

Losers of globalization? Politics in the Prosecco Hills region in Italy as a case of radical right-wing populism in a (wealthy) rural area

Enrico Padoan¹ <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1292-5428>

Lorenzo Zamponi² <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9327-3806>

¹ University of Tuscia

² Scuola Normale Superiore

Corresponding author: Enrico Padoan, enrico.padoan@unitus.it

This article has been accepted for publication and undergone full peer review but has not been through the copyediting, typesetting, pagination and proofreading process, which may lead to differences between this version and the Version of Record.

Accepted: August 27, 2024 **Published:** August 29, 2024

Abstract:

Electoral success of radical right-wing populist parties (RRPPs) is often associated with the ‘losers of globalization’. Such broad and stylized accounts may, at least apparently and/or partially, enter in collision with empirical reality, though. This research focuses on the mechanisms of (re)production of the political consensus for RRPPs in an emblematic rural area of North-Eastern Italy: the “Prosecco Hills”. It is a wealthy area, where export-oriented intensive agriculture and tourism are both well-established and on the rise, in a province where the unemployment rate is 50% lower than the national average: quite far from the usual depiction of those places left behind by globalization processes. Our research aims at offering some accounts for the long-lasting and even increasing popular support for RRPPs in this area, marked by strongly majoritarian pro-autonomist stances amongst the population. The paper relies on the collection and the analysis of individual-level survey data from an on-line questionnaire submitted through local Facebook groups, as well as on semi-structured interviews with available survey respondents. Our findings point at the centrality of producerism as a cultural-identitarian glue easing the process of political articulation of localist, pro-autonomist positions by RRPPs. We also contend that both the continuity with the Christian Democracy era and the recent electoral rise by Fratelli d’Italia at the expense of the League help also understand that localism and producerism are not inherently radical-right elements, while they are much resistant to party cues. Localism and producerism are logics of understanding politics, rooted in the structure of social relations that characterize a certain territory, that, in certain conditions, provide RRPPs with a substantial electoral advantage. However, our findings also find some evidences of existing frictions between (majoritarian) producerist attitudes and the mounting sensibility for environmental issues, which may suggest some tensions between localist and producerist logics in the near future.

Keywords:

Populism, Localism, Producerism, Veneto, Losers of Globalization, Subnational Politics.

Please cite this article as:

Padoan, E., & Zamponi, L. (2024). Losers of globalization? Politics in the Prosecco Hills region in Italy as a case of radical right-wing populism in a (wealthy) rural area. *Italian Journal of Electoral Studies QOE – IJES*, Just Accepted. <https://doi.org/10.36253/qoe-15734>

Introduction: the puzzle

Electoral success of radical right-wing radical populist parties (RRPPs) has been explained by different – albeit not necessarily mutually exclusive – arguments. Since RRPPs generally tend to receive disproportionate support from categories such as production workers, artisans and small business owners, some studies have consequently put a stronger emphasis on the negative economic effects of neoliberalism on those categories to account for the electoral fortunes of RRPPs (e.g. Oesch, 2012; Arzheimer, 2013). Other studies, in turn, consider cultural conservatism either as a crucial intervening variable between class and (populist) voting choice (Gidron and Hall, 2017; Bornschier and Kriesi, 2013; Langsaether, 2018) or as the main driver for the support towards RRPPs (Inglehart and Norris, 2016).

A further strain of literature focuses on ‘where’ populist voters live instead on ‘who’ they are, consequently understands the rise of RRPPs as a sort of ‘revenge of the places that don’t matter’ (Rodríguez-Pose, 2017), which are normally identified in declining and lagged-behind areas, as the success of Brexit movement, Donald Trump and Marine Le Pen, all of them enjoying stronger support in de-industrialised and impoverished regions, would empirically suggest (Fieschi, 2019). Despite their very different hypothesized mechanisms and potential analytical consequences, all of these rival hypotheses agree on the identification of RRPPs’ voters with the (either actual or potential) ‘losers of globalization’ (Kriesi et al., 2006; Teney et al., 2014; Dunin-Wąsowicz and Gartzou-Katsouyanni, 2023). Such broad and stylized accounts may, at least apparently and/or partially, enter in collision with empirical reality, though, at least in certain socio-territorial contexts. This research focuses on the mechanisms of (re)production of the political consensus of radical right-wing populism in an emblematic rural area of North-Eastern Italy, and specifically in the sub-region known as “Prosecco Hills” (PH, *Colline del Prosecco*), the area in which Prosecco wine has been historically produced¹.

PH is a wealthy area, with quite satisfying economic indicators and a long-lasting political dominance of radical right populism in its different incarnation, from the Northern League to the League to Brothers of Italy, which has been consistently attracting higher electoral support than at the national, regional and provincial level. An area where export-oriented intensive agriculture and

¹ The area can be defined in two slightly different ways: the act of law (DM 17/2009) that established the “Protected and Guaranteed Designated of Origin” certification for Conegliano-Valdobbiadene historical Prosecco wine mentions 15 municipalites; the UNESCO decision that in 2019 recognised the Prosecco Hills as Wolrd Heritage also mentions 15 municipalities in the “Core” and “Buffer” zones. The two lists almost perfectly coincide, but one (Colle Umberto) is included in the former and not in the latter, and one (Revine Lago) viceversa. Thus, for the purposes of this paper we will refer with “Prosecco Hills” to the 16-municipality area that would result from merging the two existing defitions, including: Cison di Valmarino, Colle Umberto, Conegliano, Farra di Soligo, Follina, Miane, Pieve di Soligo, Refrontolo, Revine Lago, San Pietro di Felleto, San Vendemiano, Susegana, Tarzo, Valdobbiadene. Vidor, and Vittorio Veneto.

tourist industry is both well-established and on the rise, in a province where unemployment rate is slightly more than half than the national average (ISTAT 2022), PH is quite far from the usual depiction of those ‘places left behind’ by ‘globalization processes’ which would represent the perfect *humus* for RRPPs support. The number of Prosecco bottles produced in a year went from 142 million in 2011 to 464 million in 2019, and 78% of them were exported (Ponte, 2021): rather far from ‘losers of globalization’.

Nor, at a first glance, a process of gradual impoverishment of the middle classes – a process recently identified as strictly associated to the rise of League’s support (Bloise, Chironi and Pianta, 2020) seems to have occurred. Our single-case study research focuses on PH because of its representativeness of quite well-off, rural-hilly areas composed by an ensemble of small-to-medium cities and villages in North-Eastern Italy where radical right populism imposed its political hegemony (Passarelli and Tuorto, 2018). Furthermore, it is an area where social and environmental consequences of agro-industry have triggered different local conflicts (Ponte, 2021) that nonetheless did not challenge the ruling party’s hegemony.

This paper thus aims at contributing to what has been authoritatively called ‘the localist turn in populism studies’ (Chou, Moffitt and Busbridge, 2022). Several studies (e.g. Heinisch et al., 2020; Moffitt, 2020), also focusing on the League’s case (McDonnell, 2006; Ardeni, 2020; Albertazzi and Zulianello, 2021), have already emphasized the importance that place and local identities play in (mostly, albeit not exclusively, right-wing; Heinisch and Jansesberger, 2023) populist discourses. Recently, Mazzoleni coined the concept of ‘territorial populism’ (2023) to identify the numerous RRPPs emphasizing territory belonging rather than other typical mobilizing issues (e.g., gender issues, xeno- and Islamophobia...). As Chou and colleagues highlight, ‘the question remains: how specifically do populist discourses and practices intersect with localist discourses and practices?’ (2022: 132). Right-wing populists typically adopt localist discourses to attract voters showing strong attachments towards their living areas or community, for example by associating ‘the local’ with a ‘traditional version of community’ idealizing ‘hardworking people’ (Fitzgerald, 2018) and often propagating a romanticized vision of rural life (Mamonova and Franquesa, 2019). In the specific case of the League, calls for political autonomy are added as a sort of policy addendum to the celebration of localist values (Zaslove, 2011). This paper, while confirming some of these findings, also contributes to qualify them, by identifying ‘producerism’ (Ivaldi and Mazzoleni, 2019: see the third section below) as a key discourse employed by right-wing populist actors to champion localist attitudes in wealthy or at least strongly economically integrated areas. Furthermore, this paper qualifies those arguments that suggest the possibility of support for right-wing populist actors being damaged by the presence of a lively local network of civic associations (e.g., Fitzgerald, 2018). We

contend that specific associational networks nurtured by *bonding* (instead of *bridging*) social capital (Woolcock, 1998; Putnam, 2000) – networks that have a long history in the PH areas, mostly associated to the past Christian-Democrat hegemony – are instead key to understand the reproduction of conservative values, over which contemporary RRPPs have partially built their ongoing success. Against the literature emphasizing the correlation between populist voting and low social capital (Rodríguez-Pose, Lee and Lipp, 2021), we claim that bonding capital - defined by Tahlyan, Stathopoulos and Maness (2022) as “the capital gathered from close contacts, people who are similar in characteristics and ideologies (Nicholas et al., 2018), and helps people ‘get by’ in life [Stone et al., 2003]” – is at the core of RRPPs’ support in the PH.

The political context: Radical right-wing populism(s)’ enduring dominance

Our research thus aims at offering some accounts for the long-lasting and even increasing popular support enjoyed by radical right-wing populist parties in this sub-region, a fact that it is even more striking if we take into account two different phenomena: the political evolution of the League under Matteo Salvini’s leadership and its partial substitution by Brothers of Italy as the stronger incarnation of radical right populism. First, between 2015 and 2019, the League (even changing its name, from “Lega Nord”, Northern League, to “Lega”, League) completed its transformation from an ethno-regionalist party to a populist-nationalist party. In both of these different phases of League’s history, all the main constitutive characteristic of the populist radical right (Mudde, 2007) have been (and still are) clearly present: anti-establishment narrative, authoritarianism and nativism (Passarelli and Tuorto, 2018). However, such attributes are now declined in a different manner, coherently with the recent shift from an ethno-regionalist to a nationalist platform. The establishment to attack, once identified in “Rome” and the Italian centralist state, is now mainly identified with the European institutions. The founder of the party Umberto Bossi, for a long time the unchallenged leader of the Northern League, has been eclipsed by the rise of Salvini. The League’s nativism has changed from “Northern Italy First” (*Prima il Nord*) to “Italian Firsts” (*Prima gli Italiani*), a transformation that also highlights how much the party, once presenting itself as the defender of a specific territory, has shifted towards an ethnic definition of its core-constituencies (although nativist and xenophobic appeals were present well before Salvini’s turn). Secondly, between 2019 and 2022, Brothers of Italy (“Fratelli d’Italia”, FDI), under the leadership of Giorgia Meloni, heir of a post-fascist tradition that had historically been marginal both at the national and the regional level (see Table 1), gradually took the League’s place as the leading radical right populist party both in Italy and in Veneto. In particular, the choice to oppose, between 2021 and 2022, Mario Draghi’s technocrat-led grand-coalition

government, that the League instead supported, provided Meloni with a unique chance to claim the monopoly of Euroscepticism and nativism, leading to Brothers of Italy's triumph at the general elections of 2022. In that occasion, for the first time in history, Brothers of Italy was not only the largest party in Italy, but also the largest party in Veneto, and in the Prosecco Hills.

Table 1. Vote share in the PH municipalities of FDI and the League in 2013 (national elections), 2019 (European elections) and 2022 (national elections), compared with Christian-Democrats in 1976 and with Christian Democrats and the League in 1992.

Municipality	Residents (2019)	Vote Share for DC		Vote Share for League				Vote share for FDI		
		1976	1992	1992	2013	2019	2022	2013	2019	2022
Cison di Valmarino	2.596	48,11	34,01	17,07	11,38	54,05	17,06	1,71	5,68	34,37
Colle Umberto	5.079	49,24	29,84	26,60	12,13	53,67	17,91	1,24	7,02	31,79
Conegliano	34.642	46,45	25,65	22,48	9,47	44,40	12,09	1,33	6,75	31,65
Farra di Soligo	8.503	49,84	32,48	26,72	19,63	59,97	19,01	1,01	7,09	38,7
Follina	3.567	52,52	31,91	20,13	12,85	51,02	17,07	1,35	8,31	34,96
Miane	3.113	47,69	32,76	19,18	16,79	54,91	19,94	1,06	7,74	34,28
Pieve di Soligo	11.793	55,86	28,39	31,88	16,19	54,94	18,64	1,09	6,27	33,77
Refrontolo	1.724	58,25	30,52	32,24	22,66	63,73	21,77	0,66	5,57	40,07
Revine Lago	2.090	43,19	27,75	24,48	12,12	52,27	18,43	1,52	6,30	29,99
San Pietro di Feletto	5.136	43,84	25,51	29,94	13,89	52,48	15,35	1,28	7,18	34,63
San Vendemiano	9.872	47,86	29,32	21,36	15,12	58,58	17,91	0,95	5,50	33,89
Susegana	11.678	42,88	24,72	26,33	12,80	58,58	15,92	1,01	5,88	36,39
Tarzo	4.249	40,86	26,58	23,98	17,32	59,38	28,67	0,57	5,71	29,18
Valdobbiadene	10.163	58,50	32,36	25,61	21,44	58,92	17,52	1,34	8,27	42,2
Vidor	3.645	66,44	35,83	27,46	22,25	62,57	20,59	1,06	5,84	36,05
Vittorio Veneto	27.307	38,76	23,69	23,39	9,76	46,48	13,94	1,09	6,17	29,69
Prosecco Hills Area	145.157	45,51	26,31	23,55	12,98	50,66	14,93	1,12	6,38	31,09
Treviso (Province)	887.806	54,11	32,90	21,54	13,30	53,64	17,30	1,01	6,09	32,3
Veneto (Region)	4.879.133	51,76	30,67	16,29	10,53	49,88	14,50	1,50	6,76	32,7
Italy (Country)	59.641.488	38,71	29,66	8,65	4,09	34,33	8,79	1,96	6,46	25,98

Table 2. Vote share in the PH municipalities of FI-PdL and the right-wing coalition as a whole in 1994 (national elections), 2013 (national elections), 2019 (European elections) and 2022 (national elections).

Municipality	Residents (2019)	Vote Share for FI-PdL				Vote share for right-wing coal.			
		1994	2013	2019	2022	1994	2013	2019	2022
Cison di Valmarino	2.596	21,48	20,42	7,57	6,58	51,73	34,68	67,30	58,7
Colle Umberto	5.079	20,49	15,50	5,40	6,29	55,01	29,54	66,09	57,41
Conegliano	34.642	22,05	18,64	7,90	6,38	54,78	30,01	59,05	51,78
Farra di Soligo	8.503	21,06	17,45	5,60	7,58	52,52	38,99	72,66	66,43
Follina	3.567	18,65	15,99	6,04	5,43	49,70	31,76	65,37	58,72
Miane	3.113	19,97	13,98	4,79	5,08	47,92	32,53	67,44	61,9
Pieve di Soligo	11.793	21,24	17,96	7,03	7,58	55,25	36,93	68,24	61,08
Refrontolo	1.724	17,57	18,89	6,08	7,52	53,18	43,15	75,38	69,86
Revine Lago	2.090	19,25	14,18	6,30	4,97	50,11	29,73	64,87	54,6
San Pietro di Feletto	5.136	16,59	18,22	6,18	6,93	56,88	34,35	65,84	58,47
San Vendemiano	9.872	22,07	16,34	5,31	6,97	54,46	32,88	69,39	59,93
Susegana	11.678	20,69	18,33	4,77	6,77	57,73	32,72	69,23	61
Tarzo	4.249	18,21	16,14	5,08	4,71	53,24	35,88	70,17	63,13
Valdobbiadene	10.163	35,82	19,50	6,10	6,73	57,16	43,44	73,29	68,11
Vidor	3.645	21,57	17,22	3,93	5,82	59,53	41,27	72,34	64,34
Vittorio Veneto	27.307	20,09	14,72	5,11	5,19	53,15	26,35	57,76	49,97
Prosecco Hills Area	145.157	19,67	16,61	5,89	5,84	51,72	29,38	62,93	54,98
Treviso (Province)	887.806	22,20	17,86	5,72	6,80	49,80	32,93	65,45	58,5
Veneto (Region)	4.879.133	23,60	18,09	6,05	6,69	47,80	30,79	62,69	54,03
Italy (Country)	59.641.488	21,01	21,56	8,79	8,11	42,84	29,18	49,58	43,79

Source: Ministry of Internal Affairs. DC=*Democrazia Cristiana*; FI=*Forza Italia*; PdL=*Popolo della Libertà*.

“Right-wing coalition”=includes FI/PdL; League; AN (*Alleanza Nazionale*) and FDI.

As said, the Veneto region has historically been a stronghold of the Christian-Democrats (“Democrazia Cristiana”, DC) during the so-called Italian ‘First Republic’ (1946-1992), and the PH area has been no exception. The Northern League has most strongly grown, since its own foundation (1983), particularly in rural provinces in the Prealpine valleys of Lombardy and Veneto, by successfully inheriting the Christian Democrat hegemony in those areas (Passarelli and Tuorto, 2018), of which the PH are almost a prototypical example. From data exposed in Table 1, it emerges that the correlation between the vote share in the PH municipalities for the DC in 1976 and the League in both 2013 (when the LN was highly affected by financial scandals) and 2019 (the peak of the League’s history) was still very high ($R^2=0.72$ in 2013 and 0.54 in 2019)². The Northern League has

² As a comparison, see the correlation between DC’s voting share in 1976 and *Forza Italia/PdL*’s voting share (see Table 2) in 1994 ($R^2=0.35$), 2013 ($R^2=0.36$) and 2019, when the party had a major downturn ($R^2=-0.08$). The dominant party of the right was less able than the League to appeal to rural areas (in the PH, the correlation between municipality size and voting share for the League – but not for FI - is consistently negative). However, the correlation between DC’s voting share in 1976 and the voting share of all the right-of-center parties is highly positive in 1994, 2013, 2019 and 2022 ($R^2=0.35$, 0.75 , 0.61 and 0.63 respectively), thus testifying a strong and historically rooted right-wing hegemony in the area.

also benefitted, in Veneto, from the increasing political-institutional relevance of the region as subnational level of government: the current governor, the *leghista* Luca Zaia, has dominated each of the three elections he ran for, and, in 2020, also benefitting from the strong role assumed during the COVID-19 pandemic, reached an unprecedented 77 percent of the votes.

FDI, on its part, is the almost direct political heir of the post-fascist “Movimento Sociale Italiano” (MSI; see Vassallo and Vignati 2023), which was never able to reach electorally relevant results in most of Northern Italy. FDI’s roots in a different (and much electorally weaker) political culture are witnessed by the correlation between its vote share in 2013 (when, however, the party was electorally irrelevant: $R^2=-0.03$) and 2019 ($R^2=0.12$) and the vote share of the DC in 1976. However, things dramatically changed in 2022, when FDI, at both the national and regional levels, eroded much of the support enjoyed by the League: in 2022, the correlation with the vote share of the DC in 1976 was much higher for FDI ($R^2=0.65$) than for the League ($R^2=0.17$). These data already suggest that the hegemony of RRPPs goes beyond the – though far from irrelevant – party identification with the League and the latter’s organizational strength and rootedness. Research at the national level has pointed out how FDI’s victory in 2022 was mainly the result of internal shifts within the right-wing bloc: the electoral support for the coalition did not considerably increase in comparison with the previous elections, while FDI was able to attract disappointed League voters, that in turn had previously been Forza Italia voters (Roncarolo and Vezzoni, 2023). Our analysis roots this shift in a peculiar socio-territorial context, pointing out the elements that allowed this continuity.

In the last few years, Veneto in general and the PH in particular have witnessed a double political shift: from the old Northern League to the new national League and from the latter to FDI. Our article points out that this double shift could happen, apparently seamlessly, because it has taken place within the scope of the same RRP hegemony, within a right-wing electorate that already shared at least two fundamental axes: localism and producerism.

Hypotheses: localism and producerism, the keys for RRPPs’ hegemony?

Our hypothesis is that, amongst the multiple mechanisms and strategies exploited by RRPPs to maintain their electoral dominancy, a central role may be played by what we define as ‘localist politics’ (see also Wills, 2015). Apart from favourable political-cultural conditions (e.g., the heritage of the old Catholic-conservative subculture), support to the League and to Brothers of Italy may be assured by the reproduction of a hegemonic understanding of the role of ‘politics’ (both at the institutional and at the societal level) as a (more delegative than participative) tool to protect, and ease concrete improvements of social, cultural and economic conditions of ‘local communities’. Such

an understanding of the role of political activities may not only prepare a fertile terrain for the socio-political demarcation of an ‘out-group’ on ethno-cultural bases (which is a typical feature of RRPPs). It may also make the politicization of different social, redistributive and environmental conflicts more difficult, or, at the very least, it may force social and political contentious actors to negotiate with such hegemonic ‘localism’ and to frame their activities consequently. Local political officials, in this vein, are seen as representative of a local community, more than of a political or socio-economic group, and expected to defend and promote local interests. Local identities trump any other belonging³ and localist politics may arguably favour ‘horizontal’, inter-local conflicts over scarce public and private resources, instead of triggering processes of articulation of political discontent towards more far-reaching and politically sensitive goals.

We also contend that, to understand the reasons for the reproduction of an extremely high support to radical right populism in wealthy areas such as PH, ‘localism’ should be read in conjunction with another key concept that has already been vastly associated to the core of the populist radical right identities and proposals (e.g. Rathgeb, 2021), that is, *producerism*. Producerism consists in the idea that “*the ‘producers’ of the nation’s wealth should enjoy the economic fruits of their own labors [...] Individuals and groups driven by work are seen as superior, both economically and culturally [...] they embody virtue and morality, as opposed to ‘parasites’ at the top and bottom of society [...] aristocrats, bankers, the undeserving poor, and immigrants*” (Ivaldi and Mazzoleni, 2019: 7). RRPPs’ typical social policy proposals (often inspired by welfare chauvinism [Mudde, 2007] and by the distinction between ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving poors’), calls for state retrenchment and critiques against (national and supranational) bureaucracies, and possibly even anti-intellectualism and scepticism against experts (also associated to the PRR: e.g. Merkley, 2020).

Furthermore, localism and producerism can easily be combined and even mutually reinforce, through different ways, as in the case of the so-called ‘nationalism of the rich’ (Dalle Mulle, 2018) in which ‘local people’ legitimise their secessionist aspirations through a contraposition between an ‘us’ – the hard-workers, the *producers*, but politically weak and excluded, with their own cultures disregarded as ‘provincialism/parochialism’ – and a ‘them’ – parasitic but controlling state power and resources and hegemonic at the cultural level. Said otherwise, such localist/producerist discourse builds upon the disalignment between a (high) economic status and a (low) political and (possibly) cultural statuses and thus points at correcting it and to obtain political (and, in case, cultural) recognition.

³ Vanzetto (2022), in his study of peasant political culture in Veneto in the 19th and 20th century, has coined the concept of ‘amoral townism’ (“paesismo amorale”) to identify this mechanism.

Another way to tie localism and producerism – already identified as a major driver for right-wing populism in Europe (Mamonova and Franquesa, 2019) is probably more strictly associated with ‘the politics of rural’ (Brooks, 2020): this discursive mechanism builds on the rural/urban cleavage to identify rural areas as a sort of national *heartland* (Taggart, 2000: 95), “*a territory of the imagination... an evocation of that life and those qualities worth defending... that place, embodying the positive aspects of everyday life*”. Celebration of rural (or, in a more cautious form, non-urban) values as central for the national (or subnational) ‘heartlands’ can be declined in quite different ways. One that deserves to be mentioned here is ‘gastronationalism’ (DeSoucey, 2010), which “*signals the use of food production, distribution, and consumption to demarcate and sustain the emotive power of national attachment, as well as the use of nationalist sentiments to produce and market food*” (DeSoucey, 2010: 433). Gastronationalism in Italy has been extensively analysed (see Sassatelli, 2020), since ‘Made in Italy’ rhetoric applied to production and consumption in different sectors (including food) has become a sort of valence issue that most political forces try to own. As Rabbiosi (2020: 73) emphasizes, “the identity of Italian cuisine [a key part, or ingredient, of ‘Italianness’] is paradoxically based on two coexistent principles: an absolutely local nature and a profoundly national one”. ‘Gastronationalism’ can be declined in very different ideological ways and appeal to quite different social sectors, ranging from forms of ‘food chauvinism’ and stigmatization of foreign food cultures⁴ to what has been defined as ‘middle-class food activism’, consisting of “*efforts by those with financial means, interest, and critical thinking to make consumption choices toward more sustainable and equitable food*” (Counihan, 2020: 103).

Localism and producerism, in our analysis, are not populist radical right strategies or frames; they are logics of understanding politics, rooted in the structure of social relations that characterize a certain territory. In the previous section, we have pointed out the electoral continuity between the old DC (that was far from a RRPP) and League and FDI: this continuity shows that RRPPs are far from being the only actors able to exploit localism and producerism for political support. What we claim is that, thanks to the resonance between these two hegemonic political logics and some of the main traits of radical right populism, RRPPs tend to have a structural advantage in the territories in which such logics are prevalent.

The research adopts a multi-method approach to test to which extent localist and producerist views are widespread, amongst the broad electorate and local activism and militancy, and to which

⁴ Benasso and Stagi (2019: 237) links such practices to ‘food porn’, i.e. the “overabundance of discourses around food, which has spread in a reflective way among the different levels and scopes of cultural production, as well as the practice of photographing food and sharing the image on social media”. League’s leader Matteo Salvini notoriously vastly engage with such latter practice for evident political purposes, while the Meloni government has established a ministry for “Made in Italy” and a ministry for “food sovereignty”.

extent it can be associated with the support for the radical right populism. The article thus relies on the collection and the analysis of individual-level survey data from an original on-line questionnaire to be submitted through local Facebook groups, as well as on semi-structured interviews with local key players such as party representatives, social activists and interest-groups' leaders. While the next section is devoted to specify our methodological choices, the two following sections focus on presenting our findings in relationship with localist and producerist views respectively, on the basis of the data collected. Discussion and conclusions, including comments on the generalizability of our findings and suggestions for further research avenues, then follow.

Methods

We opted for a research design based on a mixed-method approach, involving the use of an original survey (N=415) followed by semi-structured interviews (N=6) to selected survey respondents amongst those who gave their availability for a follow-up interview. The CAWI survey was not conducted on a representative sample of the population of the Prosecco Hills area, but on a sample based on voluntary participation. We gathered our sample by circulating, in the second half of July 2020, the survey link in 16 existing Facebook groups -- one for each of the municipalities that are part of PH -- entitled "You are from [municipality] if..."⁵. These are fairly popular Facebook groups (a total of 30,578 members at the beginning of the data collection period) where content such as vintage photographs and mementos, local news and politics, information about upcoming social and cultural events, etc. are typically produced. This sampling strategy enabled a good number of respondents to be collected quickly. At the same time, the non-probabilistic nature of the sample discouraged the adoption of common statistical tools for multivariate analysis (e.g. regressions). We thus presented and analysed our results through descriptive statistics. In particular, we put in evidence, for each of our variables of interest (see below), the differences between the mean scores of voters (measured through voting intention at the national level) of RRPPs, voters of the so-called 'broad camp' (*campo largo*: left, centre-left and M5S voters) and respondents oriented towards abstention⁶. To assess the statistical significance of the results, we relied on paired t-test of means (RRPP vs 'Broad Camp; RRPP vs 'Abstention') for continuous variable and on chi-square test (by grouping respondents in the three aforementioned voting categories)⁷ for categorical variables.

⁵ For more details, see Annex B.

⁶ In any case, it is curious to note that the distribution of voting intentions for the president of the Veneto region within our sample was very similar to what later occurred in the regional elections held two months after the data collection period.

⁷ Voters for the Venetian Independent Party (N=13) and for other centre-right parties (N=4) formed too small categories to be considered. For full descriptive statistics, see Annex C, Section e).

The original questionnaire that we drafted, fully available in Annex A, included questions on: socio-demographic information; political participation and on trust in different institutions; attitudes on immigration; voting intention (at the regional and national level), ideological self-placement, populist attitudes. Crucially, we included batteries of questions to assess localist and producerist attitudes. As for localism, we firstly asked for the level of attachment to different territorial identities (local, regional, national and European); then we proposed a battery of questions looking at the role of political-institutional political representation from a normative point of view, by putting in contrast territorial representation vs. class-, interest- or ideology-based representation⁸. As for producerism, we relied on: i) a question focusing on both the idea of the existence of an organic community of producers (“The interests of entrepreneurs generally do not conflict with those of workers; the good of one is the good of the other”; 0-4 Likert scale); ii) a couple of questions on the individual understanding of the concept of ‘worker’: “When I think of the word ‘workers’, I think to... a) everyone with a job, regardless of occupation and contractual status; b) waged workers; c) self-employed workers; d) hardworking people; e) trade unions; “The first opposite of ‘workers’ that come to my mind is... a) unemployed; b) entrepreneurs; c) lazy people; iii) a battery of questions focusing on the individual assessment, in terms of environmental and economic consequences, of the inclusion of the PH area in the list of UNESCO World Heritage; iv) a battery of questions putting in contrast the ecologic transition and economic growth, also declining such contrast in local terms (i.e., focusing on Prosecco economy). Descriptive data analysis is reported in the tables included in Annex C.

As said, the questionnaire ended asking for the eventual availability to a follow-up interview. 25 respondents gave their availability; we selected six of them, by assuring variation in terms of voting intention in view of the upcoming regional election and gender (see Annex D). The interviews, lasting 50 minutes on average and collected between August and November 2020, were structured as a comment of the answers given in the questionnaire, by asking interviewees for elaborating their answers (particularly on questions measuring localist and producerist attitudes) more in-depth.

Data Analysis: Localism

Amongst survey respondents who accepted to report their voting intention at the national level (N=247), the four most reported answers were: Democratic Party (“Partito Democratico”, PD) and

⁸ “A parliamentarian's job is to advance the demands of the territory where he or she was elected instead of those of his or her own party”; A parliamentarian's job is to bring forward the demands of the territory where he was elected rather than those of certain social classes”; “The mayor is first and foremost a representative of the citizens and not of the party to which he belongs”; “I feel closer to people who live in my area, even if they are of different social status, than people of my same social status who live in other parts of Italy”; Likert scale (0-4).

centrist parties (28 percent); Blank/Abstention (24 percent); League (19 percent); FDI (14 percent). League's and FDI's voters were nearly indistinguishable in terms of: left-right self-placement (7.3 in a 1-9 scale for League; 7.9 for FDI); populist attitudes, measured through a 'populism index' (scale 1-5) based on seven items (see Annex A); Alpha's Cronbach=0.81 (3.21 for the League, 3.01 for FDI); and also, interestingly, for territorial attachment at different levels. 50 percent of League's voters reported to identify themselves as more Venetian than Italian (41 percent of FDI's voters, and 9 percent of centre-left voters), while only 2 percent of League's voters reported the opposite (9 percent of FDI's voters, 46 percent of center-left voters). Differences between RRPPs and centre-left voters are the highest in terms of attachment to European identity (FDI=0.9; League=1.2; centre-left=2.2, in a 0-3 scale) and the lowest in terms of attachment to municipal identity (FDI=2.35; League=2.24; centre-left=2.17 in a 0-3 scale). Data suggest that municipal identity is not divisive, in contrast to provincial and regional (both dominant – particularly the regional one - amongst RRPPs, including FDI) and national and European identities (much higher amongst centre-left voters).

The answers to our battery of questions specifically conceived to measure localist attitudes confirm the correlation between the latter and RRPPs voting intention. Table 3 summarizes the results for our four different dependent variables of interest (each corresponding to the Likert score of questions measuring localist attitudes). With the exception of DV3 (which received high scores from all respondents) the differences in terms of localist attitudes amongst RRPPs' voters and the rest (particularly in comparison with left-of-centre voters) are clear. Furthermore, as results on DV1 shows, the (reported) rejection of partisan reasonings when opposed to the defence of 'territory' is very similar between, on the one hand, FDI's and Leagues' voters and, on the other hand, citizens oriented towards abstention (who however are more attentive to class-related understanding of politics: see DV2 and DV4). For all the variables considered in Table 3, no statistical differences between FDI's and League's voters emerge.

Table 3. Localist Attitudes: Mean Scores per Voting Intention.

Dependent Variable (0-4, Likert Scale)	RRPP	Broad Camp	Abstention
DV1: An MP's job is to advance the demands of the territory where he or she was elected instead of those of his or her own party	3.04	2.34***	2.91
DV2: An MP's job is to bring forward the demands of the territory where s/he was elected rather than those of certain social classes	3.23	2.28***	2.87**
DV3: The mayor is first and foremost a representative of the citizens and not of the party to which he belongs	3.55	3.36	3.52
DV4: I feel closer to people who live in my area, even if they are of different social status, than people of my same social status who live in other parts of Italy	2.69	1.73***	2.29**

Source: Author's Elaboration. ***= $p < 0.01$; **= $p < 0.05$; *= $p < 0.10$ (paired means, t-test).

Our qualitative interviews confirm the same tendency and provide more ground for analysis. On the one hand, localism seems to be strongly rooted in a certain regional identity, the same that was at the core of the League's discourse during its autonomist years, based on the idea that Veneto's economic growth during the last few decades took place in spite of an excessive political and fiscal oppression by the central government, as stated by a resident of the PH who never voted for the League:

The problem is Rome, is taxes. And here there is a lot of pride. People are proud of what they have managed to do. They are proud and they think it was all thanks to them. (I4)

But localism, as it emerges from our interviews, is not limited to claims of Venetian identity. Localism is seen by many as an ethical guarantee of political representation: local politics is considered inherently morally superior to other level of institutional representation, as in the words of a supporter of regional president Luca Zaia:

The closer you are to the territory, the more practical you are and the fewer chances you have of cheating. My mistrust of politicians is completely based on ethics. [...] I feel much closer, at a political level, to the municipality, because it is accountable to a microcosm. You can try to cheat also at the municipal level, but you are under constant evaluation. People know who is a good mayor and who is not. Who does something for the community and who does not. (I2)

Other than the moral superiority of local government, in this excerpt we find two crucial elements of the way on understanding politics we are calling “localism”: on the one hand, the idea that a good politician is someone “practical”, someone that “does” (a “doer”, former US president George W. Bush once said); on the other hand, the reference to “the territory”, “the community” as the one entity to which politicians need to be accountable. The same principles were spelled out by other interviewees, with I2 explaining Luca Zaia’s success based on the fact that “if there is some weather trouble in Verona, he goes there, he does stuff, he is practical” and I5 defining good politics as doing “things that valorize the territory [...] for everyone’s good”. Localism, from this point of view, entails an understanding of politics in which populism, organicism and technocracy are combined based on the centrality of the local territory and community. Matters of ideology, or class, or anything else, do not appear in this model of how politics should work. Rather, localist politics is understood as a chain of territorial linkages, a scale of institutionalised local representation, as it was well explained by an interviewee:

Everything should start from the municipality, from the mayor that comes here, drinks a coffee, listens, and then at the provincial level he will be able to assert the needs, like “Look, in my municipality there is no bike lane to allow to move from the province of Treviso to the province of Padua”. Then, starting from the mayor and going to bigger and bigger level you get to have a total vision. (I1)

This micropolitical chain of representation, completely depoliticised, does not entail any role for political parties. Representation is entirely institutional and territorial, relying on an established system of social relations that allows politicians to extend their roots in local communities. In fact, the relevance of localism is also visible in the answers to the battery of questions measuring citizens’ trust in different social, economic and political organizations and institutions (Table 4). To be sure, the impact of partisan reasoning needs to be considered: voters for either FDI or the League consistently show more trust in political institutions occupied by their own preferred parties (which happen at the local and regional levels) and the same apply for voters for either PD or other left-of-centre parties, including the Five Star Movement (i.e. the coalition ruling, at the time of the survey, at the national level). RRPPs’ voters also display less trust in almost any social and economic association, including *associazioni di categoria* (grouping self-employed workers and small and medium enterprises) and *liste civiche* (local-level electoral slates, often centre-left-leaning, at least in the PH area). Interestingly, there are no statistically significant differences when political parties are concerned, nor, crucially, on voluntary associations operating at the local level, to which RRPP’s voters show higher (albeit not statistically significant) levels of trust: this is the case of *Pro Loco* (groups typically organizing local events) and of *Protezione Civile* (Civil Defence, typically involved

in emergency operations in human-made and natural disasters). In the case of *Alpini* - the Italian Army's specialist mountain infantry, very much part of Venetian identity and whose retired members are involved in voluntary activities at the local level – trust amongst RRPPs' voters is significantly higher than among centre-left voters.

Table 4. Trust (scale 1-10) in institutions and social organizations per voting intention (means).

Institutions/Associations	Populist Radical Right	Centre-Left + M5S	
President of Republic (Mattarella)	3,7	7,7	**
EU	2,9	7,1	**
Region	8,2	5,8	**
President of Region (Zaia)	9,0	5,4	**
Prime Minister (Conte)	3,1	6,8	**
Parliament	2,8	5,4	**
Province	6,5	4,4	**
Municipality	7,4	6,3	**
Mayor	7,3	6,1	**
Municipal Council	6,8	5,8	**
Parties	3,1	3,6	
Local-Level Political Lists (<i>Civiche</i>)	3,7	4,9	**
Unions	3,1	4,4	**
Self-Employed's and SME Associations	3,9	4,5	*
<i>ProLoco</i>	6,1	5,5	
<i>Protezione Civile</i>	7,8	7,3	
<i>Alpini</i>	8,4	7,2	**
Sport Associations	6,6	7,0	
AVIS (Blood Donors)	8,0	8,0	
Volunteering Associations	5,3	7,0	**
Environmental Organizations	4,6	6,8	**
ARCI (Left-wing Recreatory Associations)	3,6	6,2	**
Associations for Immigrants' Rights	2,4	6,1	**
Territorial Committees	5,0	6,2	**
Social Centres	2,3	5,1	**
Groups for Social Collective Purchasing	4,7	6,7	**

**=p<0.05; *=p<0.10 (paired means, t-test).

Overall, organizations relying on, and nurturing, forms of bonding (instead of bridging) social capital are well-trusted by RRPPs' voters. Also when looking at the percentage of membership into different organizations – and considering that low number of observations prevents, in this case, from drawing any conclusion - the picture seems similar: in our sample, 23 percent of RRPPs' voters declared to be involved in a *Pro Loco* (vs 15 percent of centre-left voters), and 11 percent of the former (vs 5 percent of the latter) declared to be part of *Alpini*; in contrast, 17 percent of centre-left

voters (vs 2 percent of RRPPs') declared to participate in some environmentalist organizations⁹. Our data confirms that bonding capital is indeed at the core of RRPPs' support in the PH. Evidence from our interviews also strengthens this argument, while also emphasizing the contact points with producerist attitudes and self-narratives in the PH. First of all, these organisations testify the tendency to "do" and the moral superiority of being "practical" that was already identified as virtuous when discussing politicians, as an interviewee well explained, with a clear cross-class understanding of society:

Here they are not sitting on their hands, no welfarism, they are doing their own thing and are able to organize themselves. Alpini, Avis and Pro Loco are thriving associations, with written documents and formal procedures [...]! Pro Loco organising festivals on the basis of programmatic documents! Managerial skills, even to organize a village festival. This cohesion is stronger than expecting someone's help. [...] I'm an advocate of associationism, it's essential to engage with people from different social classes as well, because often in the Pro Loco, in associations, there is the manager and the worker, the farmer and the bank manager, a little bit of everything (I5);

In the same vein, the same territorial understanding of politics is applied to associations, with the implied moral superiority of the local level once again coming to the fore, based on the direct accountability to the community:

In my opinion the closer you are to the territory the more practical you are and the less opportunity you have to cheat. Of course even in local associations you have internal conflicts, for power. But still they do something for the territory, which is traceable. Every association that is big, Italian European global... you get lost there. There is opacity, there is no transparency, too many steps, and these too many steps create possibilities of cheating. (I2);

Yet, where associational linkages emerge as peculiar of what we are calling in this article "localism" is not in their parallelism with politics, but rather in their oppositional comparison to politics. Many interviewees promote a certain type of civic association exactly because they entail a model of representation that is different from the one embodied by political parties. On the one hand, parties (but also unions) are considered inherently partisan, violating the organicist unity of the local community that we have already seen as one of the main pillars of localism, while this type of associations represent exactly community:

⁹ As for the intersection between localism and nativism, 92 percent of RRPPs' voters declare to have little or any trust in migrants (vs 28 percent amongst centre-left voters), and 13 percent of RRPPs' voters report to have little or any trust in local people (vs 24 percent). 54 percent of RRPPs' voters disagree with the statement "who grow up in Veneto is Venetian, families' origins do not matter" (vs 21 percent). 98 percent of centre-left voters report to have not had any personal problems with immigrant residents – vs 64 percent amongst RRPPs' voters.

That type of associations, like the Alpini, the Protezione Civile, they are associations in which there is a person who wants to help another person. Political parties, instead, but also unions, give me the idea that you want to go against certain people to help others. (I1)

On the other hand, the comparison between these organisations and political parties stresses the other pillar of localism we mentioned before: the cult of “doing”, of practicality, of concreteness, that is strictly linked to the territorial dimension:

I consider much more concrete the participation in organisations like Avis. [...] Even the Pro Loco is much more concrete than parties, in which the strategic line is decided elsewhere, in other territories. If I have to choose, I certainly prefer the territorial and associational dimension. (I5)

Based on this analysis, localism emerges as rooted in an established system of relationships at the territorial level, in which the prevalence of depoliticised and community-based models of activation favours an understanding of politics as a chain of institutional-territorial representation, with virtually no role for ideologies and parties.

Data Analysis: Producerism

In the previous section we have already had the opportunity to grasp how localist and producerist worldviews are often intertwined and strongly correlated with the vote for RRPPs. In this section we present further evidence to support the close relationship between producerist attitudes and the hegemony of RRPPs in the PH area.

As already reported in the Methods section, several questions were included in the survey to act as indicators for the presence of producerist attitudes. As we saw, producerism is based on an imaged organic community between entrepreneurs and workers “*opposed to ‘parasites’ at the top and bottom of society*” (Ivaldi and Mazzoleni, 2019: 7). The idea of such an organic community is captured by the item “The interests of entrepreneurs and workers coincide, the good of one is the good of the other” (Likert scale, 1-5: see table 5), while the antagonism between ‘hardworkers’ and ‘parasites’ is measured through the two items reported in table 6. As table 4 show, the idea of the existence of such an organic, non-internally conflictual community is much less widespread amongst left-of-centre voters. The same applies to the idea of a community of ‘hardworkers’ people opposed to ‘non-workers’ (Table 5). The opposition between ‘hardworkers’ and ‘non-workers’ is much more widespread amongst League’s voters (48 percent) than amongst FdI’s voters (20 percent), thus suggesting that the championing of producerist values is part of the identity of the League, i.e. the party with stronger rootedness and tradition.

Table 5: Producerist Attitudes (organic community of producers). Mean scores per voting intention.

Dependent Variable (1-5, Likert Scale)	RRPP	Broad Camp	Abstention
DV1: The interests of entrepreneurs and workers coincide, the good of one is the good of the other	2.42	2.00**	2.38

Source: Author's Elaboration. ***=p<0.01; **=p<0.05; *=p<0.10 (paired means, t-test).

Table 6: Producerist Attitudes (concept of 'worker'). Percentages of 'Yes' answers per voting intention.

Dependent Variable (1-5, Likert Scale)	RRPP	Broad Camp	Abstention	Chi-square, p-value
DV1: When I think of the word 'workers', I think to... 'hardworkers' (0= 'everyone with a job, regardless of occupation and contractual status', 'waged workers', 'self-employed workers' or 'trade unions')	21.3	7.9	22.4	0.022**
DV2: The first opposite of 'workers' that come to my mind is... 'lazy people' (0= 'entrepreneurs' or 'unemployed')	35.7	14.8	34.0	0.006***

Source: Author's Elaboration. ***=p<0.01; **=p<0.05; *=p<0.10 (chi square test; N=222 and N=204).

Interestingly enough, the organicistic view of society and politics that producerism entails, when applied to the realm of political representation, tends to end up in technocracy. The base of this logic is the same centrality of "doing" that we have already discussed in the previous section, and that is inherent to producerism, as an interview excerpt clearly shows:

You can put the word "politician" on your identity card. But basically it is not a job. You don't build anything, you do not create anything, you do not produce. This is what bothers me. [...] I have always held this idea. I have distrust in the people who are in charge, who want to rule us, because they are not competent. (I1)

The culture of "doing", of the superiority of practicality over reflection, seems to be strongly rooted, and is very clear also to those who criticize it, like in the case of this interviewee, who explicitly mentions the habit to "dumb down" his discourse in order to make it fit into the producerist framework:

For example: when someone does not study, what do they tend to say if they have had some success? Culture is *ciacole*¹⁰. Poems. [...] The League takes root in a context where culture is almost a negative value. I now do consultancy. When I establish relations I have to be careful about the language I use, I have to stay down to earth, because otherwise that

¹⁰ Idle chit chat, in Venetian.

short circuit will be created whereby "yes, yes, chit chat, words, we need to do something, to hammer a nail". The culture of "doing" is favored, and everything that gets in the way - and culture is sometimes an obstacle - is underestimated. (I6)

If "doing" is important, culture and discourse are indifferent when they are not explicitly opposed, and parties and ideologies are substituted by a chain of associational linkages and territorial institutional representation, then the step towards technocracy is not that long:

You would have to be a technician to know what the public [sector] can do. I do not have much faith in the public [sector], in the sense that in my opinion the public [sector] must learn to think as the private sector would think. Only in this way things can change. [...] An entrepreneurial and managerial culture is needed. Things that happen in the public [sector] do not exist in the private one: after two seconds you are out, as it should be! Either you bring results or you are out. Bureaucracy, barons who no one knows why they are there, lack of merit. One has to prove that he is good. [...] The people like me, I know nothing about these things, I can get an idea but decisions must be made by competent people. The people must have their say, then the competent people listen to everyone and make decisions based on the opinions of the majority. (I2)

Coherently with the producerist understanding of society, the economy of Prosecco wine is generally welcome and appreciated in the area, as is the territorial promotion ensured by UNESCO thanks to the decision to include the PH as "world heritage". Table 7 shows clear associations between support towards RRPPs and support towards the UNESCO decision and its consequences. No statistically significant differences have been found between League's and FdI's voters.

Table 7: Producerist Attitudes (on PH's inclusion in UNESCO Heritage Sites). Mean scores per voting intention.

Dependent Variable (1-4, Likert Scale)	RRPP	Broad Camp	Abstention
DV1: It is a great honor	2.56	1.89***	1.64***
DV2: It will ensure the protection of the environment from speculation and pollution	1.86	1.11***	1.09***
DV3: It will attract tourism and this is good for our economy	2.39	2.14**	2.16
DV4: It will attract tourism and this is a problem because it will increase rental costs	1.16	1.11	1.12
DV5: It will promote the Prosecco economy and therefore pollution	1.12	1.96***	1.85***
DV6: It will foster the Prosecco economy and therefore create new jobs	2.07	1.70***	1.70**

Source: Author's Elaboration. ***=p<0.01; **=p<0.05; *=p<0.10 (paired means; t-test).

Furthermore, the environmental issues raised by the production of prosecco represent a significant tension between localism and producerism, between the defence of the local territory and the prevalence of economic growth over anything else. From this point of view, as Table 8 illustrates,

there is a clear association between vote for RRPPs (either League or FdI) and sceptical when not openly oppositional attitudes towards the transition to a green economy and its social consequences.

Table 8: Producerist Attitudes (on Environmental Issues). Percentages of ‘Yes’ answer per voting intention.

Dependent Variable (Binary)	RRPP	Broad Camp	Abstention	Chi-square, p-value
It is necessary to impose changes and new laws to protect the environment, the goodwill of individuals is not enough (0= Each of us can already do a lot by reducing waste and changing our lifestyles)	48.5	62.7	60.4	0.191
Environmental protection is more important than economic growth (0= It is easy to talk about environmental defense without thinking about the economic consequences)	33.3	74.1	73.1	0.000***
Green economy (e.g., using renewable energy) would boost our economy (0= Shifting to a green economy, at least at first, would mean a loss to our economy)	66.1	94.4	88.0	0.000***
New jobs will be generated, however, it will be difficult to find jobs for those who will lose their jobs in traditional polluting industries (0= New jobs will be generated that will offset the loss of jobs in traditional polluting sectors)	57.1	26.4	32.6	0.001***

Source: Author’s Elaboration. ***=p<0.01; **=p<0.05; *=p<0.10 (chi-square test).

While, in quantitative terms, producerism seems to prevail over localism when there is a tension among the two elements, in our qualitative fieldwork we have also witnessed cases in which localist environmentalist clearly emerges as a dominant force, as in this excerpt:

[From politics] I would expect that the priority is to protect what allowed us to get here. We are here for the grapes, for the vineyard. This type of added value must be preserved, preserving nature, tradition, and our territory. With certain legislation, with bans, which first of all protect the environment, water, air, and then the rest follows accordingly. Because if I have good wine and good water I have a better quality of life. I have a beautiful territory, I protect it in the best possible way, and from there a sustainable economy can revolve around it, which brings jobs, a sustainable environment, and then tourism that makes everyone feel good. (I1)

Reading this against the backdrop of the climate crisis allows to point out both an element of tension in the dominant political framework in the PH, built on localism and producerism, and early occurrences of the emerging political polarisation over climate and the green transition that is becoming yet another component of the culture war carried out by conservative forces in many areas of the world.

Conclusions

This article addresses the success of RRPPs in a rural area that cannot be defined as populated by “losers of globalization” but that rather witnessed an unprecedented economic growth thanks to the capacity to produce and export sparkling wine. Winners of globalization do, indeed, vote for RRPPs, in certain conditions. Our analysis, in the specific case of the PH in Veneto, Italy, identifies this condition in the hegemony of localism and producerism in the shared understanding of politics in the area. A few final considerations need to be made.

First of all, localism and producerism, as we understand them, are strongly interrelated. They are two sides of the same coin, two complementary aspects of the depoliticisation of institutional representation, of the decline of political parties, of the emergence of a technical-managerial understanding of politics. This dominant understanding of politics at the local level seems to play in favour of RRPPs, notwithstanding their differences: not only the area has seen the electoral prevalence of the Northern League, of Salvini’s national League and of Brothers of Italy, but even before the last transformation, when the League was still dominant, its voters and those supporting Brothers of Italy were mostly aligned on the indicators analyzed in this article. This seems to imply, on the one hand, the existence of a relatively stable bloc of RRPP voters, not attached to a single party but rather to the right-wing electoral coalition and ready to support different parties, within the coalition, in different cases. On the one hand, the literature on the Italian party system has already pointed out how, in the so-called Second Republic, electoral volatility between parties has dramatically increased in comparison with the First Republic, while bloc volatility has remained structurally low (D’Alimonte and Bartolini, 1997; Bardi, 2007; Regalia, 2018; Roncarolo and Vezzoni, 2023), supporting the hypothesis of a declining identification with parties and an increasing identification with broad political coalitions. In this context, a common political culture or common political opportunities can be shared by multiple parties within the same space, since voters tend to freely choose among them without changing their political identity. On the other hand, our results strongly qualify the argument of Heinisch and Jansesberger (2023), who, finding that ‘the League supporters of 2018 had a more pronounced nation-state identity than did those of other parties [...] starkly different from their equivalents in 2016 [i.e. when the Salvini’s nationalist turn was still in its infancy]’, concluded that “voters respond to party cues as these changes were initiated by the party not the voters”. This paper rather suggests that, at least in the wealthy PH area, right-wing voters’ territorial identities are much more resistant to party cues: arguably, Heinisch and Jansesberger’s findings may better portray the evolution of the League’s electorate at the national level.

It needs also to be pointed out that the localist-producerist logic of understanding politics was not born yesterday, but it is rather rooted in the history of the Italian Republic. In particular, the role

of civic associations in providing political linkages while party organizations remain relatively weak is coherent with what we know of the “white subculture” that characterized Veneto in the First Republic as a system of social relations and organizations built around the structure of the village and of the Catholic Church (Trigilia, 1986; Cento Bull, 2000; Almagisti, 2016). This continuity with the Christian Democracy era helps also understand that localism and producerism are not inherently radical-right elements: they are logics of understanding politics, rooted in the structure of social relations that characterize a certain territory, that, in certain conditions, provide RRPPs with a substantial electoral advantage. A discussion of the reasons behind the particularly relevant role of local and producerism in Venetian politics goes beyond the scope of this article. The persistence of some of the historical traits of the “white subculture”, including the prevalence of the State vs. Church and centre vs. periphery cleavages over the class one (Diamanti and Riccamboni, 1992), can reasonably be expected, and has already been observed for what concerns “anti-state localism” (Almagisti and Zanellato, 2021). Historians have found traces of this model of understanding politics even before the Second World War, tracing its origins in the limited integration of Venetian rural areas into the Italian national project (Vanzetto, 2022). The partial de-industrialisation of the region (Zazzara, 2020) may also have played a significant role in the most recent evolutions.

Furthermore, Veneto in general and the PH in particular are not the only socio-territorial context in which localism and producerism play a role. We have investigated this territory because, on the one hand, the combination between the heritage of the “white subculture” and the socio-territorial characteristics of Veneto are particularly favorable for localism and producerism, and, on the other hand, the PH provide a particularly poignant case of RRPPs-voting “winners of globalization”. Still, the prevalence of such political logics is also linked to broad societal phenomena, such as the decline of class identities and political ideologies, that might make them significant also in other socio-territorial contexts. Further research should explore the difference between the role of localism and producerism in the PH area and the one the same factors play elsewhere.

Finally, we cannot avoid to observe that, notwithstanding the strong relationship between localism and producerism, environmental issues and struggles are an element of structural tensions between the two. It is not by chance that Veneto has hosted in the last few years a significant number of territorial conflicts (Fregolent, 2015), even if the environmental issue has rarely been appropriated by the political centre-left as a central element in its political platform, and the attempt to reproduce a partially amended and softened version of the right-wing localist and producerist agenda has prevailed. Still, even in the PH, environmental protests against the Prosecco monoculture are not rare (Basso & Fregolent, 2021). Such a centrality of the territory is inherently in tension with the habit of considering the territory as an infinite resource that traditionally characterize producerism.

Finalizing this article in 2024 implies taking into account the crisis that the League is undergoing in Veneto, including the PH, after the 2022 elections, that was FDI as the largest party in the Region. The conflict between the supporters of Matteo Salvini's national radical-right strategy and those (partially identifying with the regional president Luca Zaia) proposing a comeback of a regionalist/autonomist agenda is open, and has directly involved the PH: Gianantonio Da Re, former mayor of Vittorio Veneto, member of the European Parliament and local leader of the League for more than three decades, was formally expelled from the party in March 2024 after his strong critiques against the 'radical Right' and anti-autonomist turn of the Salvini's League. The fracture brought to local splits in a few municipalities, allowing for example the centre-left to win the mayoral elections in Vittorio Veneto in June 2024.

It is much too early to say if this is the beginning of a region-wide split or even of a structural decline of the domination of the League over Venetian politics. What we have presented in this paper, and recent development in the regional politics, suggest that the persistent characters of local politics matter more than their party carriers, in fostering the domination of the populist radical-right in well-off rural areas. At the same time, we fully acknowledge the limitations of this article in terms of our survey data collection strategy, which is surely innovative and promising (in terms of benefit-cost ratio) but at the same time unable to build a representative sample. In this sense, our research may hopefully represent a starting point for further research on RR politics in specific contexts as well as on politics in North-Eastern Italy. This region seems not only understudied (at least from a political science perspective), but also a laboratory of local, environmental and/or economic conflicts, often entailing highly complex social and cultural struggles currently championed by the radical right (not only in rural areas: see as an example the case of the once left-oriented industrial town of Monfalcone) deserving much attention in our discipline.

References

- Albertazzi, D. & Zulianello, M. (2021). Populist Electoral Competition in Italy: The Impact of Sub-national Contextual Factors. *Contemporary Italian Politics*, 13(1), 4-30. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23248823.2020.1871186>.
- Almagisti, M. (2016). *Una democrazia possibile. Politica e territorio nell'Italia contemporanea*. Carocci.
- Almagisti, M. & Zanellato, M. (2021). Il Ritorno Del “Doge”: Un’analisi storica del voto regionale in Veneto del 2020. *Regional Studies and Local Development*, 2(1), 43–76.
- Ardeni, P.G. (2020). *Le radici del populismo*. Laterza.
- Arzheimer, K. (2013). Working-class parties 2.0?: Competition between centre-left and extreme right parties. In J. Rydgren (Ed.), *Class Politics and the Radical Right* (pp.75-90). Routledge.
- Bardi, L. (2007). Electoral change and its impact on the party system in Italy. *West European Politics*, 30(4), 711-732 <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01402380701500256>.
- Basso, M. & Fregolent, L. (2020). Fighting against monocultures: wine-growing and tourism in the Veneto Region. In L. Fregolent L. & O. Nello (Eds.), *Social movements and public policies in Southern European cities* (pp. 151-165). Springer.
- Bloise, F., Chironi, D. & Pianta, M. (2021). Inequality and voting in Italy’s regions. *Territory, Politics, Governance*, 9(3), 365-390. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/21622671.2020.1837219>.
- Bornschiefer, S. & Kriesi, H. (2013). The populist right, the working class, and the changing face of class politics. In J. Rydgren (Ed.), *Class Politics and the Radical Right* (pp.11-29). Routledge.
- Brooks, S. (2020). Brexit and the Politics of the Rural. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 60(4), 790-809. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/soru.12281>.
- Cento Bull, A. (2000). *Social identities and political cultures in Italy: Catholic, Communist and Leghist communities between civiness and localism*. Berghahn Books.
- Chou, M., Moffitt, B. & Busbridge, R. (2022). The Localist Turn in Populism Studies. *Swiss Political Science Review*, 28, 129-141. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/spsr.12490>.
- Counihan, C. (2020). Food Consumption and Food Activism in Italy. In R. Sassatelli (ed.), *Italians and Food* (pp. 101-125). Palgrave.
- D’Alimonte, R. & Bartolini, S. (1997). ‘Electoral transition’ and party system change in Italy. *West European Politics*, 20(1), 110-134. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/01402389708425177>.

- De Soucey, M. (2010). Gastronationalism: Food Traditions and Authenticity Politics in the European Union. *American Sociological Review*, 75(3), 432-455.
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0003122410372226>.
- Diamanti, I. & Riccamboni, G. (1992). *La parabola del voto bianco: elezioni e società in Veneto (1946-1992)*. Neri Pozza.
- Dunin-Wąsowicz, R. & Gartzou-Katsouyanni, K. (2023). Geographical Dimensions of Populist Euroscepticism. *Political Studies Review*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/14789299231201810>.
- Fieschi, C. (2019). *Populocracy: the tyranny of authenticity and the rise of populism*. Agenda Publishing.
- Fitzgerald, J. (2018). *Close to Home: Local Ties and Voting Radical Right in Europe*. Cambridge University Press.
- Fregolent, L. (2015). Trasformazioni territoriali e proteste dai cittadini: un caso studio. *Economia e Società Regionale*, 33(3), 70-81.
<https://www.francoangeli.it/Riviste/schedaRivista.aspx?IDArticolo=56096>.
- Gidron, N. & Hall, P. (2017). The politics of social status: economic and cultural roots of the populist right. *British Journal of Sociology*, 68(S1), S57-S84.
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/1468-4446.12319>.
- Heinisch, R., & Jansesberger, V. (2023). Does ethno-territorial identity matter in Populist Party support? Evidence on the demand-side from 19 populist radical right and populist radical left national and regionalist parties. *European Politics and Society*, 24(2), 213–233.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23745118.2021.1976577>.
- Heinisch, R., Massetti, E. & Mazzoleni, O. (2020) *The People and the Nation: Populism and Ethno-Territorial Politics in Europe*. Routledge.
- Inglehart, R. & Norris, P. (2016). Trump, Brexit, and the Rise of Populism: Economic Have-Nots and Cultural Backlash. HKS Working Paper No. RWP16-026.
- ISTAT (2022). *Rilevazione sulle forze di lavoro*. <http://dati.istat.it/index.aspx?queryid=25524>.
- Ivaldi, G. & Mazzoleni, O. (2019). Economic Populism and Producerism: European Right-Wing Populist Parties in a Transatlantic Perspective. *Populism*, 2(1), 1-28.
https://brill.com/view/journals/popu/2/1/article-p1_1.xml.
- Kriesi, H. P., Grande, E., Lachat, R., Dolezal, M., Bornschieer, 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.
<https://ejpr.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2006.00644.x>.

- Langsæther, P. (2019). Class voting and the differential role of political values: evidence from 12 West-European countries. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, 29(1), 125-142. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17457289.2018.1464015>.
- Mamonova, N. & Franquesa, J. (2019). Populism, Neoliberalism and Agrarian Movements in Europe. Understanding Rural Support for Right-Wing Politics and Looking for Progressive Solutions. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 60(4), 710-731. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/soru.12291>.
- Mazzoleni, O. (2023). *Territory and Democratic Politics. A Critical Introduction*. Palgrave.
- McDonnell, D. (2006). A weekend in Padania: Regionalist populism and the Lega Nord. *Politics*, 26(2), 126-132. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-9256.2006.00259.x>.
- Merkley, E. (2020). Anti-Intellectualism, Populism, and Motivated Resistance to Expert Consensus. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 84(1), 24-48. <https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfz053>.
- Moffitt, B. (2020). *Populism*. Polity Press.
- Mudde, C. (2007). *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. Cambridge University Press.
- Nicholas, C., Welters, R. & Murphy, L. (2018). Does social capital help communities to cope with long-distance commuting? *Regional Studies*, 52(12), 1646-1657. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00343404.2018.1437899>.
- Oesch, D. (2012). The class basis of the cleavage between the New Left and the radical right: An analysis for Austria, Denmark, Norway and Switzerland In J. Rydgren (Ed.), *Class Politics and the Radical Right* (pp.31-52). Routledge.
- Ostiguy, P. (2018). Populism: A Socio-Cultural Approach. In P. Taggart, C. Rovira, P. Ochoa, & P. Ostiguy (Eds.), *Oxford handbook of populism* (pp. 73–97). Oxford University Press.
- Passarelli, G. & Tuorto, D. (2018). *La Lega di Salvini. Estrema destra di governo*. Il Mulino.
- Ponte, S. (2021). Bursting the bubble? The hidden costs and visible conflicts behind the Prosecco wine ‘miracle’. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 86, 542-553. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0743016721001996>.
- Putnam, R. (2000). *Bowling alone: the collapse and revival of American community*. Simon & Schuster.
- Rabbiosi, C. (2020). Locating Italianicity through food and tourism. Playing with geographical Scales. In R. Sassatelli (ed.), *Italians and Food* (pp. 71-99). Palgrave.
- Rathgeb, P. (2021). Makers against Takers: The Socio-Economic Ideology and Policy of the Austrian Freedom Party. *West European Politics*, 44(3), 635–660. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01402382.2020.1720400>.

- Regalia, M. (2018). Electoral Reform as an Engine of Party System Change in Italy. *South European Society and Politics*, 23(1), 81-96.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13608746.2018.1432245>.
- Rodríguez-Pose, A. (2018). The revenge of the places that don't matter (and what to do about it). *Papers in Evolutionary Economic Geography (PEEG)* 1805, Utrecht University.
https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/85888/1/Rodriguez-Pose_Revenge%20of%20Places.pdf.
- Rodríguez-Pose, A., Lee, N. & Lipp, C. (2021). Golfing with Trump. Social capital, decline, inequality, and the rise of populism in the US. *Regions, Economy and Society*, 14(3), 457-481.
<https://academic.oup.com/cjres/article/14/3/457/6375185>.
- Roncarolo, F. & Vezzoni, C. (2023). Conclusioni. Fu vera svolta? Luci e ombre di un quadro in movimento. In F. Roncarolo & C. Vezzoni (eds.), *Svolta a destra? Cosa ci dice il voto del 2022* (pp. 257-267). Il Mulino.
- Sassatelli, R. (ed.) (2020). *Italians and Food*. Palgrave.
- Stone, W., Gray, M., & Hughes, J. (2003). *Social capital at work: How family, friends and civic ties relate to labour market outcomes*. Australian Institute of Family Studies Melbourne.
- Taggart, P. (2000). *Populism*. Open University Press.
- Tahlyan, D., Maness, M. & Stathopoulos, A. (2022). Disentangling Social Capital – Understanding the Effect of Bonding and Bridging on Urban Activity Participation. Available at SSRN:
<https://ssrn.com/abstract=4050229> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4050229>.
- Teney, C., Lacewell, O., & De Wilde, P. (2014). Winners and losers of globalization in Europe: Attitudes and ideologies. *European Political Science Review*, 6(4), 575-595.
<https://doi:10.1017/S1755773913000246>.
- Triglia, C. (1986). *Grandi partiti e piccole imprese: comunisti e democristiani nelle regioni a economia diffusa*. Il Mulino.
- Vanzetto, L. (2022) *Rivolte di paese. Una nuova storia per i contadini del Veneto profondo*. Cierre Edizioni.
- Vassallo, S. & Vignati, R. (2023). *Fratelli di Giorgia. Il partito della destra nazionale-conservatrice*. Il Mulino.
- Wills, J. (2015). Populism, localism and the geography of democracy. *Geoforum*, 62, 188-189.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2015.04.006>.
- Woolcock, M. (1998). Social capital and economic development: Toward a theoretical synthesis and policy framework. *Theory and Society*, 27, 151–208.
<https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1006884930135>.

Zaslove, A. (2011). *The Re-invention of the European Radical Right: Populism, Regionalism, and the Italian Lega Nord*. McGill-Queen's University Press.

Zazzara, G. (2020). Deindustrializzazione e industrial heritage. Approcci convergenti alla memoria del passato industriale. *Italia Contemporanea*, 292, 117-143.

<https://doi:10.3280/IC2020-292005>.

Just Accepted - Early View