano: Mimesis.

Giubilei, F. (2020) *Giorgia Meloni. La rivoluzione dei conservatori*. Roma: Giubilei Regnani.

Ivaldi, G., and Mazzoleni, O. (2020) 'Economic populism and sovereignism: the economic supply of European radical right-wing populist parties'. *European Politics and Society* 21 (2), pp. 202-218.

Kelly, C.R. (2020) 'Donald J. Trump and the rhetoric of ressentiment'. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, *106*(1), pp. 2-24.

Mazzoleni, O., & Ivaldi, G. (2022) 'Economic populist sovereignism and electoral support for radical right-wing parties'. *Political Studies* 70 (2), pp. 304-326.

Meloni, G. (2021) *Io sono Giorgia. Le mie radici, le mie idee*. Milano: Rizzoli.

Mudde, C. (2007) *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mueller, S., and Heidelberger, A. (2020) 'Should we stay or should we join? 30 years of Sovereignism and direct democracy in Switzerland'. *European Politics and Society*, 21(2), pp. 182-201.

Newth, G. (2022) Matteo Salvini, Giorgia Meloni, and 'Post-Fascism' as Political Logic. *Political Studies Association Blog*. From https://www.psa.ac.uk/psa/news/matteo-salvini-giorgia-meloni-and-%E2%80%98post-fascism%E2%80%99-political-logic.

Newth, G. (2024) 'From Common Sense to Faith: Matteo Salvini's normalisation of far right ideology via social media (2018-2023)'. In V.A. Bruno (Ed.) (2024). *On Tradition, Common Sense and Conspiracies Strategies and Insights of the Contemporary Far Right*. Polidemos EduCatt (pp. 63-88).

Newth, G. and M. Maccaferri (2022) 'From performative antifascism to post-fascism: the Lega (Nord)'s political discourse in historical context'. *Journal of Political Ideologies*. DOI: 10.1080/13569317.2022.2138296.

Nölke, A. (2017) 'Financialisation as the core problem for "Social Europe"'. *Revista de Economia Mondial*, 46, pp. 27-47.

Nölke, A. (2020) *Financialization and the crisis of democracy*. London: Routledge.

Pirro, A.L. (2023) 'Far right: The significance of an umbrella concept'. *Nations and Nationalism*, 29(1), pp. 101-112.

Puleo, L. and Piccolino, G. (2022) 'Back to the post-fascist past or landing in the populist radical right? The brothers of Italy between continuity and change'. *South European Society & Politics*, pp. 1-25.

Salmela, M., & Von Scheve, C. (2017) 'Emotional roots of right-wing political populism'. *Social Science Information*, *56*(4), pp. 567-595.

Scopelliti, A. and Bruno, V.A. (2023) 'Restoration of Sovereignty? Interpretative Lectures of Sovereignism beyond Nationalism and Populism'. *Soft Power* 9(2), pp. 191-211.

Vampa, D. (2023) *Brothers of Italy: A New Populist Wave in an Unstable Party System*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Vassallo, S., and Vignati, R. (2023) *Fratelli di Giorgia. Il partito della destra nazional-conservatrice*. Bologna: Il Mulino.

Ventura, S. (2022) *Giorgia Meloni e Fratelli d'Italia. Un partito personalizzato tra destra estrema e destra radicale*. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Italia. Available at: https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/rom/19659.pdf

Verzichelli, L., (2021) 'Conclusions. The populism-sovereignism linkage: findings, theoretical implications and a new research agenda'. In L. Basile and O. Mazzoleni, eds., *Sovereignism and Populism. Citizens, Voters and Parties in Western European Democracies* (108-120). London: Routledge.

You Tube (2022, 29 August). Meloni: "Io ci provo ad essere più pacata, ma vengo dalla Garbatella". Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0_dKCy2Orb0.

An Italian Thatcherism, at Last? Meloni Government and the Analysis of the Far-Right in Power

ADRIANO COZZOLINO[1]

Abstract. This chapter provides a diachronic comparison between the governments led by Margaret Thatcher in England and the current government under Giorgia Meloni in Italy. Through the qualitative method of historical analogy, this study examines some of the key interpretations of Thatcherism – particularly at the ideological, policy, and consensus levels – in order to develop novel insights to frame some of the fundamental aspects of the ideology and policies of the Meloni government. This work argues that these two cases are examples of the connection between conservative ideology and neoliberalism. Finally, this study aims to provide a possible analytical framework for future research concerning the far-right in government in terms of consensus, ideology and policy, namely several crucial dimensions to assess the capacity of duration and long-lasting impact of the far-right hegemony.

Keywords: Thatcher; Thatcherism; Meloni; far-right; neoliberalism; conservative ideology.

[1] Università della Campania "L. Vanvitelli", adriano.cozzolino@unicampania.it.

Introduction

On 22 October 2022, Giorgia Meloni was sworn in by the President of the Republic, Sergio Mattarella, as Prime Minister. This oath contains a double first time. The first time for a woman to become Prime Minister in Italy and the first time for a "post-fascist" party (Bruno and Downes, 2020, 2022; Puleo and Piccolino, 2022; Donà, 2022; Baldini, Tronconi and Angelucci, 2022; Vampa, 2023), namely *Brothers of Italy* (Fratelli d'Italia), to be the leading force within the government coalition. Enough to attract scholarly attention and, more broadly, to try to understand the pathway that has led such a political force to be the main party in Italy while also analysing its policy and political economy programme.

However, this chapter accomplishes neither of the goals mentioned above, namely the analysis of how Giorgia Meloni managed to become Prime Minister or the policy programme of her government. The essay approaches instead the question of the far-right currently in power in Italy from the backdoor. The aim is to set out a possible *analytical framework* for future research to understand the consensus and praxis of the far-right in power. In turn, this is achieved through a diachronic analysis of two right-wing governments: Thatcher's government in England throughout the 1980s and Meloni's current government in Italy. As regards the methodology and research process, the paper relies on the method of historical analogy – in particular as developed by Mark Kornprobst (2007; Almagisti, Baccetti, Graziano, 2018; Ferrara, 2021) – and uses it to develop a comparison between the two cases introduced above of far-right in power. As we shall see very shortly, in this methodology, the interpretation of a phenomenon of the past illuminates – through the exercise of diachronic comparison – certain aspects of a present case.

Now, the question is why selecting these two cases and this specific approach. Margaret Thatcher's rise to power, and especially the intellectual debate that has tried to *interpret* her long-standing consensus and controversial (if not contradictory) policy, can be instrumental in developing some of the essential elements of a possible analytical framework – which is the objective of this essay. In other words, a "map" that can be employed to study the far-right in power. Thus, rather than just analysing the content of some key policy of the Meloni government, this chapter is concerned with broader epistemological and then empirical questions related to the analysis of – in this case – the Italian far-right in power and the explanation of its sources of consensus. In fact, a more conscious use of the historical analogy advises us to pay careful attention to the interpretation of historical facts and processes so that, through critically discussing such interpretations, we can develop novel insights about the phenomenon of our interest.

The case of Thatcher is a crucial "test case" for two reasons: first of all, because of her longstanding consensus[2], which is not easy to explain in light of her controversial policies and confrontation with some sectors of the English working class. Second and indirectly, because of the debate that, throughout several decades, has surrounded the *interpretation* of Thatcherism, its durability and legacy[3]. *Therefore, the overall*

[2] Let me remark that Thatcher premiership began in 1979 and ended in 1990. She led the conservative party since 1975 and then won three elections in a row (1979; 1983; 1987).

[3] The debate on Thatcher's legacy and, in general, on Thatcherism is extremely extensive. A detailed discussion of the entire debate exceeds the space limits provided here. However, I would like to highlight further fun-

focus of this work embraces some of the main elements of such interpretations and uses them to frame some aspects of the contemporary far-right in power in Italy. The reason behind this is that this debate is particularly rich in analytical depth and insightful adoption of concepts (in particular, some derived from Antonio Gramsci's thinking) employed to understand political phenomena and their overall capacity of duration by generating a certain degree of popular consensus. It is also a possible avenue to avoid flattening the complexity of politics and political-hegemonic projects to just a few explanatory variables (be it ideology, discourse, or policies). As I show in the dedicated section, the interpretation of Thatcherism offers valuable insights regarding crucial dimensions such as ideology and consensus, the material bases of Thatcher's power bloc, the foundations of Thatcher's political project, and the proper policy-making level.

One final aspect concerns the practical relevance of the methodology of historical analogy and Thatcherism. In particular, the idea of "Two Nations", which according to Jessop and colleagues is one fundamental component of the Thatcherite project, is particularly suited to frame the Meloni project. This insight seems heuristically strong, especially in the study of the reform of the "citizens' income", which has been one of the hallmark measures of this government so far. This welfare measure was introduced in 2019 by a coalition government comprising two populist parties such as *Five Star*

---

damental contributions apart from those discussed in the chapter, especially by Gamble (1988), Marsh and Rhodes (1995), Bevir and Rhodes (1998), Philips (1998), Nunn (2014), Radice (2014).

Movement and *The League*. Since then, the reform has been under the propaganda fire of a broad political and social coalition of several political parties, entrepreneurs and media. While such social and political coalition has portrayed those benefiting from the citizens' income as lazy and living off the backs of society, and the measure itself as discouraging people from working[4], just with Meloni government the citizens' income was eventually abolished and substituted with a significantly pejorative reform for those previously benefiting from this welfare measure. As I discuss below, the discursive and ideological framework of Two Nations explains very well the *productivist* idea that has supported its substantial cancellation.

The chapter is organised as follows. The next section introduces the methodology of historical analysis and argues why it is crucial to get an insight into the Meloni government by interpreting Thatcherism as a political phenomenon. Then, the proper debate/interpretation of Thatcherism is introduced and discussed. The following sections respectively frame several potential avenues for future research about the Right in power and the question of the reform of the "citizens' income".

1. *The methodology of historical analogy: a short introduction*

A crucial element of historical analogy concerns the interpretation of historical events, so that the intellectual exercise of in-

[4] Clearly, this order of discourse does not mention the increasingly poor working conditions, wage levels often insufficient to lead a decent life, endemic precarity, rising poverty levels (among working population) and/or how such a measure would improve living and working conditions.

terpretation *potentially* allows gaining new insights about current phenomena. While reasons of space do not allow us to discuss in detail all the epistemological issues and possible uses of the historical analogy, here I present some valuable pointers provided by Mark Kornprobst (2007). Kornprobst has developed a frame of guiding questions to use the methodology of historical analogy. In sum, the author begins with a distinction between *vehicle* and *tenor*, conceived as the two poles of the equation that makes possible the historical analogy. The first – the vehicle – concerns the interpretation of historical facts, while the second – the tenor – the phenomenon that we want to make intelligible. The interpretation, therefore, makes historical analogies possible and can be seen as the concrete lynchpin between past and present; on the other hand, knowledge constitutes the fabric of this bond. At the same time, several fundamental epistemological issues need to be taken into account. These are related to the range of the repertoire of historical interpretations from which a particular phenomenon is selected as a vehicle, the strict interpretation of the vehicle, the differences and similarities between vehicle and tenor, and how the interpretation of the vehicle helps us to see the tenor in a new light.

Following this map and using the method of historical analogy, Alfredo Ferrara (2021), for instance, has applied this analytical-interpretive scheme to the historical consolidation of neoliberalism as a case of passive revolution. By resorting to Gramsci's conceptual repertoire developed to interpret the case of Italian fascism as a form of passive revolution, Ferrara has used some of these concepts – such as organic and molecular crisis, historical fracture, interregnum and overall passive revolution – to elaborate new insights about the genesis and consolidation of neoliberalism globally. Neoliberalism, albeit indirectly, is the elephant in the room for this work,

too. Yet, rather than a general interpretation of the phenomenon, my analysis is mainly concerned with the debate and interpretation of one of the leading political figures – Margaret Thatcher – who paved the way to political neoliberalism and neoliberal policy.

Before shedding light on the debate on the interpretations of Thatcherism, it is worth briefly stressing several dissimilarities and similarities that justify using the historical analogy. Dissimilarities concern two main dimensions: institutions and context. The British government and institutions in the 1980s differ on many levels with the Italian context in which Giorgia Meloni won the general elections (October 2022) – from the institutional complex to the electoral system, to the legal-constitutional dimension, to the relative position in the International System, to the direct influence of the European Union, and so on. And yet, several key similarities justify the choice of this methodology. The first is as clear as fundamental: we are dealing with two political projects that can be located within the radical right-wing political family. As already noted, in the case of Italy, it is the first time that a post-fascist party has become the leading political force in the government. Thus, they are very clear-cut in their conservative positions concerning the family, crime, and so on, while also evident is the authoritarian-cum-populist appeal that seems the hallmark of both our cases – in fact, Authoritarian Populism is how Stuart Hall depicts some of the fundamental ideological traits of Thatcherism (see below). On the other hand, the other similarity concerns neoliberal policy. While Thatcher is clearly comprised within the neoliberal field and is even conceived as a leading figure in its advent, the very first months of the Meloni government already reveal a clear mainstream neoliberal direction – especially looking at tax policy, the centrality of enterprises austerity measures, and welfare restructuring. Ac-

cordingly, both cases can be seen as crucial political configurations of the specific variant of conservative neoliberalism.

The next section presents an overview of the debate about Thatcherism, while the following argues in detail why it matters to develop new insights into studying the contemporary Far-Right.

2. *The debate on Thatcherism and its ongoing relevance*

The impact of Margaret Thatcher on British and global politics cannot be underestimated. By and large, Thatcher is rightly indicated as one of the central political forerunners of neoliberalism (Harvey, 2005; Peck and Tickell, 2007). Overall, she managed to lead the British government for more than a decade by winning three elections in a row. Her government's impact and durability had the obvious effect of sparking debates and intellectual enquiries about the consensus, the policies and the legacy of Thatcherism.

In this essay I concentrate my attention primarily on one debate taking place in Britain since the 1970s and throughout the 1980s. I discuss two main blocks of arguments from Stuart Hall (also in association with Martin Jacques and Colin Leys) on the one hand and Bob Jessop (with Kevin Bonnett, Simon Bromley and Tom Ling)[5] on the other (for a broader presentation – and then reconciliation – of both sides see Gallas, 2015)[6]. "The bone of contention – as Alexander Gallas notes (2015, p. 11) – was the hegemony of Thatcherism, that is, the question regarding to what

[5] See Hall, 1979, 1983, 1985; and Hall and Jaques, 1983. For a discussion of Hall's conception of ideology see also Larrain, 1991.
[6] See Jessop *et al* 1984, 1985, 1990.

extent the political rule of Thatcher and her associates was sustained by popular consent". While these positions do not exhaust the full range of analyses of Thatcherism, they offer precious insights to develop a possible framework for political analysis of right-wing hegemonic strategies and their effectiveness over time. While Hall and colleagues try to analyse the ideological dimension and the intrinsic strength of Thatcher's Authoritarian Populism in crafting a cross-class consensus, Jessop and his group focus more on the institutional and political economy spheres. Given the different analytical standpoints, these also lead – as we shall see shortly – to varying views about the actual ability of Thatcherism to create and maintain a consensus over time.

Stuart Hall was among the first intellectuals to try to provide a framework to explain the rise of Margaret Thatcher. On the one hand, he has convincingly linked Thatcher's early fortunes to the prolonged crisis of the late 1960s and 1970s. More specifically, the (global) economic crisis brought by capitalist recession and the crisis in capitalist accumulation constitutes the historical context and process that situated the rise of the far-right. Overall, the management of the crisis – "naturally" governed by the social democratic party, Hall remarks – has mostly shifted onto the working classes (through wage restraints and income policy) the costs of the adjustment, so that "this last factor has had profound effects in disorganising and fragmenting working-class responses to the crisis itself" (1979, p. 16). On the cultural front, the Right has devised (at an ideological level) since the 1970s its classical *repertoire* of conservative discursive strategies (mainly developed against the 1960s progressive culture): the need for authority and discipline ("Law and Order"), the risk of falling into "social anarchy" due to the growth of crime rates, racism, the dangers of socialism and the excessive presence of the State (anti-statism). In the relationship between the socio-

economic dimension and ideology, Hall also offers an interpretation of the crisis of the 1970s as – in the Gramscian sense – *organic*; therefore, such a profound and irreversible crisis implies an innovative – "formative" – character of the response. Hall asserts that "[p]olitical and ideological work is required to disarticulate old formations, and to rework their elements into new configurations. The 'swing to the Right' is not a reflection of the crisis: it is itself a response to the crisis" (1979, p. 15). The already-mentioned concept of Authoritarian Populism – embodied by Thatcherism – is maybe the key insight offered by Hall. AP denotes a *capitalist state* where formal representative institutions exist, but democratic initiatives and processes are dramatically weakened. Also, AP can generate some "active popular consent" in that it resonates with popular concerns and worries.

The importance of Hall's interventions is in that he – as standalone intellectual contributions and in association with others – managed to dissect the new common sense forged by the Right, which lasted well after Thatcher lost her power – to the extent it can be still conceived as a substantive portion of neoliberal common sense. The discursive mix composed of the insistence on the perception of insecurity, anti-statism, individualism and conservative values proved to forge a strong and long-lasting vision of the world, even vis-à-vis the failures of the Right in political economy and in delivering stable growth for all.

On the other hand, institutions and the political economy are the privileged spheres of enquiry pursued by Jessop and colleagues. First of all, they criticise Hall's analysis for the excessive attention on ideology and ideological practices at the expense of political and economic organisation (the allegation is of "ideologism"). This, in turn, leads to underestimating the internal contradiction of the Thatcherite project and the social

bases that support it. Indeed, according to Jessop and associates, Hall's approach tends to foster a homogeneous view of the impact of Thatcher's messages. At the same time, these must be located within specific socially determining conditions and understand *who* – that is, which social forces and groups – accept such messages and why. To be sure, the relevance of AP is not wholly discarded. Instead, Jessop and colleagues identify the novelty of Thatcherism as a compelling synthesis of AP, neo-liberal ideas and a new productivist ideology that configures a "Two Nations Project" (I will return on this soon). At the same time, they locate the ideological sphere into what they define as the "dual crisis of the British State", that is, a crisis of both political representation in the parliament and of corporatist representation/intermediation (with the fragmentation of trade union and business associations, unable to intervene effectively in the policy-making process). This crisis – which occurred in the context of the broader crisis of the Keynesian Welfare State – opened a window of opportunity for populist discourse – the *direct* appeal to the population – and, at the same time, to enhance the decisional autonomy of the government. Accordingly, such enhanced autonomy and reduction of the role of parties in the parliament

> has certainly enhanced Thatcherism's room for manoeuvre in pursuing its monetarist strategy in the face of rising unemployment, continued de-industrialization, rising levels of taxation, increasing proportions of state spending in GDP, deterioration in the non-oil balance of trade, and so forth (Jessop et al, 1984, p. 47).

One important piece of analysis fostered by Jessop et al is precisely locating the *social basis* of Thatcher's consensus. In other words, while ideology and discourse account for building cross-class con-

sensus, the authors rightly claim also to explore the specific "material rewards" that assure the basis of consensus.

By way of summary, Jessop and colleagues have the merit to enucleate several levels of analysis that, all considered, can articulate a broader analytical toolkit to explore the overall experience and durability of the Right in power. So, the first level is the already mentioned coalition of social forces that support Thatcher – what they call "the power bloc". In the case of the Thatcher government, for instance, we find a power bloc comprising especially financial capital (epitomised as The City), thanks to the liberalisation of markets, and industry, in this case welcoming the taming of Unions. Finally, another level of analysis is the policies concretely enacted by the government and – indirectly – whether they can restore industrial and economic growth or look at an immediate consensus.

The concept of "Two Nations Project" deserves a specific remark as it can be a valuable tool to understand one crucial aspect of Meloni's politics. In short, Jessop and colleagues make a fundamental contribution by noting an *ideological* shift within the Right. The rise of Thatcherism as a political movement embodied the break with the old Tories' establishment "One Nation Project" and the shift towards a new ideological-discursive configuration – the mentioned "Two Nations Project". The first project aimed to integrate the poor, the working class and other unprivileged groups "into membership of the community through economic growth, full employment, and increasing, universal welfare benefits" (Jessop et al, 1984, p. 51). Thatcher took a completely different stance and broke with such a project by configuring a *new cleavage* between a "nation of 'good citizens' and 'hard workers' against a contained and subordinate nation which extends beyond the inner cities and their ethnic minorities to include much of the non-skilled working class outside the

South-East" (ibid) – all this in the name of *productivism* and moral indictment against those who live off welfare benefits. Thus, Thatcher put into question the very legitimacy of the welfare state and the integration of the poor and popular classes into the community in such a way; also and crucially, the Thatcherite project managed to put segments of the working population against each other and thus divide the subaltern front through a vertical line between "hard-working people" and "parasites". Such a highly effective discursive framework *cannot but resonate with the order of discourse and policies of the Meloni government.* The pejorative reform of the "citizens' income" fits this worldview and reproduces it. In so doing, the only way to be a legitimate community member is through getting a job, *regardless of the fact that many of those benefiting from the citizens' income are working poor.*

In conclusion, this strand of the debate about Thatcherism constitutes a fundamental framework for analysing political phenomena and their ideological, policy and cultural relevance. It is also relevant because all those involved tried to disentangle the sources of consensus, the ideological-discursive dimension, the political economy and its overall effects over time. The exercise of discerning such different and variegated analytical levels is thus essential to understanding the capacity of durability and the overall political and cultural legacy of a political project.

3. *Studying the Right in power: possible guiding questions and analytical domains*

In the previous paragraph, I noted that the debate on the rise, fortunes and duration of Thatcher's governments and, more broadly, Thatcherism (also as a cultural-political phenomenon)

has a peculiar heuristic relevance to understand and analyse both the consensus and policy of the far-right in power. In particular, it prompts us to question the intertwining of the ideology-discursive dimension and the specific policy enacted. These constitute different but entangled layers of political legitimation and *materiality* of any given political consensus vis-à-vis a social bloc. Namely, the base that allows consensus to be kept over time within ever-changing social and political circumstances. Consensus necessarily lives off of a discursive dimension, which conveys ideas and forges common sense, and of a policy dimension, which concerns the distribution of resources and possibilities among different social groups.

Going back to the interpretations of Thatcherism, Stuart Hall has the merit to stress and disentangle one key element, namely the efficacy of Thatcher's populist discourse, which managed to forge a cross-class common sense and then achieved a certain degree of popular consensus. Within this, the question of the State is crucial and worth further reflection. Once again, Hall provides here several key insights. The argument goes as follows: while State interventionism was potentially a pivotal site to social democracy to manage the capitalist crises of the 1970s, the party of social democracy – Labour – primarily addressed the costs of the crisis onto the working classes. Accordingly,

> [i]n the absence of any fuller mobilisation of democratic initiatives, the state is increasingly encountered and experienced by ordinary working people as, indeed, not a beneficiary but a powerful, bureaucratic imposition. And this "experience" is not misguided since, in its effective operations with respect to the popular classes, the state is less and less

> present as a welfare institution and more and more present as the state of "state monopoly capital"[7] (Hall, 1979, p. 18).

Within this paradoxical effect, the Right introduces a further paradox by presenting itself as against the State (anti-statism) and with "the people", depicting the Left as statist and oppressive (through taxation, for instance). This element seems particularly important in catching a fundamental aspect of the repertoire of the Right – whereby the State is an ideological prism to look at it. The Right, in other words, crafts a vision of the State whose core is a paradoxical anti-statism comprising a *small* State in the "economy" vs. a *strong* State in terms of steering capacity and Law&Order framework.

On their part, Jessop and colleagues correctly stress the dimension of the social bloc surrounding Thatcher's project. As they argue,

> Thatcherism must be seen less as a monolithic monstrosity and more as an alliance of disparate forces around a self-contradictory programme. We need to analyse the specific mechanisms by which *specific groups* were mobilised behind the general campaigning themes of 'resolute 'government', the 'national interest', patriotism, union bashing, etc., rather than concentrate on those empty (or over-full?) phrases themselves (Jessop et al, 1984, p. 38).

This passage is interesting in specific regard to this case study. It urges us to complement the analytical picture by broadening

---

[7] Hall makes also another important observation about social democracy: "[...] the enlarged interventionist state is the principal instrument through which the party of social democracy attempts to manage the capitalist crisis on behalf of capital".

the spectrum from the discursive level to the policy level, that is, the concrete choices concerning how resources are distributed among a coalition of interests. Such a level constitutes the glue of a social bloc and grants the material possibility of lasting over time. Again, as in the case of the social group and interests supporting Thatcher, the core is detected in the City and the powerful interests of the financial capital. However, the Treasury (in the light of the possibility of limiting public expenditures) and some sectors of industrial capital also welcomed tax cuts on business, low inflation, and the reimposition of managerial authority. Crucially, as Jessop and colleagues acutely noted, while on the economic front the Thatcherite project hardly can be said to have restored high growth rates, on the political front it succeeded in several accomplishments.

First, it articulates a clear vision of society (and a new common sense) through both Authoritarian Populism and the Two Nations project, which are two sides of the same coin. While the first *at once* amplifies and exaggerates social anxieties related to crime and then offers Law&Order solutions, the second triggers a new cleavage roughly describable as "productive vs. parasites" and aimed at restructuring the welfare state while blaming the poor.

Second, strengthening the decisional autonomy of executive power in the State is another important aspect of Thatcherism's authoritarian dimension and its intolerance for political mediation and negotiation.

Third, Thatcher compacted a social bloc comprising financial capital, industry and other social groups benefiting from her policies – low inflation, liberalisation of financial capital and privatisations. Most importantly, "Thatcherism is significant here because it provided the focal point around which the counter-offensive mobilised" (Jessop et al, 1984, p. 41). In other words, it managed to emerge as *the* political lynchpin of the

rising neoliberal offensive, and this offensive embraced the political, ideological, institutional and policy dimensions.

The discussion about several critical aspects of the interpretations of Thatcherism allows us to draw several potential research avenues to study the case of the Meloni government. Recalling the method of historical analogy briefly, in this research approach the fundamental dimension is interpretation. We can draw precious information and novel insights about what we want to study by interpreting comparable phenomena. Thus, taking inspiration from several dimensions of analysis elaborated by Jessop and colleagues to safeguard the Authoritarian Populism framework as a "rational kernel", I elaborate on some potential questions that can help to disentangle the politics of the far-right in power.

1. *Repertoires of Authoritarian Populism and the battle to shape common sense.* Possible research questions are as follows: Do the main discursive-ideological elements of Meloni's political project make it a case of renewed Authoritarian Populism (also looking at specific Law&Order policy measures)? Do we find substantial continuities in how the Right in power articulates its core discursive framework despite the different historical and societal contexts (for instance, concerning family and crime)? For example, one case of innovation within substantive continuities is the "anti-gender" movement, that is, one of the key cultural battles of the Right against the supposed "gender theory" and LGBTQ+ rights (see Prearo, 2020) in the name of "traditional family". Another essential aspect to monitor, finally, is the so-called "penal populism", which is the tendency to use penal legislation and, therefore, repression in symbolic terms by artificially creating emergencies that do not exist. This is the case with the so-called "rave decree" (a decree law introduced in the Italian criminal law system by the

Meloni government after a rave party occurred in October 2022, and presented as the response to a national emergency arising from the raves themselves) or the populist use of criminal law against migrants.

2. *Two Nations and policy agenda*. The issue here is to understand whether and to what extent the Meloni government reproduces this interpretative framework to justify ongoing welfare state retrenchment. At the same time and crucially, what is at stake is also what overall policy agenda it legitimates. There is not only the "citizens' income" reform but also other measures concerning taxation, privatisation and liberalisation, fiscal consolidation and so on. Importantly, in the analysis of Thatcherism, the contradictory nature of her policy measures is often remarked. In other words, rather than finding one coherent and homogeneous picture that could be labelled as an abstract and overarching "neoliberalism", it is a puzzle of often-incoherent interventions that try to make neoliberal policy direction coexist with cementing an allied social bloc. For instance, if an orthodox neoliberal policy would prescribe liberalisation of all service sectors, the far-right could avoid imposing such a policy in some sectors to maintain consensus. One of the most prominent cases in Italy is that of taxi licences, which taxi drivers fiercely oppose: hardly even a radical right-wing government such as this, in theory espousing neoliberal policies, will venture to liberalise licences and open the market to competition.
3. *The State*. Conceiving here the State as a dual entity (idea-ideology + institutional apparatus: Cozzolino, 2021), the question is to explore, in specific regard to the Meloni government, both these ontological levels. In other words, the analysis should first frame the idea of State endorsed by Meloni, for instance concerning market economy and

within the framework of national identity and new nationalism. Most importantly, the analysis should also study the proposed reforms. In this sense, for example, again, Jessop and colleagues point to Thatcher's policies of centralisation and concentration of decision-making power, which in turn augmented the decisional autonomy of the government. Similarly, a significant battle of the Meloni government is introducing the presidential system[8] by changing the Constitution, thus a further consolidation of the powers of the executive vis-à-vis an already marginalised parliament.

These three levels of political analysis – ideology, policy, institutions – are intended to favour a more systematic study of the Right in power. This is necessary to foster an in-depth exploration of the respective domains in which the Right operates and, at the same time, their mutual interconnections.

[8] The Italian Constitution provides for an institutional system in which parliament has (formally) a central role in the production of laws. It is flanked by the executive, which has the role of setting the political agenda and (likewise, formally) a subsidiary role in legislative production. The government itself, in order to take office, must necessarily obtain the confidence of parliament. While it also key to note that there is a *de facto* tendency towards presidentialism (for instance testified by the abuse of the emergency legislation by the executive) at least since the late 1980s and early 1990s, nonetheless a constitutional reform would have a very high institutional and symbolic impact, actually formalising the transition and taking it to the next level.

4. *Conclusions*

This chapter has aimed to set the stage for a more systematic and conceptually-cum-empirically grounded analysis of the post-fascist Right currently in power in Italy. The methodological choice fell on the method of historical analogy, a heuristic tool that, through the interpretation of comparable phenomena occurred in the past, allows us to better understand the present. If – in this research – Thatcher and her disruptive novelty represent the past, the present is the Meloni government and the ongoing renovation of conservative political culture. Thus, I addressed two cases of the Right in power with many aspects in common and a shared ideological and policy repertoire.

The paper has reviewed a strand of the debate about Thatcherism (which I have only presented in some of its essential features due to space reasons) since it is particularly rich in terms of analytical depth and insightful adoption of concepts (in particular derived from Gramsci's thinking) used to understand dynamically political phenomena and their overall capacity of duration over time. In other words, dynamism consists of thinking with political categories while using them to study political phenomena in their concrete historical development. The relevance of the debate concerns the specific features of how Thatcherism is interpreted *and* how the interpretation is concretely carried out. In this last respect, the aim of dwelling on the interpretation of Thatcherism concerns also, and especially, *how* it is empiricallyperformed. Some of the interpretations have indeed the merit of emphasising and putting in question the interconnections between the ideological-discursive and policy levels, also by looking at the constellation of interests and groups supporting Thatcher governments. In these complex interconnections, it is here that it is possible to fully appreciate the different

spheres through which a political force succeeds in obtaining and maintaining consensus, though without dispensing with the analysis of the use of force and coercion against political opposition (especially grassroots opposition).

On the other hand, there are differences between the two cases, and they are analytically relevant. If Thatcher can be seen as the dawn of the encounter between conservative ideology and neoliberalism, Meloni, on the other hand, stands at the mature phase of the neoliberal parabola. Nevertheless, while conservative ideology and political culture still seem able to generate consensus, the socio-economic context of permanent crisis makes it comparatively more difficult to reconcile legitimation and capital accumulation. The Italian case – characterised by a particular political instability and often marked by internal conflicts within party coalitions – will be a crucial test in the coming months and years to understand the ability of the far-right (and the connection between conservatism and neoliberalism) to generate consensus and legitimacy for its policies. This is especially important in light of a common sense that, as we have seen, finds one of its earliest and fundamental interpreter in MargaretThatcher.

In conclusion, the chapter has tried to indicate possible analytical avenues to interpret and study a radical Right-wing government in Italy by disentangling the spheres of ideology, policy and institutions. In doing so, the study attempted to prepare the field for future research aimed at understanding the sources of consensus and, more broadly, the political project of the far-right. Possible fields of analysis concern welfare state reform, tax policy, constitutional reforms and the nexus discourse-ideology. The methodological objective is to bring out inconsistencies and contradictions in the political framework under analysis. In so doing, this work suggests avoiding both deterministic views of the slide towards "fascism" at this

time of multiple crises of capitalism (ecological, political, social), and thus emphasising the difficulties in the far-right's camp in reconciling neoliberal policies and popular consensus, while on the other hand – as Stuart Hall remindes us with his analysis of Thatcherism – it also calls for paying ongoing attention to how the Right can shape common sense through instrumental uses of fears and popular concerns (namely, the discursive framework of Authoritarian Populism). The next few years will tell us whether and to what extent the Melonian far-right will be able to make a long-term impact and transform the Italian state further towards a neo-authoritarian neoliberal direction.

References

Almagisti, M., Baccetti, C. and Graziano, P.R. (Eds) (2018) *Introduzione alla politologia storica. Questioni teoriche e studi di caso*. Roma: Carocci.

Baldini, G., Tronconi, F. and Angelucci, D. (2022) 'Yet Another Populist Party? Understanding the Rise of Brothers of Italy'. *South European Society and Politics*, *27*(3), pp. 385-405.

Bevir, M., and Rhodes, R.W. (1998) 'Narratives of 'thatcherism''. *West European Politics*, *21*(1), pp. 97-119.

Bruno, V.A., & Downes, J.F. (2020) The case of Fratelli d'Italia: how radical-right populists in Italy and beyond are building global networks. *Democratic Audit Blog*.

Bruno, V.A. and Downes, J.F. (2023) 'The Radicalisation of the Italian Mainstream: Populist Radical Right Parties and Extreme Right-Wing Movements in Italy (2012-2022)'. In Kondor, K. and Littler, M. (eds) *The Routledge Handbook of Far-Right Extremism in Europe*, 1st edition, pp. 129-144. London: Routledge.

Clarke, P. (1999) 'The rise and fall of Thatcherism'. *Historical Research, 72*(179), 301-322.

Cozzolino, A. (2021) *Neoliberal transformations of the Italian state. Understanding the roots of the crisis*. Lanham (MA): Rowman & Littlefield.

Donà, A. (2022) 'The rise of the Radical Right in Italy: the case of Fratelli d'Italia'. *Journal of Modern Italian Studies, 27*(5), pp. 775-794.

Ferrara, A. (2021) *L'ascesa politica del neoliberalismo. Accumulazioni molecolari, rivoluzione passiva ed egemonia*. Bari: Cacucci.

Gallas, A. (2015) *The Thatcherite offensive: A neo-Poulantzasian analysis*. London: Brill.

Gamble, A. (1988) *The free economy and the strong state: The politics of Thatcherism*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hall, S. (1979) 'The great moving right show'. *Marxism today, 23*(1), pp. 14-20.

Hall, S. (1983) 'Thatcherism – Rolling back the welfare state'. *Thesis Eleven, 7*(1), pp. 6-19.

Hall, S. (1985) 'Authoritarian populism: A reply to Jessop et al.'. *New left review, 151*(1), pp. 115-123.

Hall, S. and Jacques, M. (Eds.) (1983) *The politics of Thatcherism* (p. 19). London: Lawrence and Wishart.

Harvey, D. (2007) *A brief history of neoliberalism*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Jessop, B., Bonnett, K., Bromley, S. and Ling, T. (1984) 'Authoritarian populism, two nations, and Thatcherism'. *New Left Review*, 147(1), pp. 32-60.

Jessop, B., Bonnett, K., Bromley, S. and Ling, T. (1985) 'Thatcherism and the politics of hegemony: A reply to Stuart Hall'. *New Left Review, 153*(1), pp. 87-101.

Jessop, B., Bonnett, K., and Bromley, S. (1990) 'Farewell to Thatcherism? Neo-liberalism and new times'. *New Left Review, 179*, pp. 81-102.

Larrain, J. (1991). Stuart Hall and the Marxist concept of ideology. *Theory, Culture & Society, 8*(4), 1-28.

Marsh, D. and Rhodes, R.W. (1995) 'Evaluating Thatcherism: Over the Moon or as Sick as a Parrot?'. *Politics, 15*(1), pp. 49-54.

Nunn, A. (2014) 'The contested and contingent outcomes of Thatcherism in the UK'. *Capital & Class, 38*(2), pp. 303-321.

Kornprobst, M. (2007) 'Comparing apples and oranges? Leading and misleading uses of historical analogies'. *Millennium, 36*(1), pp. 29-49.

Peck, J. and Tickell, A. (2007) 'Conceptualizing neoliberalism, thinking Thatcherism'. In Leitner, H., Peck J., Sheppard E.S. (Eds.) *Contesting neoliberalism: Urban frontiers, 26*(50), pp. 1770-1787.

Phillips, L. (1998) 'Hegemony and political discourse: the lasting impact of Thatcherism'. *Sociology, 32*(4), pp. 847-867.

Prearo, M. (2020) *L'ipotesi neocattolica: Politologia dei movimenti anti-gender*. Milano: Mimesis.

Puleo, L. and Piccolino, G. (2022) 'Back to the post-fascist past or landing in the populist radical right? The brothers of Italy between continuity and change'. *South European Society and Politics*, pp.1-25.

Radice, H. (2014) 'Thatcherism and alternatives: What future for British capitalism?'. *Capital & Class, 38*(2), pp. 277-287.

Vampa, D. (2023) Brothers of Italy: A New Populist Wave in an Unstable Party System. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Five Star Movement-League Coalition: Radical Right Populist Influence Scores Again?

ANNA GRAZIA NAPOLETANO[1]

Abstract. Over the past two decades, many populist parties have successfully entered higher political institutions. This growing presence in parliaments and governments indicates that populism is not episodic but a contagious trend. According to research, the exclusionary positions on issues that radical right populist parties focus on (such as immigration and integration) are the most influential and often lead other political parties to adopt similar exclusionary stances. In this vein, the government coalition experience between the post-ideological Five Star Movement and the radical right populist League from 2018 to 2019 represents an interesting case that might fruitfully contribute to this debate. By using qualitative analysis, spatial approach and Chapel Hill experts survey, this analysis will focus on the issues present in the inclusionary-exclusionary framework to determine if, also in the Italian case, the primary trend holds, meaning that the radical right populist parties' key topics are the most contagious ones.

Keywords: Populism in power; RRPP contagion; inclusionary-exclusionary framework; Five Star Movement-League coalition.

[1] University of Bologna, anna.napoletano3@unibo.it.

1. *The debate on populist contagion*

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, a growing number of "populist parties" have achieved enough electoral success to enter the higher political institutions or to be asked to form coalitions or give external support to the government. For a long time, researchers have debated how to define populism, and no ultimate definition has been found yet. According to this author, the most fair and flexible way to look at this phenomenon has been theorised by Cas Mudde, who defined populism as "a (thin) ideology that split society into two opposite groups 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people" (Mudde, 2004, p. 543)". In the 1990s, academics were particularly interested in "radical right populist parties" (RRPPs) given that, at that time, most of the populist parties that succeeded in entering higher political institutions shared a fundamental set of ideological features (Betz, 1995; Taggart, 2000, 2007; Mudde, 2017). However, since then, the Western European scenario has seen an increasing number of different types of populist parties in power. Along with this phenomenon, the study of populism in power has grown considerably.

This debate has developed around two longstanding main topics. First, a consistent group of academics has debated the effects of populism on democratic procedures, wondering whether it should be considered a "threat" or a "corrective" to democracy (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013; Rummens, 2017). The second much-discussed topic on populism in power addresses the relationship between populists and democratic procedures (Müller, 2016; Rummens, 2017; Urbinati, 2011), namely, can populists govern once in power? (Heinisch, 2003). In this vein, some academics have supported the

idea that populism cannot remain in power because of its very structure and the difficulty of "squaring their original emphasis on representation and their original role as a voice of the people with the constraints imposed by governing and by compromising with coalition partners" (Mair, 2009, p. 17). In contrast to this kind of opinion, other researchers have rejected the idea that populism is episodic and populist parties are unlikely to stay in power (Albertazzi and Mueller, 2013; Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2015; Wolinetz and Zaslove, 2018; Albertazzi and Vampa, 2021). As the last twenty years and the related growth of new populist parties (Graziano, 2018) within the Western European political scenario have effectively shown, populism in power is more than an episodic phenomenon destined to fail. Instead, populism in power is a "contagious" phenomenon (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2015). Once in power, populists are variously able to exert their "influence" directly or indirectly both on their own political scenario and on other political parties.

So far, different researchers have investigated how such an influence is exerted. Van Spanje defined contagious effect (or influence) as "that pressure a political (populist) party might exert on other political parties, forcing them to change their own policy positions" (Van Spanje, 2010). Moreover, different studies have proved mainstream parties tend to adopt inclusive strategies towards newcomers and populist parties when these are remarkably successful from an electoral point of view (Minkenberg, 2001; Meguid, 2005; Bale et al, 2010; Akkerman and De Lange, 2012; Mejers, 2015). In particular, Bonnie Meguid argued that niche parties could profoundly change political competition because they can "shape the importance of policy dimension" (Meguid, 2005, p. 349), exerting pressure on the other political parties. On this note, this research intends to stress the importance of the communicative aspect

when dealing with influence and, expressly, populist influence (Napoletano, 2022[2]). Indeed, the communicative aspect is essential because the "communication style for populist parties is crucial to exercise a permanent pressure" on the other political parties (Biard et al, 2019, p.180; Mudde, 2004)".

1.2 Populist policy contagion: on which issue do populists exert the most influence?

As previously mentioned, for a long time, most of the debate on populist influence on other political parties has focused on the major role played by RRPPs in power (Akkerman et al, 2016; Carvalho, 2016; Biard et al, 2019). In particular, the radical right populist party's "policy priorities are mainly in the field of immigration and integration policy" and the rule of law (Minkenberg, 2001; Zaslove, 2004; Akkerman and De Lange, 2012, p. 579; Mudde, 2007; Van Spanje, 2010; Bale et al, 2010; Biard et al, 2019). Some researchers have also tried to explain why radical right populist parties have attracted so much electoral consensus across Europe, and their main conclusion was that voters are merely attracted by their exclusionary positions on immigration rather than other policy dimensions that the RRPPs might take into consideration (Wolinetz and Zaslove, 2018, p. 10). In particular, researchers have drawn their attention to the "exclusionary effects" of the RRPPs' direct and indirect influence on the national government and how they might lead the other political parties to adopt stricter immigration policies (Paxton, 2019, p. 125).

[2]Author's PhD Thesis.

Simply put, bearing in mind the importance of context-dependent factors, RRPPs become electorally successful when they can increase the salience of the immigration issue. In particular, this might happen in the presence of "high unemployment, globalization and mistrust of political élites threatens the security, identity and employment opportunities of locals" (Zaslove, 2004, p. 100). Consequently, the electoral success of RRPPs is likely to prompt the other parties to adopt accommodative strategies towards the RRPPs' exclusionary immigration positions (Meijers, 2015, p. 3). Notwithstanding this principal trend, some studies have also tried to draw attention to other policy dimensions on which radical right populism might be particularly effective, such as "foreign policy" (Verbeeck and Zaslove, 2017) or "federalism" (Bouillard, 2019) or Euroscepticism (Meijers, 2015; Bouillard, 2019). However, the main trend seems to remain attached to the issues of immigration, rule of law and integration policy.

In this vein, Biard et al (2019) provided a comparative analysis of how RRPPs in advanced liberal democracies "directly" or "indirectly" (Schain, 2006) influence their coalition partners when they are in government or when they are in opposition, especially on topics such as immigration and integration, but also Euroscepticism and cultural policies. Interestingly, Biard et al concluded that according to the "context-dependent conditions", some RRPPs in opposition have been able to influence the political agenda of their countries more effectively compared to other RRPPs who were members of the cabinet and that the impact of this influence depends on the issue the RRPPs push forward (Veerbeck and Zaslove, 2017; Combei et al, 2020). Overall, it can be concluded that RRPPs can "make a difference" on integration issues even when they are not part of the government (Biard et al, 2019).

Compared to RRPPs that were able to join government coalitions, the number of left-wing populist parties or radical left-wing parties that joined government coalitions within the Western political scene is small. Thus, little research has been devoted to policy influence among coalition partners. However, an interesting case is represented by the Greek populist government between the radical left-wing *Syriza* and the radical right-wing (*Anexartitoi Ellines)* ANEL. In their analysis of this government experience, the first of its kind within the Western European scenario, Aslanidis and Rovira Kaltwasser proved that both these populist actors were deeply influenced by internal and external factors that forced both of them to tone down their populist and anti-establishment character, especially in response to the external pressure represented by the troika (Aslanidis and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2016, p.12). Similar to the Greek case, the government experience faced by the populist left-wing *Podemos* led this populist party to go through a radical change (Zarzalejos, 2016).

2. *Case selection: The Five Star Movement and its coalition with the League*

So far, the debate on "populist contagiosity" has mainly focused on radical right-wing parties and how they succeed in shaping the immigration policies of their countries (Bale et al, 2010; Akkerman and De Lange, 2010; Biard et al, 2019). However, in the last decades, new kinds of populist parties (Graziano, 2018) and movements characterised by a left- or right-wing or "post-ideological" attitude have succeeded in entering higher political institutions, not only within the parliament but also within the cabinet as major or junior coali-

tion partners. In this sense, the Italian Five Star Movement (5SM) represents a case in point.

Compared to other Western European populist parties, the 5SM has represented an interesting combination of features that are quite uncommon within the populist field, namely: grassroots origins, post-ideological approach (except for ecological issues), strong anti-establishment attitude, unconventional use of technology in order to promote direct democracy, fluid organisational structure and a (initial) refusal to join coalition with other political parties. What is more interesting is that the 5SM had the chance to govern with vastly different ideological political players, especially during its first two government experiences from 2018 to 2021: first with the radical right-wing League of Salvini and then with the centre-left-wing Democratic Party (*Partito Democratico*, PD). The following analysis will examine the first coalition experience as a valuable example of a government coalition between two populist parties. This first coalition experience offers an opportunity to observe how the political positions of an eclectic populist actor may change during a government coalition with a radical-right populist party (or vice versa). In particular, this analysis aims to observe if the eclectic 5SM has been influenced by the policies dear to the radical right populist League.

3. *Concepts, methods and data*

To investigate whether there was a contagion effect between the 5SM party and its coalition partners within the first two 5SM coalition governments, the first step is to understand the policy positions of the parties involved before these government experiences. To achieve this, a qualitative study of the

5SM and League has been conducted using their official electoral programs (national and European) and official statements from 2013-2018.

From a conceptual point of view, the present analysis relies on the ideational definition of populism (Mudde, 2004) and Van Spanje's definition of the contagion effect (2010) previously mentioned. Moreover, regarding policy positions (and possible policy position change), the focus will be on the topics in the inclusionary/exclusionary framework theorised by Mudde and Kaltwasser (2013). This framework organises populist parties into "inclusionary or exclusionary" categories depending on their attitude and positions on three main dimensions: material, political, and symbolic. In a nutshell: i) the material dimension addresses the economy and material "state resources" and how these are distributed; ii) the political dimension concerns political participation and public protest; and iii) the symbolic dimension singles out who are the "people" and who are the "elite" (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2012, p.15).

From a methodological point of view, this analysis will use expert surveys to analyse the policy positions of the 5SM and its coalition partner, tracing if they changed over time. Expert surveys are based on the judgement of specialists "to locate party policy positions, in the party systems of which they had expert knowledge, on a set of predefined policy dimensions" (Benoit and Laver, 2006, p. 2) and thus are instrumental in displaying political party policy positions in a specific moment and how these might change over time concerning specific policy dimensions. More specifically, in order to analyse how the policy position of the 5SM and its coalition partner might have changed from 2013 to 2019, this research relies on the spatial approach (Benoit and Laver, 2006) and bidimensional analysis. The spatial approach allows for constructing a policy space where it is possible to display political actors' prefer-

ences on different issues and measure how these preferences might change over time and, thus, how the political actors compete. In particular, in order to study the change in political parties' policy positions, this analysis relied on the expert survey data provided by Chapel Hill Expert Survey (Chapel Hill Expert Survey Trend File, 1999-2019).

From this dataset, we selected those policy dimensions[3] corresponding to the topics present within the inclusionary/exclusionary framework. For the material dimension, we select "redistribution" (redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor) and "environment" (position towards environmental sustainability). The issue "environment" was not originally included within the inclusionary/exclusionary framework; however, considering that, since its onset, the 5SM has expressed strong pro-environment positions (Tronconi, 2015), "environment" was added to the material dimension. Then, we select "immigrate" (immigration policy) and "social lifestyle" (position on social lifestyle, e.g. rights for homosexuals, gender equality). For the symbolic dimension, the EU position (overall orientation of the party leadership towards European integration) and "immigrate"[4] (immigration policy)[5] were chosen.

---

[3] See Appendix A.

[4] The position on immigration can also provide important insights for the symbolic dimension, especially if we take into consideration that exclusionary populist parties tend to identify the migrants as part of the "others" that have to be excluded.

[5] To be noted that "immigration" is present in both political and symbolic dimensions. This analysis made this choice on purpose and for two main reasons. First, according to the inclusionary/exclusionary framework, "immigration" points out who benefits from political participation rights,

The following section will provide the qualitative ideological portrait depicted according to the inclusionary/exclusionary framework of the 5SM and the League before 2018. A shorter ideological portrait of the PD will also be presented. The reason is twofold. First, considering that from 2019 to 2021, PD and the Five Star Movement were government coalition partners, it might be interesting to look at the policy affinities they had before their coalition. Second, considering that, from 2013 to 2018[6], the PD took an active part in the governments, it would be interesting to investigate whether the PD, as the main centre-left traditional party, showed any signs of possible influence by the League or the 5SM.

3.1 The Five Star Movement: Ideological portrait (up to 2018)

Characterised by a robust environmentalist attitude, undefined ideology, grassroots origins, intense local activism and massive use of new technologies and digital platforms, the 5SM presented itself as an anti-political "outsider" (Bordignon and Ceccarini, 2013) of the Italian political system. The use of the internet and digital platforms such as the

namely the major number of people possible (inclusionary attitude) or if this participation is restricted to a specific group of people (exclusionary attitude). Second, together with the "elite group", exclusionary populist parties tend to identify the "enemy" with the group of migrants. As such, including "immigration" in the analysis of the symbolic dimension might also clarify what kind of populism we are dealing with: exclusionary or inclusionary.

[6] Before the Yellow-Green government coalition.

"Blog of Beppe Grillo" was essential for what can be called the "embryo stage" (Lanzone and Tronconi, 2015, p. 58; Napoletano, 2017) of the 5SM, even before the official foundation of the Movement in 2009. Over time, the 5SM made increasing use of digital platforms to promote direct democracy, for example, by giving a chance to its members to propose or elect the 5SM delegates (representatives). Interestingly, since the beginning of its entry into higher political institutions, the 5SM has always refused to form any kind of alliance with the other political parties.

According to the literature, especially before its coalition experiences, it was difficult (a difficulty that might still persist) to classify the 5SM once and for all according to both the inclusionary-exclusionary framework and the left-right scheme. Indeed, the 5SM presents various ideological stances that are difficult to place (Graziano, 2018; Font et al, 2019; Tronconi and Mosca, 2019; Vittori, 2019, 2020). From a 2019 study on European Southern inclusionary populist parties, Font et al claimed that compared to the Spanish *Podemos* and the Greek *Syriza*, the 5SM seems "to be collocated between the inclusionary and the exclusionary continuum" for two main reasons (Font et al, 2019, p. 16). First, the 5SM does not show a clear position on the immigration issue (Graziano, 2018; Mosca and Tronconi, 2019; Vittori, 2020) and, consequently, its attitude towards the material and political dimensions is also inconsistent or, in any case, not fully inclusive (e.g., no explicit reference to women or immigrants). Moreover, on issues such as civil rights and, for example, homosexual marriage, the Movement has also never taken defined positions (Vittori, 2020). In a few cases, the movement decided to "delegate the decision" to its activists and members through an online poll (Manucci and Amsler, 2017, p. 112).

However, notwithstanding the difficulties in defining the ideological nature of the 5SM once and for all, on the material dimension, this actor showed a less blurred position from the beginning of its political adventure. In their study on the ideological positioning of the 5SM, Mosca and Tronconi claimed that from the economic point of view, this populist actor shows left-wing features such as "welfare expansion, state intervention in the economy and universal basic income programme"[7] but also right-wing features such as "anti-tax discourse" (Mosca and Tronconi, 2019, p. 1276). Notwithstanding the right-wing anti-tax discourse (that will take place clearly from 2018, Vittori, 2020), the 5SM showed itself to be in favour of economic redistribution (also through the *reddito di cittadinanza*, "guaranteed minimum income," and against the financial interest of banks and multinationals since the onset of its political experience (Vittori, 2020). Not surprisingly, the electoral programme from 2013 based on seven main points – "state and citizens, energy, information, economy, transportation, health and education" – was also based on initiatives aimed to protect citizens from the economic interests of banks, multinationals and monopolies such as the Italian "Eni, Enel, Mediaset". Moreover, this electoral programme proposed the introduction of the "guaranteed unemployment subsidy" (Vittori, 2020, p. 124) but also, interestingly, called for the protection of local production (Movimento 5 Stelle 2013). It should be noted that the im-

[7] However, concerning the inclusionary economic point of view of 5SM, Font et al (2019) stressed that even if the 5SM has pushed for a redistributive use of material resources, this is subject to strict restrictions for non-Italian citizens.

portance of local production and "made in Italy" is one of the battle horses of the League, too.

Concerning the use of resources to protect the environment, the 5SM was the most inclusive political actor within the Italian political scenario (Movimento 5 Stelle, 2013, 2014, 2018), and, especially before its government experiences, it was the leading defender of environmental battles.

Turning to the political dimension, the 5SM is hard to define as a merely inclusive or exclusive populist actor. The political dimension involves topics such as political participation and public protest (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012, p.15) and, in particular, political participation represents a paradox issue within the 5SM especially if we refer to immigration (Font et al 2019; Vittori, 2020). Officially, and for the first time in its programs, the 5SM spoke openly about immigration from 2018[8]. Before that year, the Movement was never too openly clear about immigration or specific topics related to it, such as the introduction of the *ius soli*[9], and did not show univocal signs of multiculturalism (Vittori, 2020; Font et al, 2019). Very shortly, in 2018, the movement called for the "stop to the business of immigration" and "immediate repatriation for illegal immigrants" and asked for economic resources to reinforce the territorial commission that sorts migrants on Italian soil (Movimento 5 Stelle, 2018). Especially from 2018, in its electoral programs, it referred to immigration more in terms of find-

[8] Although in the program for the European elections in 2014, the 5SM called for a European common redistribution of migrants.

[9] It is important to note that in 2017, the 5SM abstained from voting on the law on *ius soli.*

ing ways to "regulate it"[10] (Movimento 5 Stelle, 2014) rather than in terms of open integration and multiculturalism.

Speaking about the political dimension, in addition to immigration, it is also crucial to look at the right to protest and the protection of civil rights (e.g., LGBT and gender equality) as part of the political representation and participation dimension. Somehow, the 5SM was born as a "protest movement" itself, and, on this point, it never showed an exclusionary position calling for reinforcement of law and order in this sense, at least up to 2018. However, on the same note, the Movement never showed clear homogenous inclusionary or exclusionary official positions on civil rights either (Vittori, 2020).

Concerning the symbolic dimension, namely the definition of who are the people and who are the elite, as previously mentioned, it is not "ideologically" clear who the people are (Manucci and Amsler, 2017). In general, it is possible to argue that the 5SM addressed (to the) Italian citizens mostly. In this vein, the fact that, since 2013, the Movement exalted the product Made in Italy in its programmes might also contribute to this assumption. However, it is not possible to find a clear-cut exclusionary position about immigration in the 5SM discourse. Notwithstanding this, especially at the onset of its political experience, the Movement pointed out "the European Central Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the EU, other Italian parties, Germany, international financial actors, neoliberals" (Font et al, 2019, p. 11) and Italian big monopo-

[10] At the national, but also supra-national level, calling for a significant involvement of the European Union in the redistribution of migrants.

lies such as "Eni, Enel, Mediaset, Benetton autostrade, Telecom" (Vittori, 2020, p. 124) as part of the (evil) elite.

3.2 League: Ideological portrait (up to 2018)

The League finds its roots at the end of the 80s when, under the influential (and authoritative) leadership of Umberto Bossi, the Lombard League presented itself as an outsider of the old-fashioned politics and its corrupted political parties (Ignazi, 2018). Robustly present at the local level, characterised by solid activism and organised according to the model of the mass party[11] (Ignazi 2018, Albertazzi et al, 2018), at the onset of its political experience, the League was an anti-party regionalist populist party (McDonnell 2006; Veerbeck and Zaslove, 2015; Ignazi, 2018; Agnew and Shin, 2002). In particular, the Northern League was an "anti-immigration and traditionally anti-southern party" party (Longo, 2016, p. 16) that pushed for "an administrative and fiscal independence" from *Roma Ladrona* ("Rome the thief"; see Agnew and Shin, 2019; Ignazi, 2018, pp. 184-185).

However, as Piero Ignazi stressed, notwithstanding these exclusionary features (except the devolution), at the onset of its political experience, the League was "ideologically a *pot pourri*" because if, for example, on the one hand, it showed clearly antimigration and xenophobic positions, on the other

[11] Although, as Piero Ignazi stressed, the Northern League organisational structure at this point resembled the mass party model, it was also very much affected by the hierarchical leadership of Umberto Bossi, especially in terms of epurations (Ignazi, 2018).

hand, it also "showed openness towards civil rights" (Ignazi, 2018, p.187). However, this undefined ideological attachment would change dramatically during the second coalition government experience with Silvio Berlusconi (2001 – 2005), when the Northern League clearly moved towards "extreme right positions" on topics such as law and order, becoming, at the same time, also "a staunch defender of Christianity" (Ignazi, 2018, p.199; Passarelli and Tuorto, 2018).

In 2012, after a series of scandals related to improper use of the Northern League funds by Bossi and his family, the Northern League leadership changed. In 2013, Matteo Salvini became the new charismatic leader of the Northern League. This leadership change also marked a change of direction for the past Northern League. Indeed, this change coincided with a shift in the definition of the "pure people" category from the Northern League of Bossi to the Lega of Salvini. Before 2012, for the Northern League, the pure people (identified on an ethnical basis) were those located in the North of Italy; after 2013, this framework changed progressively. Under Salvini's personalist leadership[12] (Albertazzi et al, 2018, p. 3) and his new strategy of communication based on a massive, direct and "emotional" (Passarelli and Tuorto, 2018, p. 79) use of social media, the pure people are still identified on an ethnical basis. Still, now they are identified with all the "Ital-

[12] Even the name of the party changed from the Northern League to the League – Salvini premier.

ians", whereas the "others" threaten the Italian identity from a cultural and an economic point of view[13].

As a consequence of this assumption, every aspect of society and political life must be interpreted according to the motto "Italian First" (Graziano, 2018, p. 25), which brought the League to push for a society where the state material resources, political representation and protest rights should be strictly regulated on a nativist basis. For all these reasons, according to the scholarship, the League headed by Matteo Salvini is a clear example of a radical right populist party (Veerbeck and Zaslove, 2014; Ivaldi et al, 2017; Graziano, 2018; Passarelli and Tuorto, 2018) and an exclusionary populist actor (Cervi et al, 2020).

In particular, looking at the material dimension, the League "supports social market policies aimed to favour internal production" (Lega Nord, 2013). Moreover, it supports the "flat tax" (Lega 2018) and strongly opposes the austerity policies from the EU (Lega Nord 2013, 2018) (Ivaldi et al, 2017). In addition to this, the League does not show clear environmentalist features, nor is it available to support the costs for environmental policies: "Facts show that the reduction of Co_2 is an expensive and useless effort, that shift the attention from the real problem: pollution!" (Lega, 2014). Despite these statements in the electoral program from 2018, the League dis-

[13] It is important to note that, compared to the past Northern League headed by Umberto Bossi, Salvini's new symbolic discourse led the League to conquer regions traditionally linked to the left and, for the first time, to gather consistent electoral support even in the southern regions (Albertazzi et al, 2018, p.1; Passarelli and Tuorto, 2018).

played openness towards the green economy and measures aimed to promote the reduction of pollutants (Lega, 2018).

Besides the positions on the economy, the exclusionary nativist point of view of the League also affects how this populist party perceives political representation, and the Motto "Italian First" sets the boundaries for what political participation is and who deserves to be politically involved (Italian political sovereignty first). Indeed, according to the League (the Italian) citizens must be protected from two main threats: first, from "migrants" and second, from the selfish interests of other political parties and international actors such as the "European Union" (Ivaldi et al, 2017, p. 358; Graziano, 2018) which, according to the League, want to repress the political sovereignty of Italian citizens. It is to be noted that the role previously held by "Rome thief" gave way entirely to the European Union institutions (Albertazzi et al, 2018; Passarelli and Tuorto, 2018). Not surprisingly, the League of Matteo Salvini became one of the most Eurosceptical populist actors in Europe, along with other leaders such as Marine Le Pen, Victor Orbán and Geert Wilders.

Overall, it is possible to argue that the League headed by Salvini seems to have dropped the economic and political battle of regional autonomy (Ignazi, 2018; Albertazzi et al, 2018). However, as Albertazzi et al (2018) proved, if it is true that Salvini shifted the focus from the original regionalist battle for the autonomy of Padania in favour of issues such as the reinforcement of law and order and exclusionary immigration policies (Lega, 2013, 2014, 2018), it is also true that the call for independence remained very much felt by the League

representatives at the regional level[14] (especially in Veneto and Lombardy) (Albertazzi et al, 2018, pp.16-17). Concerning the right of public protest, the League defends the idea of a society based on a strict law and order point of view in which protesting should also be limited. At the same time, as a tenacious defender of the catholic religion and Christian roots, the League of Salvini promotes and defends the idea of a traditional family and does not support LGBT rights or gay marriage (Passarelli and Tuorto, 2018).

3.3 Democratic Party: Ideological portrait (up to 2018)

Compared to the 5SM and the League, the PD can be considered a non-populist, traditional[15] centre-left political party[16]. Different from the League and the 5SM, it actively participated in the governments from 2013 to 2018. Indeed, the prime ministers who ran the governments from 2013 to 2018 (Enrico Letta 2013-2014, Matteo Renzi 2014-2016, Paolo Gentiloni 2016-2018) were all members of the Democratic Party. Concerning this point, it is important to emphasise that all these governments were not elected but institutional governments[17].

---

[14] This regionalist calls for autonomy also led to a (consultive) referendum in Veneto in 2017 to ask for a greater degree of autonomy from Rome.

[15] With important change from an organisational point of view (Bernardi et al, 2017).

[16] Although in terms of time, the League was officially founded in 1991 and the PD in 2007.

[17] The government of Enrico Letta represents a special case. In 2013, regular elections took place, but no coalition could reach the necessary majority in both parliamentary chambers.

Nowadays the PD represents the main centre-left party within the Italian political scenario. It can be considered as the result of the convergence which took place in 2007 between "the centrist party 'Democracy and Freedom' – the Daisy (Democrazia e Libertà, La Margherita) and the social democrats 'Democrats of the Left' (Democratici di Sinistra – DS)" (Froio, 2021, p. 252). The presence of these two currents within the party created different ideological difficulties over time, (Froio, 2021) as well as the influence of different secretaries/leaders led to continuous internal conflicts, especially under Matteo Renzi's government (Ignazi, 2018).

If, from an economic point of view, the two souls of the PD found a common denominator in a sort of "third way position on economy and social policy" (Froio, 2021, p. 252) and displayed a homogenous pro-Europe sentiment (Partito Democratico, 2013), on other issues such as civil rights (for example) gay marriage, they continued to oppose each other (Ignazi, 2018, p. 235).

From an economic point of view (material dimension), the PD showed "soft" inclusionary economic policies (Partito Democratico, 2013, 2014, 2018) and "mixed calls for the budget to be balanced with a 'third way'[18] approach to economic matters" (Froio, 2021, p. 257). In 2013, it officially called for "property tax and fiscal policies in support of female employment" and "reform of welfare aimed to support families" (Partito Democratico 2013). Similarly, in 2018, it proposed to reinforce the welfare measures for families, especially those in economic difficulty, and to introduce the "min-

[18] In particular this "third way approach" was evident under Matteo Renzi's government.

imum wage" but, at the same time, stressing the importance of work: "whoever proposes an income for all regardless of work clashes with the principle of reality and common sense" (Partito Democratico, 2018).

Looking at the environmental side, the PD officially stated its favourable position for a green and circular economy and the respect of the environment (Partito Democratico, 2018). Turning to the political dimension (political participation and public protest) the PD does not show a real continuous and homogenous pattern which is solely inclusive or exclusive. From an official point of view, in its electoral program from 2013 and 2018, this party displayed very inclusive positions on topics such as the *ius soli* (in 2014 it called for a European *ius soli*, Partito Democratico, 2014), gender equality and LGBT rights (Partito Democratico, 2013, 2018). In particular, speaking about LGBT rights, the PD promoted and obtained recognition for same-sex civil unions in 2016 (Cirinnà Law). However, on immigration, the PD tended to promote inclusive pro-immigration policies; conversely, it also adopted ambiguous and severe immigration policies (Froio, 2021). For the 2014 European elections, the PD called for a "Europe of integration" based on a joint European effort to rescue and redistribute migrants (Partito Democratico, 2014). Similarly, in 2018, the official program stated, "Europe has a duty to welcome political refugees. It is an international right that it must not find any exceptions in Europe. This is exactly where the Union comes into play: let's go beyond the Dublin agreements – unfortunately approved by the Berlusconi government – which is the principle that asylum seekers are a problem of the country of first disembarkation" (Partito Democratico, 2018, p. 26). However, in 2017, during Gentiloni's government, the Minniti-Orlando law was adopted, which introduced restrictive, exclusionary immigration measures (including strict rules for the NGOs) mainly based on a bilateral agreement with Lybia (Froio, 2021, p. 260). In general, these measures were aimed at stopping immigra-

tion, making repatriation faster and letting Lybia "take care of the situation" – even at the cost of neglecting compliance with humanitarian standards.

As a conclusive important note on the PD, it is important to emphasise that it openly claimed to want to fight populism. Indeed, in 2013, the PD clearly stated that it wanted to challenge populism: "For us, populism is the main opponent of genuinely popular politics. In recent years it has been fueled by a financial liberalism that has left the less affluent classes at the mercy of an unregulated market. The populist right has promised an illusory protection from the effects of financial liberalism by raising cultural, territorial and sometimes xenophobic barriers. The only real answer to populism is democratic participation. The crisis of democracy is not fought with 'less' but with 'more' democracy" (Partito Democratico, 2013).

The ideological analysis of the Five Star Movement, League, and Democratic Party according to the inclusionary-exclusionary framework ends here. In the next section, this analysis will use the spatial approach to quantitatively display whether the 5SM pushed the League to change its position on the material, political, and symbolic dimensions or vice versa.

4. *Spatial approach analysis: Quantitative analysis of policy position shift*

In this section we will present a spatial bidimensional analysis[19] based on Chapel Hill Expert Survey data from 2014 to 2019. In particular, this analysis picks up those policies[20] that cover the dimensions present in the inclusionary-exclusionary framework (material, political and symbolic).

These tables display the major political parties present in those years (from 2014 to 2019) and those that might interest our research purposes. Especially *Forza Italia* (Go Italy) and *Fratelli d'Italia* (Brothers of Italy) are particularly interesting as allies of the League at a regional and local level. Within the table, we included the score for the policy position provided by the dataset and the national election year. Labels = M5S: Five Star Movement; LN: League; FdI: Brothers of Italy; FI: Forza Italia; PD: Democratic Party.

The x axis represents the left/right[21] spectrum, the x axis represents the left/right spectrum, namely the "overall ideological stance" ("Lrgen") of the political parties indicated by the experts, whereas the y axis the policy dimension of our interest. Thus, the bidimensional analysis allows us to display

[19] Different colors point out different degree of extremism: red for left wing, yellow for center and blue for right wing.

[20] See Appendix A.

[21] The Chapell Hill expert survey does not provide variables that clearly distinguish between inclusionary and exclusionary positions. For this reason, we decided to use the classic left/right distinction. According to the present analysis that looks at singular policy issues per time, this distinction is still reliable and fair in reference to the main inclusionary-exclusionary theoretical framework.

the ideological position of political parties on certain specific policy issues pointed out by the inclusionary/exclusionary framework and observe how these might change over time.

Table 5.1. Bidimensional analysis, Italy (2014 -2019)
Redistribution (material), Left/Right

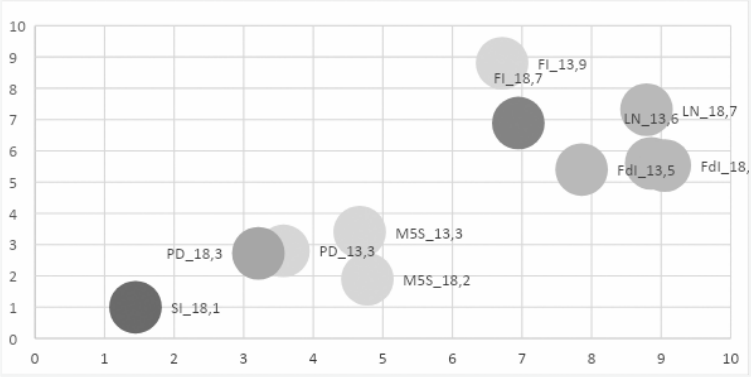
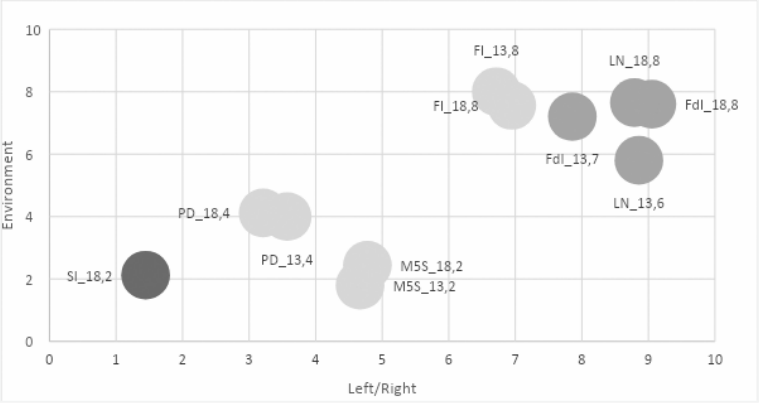


Table 5.2 Bidimensional analysis, Italy (2014 -2019)
Environment (material), Left/Right

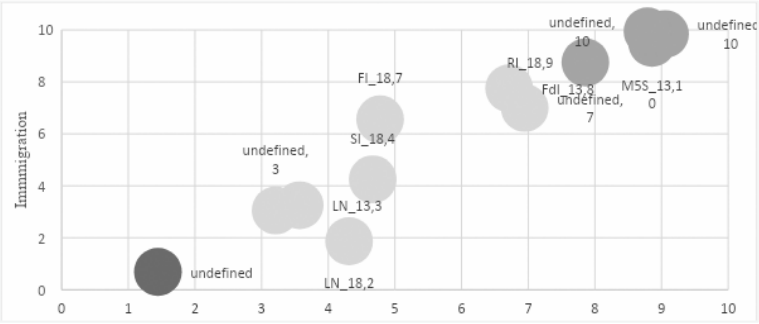


From a material point of view, looking at "redistribution", there are no considerable shifts from 2014 to 2019 for 5SM[22]. On a scale from 0 (extremely favourable to redistribution) to 10 (strongly opposes redistribution), the 5SM remained quite favourable to redistribution, passing from 3 (2014) to 2 (2019). The LN and FdI tended to oppose redistribution. LN shifted from a score of 6 (2014) to a score of 7 (2018), whereas FdI changed from a score of 5(2014) to 6 (2019). PD was the only one that remained stable in its position (3), quite favourable to redistribution over time.

Looking at "environment," the most important results show that the 5SM remained quite open and inclusive regarding the use of economic resources for the environment (score 2 from 2014 to 2019), whereas its coalition partner LN became even more strict and exclusive on this issue (from score 6 in 2014 to score 8 to 2019).

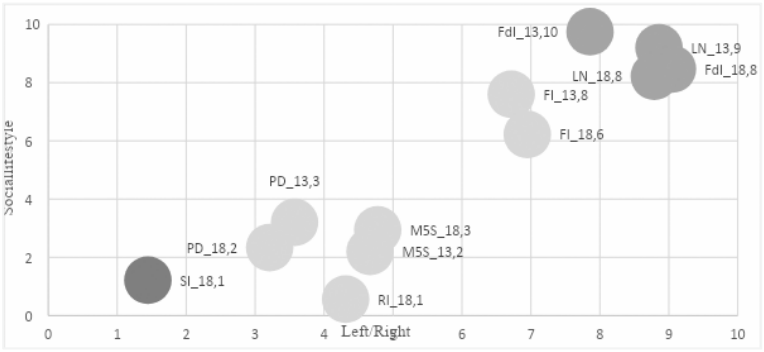
[22] To be noted that these tables display the major political parties present in that moment, and that those political parties that disappeared in that period were not included. Within the table we included the score for the policy position and the year of last national election. Labels = M5S: Five Star Movement; LN: League; FdI: Brothers of Italy; FI: Forza Italia; PD: Democratic Party.

Table 5.3. Bidimensional analysis, Italy (2014 -2019)
Immigration (political and symbolic) – Left/Right



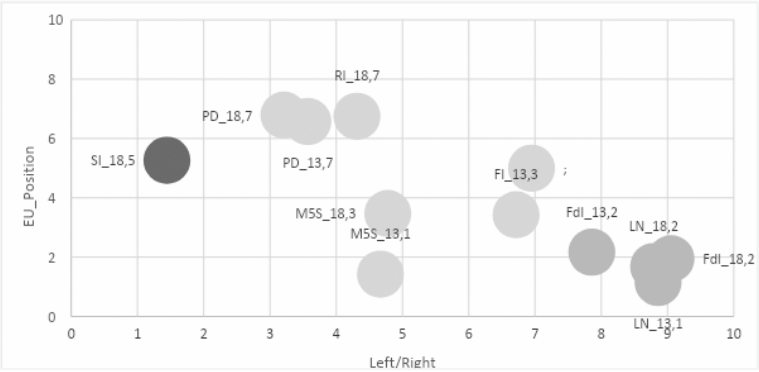
Turning to the political dimension, it is possible to acknowledge an important policy shift on immigration for 5SM during its first coalition period with LN. On a scale from 0 (strongly favours a liberal policy on immigration) to 10 (strongly favours a restrictive policy on immigration), the 5SM passed from a less restrictive position 4 (2014) to a notably more restrictive position scoring 7 (2018). In contrast, LN remained stable on its exclusionary position 10 from 2014 to 2019, and the PD did the same, not moving at all from its (quite) inclusive position (3). The PD remained stable in its soft inclusionary position (3 in 2014 and 2019). Interestingly, FdI shifted towards an even more exclusionary position towards immigration, going from 9 (2014) to 10 (2019).

Table 5.4. Bidimensional analysis, Italy (2014 -2019)
Social lifestyle (political), Left/Right



Concerning social lifestyle, the 5SM started with a quite inclusive position, but this slightly shifted from a score of 2 (2014) to 3 (2019), which means that overall, it remained quite supportive (but not really open) towards topics such as civil rights and gender equality. Between 2014 and 2019, the PD remained quite inclusive, shifting from a score of 3 towards an even more inclusive position of 2. LN and FdI remained very exclusive on these topics, although FdI mildly toned down its position (from 10 to 8). An interesting result is related to Forza Italia (FI) which moved away from the exclusionary right-wing corner towards a more lenient position from 2014 to 2019.

Table 5.5. Bidimensional analysis, Italy (2014 -2019)
EU_Position (symbolic), Left/Right



Finally, looking at the position of the EU, it is possible to observe that the 5SM became "softer" towards the EU integration, shifting from a more exclusionary position towards a less strict view on EU, shifting from 1 (2014) to 3 (2019). This cannot be considered as a striking result but is still quite relevant, especially if we consider the original anti-EU character of the 5SM. By contrast, LN and FdI remained quite loyal to their very exclusionary position towards the EU. Interestingly, FI, which was already less exclusionary (score 3 in 2014) than its allies FdI and LN, moved towards an even more open approach towards the EU (score 5 in 2019).

5. *Results*

Overall, these main results on the dimension of the inclusionary-exclusionary framework (material, political and symbolic) suggest that only on the material dimension did the 5SM remain truly loyal to its initial positions. Especially re-

garding immigration and EU integration, the 5SM changed its mind considerably. What is quite clear is that the 5SM shifted towards a more exclusionary view of immigration between 2014 and 2019. By contrast, it seems that the League did not change its exclusionary position on any dimension in any way because of having the 5SM as a coalition partner. Indeed, especially on redistribution and the environment, the League became even more extreme in its exclusionary positions on these topics, positioning itself farther from its coalition partner. It could be argued that the League tended to follow its external coalition partner, Brothers of Italy, in its extreme positions. The PD did not show striking shifts on any of the policy issues presented. However, looking at this last point, it is important to note that even if, according to these bidimensional analyses, the PD remained stable on its soft inclusionary position on immigration, it also adopted some exclusionary positions on this topic between 2013 and 2019. In particular, during the Gentiloni Government in 2017, the PD promoted the Minniti-Orlando law, which introduced severe restrictions on immigration (Froio, 2021, p. 260). Overall, it can be argued that immigration remains a sensitive topic regarding populist influence (Biard et al, 2019), especially in the presence of exclusionary populist parties within the political scenario.

6. *Conclusions*

This analysis is aware that these results are not enough to argue that the policy shifts described are due to radical right populist contamination. However, they provide a fruitful insight that a quantitative and qualitative analysis might investigate further and that the present author has researched deep-

ly. For now, this essay suggests that within the period from 2014 to 2019, the 5SM remained quite loyal to its inclusionary position on economic redistribution and protection of the environment. In contrast, it showed a notable shift towards stricter immigration policies. On the EU, the 5SM showed a more open attitude. It might be argued that due to its "experience in office," the Movement felt forced to soften its original anti-EU positions. Conversely, the League remained quite stable in its exclusionary positions, becoming even more exclusionary on topics such as redistribution and environment – topics that are actually very important for the 5SM.

Overall, looking at these data, it is possible to claim that the 5SM was influenced by its coalition partner, the League. In contrast, the League wanted to stress the differences from the 5SM, shifting towards even more exclusionary positions along with Brothers of Italy. In conclusion, this case study confirms that RRPP topics are the most contagious. Furthermore, it can be argued that the PD was also, to some extent, influenced by the League in terms of immigration and integration policies. Indeed, according to the bidimensional analyses presented, the PD remained quite stable on its policy position except for "social lifestyle" (e.g. gay marriage and LGTB rights), where it shifted towards an even more inclusionary position. However, it is equally important to note that, even if, in our bidimensional analysis, the PD showed quite an open attitude towards immigration and did not show significant changes between 2013 and 2019, it pushed forward exclusionary immigration policies in 2017 under the Gentiloni government.

References

Agnew, J., & Shin, M. (2002) *Mapping Populism: Taking Politics to the People* (Illustrated ed.). London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Albertazzi, D., & Mueller, S. (2013) 'Populism and Liberal Democracy: Populists in Government in Austria, Italy, Poland and Switzerland'. *Government and Opposition*, 48(3), pp. 343-371.

Albertazzi, D., & McDonnell, D. (2015) *Populists in power*. Oxon: Routledge.

Albertazzi, D., Giovannini, A., & Seddone, A. (2018) ''No regionalism please, we are Leghisti!' The transformation of the Italian Lega Nord under the leadership of Matteo Salvini'. *Regional & Federal Studies*, *28*(5), pp. 645-671.

Albertazzi, D., & Vampa, D. (2021) *Populism and New Patterns of Political Competition in Western Europe (Extremism and Democracy)* (1st ed.). Oxon: Routledge.

Akkerman, T., & de Lange, S.L. (2012) 'Radical Right Parties in Office: Incumbency Records and the Electoral Cost of Governing'. *Government and Opposition*, *47*(4), pp. 574-596.

Akkerman, T., Lange, S.D.L., & Rooduijn, M. (2016) *Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties in Western Europe: Into the Mainstream?* (Routledge Studies in Extremism and Democracy) (1st ed.). Oxon: Routledge.

Bale, T., Green-Pedersen, C., Krouwel, A., Luther, K.R., & Sitter, N. (2010) 'If you can't Beat them, Join them? Explaining Social Democratic Responses to the Challenge from the Populist Radical Right in Western Europe'. *Political Studies*, 58(3), pp. 410-426.

Bernardi, L., Sandri, G., & Seddone, A. (2017) 'Challenges of political participation and intra-party democracy: Bittersweet symphony from party membership and primary elections in Italy'. *Acta Politica*, *52*(2), pp. 218-240.

Betz, H.-G. (1994) *Radical right-wing populism in Western Europe*. New York: St. Martins Press.

Beyme, K.V. (1988) 'Right-wing extremism in post-war Europe'. *West European Politics*, *11*(2), pp. 1-18.

Biancalana, C. (2020) 'From social movements to institutionalization: The Five-star Movement and the high-speed train line in Val di Susa'. *Contemporary Italian Politics*, *12*(2), pp. 155-168.

Biard, B., Bernhard, L., & Betz, H.-G. (2019) *Do they make a difference?: The policy influence of radical right populist parties in Western Europe*. London: ECPR Press.

Biorcio, R., & Sampugnaro, R. (2019) Introduction: The Five-star Movement from the street to local and national institutions. *Contemporary Italian Politics*, *11*(1), pp. 5-14.

Bordignon, F., & Ceccarini, L. (2013) 'Five Stars and a Cricket. Beppe Grillo Shakes Italian Politics'. *South European Society and Politics*, *18*(4), pp. 427-449.

Bordignon, F., Ceccarini, L. (2016) The five stars continue to shine: the consolidation of Grillo's 'movement party' in Italy. Contemporary Italian Politics, 8(2), pp. 131-159.

Biard, B., Bernhard, L., & Betz, H.-G. (2019) Do they make a difference?: The policy influence of radical right populist parties in Western Europe. London: ECPR Press.

Bouillaud, C., (2019) 'The Nothern League (1991 – 2018); Thriving Without Delivering? Or Haming Southern Italy for Decades by its Very Existence?'. Biard, B., Laurent., B., & Betz, H., G., (Eds), *Do they Make a difference? The policy influence of radical right populist parties in Western Europe*. London: ECPR Press (pp.95 -122).

Carvalho, J. (2016) *Impact of Extreme Right Parties on Immigration Policy: Comparing Britain, France and Italy* (Routledge Studies in Extremism and Democracy) (1st ed.). Oxon: Routledge.

Cervi, L. (2020) 'Exclusionary Populism and Islamophobia: A Comparative Analysis of Italy and Spain'. *Religions*, *11*(10), p. 516.

Chapel Hill Expert Survey Trend File, 1999-2019, Jolly, Seth, Ryan Bakker, Liesbet Hooghe, Gary Marks, Jonathan Polk, Jan Rovny, Marco Steenbergen, and Milada Anna Vachudova. Forthcoming. "Chapel Hill Expert Survey Trend File, 1999-2019." Electoral Studies.

Christiansen, F., J., Bjerregaard, M., & Thomsen, P., F., (2019) 'From marginalization to political insider. The policy influence of the Danish People's Party'. In B.Biard, L. Bernhard, H.G. Betz (Eds.) *Do they make a difference?: The policy influence of radical right populist parties in Western Europe*. London: ECPR Press.

Codice Etico del Movimento 5 Stelle. Retrieved from: https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/associazionerousseau/documenti/codice_etico_MoVimento_2017.pdf (last access, 29 September 2022).

Combei, C., Giannetti., Farné., M., D., Pinto, L., (2020) 'Populism and Policy Issues: Examining Political Communication on Twitter in Italy 2018-2019'. *Italian Political Science*, *15*(2).

Font, N., Graziano, P., & Tsakatika, M. (2019) 'Varieties of Inclusionary Populism? SYRIZA, Podemos and the Five Star Movement'. *Government and Opposition*, *56*(1), pp. 163-183.

Froio, C. (2021) Italy, In Albertazzi, D., & Vampa, D. (Ed.*), Populism and New Patterns of Political Competition in Western Europe (Extremism and Democracy)*, London: Routledge (pp. 250 -268).

Heinisch, R. (2003) 'Success in opposition – failure in government: explaining the performance of right-wing populist parties in public office'. *West European Politics*, *26*(3), pp. 91-130.

Ignazi, P. (2018) *I partiti in Italia dal 1945 al 2018*. Bologna: Il Mulino.

Ivaldi, G., Lanzone, M.E., & Woods, D. (2017) 'Varieties of Populism across a Left-Right Spectrum: The Case of the Front National, the Northern League, Podemos and Five Star Movement'. *Swiss Political Science Review*, *23*(4), pp. 354-376.

Graziano, P. (2018) *Neopopulismi. Perché sono destinati a durare.* Il Mulino: Bologna.

Lanzone M., and Tronconi F. (2015) Between Blog, Social Networks and Territory: Activists and Grassroots Organization. In F. Tronconi (Ed.), *Beppe Grillo's Five Star Movement. Organization, Communication and Ideology* (pp. 53-74). Farnham, England: Routledge.

Lega Nord (2013) Programma Elezioni Politiche 2013. Retrieved from: https://www.leganord.org/phocadownload/elezioni/politiche /Programma%20Politiche%202013.pdf (last access, 14 February 2024).

Lega (2014) Programma Elettorale Europee 2014. Retrieved from: https://www.leganord.org/component/phocadownload/category/194-programma-elettorale-europee-2014 (last access, 14 February 2024).

Lega Nord, (2014b) http://www.isola.leganord.org/tag/isola/ (last access, 14 February 2024)Lega (2018) Programma Elezioni Politiche 2018. Retrieved from: https://www.leganord.org/index.php (*last access, 14 February 2024).*

Napoletano, A.G., (2017) Innovative Politics: Does The Five Star Movement Deviate from its 'Democratic Formula'? (Master Thesis), retrieved from https://theses.ubn.ru.nl/server/api/core/bitstreams/f1c1fbd1-a92a-43d2-b96d-71b27c55945b/content (Last Access 14 February 2024).

Mair, P. (2009) *Representative versus responsible government.* Cologne: Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies.

Manucci, L., & Amsler, M. (2017) 'Where the wind blows: Five Star Movement's populism, direct democracy and ideological flexibility'. *Italian Political Science Review/Rivista Italiana Di Scienza Politica*, *48*(1), pp. 109-132.

McDonnell, D. (2006) 'A weekend in Padania: Regionalist populism and the Lega Nord'. *Politics*, *26*(2), pp. 126-132. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9256.2006.00259.x.

Meguid, B.M. (2005) 'Competition Between Unequals: The Role of Mainstream Party Strategy in Niche Party Success'. *American Political Science Review, 99*(3), p. 347-359.

Meijers, M.J. (2015) 'Contagious Euroscepticism'. *Party Politics*, 23(4), pp. 413-423.

Minkenberg, M. (2001) 'The radical right in public office: Agenda-setting and policy effects'. *West European Politics, 24*(4), pp. 1-21.

Movimento 5 Stelle (2009°) *Carta di Firenze*. Retrieved from: http://www.montepulciano5stelle.org/wordpress/il-movimento-5-stelle/carta-di-firenze/ (last access, 14 February 2024).

Movimento 5 Stelle (2009b) *Non Statuto*. Retrieved from: https://www.carteinregola.it/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Regolamento-Movimento-5-Stelle-26-9-2016-.pdf. (last access, 14 February 2024).

Movimento 5 Stelle (2013) Programma Elettorale per elezioni politiche 2013. Retrieved from: https://www1.interno.gov.it-/mininterno/export/sites/default/it/assets/files/25_elezioni/6_MOVIMENTO_5_STELLE.PDF (last access, 14 February 2024).

Movimento 5 Stelle (2014) Programma Elettorale per elezioni europee 2014. Retrieved from: https://st3.idealista.it/news/archivie/2014-05/programma-movimento-5-stelle.pdf (last access, 14 February 2024).

Movimento 5 Stelle (2017) Nuovo Statuto. Retrieved from: https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/associazionerousseau/documenti/statuto_MoVimento_2017.pdf (Last access, 14 February 2024).

Movimento 5 Stelle (2018) Programma elettorale Capo Politico Luigi Di Maio. Retrieved from: https://dait.interno.gov.it/documenti/trasparenza-/politiche2018/Doc/4/4_Prog_Elettorale.pdf (last access, 14 February 2024).

Mudde, C. (2004) 'The Populist Zeitgeist'. *Government and Opposition, 39*(4), pp. 541-563.

Mudde, C., & Kaltwasser Cristóbal Rovira. (2017) *Populism: a very short introduction.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mudde, C., (2017) Populism: An Ideational Approach, in Espejo, P.O., Ostiguy, P., Kaltwasser.

Cristóbal Rovira, & Taggart, P. (Eds.). *The Oxford handbook of populism* (pp. 27-47). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mudde, C., & Kaltwasser, R.C. (2012) *Populism in Europe and the Americas: Threat or Corrective for Democracy?* Cambridge University Press.

Mudde, C., & Rovira Kaltwasser, C. (2013) 'Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary Populism: Comparing Contemporary Europe and Latin America'. *Government and Opposition*, *48*(2), pp. 147-174.

Mudde, C. (2016) *The Populist Radical Right (Extremism and Democracy)* (1st ed.). Routledge.

Müller Jan-Werner, (2017) *What is populism?* UK: Penguin Books.

Passarelli, G., & Tuorto, D. (2018) *La Lega di Salvini: Estrema destra di governo (Contemporanea)* (Italian Edition). Il Mulino: Bologna.

Partito Democratico, (2013) Programma elettorale per elezioni politiche 2013, Retrieved from: https://s3.amazonaws.com/PDS3/allegati/il-programma-dei-democratici-e-dei-progressisti.pdf (last access, 14 February 2024).

Partito Democratico, (2014) Programma elettorale per elezioni europee 2014. Retrieved from: https://s3.amazonaws.com/PDS3/allegati/programma%20pd%20europa_DEF_Layout%201_1.pdf (last access, 14 February 2024).

Partito Democratico, (2018) Programma elettorale per elezioni politiche 2018. Retrievedfrom: https://dait.interno.gov.it/documenti/trasparenza/politiche2018/Doc/98/98_Prog_Elettorale.pdf (last access, 14 February 2024).

Paxton, F. (2019) 'Towards a Populist Local Democracy? The Consequences of Populist Radical Right Local Government Leadership in Western Europe'. *Representation*, 56(3), pp. 411-430.

Rummens, S., (2017) Populism as a threat to liberal democracy, in Espejo, P.O., Ostiguy, P., Kaltwasser Cristóbal Rovira, & Taggart, P. (Eds.). *The Oxford handbook of populism* (pp. 554-570). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Schain, M.A. (2006) 'The extreme-right and immigration policymaking: Measuring direct and indirect effects'. *West European Politics, 29*(2), pp. 270-289.

Taggart, P. (2000). *Populism*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Tronconi, F. (Ed.). (2015) *Beppe Grillo's Five Star Movement. Organization, Communication and ideology*. Farnaham, England: Routledge.

Tronconi, F. (2018) 'The Italian Five Star Movement during the Crisis: Towards Normalisation?' *South European Society and Politics, 23*(1), pp. 163-180.

Mosca, L., & Tronconi, F. (2019) 'Beyond left and right: the eclectic populism of the Five Star Movement'. *West European Politics, 42*(6), pp. 1258-1283.

Urbinati, N. (2011) 'Representative democracy and its critics'. In S. Alonso, J. Keane & W. Merkel (Eds.), The Future of Representative Democracy (pp. 23-49). Cambridge,England: Cambridge University Press.

Van Spanje, J. (2010) 'Contagious Parties: Anti-Immigration Parties and Their Impact on Other Parties' Immigration Stances in Contemporary Western Europe'. *Party Politics*, 16(5), pp. 563-586.

Verbeek, B., & Zaslove, A. (2014) 'The impact of populist radical right parties on foreign policy: the Northern League as a junior coalition partner in the Berlusconi Governments'. *European Political Science Review, 7*(4), pp. 525-546.

Vignati, R. (2015) 'Beppe Grillo and the Movimento 5 Stelle: A Brief History of a Movement with a Leaderless Ideology'. In F. Tronconi (Ed.). (2015) Beppe Grillo's Five Star Movement. Organization, Communication and ideology (pp.9-29). Farnaham, England: Routledge.

Vittori, D. (2019) 'The impact of populism on party organization? A study of four Southern European 'populist' parties'. *European Politics and Society*, *21*(1), pp. 53-71.

Vittori, D. (2020) *Il valore di uno: Il Movimento 5 Stelle e l'esperimento della democrazia diretta (Italian Edition)*. Rome: LUISS University Press.

Wolinetz, S.B., & Zaslove, A. (2018) *Absorbing the blow: populist parties and their impact on parties and party systems*. London: Rowman & Littlefield International, Ltd.

Zarzalejos, J. (2016) 'Populism in Spain: An Analysis of Podemos'. *European View*, 15(2), pp. 183-191.

Zaslove, A. (2004) 'Closing the door? The ideology and impact of radical right populism on immigration policy in Austria and Italy'. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 9(1), pp. 99-118.

Appendix A
Chapell Hill Expert Survey trend file 1999-2019 – Questions

Material dimension

REDISTRIBUTION = position on redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor.

0 = Strongly favors redistribution; 10 = Strongly opposes redistribution

ENVIRONMENT = position towards environmental sustainability

0 = Strongly supports environmental protection even at the cost of economic growth; 10 = Strongly supports economic growth even at the cost of environmental protection

Political and symbolic dimension

IMMIGRATE_POLICY = position on immigration policy.

0 = Strongly favors a liberal policy on immigration; 10: Strongly favors a restrictive policy on immigration

Political dimension

SOCIALLIFESTYLE = position on social lifestyle (e.g. rights for homosexuals, gender equality).

0 = Strongly supports liberal policies; 10 = Strongly opposes liberal policies

Symbolic dimension

EU_POSITION = overall orientation of the party leadership towards European integration in YEAR.

1 = Strongly opposed
2 = Opposed
3 = Somewhat opposed
4 = Neutral
5 = Somewhat in favor
6 = In favor
7 = Strongly in favor 25

A Theoretical Framework to Explore Multiple Processes of Far-Right Mainstreaming: Focusing on France and Italy

ALESSIO SCOPELLITI[1]

Abstract. The chapter aims to highlight multiple approaches for understanding the mainstreaming of far-right parties, using the French and the Italian cases to demonstrate that such a complex phenomenon cannot be attributed to a single factor (or approach). Instead, it argues it typically results from the simultaneous influence of multiple factors. And for their ideological nature, the mainstreaming of the far-right can have far-reaching consequences for liberal democracies: (a) far-right parties often exhibit a hostile stance towards minority groups and civil liberties, such as freedom of the press, expression, and association; (b) far-right parties tend to be authoritarian and, thus, anti-democratic, leading to attempts to limit democratic participation and political competition; (c) far-right governments manifest through forms of majoritarianism that implicitly rely on restrictions on political and civil rights, implementing laws that undermine political pluralism. Eventually, the normalisation process of far-right ideas is a phenomenon that, in the long run, produces hatred and discrimination, as people may perceive far-right values as acceptable, resulting in increased discrimination and violence from

[1] Università Statale degli Studi di Milano, alessio.scopelliti@unimi.it.

the relative ethnic/political majority against multiple minorities that coexist in nowadays societies.
Keywords: Far-right; mainstreaming; Italy; France; Liberal democracy.

Introduction

Over the last decade, academic literature on party politics has observed the surprising electoral success of far-right political parties. These movements – once considered controversial due to their historical values and ideals – are no longer seen as fringe parties that voters choose to protest against the establishment or express social discontent. Instead, they have become genuine electoral alternatives, consolidating their presence in national elections across Europe and globally. Accordingly, this chapter primarily focuses on far-right parties that are no longer ephemeral electoral phenomena. Instead, they have firmly established themselves as viable options in modern European party politics nationally and transnationally. Table 1, drafted in August 2023, showcases recent electoral results in European national parliaments. Notably, many of these parties, such as Vlaams Belang and the National Rally, initially secured only a few seats but significantly increased their parliamentary representation in subsequent elections. Even Brothers of Italy witnessed substantial seat gains between 2018 and 2022 despite a reduction in the total number of Italian MPs due to a constitutional referendum. Furthermore, it is essential to observe the electoral performance of far-right parties in recent elections that did not increase in electoral performance. Parties like Freedom Party, Freedom and Direct Democracy, Alternative for Germany, Party of Freedom, Vox and Sweden Democrats experienced slight decreases in their seat counts between the last two consecutive elections. The League, on the other hand, witnessed a significant decline in electoral performance.

Table 1 electoral results of far-right parties in European countries' national parliaments

Country	**Far-right party**	**Year t-1**	**Seats t-1**	**Year t**	**Seats t**
Austria	Freedom Party	2017	40	2019	31
Belgium	Vlaams Belang	2014	3	2019	18
Czech Republic	Freedom and Direct Democracy	2017	22	2021	20
France	National Rally	2017	8	2022	89
Germany	Alternative for Germany	2017	91	2021	83
Italy	League	2018	125	2022	23*
Italy	Brothers of Italy	2018	32	2022	69*
The Netherlands	Party of Freedom	2017	20	2021	17
Spain	Vox	2019	52	2023	33
Sweden	Sweden Democrats	2018	62	2022	61

Notes: * Constitutional Law No. 1 of 19 October 2020 provided a drastic reduction in MPs from 630 to 400 deputies and from 315 to 200 senators.

This trend of far-right parties' electoral performance becomes even more pronounced when examining the transnational level, particularly in European elections. Comparing the 2014 and 2019 European elections, Table 2 reveals significant seat increases for parliamentary groups that endorse far-right ideologies. The Identity and Democracy group added approximately forty-three seats, and the European Conservatives and Reformists gained about four seats.

Table 2 European Parliament Elections in 2019

European Parliamentary Group	**Seats in 2019 European Elections**	**Difference of seats from 2014 European Elections**
European People's Party (EPP)	187	-27
Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D)	148	-19
Renew Europe (ex-ALDE)	97	+29
Identity and Democracy (ex-ENF)	76	+43
The Green/European Free Alliance (Greens-EFA)	68	+22
European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR)	62	+4
European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL)	40	-11
Unaffiliated parties	27	+10
Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD)	0	-24

Source: Politico website
(https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/european-parliament-elections-2019/)

These European electoral results carry multiple implications. Firstly, the 2019 European elections saw a notable increase in voter turnout, a departure from the decades-long decline in European Parliament election participation. This shift underscores the growing importance of the European Parliament in national political debates. Secondly, the new composition of the European Parliament signifies shifting political dynamics at both European and national levels. For the first time in Euro-

pean Parliament history, the European People's Party and the Socialists & Democrats no longer held an absolute majority, leading to alliances with Renew Europe and Greens/European Free Alliance groups, promoting further European integration. Lastly, this political coalition in the European Parliament highlights the emergence of an opposing political pole, comprising parties from the European Conservatives and Reformists Group (ECR) and the Identity and Democracy Group (ID). As such, despite their defeat in the 2019 European elections, this pole has gained significant media and political attention, strengthening far-right parties' arguments within the European electorate.

These results, whether at the national or European level, resonate with the introductory theme of the normalisation and acceptance of far-right parties from a demand-side perspective. Voters are becoming less hesitant to support these parties, as they are no longer seen as mere protest votes or reflections of social discontent. Instead, far-right parties are increasingly viewed as representing voters' ideals and interests. Given the ongoing electoral success of far-right parties in today's European politics, this chapter does not focus on the reasons behind their electoral success; instead, its main goal is to explore the implications of this success, specifically the normalisation of far-right narratives and ideologies. To accomplish this, the chapter firstly reviews existing academic literature, clarifying key concepts relevant to the study of far-right parties, including their conceptualisation of "what is *far-right?*" and the conceptualisation of "what does it mean *mainstreaming* of the far-right?". Secondly, the chapter introduces a new theoretical framework that may aid future researchers in investigating the mainstreaming of far-right parties. This framework draws from multiple interdisciplinary branches of academic literature, organised into three main blocks: the

cultural, rational, and institutional approaches. While not presenting empirical evidence, the chapter uses case studies from France and Italy to illustrate these three approaches, offering readers a deeper understanding of the so-called phenomenon of *far-right mainstreaming*.

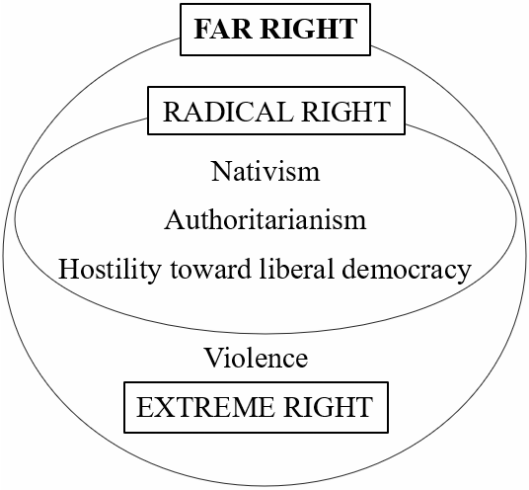
1. *Literature review*

1.1 What is the far-right?

The far-right party family has received numerous definitions over the decades. The concept has evolved due to extensive post-Second World War literature, likening it to right-wing totalitarian ideologies like Nazism and Fascism, spawning new categories such as neo-Nazism and neo-Fascism. Multiple generations of academics have studied and interpreted the political landscape to deepen their understanding. My goal is to clarify how academia nowadays defines the core features that constitute the far-right as an ideology.

Far-right is often associated with various terms aiming to reveal its core ideologies. In this chapter, I will mainly rely on three authors who extensively explored the far-right concept: Cas Mudde (2007, 2019) and the work from Sofia Vasilopoulou and Daphne Halikiopoulou (2015). Drawing from their seminal works, the far-right is understood as an umbrella term encompassing two similar but distinct notions: the radical right and the extreme right (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1. Umbrella conceptualisation of the far-right



The main constitutive characteristics of contemporary radical right ideology can be categorised into three strands: nativism, authoritarianism, and hostility towards liberal democracy. *Nativism*, as defined by Mudde (2007, p.22), centres on the belief that states should exclusively comprise members of the native group or nation, viewing non-native elements as threats to national homogeneity. Nativism defines citizens' belonging in ethnic terms (Betz, 1994) and, accordingly, radical right parties argue that multiculturalism shall be considered a threat to national heritage and traditions (Triandafyllidou, 1998; Rovny, 2013). Moving to *authoritarianism,* following the stream of research of Adorno and his colleagues (1950), Flanagan and Lee (2003, p.238) describe it as valuing self-denial, where everyone in the party – and, eventually, the country – must guarantee loyalty to the group and unchecked leaders. Once in government, far-right parties may impose law

and order not only against external threats (e.g. all those that do not belong to the majoritarian ethnic group) but also against internal enemies, including political critics and political opponents (Heinisch, 2003, p. 95). The final characteristic distinguishing radical right parties from extreme parties, which still creates confusion for the broader audience (and observers and political scientists often underestimate it), is the *hostility towards liberal democracy*. Having reviewed the previous core features, one shall notice that they are inherently in contrast with the fundamental principles that constitute a liberal democracy, which is based on:

> the importance of protecting individual and minority rights against the tyranny of the state and the tyranny of the majority. [...] This is achieved by constitutionally protected civil liberties, strong rule of law, an independent judiciary, and effective checks and balances that, together, limit the exercise of executive power (Coppedge et al, 2023, p. 45).

However, once in power, radical right parties tend to express (not necessarily in an explicit way) extreme forms of majoritarianism (Mudde, 2013, 2014; Betz and Johnson, 2016; Castillo-Ortiz, 2019; Urbinati, 2019). We have witnessed European governments with radical right political parties in power that exemplify this strengthening of majoritarian institutions, such as Fidesz in Hungary and Law and Justice in Poland. In both countries, these parties have shown disregard for the rule of law by suppressing political rights and the rights of both ethnic and LGBT+ minorities (Wintrobe, 2018, p. 218). Similarly, in Italy, once the League joined the Conte I cabinet in 2018, pushed for implementing the "security decrees" that hinder the action of NGOs to rescue migrants at sea and limit civil society's rights to protest (Corsi, 2019). Another example is the Israeli judicial reform proposed by the Netanyahu gov-

ernment to curb the judiciary's influence over lawmaking and limit the Supreme Court's power to exercise judicial review (Roznai, 2018). All these examples have been unlisted as rising cases of the so-called "illiberal democracies" (Plattner, 2020). As one can notice, the core feature of hostility towards liberal democracy is the most complex. It is often confusing when scholars attempt to distinguish radical right from extreme right (Carter, 2018). Both types of far-right movements possess nativist and authoritarian traits, albeit with cultural and historical variations. However, it is their differing attitudes towards liberal democracy that set them apart. The radical right is generally seen as pro-democracy and anti-violence, while the extreme right is characterised as anti-democratic and pro-violence.

In summary, one shall distinguish these two types of far-right movements, keeping in mind that while extreme right movements are often associated with a rejection of democracy and a propensity for violence (and for that reason, excluded by the democratic game), radical right movements vary in their relationship with democracy. The radical right does participate in democratic processes, seeking to capitalise on public support and achieve power through legal and electoral means. But one should still remember that its electoral success might lead to more extreme and (il)liberal regimes.

1.2 What does it mean "mainstreaming" of the far-right?

First of all, before I start to clarify what can be conceptualised as the mainstreaming of a certain ideology, I believe it is necessary to clarify the conceptual root of such a process. Therefore, I shall explain: what is a mainstream party?

The term "mainstream party" is frequently used in political science by two main characteristics: ideological positionality and or-

ganisational aspects. The first attribute, as one can intuitively observe, links mainstream parties to the classical cleavage structure of left vs right ideological conflict, positioning these types of parties as those that dwell in the centre-left, centre, or centre-right of such ideological spectrum. Therefore, mainstream parties embody classical cleavage structures, like the Christian Democratic, the Social Democratic, the Liberal, and the Conservative parties. Parties founded on these conflicts are considered moderate (due to their non-extreme/radical ideological positioning) and, thus, mainstream, while any other political parties that position on the fringes of such conflict are not to be considered mainstream (Pop-Eleches, 2010; Meguid, 2005). Alternatively, other authors prioritise other parties' characteristics, including parties' government potential. For instance, Giovanni Sartori (1976) defines mainstream parties as those capable of governing or forming coalitions. This definition includes established parties in their current systems as mainstream parties since they are those political forces that have held power and can do so again. Both approaches were valuable from the late 1940s to the 1960s when European party systems were stable and based on the four Rokkanian classical cleavage structures (State vs Church, Centre vs Periphery, Urban vs Rural, Employers vs Workers). However, since the early 1970s, new cleavage structures have challenged the validity of these two criteria. The last decades have complicated categorisations of mainstream and non-mainstream parties due to the latest evolving process that democratic regimes have been experiencing.

For instance, when populist parties (whether left-wing or right-wing) join governing coalitions[2] or become governing

[2] See for instance, Podemos, Danish People's Party, Freedom Party of Austria.

parties[3], do they become mainstream? When a centre-right party adopts a far-right platform[4], does it remain mainstream? These questions reflect the fluidity of party labels, which inevitably change with circumstances, political landscapes, and time. For that reason, the classification of mainstream parties based on their ideological belonging on the left vs right scale and capability to join a government presents significant shortcomings. Nonetheless, Benjamin Moffitt's (2022) conceptualisation stands out in this literature. In particular, he focuses on the distinction between mainstream and pariah parties, emphasising political legitimacy and social normalcy rather than on the core features of mainstream parties. This shift redirects attention to the acceptance of norms and ideas a party represents despite these values being once considered unspeakable and stigmatised. As such, Moffitt's concept portrays a mainstream party as the antithesis of a pariah party, which is not politically and socially accepted and should not participate in the current party system. Therefore, mainstreaming is rather a process of acceptance of extreme ideas, turning them into the new acceptable norms for society and, inevitably, for the democratic political game.

Specifically, when discussing the "mainstreaming" of the far-right, reference is often made to the so-called fourth wave of the far-right, emerging in the 21st century (Mudde, 2019). This is the most recent step of the long evolving process of far-right parties, which have been able to electorally capitalise in the last

[3] See for instance Syriza, Fidesz, Five Star Movement.

[4] See for instance the Republican Party under Trump or the Conservative party under Johnson.

two decades on recent economic crises (e.g. 2008 financial crisis, the rise of economic stagnation and endemic unemployment) and cultural crises (9/11 terrorist attack, 2015 migration crisis and uprising of islamophobia). As such, the defining feature of this fourth wave is the mainstreaming of the far-right, and this term has two main procedural directions on how mainstreaming takes place. The first involves mainstream parties adopting elements of pariah parties' ideology, policies, discourse, or rhetorical style to counter electoral threats. Akkerman et al (2016) suggest calling this phenomenon "radicalisation" since it does not involve radical parties moderating but mainstream parties adopting radical elements. The second process, conversely, concerns legitimising non-mainstream parties, allowing them to gain acceptability and become part of the mainstream, providing them with legitimacy and increased political and electoral viability (Brown et al, 2023). Both processes have significant implications in today's party politics. On the one hand, mainstream forces deviate from their original ideological positions towards more radical ones to capture more votes. On the other hand, stigmatised political and social movements are gaining more acceptance from the general public and political competitors. Together, these processes describe the fourth wave of the far-right. Unlike earlier waves, today's far-right parties are acceptable coalition partners for mainstream right and occasionally left parties. Furthermore, ideas from the far-right are openly debated in mainstream circles, news broadcasts, talk shows and social media. Although the radicalisation of mainstream parties has its specific relevance for the future of democratic regimes, I shall focus, in the following section, on multiple approaches to explore the second process: the mainstreaming of the far-right.

2. *Three approaches to exploring far-right mainstreaming*

In general, all three theoretical approaches suggest that far-right ideas are mainstreamed through their diffusion in various social contexts. However, these approaches differ in their focus and the modalities they express for this phenomenon.

2.1 Cultural approach

This approach focuses on disseminating far-right ideas through popular culture, such as mass media, music, film, and television. The far-right is not a particularly intellectual movement – in fact, many far-right groups are openly anti-intellectual, considering all intellectuals to be cultural Marxists. However, some organisations focus on developing and innovating far-right ideas and training far-right activists. This includes specific organizations within the most successful political parties, which organise thematic conferences and summer schools to train their members, and groups which focus exclusively on education, for example, by publishing books and magazines. This approach argues that far-right ideas are mainstreamed through their presence in popular culture, making them acceptable and desirable for some people.

One shall consider that the mainstreaming of far-right ideas passed through a normalisation of constructed truths that used to be unsayable and suddenly became sayable. Therefore, discussing the "shameless mainstreaming" of far-right discourses (Wodak, 2021), I primarily draw from Michel Foucault's works on the construction of truths in society (Foucault and Gordon, 1980). He argued that truth is not an absolute and unchanging concept, but it is instead a more flexible idea that is produced by social and cultural influences. And as a product of the societal realm, it is also influenced by chang-

es in the historical context and established societal norms. In other words, what is considered true in our society is often shaped by powerful dominant structures that shape and determine dominant shared values. Accordingly, living in turbulent *post-truth* times, the far-right often capitalises on a lack of trust in official institutions. It often questions the truthfulness of established (and therefore accepted) trust; when people perceive the state or mainstream institutions as corrupt or ineffective, the information they produce is also viewed as tainted. This situation encourages people to turn to alternative sources of information that provide their own interpretation of reality and how this shall be managed.

In today's digital age, the most representative example of a post-truth society is the capability of far-right actors to find new avenues for disseminating their ideologies, circumventing the need for negotiation with mainstream media companies. Instead, they can create their own digital content thanks to digital platforms, gaining more visibility and popularity. An illustrative case is Steve Bannon's news website (Breitbart.com), which aimed to build a platform for the alt-right (Michael, 2017). Moreover, these alternative media vehicles allowed other far-right figures to prosper, often adopting the veneer of intellectuals and feigning legitimacy to advance white supremacist ideas (through titles, such as "professor" and "dr", along with academic references) (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001). Moreover, keeping in mind the inevitable erosion of trust towards established institutions, far-right actors strategically position themselves as purveyors of truth, representing the voice of the "people" against the corrupted "elite." This transformation of the far-right into a "truth industry" represents a significant shift in the dynamics of media and political discourse in the digital age that encourages processes of far-right mainstreaming.

2.2 Rational approach

A rational (or strategic) approach by far-right actors involves their direct employment of persuasive techniques to appear less "extreme" in the eyes of their electorate, seeking legitimacy both when looking for power (in opposition) and also once holding such power (in government). Especially in opposition, social media's digital realm has become one of the most potent tools of far-right parties seeking mainstreaming. Thanks to the vague regulatory policies and algorithmic clustering of social media content and groups, far-right movements have been facilitated in constructing their identities and spreading far-right ideas and values (Ekman, 2019). Some authors even agree that social media have functioned as amplified platforms of far-right ideas, which blurred the boundaries between the mainstream and the pariah (Ekman, 2022). One key interpretive frame shaped via social media is new common sense constructions, providing frameworks to make sense of the world (Maccaferri and Newth, 2022; Newth and Scopelliti, 2023). Producing far-right knowledge by movements, whether in opposition or in power, is not a novel practice. Historical examples abound, such as during the Third Reich. Back then, scientific publications were prolific, aiming to establish scholarship on the "Jewish question" and justify the Holocaust under the Nazi regime (Stenweis, 2008). Simultaneously, far-right totalitarian regimes used cultural propaganda to combat various enemies, both ideological (e.g., antifascists) and racial (primarily targeting Jews). Fascist anthems like "Giovinezza" and "Faccetta Nera" significantly shaped Italian public opinion, rationalising colonialism and Italian overseas military endeavours (Pickering-Iazzi, 2000). Radio broadcasts featuring speeches by Hitler and Mussolini through loudspeakers served as a primary tool for disseminating news. The film industry of the 1930s also played a pivotal role in disseminating far-

right ideas and values (O'Shaughnessy, 2017). These tactics, not limited to the past, continue to be employed by contemporary far-right governments once gaining power. For example, Brazilian President Bolsonaro has propagated homophobic theories concerning the ideological indoctrination of children and teenagers in schools by teachers (Knijnik, 2021). Likewise, Donald Trump encouraged the dissemination of anti-liberal theories like Pizzagate[5] (Bleakley, 2023).

2.3 Institutional approach

The influence of electoral systems on the mainstreaming of the radical right is another crucial aspect to consider in understanding the rise and success of far-right parties and ideologies in contemporary politics. The electoral system, which defines the rules of the game for political competition, can either facilitate or hinder the access of far-right parties to national institutions. In this context, the European electoral system stands out as a crucial factor contributing to the visibility and acceptance of far-right actors (Reungoat, 2017). The European Parliament political arena operates on a proportional electoral system, which differs significantly from many national electoral systems that often rely on first-past-the-post or other majoritarian mechanisms. This distinction is pivotal because it provides new avenues and opportunities for political actors facing limitations within their national electoral systems. The proportional repre-

[5] This conspiracy theory emerged shortly before the 2016 electoral campaign, suggesting Democratic Party leaders were involved in ritual Satanic child abuses.

sentation system used in European elections thus allows for a more accurate reflection of the overall electorate's preferences, enabling minor parties, including those on the far-right, to secure representation. One of the key strategies employed by far-right movements in Europe has been to leverage European Parliamentary elections as a stepping stone for national political action. This approach has yielded several benefits for these parties and movements. Firstly, the presence of far-right politicians in the European Parliament lends credibility and legitimacy to their ideas and agendas, at least in the eyes of some segments of the electorate (Reungoat, 2017). Having Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) validates these parties, signalling to voters that they are a legitimate part of the political landscape. Moreover, the exposure gained through European elections can be instrumental in mobilising symbolic resources (Carter et al, 2007). High vote counts, media attention, and the sheer presence of far-right actors in the European Parliament help bolster their image and influence. These symbolic resources, in turn, can be used to build trust with voters or potential coalition partners. They become tools for legitimising far-right positions and policies, making them more palatable to a broader audience. Additionally, the European Parliament provides far-right parties access to material resources that are often challenging to obtain through national electoral processes. This includes recruiting European and local staff associated with individual MEPs, party groups, and Euro-parties. As a result, the European elections have become a strategic arena for the far-right, serving as a back door to national politics and contributing to their continued growth and influence in contemporary European politics (Shemer-Kunz, 2013).

3. *Case studies in comparison: France and Italy*

The following section does not serve as empirical evidence in support of the above theoretical framework. Instead, it functions as a set of examples to help the reader properly understand the multiple approaches to mainstreaming the far right.

3.1 France

A prime example illustrating the implications of mainstreaming the far-right through a cultural approach is the pivotal role played by Alain de Benoist. De Benoist, a French journalist and political philosopher, was a founding member of the *Nouvelle Droite*, a political and cultural movement dedicated to forging a new conservative identity by critiquing post-war collectivist ideals (communism and liberalism). He also founded and led the ethno-nationalist think tank GRECE (*Groupement de recherche et d'études pour la civilisation européenne*) (Rueda, 2021). GRECE's name, with its metapolitical objectives, emphasises its mission to rebuild culture not merely in service of nationalism but in pursuit of a new Europe. The following cultural influence was eventually reached through GRECEss leading publication, *Nouvelle école*, which welcomes prominent figures from the French right-wing cultural sphere to deliver essays and pieces linked to the values of the new right, such as ethnopluralism (Spektorowski, 2003).

Another example of the far-right's mainstreaming success is the transformation of the Front National under Marine Le Pen's leadership. When she assumed leadership, her status as a young woman in a predominantly male party signalled a shift towards novelty and garnered interest, especially among female voters. Marine Le Pen's strategy for the so-called *dediabolisation* (or de-demonization) involved changing the par-

ty's image and opening it up to a broader audience (Pérez and Vuelta, 2020). This strategy included distancing herself from the *Ni droite ni gauche* label, attacking Muslim communities, denouncing anti-Semitism, and seeking legitimacy within the Jewish community and Israel. This shift has attracted a middle-class segment of the population that has been defined by the literature as either "losers" of globalisation (Kriesi et al, 2006) or those who claim a "cultural backlash" (Norris and Inglehart, 2019) of authoritarian populist attitudes against cosmopolitan values.

Finally, another significant aspect determining the mainstreaming of the far-right in France is the different impact between the French and European electoral systems. In France, a majoritarian electoral system is in place. If no candidate secures over fifty per cent of the vote, a second round is organised, featuring only the top two candidates, with the one receiving an absolute majority winning. In this electoral context, as far-right parties have gained prominence in advanced democracies, established parties have faced a dilemma (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2019). They must decide whether to create a cordon sanitaire by avoiding alliances with far-right parties or invite them into government, forming a potentially tainted coalition. Establishing a cordon sanitaire can prevent extreme parties from immediately entering the government but may also energise their support in future elections. In contrast, forming a tainted coalition can limit the subsequent electoral success of extreme parties in exchange for granting them some institutional power in the short term. In France, the phenomenon of the cordon sanitaire has been observed numerous times, as the mainstream left and right have consistently refused to cooperate with the Front National. This is why the European electoral system, being proportional, has been so crucial for mainstreaming the French far-right. Such an electoral system pro-

vided substantial success in European elections, enabling far-right party actors to mobilise symbolic resources, gaining credibility with the electorate or potential coalition partners through the legitimacy of MEPs, media visibility, and a high number of votes (Reungoat, 2017). It is crucial to remark that in the more recent presidential elections, Marine Le Pen is not anymore an outcast of the national party system but a political player who has gained popularity and is recognised as an established political alternative, primarily thanks to her experience at the European Parliament.

3.1 Italy

Unlike the French example, the Italian country lacked significant think tanks that shaped societal perception of far-right ideas. Nonetheless, the rational approach best fits the Italian example while illustrating the mainstreaming of far-right parties while in a position of power. Two of Italy's most right-wing governments – the Conte I cabinet and the Meloni cabinet – exemplify this. Despite apparent differences, the Conte I cabinet resulted from the alliance between the League and the Five Star Movement in 2018, sharing hard Euroscepticism as the main common ground to justify such a government alliance. During this government, Matteo Salvini served as vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Internal Affairs, where he introduced some of the most stringent decrees against freedom to protest and the possibility of NGOs to help migrants in the Mediterranean Sea: the so-called "security decrees" or "Salvini's decrees", by juxtaposing the migrant crisis with a public safety issue. The Meloni cabinet, in turn, stands as Italy's most right-wing government. It is led by Brothers of Italy and supported by the League and Go Italy. In this case, the entire cabinet consistently promotes far-right narratives, including

hard Euroscepticism, anti-immigration policies, opposition to surrogacy, and criticism of homosexual families, emphasising law and order.

Like France, Italian far-right parties also utilised the European Parliament as a platform for their narratives and ideas (Bélanger and Wunsch, 2022). Notably, prominent Italian far-right leaders, such as Matteo Salvini from the League and Giorgia Meloni from Brothers of Italy, benefited from their European experiences. Salvini served as an MEP for five years before becoming party leader, gaining visibility through controversial protests in the European Parliament, championing slogans like "no euro" and "italexit". Similarly, Giorgia Meloni leveraged her European experience. While she never held a seat in the European Parliament, she became the president of the Conservative European Group. This role showcased her leadership skills, allowing her to self-label as Conservative while advancing far-right ideas to normalise Brothers of Italy's political agenda. However, the Italian electoral system has historically been proportional, granting far-right parties access to local and national institutions despite their ideological roots – even with the Italian Social Movement. Consequently, far-right parties often faced stigma during the First Republic, but they could still access power.

4. *Conclusions*

During the fourth wave of the far-right, such movements were initially considered niche parties, focusing primarily on socio-cultural issues like crime and immigration. Mainstream parties predominantly competed on socio-economic matters, such as taxation and unemployment. However, in the past two decades, socio-cultural issues have again taken centre stage in the

political agenda (Mudde, 2019). Across most European countries, political debates are now dominated by socio-cultural topics and identity conflicts. Norris and Inglehart call it *cultural backlash,* where a large section of society finds its most significant expression through "discourses blending nationalism, anti-globalism, racism, welfare nationalism, anti-immigrant and refugee themes, and the need for strong leadership and order" (Bennett and Livingston, 2018, p. 131). From this perspective, the new cleavage proposed by Norris and Inglehart (2016, 2019) is presented as a reaction against modernity that gave rise to a new conflict, namely authoritarian populist values vs cosmopolitan liberalist values. These discussions often include explicit or implicit defences of white supremacy in response to the increased politicisation of ethnic, religious and cultural minorities. Consequently, socio-cultural concerns are no longer niche, as mainstream parties now prioritise them, at least during their electoral campaigns. One could even argue that socio-economic issues have become niche in today's political landscape (demonstrating as much less salient has become the classical cleavage left vs right).

In this chapter, I aimed to highlight multiple approaches for understanding the mainstreaming of far-right parties, and both the French and the Italian cases demonstrated that such a complex phenomenon cannot be attributed to a single factor (or approach). Instead, it typically results from the simultaneous influence of multiple factors. Moreover, recognising that we are currently witnessing processes of normalisation or mainstreaming of the far-right raises questions about its implications. The far-right has established a lasting presence in politics, including those factions that survived the 1945 defeat of the Fascist and Nazis movements that initially inspired them (e.g. neo-Nazis and neo-Fascist parties). And for their own ideological nature, the mainstreaming of the far-right

can have far-reaching consequences for liberal democracies. Firstly, far-right parties often exhibit a hostile stance towards minority groups and civil liberties, such as freedom of the press, expression, and association. Far-right parties tend to be authoritarian and, thus, anti-democratic, leading to attempts to limit democratic participation and political competition. Lastly, far-right governments manifest through forms of majoritarianism that implicitly rely on restrictions on political and civil rights, implementing laws that undermine political pluralism. Eventually, the normalisation process of far-right ideas is a phenomenon that, in the long run, produces hatred and discrimination, as people may perceive far-right values as acceptable, resulting in increased discrimination and violence from the relative ethnic/political majority against multiple minorities that coexist in nowadays societies.

References

Adorno, T.W. (1950) *The authoritarian personality*, New York: Harper & Brothers.

Akkerman, T., de Lange, S.L. & Rooduijn, M. (2016) Inclusion and Mainstreaming? Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties into the New Millennium. In Akkerman T, de Lange SL and Rooduijn M (eds), *Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties in Western Europe: Into the Mainstream?* Abingdon: Routledge. Wodak, R. (2021). *The politics of fear: the shameless normalization of far-right discourse*. London, UK: SAGE.

Bélanger, M.È., & Wunsch, N. (2022) From cohesion to contagion? Populist radical right contestation of EU enlargement. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, *60*(3), 653-672.

Bennett, W.L., & Livingston, S. (2018) The disinformation order: Disruptive communication and the decline of democratic institutions. *European journal of communication*, *33*(2), 122-139.

Betz, H.G. (1994) *Radical right-wing populism in Western Europe*. Springer.

Betz, H.G., & Johnson, C. (2016) Against the current stemming the tide: the nostalgic ideology of the contemporary radical populist right. In *The Populist Radical Right*. Routledge.

Bleakley, P. (2023) Panic, pizza and mainstreaming the alt-right: A social media analysis of Pizzagate and the rise of the QAnon conspiracy. *Current Sociology*, *71*(3), 509-525.

Brown, K., Mondon, A., & Winter, A. (2023) The far right, the mainstream and mainstreaming: Towards a heuristic framework. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, *28*(2), 162-179.

Bugaric, B. (2019) Could populism be good for constitutional democracy?. *Annual Review of Law and Social Science*, *15*, 41-58.

Carter, E. (2018) Right-wing extremism/radicalism: Reconstructing the concept. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 23(2), 157-182.

Carter, E., Luther, K.R., & Poguntke, T. (2007) European integration and internal party dynamics. *The Europeanization of National Political Parties: Power and Organizational Adaptation*, 1-27.

Castillo-Ortiz, P. (2019) The illiberal abuse of constitutional courts in Europe. *European Constitutional Law Review*, *15*(1), 48-72.

Coppedge, Michael, John Gerring, Carl Henrik Knutsen, Staffan I. Lindberg, Jan Teorell, David Altman, Michael Bernhard, Agnes Cornell, M. Steven Fish, Lisa Gastaldi, Haakon Gjerløw, Adam Glynn, Sandra Grahn, Allen Hicken, Katrin Kinzelbach, Kyle L. Marquardt, Kelly McMann, Valeriya Mechkova, Anja Neundorf, Pamela Paxton, Daniel Pemstein, Oskar Ryd´en, Johannes von R¨omer, Brigitte Seim, Rachel Sigman, Svend-Erik Skaaning, Jeffrey Staton, Aksel Sundstr¨om, Eitan Tzelgov, Luca Uberti, Yi-ting Wang, Tore Wig, and Daniel Ziblatt. (2023) *V-Dem Codebook v13*". Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project.

Corsi, C. (2019*) Evaluating the" Salvini Decree": doubts of constitutional legitimacy*. European University Institute.

Curran, G. (2004) Mainstreaming Populist Discourse: The Race-Conscious Legacy of Neo-populist Parties in Australia and Italy. *Patterns of Prejudice* 38(1), 37-55.

Ekman, M. (2019) Anti-immigration and racist discourse in social media. *European Journal of Communication*, 34(6), 606-618.

Ekman, M. (2022) 'The Great Replacement: Strategic Mainstreaming of Far-Right Conspiracy Claims', *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 28 (4): 1127-43

Flanagan, S.C., & Lee, A.R. (2003) The new politics, culture wars, and the authoritarian-libertarian value change in advanced industrial democracies. *Comparative Political Studies*, *36*(3), 235-270.

Foucault, M. & Gordon, C. (1980) *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings 1972-1977*. New York: Pantheon.

Gramsci, A. (1971) *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith. London: Lawrence & Wishart.

Heinisch, R. (2003) Success in opposition – failure in government: explaining the performance of right-wing populist parties in public office. *West European Politics*, *26*(3), 91-130.

Jagers, J., & Walgrave, S. (2007) Populism as political communication style. *European journal of political research*, *46*(3), 319-345.

Knijnik, J. (2021) To Freire or not to Freire: Educational freedom and the populist right-wing 'Escola sem Partido'movement in Brazil. *British Educational Research Journal*, *47*(2), 355-371.

Kress, G.R., & Van Leeuwen, T. (2001) Multimodal discourse: The modes and media of contemporary communication. *(No Title)*.

Kriesi, H., Grande, E., Lachat, R., Dolezal, M., Bornschier, S., & Frey, T. (2006) Globalization and the transformation of the national

political space: Six European countries compared. *European Journal of Political Research, 45*(6), 921-956.

Levitsky, S., & Ziblatt, D. (2019) *How democracies die*. Crown.

Maccaferri, M., & Newth, G. (2022) The delegitimisation of Europe in a pro-European country: 'Sovereignism'and populism in the political discourse of Matteo Salvini's Lega. *Journal of Language and Politics, 21*(2), 277-299.

Martín Pérez, I., & Ibeas Vuelta, N. (2020) Du Front National de Jean-Marie Le Pen au Rassemblement National de Marine Le Pen: diabolisation et «dédiabolisation».

Mayer, N., & Perrineau, P. (1996) *Le Front national à découvert* (p. 418). Presses de Sciences Po.

Meguid, B.M. (2005) Competition Between Unequals: The Role of Mainstream Party Strategy in Niche Party Success. *American Political Science Review* 99(3), 347-359.

Michael, G. (2017) The rise of the alt-right and the politics of polarization in America. *Skeptic (Altadena, CA), 22*(2), 9-18.

Moffitt, B. (2022) How do mainstream parties 'Become'mainstream, and pariah parties 'become'pariahs? Conceptualizing the processes of mainstreaming and Pariahing in the labelling of political parties. Government and Opposition, 57(3), 385-403.

Mudde, C. (2004) The populist zeitgeist. *Government and opposition, 39*(4), 541-563.

Mudde, C. (2007) *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe, Transformations of Populism in Europe and the Americas: History and Recent Tendencies*, New York: Cambridge University Press.

Mudde, C. (2013) Three decades of populist radical right parties in Western Europe: So what?. *European Journal of Political Research, 52*(1), 1-19.

Mudde, C. (2014) Fighting the system? Populist radical right parties and party system change. *Party Politics*, *20*(2), 217-226.

Mudde, C. (2019) *The far right today*. John Wiley & Sons.

Newth, G., & Scopelliti, A. (2023) Common sense, populism, and reactionary politics on Twitter: An analysis of populist far-right common sense narratives between 2008 and 2022. *Party Politics*, 13540688231224319.

Norris, P., & Inglehart, R. (2016) Trump, Brexit, and the rise of populism: Economic have-nots and cultural backlash. *Harvard JFK School of Government Faculty Working Papers Series*, 1-52.

Norris, P., & Inglehart, R. (2019) *Cultural backlash: Trump, Brexit, and authoritarian populism*. Cambridge University Press.

O'Shaughnessy, N. (2017) Marketing the Third Reich: Persuasion, packaging and propaganda. Routledge.

Pickering-Iazzi, R. (2000) Structures of Feminine Fantasy and Italian Empire Building, 1930-1940. *Italica*, *77*(3), 400-417.

Plattner, M.F. (2020) Illiberal Democracy and the Struggle on the Right. In *The Emergence of Illiberalism* (pp. 43-57). Routledge.

Pop-Eleches, G. (2010) Throwing Out the Bums: Protest Voting and Unorthodox Parties after Communism. *World Politics* 62(2), 221-260.

Reungoat, E. (2017) The various effects of European election rules on party oppositions to the EU in France. In *The Routledge Handbook of Euroscepticism*.

Rovny, J. (2013) Where do radical right parties stand? Position blurring in multidimensional competition. *European Political Science Review*, *5*(1), 1-26.

Roznai, Y. (2018) Israel–A Crisis of Liberal Democracy?. *Constitutional Democracy in Crisis*.

Rueda, D. (2021) Alain de Benoist, ethnopluralism and the cultural turn in racism. *Patterns of Prejudice*, *55*(3), 213-235.

Rydgren, J. (2007) The sociology of the radical right. *Annu. Rev. Sociol.*, *33*, 241-262.

Sartori, G. (1976) *Parties and Party Systems*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Shemer-Kunz, Y. (2013) The "back door" to national politics: The French greens and the 2009 European Parliament elections. *Practices of Inter-parliamentary Coordination in International Politics – The European Union and Beyond*, 161-74.

Spektorowski, A. (2003) The New Right: Ethno-regionalism, ethnopluralism and the emergence of a neo-fascist'Third Way'. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, *8*(1), 111-130.

Stenweis, A.E. (2008) *Studying the Jew: scholarly anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany*. London, UK: Harvard University Press.

Triandafyllidou, A. (1998) National identity and the'other'. *Ethnic and racial studies*, *21*(4), 593-612.

Urbinati, N. (2019) *Me the people*. Harvard University Press.

Vasilopoulou, S. and D. Halikiopoulou (2015) The Golden Dawn's & Nationalist Solution: Explaining the rise of the far right in Greece, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Wintrobe R. (2018) An economic theory of a hybrid (competitive authoritarian or illiberal) regime, *Public Choice*, 177(3-4), 217-233.

The Image of the EU as Crisis Manager in Italian Right-Wing Narratives: The Case of COVID-19

MATILDE ZUBANI[1]

Abstract. This chapter traces the emergence of Eurosceptic positions in the Italian political landscape by looking at two right-wing populist parties, the League and Brothers of Italy. This analysis focuses mainly on the period of the COVID-19 pandemic that the European Union (EU) experienced at its peak in 2020-2021. Starting from an original database of tweets posted by the leaders of these two parties, the aim is to compare the different narratives used to frame the European institutions in their role as crisis managers. Shared narratives focus on protecting national interests and the need for Italy to be treated with equity, solidarity and respect by the EU institutions and the other Member states. However, while in the first period, both were opposition parties and shared positions critical of the government's actions and its subalternity to the EU, some changes occurred when the League decided to support the Draghi executive.

Key-words: COVID-19; European Union; right-wing populism; Euroscepticism; framing

[1] Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, matilde.zubani@unicatt.it.

Introduction

The COVID-19 crisis arrived in Italy at the end of a decade of significant political instability, in which five different governments[2] followed one another with ever-changing alliances and ruling majorities. The two-year period 2020-21 was no exception. While the pandemic crisis bedevilled Europe and the world, Italy changed two cabinets, the Conte II (from 05/09/2019 to 13/02/2021) and the Draghi's (from 13/02/2021 to 22/10/2022).

The COVID pandemic has created unprecedented challenges for the European Union (EU) and its Member States regarding their health and border policies, the protection of civil liberties, and the principles and workings of representative democracy. Wide-ranging decisions had to be made quickly. The global nature of the crisis stimulated a multilevel intergovernmental management, where the EU assumed a high salience.

In Italy, the role of the EU as crisis manager was put at the centre of the debate when the country realised it could not cope with the unprecedented emergency alone. During 2020 and 2021, the battle between Eurosceptic and Euro-enthusiast sentiments shifted the dialectical balance of the ruling and opposition parties, pervading the online and offline public communication space. Moments of great institutional tension alternated with appointments that had the flavour of an epochal turning point.

---

[2] Monti government (16 November 2011 to 27 April 2013), Letta Government (from 28 April 2013 to 21 February 2014), Renzi Government (from 22/02/2014 to 12/12/2016), Gentiloni Government (from 12/12/2016 to 01/06/2018), Conte Government (from 01/06/2018 to 04/09/2019).

Around Europe, populist radical right parties (PRRPs), the traditional strongholds of Eurosceptic claims, seemed to have a golden opportunity to take advantage of the crisis by credibly framing it as a failure of representation, capitalising on the missteps of adversaries and/or by using the pandemic to feed public resentment. However, this potential was exploited differently depending on whether they were government or opposition parties (Rovira Kaltwasser and Taggart, 2022). Italy provided examples of both positions. As long as the Conte II government was in power, the PRRPs – including Brothers of Italy (*Fratelli d'Italia*, FdI) and the League (*Lega*) – formed a common opposition front at the national level. During the Draghi government, the League joined the so-called "national unity" coalition, while Brothers of Italy remained the only opposition party.

In an environment of intensely disputed claims over governmental policies in response to COVID-19, distrust of – and discontent with – evidence-based policy interventions, the discrediting of professional and technocratic expertise, and the promotion of simplistic or emotional responses, often through social media, can be handled as some of the many reactions of the PRRPs to this crisis (Wondreys and Mudde, 2022).

To contribute to the analysis of this political-institutional framework, this chapter will explore how the role of the EU as crisis manager has been framed by the League and Brothers of Italy leaders during the first two years of the pandemic. To do so, we will give an overview of the origins and developments of right-wing Euroscepticism in Italy; then, we will take a closer look at the consequences of the arrival of COVID-19 in Europe on the institutional system and decision-making mechanisms of the European Union. Finally, we will examine the data collected on Twitter from the accounts of Matteo

Salvini and Giorgia Meloni to compare emerging narratives and draw some conclusions.

1. *Right-wing Euroscepticism in Italy*

The entry into force of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 is generally identified as the moment when the first critical voices towards European integration and European institutions began to emerge in Italy (see, for example Verney, 2011). The Maastricht Treaty strengthened the institutions of the European Community and defined the criteria for achieving the European Monetary Union (EMU) by 1 January 1999. These criteria were designed to ensure that countries were ready to join EMU by meeting the same standards, obliging candidate countries to satisfy economic policy objectives to demonstrate their willingness and ability to pursue a sustainable convergence policy. Therefore, this transformation process fostered the emergence of the EU as a relevant domestic policy issue. The emphasis on budgetary discipline and the rigid criteria that must be respected to join the Eurozone promoted a sort of identification between tool and objective: the constraint became Europe, and vice versa (Pasquinucci, 2022).

In recent decades, the EU has gone through multiple crises[3], all of which have significantly impacted the emergence of Euroscepticism in Italy and elsewhere. The strategy implemented by Eurosceptic parties – particularly the League and Brothers of Italy – has been based on creating an image of the

[3] The financial crisis that hit the eurozone in 2010, the "migration crisis" of 2015 and, finally, the COVID-19 pandemic.

EU as "other" in opposition to "us", i.e., the Italian people, whose sovereignty is threatened from outside. The antagonistic narrative towards the EU, combined with the hostility towards a pro-European ruling elite incapable of defending national interests and essentially acting as imposers of decisions taken abroad, creates an interesting point of contact between Euroscepticism and contemporary populism (Kneuer, 2019).

Looking at the case of the League, under the leadership of Matteo Salvini (from 2013 onwards), the party has moved away from its previous political identity as a voice for Italy's north. It has placed hostility towards the policies and institutions of the EU at the heart of its rhetoric, substituting Rome as "the place where incompetent and corrupt elites exploit ordinary citizens". The fall of Berlusconi's cabinet in November 2011, and, more importantly, the appointment of former European Commissioner Mario Monti as Prime Minister, allowed the League to position itself as the principal party in the Italian parliament opposing European integration (Brunazzo and Gilbert, 2017).

Driven by the growing discontent caused by the economic and migration crises, the League strengthened its right-wing, ethnocentric, and Eurosceptic positions. It focused on promoting "Italy first" narratives and framing its anti-EU position using sovereigntist and nativist arguments. It also endorsed outright criticism of toward the EU elite, the EU regime, and the EU community, which are seen as a threat to national territorial/cultural unity (Zappettini and Maccaferri, 2021).

In the case of Brothers of Italy, the party's first electoral manifesto, in 2013, while declaring support for European integration and membership of the single currency, introduced an anti-establishment narrative that pitted supporters of a "Europe of the peoples" against proponents of a "Europe of finance and oligarchy" (FdI, 2013). The choice of proposing

this dichotomy highlights one of the main features of the Eurosceptic populist discourse. Populists have typically resorted to the narrative of the elite versus the people to highlight the lack of democratic legitimacy of the EU: the elite, or the "Brussels bureaucrats", favour the interests of the bankers and the privileged and make decisions in compliance with an opaque system of alliances, without any consideration of the people's voice (Cozzaglio and Efthymiou, 2022).

After only one year, looking at the party's official positions, it was registered an escalation of intolerance towards the European institutional set-up, especially against other Member States accused of wanting to humiliate Italy. At the same time, the euro is seen as an obstacle to Italy's recovery and the cause of inequalities between Member States. Moving to a different narrative angle, in 2017, at the party congress, the EU was publicly accused of eroding Italian national identity (Puleo and Piccolino, 2022).

Clearly, those listed so far are only some of the characteristics of the Eurosceptic expression of the League and Brothers of Italy. We will then see how these narratives will be used during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis.

2. *COVID-19 pandemic shakes the European Union*

When the first cases of COVID-19 were confirmed in the EU, thus opening a health crisis unprecedented in the continent's recent history, the experience of the last two crises the Union went through (the Eurozone crisis in 2010-12 and the migration crisis of 2015-16) was still vivid in the memory of Europeans. According to the critics, in the first the EU did the bare minimum to save the monetary union; in the second, it failed spectacularly in pursuing a common migration and asylum

policy (Alcaro and Tocci, 2021). In both cases, the appeal for more solidarity has been a recurring pattern in political discussions on how to cope with the crises the EU is confronting. According to Grimmel (2021), there is a yawning gap between the rhetorical commitment to solidarity and Member States' practices of solidarity: even though the EU and its members regularly refer to solidarity as one of their fundamental values, the concept regularly fails to translate into concrete and joint action. This lack of solidarity in problem resolution renders solidarity a weak principle within the EU's political framework and precludes more effective crisis management.

The expectation within Italy and other countries in Europe was that the EU institutions, including the European Central Bank (ECB), the European Commission, the Council of Ministers, the European Parliament, and the Member States themselves would react immediately to shield the region from the harmful effects of the pandemic. However, the situation was more complex than that, especially as states attempted to promote their policies and safeguard their national interests.

During the first phase of the pandemic, i.e. March-April 2020, the lack of unity, solidarity, and cooperation was evident: the leaders of the Member States proceeded haphazardly by re-establishing national borders and reinforcing restrictions on the export of medical equipment with the EU market. Meanwhile, European institutions have been essentially silent and made missteps. The most striking was by the ECB President Christine Lagarde, who – referring to calls for the ECB to cut interest rates to ease borrowing costs for highly indebted eurozone countries – said: "We are not here to close [bond] spreads, there are other tools and other actors to deal with these issues" (ECB, 2020).

These initial and uncoordinated national closures had the potential to inflict further, perhaps irreversible, damage as they threatened the very integrity of the single market that depends on the free flow of goods, services, capital and labour. This conclusion must have been soon reached by European leaders who, not without difficulty, abandoned their initial hesitations and started working together to mitigate the effect of the crisis.

The economic response first took the form of a liquidity injection of over EUR 1 trillion through the ECB's temporary asset purchase programme and the suspension of the Stability and Growth Pact ceilings on deficit, debt and inflation rates. After much bargaining in the Eurogroup, an agreement was reached to reform the European Stability Mechanism. An agreement was also reached to channel EUR 250 billion through the European Investment Bank and EUR 100 billion into a new European employment insurance scheme. Most significantly, the European Council endorsed a EUR 750 billion EU Next Generation Fund, favouring grants over loans (Alcaro and Tocci, 2021).

Some have claimed that, in many respects, the COVID-19 crisis seemed to be a replica of the "emergency policy" experienced during the eurozone crisis, with a clear tendency for executive policy to benefit national governments and the European Council (and, to a lesser extent, the Eurogroup) (White, 2019; Hodson and Puetter, 2019).

Indeed, the challenge for the European institutions has been insidious, given that economic governance takes place on different levels: national, the eurozone and the EU as a whole. The EU has complex institutions that generally need a long time to make decisions with laborious negotiations and progress that happens in small steps – precisely the opposite of what was needed during an acute emergency such as the

COVID-19 pandemic. However, even though, at the beginning of the crisis, it seemed that Europe was destined to remain imprisoned in a logic of mutual distrust, crossed vetoes and lengthy procedures, in the end, it proved effective and brought home fundamental decisions and institutional innovations.

The assessment of the European Council's work contrasts those who think that the EU has experienced a "Hamiltonian moment" foreshadowing the beginning of an economic and fiscal union long invoked in the EU's history, and those who instead believe that only a temporary result was achieved to cope with the emergency, leaving unresolved questions related to fiscal integration that will pave the way for more political polarisation (Tesche, 2022).

3. *Right-wing narratives on the role of the EU as crisis manager*

According to the survey coordinated by the Laboratorio Analisi Politiche e Sociali (LAPS) of the University of Siena in April 2020, the coronavirus emergency weakened the image of the EU among Italian citizens, fostering a critical orientation towards it. As many as 79 per cent of the Italian public believe that the EU's efforts to support Italy in coping with the crisis were inadequate; 73 per cent of the sample believe that the pandemic has demonstrated the complete failure of the EU. These data cross the electorates of the different parties, unsurprisingly peaking among voters of the League and Brothers of Italy, where almost the entire sample expressed a negative opinion (86 per cent and 92 per cent, respectively) (Angelucci and Piccolino, 2020).

To analyse what narratives the Italian PRRs proposed during the first two years of the pandemic regarding the role played by the European Union in managing the crisis, a data-

base was built with the tweets posted by Matteo Salvini (@matteosalvinimi), leader of the League, and Giorgia Meloni (@GiorgiaMeloni), leader of Brothers of Italy, from January 1, 2020, to December 31, 2021.

The choice to observe how political communication developed in the digital space is due to the fact that the limitations imposed by the pandemic on "in-person" interpersonal relations significantly influenced the evolution of political discourse on social networks. It was found that 65 per cent of UN member states had a leader who addressed the citizenry directly on Twitter to discuss what was happening during COVID-19 (Haman, 2020). In Italy Twitter recorded +24 per cent of registered accounts in 2020 (Il Sole 24 Ore, 2020).

Moreover, it should be noted that the digital space seems to make populist leaders particularly comfortable, enhancing some of the typical characteristics of this debate. Social media allows for the creation of a direct relationship with the public, which goes beyond the circle of loyal voters and personally involves the audience, who are authorised to comment, evaluate and share the message by spreading it among their contacts. Thanks to social media, the populist leader can establish an emotional relationship through simple and fast language, which sometimes becomes polarising, simplistic and provocative (Del Lago, 2017).

Tweets were extracted by scraping the Twitter API with the academictwitteR R package, filtering by keywords and time. They were manually checked for relevance, and 222 tweets have been included: 177 by Matteo Salvini and 45 by Giorgia Meloni.

A manual qualitative coding software tool (MAXQDA) allowed to perform a framing analysis[4] based on a validated coding book, which identified seven coding categories functional to detect framing emergence: claimant, addressee, problem definition, problem source, policy solution/claim for change, evaluation of EU action, and justification.

Even before assessing the content of the various tweets collected, it can be observed that the presence of the EU in Giorgia Meloni's digital space within the period under analysis is substantially marginal, with only 45 relevant tweets over two years in which COVID-19 was a trending topic almost every day.

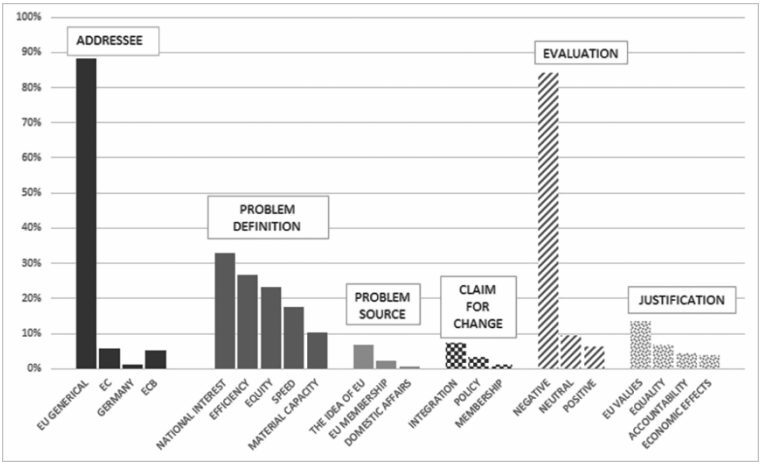
The frequency analysis (see Fig. 1 and 2) revealed, with no surprise, that the PRR leaders' overall evaluation of the EU's role as crisis manager was predominantly negative (78 per cent of Meloni's tweets and 84 per cent of Salvini's tweets contained an explicit negative assessment).

Referring to European institutions, both leaders mainly used generic expressions such as "l'Europa" (Europe) or "l'UE" (the EU) without explicitly identifying the European institution held responsible for the decision or procedure being discussed and contested. Another general observation is that Meloni mainly focused on the issue of protecting the national interest: 58 per cent of her tweets can be traced back to this framing category, compared to 33 percent of Salvini's

[4] Following Entman's definition, framing is the process of "selecting and highlighting some facts of events and issues and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution". Frames manifest themselves in specific words, phrases, symbols, and images that the receiver is familiar with (Entman, 2003).

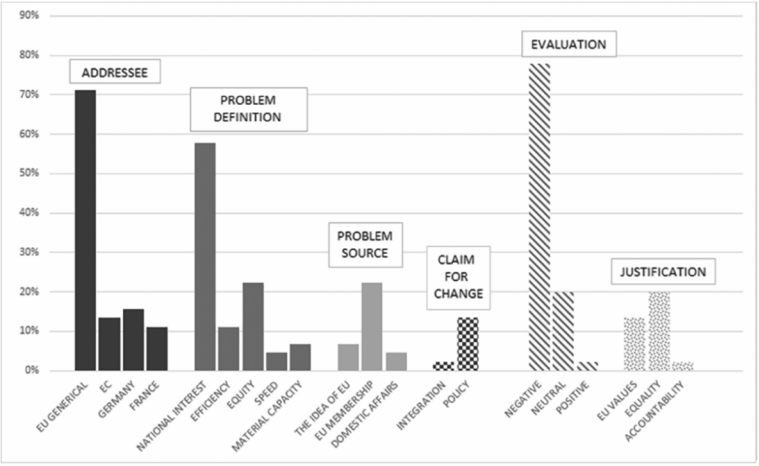
tweets. Salvini employed a more diversified range of narratives, including claims on the (in)efficiency of the decisional process at EU level (27 per cent) and on the (lack of) equity/solidarity shown by the institutions when taking actions (23 per cent).

Figure 1. Frequency of coding categories - @matteosalvinimi



Source: author's own elaboration based on original dataset.

Figure 2. Frequency of coding categories - @GiorgiaMeloni



Source: author's own elaboration based on original dataset.

But let us look at a few tweets (Table 1) that can significantly exemplify what has been covered so far.

Table 1: Tweets sample from @matteosalvinimi and @GiorgiaMeloni.

Account	**Date**	**Original tweet**	**English translation5**	**Main coding categories**
@matteosalvinimi	16/03/2020	Serve ripensare a questa	We need to rethink this	PD: Equity – National In-

[5] Translations from the Italian have been made by the author.

Account	**Date**	**Original tweet**	**English translation5**	**Main coding categories**
		Unione europea che è "Unione" quando serve a qualcuno e non è "Unione" quando ad aver bisogno è l'Italia	European Union that is "Union" when it benefits someone and is not "Union" when Italy is in need	terest PS: EU Membership CFC: Institutional asset E: Negative J: EU values
@matteosalvinimi	19/07/2020	Questa Unione europea tradisce il sogno dei nostri padri, è solo una banca d'affari dove pochi ci guadagnano e molti ci rimettono, l'Italia prima di tutti. Abbiamo pagato più di 200 miliardi per avere indietro poco o niente, mentre altri corrono...	This European Union betrays the dream of our fathers, it is just an investment bank where few gain and many lose out, Italy first. We have paid more than 200 billion to get back little or nothing, while others run...	PD: Equity – National Interest PS: The idea of EU CFC: n/a E: Negative J: Economic effects
@matteosalvinimi	17/02/2021	Se garantisce salute e lavoro, evviva l'Europa. Se	If it guarantees health and jobs, hurray for Eu-	PD: Efficiency – National Interest PS: EU Mem-

Account	**Date**	**Original tweet**	**English translation5**	**Main coding categories**
		impone disoccupazione e chiusure, e sbaglia a ordinare i vaccini, criticarla non è solo un diritto, ma un dovere di ogni cittadino di questo Paese.	rope. If it imposes unemployment and closures, and fail to order vaccines, criticising it is not only a right, but a duty of every citizen of this country.	bership CFC: n/a E: Negative J: National identity/sovereignty
@Giorgia Meloni	26/02/2020	sul #Coronavirus ennesima dimostrazione di un'Europa assente sulle grandi questioni e troppo presente in altre non necessarie in questa emergenza sarebbe stato ragionevole che l'Europa si fosse messa a tavolino per stabilire un unico protocollo valido per tutti gli	on the #Coronavirus yet another demonstration of a Europe that is absent on major issues and too present in other unnecessary ones in this emergency it would have been reasonable for Europe to have sat down to establish a single protocol valid for all member	PD: Efficiency – Equity PS: n/a CFC: Policy E: Negative J: National identity/sovereignty

Account	**Date**	**Original tweet**	**English translation5**	**Main coding categories**
		Stati membri	states	
@Giorgia Meloni	28/06/2020	L'Europa lascia intendere che se l'Italia non accederà al #MES, la trattativa sul #recoveryfund sarà più difficile. L'ennesima conferma che il MES è in realtà uno strumento per controllare la nostra economia. È una trappola, e l'Italia non deve caderci dentro.	Europe hints that if Italy does not join the #MES, the #recoveryfund negotiations will be more difficult. Yet another confirmation that the ESM is actually a tool to control our economy. It is a trap, and Italy must not fall into it.	PD: National Interest PS: n/a CFC: n/a E: Negative J: National identity/sovereignty

Account	Date	Original tweet	English translation5	Main coding categories
@Giorgia Meloni	07/03/2021	Multinazionali del farmaco decidono di tagliare le forniture di vaccini a propria discrezione perché l'UE ha stipulato contratti senza clausole veramente vincolanti. È vergognoso che nessuno chieda conto di questo fallimento. Serve intervenire in difesa dell'interesse nazionale italiano	Multinational drug companies decide to cut off supplies of vaccines at their own discretion because the EU has concluded contracts without truly binding clauses. It is shameful that no one is holding this failure to account. Action is needed in defence of Italy's national interest	PD: Efficiency – National Interest PS: n/a CFC: n/a E: Negative J: Accountability

Source: author's own elaboration based on original dataset.
Note: the reported coding categories are Problem definition (PD), Problem source (PS), Claim for change (CFC), Evaluation (E) and Justification (J). Not all categories are applicable for all tweets. The extensive coding book is available upon request.

The evidence points to some common tendencies, e.g., both leaders viewed EU action as an unwelcome "interference" of EU institutions in domestic politics. This reflects the idea that European integration is (and has always been) criticised by its opponents as an elite-driven process, dominated by all-

powerful and obscure European technocrats and bureaucrats, who are uncontrollable because they could not be punished by the citizens, or by what populists call "the people" (Pasquinucci, 2022).

In line with the sovereigntist orientations of the two right-wing parties, the theme of defending the national interest was very prominent. There are several references to unfair treatment by institutions, which are portrayed as very demanding in terms of constraints and transfers of money. At the same time, these institutions would be unwilling to give or – as the populist leaders said – to give back and share the burden of the economic and material difficulties of the crisis among the different Member States.

As for the League, we can see how Salvini denounced the EU's slowness, ineffectiveness and lack of solidarity with the Italians in the first phase of the pandemic. Notably, in his tweet of July 19, 2020, Salvini referred to an EU that "betrays the dream of our fathers" by de facto taking a leading role in the definition of what would be the EU's founding ideals, which he claimed were being betrayed by the crisis management choices made by the EU.

From February 2021, the participation in the Draghi government "without conditions and vetoes" opened to the League's "keep one foot in and one foot out of government" strategy. Salvini was urged to soften his Eurosceptic narrative (and we see this in the tweet of 17/02/2021) while at the same time trying to maintain a diffident and critical attitude. At the beginning of 2021, a series of tweets alluded to the importance of having President Draghi as a strong interlocutor at the European bargaining table and to the fact that the Prime Minister's credibility in European "circles" was instrumental in having Italy and its interests respected within the crisis management framework, hence the need to support his

executive[6]. At the same time, Salvini tried to position himself as a responsible leader; by siding with the government, criticism was often shifted to the EU, accused of starting a trade war against Italy and being deaf to the concerns of Italians.

As we have already pointed out, Meloni focused mainly on domestic affairs and crisis management from a strictly national perspective, relegating European institutions to absolute second place. Meloni's criticisms appear more circumstantial than Salvini's and focus on specific actions, such as the ESM, which are seen as a potential threat to Italy's sovereignty. Criticism is levelled at the uselessness of "procedural red tape", and the finger is also pointed at some Member States (Germany and France) accused of "excessive power" to the detriment of Italy[7].

In contrast to the League, Brothers of Italy decided not to support Draghi's cabinet, remaining the only opposition party. This position allowed FdI to present itself as the only faithful bulwark of Italians' interests and to emerge as the only

[6] See for example @matteosalvinimi on 27/04/2021: "*Draghi è la persona giusta al posto giusto: stiamo aiutando il Paese a uscire da una guerra. Con la sua autorevolezza se chiama in Europa, rispondono. A Conte metterebbero la segreteria telefonica*" [Draghi is the right person in the right place: we are helping the country out of a war. With his authority if he calls in Europe, they answer. Conte would get an answering machine...]

[7] See for example @GiorgiaMeloni on 17/03/2020: "*L'emergenza #coronavirus poteva essere per l'#Europa l'occasione di dimostrare che c'è ed esiste, ma si è rivelata solo l'ennesima occasione per Francia e Germania per provare a spolpare l'Italia. Europa dove sei?*" [The #coronavirus emergency could have been an opportunity for #Europe to show that it is there and that it exists, but it turned out to be just another chance for France and Germany to try to plunder Italy. Europe where are you?].

"reactive" party. This choice certainly made the party much more visible in the eyes of the voters and may partially justify its great success in the early elections of 2022.

4. *Conclusion*

Italy's path from a Europhile EU member to a Eurosceptic state is not surprising. The heavy commitments and sacrifices that Italy initially undertook to join the ambitious European integration project have put its capabilities to the test. What made everything more difficult was the impact of the global financial crisis of the 2000s, with long-lasting damage to Italy. This was compounded by the EU's uncoordinated response to migration across the Mediterranean and Italy's inability to manage this exodus alone. Additionally, the tragic impact of the Coronavirus pandemic in Italy and, once again, the failure – at least initially – of EU solidarity. The Eurosceptic political orientation emerged from a changed economic and social landscape that pushed many Italians to question the viability and value of EU membership (Brunazzo and Mascitelli, 2021).

As expected, the right-wing parties exploited the government's difficulties in dealing with the COVID-19 crisis by accusing it of responding too late, too slowly or without the necessary force. At the same time, we have seen that these parties lashed out at the containment measures they considered undemocratic and unconstitutional when the governments adopted them. A trend that seems to have united the right-wing populist parties, whether they were in government or opposition, is Euroscepticism, as we have also seen in the Italian case. This Eurosceptic discourse combines nativism and populism and accuses the EU of misusing the pandemic

to undermine national sovereignty and push through new supranational measures (Wondreys and Mudde, 2022).

References

Alcaro, R. and Tocci, N. (2021) 'Navigating a Covid World: The European Union's Internal Rebirth and External Quest', *The International Spectator*, 56(2), pp. 1-18. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2021.1911128.

Angelucci, D. and Piccolino, G. (2020) 'Emergenza coronavirus e politica estera. L'opinione degli italiani sul governo, l'Europa e la cooperazione internazionale' University of Siena, Department of Social, Political and Cognitive Sciences. DISPOC/LAPS (University of Siena) and IAI. Available at: https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/laps-iai_2020_covid.pdf (Accessed: 26 June 2023).

Brunazzo, M. and Gilbert, M. (2017) 'Insurgents against Brussels: Euroscepticism and the right-wing populist turn of the Lega Nord since 2013', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 22(5), pp. 624-641. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/1354571X.2017.1389524.

Brunazzo, M. and Mascitelli, B. (2021) 'At the origin of Italian Euroscepticism', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of European Studies*, 12(2). Available at: https://doi.org/10.30722/anzjes.vol12.iss2.15072.

Cozzaglio, I. and Efthymiou, D. (2022) 'The populist challenge to European Union legitimacy: Old wine in new bottles?', *Journal of Social Philosophy*, p. josp.12487. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1111/josp.12487.

Del Lago, A. (2017) *Populismo digitale: La crisi, la rete e la nuova destra.* Raffaello Cortina Editore.

Entman, R.M. (2003) *Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy. Chicago*, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Fratelli d'Italia (2013) Il programma politico - Fratelli d'Italia - Centrodestra Nazionale. Available at: https://web.archive.org/web

/20130323224415/http://www.fratelli-italia.it/programma.html (Accessed: 28 June 2023).

Grimmel, A. (2021) '"Le Grand absent Européen": solidarity in the politics of European integration', *Acta Politica*, 56(2), pp. 242-260. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1057/s41269-020-00171-7.

Haman, M. (2020) 'The use of Twitter by state leaders and its impact on the public during the COVID-19 pandemic', *Heliyon,* 6(11), p. e05540. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2020.e05540.

Hodson, D. and Puetter, U. (2019) 'The European Union in disequilibrium: new intergovernmentalism, postfunctionalism and integration theory in the post-Maastricht period', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 26(8), pp. 1153-1171. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2019.1569712.

Il Sole 24 Ore (2020) A proposito di dati, quanto siamo stati connessi ai social nel 2020? Available at: https://www.infodata.ilsole24ore.com/2020/11/19/a-proposito-di-dati-quanto-siamo-stati-connessi-ai-social-nel-2020/ (Accessed: 28 June 2023).

Kneuer, M. (2019) 'The tandem of populism and Euroscepticism: a comparative perspective in the light of the European crises', *Contemporary Social Science*, 14(1), pp. 26-42. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/21582041.2018.1426874.

Pasquinucci, D. (2022) 'From narrative to counter-narrative: the European constraint and the rise of Italian populist Euroscepticism', *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 30(1), pp. 39-51. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2020.1839396.

Puleo, L. and Piccolino, G. (2022) 'Back to the Post-Fascist Past or Landing in the Populist Radical Right? The Brothers of Italy Between Continuity and Change', *South European Society and Politics*, 27(3), pp. 359-383. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/13608746.2022.2126247.

Rovira Kaltwasser, C. and Taggart, P. (2022) 'The Populist Radical Right and the Pandemic', *Government and Opposition*, pp. 1-21. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2022.46.

Tesche, T. (2022) 'Pandemic Politics: The European Union in Times of the Coronavirus Emergency', *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 60(2), pp. 480-496. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13303.

Verney, S. (2011) 'Euroscepticism in Southern Europe: A Diachronic Perspective', *South European Society and Politics*, 16(1), pp. 1-29. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/13608746.2010.570124.

White, J. (2019*) Politics of Last Resort: Governing by Emergency in the European Union.* Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.

Wondreys, J. and Mudde, C. (2022) 'Victims of the Pandemic? European Far-Right Parties and COVID-19', *Nationalities Papers*, 50(1), pp. 86-103. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2020.93.

Zappettini, F. and Maccaferri, M. (2021) 'Euroscepticism between Populism and Technocracy: The Case of Italian Lega and Movimento 5 Stelle', *Journal of Contemporary European Research*, 17(2). Available at: https://doi.org/10.30950/jcer.v17i2.1184.

POLIDEMOS

CENTRO PER LO STUDIO DELLA DEMOCRAZIA E DEI MUTAMENTI POLITICI
CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF DEMOCRACY AND POLITICAL CHANGE

Volumi pubblicati

1. Damiano Palano (ed.), *State of Emergency. Italian Democracy in Times of Pandemic* (2022)

2. Damiano Palano, *Towards a Bubble Democracy? Notes for a Theoretical Framework* (2022)

3. Antonio Campati and Damiano Palano (eds.), *Democracy and Disintermediation. A Dangerous Relationship* (2022)

4. Valerio Alfonso Bruno (ed.), *Populism and Far-Right. Trends in Europe* (2022)

5. Damiano Palano (a cura di) *Il futuro capovolto. Per una mappa degli immaginari distopici del XXI secolo* (2022)

6. Brunetta Baldi, Giulio Citroni, Martino Mazzoleni, *PNRR e Città Metropolitane. La sfida dei Piani Urbani Integrati* (2023)

7. Cristina Bon (ed.), *Utopian Visions, Dystopic Realities. Multidisciplinary Reflections on Contemporary Challenges* (2023)

8. Marta Postigo, Gabriella Silvestrini, Mauro Simonazzi (eds.), *Constitutional Democracy and the Challenges of Anti-Liberalism. Lessons from Experience* (2023)

9. Valerio Alfonso Bruno (ed.), *On Tradition, Common Sense and Conspiracies. Strategies and Insights of the Contemporary Far Right* (2024)

10. Samuele Mazzolini (ed.), *Latin America at a Glance. Recent Political and Electoral Trends* (2024)

11. Antonio Campati (ed.), *Illiberal Trends. Democracies under Pressure* (2024)

12. Damiano Palano (a cura di), *Il futuro della democrazia italiana. Politica e società al tempo del governo Meloni* (2024)

13. Sabina de Silva (ed.), *The Use of Culture in Modern Conflicts and Political Competition: An Insight from Ukraine and the Western Balkans* (2024)

14. Valerio Alfonso Bruno and Daniela Caterina (eds.), *The Italian Right Today. Narratives, Ideologies, Policies* (2024)

finito di stampare
nel mese di ottobre 2024
presso la LITOGRAFIA SOLARI
Peschiera Borromeo (MI)
su materiali e tecnologie ecocompatibili

Focusing on the *Italian Right today* is a challenging task. Conceptual intricacies, the uniqueness of the Italian political laboratory, and a nonstop exposure to an acceleration of events at the national, European, and global levels often leave us with the uncomfortable, helpless feeling that "a proper understanding" will necessarily remain out of reach. The present volume takes steps to counter such a powerless feeling. It collects the contributions presented during a study day on the Italian Right organised by the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan and the Polidemos Center for the Study of Democracy and Political Change. From different perspectives and analytical foci, through various instruments and research strategies, the five contributions of this collected volume show that focusing on the Italian Right today – with an eye to its *narratives*, *ideologies* and *policies* – is a challenge we cannot postpone. It asks for innovative efforts to think outside the box and free us of disciplinary shackles. In various forms, the following contributions provide food for thought in addressing three crucial issues: first, the conceptual and terminological implications of focusing on the Italian Right today; second, the conceptualisation and study of its relationship with the past; and finally, the attention to concrete policies. This way, the volume paves the way to cross-fertilisations among various (sub-)disciplines in sociology and political science to gain a more granular understanding of the feedback chain linking dynamics of (self-)representation, effective policy decisions and consensus underpinning the Italian Right (in power) today – and beyond.

Valerio Alfonso Bruno is Research Fellow at Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, where he collaborates with Polidemos (Center for the Study of Democracy and Political Change) and fellow at the Far-Right Analyis Network (FRAN). Bruno is a specialist on the Italian far-right and has recently contributed to the "Routledge Handbook of Far-Right Extremism in Europe" and the "Handbook Non-Violent Extremism" and co-authored the book "The Rise of the Radical Right in Italy A New Balance of Power in the Right-Wing Camp" (Ibidem/Columbia University Press) with J.F. Downes and A. Scopelliti. His online analyses have appeared, among others, on Al Jazeera, Financial Times, Economist, France24, Sunday Times.

Daniela Caterina holds a PhD in Political Science from the University of Hamburg. She is currently Associate Professor at the School of Philosophy of the Huazhong University of Science and Technology in Wuhan (China). Her research interests range from state theory and the thought of Antonio Gramsci to the study of critical approaches to political economy and discourse analysis, as well as Italian politics and Sino-Italian relations. Her major publications in international journals include "Gramsci in China: Past, present and future of a still open encounter" (Antipode, 2021) and "Economic imaginaries and beyond: A cultural political economy perspective on the League party" (Critical Discourse Studies, 2021). She is the author of "Struggles for hegemony in Italy's crisis management: A case study on the 2012 labour market reform" (Springer, 2019) and is currently working on the monograph "Discourses of China as Other: Intellectual production and political economy" (Routledge).

The Italian Right Today

VALERIO ALFONSO BRUNO
AND DANIELA CATERINA (edited by)

EDUCatt - Ente per il Diritto allo Studio Universitario
dell'Università Cattolica
Largo Gemelli 1, 20123 Milano - tel. 02.7234.22.35 - fax 02.80.53.215
e-mail: editoriale.dsu@educatt.it (produzione);
librario.dsu@educatt.it (distribuzione)
web: libri.educatt.online
ISBN: 979-12-5535-333-1

euro 13,00