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Voters, issues, and party loyalty: The 2022 Italian election under the magnifying glass

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Abstract. The 2022 Italian election marked a historic victory for the centre-right coalition. This camp was spearheaded by Giorgia Meloni's Brothers of Italy (FDI), with a solid performance of this radical right party across the country. However, considerable nuance emerges by looking at different aspects of the vote, which we do by leveraging original data from the pre-electoral wave of the 2022 CISE/ICCP survey. After recapping both the build-up to and results of the election, we employ this data on these specific fronts. First, we analyse vote flows between the 2018 and 2022 elections in three big cities in Northern, Central, and Southern Italy: Turin, Florence, and Naples. This analysis shows that FDI becomes more competitive in these traditionally unfavourable contexts, although less so in Naples. Second, we analyse data on the configuration of Italian voters' preferences, which reveals an increasingly progressive electorate in an apparent contradiction with the election results. Third and final, we go deeper into the demand-side picture by assessing the role of sociodemographic characteristics over vote choice, presenting the voter profile of the five largest parties: the three main centre-right parties, the Democratic Party, and the Five Star Movement. Overall, the findings that emerge from our article enhance a more fine-grained understanding of this crucial election in Italy.

Keywords: 2022 Italian election, sociodemographics, issue preferences, party loyalty, vote flows, Brothers of Italy.

INTRODUCTION

The 2022 Italian general election, held on 25 September 2022, marked a historic result for Brothers of Italy (FDI) and its leader Giorgia Meloni. The largest party emerging from the electoral competition, with more than 7 million votes, FDI successfully exploited its opposition status during the XVIII (2018-2022) legislature, in which three ideologically heterogeneous coalition governments were sworn in (specifically: Conte I, Conte II and Draghi). In such a context of frenetic government turnover, FDI firmly opposed all cabinets, even those joined by the party's centre-right allies. Rewarded by vot-

ers for these choices, Meloni thus replaced Mario Draghi as the head of the government, forming the sixty-eighth Italian cabinet and becoming the first female prime minister in Italy's history.

Among the main centre-right parties, FDI is the youngest formation. Meloni's party was, in fact, founded between 2012 and 2013. Nevertheless, FDI has an established tradition. Notably, it inherits the post-fascist Italian legacy (Puleo and Piccolino 2022), characterised by the gradual transition from the Italian Social Movement (MSI) to National Alliance (AN) (Ignazi 2018). Before reaching a high support in the polls, FDI struggled to record satisfactory results in the electoral contests. Indeed, it participated in the 2013 and 2018 general elections recording poor performance (D'Alimonte 2013; Emanuele et al. 2020). Since its formation up to September 25, 2022, FDI has constantly been the junior member of the centre-right coalition (Tarchi 2018). After having reversed the balance of power, Meloni is now confronted with crucial governmental challenges. Notably, she needs to build international reliability vis-à-vis supranational actors and globalised markets while preserving at the same time responsiveness[1] towards FDI voters.

The 2022 Italian general election differed from past electoral contests as its aftermath was characterised by a less troublesome government formation and bargaining. The result emerging from the ballot boxes allowed the centre-right coalition to obtain a solid majority in both chambers (Chamber of Deputies and Senate). Different from 2022, in 2013 and 2018 government formation was characterised by the establishment of unpredictable coalitions, largely deviating from the pre-election ones (Schadee et al. 2019).

Through the analysis of the original data from the pre-electoral wave of the 2022 CISE/ICCP survey,[2] this article aims to contribute to the literature on Italian elections – and specifically to the enquiry of the 2022 election to understand how their results came about – by focussing on three main factors related to this electoral competition: issue preferences of the electorate, voters' sociodemographic characteristics, and party loy-

alty through the analysis of vote flows. Such three topics are useful as they allow better appreciation of different dimensions regarding the 2022 election. First, by scrutinising the issue preferences of the electorate, we can understand the main citizens' concerns behind this electoral contest. As issues have been increasingly centre-stage in the last electoral competitions in European countries (De Sio and Lachat 2020), in this article we provide scholars with relevant information on the Italian case. By the same token, examining the impact of the electorate's sociodemographic features over vote choice helps uncovering fundamental trajectories regarding, for instance, parties' appeal and the social composition of their supporters. This is of particular relevance in a context like Italy, where traditional social divides do not follow predictable paths (see for instance De Sio 2018 on the social traits of PD voters). Third, vote flows are informative on what we labelled as party loyalty. In studying vote flows, we aim to appreciate whether parties managed to obtain new voters, while preserving old constituencies.

The article is structured as follows. The following section delineates the historical background by focussing on the recent political developments in the Italian parliamentary and governmental arenas. Then, the third section illustrates the results of the 2022 election. In the fourth section, we explore the vote flows in three large Italian cities: Turin, Florence, and Naples. The fifth part is devoted to analysing the issue preferences of voters to understand if some issues might have played a more relevant role than others. The sixth section focusses on the 'identikit' of voters, investigating which sociodemographic categories (age, gender, education, and social class) have played the lion's share when it comes to party choice. A concluding part follows.

BACKGROUND

Formed after the election held on March 4, 2018, the XVIII (2018-2022) legislature has been characterised by high government turnover (Conti et al. 2020a) and turbulence in almost all parliamentary groups, confirming Italy's long tradition of unstable cabinets (Curini and Pinto 2017; Improta 2022). During such a legislative term, three different cabinets were formed. Counting on the relative majority of seats in both Chamber of Deputies and Senate, the Five Star Movement (M5S) established a coalition government with the League after nearly three months of challenging bargaining, eventually giving rise to the first cabinet headed by Giuseppe Conte – at the time, a non-partisan figure who howev-

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[1] Here we refer to the responsibility-responsiveness dilemma thoroughly examined by Peter Mair (2009; 2013).

[2] The 2022 CISE/ICCP survey is a pre-electoral Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI) survey investigation designed by the CISE (Italian Centre for Electoral Studies) and administered by Demetra srl as part of the Issue Competition Comparative Project (ICCP) (De Sio et al. 2019). A representative sample of Italian voters (N=861) was interviewed from 30 August to 5 September 2022, just before the blackout for polls imposed by the Italian legislation. The sample reproduces population quotas for gender, age, level of education and geographical area of residence.

er had strong ties with the M5S.[3] Almost one year after the Conte I government formation, the balance of power in terms of public support between the two governing partners changed as a consequence of the League's substantial rise in the European elections in May 2019 (Landini and Paparo 2019; Angelucci and Maggini 2019). Seeking to exploit the increased support, the League's leader Matteo Salvini strategically asked for early elections (Cotta 2020). However, Salvini's attempt to elicit an early dissolution of the legislature failed as the M5S successfully managed to form an alternative coalition with three centre-left parties – the Democratic Party (PD), Italy Alive (IV), and Article One Democratic and Progressive Movement (MDP). Conte again led the new government, but the governmental actions shifted from being characterised by clear anti- to more pro-European stances (Capati and Improta 2021; Fabbrini 2022).

The Conte II government was confronted with one of the most challenging crises Italy has ever faced: the COVID-19 pandemic. The consequences of the pandemic on the Italian political system have been vital in reshaping party competition (Capati et al. 2022; Russo and Valbruzzi 2022), public opinion preferences (Vicentini and Galanti 2021), and political leadership (Loner 2022). The Conte II government found itself handling the health crisis by implementing unparalleled measures and declaring a state of emergency. By doing so, the government put in place unprecedented restrictions on citizens' freedoms. However, conflicts deriving from the COVID-19 management were key in prompting the Conte II government's early termination. Indeed, intra-coalition tensions over the pandemic governance between Conte and Matteo Renzi, leader of the junior coalition partner, i.e., IV, led to the resignation of IV's ministers and the fall of the government.

After new negotiations between parliamentary parties and the President of the Republic Sergio Mattarella, the former President of the European Central Bank (ECB) Mario Draghi was entrusted forming a 'national unity' government, with the precise goal of limiting the spread of the virus and adequately investing the European funds and loans related to the Next Generation EU (NGEU) surrounding the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR). The Draghi government, involving all the main parties but Brothers of Italy (FDI) and Italian Left (SI), was sworn in on February 13, 2021. Despite being a national unity government, intra-coalition con-

flicts emerged even in this exceptional ruling configuration. Specifically, government instability has been evident since the 2022 presidential election held in January. The major political formations were unable to converge on a single candidate on both sides of the political spectrum (i.e., centre-left and centre-right coalitions). Such a political deadlock was eventually solved with Mattarella's acceptance of serving for a second seven-year term at the *Quirinale* (Quirinal Palace)[4]. Turbulence in domestic politics was then coupled with the increased international insecurity deriving from the Russian invasion of Ukraine and its challenging consequences (e.g., high inflation rates and gas and energy crisis). The Draghi government firmly adhered to the Western bloc positions, contributing to sanctioning Russia and supporting Ukrainian military efforts (Di Mascio et al. 2022; Newell 2022).

The Russian-Ukrainian crisis increased the complexity of coalition governance (Bordignon et al. 2022). In particular, the M5S split into two different factions. On the one hand, Conte and his loyal members started to criticise Draghi's approach. On the other hand, a smaller group of parliamentary members guided by the former leader of the M5S, Luigi Di Maio, desired to reinforce Draghi's agenda on both the pandemic and the war, criticising Conte's shift from being a government supporter to be an internal opponent. Such infighting ultimately resulted in a party split of the M5S and a withdrawal of support to Draghi by Conte.

In this context, Draghi became unwilling to find a viable and alternative governing solution, and the legislature was eventually dissolved earlier than the constitutionally mandated end of term. Considering the consistent opposition status maintained by FDI throughout the legislature, it was immediately apparent that Giorgia Meloni was the frontrunner in the 2022 electoral contest. The peculiarity of the 2022 election, compared to recent ones, lies in its decisiveness. The outcome of the election produced an easily identifiable winner. As previously mentioned, different from 2022, in 2013 and 2018 there was a deviation from pre-election coalitions. In addition, in these elections, the bipolar patterns in which the winning coalition would govern on its own became a distant memory (Emanuele and Chiaramonte 2020).

THE 2022 ITALIAN ELECTION RESULTS

The pivotal 2022 Italian election marked the victory of the centre-right coalition, historically spearheaded by

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[3] Conte was nominated as a potential Minister of Public Administration for the M5S' *Squadra di governo* (pools of ministrable candidates) during the election campaign. After an initial role as 'mediator' between the M5S and the League, he eventually became formally affiliated with the former party. Currently, Conte is the President of the M5S.

[4] The official residence of the President of the Republic.

a party that is the direct heir of the Italian neo-fascist tradition in FDI (e.g., Improta and Trastulli 2022), leading to its return to power after 14 years. This also coincided with another historical event: the formation of the first Italian government led by a woman as its Prime Minister, i.e., FDI's leader Giorgia Meloni. The first-ever republican election held in the autumn, a direct result of the latest government crisis of the XVIII (2018-2022) legislature and anticipated by an equally unprecedented summer campaign, marked a clear affirmation of FDI as Italy's new first party, despite the highest-ever abstention rate recorded in an Italian general election (36.1%; see, e.g., Improta et al. 2022; Trastulli and Flumeri 2022; Garzia 2022). Further, it stressed the role of the centre-right as the country's leading political coalition, also due to the mixed system dictated by the *Rosatellum* electoral law (Chiaramonte and D'Alimonte 2018) and the fragmentation of the opposing camp into several parts. Among these factors, the decline in turnout is a relevant red flag for the quality of the Italian democracy. Indeed, the 2022 negative record in electoral participation also marks a historical 9-point drop from 2018. Taken together, such results indicate that Italy is becoming a country in which citizens are valuing less the electoral moment. In comparative terms, this decline echoes the recent paths traceable in the last election in Portugal (Lopes 2022) and, more generally, in most European democracies over the last decades (Flickinger and Studlar 1992).

Table 1 recaps the electoral results of the main parties we analyse, breaking down the votes, seats, and relative shares of each formation.[5] By first looking at the two coalitions, the victory of the centre-right over the centre-left is evident and encompassing, as all indicators show. Votes-wise, in both chambers, the centre-right gained around 12.3 million preferences against the centre-left's over 7.3 million. In both chambers, this equates to approximately 44% of votes in favour of the centre-right vis-à-vis just above 26.1% for the centre-left. Due to the disproportional effects produced by the electoral system as a consequence of the greater unity and thus competitiveness in the majoritarian arena, this already sizeable gap in votes became even more prominent in terms of parliamentary representation. Indeed, the centre-right won just below 60% of the seats in both chambers (237 out of 400, i.e., 59.3%, in the Chamber of Deputies, and

115 out of 200, i.e., 57.5%, in the Senate), whilst the centre-left fared just above 25% (85 out of 400, i.e., 26.1%, in the Chamber of Deputies, and 44 out of 200, here too 26.1%, in the Senate).

By disaggregating this picture and looking at individual parties, additional interesting evidence emerges. As said, the centre-right was decisively led by FDI, which emerged as – by far – the largest Italian party, both votes- and seats-wise. Indeed, Meloni's party rose from a mere 4.3% vote share in 2018 (i.e., just above 1.4 million votes) to win over 7 million votes, just below 30%, in both chambers, translating into 118 seats in the Chamber of Deputies (25.9%) and 66 seats in the Senate (33%). Within this coalition, other remarkable findings emerge – namely, the relatively similar electoral performance of the League and FI in both chambers (the former below 9%, the latter above 8%, with both winning more than 2 million votes); and the fact that in terms of votes, seats, and the related shares, FDI alone is always larger than the sum of these two partners. This is true despite the seat discrepancy between the League and FI, which favoured the former and derived from how the coalition candidates were assigned across the single-member districts amongst these two partners. In turn, this decision was based on electoral polls and prior electoral performance by Matteo Salvini and Silvio Berlusconi's parties, further highlighting the comparatively larger downfall of the League both compared to previous contests, at the national and European levels, as well as to the expected results given how intra-coalitional quotas, i.e., the partisanship of coalition candidates in single-member districts, were allocated. As expected, the role played by Us Moderates in the coalition's success was marginal, albeit this coalition partner won a disproportionate number of seats in the Chamber compared to its electoral size.

In terms of other relevant party actors, whilst it is true that the leading force of the centre-left, the PD, solidified itself as the country's second electoral force and the largest opposition party, its electoral performance was not much better compared to the '18%' 2018 election (Emanuele and Paparo 2018). Indeed, across both chambers, Enrico Letta's party won above 5 million votes, equating to 19% of the vote share in the Chamber and 18.6% in the Senate and translating into, respectively, 69 (17.3%) and 38 (19%) seats. The progressive coalition was not aided by the electoral performance of either the Left-Green Alliance or More Europe, as seen in Table 1.

Finishing off with the M5S and the centrist 'Third Pole', the former emerged as the biggest loser from the 2022 Italian election, whilst the latter made a solid elec-

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[5] We focus here on the centre-left (i.e., PD, Left-Green Alliance, More Europe, and Civic Engagement), centre-right (i.e., FDI, League, FI, and Us Moderates), the M5S, and the 'Third Pole'. Indeed, considering such parties, we can appreciate the broader picture of the 2022 Italian electoral supply by, at the same time, being parsimonious when it comes taking into account (too) small parties.

Table 1. 2022 Italian election results: votes and seats in the Chamber of Deputies and Senate (main parties).

Parties (and coalitions)	Chamber of Deputies				Senate			
	Votes	Vote %	Seats	Seat %	Votes	Vote %	Seats	Seat %
Brothers of Italy (FDI)	7,302,517	25.9	118	29.5	7,167,136	25.5	66	33.0
League	2,464,005	8.8	65	16.3	2,439,200	8.7	27	13.5
Forward Italy (FI)	2,278,217	8.1	45	11.3	2,279,802	8.1	18	9
Us Moderates (NM)	255,505	0.9	7	1.75	243,409	0.9	1	0.5
Centre-Right	**12,300,244**	**43.8**	**237**	**59.3**	**12,285,071**	**43.7**	**115**	**57.5**
Democratic Party (PD)	5,356,180	19.0	69	17.3	5,236,344	18.6	38	19.0
Left-Green Alliance (SIVER)	1,018,669	3.6	12	3.0	989,890	3.5	4	2.0
More Europe	793,961	2.8	2	0.5	808,676	2.9	0	0
Civic Engagement (IC)	169,165	0.6	1	0.3	153,964	0.5	0	0
Centre-Left[a]	**7,358,738**	**26.1**	**85**	**21.3**	**7,329,652**	**26.1**	**44**	**22.0**
Five Star Movement (M5S)[b]	4,339,813	15.4	52	13.0	4,319,697	15.3	28	14.0
'Third Pole' (AZ-IV)[c]	2,186,747	7.8	21	5.3	2,138,092	7.6	9	4.5
Overall Total[d]	28,141,631	100	400	100	28,111,623	100	200	100

Source: Authors' elaboration based on Ministry of the Interior data. [a] Both coalitions' row totals (centre-left and centre-right) include votes and seats assigned to the related lists abroad, in the Aosta Valley, and in the single-member districts of Trentino-Alto Adige–South Tyrol. [b] Row totals for the M5S include votes and seats assigned abroad and the votes assigned in the Aosta Valley in coalition with the Italian Left and other progressive lists. [c] Row totals for the 'Third Pole' include votes assigned abroad. [d] Overall row totals include all votes and seats assigned to all parties participating in the 2022 election, including in the Aosta Valley, in Trentino-Alto Adige–South Tyrol, and abroad.

toral debut. Indeed, Giuseppe Conte's party went from being the largest formation in the 2018 contest by far, with almost 33% of the vote share and largest parliamentary groups, to its status as the third-largest Italian party behind FDI and the PD overall, with roughly 4.3 million preferences (above 15% of the vote shares in both chambers), 52 seats in the Chamber of Deputies (13%), and 28 seats in the Senate (14%). Instead, albeit eventually running outside of a competitive electoral coalition after dropping out of the PD-led centre-left, the new-born 'Third Pole' fared relatively well, with over 2.1 million votes and over 7.5% of the vote share across both chambers, 21 Chamber seats (5.3%), and 9 Senate seats (4.5%).

Before further zooming in by analysing patterns of party loyalty in three regional capitals, Table 2 shows the electoral results by region, displaying for each the vote share obtained by the main parties in 2022 and 2018 and the variation between the two elections. First and foremost, the table clearly exhibits FDI's wavering performance in the 2022 elections; it obtained from the 17.5% of the votes in Campania to 32.9% in Veneto, being the first party in 12 regions out of the 19 analysed. However, the table also reveals that Meloni's party did not perform particularly well in many Southern regions – namely, Basilicata, Calabria, Campania, Molise, Apulia,

and Sicily – where the M5S, instead, recorded higher support. FDI also obtained limited support in Trentino-Alto Adige-South Tyrol (stronghold of the regionalist Südtiroler Volkspartei). Yet, Table 2 showcases the massive growth of the party compared to the 2018 elections in all regions, from the minimum increase in Campania (14 percentage points) to the maximum increase obtained in Veneto (28.6 percentage points).

Indeed, interesting patterns emerge if we compare the national party variations between the two elections (displayed in the last row of the table) with those recorded across regions. By grouping the regions into North, Red Zone, and South, we see that some parties (such as FI) gained and lost across regions quasi-homogeneously with just a few exceptions, while others performed particularly well or particularly bad in some areas of the country more than in others. If we look at the Democratic Party (PD), for instance, the table shows that it was punished the most by voters in the historically left-wing area of the country – e.g., the *Red* Zone (Diamanti 2009; Galli et al. 1968) – as well as in some Northern regions, where it performed mostly worse than in 2018 – even though the national level variation indicates for this party an overall tiny increase of 0.3 percentage points.

Table 2. 2022 Italian election results by region: votes in the Chamber of Deputies (main parties).

	FDI 2022 %	FDI 2018 %	FDI variation pp	PD 2022 %	PD 2018 %	PD variation pp	M5S 2022 %	M5S 2018 %	M5S variation pp	League 2022 %	League 2018 %	League variation pp	FI 2022 %	FI 2018 %	FI variation pp
Northern Italy															
Friuli Venezia Giulia	31.6	5.5	26.1	18.3	18.5	-0.2	7.1	24.1	-17.0	11.0	26.6	-15.6	6.8	11.0	-4.2
Liguria	24.4	3.8	20.6	22.4	19.7	2.7	12.9	29.9	-17.0	9.3	20.2	-10.8	6.5	12.8	-6.4
Lombardy	28.7	4.1	24.6	19.0	21.1	-2.1	7.4	21.1	-13.7	13.4	28.4	-15.0	7.9	14.0	-6.1
Piedmont	27.2	4.1	23.1	20.0	20.5	-0.5	10.3	26.1	-15.7	10.8	23.0	-12.3	7.9	13.7	-5.7
Trentino-Alto Adige-South Tyrol	19.3	2.7	16.6	17.0	14.6	2.4	5.1	19.2	-14.1	8.8	19.7	-10.9	3.5	7.2	-3.7
Veneto	32.9	4.3	28.6	16.2	16.7	-0.4	5.8	23.8	-18.0	14.6	32.9	-18.3	7.0	10.8	-3.8
Red Zone															
Emilia Romagna	25.3	3.4	21.9	28.0	26.4	1.6	9.8	27.1	-17.4	7.6	19.6	-12.0	5.9	10.1	-4.2
Marche	29.4	5.0	24.5	20.3	21.4	-1.1	13.5	35.1	-21.6	8.0	17.6	-9.6	6.9	10.1	-3.3
Tuscany	26.1	4.2	21.9	26.4	29.6	-3.2	11.1	24.5	-13.5	6.6	17.7	-11.0	5.6	10.1	-4.5
Umbria	31.1	5.0	26.1	20.7	24.9	-4.2	12.6	27.1	-14.5	7.8	20.5	-12.6	6.9	11.4	-4.5
Southern Italy															
Abruzzo	27.9	5.0	22.9	16.6	14.1	2.5	18.5	39.6	-21.1	8.1	14.1	-6.0	11.1	14.8	-3.6
Apulia	24.0	3.8	20.2	16.3	13.4	2.9	28.0	44.9	-16.9	5.4	6.3	-0.9	11.7	19.1	-7.4
Basilicata	18.4	3.8	14.7	15.2	16.4	-1.2	24.7	43.9	-19.2	9.1	6.4	2.7	9.5	12.6	-3.1
Calabria	19.1	4.6	14.5	14.0	14.1	-0.1	29.5	43.3	-13.9	5.9	5.7	0.2	15.8	20.4	-4.6
Campania	17.5	3.6	14.0	15.4	12.8	2.6	34.8	49.5	-14.7	4.5	4.4	0.1	9.8	18.6	-8.9
Lazio	31.6	8.3	23.3	19.3	18.6	0.7	14.9	32.8	-18.0	6.4	13.5	-7.2	6.9	13.4	-6.5
Molise	21.6	3.2	18.5	17.5	14.1	3.4	24.7	45.6	-20.9	8.6	8.9	-0.2	11.5	16.4	-4.9
Sardinia	24.0	4.1	19.9	18.2	14.7	3.5	21.7	42.3	-20.6	6.4	11.0	-4.6	8.7	15.0	-6.3
Sicily	19.2	3.7	15.5	11.8	11.2	0.6	28.2	48.7	-20.5	5.1	5.2	-0.1	11.3	21.0	-9.7
Italy	26	4.4	21.6	19.1	18.8	0.3	15.4	32.7	-17.3	8.8	17.4	-8.6	8.1	14	-5.9

Source: Authors' elaboration based on Ministry of the Interior data; *Note*: pp = percentage points.

Another case of party that lost the most in its own territory (Diamanti 2009) is the League, perhaps the most evident example of a party that performed heterogeneously across different areas of the country. With a national variation of -8.6, the League lost across almost all regions, but it suffered particularly in the North (with an average decrease of 13.8 percentage points), and to a lesser extent in the Red Zone (with an average decrease of 11.3 percentage points); on the other hand, in Southern regions, rarely did the League's variation reach similar values to the national variation, and in a few cases it actually even performed slightly better than in 2018.

Contrarywise, FDI, which at the national level recorded an increase of 21.6 percentage points and improved by far its performance compared to the previous election, did so more in the Red Zone and in the Northern regions than it did in the South. The M5S, instead, which at the national level recorded a decrease of 17.3 percentage points, worsened by far its performance compared to the previous election. In the South its vote share decreased by the highest extents (often by more than 20 percentage points). Yet, as mentioned above, the M5S managed to remain the first party in many Southern regions. This is due to the massive support it enjoyed in Southern Italy in 2018. In fact, while a decrease of only 13.7 percentage points turns the M5S into the least voted of the five main parties in Lombardy in 2022, a much higher decrease of 20.5 percentage points in Sicily, still leaves the party undisturbed on the highest place on the podium – quite far from anyone else – leaving the geography of the party substantially unchanged.

VOTE FLOWS IN THREE BIG CITIES: TURIN, FLORENCE, AND NAPLES

After having observed the electoral results, we move to presenting evidence on the inter-electoral vote flows between the 2018 and 2022 general elections in three major Italian cities, to grasp the features regard-

ing one of the three dimensions of interest in this article for understanding the 2022 election's results[6]. To do so, based on data availability in large enough contexts that have an adequate number of electoral polls, we present evidence concerning the largest available city from each of Italy's three geographical macro-areas, namely the North, Centre, and South. Hence, the following cities were selected according to these criteria: Turin for the North, Florence for the Centre, and Naples for the South.[7] As will be evident in the paragraphs below, this selection of cities will usefully allow observing some peculiarities specific to different local contexts (e.g., above all, the competitiveness of the M5S in Naples).

Overall, the vote flows at large seem to confirm some general trends that emerged from the national results, whilst adding additional nuance to the picture deriving from the peculiarities of the level of analysis. Considering the territorial characterisation of the election, recent enquiries into this aspect showed that at least three 'Italies' can be identified (Emanuele 2022). First, the centre-right has its strongholds in small towns. Second, regarding opposition formations, the urban areas in the North and in the Centre confirmed their traditional support for the PD. Finally, the M5S proves to be the landmark in Southern Italy.

More in detail, the centre-left, and the PD in particular, maintain a higher electoral competitiveness in large cities, especially compared to its general performance; often being the first coalition and party in large cities, especially in the North and Centre. However, in such large centres, the PD also loses voters to, chiefly, the Third Pole and FDI. Second, although most often lagging behind the PD and centre-left coalition themselves, FDI's comprehensive victory in the 2022 was likewise made possible by the significant inroads made in such large urban contexts, where Giorgia Meloni's party also significantly improved its vote share compared to 2022 and solidified itself as a major electoral force. This was driven by inflows of voters from essentially across the entire political spectrum, but chiefly due to a reconfiguration of support internal to the centre-right (hence, from the League and FI). Third, despite not reaching the vote shares of 2018, the M5S confirmed its (by far) leading status in the South, topping both the runner-up

PD and its centre-left coalition, as well as FDI and the centre-right. Yet, Conte's party seems to have lost a lot of former voters to abstention in these contexts. Finally, the newborn Third Pole was more competitive in large urban contexts, especially in the North and Centre, than nationally, gaining the vast majority of its support at the centre, e.g., from the PD on the left and FI on the right.

Turin

Starting from the Piedmont capital (see Collini et al. 2022), the election results in Turin pointed to an above-average competitiveness of the centre-left coalition led by the PD, the heightened competitiveness of FDI, a sharp decline of the M5S, and a very good performance of the centrist Third Pole.

A look into vote flows in the Piedmont capital, graphically represented in Figure 1, provides interesting information. Indeed, whilst overall the centre-left and centre-right coalitions performed similarly in 2018 and 2022 in terms of vote share, a key difference emerges in the composition of their electoral support. On this regard, the centre-left coalition displays a higher degree of inter-electoral loyalty, with roughly two out of three voters who previously cast their vote for either the PD or other centre-left formations in 2018 doing the same in 2022. Conversely, the percentages of voters who confirm their support for centre-right parties are much lower: 46.2% for FDI, 40.4% for the League, and 18.2% for FI, with the latter being the party with the lowest capability to remobilise its electorate alongside the M5S (27%), which lost around 4 out of 10 of its 2018 voters to abstention. It is also worth noting how the least amount of change, by far, is recorded amongst those who abstained in 2018, more than 87% of which also did not vote in 2022. Defections to abstention are instead the lowest in the case of the centre-left bloc and FDI.

In terms of outflows, voters who formerly supported the PD but did not vote for Enrico Letta's party in 2022 chiefly moved towards the centrist 'Third Pole' (14% of those who voted PD in 2018) and former government partner M5S (8%). This means that the composition of the PD's electoral support in Turin in 2022 was chiefly made up of former PD voters (75%) and supporters of other centre-left partners. Conversely, outflows from parties within the centre-right coalition are mostly inwards, meaning towards other formations from this bloc. Most notably, the 'vote drain' mainly concerns the League, with over 4 out of 10 of its former voters in 2018 (40.4%) now supporting FDI and almost one-third abstaining in 2022. This reconfiguration of electoral support within the centre-right bloc significantly contributed to FDI's excel-

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[6] Tables with flow sources and destinations are presented in the Appendix.
[7] The flows presented were calculated by applying Goodman's (1953) model to the electoral polls of the municipalities of Turin, Florence, and Naples. Following Schadee and Corbetta (1984), we eliminated the sections with less than 100 voters (in each of the two elections considered in the analysis), as well as those that registered a rate of change of more than 15% in the number of registered voters (both increasing and decreasing). The value of the VR index is 18.8 for Turin, 16.3 for Florence, and 16.5 for Naples.
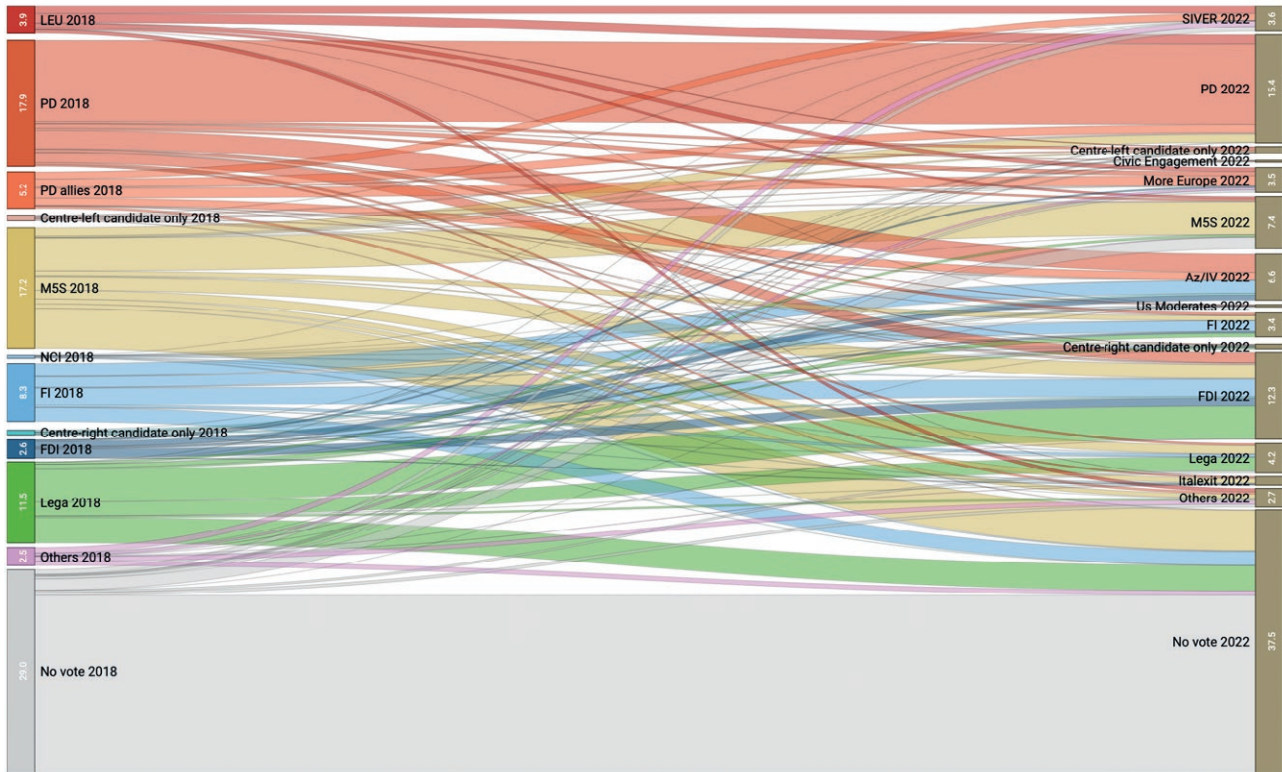
Figure 1. Turin vote flow chart (2018 and 2022 general elections). *Source*: Author's elaboration based on 2022 CISE/ICCP survey.

lent performance in Turin. Indeed, data shows how Giorgia Meloni's party enjoyed cross-cutting support across the party spectrum, with almost 7 out of 10 of the 2022 FDI voters having supported other centre-right parties in 2018 (68%, of which around 38% from the League, 20% from FI, and 10% from its own much smaller support base in 2018), alongside several former M5S (16.7%) and even PD voters (11.2%). Finally, the well-performing centrist 'Third Pole' found most of its support amongst former voters of centre-left PD (39.2%), centre-right FI (24.8%), and other centre-left formations (16%). Overall, it is possible to conclude from this analysis that electoral success or demise in Turin was primarily down to the capability to remobilise one's own electorate (in the case of the centre-left) or lack thereof (in the case of the M5S); barring the case of FDI, which instead was favoured by the reconfiguration of the internal support composition within the centre-right coalition.

Florence

Florence also emerges as a context in which the PD-led centre-left is the most supported electoral coalition (see Boldrini and Paparo 2022), although the gap with

the centre-right narrowed in light of the good performance of FDI. Further, like in Turin, here too the centrist 'Third Pole' beat the M5S to the third-largest electoral competitor.

Against this backdrop, the vote flows for Florence in Figure 2 are highly informative. They, firstly, show that, similarly to other large cities, the highest degree of inter-electoral loyalty is the PD's, with 56.7% of voters who supported the main centre-left party in 2018 doing so in 2022 as well. However, here FDI follows much more closely with 53.7%, followed at a distance by the M5S (29%) and subsequently, at much lower levels of inter-electoral loyalty, the remaining centre-right parties in FI (15.7%) and, lastly, the League (13.4%). Finally, in line with what was recorded more generally, even in the Tuscan capital the vast majority of those who did not vote in 2018 confirmed their unwillingness to go to the polls in 2022 (88%).

It is also interesting to look at the outward movements from each individual formation and the composition of their 2022 electoral support. Indeed, the PD suffered a significant loss of voters both in favour of the newborn 'Third Pole' (17.6% of PD voters in 2018) and, even more remarkably, to FDI, with more than one out
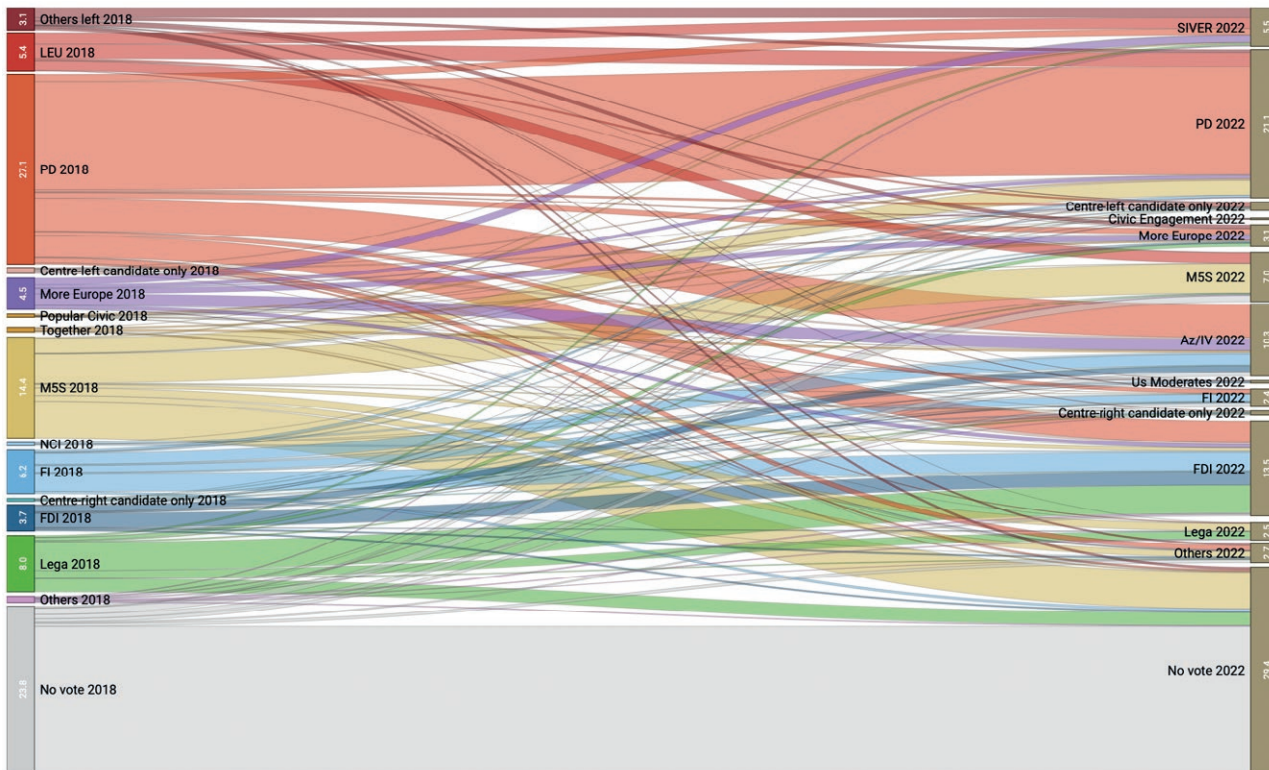
Figure 2. Florence vote flow chart (2018 and 2022 general elections). *Source*: Author's elaboration based on 2022 CISE/ICCP survey.

of 10 PD voters in 2018 shifting to the winning party of this election (11.3%). This means that Enrico Letta's party mainly maintained a central core of support from former voters of the PD itself (72.9%), with inflows from the M5S (10.1%) and centre-left parties at large (9.7%). In terms of centre-right formations, a staggering almost half of League voters in 2018 (49%) and more than four out of 10 FI supporters (41%) contributed to Giorgia Meloni's party's good performance, which also resulted from a considerable cross-cutting support (with sizeable chunks of 2018 voters of the PD and centrist More Europe, respectively 11.3% and 10.8%, voting FDI in 2022). This reflects in FDI's vote composition in 2022, which, looking at other parties, is made up of several former League (29.7%), FI (19.3%), and even PD voters (22.7%). Instead, the M5S mainly lost out to the historically high rate of abstention recorded in 2022, with over a third of its 2018 voters now refusing to vote (36.4%), whilst also losing out to the PD (14.8%) and League (7.5%). Conversely, the emerging left-wing profile of Giuseppe Conte's party was confirmed by both the vote inflows and composition of its electoral support in the Tuscan capital, as the M5S lured 27.6% of those who voted for the left-wing Free and Equal PD-supporting party

in 2018,[8] with this portion making up one of the most sizeable shares of this party's vote share (21.5%) alongside chiefly former M5S voters and voters not voting in 2018. Lastly, the newborn centrist 'Third Pole' was mainly made up of those who, in 2018, voted for parties at or around the centre of the political spectrum: PD (46.4%), More Europe (15.9%), and FI (15.2%). Interestingly, the alliance established by Matteo Renzi and Carlo Calenda managed to attract support from the leading formations of the 2018 centre-left coalition, namely, over 60% from PD and More Europe.

To sum up the case of Florence, here, like elsewhere, electoral success (e.g., in the case of the PD) or demise (e.g., in the case of the M5S) is chiefly determined by the different capacities to remobilise one's own former electorate. Further, FDI's support is here too the result of both a reconfiguration of support internal to the mainstream right and a more mainstream ability to cater to even former centre-left PD voters, which is a testament to a generalised and remarkable growth.

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[8] The rest of this leftist electorate was divided between the PD itself (37.6%) and the Left-Green Alliance (28.6%).

Naples

Despite traditionally being a 'battlefield' and 'swing' area (Allum 1974; Palloni 1979), the M5S has been recently attracting growing and stable support in Naples. In 2022, Conte's party topped the polls in this city by quite some margin, then followed by the PD-led centre-left coalition, the FDI-led centre-right camp, and the centrist 'Third Pole'.

Figure 3 displays the vote flows traceable in Naples (see also Boldrini et al. 2022), the largest city in Southern Italy. Compared to the 2018 general elections, one of the main aspects to observe is inter-electoral loyalty, i.e., the percentage of voters who confirmed their choice between two consecutive elections. In this regard, the PD shows the highest degree of loyalty (49%), followed by the League (41%) and the M5S (41%). On the other hand, FDI and FI recorded a limited share of inter-electoral loyalty (28% and 24%, respectively), proving to be the parties with the highest level of disloyalty in the city. Moreover, an interesting trait emerging from Figure 3 is the substantial loyalty of the M5S voters, despite disruptive party transformations occurring in the XVIII (2018-2022) legislature. While 43% of the 2018

M5S voters opted for abstaining in 2022, just a negligible part of that voters decided to vote for other political formations. Additionally, as clearly visible in Table 10 in the Appendix, Conte's party was the only one to remobilise the group composed of abstainers and voters at their first election in 2018 (16% of those who abstained in 2018 went to the polls to vote for M5S in 2022). The other parties lost significant portions of their constituencies to competitors. In particular, the 2018 voters of the PD moved towards FDI (18%) and the 'Third Pole' (16%).

Furthermore, Figure 3 shows similar trends for parties regarding the comparison between the 2018 and 2022 electorates. Specifically, in 2022 the M5S managed to obtain support from the citizens already supporting it in 2018, similarly to the PD and the League. However, almost all parties failed to attract new voters and successfully remobilise former non-voters, except for the M5S, which drew the abstentionist vote (33% of its inflows).

The 2022 Italian general election saw the *exploit* of FDI and Giorgia Meloni. However, by looking at Naples, the city confirmed its loyalty to the M5S, despite the party having experienced high complexity when in government. Indeed, FDI managed to attract voters from all
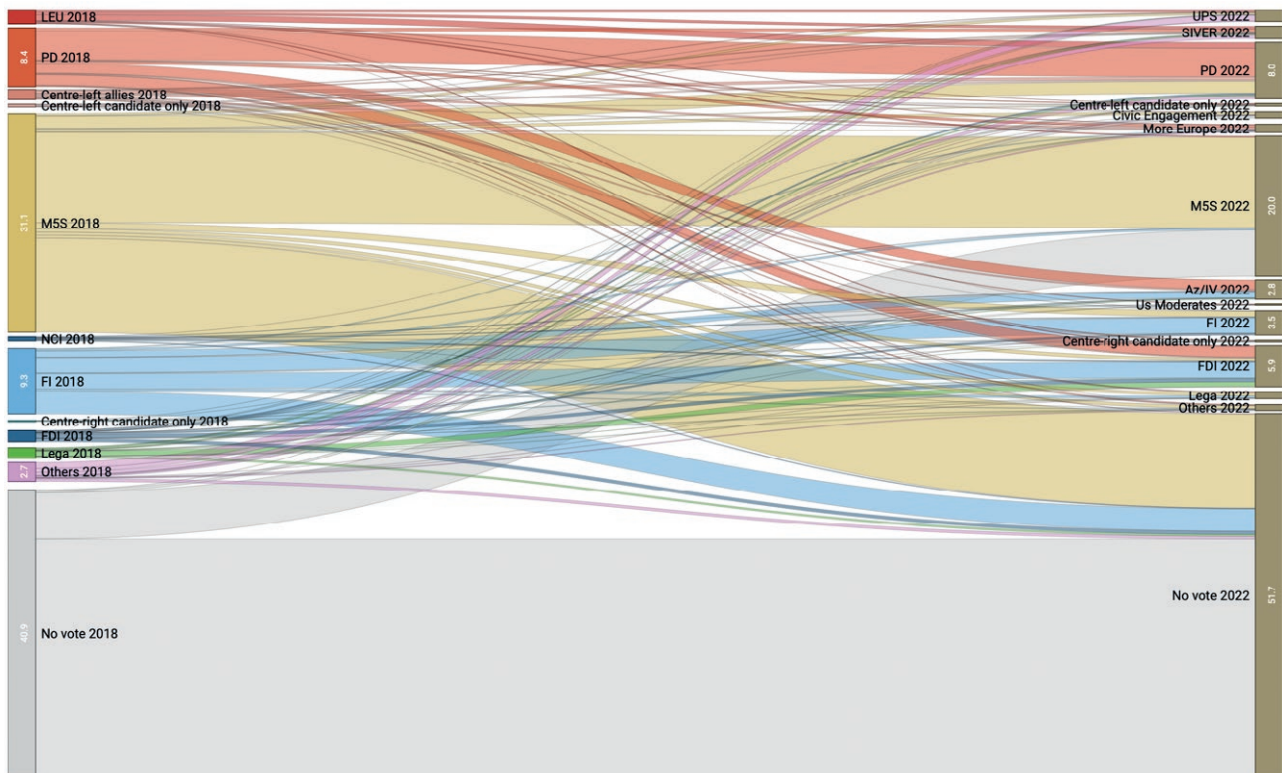

Figure 3. Naples vote flow chart (2018 and 2022 general elections). *Source*: Author's elaboration based on 2022 CISE/ICCP survey.

major parties, especially from FI (38% of its 2022 voters supported Berlusconi's party in 2018), PD (26%) and the League (12%). Yet, voters from M5S were not convinced by Meloni's electoral supply, as FDI received only 8% from former M5S voters.

Overall, the 'resistance' of the M5S in Naples can be explained by Conte's party's effective efforts in remobilising the electorate, despite huge losses towards non-voting. Thus, Conte and the M5S remained the top political formation in the city, limiting the rise of FDI.

THE ISSUE PREFERENCES OF ITALIAN VOTERS

After exploring the patterns of party loyalty, we shift the attention to the role of issues. The data collected in the pre-electoral wave of the 2022 CISE/ICCP survey showed that the Italian electorate of 2022 (1) shared some common non-polarising concerns to which it attributed high levels of priority and (2) tended to take quite progressive stances on various issues ranging from the economy to civil rights (Mannoni et al. 2022). The latter makes the results of the 2022 Italian elections even more puzzling. How come tendentially progressive preferences translated into the worst performance in the history of the Italian left (Emanuele et al. 2022) and the victory of a right-wing coalition led by a radical right party? While it goes beyond the purpose of this article to answer such a relevant question, this section will shed some light on voters' preferences regarding a list of 35 issues (11 valence and 24 positional) considered the most salient in the public debate at the time the electoral campaign was taking place. In doing so, it will reveal the context in terms of public opinion configuration where such results became possible.

Valence issues

Valence issues are defined as policy goals that do not cause sharp divisions among the public and on which, consequently, there is generally a high level of support among the electorate (e.g., Stokes 1963). In other words, these are goals that are shared by parties and voters across the political spectrum, regardless of ideology or different political stances. Because of that, when it comes to a valence issue, the outcome of party competition does not depend on the position parties take on it but rather on how credible the electorate thinks each party is to act consistently with that stance in pursuit of that policy goal (De Sio and Weber 2020; D'Alimonte et al. 2020).

The valence issues included in the 2022 CISE/ICCP survey were also those to which the respondents attributed the highest priority as opposed to positional issues[9]. Out of 11 valence issues, only one (i.e., to make Italy count more in the EU) was considered a priority by less than 80% of the respondents (see Table 3). Most of these shared policy goals refer to macroeconomic indicators and reflect the urgency to contrast obstacles to economic growth.

As the table below shows, the top priority for the Italian electorate of 2022 strictly relates to the energy crisis, and the consequent increase in electricity and gas prices – 92% of the respondents agreed that it is a priority that private citizens and firms should be guaranteed affordable prices for gas and electricity. There was also massive agreement on the importance of the economic goals to fight against unemployment (90%), reduce poverty (87%), foster economic growth (86%), contrast inflation (86%), lower taxes on labour (86%), fight tax evasion (84%), and implement the PNRR reforms to avoid losing the EU funds (80%). Hence, what emerges is a solid concern for the economic growth of the country in general, but also a substantial demand for financial stability for households and private individuals. Besides economic concerns, one of the most acclaimed issues on the list is the contrast to violence against women and femicides, which almost 90% of the respondents deem a priority in the Italian political agenda. Interestingly, Giorgia Meloni emerged as the most credible leader to pursue that goal (De Sio et al. 2022). Another priority for the 2022 Italian electorate is the fight against global warming, crucial for more than 80% of the sample.

As anticipated above, making Italy's voice count more in Europe is not as much of a priority as the rest of the valence issues. This finding, perhaps attributable to the increased cooperation with the European Union during the pandemic and the Draghi government, seems in line with a trend of declining Euroscepticism in the country (Conti et al. 2020b) compared to the past (more on this below).

Positional issues

If valence issues somewhat bring the electorate together around a shared policy goal, quite the contra-

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[9] Following De Sio et al. (2018), the questionnaire was designed to investigate the structure of issue competition in each country of interest. Prior to the pre-election survey, country experts were asked to identify issues likely to be salient during the electoral campaign. The issue selection is therefore country specific. As for valence issues, consisting of a single, shared policy goal on which consensus is assumed, the respondents are asked what party they deem credible to achieve a particular goal, and how much they prioritise that specific issue. As for positional issues, characterised by the presence of two opposing policy goals, respondents are also asked to express a preference on which one of the two goals they support.

Table 3 – Priorities attributed to 11 valence issues.

Issue goal	Priority (%)
Guarantee affordable gas and electricity prices to citizens and businesses	92%
Fight unemployment	90%
Fighting violence against women and femicide	89%
Reduce poverty	87%
Foster economic growth	86%
Fight inflation	86%
Reduce taxes on labour	86%
Fight tax evasion	84%
Fight global warming	82%
Implement the PNRR reforms to avoid losing the EU funds	80%
Make Italy count more in the EU	72%

Source: 2022 CISE/ICCP survey; Mannoni et al. 2022.

ry happens with positional issues. They are divisive, as characterised by the co-existence of two opposite policy goals that divide the public among those who favour one and those who stand for the other (Stokes 1963). In these cases, when it comes to party competition, the party's stance on a single issue does matter as it might be decisive for the final vote choice (De Sio et al. 2018).

The positional issues included in the 2022 CISE/ICCP survey were 24 in total and covered, once again, economic and financial issues, the issue of immigration, policy goals related to civil rights and freedom, climate change and environmental protection, institution-related issues, and the Russia-Ukraine war. The issues were selected to cover all relevant campaign topics (ICCP Study, see De Sio and Lachat 2020).

Table 4 summarizes the results, providing an overview of where Italian voters stood on each of those issues, and which ones they deemed most relevant. At the top of the table, we find the most salient ones, priority for far more than 70% of the respondents. Here, the economy dominates the scene: among the very first issues we find minimum wage, basic income, retirement age, and progressive taxation.

If we look exclusively at the economic issues across the table, overall, a tendency emerges to prefer the more progressive policy goal in almost all cases where this can be clearly identified. A substantial majority of respondents support the introduction of the minimum wage (84%), stand for the reduction of income inequality (79%), reject flat tax in favour of keeping progressive taxation (78%), and indeed would welcome an increase in the inheritance tax on large assets that exceed 5 million euros (67%).

However, despite the strong support for reducing income inequality and poverty in the country, most respondents clearly prefer abolishing basic income (introduced by the first Conte government in 2019), with only 39% favouring keeping it. On this specific policy goal, there was a complete turnaround in the electorate between 2018 and 2022. In 2018, when the debate was about whether basic income should be introduced, most Italians (more than 70%) wanted to introduce the measure (Emanuele et al. 2019). Now the percentage of supporters plummeted, and most voters would want it abolished. It is legit to doubt that such a radical shift came with no consequences on the vote choices of the 2022 electorate. Indeed, the M5S has by far been perceived by voters as the top promoter and guarantor of basic income and, as such, tended to get higher shares of vote support among basic income receptors (Angelucci et al. 2022; Emanuele and Maggini 2019). On the other side of the issue stands Brothers of Italy, which can safely be identified as the party that most adamantly opposed it and fiercely stands for its abolishment. Indeed, this is one of the two issues (the other, we remind it, being contrasting violence against women) for which Giorgia Meloni ranked first in credibility among all leaders (De Sio et al. 2022).

In addition, there is another economic issue on which the electorate seems to be in line with the position taken, among others, by FDI – namely, retirement age. Roughly four out of five respondents on this issue stood in favour of reducing the retirement age, contrasting the current legislation that regulates its progressive increase. While this cannot be said to be a typical rightist position, Meloni's party did include a proposal to stop longevity adjustments of retirement age in its program.

Finally, one economic issue split the public into halves – whether to insist on collecting past unpaid tax bills or forgive them and move forward. Although, as mentioned above, 84% of respondents considered fighting tax evasion a priority, that percentage lowers to 65% for the more specific issue of dealing with past unpaid taxes. Even more interesting, half of those who deemed crucial to deal with those, would rather forgive them than keep collecting them.

A somewhat ambivalent tendency also emerges on the issues of immigration and rights granted to immigrants. A majority (57%) would like to maintain the current level of access to social services for immigrants (instead of limiting it) and to grant more easily Italian citizenship to Italian-born, Italian-raised children of legal immigrants (instead of maintaining the current legislation on it). However, a much more substantial majority (68%) stands against the current state of

Table 4. Percentage of support for opposite policy goals.

Progressive issue goal (where applicable)	Support (%)	Conservative issue goal (where applicable)	Support (%)	Overall priority (%)
Introduce the minimum wage	84%	Not introducing the minimum wage	16%	79%
Maintain the basic income	39%	Abolish the basic income	61%	76%
Reduce retirement age	79%	Keep the existing normative that regulates the progressive increase of retirement age	21%	76%
Keep progressive taxation (who earns more pays higher percentages)	78%	Introduce a flat tax	22%	75%
Suspend the economic sanctions against Russia	43%	Maintain the economic sanctions against Russia	57%	75%
Maintain the ban on nuclear power plants in Italy	47%	Resume construction of nuclear power plants in Italy	53%	74%
Prioritise environmental protection, even at the cost of economic growth	66%	Prioritise economic growth, even at the cost of environmental protection	34%	74%
Keep receiving immigrants like now	32%	Limit the reception of immigrants	68%	73%
Stop supplying weapons to Ukraine	59%	Keep supplying weapons to Ukraine	41%	72%
Legalise euthanasia in cases of incurable diseases	86%	Keep euthanasia always illegal	14%	70%
Stay in the EU	72%	Leave the EU	28%	70%
Reduce income inequality	79%	Not reducing income inequality	21%	69%
Effectively guarantee the possibility of having an abortion	82%	Limit the possibility of having an abortion	18%	68%
Keep collecting past unpaid tax bills	51%	Forgive past unpaid tax bills	49%	65%
Not install new regasification plants	24%	Install new regasification plants	76%	65%
Maintain the 110% super bonus aimed at fostering energy-efficient homes	69%	Abolish the 110% super bonus aimed at fostering energy-efficient homes	31%	63%
Stay in NATO	73%	Leave NATO	27%	63%
Increase the penalties for those who discriminate and commit crimes against homosexuals and transsexuals	71%	Maintain the existing penalties for those who discriminate and commit crimes against homosexuals and transsexuals	29%	61%
Maintain the figure of the President of the Republic elected by Parliament, acting as a guarantor	42%	Introduce presidentialism	58%	58%
Maintain the current powers of the judiciary in Italy	52%	Reduce the powers of the judiciary in Italy	48%	57%
Maintain the current level of access to social services for immigrants	57%	Limit access to social services for immigrants	43%	56%
Increase the inheritance tax on assets beyond 5 million euros	67%	Not increase the inheritance tax on assets beyond 5 million euros	33%	53%
Grant citizenship more easily to legal immigrants' children who were born and raised in Italy	57%	Maintain the current legislation on granting citizenship to legal immigrants' children who were born and raised in Italy	43%	52%
Legalise soft drugs	56%	Keep soft drugs illegal	44%	49%

Source: 2022 CISE/ICCP survey; Mannoni et al. 2022.
Note: For some issues, a clear distinction between progressive and conservative policy goal was not applicable (e.g., weapon supply to Ukraine, sanctions to Russia). In those instances, each of the two opposite policy goals was arbitrarily assigned to either column; such assignation does not reflect the nature of those policy goals as progressive or conservative.

affairs as per immigrants' reception and would instead reduce the number of immigrants the country receives. It should be noted that the overall priority attributed to the latter is higher than that attributed to the former two issues, who lie at the bottom of the table.

As per what regards civil rights and freedom more in general, these are spread across the table, with salience ranging from 70% on euthanasia, to 49% on legalisation of soft drugs. On these issues, respondents con-

sistently expressed a preference for the more progressive policy goal. The sample revealed massive support for legalising euthanasia in cases of incurable diseases (86%) and effectively guaranteeing the possibility of having an abortion (82%). The goal to punish acts of discrimination and crimes more severely against LGBTQ+ community members was solidly welcomed, too (71%). The most controversial issue here was the legalisation of soft drugs. To begin with, as mentioned above, it was not

even deemed relevant by most respondents in the sample, resulting as the least salient among all positional and valence issues. Still, a majority would rather see soft drugs legalised than not, further confirming a general tendency to oppose conservative positions regarding civil rights and individual freedom.

Beyond the more commonly salient issues during the last electoral campaigns in Italy (D'Alimonte 2019), the 2022 Italian national election was the occasion for some issues to find renewed attention in the public debate. The first example of that is the issue of environmental protection and energy consumption. While the general imperative goal to protect the environment seems to be prioritised by four Italian voters out of five, more specific policy goals about protection from global warming do not seem to enjoy the same support. On the one hand, most voters claim they would prioritise environmental protection even at the expense of economic growth (66%) and prefer not to abolish the tax bonus aimed at fostering energy-efficient homes (69%). On the other hand, less than 25% oppose the new installation of new regasification plants, and less than 50% believe Italy should maintain the ban on nuclear power plants.[10]

The second instance of a topic that was usually not part of the list of most debated ones during the campaign is, for obvious reasons, Italy's position towards Russia and Ukraine in the context of the war. Respondents were asked whether Italy should keep providing weapons to Ukraine and whether it should maintain the economic sanctions against Russia. Italians perceived both issues as a priority the country and the future government should deal with. However, as for the specific positions, the electorate seems to be split into halves, with a mild majority preferring to maintain the sanctions against Russia (57%) but also stop supplying weapons to Ukraine (59%).

As for the institutional format of the country, the sample shows Italians tend to prefer to maintain the current status quo. The Italian electorate seems to firmly prefer to remain in the EU (72%), and NATO (73%), and slightly more than 50% prefer to maintain the judiciary's power as it is now instead of reducing it. However, Italians appear way more convinced to embrace change regarding their form of government (one last novelty of this election). Almost 60% would give up the figure of the President of the Republic elected by the Parliament, acting as guarantor of the Constitution, and elect themselves a president instead.

In other words, the 2022 Italian electorate emerges as aligned on a shared agenda consisting of economic and financial stability, effective management of the immigration flows, the climate crisis, and, even more urgently, the energy crisis. An electorate that is evidently unsatisfied by the implementation of the policy on the basic income (which before being introduced enjoyed broad support among voters) but that otherwise takes neatly progressive stances on economic issues (e.g., flat tax, minimum wage, tax on large assets above 5 million euros) and civil rights (abortion, euthanasia, soft drugs, protection of LGBTQ+ community members).

One may argue that social desirability (Karp and Brockington 2005) might have contributed to biasing the overall picture of the electorate's preferences. However, it is worth mentioning that for those instances where the issue was also salient in the 2018 Italian elections, and as such included in the 2018 CISE/ICCP survey (see De Sio et al. 2019), a trend still seems to emerge towards more inclusive attitudes among the electorate. To begin with, in 2018, the general picture that emerged was that of a public opinion with progressive stances on the economy and conservative stances on immigration (Emanuele et al. 2020). This ambivalence somewhat still echoes in nowadays public opinion, as the sample appears more reluctant to massively side for the progressive policy goal when it comes to immigration than when economic issues are involved.

Yet, compared to four years ago, on most issues the electorate seem to have further moved towards the left. In 2018, 79% wanted to introduce the minimum wage – now that goal is cheered by 84%. In 2018, 74% rejected the flat tax – now that number increased to 78%. In 2018, only 47% would support the legalisation of soft drugs – now 56% do. Even on the issue of immigration, where on both occasions respondents were found to take the most closed, conservative, non-inclusive attitudes, this tendency is unequivocal. In 2018, 79% wanted to limit the number of immigrants, 60% to restrict their access to social services, and 56% would not want to ease the process of granting citizenship to children of legal immigrants. Four years later, those percentages have fallen to, respectively, 68%, 43%, and 43%, thus getting 11, 17, and 13 percentage points closer to a more inclusive position.

That is perhaps the most striking finding here, especially if juxtaposed with the election results: an overall *left-leaning* electorate handing in the government to a convincedly *right-wing* coalition. How to make sense of such apparently paradoxical outcome? First, it should not be overlooked that the success of the conservative coalition resulted from the vote choice of those who went to

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[10] It should be noted to this regard that, in a referendum held in 2011 with a registered turnout of 55%, 94% of voters chose to abrogate the norms that would have allowed to produce nuclear energy in Italy (Di Virgilio 2012).

the polls on September 25 – which is two thirds of the electorate. Whereas data shown so far discusses the preferences of the whole public opinion, including that third of the electorate who did not go to vote. Hence, the unprecedented abstention of this national election might have itself played a role in this mismatch between the progressive positions of electorate and the conservative profile of the parties who formed the government.

A second explanation could be related to Meloni's ability to capitalise on the discontent of a portion of the electorate. According to the 2022 CISE/ICCP survey data, few weeks before the election day an abundant 35% of the respondents had a negative opinion of the Draghi government (more than 20% judged it "quite negatively" and more than 15% "very negatively"). While 60% of Italians were overall satisfied with the government led by Mario Draghi (Emanuele and Improta 2022), by firmly opposing it – and being the only party doing so – FDI was probably able to gain the trust and support of many of those unsatisfied voters.

Finally, what data seems to suggest is that, once again, the party competition is played not merely on parties' positions on policy goals but also and most importantly on a combination of issue salience and leaders' credibility to successfully pursue salient policy goals (De Sio and Weber 2014). We saw above that FDI matched the position of the electorate on the issues of basic income and retirement age. If one thinks that both issues ranked second by salience among all positional issues (the first being the introduction of minimum wage, which the evidence shows is not so divisive after all) and adds to that the consideration of Meloni as more credible than anyone else to abolish basic income, the electoral success FDI obtained vis-à-vis the general progressive inclinations of the overall electorate seems much less of a contradiction.

TRACING VOTERS' IDENTIKIT: THE EXPLANATORY ROLE OF SOCIODEMOGRAPHICS ON VOTE CHOICE

To gauge the features of the third dimension under enquiry regarding a better appreciation of the 2022 results, we now focus on investigating the predictive ability of sociodemographic characteristics over vote choice in these elections. As extensively explained by van der Eijk et al (2006), vote choice is generally conceptualized as a function of (1) the characteristics of the voter, (2) the alternatives of parties available in the political arena; and (3) a decision rule, which specifies how the utility assessments made on these two aforementioned conditions lead to the concrete choice.

Here, a rigorous analysis assessing the effect of voters' characteristics on their propensity to vote (PTV) for Italian parties running in 2022 national elections has been conducted. Given the structure of the Italian party system, a profile of the Italian constituents is drawn for each party or coalition considered. For this purpose, once again data from the 2022 CISE/ICCP survey have been employed (De Sio and Angelucci 2022), from which multivariate model estimates were drawn. To establish the impact of voters' characteristics on their propensity to vote for a specific party, the sociodemographic categories of age, gender, education, and social class have been considered.

In this regard, Figures 4-8[11] below display the propensity to vote, based on the aforementioned sociodemographic categories, for the main Italian political parties in descending order of electoral share. Many interesting conclusions can be highlighted, starting from the undisputed winner, FDI (Figure 4). First, whilst we could have expected and forecasted a direct relationship between the female constituency and the vote for FDI due to the female leadership of Giorgia Meloni, this association does not emerge. During the 2022 election, men and women had nearly the same propensity to vote for FDI (on average, the propensity to vote for FDI is equal to 3.7 circa for both genders), and the difference between the two propensity values is not significant. A similar picture can be drawn when it comes to age: FDI reaches voters across the entire age scale, with a slightly higher – yet not significant – tendency for constituencies between 55 and 64 years old.

In this regard, education and social class depict a different story. When looking at the results for education, the biggest category of FDI voters comes from a low education background, mainly holding the elementary or secondary school level (average vote propensity equal to nearly 4.2 for elementary-school constituencies, and 3.3 for secondary-school). In line with the traditional conservative profile, most Italian citizens voting for FDI also belong to the middle class (mean propensity = 4.4 circa), followed by the upper class. Additionally, the figure illustrates that the difference in the propensity to vote for this party between the middle and the lower classes is highly significant. In contrast, the difference between the middle and upper classes' estimates does not hold any significant result. Notwithstanding the

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[11] Figures 4-8 display histograms depicting the average propensity to vote (PTV) on a 0 to 10 scale by gender, age, education level, and social class. The data employed for these analyses are based on the 2022 CISE/ICCP survey. The results derive from multivariate models estimated on a sample of 861 observations. Error bars are shown to evaluate the statistical significance in the differences.

Figure 4. Propensity to vote for FDI on a 0 to 10 scale by gender, age, education level, and social class. *Source*: Angelucci and Improta (2022).

Figure 5. Propensity to vote for the League on a 0 to 10 scale by gender, age, education level, and social class. *Source*: Angelucci and Improta (2022).

Figure 6. Propensity to vote for FI on a 0 to 10 scale by gender, age, education level, and social class. *Source*: Angelucci and Improta (2022).

various attempts of FDI to increase its appeal over the working class, the results on education and social class pinpoint FDI as a traditionally conservative party that attracts the least educated and middle-class electorate (Angelucci and Improta 2022).

Similar to the voter identikit constructed for FDI, the voter profile for the League presents no significant difference in the propensity to vote for gender nor the level of education and social class compared to the findings illustrated for FDI. The League seems more appealing among middle-class and less educated voters. The average propensity to vote for the League is higher among citizens in the 30-44 and 45-54 age ranges, against the 55-64 age range exhibited for FDI. Consequently, the similar voter profile depicted for both the League and FDI and the sharp decrease in support for the League registered during the 2022 elections (nearly a loss of 8 percentage points since the 2018 electoral share) informs about electoral transitions from the League to FDI (Mannoni and Angelucci 2022).

After FDI and the League, FI constitutes the third party by the size of the centre-right coalition of the 2022 general elections, followed by Us Moderates (NM). However, the findings exhibited for FI significantly differ from the scenario presented for FDI and the League.

While FI shares nearly the same result concerning the level of education and gender, acquiring increased support equally among male and female voters with lower levels of schooling, on average, the party attracts more voters from the upper class (the result significantly differs from the estimate drawn for the working class). A secondary, surprising effect registered for FI regards the variable of age: unexpectedly, the party plays a major engagement among young voters from 18-29 and 30-44 age ranges, although the propensity to vote in this age class in respect to the other ranges is not statistically significant.

From Figure 7, it is possible to observe that male voters have a slightly higher propensity to vote for PD than female ones, although this difference is not significant. For what concerns age, the Democratic Party continues to obtain more support from the youngest (18-29) and oldest (65+) age ranges, as occurred in previous elections (Paparo 2018; Angelucci and Improta 2022). Moreover, in line with previous elections' results (Barisione et al. 2018), we can observe that, on average, highly educated voters (holding a university degree) are more inclined to vote for PD than lower-educated citizens. An interesting finding regarding this party's support relates to social class. Among the lower social classes,
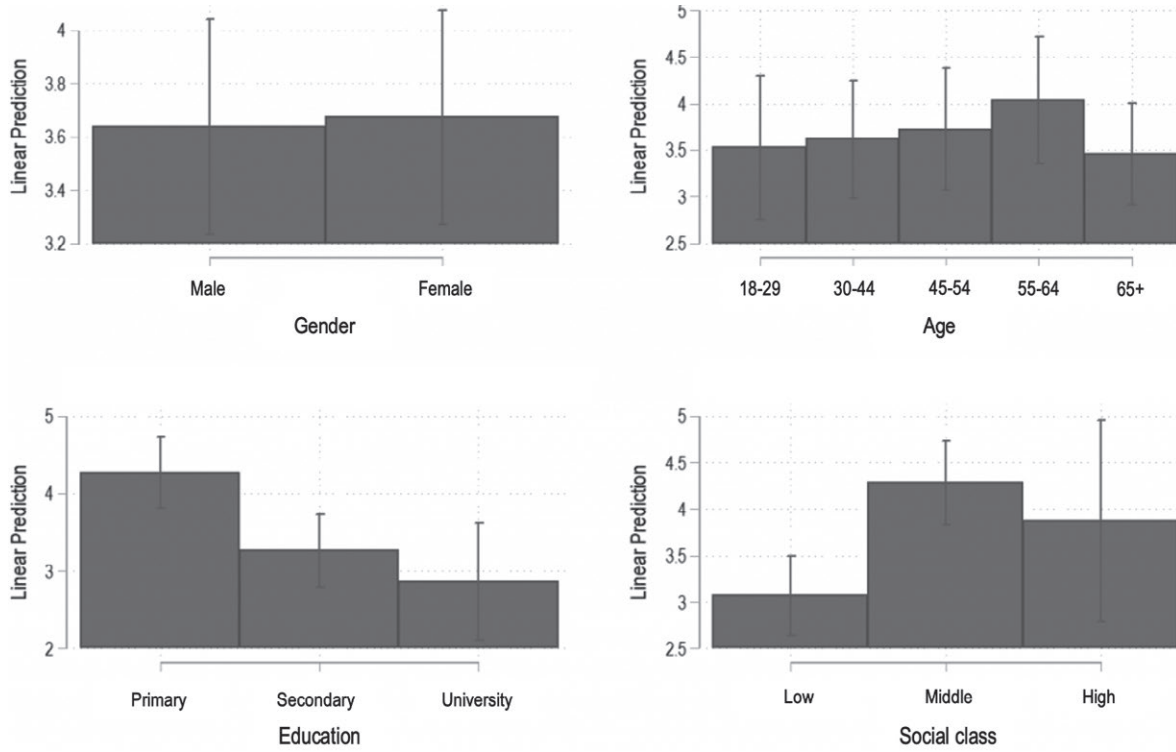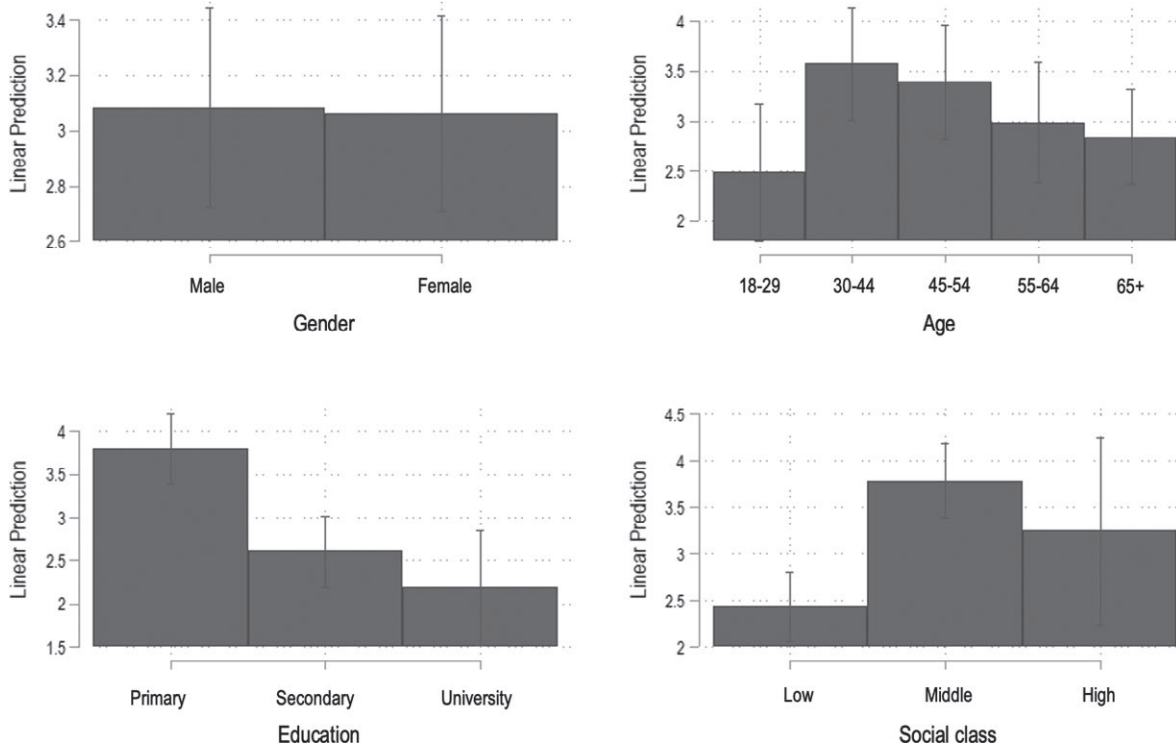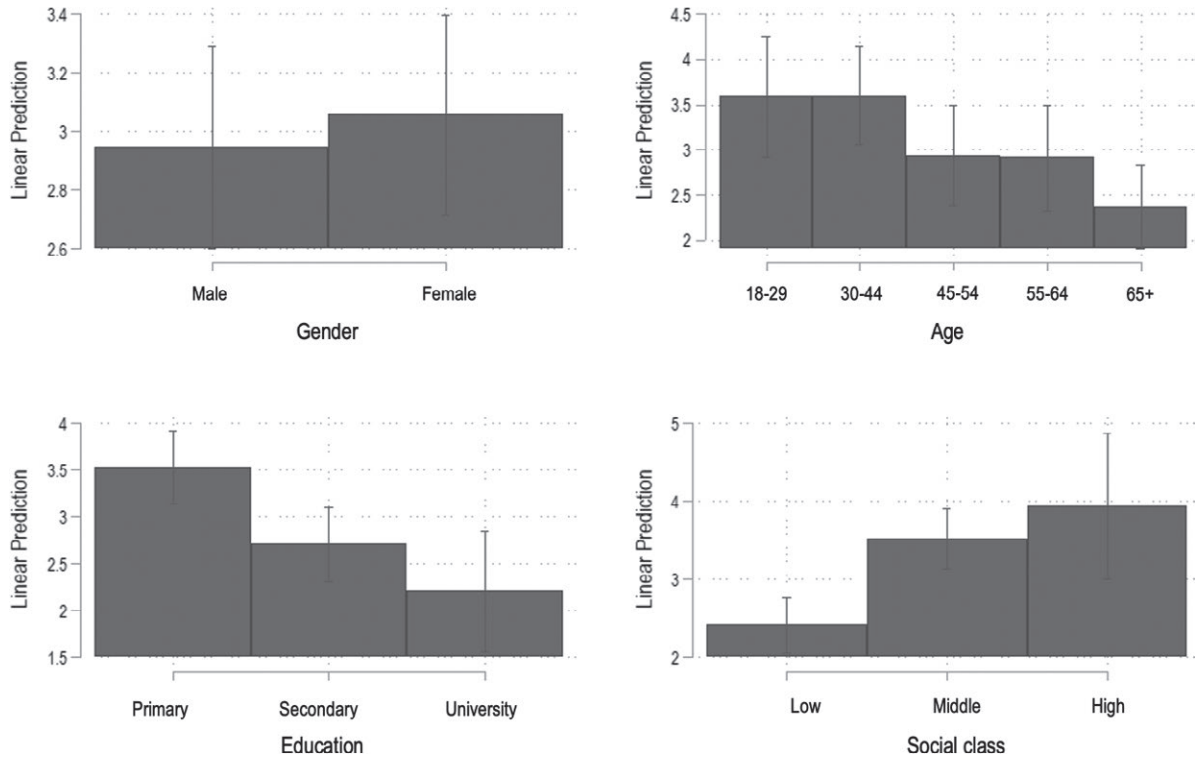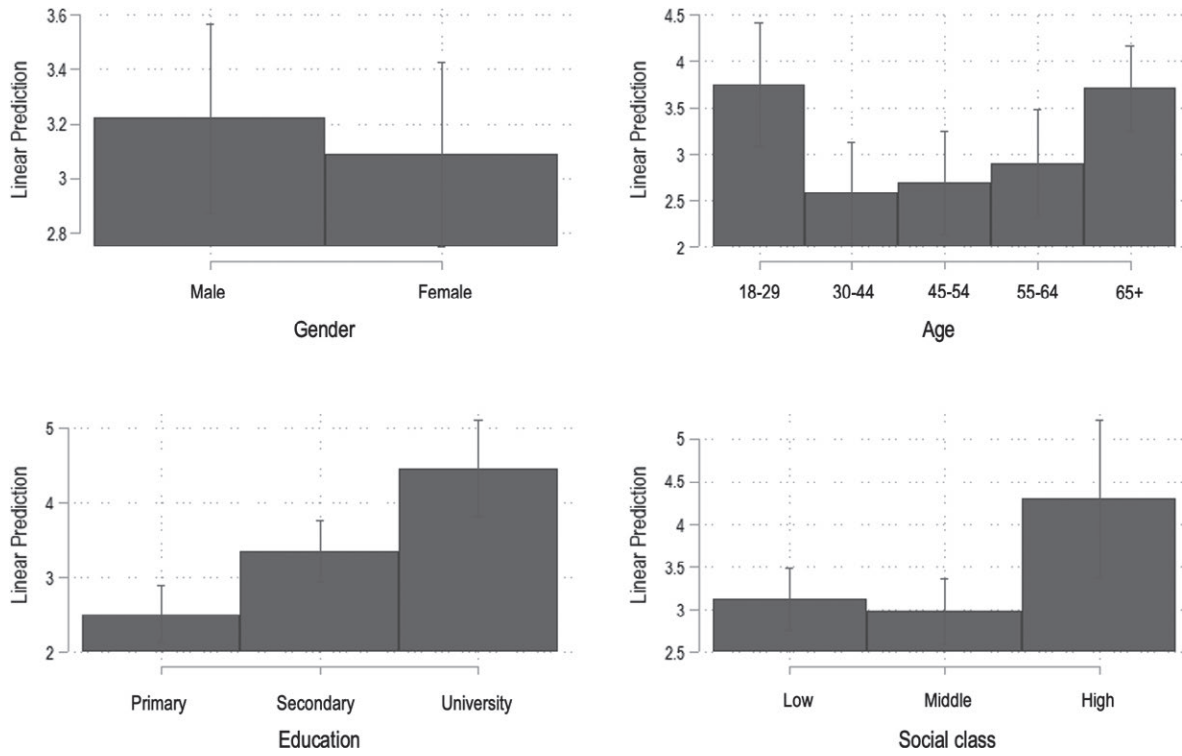
Figure 7. Propensity to vote for PD on a 0 to 10 scale by gender, age, education level, and social class. *Source*: Angelucci and Improta (2022).
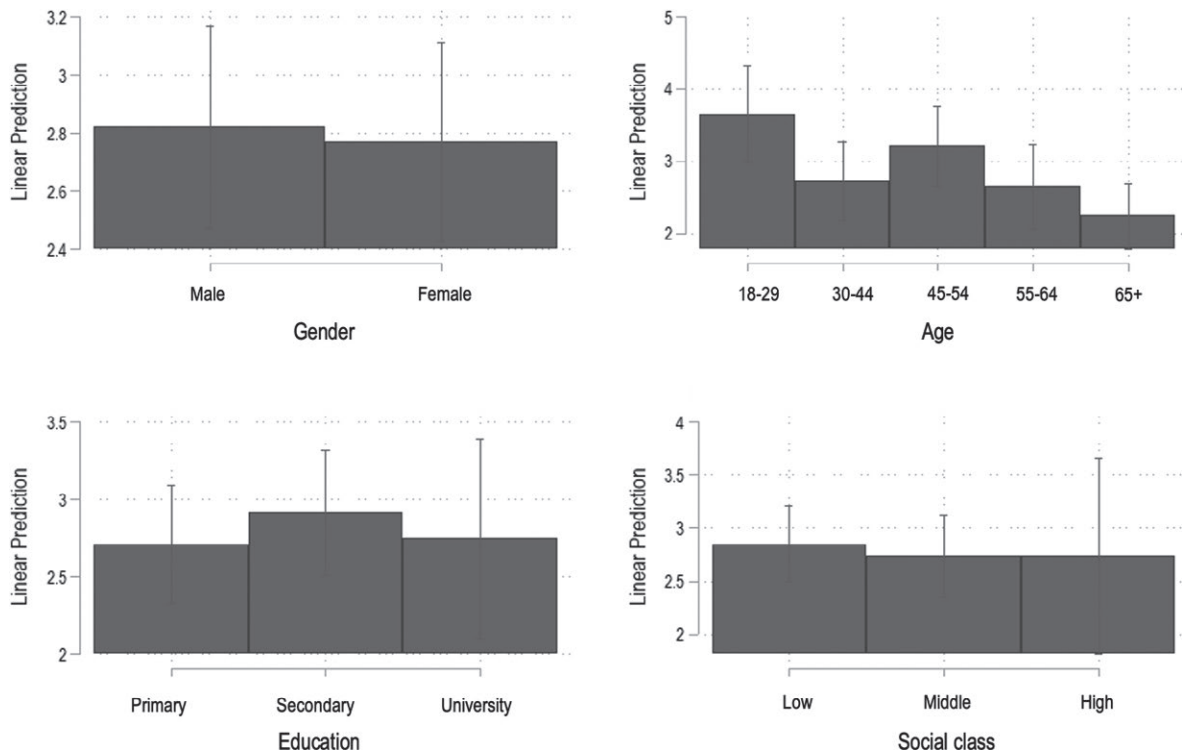

Figure 8. Propensity to vote for M5S on a 0 to 10 scale by gender, age, education level, and social class. *Source*: Angelucci and Improta (2022).

the propensity to vote for the party remains low, without significant differences; however, for the upper classes, it strikes with a considerably higher estimate. The difference between the upper and the middle classes' estimates is statistically significant, indicating that the PD performs well in wealthier social classes. However, the difference recorded disappears when comparing upper and lower class. Overall, the 2022 election's result suggests that, just as in 2018 (De Sio 2018), the PD was substantially unable to attract voters from the lowest social classes, thus being unsuccessful in stemming the tide of change brought about by Meloni.

Lastly, the findings related to the M5S shows that the party was capable to attract support from the full range of the electorate, contrary to the direction of the electoral campaign implemented by Giuseppe Conte, who targeted progressive voters (La Stampa 2022). The variables of gender and social class present no statistically significant results, confirming that voters from any class and gender have approximately the same propensity to vote for the M5S. A similar finding is also displayed for education: although citizens holding secondary-level education exhibit a slightly higher propensity to vote M5S, this difference in estimates is not significant. Conversely, age presents perhaps the most interesting result: younger generations (18-29), followed by middle-aged voters, show a higher likelihood to vote for M5S compared to other age ranges. Overall, the M5S establishes itself as a party attracting different voters, with exceptional support from young voters.

CONCLUSION

The present article has uncovered the main features underpinning the 2022 Italian election by delving into the voters' sociodemographic characteristics, issue preferences, and inter-election loyalty. The findings show insightful elements. Held in a context of increased economic, international, and domestic tensions, the election's result was the complete and total victory of Giorgia Meloni's FDI. However, the specificities of the electorate emerging from our scrutiny of their issue preferences depict a more composited story.

Notably, although on issues the 2022 Italian electorate has been a left-leaning one overall, it was also more concerned with immigration flow management and economic stability, particularly the energy crisis, than with other issues. Additional factors underpinning Meloni's success may lie in the increased citizens' discontent towards incumbents, especially during crises (Bojar et al. 2022), parties' mobilisation capabilities

(Donà 2022; Pirro 2022), and the role of her leadership in an increasingly personalised politics (Marino et al. 2022; Musella 2022). In particular, the salience of some specific issues and the leaders' credibility to tackle them could have played the lion's share in such a public opinion environment.

Moreover, another interesting finding is related to the FDI electorate's sociodemographic characteristics. Unexpectedly to some, the female leadership of Giorgia Meloni – an exceptional case in the Italian political landscape – did not elicit a growing electoral support from women. Men and women, indeed, record almost the same propensity to vote for FDI. An essential characteristic under investigation contributing to boosting Meloni's support is that of education. When observing the results about education levels, people with low education have a higher propensity to vote for FDI. This result is in line with established research demonstrating the closeness of less educated population strata to conservative parties and positions at large (Diamanti 2013). Finally, regarding vote flows, FDI effectively enhanced its starting positions in 2018, confirming its competitiveness even in traditionally unfavourable contexts such as large cities. However, this is true for Turin and Florence. Naples, in this regard, is an exception. The city confirmed its loyalty to the M5S, even after its difficulties deriving from governmental experience, e.g. parliamentary defections.

All in all, the 2022 Italian election was – again – an election of records: from the new all-time low in turnout for Italian general elections to the installation of a government formed by two populist radical right parties (Garzia 2022). Among such interesting events, Meloni was sworn in as the first female prime minister in the country's history. The government formation process was less labyrinthine than in the past, and, after initial turbulence, the portfolio allocation was conducted by satisfying most of the centre-right coalition partners' preferences. Meloni is now confronted with crucial challenges, particularly in the economic arena. Like many other European and non-European countries, Italy is again under tremendous pressure. Will the new government handle it?

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APPENDIX

Table 5. Adjusted source percentages for vote shifts in Turin between the 2018 and 2022 elections.

| | 2018 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
	LEU	PD	PD allies	Centre-left candidate	NCI	FI	Centre-right candidate	FDI	Lega	M5S	Other	No Vote	Total
2022													
No Voto	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.3	5.2	0.1	0.0	9.6	15.3	1.7	67.7	100.0
Italexit	2.3	19.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	4.7	3.8	6.3	1.3	57.9	4.3	0.3	100.0
Centre-right candidate	0.0	13.3	0.0	2.5	3.3	13.7	3.7	12.1	31.6	18.9	0.0	0.8	100.0
FDI	0.0	11.7	0.4	1.6	0.9	19.7	1.6	9.8	37.8	16.3	0.2	0.0	100.0
Lega	0.0	7.0	0.0	0.0	1.3	8.0	1.1	0.0	46.8	28.9	0.0	6.9	100.0
Us Moderates	6.8	30.1	10.1	0.0	2.0	14.2	7.1	17.5	7.1	0.0	5.1	0.0	100.0
FI	0.0	10.7	1.2	0.0	1.0	44.6	1.3	5.8	15.6	19.8	0.0	0.0	100.0
Civic Engagement	0.3	28.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	8.8	2.3	17.8	0.0	41.8	100.0
PD	8.5	74.7	7.6	1.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	7.6	0.0	0.5	100.0
More Europe	16.0	16.9	39.8	2.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	6.0	0.0	0.6	8.9	9.6	100.0
SIVER	28.9	0.0	27.9	1.1	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.0	0.0	22.3	18.5	100.0
Centre-left candidate	11.2	37.2	16.3	0.0	0.2	0.0	1.3	3.0	0.0	19.3	1.0	10.5	100.0
M5S	4.3	4.0	0.0	1.4	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.8	63.5	0.8	22.0	100.0
AZ/IV	0.0	39.3	16.0	1.9	0.2	28.0	3.5	11.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
Others	18.2	0.0	11.6	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	8.6	23.3	23.2	14.7	100.0

Source: Authors' elaboration based on 2022 CISE/ICCP survey.

Table 6. Adjusted destination percentages for vote shifts in Turin between the 2018 and 2022 elections.

| | 2018 | | | | | | | | | | | |
	LEU	PD	PD allies	Centre-left candidate	NCI	FI	Centre-right candidate	FDI	Lega	M5S	Other	No Vote
2022												
No Voto	0.0	0.0	0.0	8.5	28.4	23.6	4.2	0.0	31.1	33.4	24.8	87.5
Italexit	0.7	1.3	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.7	7.3	2.9	0.1	4.1	2.1	0.0
Centre-right candidate	0.0	0.5	0.0	2.1	5.4	1.1	3.7	3.0	1.8	0.7	0.0	0.0
FDI	0.0	8.1	1.0	25.2	28.1	29.5	30.4	46.2	40.4	11.7	1.1	0.0
Lega	0.0	1.6	0.0	0.0	14.2	4.1	7.0	0.0	17.0	7.1	0.0	1.0
Us Moderates	0.6	0.5	0.6	0.0	1.6	0.6	3.6	2.2	0.2	0.0	0.7	0.0
FI	0.0	2.0	0.8	0.0	8.6	18.2	6.6	7.4	4.5	3.9	0.0	0.0
Civic Engagement	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.9	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.4
PD	33.8	64.2	22.3	20.6	1.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	6.8	0.0	0.3
More Europe	14.6	3.3	27.0	9.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	8.2	0.0	0.1	12.4	1.2
SIVER	26.8	0.0	19.2	5.2	2.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.0	31.7	2.3
Centre-left candidate	2.8	2.0	3.0	0.0	0.6	0.0	1.9	1.1	0.0	1.1	0.4	0.4
M5S	8.2	1.6	0.0	13.5	4.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.5	27.3	2.3	5.6
AZ/IV	0.0	14.4	20.1	15.4	2.7	22.3	35.3	28.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Others	12.6	0.0	6.0	0.0	2.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.0	3.6	24.5	1.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Authors' elaboration based on 2022 CISE/ICCP survey.

Table 7. Adjusted source percentages for vote shifts in Florence between the 2018 and 2022 elections.

	2018															
	Popular civic	Together	PD	More Europe	Centre-left candidate	FI	FDI	Lega	NCI	Centre-right candidate	LEU	M5S	No Vote	Others	Others left	Total
2022																
PD	1.0	0.0	72.9	2.1	0.5	1.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	9.7	10.1	0.0	0.3	1.9	100.0
SIVER	0.0	0.5	18.6	17.6	0.8	0.0	0.0	4.1	0.0	0.0	28.4	3.1	0.0	2.1	24.7	100.0
Civic Engagement	3.9	1.8	51.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	13.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.6	22.7	2.2	0.0	100.0
More Europe	0.9	6.2	25.3	24.1	4.4	3.6	3.1	13.4	0.0	1.6	0.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	16.5	100.0
Centre-left candidate	2.9	0.0	25.0	7.9	1.7	5.4	0.0	4.4	1.6	0.0	19.7	5.6	16.9	0.0	8.9	100.0
AZ/IV	0.5	2.6	46.4	15.9	2.1	15.2	8.3	0.0	2.0	1.0	0.0	0.0	6.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
FI	0.9	0.0	22.8	0.0	0.0	40.7	5.7	0.0	1.6	3.1	0.0	1.8	19.7	0.0	3.6	100.0
FDI	0.0	0.2	22.7	3.6	1.8	19.3	14.7	29.7	1.2	0.7	0.0	3.5	1.4	1.2	0.0	100.0
Lega	0.5	0.0	4.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.0	44.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	43.1	0.0	4.6	0.5	100.0
Us Moderates	5.8	1.2	6.9	9.5	0.0	41.3	16.4	0.0	6.6	0.0	0.7	0.0	0.0	2.7	8.9	100.0
Centre-right candidate	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.9	22.4	8.6	25.5	0.7	2.2	9.5	18.6	0.0	9.6	0.0	100.0
M5S	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.0	0.0	0.6	21.5	60.3	12.8	1.9	0.4	100.0
No Vote	0.0	0.5	0.7	0.0	0.1	1.1	0.7	6.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	17.8	71.2	0.4	1.1	100.0
Others	1.0	1.1	26.1	3.0	0.0	0.0	7.3	3.9	0.0	0.5	0.0	30.6	15.0	2.2	9.3	100.0

Source: Authors' elaboration based on 2022 CISE/ICCP survey.

Table 8. Adjusted destination percentages for vote shifts in Florence between the 2018 and 2022 elections.

	2018														
	Popular civic	Together	PD	More Europe	Centre-left candidate	FI	FDI	Lega	NCI	Centre-right candidate	LEU	M5S	No Vote	Others	Others left
2022															
PD	46.9	0.0	56.9	10.0	13.5	4.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.7	37.6	14.8	0.0	8.1	13.1
SIVER	0.0	4.1	3.8	21.5	5.6	0.0	0.0	2.8	0.0	0.0	28.6	1.2	0.0	13.5	43.3
Civic Engagement	1.9	0.6	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.2	0.6	0.0
More Europe	5.7	27.7	2.9	16.5	16.7	1.8	2.6	5.1	0.0	12.5	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	16.2
Centre-left candidate	7.6	0.0	1.1	2.1	2.6	1.1	0.0	0.7	4.4	0.0	4.4	0.5	0.9	0.0	3.5
AZ/IV	11.5	38.2	17.6	36.5	25.9	25.1	23.1	0.0	46.0	24.8	0.0	0.0	2.6	0.0	0.0
FI	4.7	0.0	2.0	0.0	0.0	15.7	3.7	0.0	8.8	18.4	0.0	0.3	2.0	0.0	2.8
FDI	0.0	3.6	11.3	10.8	29.5	41.9	53.7	49.9	34.4	24.4	0.0	3.3	0.8	19.2	0.0
Lega	2.8	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.0	13.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	7.5	0.0	13.5	0.4
Us Moderates	4.7	0.7	0.1	0.8	0.0	2.5	1.7	0.0	5.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.2	1.1
Centre-right candidate	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.2	2.2	1.4	1.9	1.0	3.3	1.1	0.8	0.0	6.9	0.0
M5S	8.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.7	0.0	11.1	27.8	29.4	3.8	15.6	0.8
No Vote	0.0	20.7	0.8	0.0	4.0	5.0	5.6	22.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	36.4	88.0	14.4	10.8
Others	5.9	4.4	2.6	1.8	0.0	0.0	5.4	1.3	0.0	3.6	0.0	5.8	1.7	7.1	8.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Authors' elaboration based on 2022 CISE/ICCP survey.

Table 9. Adjusted source percentages for vote shifts in Naples between the 2018 and 2022 elections.

			2018										
	LEU	PD	Centre-left candidate	Centre-left allies	NCI	FI	Centre-right candidate	FDI	Lega	M5S	Other	No Vote	Total
2022													
More Europe	7.7	31.0	4.8	21.3	0.0	9.0	1.0	2.6	0.9	7.2	14.5	0.0	100.0
SIVER	21.2	27.8	4.4	6.1	0.0	0.0	0.8	1.1	8.4	1.1	29.0	0.0	100.0
Civic Engagement	0.0	5.3	0.0	0.3	0.9	0.0	0.1	2.7	0.0	43.6	9.2	38.0	100.0
PD	10.5	50.7	2.2	5.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.5	1.8	21.9	5.3	0.0	100.0
FI	0.1	0.0	0.7	0.0	3.3	63.7	0.4	6.6	0.0	24.7	0.5	0.0	100.0
Lega	0.0	4.5	0.0	12.6	0.0	30.4	0.0	2.2	2.9	43.1	4.3	0.0	100.0
FDI	2.1	26.2	0.0	2.2	2.7	37.6	1.5	7.6	11.9	8.0	0.3	0.0	100.0
Us Moderates	0.0	54.5	2.3	0.0	3.8	28.4	1.7	3.1	6.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
UPS	18.0	0.0	1.3	4.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.4	1.1	17.5	54.5	1.7	100.0
Centre-left candidate	13.7	28.5	4.5	9.1	0.1	0.0	0.0	2.9	6.4	22.0	12.8	0.0	100.0
M5S	0.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3	1.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	64.6	0.0	33.1	100.0
Centre-right candidate	0.0	39.8	0.0	13.7	3.5	32.6	2.8	1.3	6.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
AZ/IV	0.0	49.5	0.2	7.0	3.6	32.2	1.5	3.0	3.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
Others	0.8	16.7	2.7	0.0	0.7	7.7	0.4	4.8	4.9	49.5	11.9	0.0	100.0
No Vote	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.2	6.1	0.0	0.9	0.5	25.9	0.7	65.5	100.0

Source: Authors' elaboration based on 2022 CISE/ICCP survey.

Table 10. Adjusted destination percentages for vote shifts in Naples between the 2018 and 2022 elections.

			2018									
	LEU	PD	Centre-left candidate	Centre-left allies	NCI	FI	Centre-right candidate	FDI	Lega	M5S	Others	No Vote
2022												
More Europe	4.5	4.2	13.6	17.1	0.0	1.1	6.1	1.9	0.7	0.3	6.2	0.0
SIVER	19.5	6.0	19.4	7.7	0.0	0.0	7.8	1.3	10.4	0.1	19.4	0.0
Civic Engagement	0.0	0.6	0.0	0.2	1.4	0.0	0.4	1.5	0.0	1.3	3.1	0.8
PD	42.9	48.5	43.7	28.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	12.6	10.0	5.7	15.9	0.0
FI	0.3	0.0	5.7	0.0	20.5	23.7	7.4	14.4	0.0	2.8	0.7	0.0
Lega	0.0	0.5	0.0	8.5	0.0	3.2	0.0	1.3	1.9	1.3	1.6	0.0
FDI	6.3	18.3	0.0	8.8	28.3	23.6	47.7	27.9	47.3	1.5	0.6	0.0
Us Moderates	0.0	1.2	1.0	0.0	1.3	0.6	1.8	0.4	0.8	0.0	0.0	0.0
UPS	14.9	0.0	5.4	5.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.4	1.2	0.9	33.0	0.1
Centre-left candidate	2.7	1.3	4.3	2.5	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.7	1.7	0.3	1.8	0.0
M5S	8.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	9.8	2.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	41.5	0.0	16.1
Centre-right candidate	0.0	1.2	0.0	2.4	1.6	0.9	3.9	0.2	1.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
AZ/IV	0.0	16.5	1.2	13.7	18.3	9.6	23.0	5.2	5.7	0.0	0.0	0.0
Others	0.3	1.7	5.7	0.0	1.1	0.7	1.9	2.6	2.8	1.4	3.8	0.0
No Vote	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.8	17.6	34.0	0.0	28.6	16.4	43.1	14.0	82.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Authors' elaboration based on 2022 CISE/ICCP survey.

Running out of oxygen: The financial condition of Italian political parties

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Abstract. Electoral competition is quite expensive. The prevalent idea in Western countries is that public funding may contribute to and preserve the system's fairness and pluralism, defending political parties from the influence of big money. However, the Italian reform of political funding approved in 2014 appears to move in an opposite direction, encouraging political players to extract private sources while discarding public support. Such a choice entails hazards associated with several current phenomena, including system transparency, financial appeals from competing players and the rising personalization of politics. This article describes the financial status of the major Italian political parties in 2013 and 2018, with an emphasis on the allocation of private funds. Unfortunately, political parties' responses to the new regulation came late, resulting in significant variations and disparities. Private money needs regulation and restrictions before being established as the primary source of revenue for political competition. At present, Italian political parties are left with few guidelines and appear to be navigating by sight.

Keywords: Political Financing; Party's Organization; Personalisation; Private Political Financing; Financial Appeal

1. PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

How are Italian political parties dealing with the end of the era of public financing? A significant revision of the political financing system that started in 2017 has drastically altered the way political parties should seek funding, restoring the primacy of individual donations and direct linkages with civil society. So far, little proof has been provided about the true state of political actors' wallets.

In the United States, considering the relationship between money and politics entails comprehending and acknowledging the dominance – or better, the hegemony – of private donations. The majoritarian system and the large number of elected offices emphasise the importance of individual players and personalised campaigns supported by private contributions. Political parties and candidates have traditionally managed their own campaigns with the help of organisations, committees and networks of private actors. The regulation established by national and federal legislation provides several ways to assist – directly and indirectly – a selected candidate's political activ-

ity (see Hasen 2009; Ewing *et al.* 2012). Transparency is ensured by the high degree of disclosure, strict rules, and supervision by an *ad hoc* authority – the Electoral Commission – which demands the continual release of financial accounts and declarations revealing the source of money – as well as the identification of expenditures. Furthermore, lobbying activities by corporations and economically powerful players – the 'big money' – are highly regulated and thoroughly organised at all representational levels.

On the contrary, in the EU framework, financing political competition has typically been seen as a public obligation. To minimise the impact of private funds, legislators broadened the public funding system and limited the availability of private funds.

The Great Recession of the late 2000s raised the issue of the state's cost of politics. Major countries saw a shift in their approach to providing financial support to political players (see Ignazi and Fiorelli 2022). In Italy, the re-evaluation of public funding has resulted in a significant and radical change in the logic of resource acquisition. Since 2017, political parties have been relying on their ability to collect private financial support from civil society, with very little assistance from the state. However, adapting to the new regulations takes time and an organisational strategy.

This research contributes to clarifying the current status of Italian political parties in order to focus academics' attention on the allocation of private money inside the party system. The Italian political system is not accustomed to the fundamental role of private donations; rather, it is sceptical of them. For political parties, collecting money from private donors means establishing – or exploiting – their networks in civil society and their ability to extract resources and trust from their political base. From an organizational perspective, political parties should re-activate the role of the party on the ground (POG) and the attractiveness of the party in central office (PCO). This article describes the financing situation of Italian political parties during the transition to a new financial regime. Data from the 2013 and 2018 elections, in particular, allow us to illustrate the disparities between major political parties, as well as the hazards connected with their financial appeals to individual contributors and corporate donors. We should expect to find political parties in a difficult situation with regard to adapting to the new rules and logic of private financial support.

The article is structured as follows: It first provides a reconstruction of the literature available on the relationship between money and politics, emphasizing the theoretical aspects (Section 2). Then, the interests and logic that can move donors are discussed (Section 3). The Italian new regulation is explained in Section 4. The data and analysis are described in Section 5. Finally, conclusions regarding how Italian political parties have adapted are formulated in Section 6.

2. MONEY, POLITICS AND PARTIES

The link between the funding of politics and the flow of private money has always been one of the most enigmatic issues to be examined in public and scholarly discourse (Fischer and Eisenstadt 2004; Melchionda 1997). A look at the main literature can be useful to understand the need to focus the empirical research on what is a neglected topic in the European context.

For Pinto-Duschinky (2002), political finance is commonly defined as 'money for electioneering', but it also includes operations such as maintaining permanent offices, polls, policy research, political education, public campaigns and voter mobilisation. However, the essential relevance of the election moment is acknowledged among consolidated democracies.

As Alexander remarked, 'politics is big business and has become a major industry' (Alexander 1992: 78); therefore, the importance of money is self-evident. The role of members in providing resources was traditionally emphasised by mass parties, but with the crisis of this type of political organisation, things have changed, and parties may now require other sources of income to compete on the political scene. Money, according to Alexander (1989), is an aspect of political power, since it buys what cannot or will not be volunteered, and thus, it is able to replace the lacks created by shifts in the party model (such as from the mass party to the cartel party).

Politics is becoming increasingly expensive. Three distinct processes can be identified as the foundations of the growth in political expenses: the strengthening of electoral competition, the introduction of new technology and the necessity for increased professionalisation and more employees (see Farrell 2006, Norris and Van Es 2016). The progressive commodification of politics and the increasing importance of party financing are outcomes of phenomena first identified by Kirchheimer (1966), such as the decline of social roots and an ideological basis; reduced importance of party members; increased influence of leaders and professionals; sclerosis of party systems; and programmatic flattening. These characteristics suggest a growing withdrawal of parties from civic society and its original conflict lines. They also support a move from labour-intensive to capital-intensive campaigns due to a drop in volunteer work and

the use of new technology (Norris 2000; Sorauf 1988). As Melchionda observed, in such circumstances, companies and interest groups cannot influence policymaking through the usual lobbying directed at legislative assemblies, leaving the major parties in control of the electoral scene. Instead, they might try to actively influence the electoral process by selecting candidates with the help of money (Melchionda 1997: 173).

Political parties in almost all modern democracies have undergone, and in some cases have been encouraged to undertake, organisational adjustments to become electoral–professional parties (Panebianco 1988). Political parties have become 'more centralised and more professionalised' (Farrell and Webb 2000: 123) as a result of progressive cartelization, which has seen political parties become increasingly reliant on public resources for decades (Katz and Mair 1995) and an increase in management costs due to the widespread use of technologies (Melchionda 1997). The change process has been followed by a gradual and progressive drop in membership, leaving political groups without their primary sources of funding and support.

With this in mind, the introduction of direct and indirect forms of public funding to politics has had an impact on the main European democracies since the 1960s, raising the financial capacity of parties while diminishing incentives for their electorates to engage in self-financing activities (Nassmacher 2003; Hopkin 2004).

This is reflected in party organizational models. According to Katz and Mair (1994), political parties, understood as organisations, have three distinct faces that cover significantly different roles and positions: the party on the ground (POG), which concerns the party's relations at the grassroots level, its basic structure, inclusion activities and, obviously, membership campaigns; the party in central office (PCO), which corresponds to the executive centre, to the central offices; and the party in public office (PPO), which represents the party in public and elected arenas.

The geographical articulations of a party and its members on the ground, thus the POG, constituted the fulcrum of the organisation's strength and political power during the period of the dissemination and domination of the mass party model. Even at the subsistence level, the function of membership and the membership fees derived from it were a reliable, more or less consistent source of funding and legitimacy. With the introduction of public funding, which corresponds to new social and political dynamics that lead the electorate to ever-increasing volatility, the balance of power within the various facets of the party was altered, favouring a

type of centralization that sees its distinctive character as a horizontal relationship between the PCO and the PPO. Public funds were transferred to the PCO based on the power and numbers of the PPO. The electoral results, and thus the representation in parliamentary arenas, were fundamental to calculating the number of public resources for each competitor. The cartel party, with its emphasis on the need to grab public resources, upholds the centrality of the PPO in the subsistence of the organisation (see Katz and Mair 1995; Ignazi *et al.* 2016). These processes are relevant in all the main European democracies, including Italy, but with crucial contextual distinctions (Katz and Mair 1994; Scarrow *et al.* 2017). All of Europe's main democracies have been touched by the problem of the party as a popular organisation (Ignazi 1996). The supporting role of the POG has been replaced by the PPO.

3. PRIVATE MONEY AS INTERESTED MONEY

Knowing the source of political money is critical for understanding other facets of a political system, such as interest representation, power distribution, decision-making processes, election procedures, the party system and political communication (Melchionda 1997). The motivations of external contributors are critical in determining why a private actor would invest in a political actor given that money distorts political equality and that larger financial resources typically lead to greater political power (Fischer and Eisenstadt 2004). In general, an external donor may opt to contribute money to a political actor's campaign for one of two reasons: to gain influence or for an electoral purpose (Vanberg 2005). The influence or service motive describes an exchange of favours between a donor who is pursuing their own goals and a political candidate who may adjust their policy stances to suit the specific needs of their funding base (see Ashworth 2006; Gorssman and Helpman 1996; Prat 2000). The electoral motive, on the other hand, is merely tied to the donor's desire to raise the odds that a political actor will win an election, with no expectation of any favour in return (see Baron 1994; Coate 2001). A scientific controversy has erupted about how electoral donations influence the behaviour of politicians and political parties, as well as the outcomes of elections (see Vanberg 2005).

The language of money can be either pragmatic or ideological (McMenamin 2012). Pragmatic money is money donated to a political actor to achieve specific goals, whereas ideological money is donated to promote the public good by sponsoring parties and candidates

regarded as the best alternative for achieving collective goals (McMenamin 2012). The overall production system of a society can influence its financial dynamics. Liberal economies tend to favour pragmatic money, whereas coordinated economies tend to favour ideological money (McMenamin 2012). Furthermore, liberal markets typically use a majoritarian system, which leads to pragmatic strategies based on the likelihood of wholesale government changes, whereas coordinated economies typically use consensual institutions, which leads to less dramatic political changes and more ideologically motivated donations (McManamin 2013).

According to the political economy perspective, political divisiveness and extreme liberalisation in a globalised environment place pressure on corporations that want to retain the present set of institutions rather than risk rapid changes. Predictability within institutions is valued. Donating across the political spectrum is a logical approach for contributors in a problematic environment (Goerres and Höpner 2014). Italy is seen as having a mixed economy, balancing liberal and coordinated characteristics (Iversen 2005; Soskice 1999). Furthermore, between 1995 and 2006, polarisation in the Italian system went from 0.6 to 0.82, and the effective number of electoral parties expanded from 4.6 in 1987 to 5.6 in 2006 (Bardi 2007). Given the aforementioned economic perspective, these features of the Italian political system should contribute to destabilising political competition and increasing unpredictability and should cause private funders to adopt pragmatic tactics.

Scarrow (2007) criticised the scarcity of cross-national research on the character and motives of political players in this regard. In terms of systemic determinants, the ideological orientation of political actors may serve as a shortcut for donors, particularly in fragmented contexts, while the type of electoral structure may impact the amount of attention devoted to parties. In the United Kingdom, Ewing (2006) conducted the first study on private donations to political parties and politicians. Until 1997, political income disclosure was entirely voluntary on the side of the parties. Since the Political Parties, Elections and Referendum Act of 2000, parties have only been required to report contributions in excess of £5,000 to the Electoral Commission. In Ewing's study, the Conservative Party received significant contributions from corporations and corporate owners, whereas the Labour Party received funding from labour unions. Samuels (2001) investigated sources of financing for Brazilian elections and discovered that the bulk of the money originates from the private sector, but not for left-wing politicians, who are often barred from this cash pool. The same applies to endorsements in the United

States, where individual financial capacity appears to be directly connected to politicians' conservative beliefs (Ensley 2009).

Other studies have focused on the logic of personalization, emphasizing how electoral rules can impact the degree to which candidates capture the attention of contributors at the expense of parties (Johnson 2008). Candidates acquire popularity in open-list systems, in which voters can vote for their preferred candidates but are excluded in closed-list (CLPR) systems in which parties issue organised candidates (see Carey and Shugart 1995). Candidates' personalities, in addition to these structural characteristics, have a vital influence in attracting funders' attention. Donors, as goal maximisers and rational agents, typically vote for political actors who, if elected, would pursue comparable interests. As a result, programmatic agreement and the chance of victory might be significant external variables. Many studies have been conducted to investigate the link between the interests of government actors and those of donors. Donors frequently provide money to politicians who are sympathetic to their own interests, are likely to modify their policy ideas, and are predicted to win a seat, according to Mueller (2003). Magee (2002), on the other hand, proposed that, rather than providing funding to influence politicians, interest groups should refer to candidate policies. According to programmatic consensus, professional organisations and businesses prefer to give to political parties that they feel have a high chance of attaining a majority of seats (Brunell 2005; Koger and Nicoli Victor 2009). Vonnahme (2014) developed a model to investigate whether some parties receive large amounts of money from many donors, while others do not. Donations, according to the model, may be viewed as a type of connection between contributors and candidates, based on loyalty and common viewpoints (Vonnahme 2014). By researching city council elections in two significant cities in the United States, Krebs (2001) revealed that in addition to other crucial elements, such as party endorsement and the competitive atmosphere, successful fundraising is a result of incumbency and past political experience. Esterling (2007) strengthened the incumbency argument by outlining how hard money—large corporate donations—is directed towards members with a demonstrated capacity to design successful policies. Brunell (2005), on the other hand, established that incumbents at the state level obtain less money; therefore, their re-election is less dependent on funding. Non-incumbents, on the other hand, must struggle to raise finances to successfully campaign against incumbents (Baker 2015). The level of personalisation connected with personal campaigns, on the other

hand, depends on the broader environment. Newcomers may be interested in showing their party ties in a party-centred campaign, while incumbents may prefer a more personalised and autonomous campaign (Crisp and Desposato 2004).

Overall, the incumbency advantage is a disputed idea that generally refers to single-member district systems (see Mayhew 1974) or closed-list multi-member district systems, which, because of the increased degree of intra-party conflict, are feasible strategies for parties to pursue (Moral *et al.* 2015).

4. THE ITALIAN REGULATION ON POLITICAL FINANCING

Scholars generally agree that political finance regulations and reforms reflect the interests of the parties in power: a revenue-maximizing party is focused on increasing its revenue, even beyond what is required, whereas an electoral economy party is more concerned with the policy process, in accordance with public opinion demands (Scarrow 2004).

In Italy, the dynamics associated with political finance regulation have always taken on an emergency dimension (Teodori 1999; Pelizzo 2004). The history of the discipline that governs the use of public funding may be split into five separate periods, according to the temporal subdivision employed by Pizzimenti and Ignazi (Pizzimenti and Ignazi 2011; Pizzimenti 2018).

The first period covers 1948 to 1973. It can be seen as a regulatory void (Pizzimenti, 2018), a period of significant immobility in which the Legislator opted not to engage in the regulation of political funding. The Italian parties' imprecise and ambiguous legal existence (as defined in Article 49 of the Constitution) did not provide a clear definition of their political role as collective actors (see Musumeci 1999; Verzichelli 2016).

The 1973 Petroleum Union scandal and the subsequent attention of public opinion to the subject of corruption opened the way for the quick parliamentary procedure that resulted in the ratification of Law 195 on May 2, 1974. The introduction of public funds to guarantee the ordinary activities of parties and reimbursements for electoral expenses due to national political elections should have represented, in the Legislator's opinion, an additional source of income in addition to self-financing and liberal donations, discouraging the use of illicit funds (Melchionda 1997; Pasquino 1982).

The annual payment was assigned to the PPO – via the relevant parliamentary group – but was ultimately allocated to the PCO. The balance between the different sides of the party was altered, increasing the importance of the relationship between the PPO and PCO, to the disadvantage of the POG.

The regulatory establishment occurred between 1974 and 1981. Law 422 of August 8, 1980, increased public funding for elections to regional councils and the European Parliament. Law 659 of November 18, 1981, altered the distribution percentages of yearly contributions and, most importantly, added standards for financial transparency and the requirement of joint disclosure for donations above 5 million Lire (around 2.5 thousand Euro).

Between 1982 and 1992, Italian political parties attempted to enhance their resources, for example, by increasing the overall sum for reimbursements for regional elections, without addressing the difficult issue of accounting and transparency (Pasquino 1982).

A period of regulatory segmentation can be identified between 1993 and 2006. With the emergence of the Mani Pulite inquiry and the Tangentopoli scandal in February 1992, the necessity to legitimate political parties in the eyes of citizen-voters became critical. Financing for ordinary party activities was abolished in an abrogative referendum held on April 18 and 19, 1993, with 90.3% of ballots cast in favour. The following period was characterised by regulatory instability on the issue of funding (Pizzimenti and Ignazi 2011).

By establishing the concept of a 'political movement', the new legislation expanded the audience of potential beneficiaries for reimbursement of election expenditures. Furthermore, the contributions had to be computed by multiplying a predetermined quota, which varied according to electoral level, by the number of residents, substantially raising the overall amount to be provided in comparison to the years before the Law 515/93. The requirements for accessing the distribution of money were set differently for the Chamber and the Senate: 3% of votes on a national level for the Chamber and 5% of votes on a regional level for the Senate.

The Legislator began to look at private money with Law 2 of January, 1997, in an attempt to encourage liberal donations from citizens-taxpayers. This legislative instrument defined the creation of two funds in favour of the parties: one derived from the capacity of private citizens to donate 4 x 1000 of their taxable earnings in favour of all eligible political parties and movements, up to a total of 110 billion Lire/year; and the other based on tax deductions on donations, up to a total of 50 billion Lire/year.

Law 157 of June 3, 1999, expanded compensation for costs related to referendum campaigns as well. The payment for election expenditures was increased further by

modifying the per capita share and multiplying it by the number of persons enrolled on the electoral lists, and was distributed in several phases during the legislative term. The amount was adjusted to the value of the euro, and the size of the total contribution was raised with Law 156 of July 26, 2002. Furthermore, with Law 51 on February 23, 2006, the allocation of reimbursements was created for the entire duration of the legislature, even if the legislature was terminated early.

According to Pizzimenti (2018), the period between 2007 and 2014 reversed the previous decades' pattern of increasing money and coverage. In fact, in recent years, direct financing to political parties has been reduced (Legislative Decree 231 of 21 November 2007; Laws 122 of 30 July 2010 and Law 111 of 15 July 2011), altered (Law 96 of 6 July 2012), and then abolished (law 13 of 21 February 2014).

The deepening of the financial crisis, as well as the escalation of government insecurity, has prompted rationalisation reviews. With Law 96/2012, the Monti administration revised the allocation of public funds to parties in an attempt to promote a push towards self-financing. Seventy percent of public resources destined for political organisations were distributed through electoral reimbursement, while 30% of the total amount was categorised as co-financing and was directed to parties that exceeded the 2% of votes. In direct contrast to the other European democracies, less than two years after the rationalisation reform, Law 13/2014 (previously Legislative Decree 149/2013) authorised the progressive elimination of all types of direct state contributions. Since 2017, liberal donations have been the primary source of revenue for political parties (with a maximum limit of 100,000 euros per year for each donor). Furthermore, the creation of the Register of Political Parties, as stated in Law 13/2014, provides the access to the collection of the 2x1000 Irpef that taxpayers can choose to give to specific political groups.

In the context of a financial crisis and highly critical public opinion in 2013, the main political parties with parliamentary representation voted unanimously in favour of financing reform, despite opposition from the more extreme parties (from both the right wing and the left wing).

As previously stated, the regulatory evolution of political funding in Italy has been marked by an emergency situation, with reforms that are frequently insufficient to address the actual demands of sustenance and the legitimacy of the players involved. In terms of organisational structure, the direct interaction between the PCO and the PPO in the collection and administration of financial resources has left little place for the POG.

This centralization of financial power, as well as access to resources normally reserved for parties with parliamentary representation, is consistent with the Italian party system's tendency towards cartelization. Nonetheless, the explicit political competition, as well as the constant emergence of new political actors, make the Italian situation an example of non-exclusive and *sui generis* cartelization (Pizzimenti 2018) throughout the period of public financing domination.

In comparison to the recent reform in Law13/2014, important issues relating to transparency (see Tarli Barbieri 2016), the increasingly influential but hidden role of political foundations (Diletti 2018) and, above all, whether and how the new financing dynamics will determine a significant organisational rebalancing between the various faces of the party remains to be clarified.

5. THE FINANCIAL SITUATION OF ITALIAN POLITICAL PARTIES

This article examines the financial statements of central political parties, as well as private donations disclosed by party national headquarters and candidates running for national office in 2013 and 2018. These years are important to understand the shift that occurred after the reform was adopted in 2014, comparing the last election with substantial public financing and the first one without financial public support. The research focuses on the following main political parties[1] running in Italy in the 2018 general elections: Fratelli D'Italia (FdI; 4% of votes); Lega Nord (LN; 17%); Forza Italia (FI; 14%)[2]; Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S; 33%); and Partito Democratico (PD; 19%). Financial disclosures are published on official party websites, and the Treasury of the Chamber of Deputies provides a list of private donations declared by political parties and candidates.

The financial conditions of the main Italian political parties are illustrated in Table 1. The total sum declared plainly shows that PD is the wealthiest party, reporting approximately 12 million euros in 2018, followed by LN (11 million), FI (7 million), FdI (3 million) and M5S (1 million). The differences in income between 2013 and 2018 indicate that PD and FI suffered the greatest damage (-68% and -56%, respectively). The LN party lost just 15%, while FdI and M5S increased their income by + 21% and + 58%, respectively. The new financial tools for

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[1] Only those parties reaching more than 4% of votes according to available data sources were selected.
[2] The People of Freedom party running in 2013 was considered FI in the 2018 elections.

Table 1. Total income of major Italian political parties, variation 2013-2018 and share of sources in 2018.

	Total Income 2018 (Euros)	Δ 2013-2018 (%)	2‰ (%)	Private Money (%)
Fratelli D'Italia	2.602.575	21%	27.7	68.5
Lega Nord+Lega Salvini	10.556.455	-15%	28.1	71.0
Forza Italia	6.638.606	-56%	9.6	61.0
Movimento 5 Stelle	1.162.191	58%	*	100.0
Partito Democratico	11.974.493	-68%	58.5	40.8

Source: Parties' official financial reports. Author's elaboration.

Table 2. Distribution of private money, variation 2013-2018, number of donations declared and share of donations from elected officials in 2018.

	Private Money 2018 (Euros)	Δ 2013-2018 (%)	n Private Donations 2018	Δ 2013-2018 (%)	Donations from Elected (%)
Fratelli D'Italia	1.783.360	13%	101	2.3	42
Lega Nord+Lega Salvini	7.491.274	91%	338	0.6	87
Forza Italia	4.046.381	-73%	281	27.1	69
Partito Democratico	4.879.712	-58%	202	-0.6	91

Source: Parties' official financial reports. Author's elaboration.

liberal donations enacted in 2013 (the 2x1000of taxable earning from citizens) apply to political parties properly registered on a formalised national list. This type of revenue – formal indirect public funding – is very important for PD (58% of total revenues). The LN and FdI parties receive around 28% of their total revenue from state assistance, while FI accounts receive just 10%.

Private contributions, which constitute the majority of the new political financing system, are critical for FdI and LN (accounting for approximately 70 % of their total income, respectively), followed by FI (60 %) and PD (accounting for less than half of its income).

A particular point should be made in relation to M5S. The financial accounts of M5S are difficult to discern due to their organisational peculiarities: no membership fee is required, and it is articulated in several distinct national structures: the 'official' M5S movement, the Electoral Committee for National, Sub-national, and European elections and, since 2016, the Rousseau Association, which presents separate financial reports. Most crucially, the M5S refused to register in the new national list of political parties (established by the 2014 reform), so it could not benefit from the 2x1000 tax discount, which was only available to registered parties. Furthermore, a significant portion of the members' salaries are sent to a special fund – *Fondo per il micro-credito* – which redistributes resources to non-partisan and non-political initiatives. For these reasons, M5S is a one-of-a-kind political organisation in the Italian and European contexts, making comparisons with other traditional organised political players problematic.

Given the real benefits of the 2014 financial reform, it is critical to begin focusing on the role of private money in Italian political competition and the variations that may characterise the financial power political parties express through it. According to official party financial disclosures (Table 2), LN appears to be the richest actor in terms of private donations in 2018 (approximately 7.5

million euros reported from private sources), followed by PD (approximately 5 million), FI (approximately 4 million) and FdI (approximately 1.8 million). The allocation of private funds partly reflects the electoral power of the political parties. A comparison with the 2013 scenario reveals the following dynamics: While PD and FI – the two most powerful parties in the bipolar competition between 2008 and 2013 – suffered losses in the shift to private funding, the right-wing parties of LN and FdI showed a positive trend, with LN more than tripling its private earnings. The number of financial contacts behind the resources accounted for as private can be seen by looking at the number of private donations disclosed by the parties. When we investigate the nature of the donors and the connections with specific interests that might support the political organisation, financial relations, such as private and voluntary donations, help define the relationship between political actors and civil society, the foundation of their legitimacy (see Fiorelli 2021). According to political party donations revealed in 2018, LN has more financial links than other parties. However, the differences between 2013 and 2018 show that the number of donations did not grow in terms of the amount of private money reported, suggesting that the average amount of donations rose, but not the number of donors at stake. The PD reports a negative trend, showing that both the amount collected and the number of donations decreased between 2013 and 2018. The FI party had a positive change in the number of reported donations but a negative quantity of private revenue because the party's founder (and owner), Silvio Berlusconi, contributed significantly with his own funds in 2013 (15 million Euro) but not in 2018.

However, to appreciate the importance of private money in the Italian party system, we must distinguish between external private sources of money (from civil society, either people or businesses) and internal sources.

In particular, the internal source of private money correlates with payments made to a political party's central structure by its elected officials, known as the 'party tax'. According to Bolleyer and Bytzek (2014), taxing the salaries of European political parties is a common strategy. Different political parties acknowledge the necessity of supporting party organisational expenditures through direct contributions from MPs and parliamentary groupings in the statutes of their respective parties. In Italy, nearly all political parties control this transfer of funds, which amounts to about 23% of MPs' salaries on average (Bolleyer and Bytzek 2014. However, unlike in Germany and France, where the party tax is reported as a distinct item in the party's budget, these funds in Italy are formally considered private donations and are not segregated from other private donations. As a result, the evaluation of private money in the party's finances is skewed. As long as the party tax is an informal but widespread practise by which political parties receive state resources indirectly, it should be tracked and assessed independently. Except for the FdI (42%), the percentage of private earnings generated by Italian political parties from internal sources in 2018 accounts for half or more of the total number of private donations declared. Previous research (see Fiorelli 2022) has shown that after the end of the public finance era, all political players, particularly the PD, increased their reliance on the party tax. The internal structure of Italian political parties' private earnings vividly illustrates their challenges in attracting financial assistance from civil society.

Additional complexities arise when we consider the quantity of corporate donations reported by parties and candidates. Corporate contributors are commonly regarded as the most essential component of a private political finance system. Businesses directly participate in the political process by funding political parties and/ or individual candidates. Controlling and monitoring private money originating from companies, as well as its dynamics among actors, is critical to ensuring transparency and avoiding unclear financial relationships. Table 3 shows the allocation of private corporate donations disclosed by political parties and candidates in 2018. We can clearly distinguish two categories based on the overall number of corporate donations given to political parties and candidates: FdI and LN, which have few reported donations, and FI and PD, which have a considerable number of financial supporters declared. The difference between the elections in 2013 and 2018 is negative for all the actors evaluated. This can be attributed to the economic situation (private donations are extrinsic to economic wealth and growth), but it can also be considered to be due to internal political factors, such as the level of

Table 3. Donations from corporations to political parties and candidates in 2018.

	Donations from corporations (n)	Δ 2013-2018 (%)	to Political Parties (n)	to Candidates (n)
Fratelli D'Italia	8	-64%	5	3
Lega Nord+Lega Salvini	5	-64%	4	1
Forza Italia	51	-32%	15	36
Partito Democratico	71	-35%	1	70

Source: Parties' official financial reports. Author's elaboration.

uncertainty in the electoral competition or the presence of challengers such as M5S, who caused political turmoil during the formation of the 2013 government.

The most significant element to address is how political players recruit corporate contributors. The minimal private donations disclosed by FdI and LN are largely aimed towards each party's central office. In contrast, FI candidates have double the potential to receive corporate donations in comparison to their national party's headquarters, whereas PD appears to rely nearly entirely on its candidates for this source of money. Consistently, FI and PD indicate a personalization of fundraising ability in 2018, as seen by longitudinal patterns dating back to 2013 (see Fiorelli 2017).

6. REMARKS FOR A RESEARCH AGENDA ON PRIVATE FINANCING

The issue of political financing in Italy has a long and storied history, as discussed in this study. Previous changes and adjustments saw public finance play a dominant role, with the illusion of avoiding external influence within political competitions while maintaining the system's plurality. The crisis of legitimacy that collective political actors such as political parties are facing in most long-established democracies across the Western world has taken unexpected turns in Italy: the 2014 financing reform abolished, de facto, direct state support for political parties, leaving the organisations to rely on their own capacity to extract resources from civil society.

This preliminary research reveals that Italian political parties are struggling for financial survival: they are, as predicted, substantially poorer than previously, and they are attempting to resist as organisations by exploiting their financing resources – mostly internal. There are significant discrepancies among the most prominent actors in the Italian system, which are directly tied to their electoral capacity: PD is the favoured actor,

whereas FdI has fewer financial resources due to its poor electoral appeal. The M5S party, as previously stated, is an exception. However, the institutionalisation process that it must undertake may result in a changing viewpoint inside this party and a re-evaluation of the instruments offered to support its actions.

Variations across actors are focused on the major source of money that was permitted after 2014: the private one. All political parties, notably PD, appear to rely on internal donations provided by their political representatives. Unfortunately, the preponderance of internal sources of financing implies that political players do not go out to activate the financial network in civil society, highlighting their longstanding dilemma. On the one hand, with the exception of PD, which appears to be popularly appealing, the instrument of 2 ‰ only accounts for a small share of the overall revenue of parties. Private donations, on the other hand, are not expanding as planned – in terms of quantity and amounts – and when they are significant, they mostly pertain to internal sources (from elected officials). Business donations, albeit small, revealed another issue: Corporate contributors appear to be more interested in individual candidates than in the central organization of political parties. The personalization of political financing dynamics may result in an imbalance in the distribution of financial power within a party, causing intra-party competition and/or conflict.

Private support of political groups in Italy, as in other systems, such as the United States or the United Kingdom, has crucial implications that researchers should analyse, understand and evaluate: There are risks associated with the influence of wealthy donors who may use financial support to influence the political agenda in their favour; there are risks associated with the long-term stability of political organisations, as private donations tend to fluctuate according to economic conditions and electoral predictability; and there are risks associated with the transparency of all actors involved: political parties, candidates and associations. For example, the existence and role of political foundations, which are often closely tied to specific individual candidates or previous politicians, are unclear. In this regard, the Law.3/2019 (anti-corruption law) attempted to equate the transparency obligation of associations with that of registered political parties, but it left a lot of room for interpretation and escape strategies.

Scholars have long been interested in political funding dynamics. When private sources are acknowledged as dominant, certain considerations about the accountability and responsiveness of political actors must be addressed to comprehend the logic of money transfers and the grounds of legitimacy that political parties prioritise. The Italian political system is not accustomed to this, and political actors currently appear to navigating by sight.

From an organisational perspective, the desire to reinvigorate the function of the POG through a search for liberal donations is still secondary to the role of the PPO in transferring money to the PCO utilising elected internal donations as the primary private source of funds. In spite of the drastic reform in political finance, the organisational balance among the many faces of the party has not changed at all.

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New challenges for representative democracy: The changing political space in Western Europe

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Abstract. Globalisation and EU integration have reshaped political alignments in western Europe, with the emergence of new conflicts within a political space still ideologically structured in two dimensions (economic and cultural). However, recent challenger parties appear to question such alleged bi-dimensionality, e.g. combining anti-immigrant stances with progressive views on moral issues. In light of such challenges, the article aims to understand whether citizens' positions on policy issues can still be interpreted according to latent ideological dimensions, exploring possible differences across distinct party electorates and age groups (young vs. older people). The article analyses the ideological consistency of voters' issue preferences and the dimensionality of the issue space in seven western European countries through original survey data and scaling techniques. Results show that most citizens (especially young and right-wing voters) take ideologically inconsistent positions on cultural GAL-TAN and economic left-right issues, whereas are quite consistent on immigration and EU issues.

Keywords: voter issue preferences, ideological consistency, political space, generational differences, scaling analysis, survey data

INTRODUCTION

During recent decades, European democracies have been facing deep political changes at both the citizenry and party-system levels with the rise and success of new and/or anti-establishment nationalist parties and the emergence and politicisation of new issues related to the European Union, globalisation, immigration and climate change. These events are accelerating continuations of long-term processes. The individualisation of vote choices has weakened long-standing group loyalties. The development of the internet and online social networks is rapidly changing the formation and the dynamics of public opinion. Globalisation processes have transformed the economic landscape and reshaped political alignments, with the emergence of new conflicts (especially between the winners and losers from globalisation) in a political space still ideologically structured in two dimensions (economic and cultural). However, recent challenger anti-establishment parties appear to question even this alleged bi-dimensionality, e.g. anti-immigrant stances can be paired with progressive views on individual civil rights (De

Sio & Lachat, 2020). In other words, we might be experiencing a phase of ideological de-structuring (both in public opinion and in party supply). In the light of such challenges, the broad objective of this study is to gain a comprehensive and systematic understanding of whether and how models of the political space based on dimensionality can still describe issue stances among voters in western Europe or whether a deeper de-structuration of issue preferences is spreading among citizens, who then become open to innovative cross-cutting party platforms. In this regard, the type of voted parties (in terms of their ideological families) and birth cohort differences are the two variables to be considered in order to investigate thoroughly whether citizens' issue preferences differ in terms of the presence, type and level of ideological structuring. Answering these questions and the comparison between young and older people will inevitably provide (speculative) indications of future developments in European representative democracies. Indeed, as ideological orientations structure party choices (Thomassen, 2005), an eventual lack of ideological anchors among the young will be likely to make voting even more volatile in the long run, with potential implications for the quality of democracy and the stability of political systems.

The article is structured as follows. The first section briefly reviews the literature on the dimensionality of political space and introduces the hypotheses which will be tested; the second section presents the data and discusses the methodological approach; and the third section shows the empirical results and verifies whether the hypotheses are confirmed or disproved. First, it shows the findings of a scaling analysis to discover whether citizens' positions on issues can be interpreted according to broad latent ideological dimensions and whether there are generational differences in this regard; second, it analyses the preferences of main party constituencies on a variety of policy issues in seven western European countries, distinguishing between young people and older people; finally, it provides a systematic assessment of the ideological consistency of positions on policy issues through a consistency index of individual responses (averaged across countries, party constituencies and age groups) to determine an ultimate test of the hypotheses. The article ends with concluding remarks.

STATE OF THE ART, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

According to Lipset and Rokkan (1967), party systems emerged in Western European countries after a process of consolidation of the lines of political con-

flict, with the domination of a few social cleavages (cultural and economic) which ultimately coalesced around the class divide. Further developments in the 1970s led to a widespread pattern of electoral competition with two main rival parties (or party blocs) competing in a mostly unidimensional space (which is compatible with the key assumption of Downs's (1957) Economic Theory of Democracy), usually identified with a left-right continuum which is widely recognised among citizens (Fuchs & Klingemann, 1989; Knutsen, 1995). It is, however, important to note that the left-right concept is a dynamic communication device subject to social negotiation (Fuchs & Klingemann, 1989; Knutsen, 1995). Over time it has proved able to absorb new meanings (Dalton, 1984; Flanagan, 1982), thus preserving the unidimensional pattern of party competition. That age saw a "progressive-conservative" antithesis (Middendorp, 1978) between economic equality and cultural pluralism on the left and economic freedom and cultural uniformity on the right (Bobbio, 1994). This conceptualisation recognises that citizens' political attitudes can be organised on two main dimensions – socio-economic and cultural – but parties and their constituencies summarise their stances mostly along a single overarching left-right axis which divides economically and culturally progressive stances from economically and culturally conservative stances (Huber & Inglehart, 1995).

However, all these developments already suggested tension between a unidimensional framing of party competition (Fuchs & Klingemann, 1989; Kitschelt, 1994; Lachat, 2018) and a bi-dimensional citizen attitude space (Grasso & Giugni, 2019). One dimension relates to issues of economic equality, dividing supporters of economic redistribution from supporters of laissez-faire economics (the traditional left-right economic distinction). The other dimension concerns issues of social order and cultural diversity and is based on the contrast between authoritarian and libertarian positions (Kitschelt, 1994). According to Beramendi and colleagues (2015), authoritarian-libertarian positions can be combined with concerns for group identity and diversity in an increasingly multicultural world.

In this regard, the debate about the cultural dimension differentiates scholars' positions: on the one hand, a group of scholars see this cultural dimension as contrasting post-materialist green, alternative and libertarian (GAL) positions with traditionalist, authoritarian and nationalist (TAN) views (Inglehart, 1990; Hooghe et al., 2002; Bakker et al., 2012); on the other hand, the contrast is between "transnational" issues of "supranational integration" and "national demarcation" (Kriesi et al., 2006; 2008), which have brought about new conflicts

(especially between the winners and losers from globalisation) which are politicised by new political entrepreneurs, but still in the context of a political space ideologically structured along two dimensions. New conflicts are mostly seen as redefining the meanings of these dimensions rather than challenging their structuring ability. In particular, the issues of immigration, political integration and globalisation have mostly transformed the cultural dimension into a new universalism-particularism dimension (Beramendi et al., 2015) rather than the economic dimension, because globalisation losers are mainly mobilised in identity-based terms (Kriesi et al., 2006; 2008). Similarly, Hooghe and Marks (2018, p.109) identify what they refer to as a "transnational cleavage, which has as its core a political reaction against European integration and immigration."

However, some argue that issues of European integration do not form part of the cultural dimension but constitute a separate dimension on their own (Bakker et al., 2012). Hooghe and Marks (2018) themselves suggest that although the transnational cleavage is highly correlated with GAL-TAN (such as in the cases of nationalism and global warming regulations), not all issues that are encapsulated in GAL-TAN are necessarily part of it (for instance issues of authority and law and order). In this regard, Kitschelt (2013) distinguishes this new divide from the libertarian-authoritarian elements of the GAL-TAN dimension and suggests an alternative three-dimensional model that comprises an economic left-right dimension, a libertarian-authoritarian dimension and an identity-based dimension. This recognises that the cultural dimension hides inner multidimensionality which has turned out to be more and more politically relevant. Indeed, recent challenger parties appear to question the alleged bi-dimensionality of the political space. Anti-globalisation stances are often decoupled from conservative moral views (see Mélenchon regarding France), while – see, e.g., the Dutch Party for Freedom – anti-immigrant stances can be paired with progressive views on individual civil rights. In other words, we might be experiencing a phase of ideological destructuring (both in public opinion and in party supply). This process calls for a detailed analysis of the different issue preferences and related overarching dimensions usually associated with spatial representations (if any) of the political space.

For this purpose, the present study focuses on two sources of variation: party family and birth cohort. Indeed, previous research on party competition has highlighted how parties of the populist radical right or new/anti-establishment parties strategically combine a-ideological issue packages to expand their electoral bases (De Sio & Lachat, 2020). Furthermore, like any process of change, political change is produced not only by opinion change, but to a large extent by generational replacement. In this regard, young people as such have less stable political views compared to older people and are more open to innovation (Franklin, 2004). Furthermore, young people of late 2010s have been socialised into politics in a historical period marked by the rise of new issues concerning immigration, EU integration, globalisation and the environment. Conversely, older people grew up in the period of welfare state creation and consolidation, which was predominantly marked by the economic left-right dimension of conflict. All this can affect the kind of ideological structuration of political views in different age groups.

Therefore, the following are the main research questions in this study. Can voters' preferences on economic, cultural and transnational issues be still interpreted in terms of an overarching conservative-progressive ideological dimension? Are left-wing voters more ideologically consistent than voters for right-wing/anti-establishment/new parties? Do younger and older people differ in the ideological structuring of their political attitudes?

This study aims to answer these questions by relying on original survey data from a comparative project (Issue Competition Comparative Project–ICCP) which focused on party competition through the lenses of issue yield theory (De Sio & Weber, 2020) in a deliberate sample of western European countries.

In this regard, it is necessary to better clarify what I mean by ideologically consistent policy positions. Consistency can be evaluated according to three criteria. First, party supporters should take policy positions that are consistent with the party's profile/policy platform, although we know that the policy positions of parties and those of their voters do not usually fully overlap because voters "think much less ideologically" (Achen & Bartels, 2002) and their opinions on issues are hence less coherent (and even contradictory). I label this party-voter consistency. Second, party constituencies' stances on policy statements are consistent when they take the same direction within a specific policy domain (e.g. when they support mostly left-wing or right-wing goals on economic issues and not a mixture of both). I label this within-dimension consistency. Of course, voters can take within-dimension consistent stances that are inconsistent with party positions. Finally, in line with the conceptualisation provided by De Sio and Lachat (2020), consistency can be evaluated in terms of a classical twentieth-century progressive-conservative ideological alignment (Middendorp, 1978), which is used to summarise both the economic and cultural stances of parties and their

constituencies. In this sense, citizens are ideologically consistent when they take progressive (or conservative) positions across different issues and dimensions (economic, cultural and transnational). I label this across-dimension consistency. Although these three aspects of ideological consistency are all important and somewhat intertwined, the second and third elements are more relevant for my purposes, given the focus on the demand side of the political space.

The aforementioned ICCP project has documented that several parties and their constituencies are no longer characterised by consistent ideological attitudes *à la* Middendorp (De Sio & Lachat, 2020). Moreover, Wheatley and Mendez (2021) tested on voters the three-dimensional model of the supply side of politics proposed by Bakker et al. (2012) and showed that some sets of issues fail to form a coherent dimension when viewed from a demand-side perspective. This discussion leads to my first hypothesis:

H1. *Voters' preferences on economic, cultural and transnational issues no longer align with the traditional progressive-conservative ideological distinction.*

From this, we can derive two follow-up hypotheses. As De Sio and Lachat (2020) show, parties differ significantly when it comes to the ideological configuration of issues on which they campaign: while mainstream parties are more path-dependent and hence their policy proposals are more consistent with the traditional left-right ideology (the progressiveness-conservativeness antithesis *à la* Middendorp), new political entrepreneurs of challenger parties strategically campaign on issues challenging the classic ideology to increase their electoral appeal. Indeed, cross-ideological voter availability emerged in terms of an increased relevance of issue voting since the '90s (Thomassen, 2005), with new challenger actors politicizing specific divisive issues among less ideologically constrained publics. This strategy based on post-ideological conflict mobilization skyrocketed in the 2010s, especially characterising not only new and anti-establishment parties, which explicitly reject the labels of left and right, but also the populist radical right. Indeed, on the one hand the Euro and migration crises of the early to mid-2010s increased the saliency of concerns related to immigration and European integration; on the other hand, at this point progressive attitudes towards gender and sexuality were widely accepted in Western Europe (Spierings et al., 2017). Hence, for radical right parties nationalism, including economic protectionism, rather than traditionalism is the new winning formula to attract new voters (Hooghe & Marks, 2018) and some of them tend to reframe their xenophobic nationalism

even in terms of defence of Western liberal values: "gender equality as part of a hegemonic national culture that is under threat from the cultural 'other'" (Meret & Siim, 2013, p.83).

Therefore, I expect that:

H2. *Compared to voters for mainstream parties, voters for radical-right, anti-establishment and new parties take positions on economic, cultural and transnational issues that are less consistent with the traditional progressive-conservative ideological alignment.*

Furthermore, de-ideologization can simultaneously affect all the population (period effect), but it is expected to be driven by the younger generation. This is, first, because of a life cycle effect: young people have no or little political experience and therefore are more prone to external influences as they are uncertain between independence and familiar conditioning (Plutzer, 2002). This produces a weaker political identity compared to the older generation (Smets, 2012; García-Albacete, 2014).

Second, it is because of a generation effect, which is related more to socialisation than ageing processes. Voting is a habit learnt over time (Franklin, 2004) and political opinions formed during one's youth are more stable afterwards. Since the 1980s, voters socialised in times of change or crisis have shown lower turnouts and a weaker involvement in politics (Rubenson et al., 2004). Value change in political culture and the rise of post-materialism (Inglehart, 1990; Welzel et al., 2003) have produced sophisticated yet a-partisan citizens (Dalton, 1984). Furthermore, different generations mentally organise the political space in different ways or use similar terms with different meanings. Together with ideological de-structuring, restructuring can also take place among the young generation with new different linkages between issues. Young people increasingly see a partial decoupling of the libertarian-authoritarian and left-right distinctions (Maggini, 2016), associate left-right meanings with unusual relationships with traditional economic issues (Tuorto, 2018) or combine libertarian attitudes on cultural issues with anti-immigration and nationalist stances, as is shown by the phenomenon of the "sexually-modern nativist" (Lancaster, 2019). All this can negatively affect the ideological consistency of political views among young people.

Therefore, the third hypothesis is as follows:

H3. *Compared to older people, young people take positions on economic, cultural and transnational issues that are less consistent with the traditional progressive-conservative ideological alignment.*

DATA AND METHOD

This study aims to test the hypotheses outlined in the previous section by relying on original Computer Assisted Web Interview (CAWI) surveys carried out between 2017 and 2019 for the previously mentioned ICCP project[1] in seven European countries (Austria, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, the UK) which are quite representative of the different geographical areas in western Europe. These surveys were based on quota samples of 1000 respondents (per country) over the age of 18[2] and were conducted a month before the election day. A team of two country experts listed 20 to 30 potentially relevant campaign issues of both positional or valence character at the outset of the electoral campaign. This study focuses only on positional divisive issues. On such issues, the respondents were asked about their preferred position on six-point Likert-type scales anchored at the extremes by the two rival goals.[3] Some items are the same for all the countries, whereas many are specific to particular countries. Nevertheless, for the sake of comparison, all the items cover a multiplicity of issues on several policy domains that are the same in all the countries, namely economically divisive issues (related to taxation, the welfare state, job market regulations, government intervention in the economy, etc.), cultural issues related to personal lifestyle (such as same-sex marriage, abortion, euthanasia, law and order, environmentalism, democratic participation, gender equality, etc.) and transnational issues related to Europe, globalisation and immigration. These sets of issues can be interpreted according to three dimensions: economic left-right, cultural GAL-TAN and integration-demarcation. The advantage of this design is that these issues were salient in political-electoral terms, thus enhancing the analysis of citizens' political preferences and the related ideological configurations.

The focus on the policy preferences of older and younger people entails a need to define the boundaries of age groups. Following previous studies (Maggini, 2016), I classified as "young people" respondents between 18 and 35 years old, for two theoretical reasons and one methodological reason. The first is that in Western societies phenomena such as non-inclusion in the labour market and an increasing dependence on the

family of origin have progressively blurred the boundaries of youth, to the point that the cohort of young people has been extended to include both the "young" and "young adults" (Cavalli & Galland, 1996). The second reason is related to theories of voting behaviour (Franklin, 2004): voting is a habit that is acquired over time, usually after the first three national elections in which an individual has turned out, consequently between ages 30 and 35. Finally, from a methodological standpoint, this age group is sufficiently large to perform reliable statistical analyses.

To answer the research questions and test the hypotheses, the analysis is divided into three stages. First, I analyse the extent to which citizens in the different age groups in different countries have coherent views on economic, social and cultural matters, which can grouped into politically meaningful dimensions. Following the strategy proposed by Wheatley and Mendez (2021) for voting advice application data, this study uses a scaling approach to dimensionality of issue preferences, but on mass survey data. In particular, the analysis relies on psychometric scaling methods based on Mokken's (1971) monotone homogeneity model, often referred to as Mokken Scale Analysis (MSA), a scaling method from the item response theory family.

Previous research on issue preferences' dimensionality such as that by Otjes (2014; 2016), Walczak and colleagues (2012) and Wheatley and Mendez (2021) also uses Mokken scaling. Furthermore, like factor analysis, MSA can be used as both a confirmatory and an exploratory method. Nevertheless, when it comes to the analysis of Likert items, MSA has several advantages because factor analysis often leads to over-dimensionalisation when it is applied to ordered categorical survey items (Van der Eijk & Rose, 2015). Moreover, MSA avoids the rigid distributional assumptions required by factor analysis (Van Schuur, 2003).

Specifically, MSA tests the assumption that a group of items can be ordered on a continuum from the simplest (items answered correctly by most respondents) to the most difficult (items to which the fewest respondents answer correctly): a Guttman pattern. The quality of the unidimensional scale can be assessed in terms of deviations from a Guttman pattern, i.e. Guttman errors: the number of respondents that answer the "difficult" items correctly but answer the "easy" items incorrectly. As this study uses Likert items concerning policy statements, MSA evaluates the extent to which the items can be ordered from those for which most respondents give the progressive answer to those for which most respondents give the conservative answer (in economic and cultural terms). Hence, polytomous Mokken scaling is pre-

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[1] The ICCP project collected both survey and Twitter data. These data are available as GESIS study ZA7499 (see De Sio et al., 2019).
[2] The samples were representative of the voting-age population in each country based on gender, age, geographic area, and level of education. Some of the results shown are also based on an additional weighting by past vote recall.
[3] The detailed question wording for all the variables of interest is reported in online Supplemental Appendix A.

ferred to standard dichotomous Mokken scaling. This influences the Guttman errors, as huge deviations from the Guttman pattern (i.e. responding to all items in an extreme-progressive way and to one in an extreme-conservative way) count more than small deviations from the Guttman pattern (i.e. responding to all items in an extreme-progressive way and to one in a centrist way).

In this regard, MSA produces a value H (so-called Loevinger's H) that measures the consistency of the responses to a set of items.[4] Hence, it is a measure of scale quality, which is independent of the number of items and answer options. As a simple rule of thumb, a scale is deemed weak if $H \geq 0.3$, to be of medium strength if $H \geq 0.4$ and strong if $H \geq 0.5$ (Mokken, 1971; for more details, see online Supplemental Appendix B). Cronbach's alpha from classical test theory is also calculated to show that the outputs of the MSA are not some artefact of a particular scaling method (the threshold value for Cronbach's alpha is 0.7 for strong scales).

This study applies MSA in a confirmatory mode to test the validity of the a priori defined dimensions. The goal, indeed, is to detect reliable unidimensional scales from the policy statements made by respondents about several issues. Relying on the confirmatory method, MSA is applied in each national-level dataset separately to the groups of items belonging to the a priori defined dimensions (economic, cultural and transnational issues).

In the second stage, I focus the analysis on party electorates' preferences, looking at the average positions of the main parties' constituencies on issues, comparing older and younger people in each country. The party constituencies' preferences are investigated on issues grouped into the three a priori defined policy domains.

In the third stage, a synthetic measure of individual responses' consistency is computed to provide an ultimate test of the hypotheses. In particular, the consistency index has been built up in three steps. First, in each country-specific dataset, all the Likert items related to cultural, economic and transnational issues have been dichotomised (with 0 meaning TAN/Right-wing/Demarcationist positions and 1 meaning GAL/Left-wing/Integrationist positions). For each subset of these dummies (linked with each of the three dimensions), each respondent has been assigned to either the GAL/Left-wing/Integrationist side or the TAN/Right-wing/Demarcationist side, according to the side they aligned with most of the times. Second, I counted the number of issues of each dimension on which the respondent showed consistency with the assigned side. Third, I

have divided the number of consistent issues by the total number of issues included in the dimension. In this way, we have a measure of the consistency of individual preferences about economic left-right issues, cultural GAL-TAN issues and transnational demarcation-integration issues. For the sake of comparability, these consistency indices have been rescaled (with 0 and 1 as the minimum and maximum values, respectively).[5] Subsequently, the same procedure has been applied to all the items of each national dataset producing an index of consistency of individual responses according to the overarching progressive-conservative dimension. In other words, it is a measure of association indicating the degree to which one individual tends to take systematically progressive or systematically conservative positions. Finally, for each country, all these consistency indices have been averaged across voted parties and age groups (young vs. older) to test whether these measures of association are significantly different for supporters of mainstream vs. challenger parties (especially radical right ones) and for young vs. older voters.

RESULTS

Scaling Analysis

We can now move ahead looking at the results of MSA. I applied it in its confirmatory mode to the items of the a priori defined dimensions to investigate the extent to which these three dimensions actually constitute reliable and unidimensional scales. Table 1 shows the H coefficients and (in brackets) the number of items that satisfy the condition $Hj \geq 0.3$ (see Supplemental Appendix B for more details about values Hj). In general, it is rare for all the items in any dimension to fulfil this condition and typically the scale as a whole does not satisfy the overall $H \geq 0.3$ condition, with no significant differences when we compare young and older people. In particular, cultural GAL-TAN items and economic left-right items scale poorly, as is shown by the low values of H. Conversely, most items on the integration-demarcation dimension satisfy the condition $Hj \geq 0.3$, and in all countries this dimension forms a satisfactory,

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[4] Respondents with missing values for any of the items are dropped from the analysis.

[5] Indeed, before rescaling, consistency ranges between 0.5 and 1 when the number of issues is even; conversely, it ranges between 0.66 and 1 when there are three issues, and so forth. After rescaling, the minimum value (0) means that 0% of responses on issues related to a specific dimension (economic left-right, cultural GAL-TAN and transnational integration-demarcation) are consistent, whereas the maximum value (1) means that 100% of those responses are consistent.

and in some cases even strong, scale according to the H values. In this regard, differences between older and young people are not huge, although the strength of the scale is greater among older people, as is the number of items that satisfy the condition $Hj{\geq}0.3$. In other words, older peoples' responses to items related to the integration-demarcation dimension seem to be more consistent than young people's responses. This is especially true in France, Germany and Spain (where the H value for the young sample is around 0.3 and the number of items with $Hj{\geq}0.3$ is lower compared to the older sample) and in Austria and the UK (where all the items form a strong scale in the older age group). In the Netherlands and especially in Italy, older and young people show very similar patterns. It is striking to notice that items (supposedly) belonging to the traditional economic left-right dimension do not form a reliable and unidimensional scale, with the partial exception of the Dutch young group and the British older group, where the H values are around 0.3 (but the number of items with $Hj{\geq}0.3$ is extremely low).

In other words, unidimensionality seems to be a characteristic of the new dimension of conflict concerning globalisation, denationalisation and EU integration rather than of the traditional economic left-right division that structured political conflict in Western Europe for a long time. At least, the respondents do not show consistent responses to the items that were preselected as being on the economic left-right dimension. [6] The same applies to the cultural GAL-TAN items, with the only partial exception of the Spanish older sample (where 6 items out of 12 satisfy $Hj{\geq}0.3$ and the H is around 0.3).

To show that the (lack of) scalability is not the result of some methodological artefact, I also calculated Cronbach's alpha (see Table B1 in Supplemental Appendix B). Overall, it confirms that items related to the integration-demarcation dimension can form a single scale (only in the Spanish sample is the Cronbach's alpha slightly below the 0.7 threshold) and that items related to the GAL-TAN and economic left-right dimensions are rarely scalable.

As explained in the previous section, MSA allows us to investigate whether the policy statements made by respondents about several issues can form reliable unidimensional scales. The result that items related to both the traditional economic left-right issues and the cultural GAL-TAN issues are not characterised by unidi-

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[6] Here it should be recognised that opinions on policy issues are usually less stable than values, which show a higher level of abstraction. Thus, it is reasonable to expect that ideological consistency could be higher if the focus was on values rather than on issues.

Table 1. Overview of MSA Outputs When Applied to the Predefined Scales (Young and Older People Compared).

Country	Age group	H coefficient (no. of items $Hj{\geq}0.3$/total no. items)		
		Eco. left/right	Integration/ demarcation	GAL/TAN
Austria	Older	0.212(0/8)	**0.494**(6/6)	0.110(0/7)
	Young	0.063(0/8)	**0.315**(4/6)	0.082(0/7)
France	Older	0.138(0/3)	**0.425**(6/7)	0.180(0/5)
	Young	0.167(0/3)	<u>0.269</u>(3/7)	0.188(0/5)
Germany	Older	0.156(0/5)	**0.380**(5/6)	0.166(0/6)
	Young	0.121(0/5)	<u>0.297</u>(3/6)	0.135(0/6)
Italy	Older	0.139(0/9)	**0.384**(5/6)	0.124(0/6)
	Young	0.190(0/9)	**0.364**(5/6)	0.149(0/6)
Netherlands	Older	0.244(0/5)	**0.451**(5/5)	0.044(0/5)
	Young	<u>0.272</u>(2/5)	**0.400**(4/5)	-0.008(0/5)
Spain	Older	0.231(0/6)	**0.322**(3/4)	<u>0.275</u>(6/12)
	Young	0.196(0/6)	<u>0.290</u>(1/4)	0.147(0/12)
UK	Older	<u>0.278</u>(3/8)	**0.513**(6/6)	0.171(0/4)
	Young	0.204(0/8)	**0.364**(5/6)	0.034(0/4)

Note. H coefficients > 0.3 are in bold, whereas those around 0.3 are underlined.

mensionality means that many citizens respond to some items in an extreme-progressive way and to others in an extreme-conservative way (in economic and cultural terms). This entails also that citizens' preferences on relevant policy-related issues are not consistent with the overall progressive-conservative distinction, in line with H1. This result is confirmed (unsurprisingly) when MSA is applied to all the items included in each country-specific dataset, for both age groups (see Table B2 in Supplemental Appendix B): citizens' preferences on transnational, economic and cultural issues do not align with a common latent dimension related to the overall progressive-conservative distinction.

Ideological Configurations of Party Constituencies

The lack of ideological consistency in citizens' preferences on policy issues needs further investigation to detect two (hypothesised) sources of variation: party family (H2) and birth cohort (H3). I begin this empirical inquiry by investigating how the main party constituencies in each country take average consistent positions within and across the three a priori defined dimensions (which rarely are meaningful dimensions in the whole sample, as we have just seen, with the significant exception represented by the new integration-demarcation dimension). Electorates' mean positions on each issue,

along with standard deviation values, are reported in Tables A1–A41 in online Supplemental Appendix A. For the sake of brevity and comparability, mean positions on issues have been averaged for the three a priori defined dimensions of the political space. Figures 1–7 show, for each country, these average positions of the main party constituencies on the three issue domains. Young people's positions and older peoples' ones are compared.

In a nutshell, most party constituencies appear leftist on the economy, progressive on cultural GAL-TAN issues and quite divided on integration-demarcation issues: mostly pro-EU but anti-immigration. In all the countries, there is more ideological homogeneity on the left (although conservative attitudes on immigration are quite widespread) than on the right – where progressive views on several economic and cultural issues related to personal lifestyle (but not on law and order issues) even prevail. Overall, this ideological heterogeneity is accentuated among young voters.

To go into detail of each country, in Austria (see Figure 1), as expected Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) voters are those who take more right-wing positions. However, on cultural issues only a tiny majority of FPÖ voters are oriented towards the TAN side and on economic issues FPÖ voters, especially the youngest, are even more oriented towards the left-wing goals. Voters for the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) also show a prevalence of GAL positions, especially among the youngest, who are even located on the left-wing side of economic issues. Voters for New Austria and Liberal Forum

(NEOS) show in general a prevalence of progressive preferences.

On the left, most Pilz List and Social Democratic Party of Austria (SPÖ) voters support progressive economic and cultural goals, but are more dived on integration-demarcation issues, especially older SPÖ voters and young Pilz List voters (among the latter even prevail "demarcationist" goals). Most of them, indeed, support cultural assimilation of immigrants and more restrictive asylum rules (see Tables A1 and A2), whereas the Greens emerge as the party of cultural integration, especially regarding EU issues. On immigration issues Green voters show preference heterogeneity (see the standard deviations in Table A3).

Similarly, in France (see Figure 2) most right-wing French voters – *Les Republicains* (The Republicans-LR), National Front (FN) – take on average a progressive position on GAL-TAN issues and this ideological configuration is accentuated among young voters. Most FN voters take left-wing positions on economic issues, too. Conversely, Republicans, especially older voters, are mostly located on the right-wing side on economic issues consistently with the party's platform and campaign (Lachat & Michel, 2020).

The electorate of the new centrist party founded by President Macron, En Marche (EM), is the closest to the median voter, with a prevalence of progressive views, especially GAL positions.

On the left, most socialist and green voters take progressive ideologically consistent positions across
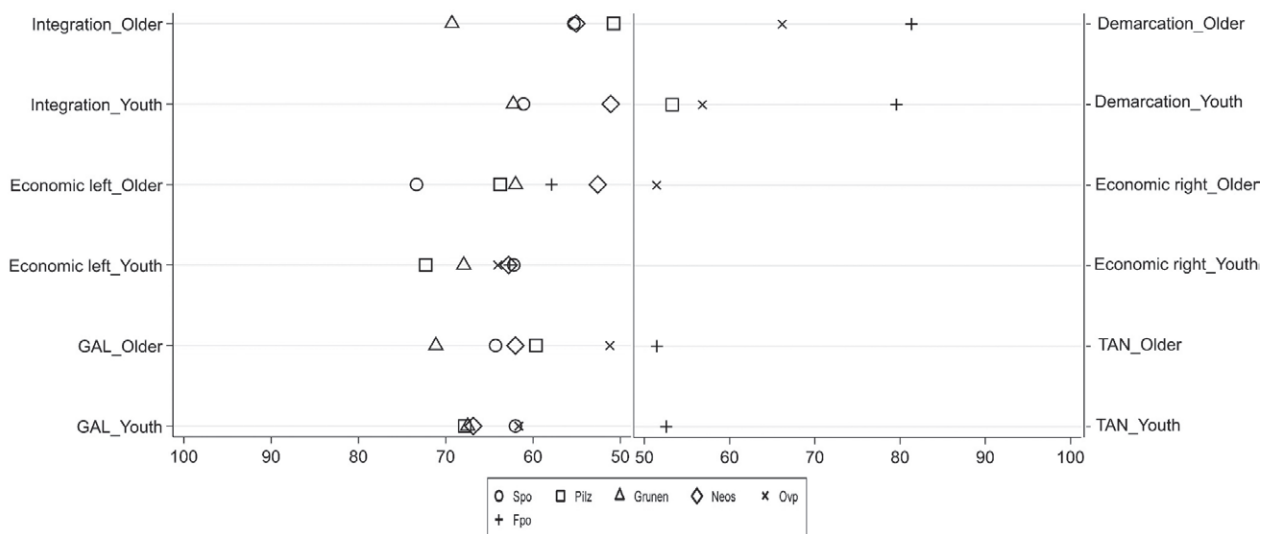

Figure 1. Average issue preferences by major party constituencies in Austria, older vs. young people (2017 general election, ICCP data). *Note.* For each policy dimension, markers represent the average percentage of party constituencies who support the favoured among the two rival sides. These considerations apply also to Figures 2–7.
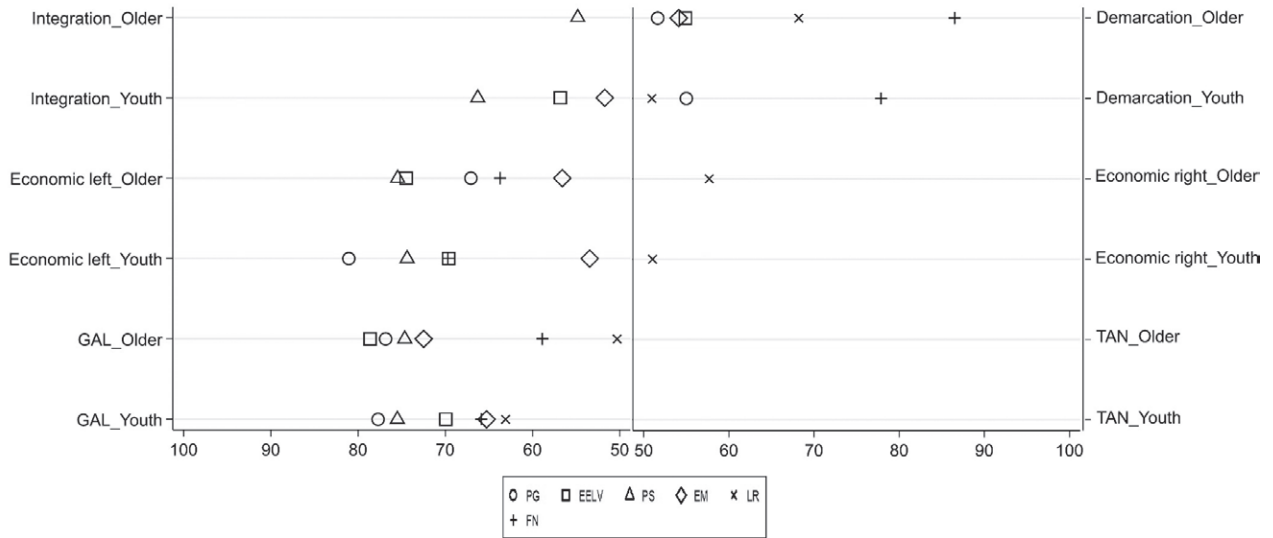
Figure 2. Average issue preferences by major party constituencies in France, older vs. young people (2017 general election, ICCP data).
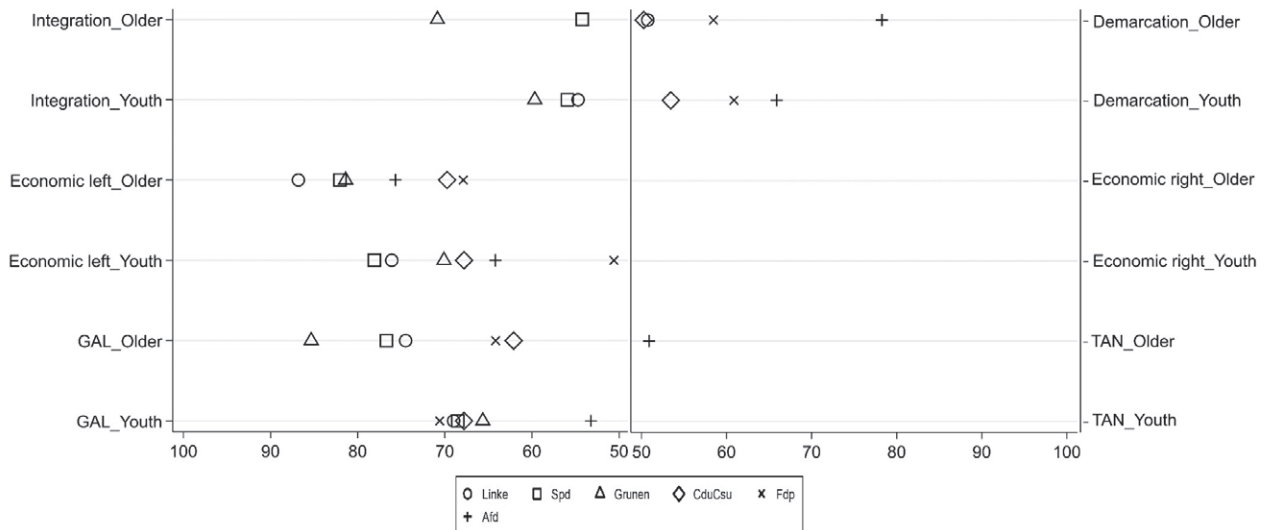

Figure 3. Average issue preferences by major party constituencies in Germany, older vs. young people (2017 general election, ICCP data).

dimensions, although older voters are quite divided on integration-demarcation issues, especially those related to immigration (see Tables A8 and A9). Left Party (PG) voters are even more located on the pro national demarcation side, where older radical left voters predominantly combine pro-EU and anti-immigration attitudes, whereas a slight majority of young PG voters oppose the EU and support both immigration and migrants' access to welfare benefits (see Table A7).

Similar patterns can be observed in the German sample (see Figure 3), where most voters for Christian Democratic Union-Christian Social Union (CDU-CSU), Free Democratic Party (FDP) and Alternative for Germany (AfD) are quite ideologically inconsistent, supporting both left-wing economic goals and cultural GAL objectives. Only a tiny majority of older AfD voters support TAN goals. Within the GAL-TAN dimension, the ideological heterogeneity is higher among young voters, whereas the latter are less progressive (hence, less inconsistent) as for the economic dimension, especially young FDP voters. Conservative voters are more ideologically consistent within the integration-demarcation dimen-

sion, especially AfD voters who are the most nationalist.

Compared to AfD electors, Green voters are on the opposite side of the integration-demarcation policy domain and the distance is larger among older voters. The majority of Social Democratic Party (SPD) and *Linke* (Left) voters are located on the pro-integration side, except older *Linke* voters who are slightly more on the pro-demarcation side.

Turning to the results for the Italian case (see Figure 4), the electorates of (centre-)right parties – Go Italy (*Forza Italia*-FI), the League (*Lega*) – mostly show left-wing economic preferences. Only among older people, a tiny majority of League voters are in favour of a flat tax and job market deregulation (see Table A22). This relatively low support for a flat tax is quite surprising, given that the issue was among the flagship proposals in both the League and FI electoral platforms and both parties campaigned on it (see Emanuele et al., 2020). Regarding the retirement age, voters' preferences are instead in line with the League's platform and electoral campaign, which innovatively emphasised a mix of left-wing and right-wing economic goals (a lower retirement age and a flat tax – see Emanuele et al., 2020). Moreover, most League and FI voters take progressive/libertarian positions on cultural issues like same-sex marriage and legislation on euthanasia.

Voters for the anti-establishment Five Star Movement (M5S) are leftist on economic and cultural issues, but quite close to right-wing voters on immigration and (to a lesser extent) the EU. In general, the average position of the M5S electorate is the closest to the median voter.

Only the Democratic Party (PD) electorate shows across-dimension consistency, with a prevalence of (economically and culturally) progressive and integrationist positions. Nevertheless, 57% of the PD electorate want to reduce the number of refugees (see Table A19).

In the Netherlands (Figure 5), party constituencies are more ideologically consistent within and across dimensions, although most voters for Party for Freedom (PVV) are located on the GAL side. Moreover, most voters for Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA), People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), Reformed Political Party (SGP) and especially PVV voters take left-wing economic positions, except young voters for CDA. In both age groups, liberal-conservative voters for VVD are the ones who are less ideologically inconsistent, although they appear quite divided. The ideological heterogeneity of VVD voters regarding economic issues is confirmed by a higher dispersion of their preferences compared to those of centre-left voters, especially in the older sample (see the standard deviations in Tables A23–A29).

As for left-wing voters, it should be noticed that a tiny majority of older Socialist Party (SP) voters are located on the national demarcation side, especially as regards immigration issues (see Table A23).

In the Spanish case (see Figure 6), on the centre-right – Citizens (*Ciudadanos*-Cs), People's Party (PP), Voice (*Vox*) – we observe ideological heterogeneity on economic issues, with a prevalence of centre-left positions. This within-dimension (and party-voter) inconsistency of PP and *Vox* voters is confirmed if we look at the standard deviations of their responses to economic
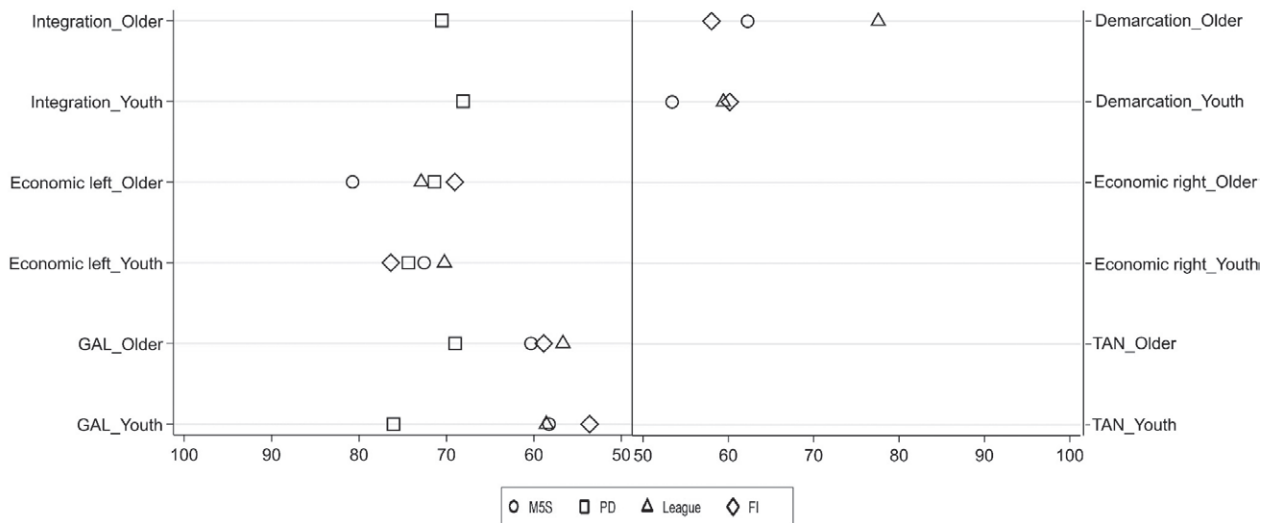

Figure 4. Average issue preferences by major party constituencies in Italy, older vs. young people (2018 general election, ICCP data).
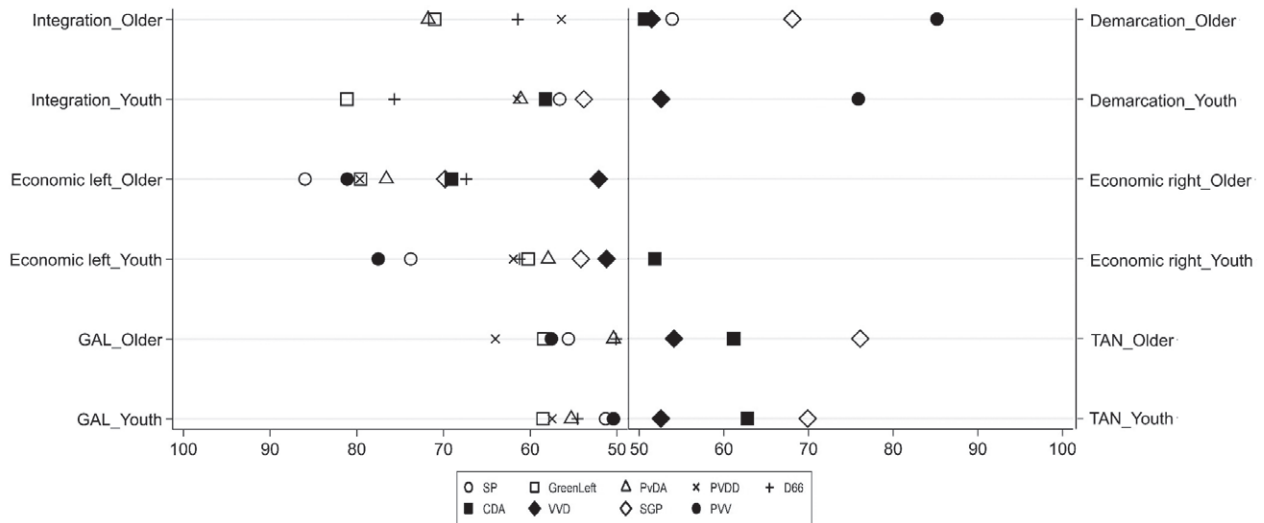
Figure 5. Average issue preferences by major party constituencies in the Netherlands, older vs. young people (2017 general election, ICCP data).
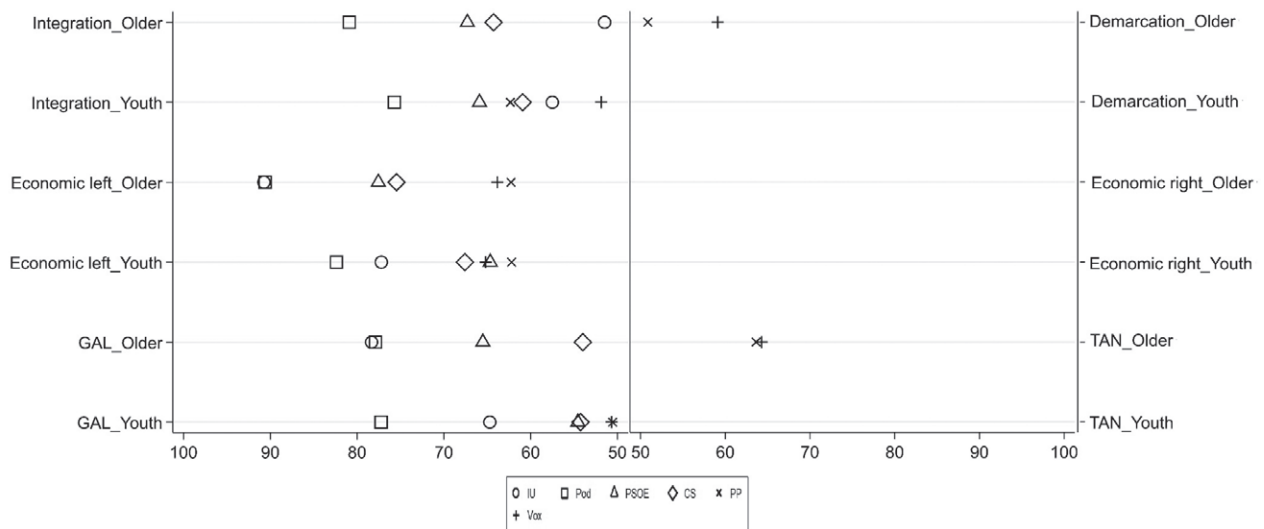

Figure 6. Average issue preferences by major party constituencies in Spain, older vs. young people (April 2019 general election, ICCP data).

items, which are definitely higher compared to those of United Left (IU)-We Can (*Podemos*) and Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) voters (see Tables A32–36). Left-wing voters appear as the most ideologically consistent across dimensions, especially older voters and those for *Podemos*.

Furthermore, a considerable proportion of centre-right voters are on the progressive/libertarian side on several cultural issues, and culturally progressive positions even prevail among young centre-right voters. The latter also lean towards the pro integration side. Indeed, only among older *Vox* and PP voters both pro national

demarcation and TAN positions on some cultural issues prevail. Furthermore, among PP and *Vox* voters anti-immigrant attitudes coexist with pro-EU stances (see Tables A35 and A36).

Conversely, when it comes to policy goals related to the debate about the Catalan "macro issue", brought about by the failed independence process promoted by the Catalan pro-independence parties, voters for Cs and especially for PP and *Vox* strongly oppose a further decentralisation of the state, a referendum on Catalonian independence, Catalan autonomy, negotiations with Catalan independentists and the allocation of public money
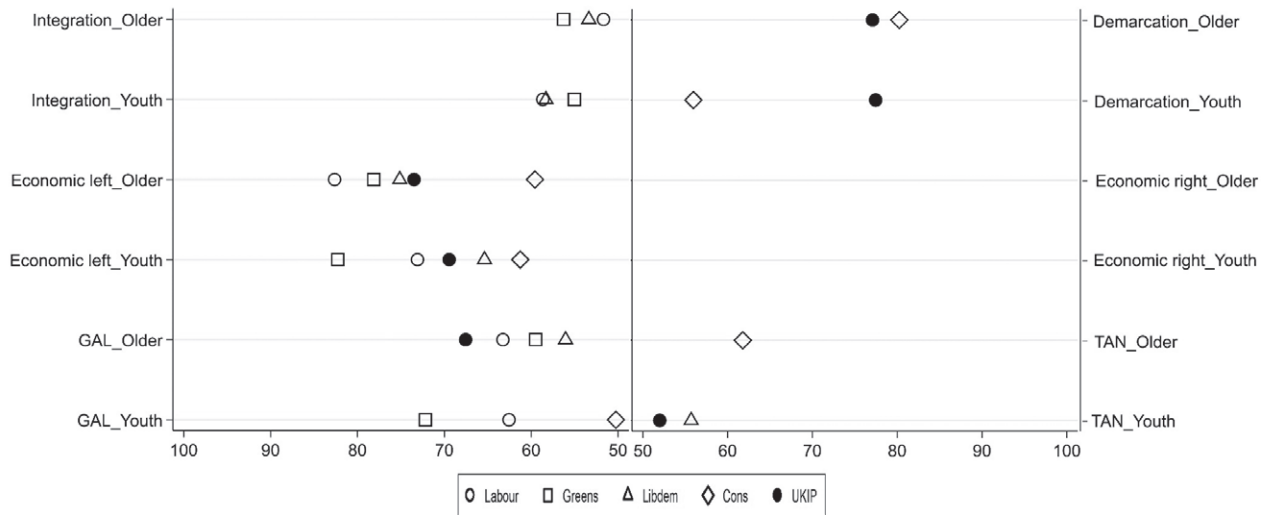
Figure 7. Average issue preferences by major party constituencies in UK, older vs. young people (2017 general election, ICCP data).

to recover the bodies of civil war casualties (see Tables A34, A35 and A36).

As far as the British case is concerned (see Figure 7), Conservative and UKIP voters combine nationalist stances on the EU and immigration with several left-wing stances on the economy and GAL stances. The latter prevail among older UKIP voters and (to a lesser extent) among young Conservatives. As regards GAL stances, it is noteworthy that UKIP voters, regardless of their age, are the most progressive on the same-sex marriage issue, and they are homogeneously progressive, as is shown by the lower standard deviation of their positions on gay rights compared to those of other party constituencies (see Tables A37–A41).

On the left, Labour voters (especially the older ones) combine progressive stances on economic and (some) cultural issues (same-sex marriage, prohibiting fracking) with rather conservative stances on immigration issues, and although they are mostly pro-EU there is a considerable proportion of them that are Eurosceptic (40%, see Table A37). Similarly, most Green voters combine a pro-EU membership stance with a conservative position on immigration issues, at least in the older group (see Table A38).

To conclude, the overall results show that most party constituencies are ideologically inconsistent across dimensions in line with the first hypothesis, although to a different degree across countries, with Dutch electorates turning out to be the most ideologically consistent, especially on the left. The higher ideological heterogeneity characterising radical right voters and the electorates of new centrist and/or anti-establishment parties

(such as EM in France and M5S in Italy) is in line with the second hypothesis, whereas mainstream centre-right parties are less ideologically consistent than expected. Furthermore, across-dimension ideological consistency is shown not only by mainstream centre-left party constituencies (e.g. PD in Italy, PS in France) but also by the new radical left (*Podemos* in Spain) and Green party constituencies.

The general ideological inconsistency is accentuated in the young sample, in line with our third hypothesis, although the differences between older and young people are not huge and in some cases young voters appear even more ideologically consistent than older ones.[7]

Consistency of Issue Preferences, by Voted Party and Age Groups

Moving beyond the average positions taken by (young and older) party constituencies on electoral campaign issues is necessary to submit H2 and H3 to a more stringent test. Indeed, average positions do not provide a

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[7] However, it is worth stressing that the saliency of issue goals could be relevant in differentiating electorates, apart from positions on issues. An analysis of the priorities attached by voters to different policy goals would require specific theoretical hypotheses and is beyond the scope of this research. That said, our questionnaire included questions about the salience of each policy goal. Looking at the data (the saliency of each issue is reported in Tables A1–A41 in Supplemental Appendix A), it turns out that right-wing voters generally prioritise issues related to national demarcation, especially anti-immigration stances. Conversely, on the left, older voters generally prioritise traditional economic left-wing goals, whereas young voters tend to prioritise progressive cultural goals.

systematic assessment of the degree to which one voter tends to take systematically progressive (left-wing, GAL, integrationist) or systematically conservative (right-wing, TAN, demarcationist) positions on issues. Therefore, we overcome these limitations through a measure of the consistency of individual responses to economic, cultural and transnational items, which has been explained in more detail in the methodological section. Table 2 reports, for each country, the mean values of the consistency index computed for each dimension, by voted party and by age group (young vs. older). The values of the cells represent the share of consistent responses given by each party constituency and age group on the issues related to each dimension (including the overarching progressive-conservative dimension in the last column on the right).

According to the numbers presented in the table, it is possible to substantially confirm the main findings of previous sections.

First, data show that the ideological consistency of issue positions within each sub-dimension is generally greater than the ideological consistency across dimensions; i.e. the overarching progressive-conservative dimension. The latter is no longer a dimension significantly structuring issue preferences, in line with H1.

Second, these data confirm H2: in general, voters for challenger parties (especially populist radical right parties) are more ideologically inconsistent compared to mainstream parties' voters. Indeed, as regards the overall progressive-conservative dimension, the lowest values of the consistency index are shown, for each country, by responses of FPÖ voters in Austria (0.201), of AfD voters in Germany (0.196), of *Lega* voters in Italy (0.186), of PVV voters in the Netherlands (0.128), of *Vox* voters in Spain (0.211), of UKIP voters in the UK (0.179). And although in France the lowest share of consistent responses does not regard FN voters, it regards EM, i.e. a new centrist party going beyond the traditional left-right ideological distinction (again in line with H2). That said, data also show that the ideological consistency of positions on issues is not a characteristic of all mainstream parties' voters, but especially of voters for centre-left parties. For instance, in Italy 41.7% of PD voters' positions on all the relevant political issues is consistent with the overarching progressive-conservative distinction, whereas the percentage of consistency is much lower among voters for *Forza Italia* (21.4%). A similar pattern can be observed in the other countries: issue preferences of SPÖ voters in Austria, of PS voters in France, of SPD voters in Germany, of PvDA voters in the Netherlands, of PSOE voters in Spain and of Labour voters in the UK are more ideologically consistent than issue prefer-

ences of voters for mainstream centre-right parties (i.e. ÖVP in Austria, *Les Républicains* in France, CDU-CSU in Germany, CDA and VVD in the Netherlands, PP in Spain, Conservative Party in the UK). Furthermore, in some countries, the most ideologically consistent issue preferences are shown not by voters for mainstream centre-left parties, but by voters for Green parties or for new populist left-wing parties. This is the case of *GroenLink* in the Netherlands, of the *Grünen* in both Austria and Germany, and of *Podemos* in Spain. This point is in line with the result shown in the previous section, hence giving it more robustness.

Table 2 also shows the values of the consistency index for issue preferences of young and older people, confirming H3: in general, older people take positions on issues that are more consistent with the progressive-conservative distinction compared to young people's preferences. However, as discussed in the previous section, differences between these age groups are not huge and there are two exceptions: the share of consistency is slightly higher among young Dutch than among older Dutch (0.239 vs. 0.231), and among young Italians compared to older Italians (0.318 vs. 0.290).

This overall picture becomes more nuanced if we look at the ideological consistency within the three sub-dimensions (economic left-right, cultural GAL-TAN and transnational integration-demarcation).

First, as regards party constituencies' preferences, there is a clear distinction between positions on issues related to the integration-demarcation dimension on the one hand, and positions on issues related to the left-right and GAL-TAN dimensions on the other. As regards the latter, indeed, it is confirmed that voters for mainstream centre-left parties, green parties and radical left parties tend to take more systematically consistent positions than voters for mainstream centre-right parties and, especially, for radical right parties. In general, socialist/social-democratic voters and radical left voters take the most consistent positions on economic issues (i.e. left-wing positions), whereas Green voters show consistent positions, especially on issues related to the GAL-TAN dimension. As an example, in Germany 63.4% of *Die Linke* voters' positions on economic left-right issues are consistent and 61.1% of Green voters' positions on cultural GAL-TAN issues are consistent. Conversely, among CDU-CSU voters the percentage of consistency on economic left-right issues is 38.9% and on cultural GAL-TAN issues is 45.4%, and among AfD voters these percentages are, respectively, 48% and 39.8%. The exception is Italy, where the most coherent issue preferences (55.9%) on economic left-right issues are taken by the M5S, more than those taken by PD voters (although the

Table 2. Overview of the Consistency of Responses on Issues Grouped into Different Dimensions, by Voted Party and Age Group.

Country	Party	Consistency Index			
		Integration-Demarcation	Left-Right	GAL-TAN	Overall Progressive-Conservative
Austria	SPÖ	0.429	0.479	0.285	0.309
	Pilz	0.356	0.395	0.304	0.218
	Grünen	0.599	0.361	0.360	0.364
	Neos	0.285	0.304	0.372	0.226
	ÖVP	0.386	0.400	0.299	0.213
	FPÖ	0.640	0.380	0.198	0.201
	All Voters By Age:				
	Older	0.490	0.418	0.279	0.248
	Young	0.384	0.373	0.279	0.224
France	PG	0.330	0.379	0.503	0.284
	EELV	0.359	0.364	0.541	0.277
	PS	0.323	0.436	0.517	0.352
	EM	0.268	0.266	0.363	0.203
	LR	0.330	0.343	0.243	0.206
	FN	0.674	0.263	0.281	0.211
	All Voters By Age:				
	Older	0.434	0.324	0.361	0.242
	Young	0.323	0.311	0.391	0.202
Germany	Die Linke	0.511	0.634	0.572	0.378
	SPD	0.370	0.584	0.565	0.384
	Die Grünen	0.403	0.515	0.611	0.464
	CDU-CSU	0.274	0.389	0.454	0.243
	FDP	0.279	0.405	0.508	0.244
	AFD	0.569	0.480	0.398	0.196
	All Voters By Age:				
	Older	0.388	0.522	0.511	0.312
	Young	0.365	0.407	0.489	0.278
Italy	PD	0.509	0.435	0.462	0.417
	M5S	0.428	0.559	0.351	0.267
	Forza Italia	0.371	0.431	0.390	0.214
	Lega	0.559	0.466	0.328	0.186
	All Voters By Age:				
	Older	0.417	0.483	0.401	0.290
	Young	0.452	0.516	0.401	0.318

Country	Party	Consistency Index			
		Integration-Demarcation	Left-Right	GAL-TAN	Overall Progressive-Conservative
Netherlands	SP	0.385	0.696	0.159	0.258
	GroenLink	0.512	0.527	0.235	0.364
	PvDA	0.414	0.433	0.096	0.291
	PVDD	0.372	0.574	0.311	0.342
	D66	0.448	0.424	0.134	0.257
	CDA	0.292	0.456	0.236	0.173
	VVD	0.293	0.407	0.190	0.230
	SGP	0.356	0.428	0.443	0.227
	PVV	0.634	0.584	0.153	0.128
	All Voters By Age:				
	Older	0.431	0.542	0.190	0.231
	Young	0.430	0.455	0.170	0.239
Spain	IU	0.451	0.768	0.515	0.518
	Podemos	0.664	0.752	0.575	0.615
	PSOE	0.494	0.646	0.372	0.410
	Ciudadanos	0.404	0.543	0.249	0.293
	PP	0.271	0.397	0.317	0.229
	Vox	0.290	0.431	0.299	0.211
	All Voters By Age:				
	Older	0.436	0.594	0.387	0.379
	Young	0.464	0.517	0.356	0.356
UK	Labour	0.526	0.623	0.423	0.396
	Greens	0.492	0.597	0.386	0.356
	LibDem	0.390	0.492	0.395	0.328
	Conservatives	0.638	0.403	0.421	0.262
	UKIP	0.653	0.499	0.353	0.179
	All Voters By Age:				
	Older	0.597	0.520	0.442	0.327
	Young	0.482	0.484	0.359	0.298

overall consistency across dimensions is much higher for PD voters' positions).

This pattern changes radically when we look at the preferences related to the integration-demarcation issues. On these issues, indeed, the most consistent positions are taken by voters for radical right parties (with consistency percentages always over 55%). The only exception is represented by the Spanish case: here, the positions of *Vox* voters on transnational issues are poorly consistent (29%), whereas the most consistent preferences (66.4%) about integration-demarcation issues are shown by *Podemos* voters. The latter are the most ideologically consistent in all the dimensions, also in comparison with other electorates in other countries. Indeed, 61.5% of positions taken by *Podemos* voters are consistent with the overarching progressive-conservative distinction.

Finally, as regards age differences, the overall picture is confirmed: in each sub-dimension, older people tend to take more consistent positions than young people (except in Austria and especially in France as for the GAL-TAN dimension, in Spain as for the integration-demarcation dimension and in Italy overall). These exceptions entail that young people's higher ideological inconsistency especially characterises their positions on economic issues.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The broad objective of this study was to investigate whether models of political space based on dimensionality can still describe issue stances among voters in western Europe or whether a deeper de-structuration of issue preferences is spreading among citizens. The article has also compared issue preferences between young and older people to investigate whether distinct generations differ in terms of ideological structuring of their issue preferences. In this regard, I hypothesised that voters' issue preferences would no longer be able to be interpreted according to a classical twentieth-century progressive–conservative ideological alignment (Middendorp, 1978), which was used to summarise both the economic and cultural stances of parties and their constituencies. The findings have confirmed this hypothesis, showing that most citizens take ideologically inconsistent positions on issues across (and in some cases even within) policy dimensions.

Going into detail, this ideological inconsistency of issue preferences in terms of the traditional overarching left-right distinction cannot be explained with a multi-dimensional model of issue space characterised by three separate dimensions: economic left-right, cultural GAL-TAN and integration-demarcation. Indeed, the results of the Mokken scaling analysis show that the three-dimensional model cannot be applied to these cases. Most cases exhibit a one-dimensional structure, although it is not the broad left-right dimension that separates progressive from conservative stances on economic and cultural issues *à la* Middendorp. Conversely, this dimension mostly corresponds to the new transnational cleavage[8]

(Hooghe & Marks, 2018) or the integration-demarcation dimension (Kriesi et al., 2006; 2008) comprising immigration and EU integration issues.

Furthermore, the analysis of party constituencies' positions showed that in the selected group of western European countries most party constituencies are quite ideologically inconsistent across dimensions, especially on the right. On the left, there is more ideological homogeneity, although significant proportions of centre-left and radical-left voters show conservative attitudes on immigration. Conversely, the electorates of centre-right and radical right parties show, on average, ideologically heterogeneous positions on both economic and cultural issues. Voters for populist radical right parties show strong preferences for both anti-immigration and anti-EU positions (except in Spain, where pro-EU stances prevail), but at the same time they combine this nationalist and exclusionist attitude with left-wing stances on most economic issues, usually more than mainstream centre-right parties. This confirms the relevance of "left-authoritarians" (Lefkofridi et al., 2014) among radical right voters who also share GAL views on several cultural issues related to personal lifestyle (e.g. euthanasia, abortion, same-sex marriage) but not on law and order issues, especially in some national contexts (e.g. the Dutch PVV) and among the young.

The ideological consistency of issue preferences of different party constituencies and age groups (youth vs. older people) has been investigated more systematically through an index of consistency of individual responses to economic, cultural and transnational items. The analysis confirms the lower ideological consistency of radical right voters, of voters for both new centrist parties and new anti-establishment parties explicitly rejecting the labels of left and right (EM in France and the M5S in Italy, although the latter shows among its voters quite consistent positions on economic issues). This result is in line with my second hypothesis. Nevertheless, I also hypothesised that mainstream parties would be more ideologically consistent. This is not always the case, especially regarding centre-right party constituencies. Moreover, electorates with more ideologically consistent positions across dimensions in terms of the classical progressive-conservative (or broad left-right) antithesis are not only mainstream centre-left party constituencies (e.g. PD in Italy, PS in France, Labour Party in the UK) but also new radical left (e.g. *Podemos* in Spain) and Green party constituencies (especially in Austria, in Germany and in the Netherlands). The latter are also the most coherently progressive on cultural issues, whereas

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[8] In this study, the focus is on political dimensions of the issue space rather than on cleavages. The latter indeed regard salient issues in which different social groups identify themselves and are mobilised by parties. However, as regards issues related to the transnational or integration-demarcation dimension, these are also very salient issues, especially immigration issues for right-wing voters and EU issues for voters for mainstream or green parties (the saliency of each issue is reported in Tables A1–A41 in Supplemental Appendix A). And several political parties, especially populist radical right parties, have mobilised voters

on such issues. Hence, this dimension shows the potentialities to be or become a political cleavage.

radical right voters are the most coherently nationalist on transnational issues. Finally, radical left and centre-left voters take the most (left-wing) consistent positions on economic issues.

In general, however, the across-dimension ideological consistency of positions on issues is low, confirming again my first hypothesis: voters' positions on cultural, economic and transnational issues are quite inconsistent, no longer aligning with the traditional progressive-conservative ideological distinction. This general inconsistency is accentuated in the young sample, in line with my third hypothesis, although differences between older and young people are not huge and there are exceptions. Furthermore, young people's positions are ideologically inconsistent mostly as regards economic issues.

To conclude, the economic left-right dimension, which for decades shaped political oppositions and alignments in western Europe, seems to have lost its ability to structure voters' issue preferences. This is not something totally new. Previous studies suggest that voters have a multidimensional understanding of economic issues (Otjes, 2016), showing that citizens who support principles such as egalitarianism do not necessarily endorse the tool that is meant to achieve it – the welfare state (Achterberg et al., 2011) – or they are not necessarily economic interventionists (Otjes, 2014) or that voters who support policies meant to achieve equal outcomes do not necessarily support policies that are meant to achieve equal opportunities (Fossati & Häusermann, 2014). This study confirms these findings, even when the focus is on specific economic policy goals on which parties in different countries and with different ideologies have campaigned. This does not mean that citizens' views on economic issues are completely inconsistent, as we have seen.

Furthermore, the loss of the structuring ability of the two dimensions (cultural and economic) along which traditional party positions could be synthesised does not mean that citizens' preferences are totally destructured from an ideological standpoint. Indeed, the new transnational dimension related to immigration and EU issues seems to have replaced the previous ones in terms of its capacity to order citizens' views on relevant political issues, both among young and older people. In other words, rather than destructuration it seems more appropriate to speak of re-structuration. This is quite reassuring. Indeed, as Downs (1957) clarified a long time ago, unidimensionality is a desirable property of democracy because it limits the risk of intransitive unstable collective preference rankings (Arrow, 1951).

As regards the differences between young and older people, given that this analysis is cross-sectional, it is not possible to draw too strong conclusions about long-term changes driven by generational differences. In other words, we do not know if the observed higher ideological inconsistency of young people is a consequence of the fact that young people are always less involved in politics compared to older ones (life-cycle effect) or rather because they have been socialized in a particular historical period which entailed a radical and long-lasting value change (generation effect). In this regard, this research has provided only preliminary mixed evidence. On the one hand, the observed lower ideological consistency among young people could signal a generational divide similar to that driven by the rise of post-materialism, which was mainly about a change in value priorities (Inglehart, 1990). On the other hand, we have seen that the differences between young and older people in terms of issue positions are not huge, being relevant mainly among voters of the populist radical right. This would not be evidence of a clear generational pattern. Hence, further research is needed. In particular, three paths appear promising: first, beyond positions on issues, the salience of issues should be also analysed to explore whether young and older people differ especially in terms of priorities, rather than in terms of positions on policy issues; second, longitudinal dynamics should be considered through a panel research design to fully disentangle life-cycle effects from generation effects; third, the interaction between age and other individual characteristics (e.g. partisanship, political interest, education) should be investigated to formulate and test conditional hypotheses about the determinants of ideological (in)consistency.

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Two is better than one? Testing a deductive MARPOR-based left-right index on Western Europe (1999-2019)

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Abstract. Most of the existing indexes measuring parties' left-right positions through Manifesto Project (MARPOR) data, including the 'RILE', share a partially or fully inductive nature and an underlying assumption of left-right unidimensionality. However, as the structure of party competition in contemporary Western Europe has been recently moving away from traditional 'left-libertarian/right-authoritarian' patterns, the inductive and unidimensional characteristics of such instruments may hinder the quality of their measurements. In this article, I introduce and develop a new left-right instrument, which is wholly deductive and relies on an explicit linkage with theoretical sources in the conceptualisation of economic and cultural left and right as the basis for the subsequent index operationalisation through the justified selection of MARPOR items. After deriving the individual deductive economic and cultural left-right scores and employing them in the mathematical formalisation of a synthetic left-right measure to be compared with existing unidimensional instruments, I perform a comparison between the new left-right index and the RILE. Both instruments are empirically tested on a dataset made covering the 20-year period between 1999 and 2019 in 16 Western European countries, for a total of 72 elections and 474 party-election combinations. More specifically, the statistical probes take the form of rank correlation analyses between the election-specific left-right rankings of each index and those provided by the external benchmark of the "Chapel Hill Expert Survey" (CHES). Results are mixed and indicate that, whilst more traditional patterns of competition seem to still apply across the board in pre-Great-Recession years, the new left-right index is a more valid measure of parties' left-right positions both in the 'turbulent times' of the 2010s and in the vast majority of the areas across the region. This is especially true in Southern Europe, for which the RILE is known to be particularly problematic. Hence, this work calls for further discussion on the different patterns of Western European party competition across space and time, as well as differentiated and context-specific deductive left-right measurement.

Keywords: left-right index, party manifestos, political parties, elections, Western Europe, 1999-2019.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the scientific analysis of the electoral supply-side and party competition throughout decades of research, scholars have been interested – perhaps

above all – in measuring the left-right positions of political formations. To do so, they have employed a number of different data sources on party positions, amongst which are mass surveys, elite surveys (e.g., Benoit & Laver, 2006), roll call data (e.g., Poole & Rosenthal, 1985; Hix, 2002), political texts at large analysed through wordscoring (e.g., Laver, Benoit, & Garry, 2003), and party manifestos. With regard to the latter, the vast majority of researchers relied on the Manifesto Project (MARPOR): an incredibly rich source of longitudinal and cross-sectional data on party positions codified through electoral manifestos, which also provides a ready-made left-right measure, the 'RILE' (Budge & Klingemann, 2001), that, due to its accessibility and coverage, was bound to become routinely used in the literature. Despite the numerous existing criticisms stemming from the unavoidable scrutiny that it was subjected to, so far critics of the RILE, have not focused on issues of left-right dimensionality. These are important, as they relate to two broader questions in the measurement of left-right positions in party competition. Empirically, by focussing on contemporary Western Europe, we know that the structuring of party competition in spaces of contestation traditionally defined as two-dimensional has evolved from occurring along a main 'left-libertarian/right-authoritarian' axis (e.g., Kitschelt, 1992, 1994) to more original and unstructured patterns, challenging '20th-century ideological consistency' (De Sio & Lachat, 2020). This then relates to a second issue, which concerns conceptualisation and operationalisation: that is, existing instruments measuring left-right positions through manifesto data are mostly unidimensional in nature and, even when they are two-dimensional, they often overlook the theoretical meaning of left and right. In view of these changing patterns of party competition and given that – by definition – even spatial analogies that on paper look appropriate 'cannot convey all of that political world' (e.g., Weisberg, 1974), such unidimensional instruments may prove far from ideal to properly measure the composite, two-dimensional left-right positions that challenge traditional sets of party positions in contemporary politics across Western Europe.

It is in this light that I aim at achieving two goals in this article: (a) the introduction of a deductive left-right index, which measures such positions by both explicitly conceptualising and operationalising left-right semantics and applying to both the economic and cultural issue dimension; and (b) an empirical test of this instrument vis-à-vis the most prominent alternative amongst existing manifesto-based left-right measures, the MARPOR's own RILE, to assess the patterns of party competition in contemporary Western Europe (1999-2019). After relying on both seminal and more contemporary literature for the deductive foundation of my index and mathematically formalising its construction, I empirically test my measure against the RILE. I do so by performing a series of rank correlation analyses of the two indexes in terms of left-right party placement in Western Europe (1999-2019) vis-à-vis the external benchmark represented by the most widely employed comparative expert survey, the 'Chapel Hill Expert Survey' (CHES) (Bakker et al., 2020). Results are nuanced and have important implications both empirically and methodologically. Indeed, my original measure based on an explicit conceptualisation of left-right semantics along two main issue dimensions outperforms the RILE in the 2010s, confirming what we know from existing evidence with regard to party competition across the continent becoming more 'unstructured' from a traditional viewpoint. However, before the outbreak of the Great Recession patterns of electoral competition seem still structured along the usual main 'left-right' axis, collapsed along a single underlying dimension, as the RILE performs best during those years. Yet, the findings also highlight some interesting territorial variation across Western Europe, especially in the case of Southern European countries, where the RILE is notoriously problematic and the index introduced here performs much better. Hence, the introduction of a deductive and two-dimensional manifesto-based left-right index seems to lead to improved measurement in specific spatial-temporal contexts, pointing towards the necessity of a methodological discussion concerning differentiated and context-specific deductive left-right measurement.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows: the following section will introduce the theoretical framework, by focussing on the evolution of party competition dynamics in Western Europe, the conceptualisation of left-right semantics and its application in two-dimensional structures of party competition, and existing MARPOR-based left-right measures. Next, it will present the research design and methods, before developing the original deductive measure of left-right positions along two issue dimensions by, first, justifying the theory-based selection of MARPOR items making it up and, second, mathematically formalising its construction into a synthetic score. Results will follow, and I will conclude by recapping the article's contributions.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 The evolution of party competition dynamics in Western Europe

The heuristic tool of the 'political space' posits that the positions of parties and voters are ordered along

issue dimensions. The literature assumes that Western European political spaces are two-dimensional, with two main dimensions of contestation (e.g., Kitschelt, 1992; Kriesi et al., 2006; van der Brug & van Spanje, 2009).[1] The horizontal axis of Western European political spaces represents the economic conflict, which revolves around the allocation of economic resources (e.g., Knutsen, 1989). Instead, non-economic matters defined as 'authoritarian' versus 'libertarian' (Flanagan & Lee, 2003), 'materialist/old politics' versus 'postmaterialist/new politics' (e.g., Inglehart, 1984), or 'Green-Alternative-Libertarian (GAL)' versus 'Traditional-Authoritarian-Nationalist (TAN)' positions (Hooghe, Marks, & Wilson, 2002) are subsumed under the vertical axis. This axis will be referred to as the cultural dimension.

Within such spaces, which are two-dimensional, empirical evidence shows that the actual patterns of party competition in Western Europe have changed over time (e.g., Rovny & Whitefield, 2019). What is meant here by patterns of competition is the clustering of the formations from a party system within such two-dimensional political spaces when competing in a given electoral contest, which will depend on the specific economic and cultural positions that they adopt and, hence, can be dimensionally configured in different ways.

Indeed, according to Kitschelt's 'axis of competition' argument (1992), in post-war decades the supply-side of electoral politics was organised along a single diagonal dimension, ranging from left-libertarian to right-authoritarian. Parties of the left adopted economic left and libertarian positions (Rovny, 2014; Rosset, Lutz, & Kissau, 2016), whilst right-wing formations presented economic right and authoritarian stances (Rovny, 2013). This meant that, effectively, the patterns of party competition across the region were structured in a unidimensional fashion (e.g., Bakker, Jolly, & Polk, 2012).

However, as parties increasingly deviated from this pattern, non-unidimensional dynamics of competition gained prominence in the literature (e.g., Bakker & Hobolt, 2013, p. 37).[2] Recent contributions (De Sio & Lachat, 2020) illustrate the increasing challenge to 'ideological consistency in 20th-century terms', especially in the post-Great-Recession decade of the 2010s. That is, presented with new electoral opportunities provided by the distribution of voters in the two-dimensional political space, several parties adopt strategies that combine economic and cultural stances innovatively. This results in a greater degree of off-diagonality from the traditional main axis of competition, with parties now further and more often deviating from it. Examples are the radical right (RRPs), which can associate either economic right or relatively left-of-centre positions with authoritarian stances (e.g., Hillen & Steiner, 2020; Wahl, 2020); 'left-authoritarians', which couple economic left and authoritarian positions (e.g., Lefkofridi, Wagner, & Willman, 2014); and 'free-market cosmopolitans', with their economic right and libertarian posture (De Sio & Lachat, 2020).

2.2 Left-right semantics in two-dimensional structures

Left-right accounts of party positions are mostly unidimensional. However, by reconstructing the theoretical meaning of left and right, it can easily be demonstrated how these concepts are applicable beyond unidimensional conceptions. Left and right simplify political complexities, thus being a general principle of orientation for communicating about politics (Laponce, 1981; Dalton, 2002). Yet, their conceptual meaning is frequently overlooked, due not only to their frequent usage, but also to their capability of absorbing new conflicts (Fuchs & Klingemann, 1990). To solve this issue, I believe a deductive approach should be adopted: that is, it is necessary to take a step back from practical applications and focus instead on theoretical sources.

Conceptually, we know from both seminal and more contemporary contributions that the left-right divide encapsulates conflict on three fundamental issues (e.g., White, 2011, 2013): inequality, social change, and human nature. The views on the first two of these fault lines derive from those on the latter, with left and right coherently associating stances on these matters. Firstly, regarding inequality, the left seeks the rectification of social inequalities (Bobbio, 1997; Anderson, 1998; Lukes, 2003; White, 2011), both economic (e.g., Bartolini & Mair, 1990), i.e. related to material conditions, and cultural (Noel & Therien, 2008), i.e. related to rights. These accounts describe the right as the pole that tolerates inequality. Secondly, the left and right are concerned with historical social change that goes in an egalitarian direction (Inglehart, 1984). This is described as the very mission of the left (Bobbio, 1997), while the right aims at preserving the existing social order (e.g., Thorisdottir et al., 2007). Thirdly, the most crucial distinction between the left and right concerns their views on human nature. As Bobbio (1997) argues, for the left what makes peo-

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[1] There are exceptions to this assumption, with some (e.g., Bakker, Jolly, & Polk, 2012) suggesting that party competition in Western Europe is structured along three dimensions. However, others argue that European integration does not constitute a full-fledged axis of party competition on its own (e.g., Marks et al., 2006), and that it is subsumed under the vertical cultural conflict (Kriesi et al., 2006).

[2] Yet, some authors argue that contemporary Western European party competition is shaped by unidimensional dynamics (e.g., van der Brug & van Spanje, 2009).
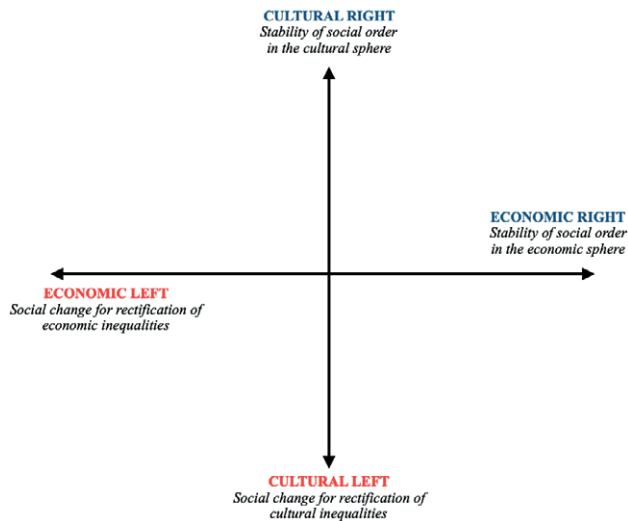
Figure 1. Left-right semantics in two-dimensional political spaces.

ple similar is more than what sets them apart, and the opposite is true for the right. Hence, conceiving the social order is a coherent extension of how the two poles view the natural order, permeating every contraposition between them.

In empirical investigations, the left-right opposition is subsumed under a single axis, in which cultural issues used are consistently associated with either of the two economic poles. This is in line with the broader idea of 'ideological consistency in 20ᵗʰ-century terms' (De Sio & Lachat, 2020). However, considering the illustrated theoretical meaning and heuristic function of these concepts, left and right can be applied beyond unidimensional structures of party competition. Indeed, several contributions already mention the existence of both economic and non-economic, or cultural, left-right positions (e.g., van der Brug & van Spanje, 2009; Hillen & Steiner, 2020).

Hence, left-right semantics can be applied to the economic and cultural dimensions making up two-dimensional political spaces in Western Europe according to the literature. Such an effort would result in a situation as per Figure 1. Here, whilst the usual, traditional economic divide is located horizontally, the vertical axis constitutes an application of left-right semantics to the cultural dimension in Western Europe. As such, a further point of clarification is needed. That is, to borrow from language often employed, for instance, in set-theoretic methods (e.g., Schneider & Wagemann, 2012), the cultural left-right dimension is a subset of the general cultural dimensions making up Western European political spaces. This means that there is no necessary overlap between all cultural issues and all cultural left-right issues. Rather, only those cultural issues that fit the

presented theoretical definition and conceptualisation of left and right, and hence reflect the illustrated division on whether to rectify cultural inequalities through social change or not, will belong to the cultural-left right dimension. This means that the cultural left-right dimension will encompass a smaller number of issues than the general cultural dimension, which will also include cultural themes that are not related to the illustrated left-right semantics.

2.3 Left-right measurement and (uni)dimensionality through manifesto data

The MARPOR dataset is one of the most widely employed data sources on electoral supply, due to its longitudinal scope and cross-sectional extension (e.g., Laver & Garry, 2000). Consequently, its party left-right measure, the RILE, has been thoroughly scrutinised and criticised from three viewpoints: methodological, theoretical, and in terms of measurement validity. Methodologically, the use of factor analysis is problematic because of issues such as sampling adequacy, interpretation of the many dimensions extracted, and violations of the linearity assumption (Franzmann & Kaiser, 2006; Jahn, 2010; Gemenis, 2013). Theoretically, the coding categories making up the left and right are criticised for being too outdated (Pennings & Keman, 2002). Moreover, Jahn (2014) argues that MARPOR authors neglect theory in their deductive *a priori* selection of items, whilst only mentioning political thinkers and politicians alike as sources for what is left and right in later publications. Finally, the RILE has well-known measurement validity issues, especially as it notoriously produces invalid estimates of party positions in Southern European countries such as Greece (Dinas & Gemenis, 2010), Italy (Pelizzo, 2003), and Portugal (Budge & Klingemann, 2001). Moreover, RILE estimates have a systematic centrist bias (e.g., Mikhaylov, Laver, & Benoit, 2012), which I argue might derive from including MARPOR items that do not pertain theoretically to left and right.

Several different MARPOR-based positional indexes have been proposed to address the presented issues. However, none of the alternatives took issues with the RILE's assumption of left-right unidimensionality, which is also present in such instruments.[3] This discrepancy between the unidimensionality of the MARPOR-based instruments routinely used to measure party left-right positions and the actual non-unidimensionality of the

[3] Despite not developing an alternative index, Zulianello (2014) criticises the RILE on theoretical grounds for assuming that the political space is structured by a unidimensional left-right conflict.

configuration of parties economic and cultural left-right positions emerging in recent times (e.g., De Sio & Lachat, 2020) may be problematic. This is because the unidimensional spatial analogy may not be the most fitting one to represent patterns of party competition and economic left-right and cultural positions within two-dimensional political spaces in contemporary Western European (e.g., Weisberg, 1974).

Indeed, purely (Budge, 1987; Laver & Budge, 1992) and partially inductive (Klingemann, 1995) factor-analytic approaches adopted by MARPOR investigators employ the same conception of left-right dimensionality. Works outside of the MARPOR remit also explicitly operationalise a single left-right continuum (Gabel & Huber, 2000; Franzmann & Kaiser, 2006; Jahn, 2010; Elff, 2013).

Partially different considerations ought to be applied to the indexes developed by Bakker and Hobolt (2013): that is, two left-right indicators alongside two additional 'libertarian-authoritarian' and 'EU integration' instruments, to capture multidimensional patterns of party competition. Still, they only inductively introduce 'economic' and a 'general left-right' measures, which are very similar to one another, without developing a non-economic left-right index.[4] Similar reasoning applies to Prosser's (2014) 'economic left-right' and 'social liberal conservative' scales, which are developed on inductive grounds only and without prior theoretical justification, not relating conceptually second-dimension issues to left and right. Furthermore, as already noted for the RILE (Keman, 2007), additional problems of measurement validity might emerge in these indexes due to the variety of issues subsumed under these left-right scales. Dolezal et al. (2016), instead, did already develop separate 'economic left-right' and 'cultural left-right' indexes, hence explicitly distinguishing different components of left and right. However, three aspects are problematic: firstly, in this case too the authors did not conceptualise economic and cultural left-right with reference to theoretical sources, thus only proceeding inductively. Moreover, their indexes present limited spatial applicability, as they were specifically devised for Austria only.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

The presented review of the literature highlighted the necessity of developing a MARPOR-based left-right measure that can recognise non-unidimensional patterns of party competition in contemporary Western

Europe. Additionally, I argue that this instrument ought to be developed deductively, differently from most of the available alternatives. The need for deduction stems from deficiencies specific to inductive approaches, such as the potential lack of construct validity deriving from the absence of any theoretical reference linking the selected MARPOR items to left and right (Drost, 2011). Moreover, results yielded by statistical techniques in terms of which scale components to employ are data-specific, and therefore different datasets are very likely to generate different indexes and scores (e.g., Prosser, 2014).[5] Instead, by relying on the aforementioned conceptualisation of left and right as the basis for index operationalisation (Adcock & Collier, 2001), I aim to develop a deductive measure of left-right positions that can be economic or cultural in nature.

On this basis, the next steps of the article will be, firstly, the illustration and justification of the deductive selection of the MARPOR categories making up the economic and cultural left-right poles of the introduced index. Secondly, in line with the logical quantitative modelling approach (Taagepera, 2008), I will formalise the construction of the index as a single synthetic left-right score, grounded in two left-right measures specific

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[4] Bakker and Hobolt's (2013) 'general left-right' index corresponds to the RILE.

[5] An application of Gabel and Huber's (2000) 'vanilla' method is highly illustrative of this point. This consists of performing a principal factor analysis of all 56 MARPOR main categories, extracting the first factor and assuming that it is the left-right dimension, hence making up the left and right poles of the index by looking at the direction (i.e., the sign) of factor loadings. I replicate their procedure on all data available in the MARPOR dataset concerning the entirety of the Western European region (i.e., the following 19 countries: Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom) for the covered twenty-year period (1999-2019). The results are reported in Table A1 in the Appendix. As evident, several contradictions emerge from the application of this purely inductive method, which should lead to seriously questioning the validity of the left-right measurement based on it. First, given this method employs all MARPOR categories regardless of the presence (or lack thereof) of any theoretical connection to the political left and right, the resulting index employs scale components that have nothing to do with these concepts specifically (e.g., the per106 on 'Peace' being exclusively linked to the left and the per410 on 'Economic Growth: Positive' being exclusively linked to the right). Second, even by conceptually stretching some of such associations, a number of MARPOR items are scale components of the pole that seems the furthest away from them theoretically (e.g., the per103 on 'Anti-Imperialism' is associated with the right, and the per606 on 'social harmony' – see, e.g., Jahn, 2010 – with the left). Third, this operation results in some of the opposite positional items available in the MARPOR codebook being included in the same pole (e.g., both the positive and negative items on 'Protectionism' with the right, and both the positive and negative items on 'Constitutionalism' with the left). These issues, which should evidently call into question the validity of such measurements, stem directly from the purely inductive nature of the 'vanilla' method, as they determine and measure left-right positions based only on empirical associations that, in turn, depend entirely on the specific data at hand.

to the economic and cultural issue dimensions, which will allow comparability in terms of measurement and performance with other existing indexes whilst, at the same time, still making it possible to rely on the two individual economic and cultural left-right scores to identify parties' left-right position in a two-dimensional space.

Whilst the deductive development of my measure will ensure its construct validity (Drost, 2011), in the empirical part of the article I will test this index against the RILE by assessing the respective measurements vis-à-vis the external benchmark constituted by CHES data (Bakker et al., 2020). Methodologically, this will take the form of several rank correlation tests by employing Spearman's ρ coefficient (e.g., Prion & Haerling, 2014), to identify which between the two measures is the better indicator of party placement vis-à-vis the election-specific left-right ranks determined by CHES data. In terms of spatial-temporal framework and, consequently, case selection, to allow for the largest possible scope of analysis, I will cover all elections in every Western European country for which and to the extent that both main sources of data, that is the MARPOR and CHES, provide information. This criterion allows for taking into consideration the 20-year period between 1999 and 2019 and 16 countries, for a total of 72 elections and 474 party-election combinations.[6] The distribution of electoral contests across each country is reported in Table A2 in the Appendix.

4. INDEX DEVELOPMENT

4.1 Deductive selection of index' scale components

The first step in developing the original left-right index is the deductive selection of the MARPOR categories making up the individual economic and cultural left-right scores. Based on the presented conceptualisation of left and right, the focus now turns to the operationalisation of these concepts (Adcock & Collier, 2001), in which the selection of scale components ought to occur and be justified with explicit reference to the literature. As to the economic left-right dimension, the selected MARPOR items are, in the left pole, market regulation and social market economy (per403), economic planning (per404), the protection of internal markets (per406), Keynesian demand management, social expenditure and support through public spend-

ing (per409), introducing minimum wages (per412), nationalisation of essential services to enlarge access to them (per413), expansion of welfare state (per504) and educational provisions (per506), and support for labour groups (per702); in the right pole, free-market economy and promotion of unhampered personal enterprise (per401), supply-side economic policies and preference for assisting businesses rather than consumers (per402), free trade and opening up markets in an opposition to protectionism (per407), economic orthodoxy, austerity policies and reduction of public expenditure in the face of crises (per414), limitation of welfare state (per505) and educational provisions (per507), and opposition to labour groups (per702).

These categories were chosen as they all specifically relate to overcoming economic inequalities on the left and trying to replicate the natural order amongst men in the economic system on the right. In particular, the desire to regulate capitalism is identified within the 'social Keynesianism' strand of economic left-wing thought (e.g., Heine, 2010), which in traditional left-wing economic practice is amongst the objectives to be achieved through long-term planning. Moreover, national economies should be sheltered from external competition and pressures, which may be particularly impactful first and foremost for workers. Additionally, demand-side economic policies to support the weakest in society and allow access to fundamental services to as many people as possible are also key characteristics of the political left. These goals are reflected in the items that operationalise policies such as the expansion of social expenditure and economic intervention, introducing minimum wages and nationalising key services, expanding the access to the welfare state in its Beveridgean (1942) conception and hence including education services, and guaranteeing better conditions for workers. Conversely, the political right usually takes the opposite stance on such positions, as its greater focus on unhampered individual freedoms translates into less support from the state to people in disadvantaged economic positions, with such differences usually perpetuated in 'pure' market economies (e.g., Böhm, 1979). Hence, it is in this spirit that links ideas of societal structure and inequality that the political right traditionally pursues economic growth without concerns for distributive outcomes (e.g., Boix, 1997). Specifically, this occurs both through free-market supply-side economic policies devised as an incentive for private investments, the anti-protectionism viewpoint concerning the opposition to interferences with free markets, and running balanced budgets by cutting down on social expenditures at large, as operationalised in the selected MARPOR items.

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[6] The included countries are Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

The cultural left-right dimension includes, in the left pole, the MARPOR codes concerning opposing war and conflicts given they harm fellow human beings (per105), support for human, civil and refugee rights (per201.2), negative attitudes towards nationalism and discrimination coupled with positive views on immigration (per602), secularist stances supportive of issues such as same-sex families and abortion whilst opposed to traditional morality (per604), rejection of stronger policing and measures such as the death penalty, coupled with liberal stances on issues such as drugs and prostitution (per605.2), promoting multiculturalism, diversity and indigenous rights (per607), and defending non-economic underprivileged minorities (per705); in the right pole, supporting greater military capacity for self-defence and external security against threats (per104), positively viewing nationalism and the suspension of some freedoms to prevent subversion, coupled with opposing immigration (per601), traditional religious and moral stances favourable to maintaining the existing social order, both public and private (per603), a tough 'law and order' view of society for internal security (per605.1), national solidarity (per606), and cultural assimilation in opposition to multiculturalism (per608).

As with the economic left-right dimension, these MARPOR categories explicitly deal with the expansion of rights and equal treatment of all men on the left and with supporting and preserving clear sociocultural distinctions amongst different people on the right. In this regard, the political left combines its more antimilitarian character with the focus on promoting and extending human rights (e.g., Rathbun, 2004; Fonck, Haesebrouck, & Reykers, 2018), as well as broader rights that reduce non-economic forms of inequality between people coming from different countries, cultures, and underprivileged categories, in a universalistic ethos. Conversely, the literature also shows that the opposite approach is taken up by the political right as it has a much narrower conception of the national interest – which, similarly to the existing external and internal order, is to be preserved also through force –, and hence the social status, position, and rights of different people on this basis, as well as the solidarity that is owed to them. These elements are to be coupled with traditional stances on moral and religious issues, typical of conservative postures and again preserving clear differences

between people, very much in a Tocquevillian fashion (e.g., Lakoff, 1998, p. 444). As per the economic left-right score, the cultural version also operationalises all the illustrated aspects of cultural left and right conceptualised on the basis of the literature through the employed MARPOR items.

Figure 2 summarises the scale components of the original left-right index introduced here.[7] Lastly, in this deductive selection not only the inclusion of some MARPOR categories, but also the exclusion of others requires a detailed justification. For reasons of space, this is reported in the Appendix.

4.2 Formalisation of synthetic left-right measure

By using the presented MARPOR items for two separate indicators of economic and cultural left-right, it is possible to locate party left-right positions on a plane. As illustrated, this measurement occurs on a deductive basis, that is by operationalising an explicit conceptualisation of left and right through the selection of scale components. It follows from this that it would also be possible to derive a general left-right score from this two-dimensional and theory-based placement of parties. The utility of this lies in the possibility of comparing, through a synthetic score, the left-right placements of my measure with the vast majority of existing alternatives, whilst still being able to represent parties' left-right positions in a two-unidimensional space through the individual economic and cultural scores.

Summarising the economic and cultural left-right positions of parties into a single value would graphically

Economic Left	Cultural Left
per403 - Market Regulation	per105 - Military: Negative
per404 - Economic Planning	per201.2 - Human Rights
per406 - Protectionism: Positive	per602 - National Way of Life: Negative
per409 - Keynesian Demand Management	per604 - Traditional Morality: Negative
per412 - Controlled Economy	per605.2 - Law and Order: Negative
per413 - Nationalisation	per607 - Multiculturalism: Positive
per504 - Welfare State Expansion	per705 - Underprivileged Minority Groups
per506 - Education Expansion	
per701 - Labour Groups: Positive	
Economic Right	Cultural Right
per401 - Free Market Economy	per104 - Military: Positive
per402 - Incentives: Positive	per601 - National Way of Life: Positive
per407 - Protectionism: Negative	per603 - Traditional Morality: Negative
per414 - Economic Orthodoxy	per605.1 - Law and Order: Positive
per505 - Welfare State Limitation	per606 - Civic Mindedness: Positive
per507 - Education Limitation	per608 - Multiculturalism: Negative
per702 - Labour Groups: Negative	

Figure 2. Scale components of the original left-right index.

[7] Although hardly appropriate due to the ipsative nature of MARPOR data (see, e.g., Chan, 2003), the routinely employed Cronbach's alpha test to check if the items employed in MARPOR-based positional indexes fit together empirically, performed against all available Western European observations in the MARPOR database between 1999 and 2019, results in a 0.1 improvement in the score of the original left-right index vis-à-vis the one of the RILE (Cronbach's alpha values of, respectively, 0.63 and 0.53). In relative terms, this indicates a better empirical fit with the data of the new instrument compared to the MARPOR's measure with regard to the internal consistency of these instruments in the analysed spatial-temporal framework.

correspond to projecting each point in the plane, representing party positions as indicated by their economic and cultural left-right scores, on a diagonal line synthesising the two left-right domains. As a preliminary step, consider projecting a point $P(x_p, y_p)$ on a line $r:y = mx$, whereby m is the slope of r. The slope, which is the ratio between cultural (y-axis) and economic (x-axis) left-right, effectively represents the relative weight of the two dimensions in determining the summary projected score.[8] For ease of interpretation and comparability, I assume here that the economic and cultural components of parties' left-right positions across the analysed elections weigh the same, although a more granular assessment of this assumption – which is beyond the scope of the article –may show otherwise depending on the specific case. Hence, this method makes it possible to empirically assess, e.g., vis-à-vis an external benchmark, which assumption as to the relation between the economic and cultural left-right dimensions is the best fit to place parties in terms of their left-right positions, by changing the value of the slope (m).

With this in mind, it is then possible to derive the equation to orthogonally project a point on a line in general terms. It was already shown that point $P(x_p, y_p)$ ought to be projected on line $r:y = mx$. To do so, it is necessary to first derive the equation of line s, which passes through point P and is itself orthogonal to line r. In general, the equation of a line passing through a point given its slope and the coordinates of the point is $y - y\_p = m(x - x\_p)$. Given that line s must be orthogonal to line r, and that the slopes of two perpendicular lines are each other's negative reciprocal, it follows that $ms = -1/mr$ and, therefore, assuming that $mr = m$, the equation

of line s will be $s:y - y\_p = -1/m(x - x\_p)$. By considering the equations of lines r and s in a system, it follows that:

$$\begin{cases} y = mx \\ y - y\_p = -1/m(x - x\_p) \end{cases} \tag{1}$$

The system is then resolved in the following steps:

$$\begin{cases} y = mx \\ mx - y\_p = -1/m(x - x\_p) \end{cases} \tag{2}$$

$$\begin{cases} y = mx \\ y - y\_p = -\dfrac{x}{m} + \dfrac{x\_p}{m} \end{cases} \tag{3}$$

$$\begin{cases} y = mx \\ mx + \dfrac{x}{m} = \dfrac{x\_p}{m} + y\_p \end{cases} \tag{4}$$

$$\begin{cases} y = mx \\ x\left(m + \dfrac{1}{m}\right) = \dfrac{x\_p}{m} + y\_p \end{cases} \tag{5}$$

In the final step, the general system of equations for identifying the coordinates of the projection of point P on the line r can be identified, given the value of slope $mr = m$:

$$\begin{cases} y = mx \\ x = \dfrac{\dfrac{x\_p}{m} + y\_p}{m + \dfrac{1}{m}} \end{cases} \tag{6}$$

Hence, it is now possible to obtain the coordinates of P_r, i.e. the orthogonal projection of point P on line r, by substituting the known coordinates of point $P(x_p, y_p)$ and the slope in equation (6). Therefore, this general system of equations is applicable to any assumption concerning the relative weight of economic and cultural left-right in party competition. At this point, it is then necessary to translate the coordinates of P_r into a single numerical value, in order to summarise the two-dimensional theory-based left-right positions into a general left-right score. To do this, it is possible to rely on the equation for deriving the distance of a point from another one, which in general terms can be expressed as the squared root of the sum of the squared horizontal and vertical distances, i.e. $\sqrt{(x2 - x1)^2 + (y2 - y1)^2}$. Here, $x2$ and $x1$ represent the coordinates on the x-axis of, respectively, P_r and the point from which one is meas-

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[8] A potential additional application of this methodological approach is that the underlying process will yield different results according to the adopted assumption on the weight of the two issue dimensions in party competition, which can be operationalised by the slope of such a diagonal line. That is, depending on whether the economic and cultural domains are assumed to have the same or different importance for parties' political offer, both the slope of the diagonal and the summary scores that will be derived by employing the economic and cultural left-right indicators will be different. This would allow testing different assumptions concerning the salience of the different issue dimensions in each specific context, either in a confirmatory or exploratory fashion. For instance, if one considers the quadrant of the plane where both the horizontal and vertical dimensions take on positive values, an m of 4 would entail a much more inclined line as values on the y-axis would equate to those on the x-axis multiplied by four. Vice-versa, an m of ¼ would result in a much flatter line, as this time values on the x-axis would correspond to those on the y-axis multiplied by four. By substituting economic and cultural left-right respectively to the x- and y-axis, the value of the slope (m) represents the relationship between these two dimensions in terms of their importance for party competition. In the first case ($m=4$) the projected coordinate will be mostly determined by the y-coordinate of a point, while in the second case ($m=¼$) it will be mostly determined by the x-coordinate.

uring the distance; the same reasoning applies to the y-axis, with $y2$ and $y1$ respectively the coordinates along this dimension of Pr and the point from which the distance is being measured. Given P_r, of which the coordinates are now known, it is possible to derive its summary score by calculating its distance from the origin $O(0, 0)$. Indeed, if there were a point $P_0(0, 0)$ coinciding with the origin O, substituting its coordinates in the presented general system of equations for orthogonally projecting a point P on the line r would result in a point with the same coordinates: $P_{0r}(0, 0)$, also coinciding with the origin O. Hence, this means that a perfectly centrist party (i.e., with economic and cultural left-right scores of 0) will always remain a perfectly centrist party, regardless of the weight assigned to either of the two dimensions. This makes it ideal as a reference point from which to calculate the distance of other points. Therefore, by substituting 0 for both $x1$ and $x2$, it is possible to obtain:

$$\sqrt{((x2 - 0)^2 + (y2 - 0)^2)} \tag{7}$$

It follows that:

$$\sqrt{((x2)^2 + (y2)^2)} \tag{8}$$

Hence, equation (8) is the general equation for deriving summary left-right scores by employing the x- and y-axis coordinates of the projection of a given point, measured through the deductive economic and cultural left-right instruments, on a line with any given value of the slope m, representing the relative importance of the economic and cultural left-right dimensions in party competition.

As mentioned above, by following the presented deductive aggregation of MARPOR items and index formalisation, the version of the original left-right index constructed here is the one with $m = 1$, hence assuming that economic and cultural left-right have the same importance in party competition. Table 1 presents summary statistics for this instrument and the RILE related to all 474 observations.

Firstly, by looking at the negative sign of the mean values taken on by both instruments, it is possible to observe how the average positioning of Western European parties in the last 20 years is left-of-centre in general terms. Another interesting conclusion can be derived by looking at the standard deviation and range between minimum and maximum value empirically taken on by these instruments in the employed dataset. Indeed, the original left-right index introduced here presents smaller standard deviations and ranges compared to the RILE, which may be due to the inclusion in the MARPOR's

Table 1. Summary statistics for the original left-right index and RILE.

	Original left-right index	RILE
Mean	-13.14	-6.79
Standard deviation	17	19.25
Min	-53.57	-52.67
Max	45	70.59
Range	98.57	123.26
Theoretical min	-100	-100
Theoretical max	100	100
obs.	474	474

measure of very broad and general items (for instance, the per202 on democracy in the left pole and the per203 on positive views concerning constitutionalism in the right pole) that do not seem to have much in common with the presented theory-based conceptualisation of left and right.

5. EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

A preliminary step in the empirical analysis is assessing the convergent validity (Drost, 2011) of the newly introduced left-right index with the RILE: that is, if the measurements of the same object – in this, parties' left-right positions – made by these two alternative instruments are in accordance with each other. To do so, I calculate the related Pearson's r value between the two instruments, which can take scores between -1 (perfect negative correlation) and 1 (perfect positive correlation), with 0 meaning no correlation. The related r score of 0.88, significant at $p<0.001$ and calculated over all 474 observations in the dataset, indicates a strong positive correlation (Ross, 2017), reassuring about the different indexes converging in their measurement of the same object.

Convergent validity tests also ought to be performed vis-à-vis survey expert data from the CHES, which is another instrument measuring parties' left-right positions but external to the MARPOR. This is an important step in determining which between the new left-right index introduced here and the RILE provides better measurement of parties left-right positions, and in which cases. Indeed, agreement between manifesto data and expert surveys is considered fundamental in the specialised literature (Krouwel & van Elfrinkhof, 2014).

This test is performed by generating the election-specific left-right ranking orders of parties deriving

Table 2. Spearman's ρ values new left-right index and RILE vis-à-vis CHES data.

Spearman's ρ	New left-right index	RILE
CHES	0.81*	0.8*
obs.	474	474

Note: * indicates statistical significance at p<0.001.

Table 3. Spearman's ρ values for the new left-right index and RILE vis-à-vis CHES data by decade.

Spearman's ρ with CHES data	New left-right index	RILE	obs.
1999-2009	0.75*	0.8*	236
2010-2019	0.86*	0.8*	238
obs.			474

Note: * indicates statistical significance at p<0.001.

from the new left-right index, the RILE, and CHES for the entire spatial-temporal framework, to then compare the degree of accordance between these ranks by employing Spearman's ρ. This is a nonparametric rank correlation coefficient that measures if two variables are related monotonically (Meyers & Well, 2013). ρ ranges between -1 and 1, representing respectively negative and positive monotone functions between variables, and takes on the value of 0 when there is no correlation between the two. Table 2 reports this information. As evident, the party left-right ranks of both MARPOR-based instruments are very strongly correlated with those resulting from CHES data. Whilst it is true that the left-right index introduced in this paper does outperform the RILE (Spearman's ρ values of, respectively, 0.81 and 0.8),[9] it only does so very marginally, leaving the question open as to when and where there are discrepancies between the two instruments.

This can be identified through a more granular analysis. Table 3 reports the Spearman's ρ scores for the original left-right index and RILE vis-à-vis the CHES by dividing the analysed timeframe into its two decades. These are the 2000s, captured here between 1999-2009, and the 2010s, between 2010-2019, during which the socio-economic and political effects of the watershed event represented the Great Recession are fully fledged and, as mentioned, innovative patterns of party competition (e.g., De Sio & Lachat, 2020) in such 'turbulent

times' (e.g., Chiaramonte & Emanuele, 2019) can be identified. Here, an interesting finding emerges: whilst the outperformed in the 2000s (Spearman's ρ values of, respectively, 0.75 and 0.8), the new left-right index decisively improves parties' left-right measurement in the 2010s (Spearman's ρ values of, respectively, 0.86 and 0.8). This confirms arguments in the literature according to which party competition in Western Europe increasingly deviated from 'traditional' ideological configurations during this decade (De Sio & Lachat, 2020), operationalised in the left and right poles of the RILE index, showing a higher degree of off-diagonality and exploiting the two-dimensionality of the political space much more even in their left-right economic and cultural positions. Moreover, the greater fit with CHES data displayed by the new left-right index compared to the RILE, with a noticeable improvement in Spearman's ρ score of around 6, indicates that this instrument includes topics that are more relevant to party competition during the 2010s compared to the MARPOR's measure, which cannot be updated for obvious reasons of longitudinal and cross-sectional comparability.

After looking at longitudinal differences between the two measures, I now compare the new left-right index and RILE across space within the Western European context. Table 4 reports the Spearman's ρ scores of these two instruments vis-à-vis the CHES in 4 geographical Western European clusters: the British Isles, Continental Europe, Northern Europe, and Southern Europe.[10] As evident, the differences between the two measures across these geographical clusters are much more marked in Continental and Southern Europe than in the British Isles and Northern Europe. Even considering this, the new left-right index outperforms the RILE in all areas but the Continental European cluster, where at this level of aggregation the structure of party competition over the 20 analysed years seems, overall, to be best described by the traditional unidimensional pattern *à-la* Kitschelt (1992, 1994) captured by the MARPOR's measure. However, recall that the Continental European category constitutes the largest group of countries in my analysis, with six countries and 175 observations, hence contributing to its internal differentiation. Indeed, a more granular investigation of this result illustrates how it is chiefly determined by two out of the six included countries, Belgium (Spearman's ρ values of, respectively, 0.66 and 0.8) and France (Spearman's ρ values of, respectively, 0.73 and 0.84), whereas the new left-right index is more

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[9] As reported in Table A3 in the Appendix, these results are robust when employing other comparable rank correlation coefficients in Kendall's τ, Somers' *D*, and Goodman and Kruskal's γ.

[10] The geographical clusters are constructed as follows. British Isles: Ireland, United Kingdom. Continental Europe: Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Netherlands. Northern Europe: Denmark, Finland, Sweden. Southern Europe: Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain.

Table 4. Spearman's ρ values for the new left-right index and RILE vis-à-vis CHES data by geographical cluster.

Spearman's ρ with CHES data	New left-right index	RILE	obs.
British Isles	0.72*	0.71*	37
Continental Europe	0.81*	0.85*	175
Northern Europe	0.77*	0.76*	115
Southern Europe	0.8*	0.74*	147
obs.			474

Note: * indicates statistical significance at p<0.001.

efficient than the RILE in the remaining four national contexts in Continental Europe (Spearman's ρ values of, respectively, 0.84 and 0.74 in Austria; 0.9 and 0.85 in Germany; 0.94 and 0.89 in Luxembourg; and 0.89 and 0.88 in the Netherlands).

Conversely, the deductive left-right instrument based on an explicit distinction between economic and cultural components of this dimension introduced here slightly outperforms the RILE in the British Isles (Spearman's ρ values of, respectively, 0.72 and 0.71) and in Northern Europe (Spearman's ρ values of, respectively, 0.77 and 0.76) whilst, especially, performing much better in Southern Europe (Spearman's ρ values of, respectively, 0.8 and 0.74). This is interesting and especially relevant, given that the validity of RILE measurements in this region has been called into question several times by scholars focusing on Greece (Dinas & Gemenis, 2010) and Italy (Pelizzo, 2003), as well as by MARPOR's researchers themselves regarding Portugal (Budge & Klingemann, 2001, pp. 44–47).

To provide an example of the new left-right index 'in action', it is in specific regard to this problematic region that I will now show descriptive evidence as to how the index introduced here operates in an exemplary Southern European case compared to the RILE, as well as its analytical utility both from a two-dimensional perspective and in the comparison with existing unidimensional MARPOR-based left-right measures. To this end, I select the election with the highest differential in Spearman's ρ scores between the new left-right index and RILE in a country where the latter notoriously produces invalid measurements (Dinas & Gemenis, 2010), Greece: specifically, the May 2012 electoral contest.[11] As will be shown, the reason why the new left-right index operates better than the RILE in a case such as this one is that it resolves some contradictions

that emerge whilst employing the MARPOR's measure in terms of construct validity (Drost, 2011). That is, the measure introduced here is able to locate parties in a way that corresponds more closely to expectations derived from sources such as academic classifications (e.g., Rooduijn et al., 2019; Döring & Manow, 2020; Nordsieck, 2021), hence providing more valid left-right measurements. At the root of this improvement is the two-dimensional and theory-based conception of left and right adopted by the new left-right measure of this article, which allows for making sense of the contradictory placements derived when applying the RILE.

This can be shown graphically: Figure 3 illustrates the left-right location of Greek parties according to the RILE, the individual economic and cultural left-right components of the new left-right index, and the new left-right index itself in the May 2012 election. Here, the RILE comes to some implausible conclusions: for instance, considers the Greek communist party, *Kommounistikó Kómma Elládas* (KKE), as a markedly right-wing formation and one of the rightmost in the party system, even more so than mainstream centre-right *Néa Dimokratía* (ND). Furthermore, radical right parties *Anexartitoi Ellines* (ANEL), *Laïkós Orthódoxos Synagermós* (LAOS) and *Laïkós Sýndesmos* (XA, Golden Dawn) are scattered across the left-right spectrum, in vastly different positions; with ANEL appearing as an overall left-wing formation. Instead, separating the economic and cultural components of left-right semantics allows for making sense of most of these incoherencies, for instance by locating the KKE as a markedly economically left-wing party and only just right-of-centre culturally, not too different than mainstream centre-left PASOK. Moreover, radical right ANEL, LAOS, and XA are all clustered along the economic left-cultural right quadrant of the alternative diagonal, whilst instead ND is as expected (by far) the most economically right-wing party, with also right-of-centre cultural positions. Hence, when synthesising these two-dimensional measurements in the single new left-right index, it is evident how the left-right placement of Greek parties is much more in line with theoretical expectations. The KKE moves back to the left side of the spectrum, where it joins all the other left-of-centre parties: radical left SYRIZA to its left, and centre-left DIMAR and PASOK to its right, with the latter closer to the dimensional centre. For context, at this time the former main party of the Greek centre-left was moving to the centre also in light of the bailout agreement signed by the Papandreou government just months before this election (Sotiropoulos, 2014). The ranking order on the right-hand side also highlights

[11] The differential in Spearman's ρ scores between the new left-right index and RILE in the Greek elections are as follows: 2000 = -0.2; 2004 = 0; 2009 = 0; May 2012 = 0.6; June 2012 = 0.54.
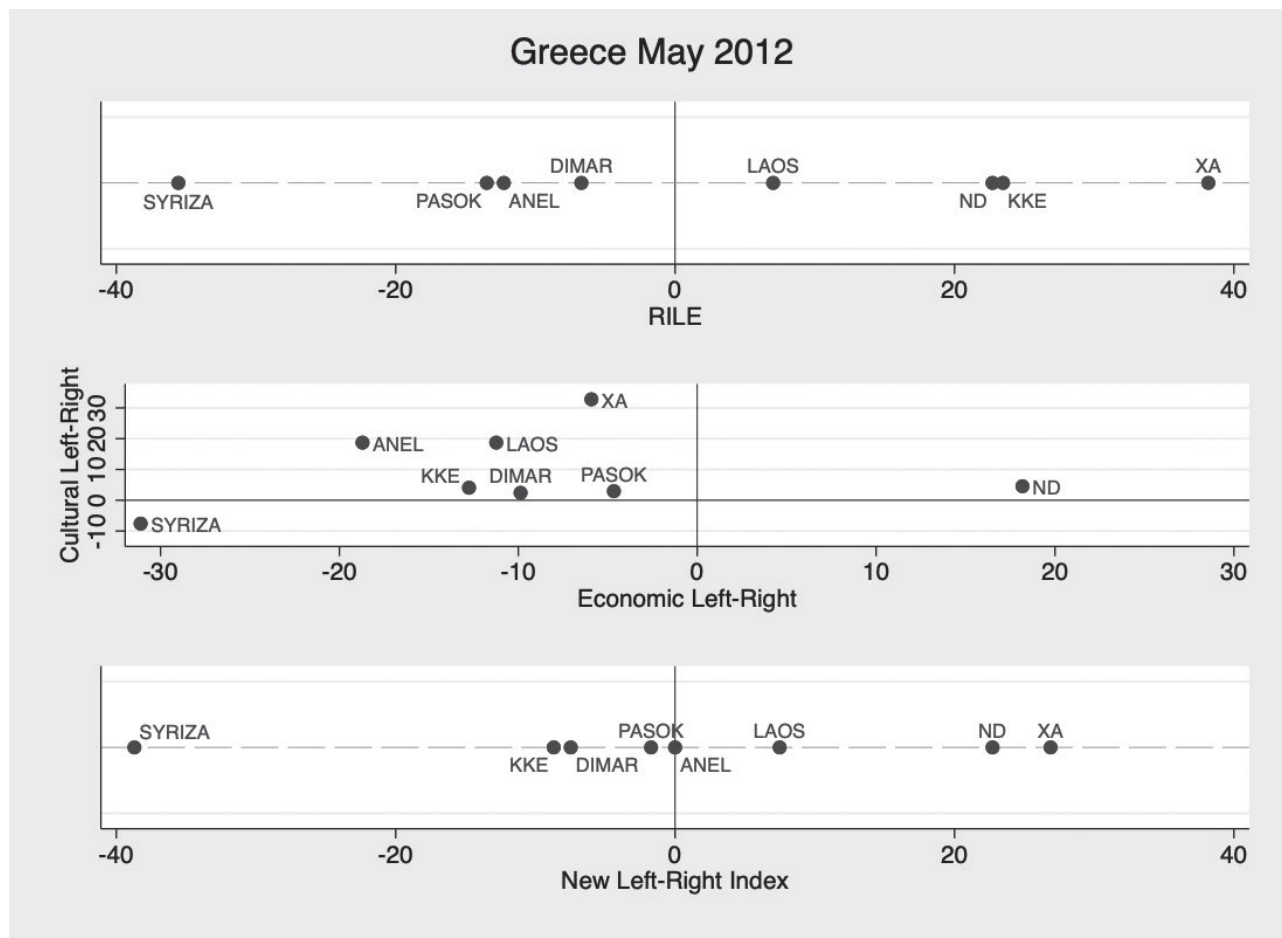
Figure 3. Greek parties left-right positions in the May 2012 election as per the RILE, the individual economic and cultural left-right scores, and the new left-right index.

interesting findings, which especially resonate with the well-known differentiation internal to the radical right chiefly with regard to the economy (e.g., Hillen & Steiner, 2020; Wahl, 2020). Indeed, due to their different economic and cultural positions that emerges from the two-dimensional graphic representation, the radical right bloc is differentiated between relatively more leftist (ANEL and LAOS) and right-wing (XA) formations, whilst the main centre-right party in ND appears as overall markedly right-of-centre due to its economic and cultural right-wing positions, as expected. Overall, these graphic illustrations demonstrate the analytical utility of deriving deductively and explicitly separating economic and cultural components of left and right, both in using them to represent party competition vis-à-vis left-right issues in two-dimensional patterns and by synthesising such scores into a unique value for the sake of comparability with other measures.

6. CONCLUSION

In this article I (a) introduced a deductive left-right index based on MARPOR data that relies on a theory-based conceptualisation of left-right semantics applied to both the economic and cultural issue dimensions as the basis for operationalisation; and (b) empirically tested this instrument against MARPOR's widely used (and criticised) RILE, allowing for an assessment of not just how the two measures perform, but also patterns of party competition in contemporary Western Europe (1999-2019). Building on a theoretical framework that discussed the evolution of the electoral supply-side in the region, left-right semantics and its application to an economic and a cultural domain, and the existing measures of party left-right positions through manifesto data, I constructed a new such left-right index to be applied on a dataset made up of 72 elections and 474 party-election combinations in 16 Western European coun-

tries between 1999-2019. I did so in two steps. First, I made a deductive selection of the MARPOR items that would make up the left and right economic and cultural poles of my index, with explicit reference to the theoretical reasons underlying the inclusion of the selected items. Second, following a logical quantitative modelling approach (Taagepera, 2008), I mathematically formalised the construction of a synthetic left-right measure, deriving from the individual deductive economic and cultural scores built here, which can be used both individually for comparisons with existing such instruments – the vast majority of which are unidimensional – and in conjunction with the two underlying scores for a comprehensive analysis of parties' left-right positions. Further, this method allows for assessing the orthogonality (or lack thereof) and the relation between the economic and cultural left-right dimension in determining patterns of party competition around left-right issue on a case-by-case basis by testing and modifying the different assumptions concerning the slope in the illustrated system of equations. This represents another novel element introduced by my approach to measuring left-right positions via MARPOR data, which can be employed in many different applications in future research.

I then empirically tested the new left-right index and RILE, assessing their performance in the article's dataset vis-à-vis the external benchmark represented by expert survey data from the CHES. These tests, which mainly employed Spearman's ρ index of rank-order correlation, were both pooled and differentiated across space and time within the dataset, allowing for both general and more granular comparisons between the two measures. Further, descriptive evidence concerning the new left-right index 'in action' was also presented, by showing a brief within-case analysis for the May 2012 election in Greece, which was also confirmed in my data as one of the most problematic countries for the measurements performed by the MARPOR's RILE (Dinas & Gemenis, 2010).

The article provides methodological and substantive contributions to the relevant literature. On the former front, the key element is the introduction of a deductive MARPOR-based left-right index, whereas as shown most existing such instruments are either partially or fully inductive in nature. The main advantage of a deductive approach is strong construct validity, which is based on an explicit theory-based conceptualisation of left and right as the basis for operationalisation. By virtue of this linkage with theoretical sources, this type of validity cannot be affected by the specific data to which left-right indexes are applied, which instead could change entirely both the scale components of inductive measures and the results provided by such instruments.

Substantively, the empirical analysis returned mixed results, which provide a differentiated and very interesting picture. Indeed, albeit overall the performance of the two measures is not too different, the traditional patterns of party competition captured through manifesto data by the RILE seem to apply better to the pre-Great Recession, 'turbulent times' (e.g., Chiaramonte & Emanuele, 2019) decade and in the Continental European cluster of countries at large. On the contrary, the explicitly deductive new left-right index that is based on the underlying application of the semantics of left and right to the economic and cultural issue dimensions is better placed to capture the patterns of competition in the 'turbulent' 2010s, confirming the expectations on the increased innovation and diminished 'ideological consistency in 20th-century terms' of Western European electoral supply during these years (e.g., De Sio & Lachat, 2020). Further, it also presents measurement improvements most geographical contexts across the region, including some Continental European countries as well as across the British Isles, Northern Europe, and – especially – Southern Europe, where the RILE has notoriously been found to produce invalid left-right estimates even by the MARPOR researchers themselves (Budge & Klingemann, 2001, pp. 44–47; Pelizzo, 2003; Dinas & Gemenis, 2010).

The evidence presented here points to two considerations in particular. First, these differentiated results underline how patterns of party competition in contemporary Western Europe have not developed in a uniform fashion everywhere. Rather, they may rather still be informed by contextual specificities that at times leave them rather unchanged from the more traditional structures seen throughout the 20th century, and at times lead them to deviate from them. Second, another point follows from the differentiated picture emerging from the test of a uniform deductive left-right index provided in this work. That is, whilst still grounded in deduction and hence based both on theoretical sources and case knowledge to justify why specific items are included, future MARPOR-based left-right measurement of party positions should move more and more towards differentiated approaches specific to given countries and time periods even when not relying on statistical induction, which as seen can be problematic in other ways. This, of course, will require a great deal of attention to the evolution of patterns of party competition in specific national contexts, to understand which specific MARPOR items that are either left- or right-wing are truly relevant, with a significant qualitative effort in the integration of case knowledge into the development and empirical application of MARPOR-based left-right indexes. Whilst by no means whatsoever being conclusive, I hope that this

research can lead to discussions related to both the illustrated substantive and methodological points.

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APPENDIX

Justification for excluding specific MARPOR categories from new left-right index's economic and cultural left-right's scale components

Additional items that constituted potential candidates for inclusion were not selected because of either of two reasons. Firstly, albeit new political issues, which contain some positions or goals that became customarily associated with either of the two poles, may have emerged in time, this does not necessarily mean that they all pertain to the left-right divide from a theoretical standpoint. Stances related to the issue of immigration, for instance, fit very well the illustrated left-right semantics, as they reflect views on human nature, social hierarchy, and order. However, the same cannot be said of other prominent themes, such as the European Union integration and environmentalism. Indeed, from a theoretical viewpoint, neither of such topics is directly or clearly related to the semantics of left and right conceptualised in this work, which chiefly revolves around social change for the rectification of economic and cultural inequalities. Indeed, on the one hand, it is difficult to argue that different stages of EU integration are inherently related with the reduction of inequalities, and in some fully integrated member states of the EU pro-European stances mean supporting the status quo. On the other, environmental protection may be seen, theoretically, from both a left-wing viewpoint on sustainable development to shelter the most vulnerable from inequalities and societal harm (e.g., in the per416.2 MARPOR item), and from a right-wing perspective on preserving natural resources (e.g., in the per501 MARPOR

Table A1. 'Vanilla' method results for Western European elections (1999-2019).

Left pole		Right pole	
per105	Military: Negative	per101	Foreign Special Relationships: Positive
per106	Peace	per102	Foreign Special Relationships: Negative
per107	Internationalism: Positive	per103	Anti-Imperialism
per108	European Community/Union or Latin America Integration: Positive	per104	Military: Positive
per201	Freedom and Human Rights	per109	Internationalism: Negative
per202	Democracy	per110	European Community/Union or Latin America Integration: Negative
per203	Constitutionalism: Positive	per302	Centralisation: Positive
per204	Constitutionalism: Negative	per303	Governmental and Administrative Efficiency
per301	Decentralisation: Positive	per305	Political Authority
per304	Political Corruption	per401	Free Market Economy
per403	Market Regulation	per402	Incentives: Positive
per404	Economic Planning	per406	Protectionism: Positive
per405	Corporatism/Mixed Economy	per407	Protectionism: Negative
per409	Keynesian Demand Management	per408	Economic Goals
per412	Controlled Economy	per410	Economic Growth: Positive
per413	Nationalisation	per411	Technology and Infrastructure: Positive
per415	Marxist Analysis: Positive	per414	Economic Orthodoxy
per416	Anti-Growth Economy and Sustainability	per505	Welfare State Limitation
per501	Environmental Protection	per507	Education Limitation
per502	Culture: Positive	per601	National Way of Life: Positive
per503	Equality: Positive	per603	Traditional Morality: Positive
per504	Welfare State Expansion	per605	Law and Order
per506	Education Expansion	per608	Multiculturalism: Negative
per602	National Way of Life: Negative	per702	Labour Groups: Negative
per604	Traditional Morality: Negative	per703	Agriculture and Farmers
per606	Civic Mindedness: Positive	per704	Middle Class and Professional Groups
per607	Multiculturalism: Positive	per706	Non-economic Demographic Groups
per701	Labour Groups: Positive		
per705	Underprivileged Minority Groups		

item) typical, for instance, of green conservativism (e.g., Scruton, 2012).

Secondly, while employing ready-made analytical tools such as the MARPOR categories, any researcher needs to be especially aware of how these are formulated, in order not to apply them inappropriately. Especially, attention should be paid to the limitations within the MARPOR codebook and its prescriptions. Here, some categories have not been included because their characteristics made them ambiguous vis-à-vis the theoretical framework of reference. For instance, per503 on equality could have belonged either to the economic ('fair redistribution of resources') or cultural left ('the end of discrimination') (Horn et al., 2017): it has therefore been discarded, as it would be impossible to empirically distinguish the scores related to the one or the other component of this category. The same reasoning applies to per201.1 on 'freedom', as it includes both economic and cultural elements pertaining individualism and liberties, which can also be interpreted differently by the left and the right as conceptualized here. A different example of ambiguity in the construction of MARPOR items is represented by the residual per706 on 'non-economic demographic groups', whereby it is not specified at all whether these are underprivileged groups or special interests. All the other categories were not included because they were not relevant to the presented theory-based conceptualisation of left and right.

Table A3. Rank correlation coefficients between the new left-right index and RILE vis-à-vis CHES data.

Rank correlation coefficients with CHES data	New left-right index	RILE
Spearman's ρ	0.81*	0.8*
Kendall's τ	0.69*	0.68*
Somers' D	0.7*	0.68*
Goodman and Kruskal's γ	0.77*	0.76*
obs.	474	474

Note: * indicates statistical significance at p<0.001.

Table A2. Distribution of elections per country.

Country	Number of elections
Austria	6
Belgium	5
Cyprus	2
Denmark	5
Finland	5
France	4
Germany	5
Greece	5
Ireland	4
Italy	5
Luxembourg	1
Netherlands	5
Portugal	6
Spain	5
Sweden	5
United Kingdom	4
total	72

La trasparenza e l'affidabilità dei sondaggi elettorali in Italia al tempo di internet e dei social media

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Abstract. The article presents the results of a research on electoral polls disseminated by the mass media in Italy and published on the institutional website www.sondaggipoliticoelettorali.it. All the electoral polls published on the institutional website from 1 January 2017 to 9 September 2022 were analyzed. In the period considered, 1.537 polls were published. The article examines their sample size, their response rates in relation to the different interviewing techniques, and the related sampling and weighting schemes. It proposes some solutions to improve the methodological transparency of the polls and make the results provided by the various polling agencies more usable. In summary, the results of our analyzes show that in Italy the electoral polls in the 21st century are going through a difficult transition period compared to the previous century. Among the various factors that in recent years make it particularly difficult to conduct polls, the spread of new communication tool and the general spread of the internet and the increase in subjects who refuse to respond to an electoral poll take in particular importance.

Keywords: electoral polls, web-survey, online panels, probabilistic and non probabilistic sampling.

1. INTRODUZIONE

L'ultimo ventennio del XX secolo può rappresentare l'età dell'oro dei sondaggi elettorali. Le persone erano facilmente raggiungibili attraverso le utenze telefoniche domestiche usando il sistema cati (computer assisted telephone interviewing) ed erano in generale propense a rispondere ai questionari; non di rado i tassi di risposta superavano il 70% (Sakshaug *et al.* 2019). In Italia, ad esempio, più del 90% delle famiglie possedeva di un abbonamento di telefonia domestica e ciò rendeva relativamente facile raggiungere un campione rappresentativo di elettori con tassi di rifiuto e di non risposta relativamente contenuti. Con il passare del tempo la percentuale di famiglie abbonate al telefono domestico si è progressivamente ridotta e contemporaneamente

è cresciuta in modo rilevante la percentuale dei rifiuti a rispondere[1].

Negli ultimi anni è impossibile procedere solo con le interviste cati per formare un campione rappresentativo degli elettori. Per includere quelle fasce di popolazione che non usano più il telefono domestico si è reso necessario introdurre prima le interviste sui telefoni cellulari e successivamente le interviste via web. La situazione attuale prevede la composizione di un campione che comprende una quota di interviste cati, che rimane la modalità ancora più diffusa per alcune categorie sociali, con una quota di interviste cami (computer assisted mobile interviewing) e/o cawi (computer assisted web interviewing).

L'adozione di tecniche miste di rilevazione produce nuovi problemi metodologici che riguardano: a) la necessità adattare lo stesso questionario alle differenti modalità di rilevazione; b) il determinare la proporzione di interviste da effettuare con le diverse modalità di rilevazione; c) la necessità di fondere in un'unica matrice i dati provenienti da fonti diverse che rimandano a popolazioni diverse di individui (gli abbonati alla telefonia fissa domestica, i possessori di un telefono cellulare e i possessori di un abbonamento internet) con diverse probabilità di essere raggiunti dalle diverse tecniche di rilevazione; d) infine occorre decidere come omogeneizzare i dati provenienti da queste diverse modalità di rilevazione con procedure di ponderazione *ex-post*.

Insieme agli aspetti tecnico-metodologici di cui ci occuperemo nei prossimi paragrafi, nel dibattito contemporaneo sui sondaggi elettorali occorre considerare i cambiamenti avvenuti nel contesto socio-politico e in particolare la diffusione di internet e dei social network che ha favorito l'ascesa di populismi di ogni genere e la polarizzazione esacerbata dai social network delle competizioni elettorali in molte democrazie occidentali. Tutto ciò ha delle ricadute sui sondaggi politici sotto diversi aspetti: per le maggiori difficoltà a raggiungere un campione rappresentativo di elettori; per l'aumento dei rifiuti da parte di molti individui a concedere l'intervista; per l'aumentata frammentazione degli intervistati in partiti/movimenti sempre più instabili e di difficile connotazione che hanno preso il posto dei partiti e degli schieramenti con una consolidata tradizione e cultura politica; infine per il crescente numero di intervistati che dichia-

ra di astenersi o si dichiara indeciso nel rispondere alla domanda sulle proprie intenzioni di voto.

L'insieme di questi fattori ha toccato il suo apice nel 2016 quando eventi come le presidenziali americane e il referendum sulla Brexit in Gran Bretagna e altre elezioni in diversi paesi europei (Italia, Grecia, Olanda, Francia, Germania, Austria, etc.) hanno manifestano la crisi dei sondaggi elettorali anche in paesi in cui da decenni sembravano funzionare, segnando così l'anno *horribilis* per i sondaggisti.

In effetti la crisi dei sondaggi era già iniziata: il 9 ottobre 2015 alcuni quotidiani pubblicarono la notizia che l'American Institute of Public Opinion – noto come istituto Gallup, dal nome del suo fondatore – non avrebbe effettuato sondaggi per le elezioni presidenziali del 2016. Pochi mesi dopo, una seconda agenzia statunitense – il Pew Research Center – annunciò il ritiro dai sondaggi elettorali adducendo le stesse motivazioni dell'istituto Gallup: ossia le crescenti difficoltà nel selezionare e intervistare un campione rappresentativo di elettori. I responsabili dei due istituti ammisero esplicitamente l'impossibilità di effettuare rilevazioni corrette poiché, rispetto al passato, era molto diminuita la possibilità di raggiungere campioni rappresentativi di elettori statunitensi a causa della frammentazione degli stessi fra cellulari, internet, micro-blog, e della crescente reticenza o ambiguità degli elettori che nell'85% dei casi rifiutavano di rispondere ai sondaggi.

Non a caso oggi sono previsti incentivi di varia natura per indurre i soggetti a rispondere ad un sondaggio – un approfondimento a parte meritano i cosiddetti panel online (vedi par. 2).

Obiettivo della nostra analisi consiste nel rispondere alla seguente domanda: come si valuta la qualità di un sondaggio elettorale? Per rispondere occorre prendere in considerazione le trasformazioni che negli ultimi anni i sondaggi elettorali hanno subito a seguito della diffusione dei sistemi di comunicazione digitali e della crescente diffusione delle tecnologie via web. Gli aspetti metodologici vanno quindi ricontestualizzati tenendo conto dell'attuale panorama dominato dalle tecnologie digitali.

Nel nostro lavoro consideriamo i sondaggi pre-elettorali che rilevano le intenzioni di voto per una ipotetica elezione futura. Anche se si tratta di argomenti che richiedono delle competenze specialistiche e che di solito non interessano la maggior parte degli utenti dei sondaggi, per valutare la qualità dei sondaggi occorre considerare le modalità attraverso le quali sono svolti e in particolare il tipo di campione adottato e il modo attraverso il quale si conducono le interviste.

Nei prossimi paragrafi analizzeremo gli aspetti metodologici dei sondaggi di oggi e li confronteremo

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[1] Secondo il National Health Interview Survey, la percentuale di adulti negli Usa che non possiede più un telefono fisso è cresciuta dal 2% nel 2001, al 5% nel 2004, al 10% nel 2006, al 16% nel 2008, al 25% nel 2010 fino al 30,2% nel 2011. Considerando le fasce d'età constatiamo come siano i giovani fra i 18 e i 29 anni che si trovano nella condizione di non essere facilmente reperibili con il telefono fisso; al contrario, la fascia d'età dei più anziani (oltre 50 anni) è cresciuta dal 36% nel 1995 al 66% nel 2010 (www.cdc.gov).

con quelli degli anni passati evidenziando gli eventuali miglioramenti o gli eventuali peggioramenti.

Nelle conclusioni forniremo delle raccomandazioni su come migliorare la qualità delle informazioni richieste agli istituti per migliorare la trasparenza e l'affidabilità dei sondaggi.

2. RASSEGNA DELLA LETTERATURA

Sui sondaggi esiste una vasta letteratura metodologica. Ovviamente in questa sede è impossibile presentarla in modo esauriente, anche se la volessimo limitare agli anni più recenti. Abbiamo quindi scelto di presentare una rassegna degli ambiti tematici emergenti segnalando i contributi a nostro avviso più significativi.

In primo luogo prendiamo in esame i contributi che si sono soffermati sui cambiamenti introdotti nelle ricerche survey, sondaggi elettorali inclusi, a causa della diffusione di internet e del web. Questi contributi evidenziano pregi e difetti della cosiddetta web-survey come il contenimento dei tempi e dei costi, i bassi tassi di risposta, i possibili incentivi da usare per reclutare i soggetti a rispondere ai questionari, il fenomeno delle interruzioni – ossia i soggetti che iniziano a compilare il questionario ma non lo completano o non lo inviano, ecc. (Alvarez e VanBeselaere 2005; Bethlehem e Biffignandi 2012; Couper 2000; Couper *et al.* 2007; Fricker e Schonlau 2002; Gittleman e Trimarchi 2010; Miller 2017).

Una caratteristica dei sondaggi al tempo di internet e dei social media è costituita dalla progressiva affermazione dei cosiddetti panel online. Si tratta di soggetti profilati che vengono reclutati in seguito a un'occasionale partecipazione ad una ricerca telefonica, ad esempio con la tecnica cati o cami, oppure dai fruitori di determinati siti web, o consumatori on line di alcuni servizi. Una volta che un soggetto accetta di essere reclutato in un panel online, di solito in cambio di una qualche forma di remunerazione, viene profilato in forma anonima sulla base di un certo numero di caratteristiche socio-demografiche. Questa profilazione consente di inviare gli inviti ai sondaggi alle persone che sono idonee a parteciparvi, riducendo preventivamente il numero dei falsi dichiaranti. Uno dei problemi delle indagini su panel online è rappresentato dalla presenza dei cosiddetti *heavy internet users*, presenti con più identità nel panel allo scopo di riscuotere più incentivi. Si stima che la quota di queste identità fittizie ammonti a circa il 50% dei partecipanti a un panel reclutato online. Ciò porta a una serie di problemi legati agli errori dovuti a risposte non corrispondenti ai profili da cui si suppone provengano (Bach e Eckman 2018; Callegaro e DeSogra 2008).

Su internet ci sono piattaforme che forniscono su richiesta degli istituti liste di nominativi disposti a partecipare a un sondaggio: Dynata (www.assirm.it/azien-de_associate/dynata/), Bilendi (www.bilendi.it), Norstat (www.norstatpanel.com), Toluna (it.toluna.com/)[2]. Quindi ci sono provider che su richiesta forniscono campioni, a loro dire rappresentativi, per qualunque ricerca di mercato, sondaggio d'opinione o altra indagine statistica.

Come è facilmente intuibile l'adozione di un panel online comporta alcuni problemi: fra questi uno dei più importanti è il cosiddetto *misreporting* motivato, ossia quel meccanismo mediante il quale i rispondenti a un sondaggio forniscono risposte errate o non corrispondenti alle loro opinioni al solo scopo di ridurre la lunghezza del questionario e quindi l'onere in termini di tempo ed energie necessario alla sua compilazione (Bach e Eckman 2018).

Il confronto fra ricerche condotte con le tecniche di interviste tradizionali (*face to face*, cati e cami) e le nuove tecniche di rilevazione basate sul web (cawi e/o panel online), è stato oggetto di numerosi studi sia da parte delle associazioni professionali come l'American Association for Public Opinion Research e l'Esomar (AAPOR 2011; Icc/Esomar 2016), sia da parte di ricercatori e studiosi indipendenti (Chang e Krosnick 2009).

I risultati presentati in genere sono sfavorevoli alle ricerche che ricorrono alla rilevazione sul web, anche se, si esprime fiducia che nei prossimi anni, a causa dell'incremento esponenziale degli utenti del web, si dovrebbero ottenere risultati migliori (Duffy *et al.* 2005).

Attualmente prevalgono le cosiddette tecniche di rilevazione mista che integrano una quota di interviste cati, una quota cami e una quota di interviste cawi. In generale si ritiene che questa soluzione sia in grado di risolvere i problemi di non copertura e non risposta delle web-survey.

Un breve cenno va fatto alle nuove tecniche di ricerca sul web e sui social media che prescindono dalla web-survey (Asur e Huberman 2010; Erikson e Wlezien 2008).

Il tema più importante e controverso riguarda le cosiddette nuove tecniche di campionamento che sono compatibili con la web-survey. Su questo argomento la letteratura metodologica è davvero imponente (si vedano fra gli altri: Berzofsky *et al.* 2009; Biernacki e Waldorf 1981; Brick 2011; Copas e Li 1997; deRada Vidal 2010; Deville 1991; Di Franco 2010; Duffield 2004; Dutwin e Buskirk 2017; Elliott e Haviland 2007; Elliott 2009; Handcock e Gile 2011; Kalton e Flores-Cervantes 2003; Kott 2006; Mercer *et al.* 2017; Revilla 2015).

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[2] All'indirizzo https://campionigratuiti.eu/sondaggi-retribuiti-online/ è possibile trovare un elenco di tutti i panel di sondaggi retribuiti online.

In estrema sintesi le proposte consistono nell'adozione di tecniche di campionamento miste, sia probabilistiche sia non probabilistiche, o nel cercare le condizioni per rendere possibile l'inferenza dei risultati dal campione all'intera popolazione di riferimento anche quando si adottano campioni non probabilistici.

La sensazione è che questo ritorno di fiamma per i campioni non probabilistici sia dovuto alla necessità di ammettere che le ricerche via web in ultima analisi si conducono su campioni di soggetti che si auto selezionano. A rigore quindi questi campioni si dovrebbero definire di comodo (o di convenienza) piuttosto che campioni non probabilistici o a scelta ragionata. Non occorre essere esperti di statistica inferenziale per sapere che dove c'è una auto-selezione degli intervistati non è possibile l'inferenza dei risultati alla popolazione, e i risultati stessi di questi campioni saranno distorti in modo sistematico. La distorsione di selezione (*selection bias*) consiste nelle differenze sistematiche tra i valori campionari e i parametri incogniti della popolazione, dovute a problemi riguardanti la composizione del campione piuttosto che a errori di altro genere.

Solitamente la distorsione deriva problemi di copertura (le liste da cui si estraggono i soggetti non includono tutta la popolazione di riferimento) e da problemi di non risposta (i soggetti che rifiutano l'intervista o non completano il questionario).

I campioni dei sondaggi condotti sul web non hanno origine da una lista di campionamento che copra interamente la popolazione di riferimento, ma nel migliore dei casi avviene un'estrazione casuale da una lista di soggetti che sono stati reclutati sul web per costituire i panel online. La ricerca metodologica si è concentrata sull'individuazione delle condizioni in base alle quali si può fare l'inferenza quando si ricorre a questo tipo di campioni. Si constata come nei sondaggi via web le liste di campionamento non coprono adeguatamente la popolazione di riferimento e una quota rilevante dei soggetti campionati non risponde al questionario (mortalità del campione). Per tali problemi la soluzione proposta consiste nell'eseguire aggiustamenti statistici, più o meno sofisticati, per correggere gli squilibri del campione (ponderazioni *ex-post*, impiego di modelli statistici complessi, ecc.; si vedano fra gli altri, Atkeson *et al.* 2014; Bethlehem 2010; Bethlehem *et al.* 2011; Biemer 2010; Biemer e Peytchev 2012; Blumberg e Luke 2007; Bosio 1996; Busse e Fuchs 2012; Callegaro e Poggio 2004; Dever *et al.* 2008; Dillman *et al.* 2009; Groves 1989; 2006; Groves e Lyberg 2010; Groves *et al.* 2004; Link e Lai 2011).

Occorre precisare che con campioni non probabilistici è necessario usare i modelli statistici in tutte le fasi del processo di indagine dalla selezione del campione alla stima dei risultati, ma ciò non esclude la possibilità che queste correzioni del campione siano insoddisfacenti.

L'alternativa principale ai panel online è il campionamento a fiume (*river sample*) in cui i potenziali intervistati sono reclutati tramite fonti simili ma sono destinati a una sola indagine. A differenza dei panel online, con il *river sample* il profilo dei rispondenti non è noto in anticipo, ma deve essere ricostruito a posteriori. In ogni caso sia i panel online sia il campionamento a fiume presentano il grave problema di escludere sistematicamente tutte le persone che non usano internet.

Ottenere una vasta gamma di potenziali intervistati è fondamentale per il successo di qualsiasi proceduta di campionamento, e si è visto che gli intervistati reclutati attraverso diversi siti web possono esibire distribuzioni demografiche (e di altre caratteristiche) estremamente diverse. Il reclutamento da una serie diversificata di fonti migliora la probabilità di soddisfare il requisito di massima eterogeneità del campione; tuttavia, aumenta anche i tempi e i costi del sondaggi.

Benché i sondaggi sul web siano condotti su campioni non probabilistici (panel online), non è possibile reperire delle chiare indicazioni per individuare le procedure di reclutamento effettivamente applicate. Le indagini non probabilistiche generalmente si basano sulla selezione dei soggetti finalizzata a ottenere la composizione campionaria desiderata mentre la raccolta dati è in corso. Di solito tale scopo è raggiunto mediante le quote, in cui il ricercatore costruisce una particolare distribuzione attraverso una o più variabili. Le quote sono definite da una classificazione incrociata di caratteristiche socio demografiche come il sesso le classi di età, ecc. Ogni quota richiede un numero definito di interviste da compiere. Il risultato finale è un campione che corrisponde alla stratificazione individuata nel disegno di campionamento. L'uso delle quote si basa sul presupposto che gli individui compresi in ciascuna quota siano intercambiabili con gli individui non campionati, ossia che condividono le stesse caratteristiche. Se tale ipotesi è soddisfatta, il campione avrà la composizione corretta sulle variabili di controllo, consentendo la stima delle medie e delle proporzioni che si generalizzano alla popolazione di riferimento.

Tuttavia, vi è un crescente consenso sul fatto che le variabili demografiche di base come età, sesso, istruzione, condizione professionale, residenza geografica, siano insufficienti per raggiungere l'interscambiabilità dei soggetti.

Alcune strategie di campionamento più complesse consentono ai ricercatori di controllare diverse altre dimensioni, ulteriori variabili di stratificazione. In lettera-

tura sono state proposte diverse procedure come l'uso di distanze euclidee[3], il *propensity score matching*[4] e *routing*[5].

Concludiamo la nostra rassegna della letteratura con un cenno ai contributi di autori italiani. Dobbiamo segnalare che in Italia l'interesse è prevalentemente rivolto sulle capacità predittive dei sondaggi elettorali e sui rischi di un uso scorretto dei risultati nel condizionare le scelte di voto degli elettori. Gli aspetti metodologici sono affrontati in modo marginale (Barisione e Mannheimer 2005; Ceri 1996; Corbetta e Gasperoni 2007; Diamanti e Ceccarini 2013; Di Franco 2018; Gasperoni e Callegaro 2007; 2008; Gasperoni 2013; Gobo 2015; Mannheimer 1996; 2016; Natale 2004; 2009; 2022).

3. DISEGNO DELLA RICERCA, IPOTESI E DATI

La nostra ricerca esamina i sondaggi elettorali estratti dal sito gestito dal dipartimento per l'Informazione e l'editoria della presidenza del Consiglio dei ministri e istituito dalla legge n. 28 del 2000 che prevede la pubblicazione dei risultati sul sito www.sondaggipoliticoelettorali.it all'interno di un documento che contiene alcuni elementi informativi[6] (art. 8, comma 3). La legge è integrata dal Regolamento in materia di pubblicazione e diffusione dei sondaggi sui mezzi di comunicazione di massa che nella sua forma vigente è definito dalla delibera n. 256/10/CSP del 9 dicembre 2010 dell'Autorità per le garanzie nelle comunicazioni (Agcom).

Il *corpus* preso in esame in questa sede consiste in tutti sondaggi elettorali pubblicati dal 1 gennaio 2017

al 9 settembre 2022, ultimo giorno prima dell'inizio dell'embargo dovuto alle elezioni politiche del 25 settembre 2022. Abbiamo censito solo le rilevazioni riferite alla Camera dei deputati, relative all'ambito nazionale e all'intero elettorato. Come detto nell'introduzione l'obiettivo della nostra analisi consiste nella valutazione delle modalità con le quali i sondaggi sono stati effettuati considerandone gli aspetti tecnico-metodologici e la loro conformità a quanto richiesto dalle norme che regolano la diffusione. Precisiamo che i dati da noi analizzati si basano esclusivamente sulle informazioni relative ai sondaggi così come sono state reperite nella documentazione pubblicata sul sito istituzionale dove sono inseriti solo i sondaggi diffusi dai mass media che sono sottoposti al rispetto della normativa vigente.

Primariamente valuteremo la trasparenza delle informazioni fornite, costruendo un indice di completezza delle informazioni, perché è un prerequisito indispensabile per valutarne la correttezza e l'affidabilità.

In secondo luogo, cercheremo di valutare l'impatto dei nuovi problemi caratteristici dei sondaggi online come l'eventuale differenza nei risultati imputabile al tipo di tecnica o di tecniche di raccolta dei dati e al tipo di campione usato.

Sottoporremo a controllo empirico l'influenza delle tecniche di rilevazione e di campionamento nella variazione dei risultati delle stime prodotte. In particolare prenderemo in esame l'eventuale influenza di variabili come: la dimensione del campione, l'errore di campionamento e il tipo di campione, se probabilistico e o non probabilistico. Valuteremo anche l'influenza della completezza delle informazioni fornite dai sondaggi come una *proxi* di qualità e di trasparenza degli stessi comparando i risultati ottenuti dagli istituti che presentano un apprezzabile numero di sondaggi effettuati nel periodo considerato.

4. RISULTATI

I 1.537 sondaggi da noi censiti sono stati realizzati da ventotto agenzie. Le quattordici[7] più attive complessivamente costituiscono il 96,8% (1.488) del totale.

Il 63,2% dei sondaggi è stato commissionato da una rete televisiva; il 10,6% da un quotidiano nazionale; lo 0,8% da un partito politico. Il restante il 25,4% dei sondaggi sono stati auto-prodotti dagli stessi istituti che li hanno effettuati.

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[3] Si caratterizza per l'abbinare in modo flessibile la popolazione di riferimento a un numero maggiore di variabili di quanto sia possibile con il campionamento per quote tradizionale. Affinché questo approccio abbia successo si usa una metrica, la distanza euclidea, con la quale la composizione delle variabili stratificatrici nel campione deve corrispondere esattamente alla corrispondente stratificazione della popolazione.

[4] Utilizzando un insieme di variabili raccolte in diverse indagini, si stima un modello di propensione combinando i campioni e prevedendo la probabilità che ciascun rispondente appartenga a un dato sondaggio. Questo modello si applica ai sondaggi successivi calcolando un punteggio di propensione per ciascun rispondente.

[5] Piuttosto che progettare campioni in modo separato per ogni sondaggio, gli intervistati sono invitati a partecipare a un sondaggio non specificato. L'indagine effettiva è determinata dinamicamente in base alle caratteristiche del rispondente e alle esigenze dei sondaggi attivi rispetto alle quote o ai criteri di selezione. Ciò consente un uso più efficiente del campione, ma significa che esso per ogni sondaggio dipende da quali altre indagini sono contemporaneamente in corso.

[6] Data di realizzazione, realizzatore, committente e acquirente del sondaggio; criteri seguiti per la formazione del campione e rappresentatività dello stesso; metodo di raccolta delle informazioni e di elaborazione dei dati; numero delle persone interpellate e popolazione di riferimento; domande rivolte; percentuale delle persone che hanno risposto a ciascuna domanda; percentuale dei rifiuti e delle non risposte a ciascuna domanda.

[7] La distribuzione di frequenza delle prime quattordici agenzie è: Tecnè 252 sondaggi; Emg acqua 190; Swg 186; Termometro politico 142; Index Research 125; Euromedia research 109; Ixè 101; Bidimedia Bi3 72; Piepoli 70; Demopolis 68; Ipsos 57; Demos&Pi 42; Winpoll 42; Quorum 32.

Tabella 1. Distribuzione dei sondaggi per tecnica di conduzione delle interviste e per anno (valori percentuali di colonna; N fra parentesi).

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	totale
cati-cami-cawi	12,7	34,6	48,2	41,2	43,5	40,4	38,3
cawi (panel online)	34,0	19,9	23,5	36,4	33,0	35,4	30,1
cati-cawi	13,7	22,4	12,9	15,5	22,8	21,7	18,0
cati	22,3	12,6	8,4	2,4	0,3	0,5	7,2
cati-cami	17,3	10,6	7,1	4,5	0,3	2,0	6,5
totale	100,0 (197)	100,0 (246)	100,0 (311)	100,0 (291)	100,0 (294)	100,0 (198)	100,0 (1537)

Esaminando le informazioni riportate nei documenti informativi è possibile rendersi conto delle notevoli differenze fra i sondaggi effettuati da agenzie diverse e, a volte, anche all'interno dei sondaggi effettuati dalla stessa agenzia nel corso del tempo.

La tabella 1 presenta la distribuzione dei sondaggi per la tecnica di conduzione delle interviste e per anno (le diverse tecniche sono elencate in ordine decrescente di frequenza sul totale generale). Il sistema misto cati-cami-cawi passa dal 12,7% del 2017 al 43,5% del 2021 (40,4% nei primi nove mesi del 2022), divenendo la modalità di conduzione delle interviste più diffusa. Di converso, i sondaggi svolti solo con interviste cati che ancora nel 2017 erano più di un quinto del totale (22,3%) dal 2020 ad oggi sono praticamente scomparsi[8]. Il cati rimane comunque una modalità di rilevazione ancora molto presente in associazione con le tecniche cami, e/o cawi. Quanto i sondaggi sono effettuati con tecniche miste di rilevazione, gli istituti non indicano quasi mai la proporzione delle interviste fatte con ciascuna tecnica, con poche eccezioni (vedi oltre).

Anche la tecnica mista cati-cami segue un andamento simile (vedi tab. 1). L'altra considerazione che può essere fatta sui dati della tab. 1 è confrontare i sondaggi svolti usando una sola tecnica (solo cati o solo cawi) con quelli che usano due o tre tecniche di rilevazione: nel 2017 il 56,3% dei sondaggi erano condotti o solo con il cati o solo con il cawi; negli anni successivi la percentuale scende sensibilmente attestandosi nell'ultimo biennio su poco più di un terzo dei sondaggi (tutto dovuto ai sondaggi cawi).

Pertanto negli ultimi anni in oltre due terzi dei sondaggi si adottano tecniche di rilevazione miste e, fra queste, si sta consolidando la cati-cami-cawi. Nel restante terzo si effettuano sondaggi solo via web.

A nostro avviso, la varietà di combinazioni fra le diverse tecniche adottate dalle agenzie è un indicatore di quanto il problema della copertura della popolazione degli elettori italiani sia ancora alla ricerca di una soluzione soddisfacente. Occorre precisare la diretta connessione fra le tecniche di conduzione delle interviste e le modalità di selezione (campionamento) degli intervistati. Ovviamente per le cati la selezione è condotta sugli elenchi degli abbonati al telefono fisso e quindi la popolazione di riferimento consiste nell'insieme degli abbonati che sono inclusi negli elenchi telefonici. Per le cami, non esistendo elenchi di abbonati a servizi di telefonia mobile, la selezione avviene di solito componendo casualmente numeri e, una volta ottenuto il consenso della persona che risponde, controllando se rientra in una quota definita dal piano di campionamento, questo procedimento rientra quindi nel cosiddetto campionamento per quote. Infine, per le interviste cawi, con o senza panel online, non è possibile a rigore definire una popolazione di riferimento, neanche in termini molto generici come, ad esempio, gli utenti della rete internet, in quanto, come detto, si tratta di un insieme di soggetti che di fatto scelgono se partecipare o no a una rilevazione. In questo caso si rientra in quel tipo di campionamento che si definisce di convenienza o di comodo.

Non a caso, la prima vistosa anomalia che abbiamo riscontrato nell'analisi dei documenti informativi pubblicati sul sito istituzionale riguarda la definizione del tipo di campione adottato. Secondo le norme vigenti (vedi art. 2 del nuovo regolamento approvato con delibera n. 256/10/CSP, pubblicato sulla G.U. n. 301 del 27.10.2010) si chiede:

una chiara distinzione tra sondaggi (basati su metodi di rilevazione scientifica applicati ad un campione) ed altre indagini prive di valore scientifico quali le manifestazioni di opinione (fondate sulla partecipazione spontanea degli utenti) e che pertanto non potranno essere pubblicate o diffuse con la denominazione di "sondaggio".

Da ciò si evince che tutti i sondaggi dovrebbero essere condotti con tecniche di campionamento probabilistiche o quanto meno con tecniche che consentono di raggiungere un campione rappresentativo della popolazione degli elettori italiani.

Poco più avanti il regolamento elenca le informazioni da inserire obbligatoriamente nel documento allegato al sondaggio da inserire sul sito istituzionale. Nel punto 11 in contraddizione con quando affermato nell'art. 2 si chiede di indicare il tipo di:

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[8] In effetti, se consideriamo gli altri sondaggi politico-elettorali come ad esempio quelli condotti su ambiti sub-nazionali (regioni o comuni), i sondaggi cati sono ancora diffusi così come l'istituto Ipsos continua ad effettuare sondaggi solo con il cati quando l'oggetto non riguarda le intenzione di voto.

campionamento probabilistico o non probabilistico, di rilevazione su panel e l'eventuale ponderazione.

Insomma sembrerebbe che contrariamente a quando affermato nell'art. 2 qualsiasi tipo di campione vada bene purché sia esplicitato. Proseguendo, nel punto 12 è richiesta la "rappresentatività del campione inclusa l'indicazione del margine di errore". In questo caso viene da chiedersi come sia possibile calcolare l'errore di campionamento se il campione non è probabilistico. Nel punto 13 si chiede di indicare "il metodo di raccolta delle informazioni" e nel punto 14 la "consistenza numerica del campione di intervistati, il numero e la percentuale dei non reperibili, dei non rispondenti e delle sostituzioni effettuate".

In realtà gli istituti, tranne poche eccezioni, non dichiarano mai apertamente che il loro campione non è probabilistico, ma di solito omettono di specificare questa importante informazione. Di seguito forniamo il riscontro delle informazioni fornite: in 1.237 sondaggi (80,5%) si dichiara di aver prodotto un campione probabilistico ossia con un'estrazione casuale degli intervistati; in 300 casi (19,5%) il procedimento di estrazione dei casi non è fornito oppure è definito non probabilistico. Nell'allegato presentiamo nel dettaglio le informazioni che i quattordici istituti più presenti nella nostra matrice dei dati forniscono per definire i loro campioni e i relativi livelli di rappresentatività.

La numerosità dei campioni varia fra il minimo di 500 casi e il massimo di 16.000. La numerosità media è di 1.350,7 casi e lo scarto quadratico medio è di 860,5 casi. Associato alla numerosità del campione è il livello dell'errore di campionamento[9] che varia fra il minimo dell'0,9% e il massimo del 4,4%. L'errore di campionamento medio è del 3% e il suo scarto quadratico medio è di 0,5%.

Occorre sottolineare che l'errore di campionamento è un parametro che può essere determinato solo se il campione è probabilistico: in tutti i 1.537 sondaggi analizzati viene indicato, ma i conti non tornano quando si esamina il tipo di campionamento adottato. Come detto, solo in 1.237 (80,5%) casi il campione si dichiara essere probabilistico (o casuale); nei restanti 300 casi (19,5%) il campione è descritto come rappresentativo di alcuni caratteri della popolazione benché l'estrazione non

sia stata di tipo probabilistico. A tale riguardo dobbiamo precisare che un conto è la tecnica di estrazione dei casi da una popolazione (e qui si distinguono i campioni probabilistici dai campioni non probabilistici o a scelta ragionata; vedi Di Franco 2010), un altro conto è l'esito del campionamento che considera l'isomorfismo, ossia la rappresentatività, fra il campione raggiunto e la popolazione da cui è stato estratto. Molto spesso si confondono i due piani, ma non andrebbe fatto[10].

Molto probabilmente gli istituti considerano probabilistici o casuali i loro campioni adottando le nuove tecniche ibride di campionamento proposte negli ultimi anni di cui abbiamo riferito nel par. 2. In ogni caso, come è possibile constatare nell'allegato, nei documenti da noi analizzati non è possibile acquisire alcuna informazione a tale riguardo.

Considerando i criteri in base ai quali è stata definita la rappresentatività dei campioni riscontriamo una maggiore omogeneità. Nel 100% dei casi i campioni sono dichiarati rappresentativi della popolazione rispetto al genere e alle fasce di età. Nel 96% dei sondaggi analizzati si aggiunge ai primi due criteri la rappresentatività per macro-zona geografica; nel 63,6% anche la rappresentatività rispetto alla dimensione demografica del comune di residenza degli intervistati. La rappresentatività rispetto al livello d'istruzione degli intervistati è indicata solo nel 39,8% dei casi; solo nel 14,6% dei casi si aggiunge anche la rappresentatività rispetto alla condizione lavorativa degli intervistati.

Nel dettaglio solo nel 3,5% dei sondaggi (pari a 54 casi) il livello di rappresentatività dichiarato consta di sei caratteri (genere, fascia d'età, zona geografica, dimensione del comune, livello di istruzione e condizione lavorativa); nel 26,2% (402) i criteri di rappresentatività sono cinque; nel 53,4% (820) i criteri sono quattro (genere, fascia d'età, zona geografica e dimensione del comune); nel 14,8% (228) sono tre; nel 2,1% (33) sono due (solo genere e fascia d'età).

Sulla base di questi risultati, considerando quando detto nel par. 2, il livello di rappresentatività dichiarato nel complesso non può che essere valutato come molto insoddisfacente. Nella letteratura da anni si evidenzia come le variabili socio-demografiche non siano più sufficienti per studiare le scelte di voto degli elettori (Itanes 2018).

È interessante esaminare come vari la rappresentatività dei campioni al variare della tecnica di conduzione delle interviste. Come abbiamo visto nella tabella 1 la modalità più frequente di somministrazione delle interviste è la cati-cami-cawi: fatto cento il totale dei son-

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[9] Come abbiamo detto le nostre analisi si basano su quanto i responsabili dei diversi istituti comunicano nei documenti tecnici inseriti sul sito istituzionale. Non possiamo che registrare alcune anomalie, fra le quali la più bizzarra riguarda i sondaggi condotti da Termometro politico che pur essendo condotti su campioni a loro dire probabilistici di numerosità compresa fra i mille e i seimila casi presenta un errore di campionamento stabilmente del 3%. Non è dato comprendere come mai questo avvenga.

[10] Per ragioni di spazio, non possiamo approfondire il dibattito su casualità e rappresentatività dei campioni. Per approfondimenti rinviamo a Marradi (1989; 1997) e Di Franco (2010; 2018).

daggi realizzati con questa tecnica il 45,7% presenta una rappresentatività su quattro caratteri; il 33% su cinque; il 19,2% su tre; l'1,5% su due e lo 0,5% su sei. La cati-cawi presenta l'83,4% dei sondaggi con una rappresentatività dei campioni costituita da 4 caratteri. I sondaggi che adottano solo il cawi presentano il 44,2% dei sondaggi con una rappresentatività costituita da 4 caratteri; il 31,8% da 5; l'11,7% da 3; il 10% da 6. Il 91,8% dei sondaggi condotti solo con la tecnica cati presentano una rappresentatività dei campioni costituita da 4 caratteri. Il 52% dei sondaggi condotti con la tecnica mista cati-cami presenta una rappresentatività del campione costituita da 5 caratteri; il 29% una rappresentatività costituita da 3 caratteri.

Di solito, prima di fornire i risultati di un sondaggio elettorale, è necessario ponderare il campione tenendo conto sia dei criteri socio-demografici usati nella fase di progettazione del campione sia rispetto ai risultati delle elezioni più vicine alla data di realizzazione del sondaggio. Nel 40,1% dei casi (616 sondaggi) non si dichiara alcun tipo di ponderazione; nel 25,3% (389) dei casi si dichiara di aver condotto la ponderazione solo rispetto ai caratteri socio-demografici e nel 31,9% (490) entrambe le ponderazioni. Questi risultati non sono credibili e riteniamo che tutte le agenzie adottino tecniche di ponderazione che evidentemente preferiscono tenere riservate. A conclusioni analoghe era giunto Gasperoni (2013) analizzando i sondaggi pre-elettorali per le elezioni politiche del 2013. Anche in quella occasione erano state evidenziate numerose omissioni nella comunicazione di queste informazioni[11].

Un'altra lacuna riscontrata nella maggioranza dei documenti informativi riguarda la mancata indicazione dell'intervallo di fiducia per le stime dei risultati dell'intera popolazione. In questo caso nel 71,6% dei casi (1.100) manca l'informazione. Nel 25,7% (95 l'intervallo indicato è del 95% e nel 2,7% (42) del 99%.

Nel 16,9% (260 casi) dei sondaggi non è indicato né il numero di persone contattate né quello dei soggetti che hanno rifiutato l'intervista (sia perché hanno rifiutato sia per qualsiasi altro motivo[12]). Fra le agenzie che forniscono queste informazioni (83,1%) il numero di contatti varia fra un minimo di 1.000 e un massimo di 28.391 soggetti. La media dei contatti è 5.072,37, lo scar-

to quadratico medio è di 2.859,29. Il numero di rifiuti varia fra un minimo di 41 e un massimo di 24.389. La media dei rifiuti è di 3.894,74 e lo scarto quadratico medio è di 2.838,52.

Secondo la normativa vigente, quando il sondaggio è stato condotto con tecniche miste di rilevazione, le agenzie dovrebbero indicare la proporzione di interviste effettuate con le diverse tecniche di rilevazione. Su 1.009 sondaggi che si trovano in questa situazione, nel 91,4% (922) questa informazione non viene fornita a fronte del 8,6% (87 casi) di volte in cui viene riportata. Fanno eccezione l'Istituto Piepoli (che in tutti i 70 sondaggi indica la proporzione di circa 70% di interviste cati e circa 30% di interviste cawi); l'agenzia Bidimedia Bi3 (dei 72 sondaggi svolti in 42 casi siamo informati che il campione è costituito da circa due terzi di intervistati provenienti da un panel online e da circa un terzo di casi di interviste effettuate con il cawi; gli altri 30 sondaggi sono stati condotti solo con il cawi). Tutte le agenzie che adottano il cati-cami-cawi non forniscono questa importante informazione che pure è richiesta dalla normativa citata con due sole eccezioni: dei 32 sondaggi svolti dall'agenzia Quorum in un solo caso è indicato il 35% di interviste cati, il 30% di interviste cami e il 35% di interviste cawi; dei 252 sondaggi svolti dall'agenzia Tecné in un solo caso si riporta il 50% di interviste cati, il 30% di interviste cami e il 20% di interviste cawi.

In media i sondaggi analizzati sono stati realizzati in circa tre giorni (2,69 giorni; 2,00 scarto quadratico medio). Considerando la tecnica di conduzione delle interviste, i sondaggi che richiedono tempi di realizzazione più lunghi sono quelli in cui è presente la tecnica cawi (rispettivamente 3,39 giorni – 1,92 scarto quadratico medio – quando si adottano le cati-cami-cawi; 2,75 – 2,18 scarto quadratico medio – quando si usano solo interviste cawi. Quando nella composizione del campione prevalgono le interviste telefoniche (cati e/o cami) i tempi di realizzazione sono più contenuti (1,78 solo cati – 2,36 scarto quadratico medio – e 1,56 – 0,78 scarto quadratico medio – cati-cami). Le rilevazioni condotte con la combinazione cati-cawi sono effettuate mediamente in 1,87 giorni – 1,23 scarto quadratico medio.

Quando si effettua un sondaggio elettorale è, o meglio sarebbe, doveroso indicare fra i risultati la percentuale di intervistati che si sono dichiarati indecisi e quella di chi esprime l'intenzione di astenersi. Anche in questo caso la maggior parte dei sondaggi da noi analizzati è carente di informazioni: solo il 14,9% dei sondaggi analizzati (229 casi) riporta la percentuale di indecisi e solo il 78,1% (1.201 casi) la percentuale di intenzionati ad astenersi che spesso include, ma non si sa con quale entità, anche la percentuale degli indecisi. Esaminan-

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[11] Nel Regolamento Agcom del 2010 l'indicazione dell'eventuale ponderazione deve essere riportata nel documento inserito sul sito web istituzionale.

[12] Occorre precisare che dalle informazioni in nostro possesso, derivate dai documenti informativi allegati ai sondaggi, non è possibile distinguere fra i contatti non andati a buon fine per rifiuto dell'intervista da quelli dovuti alla chiusura delle quote o ad altri motivi. Questo problema riguarda in modo particolare le intervista svolte con il cati o il cami, innalzando così in modo rilevante il numero dei contatti.

do i valori caratteristici della percentuale di astenuti più eventuali indecisi risulta che il valore minimo è un del tutto inverosimile 3%; il massimo il 71,5%. La media è del 37,43% e lo scarto quadratico medio è del 14,45%. Questi valori sono importanti perché consentono di stabilire il numero di soggetti effettivi che hanno espresso un'intenzione di voto. Ad esempio, se in un sondaggio condotto su 1.000 casi il 38% si è dichiarato indeciso o intenzionato ad astenersi questo significa che solo 620 soggetti hanno espresso l'intenzione di voto per un partito. Anche in questo caso i nostri risultati sono in linea con quelli presentati da Gasperoni (2013).

La tabella 2 presenta le percentuali medie di indecisi e astensioni per la tecnica di conduzione delle interviste, ovviamente relative solo ai sondaggi che forniscono informazioni a tale riguardo (1.195).

Esaminando le diverse medie appare evidente che quando i sondaggi sono svolti con la sola tecnica cawi presentano una percentuale di indecisi più astenuti (21,2%) assolutamente inverosimile, se confrontata con la sola percentuale di astensioni che si è registrata nelle elezioni politiche del 2022 (il 36,21%). In generale le tecniche di conduzione delle interviste impattano in modo significativo sulla stima della percentuale di indecisi e astenuti.

Abbiamo controllato questa relazione con il test della differenza delle medie assumendo le cinque modalità di rilevazione come gruppi statisticamente indipendenti: le differenze riscontrate risultano significative (F = 41,68; p = 0,000).

Con la tabella 3 è possibile confrontare le differenze nell'ammontare degli indecisi e astenuti rispetto all'agenzia che ha condotto il sondaggio. Le differenze fra i primi quattordici istituti sono davvero notevoli. Si passa da una percentuale media intorno al 4% che non ha davvero alcuna plausibilità nei sondaggi condotti da Termometro politico, a valori percentuali medi a partire dal 50% in su (Bidimedia b3, Demopolis e Index; vedi tab. 3). L'associazione fra la percentuale media di astenuti più

Tabella 3. Percentuali medie di indecisi + astenuti per agenzia.

agenzia	media	n	sqm
tecnè	43,06	252	2,13
swg	37,72	183	4,42
emg acqua	45,52	151	6,70
termometro politico	4,26	137	0,93
euromedia research	32,14	108	5,16
ixè	38,18	66	4,72
bidimedia bi3	54,41	61	12,72
demopolis	50,41	58	4,90
ipsos	38,56	53	4,30
index research	55,69	38	4,08
piepoli	29,66	38	7,48
quorum	41,55	29	3,97
totale	37,43	1195	14,45

sqm = scarto quadratico medio.
eta = 0,94 eta quadrato 0,87; F = 368,29, p. = 0,000.

gli incerti e l'agenzia che ha volto il sondaggio è quantificabile con il coefficiente eta che raggiunge un valore prossimo al massimo (0,94).

Pertanto possiamo affermare che l'impatto delle diverse tecniche di rilevazione adottate dagli istituti è tale da non poter confrontare i diversi risultati perché sono molto condizionati dal tipo di tecnica, e dal relativo tipo di campione, da cui derivano.

Nel complesso tutte le agenzie forniscono le seguenti informazioni: il titolo del sondaggio; il soggetto che ha realizzato il sondaggio; il soggetto committente; il soggetto acquirente; la data in cui è stato realizzato il sondaggio; il mezzo di comunicazione di massa sul quale è stato pubblicato; la data di pubblicazione; il o i temi oggetto del sondaggio; la popolazione di riferimento; l'estensione territoriale del sondaggio; il tipo di campionamento; la rappresentatività del campione e l'errore di campionamento; la tecnica di conduzione delle interviste.

A proposito del numero e/o la percentuale dei non reperibili, dei non rispondenti e delle sostituzioni effettuate e la percentuale delle persone che si sono dichiarate indecise o intenzionate ad astenersi, come detto, abbiamo invece riscontrato numerose lacune. Abbiamo evidenziato come questi problemi riguardino in particolare i sondaggi svolti con la tecnica cawi e ciò lascia presupporre che in effetti le agenzie che vi ricorrono non procedano ad un campionamento probabilistico ma selezionino gli intervistati con inviti rivolti a utenti della rete che si sono registrati in un qualche sito web o su un panel online (vedi a tale riguardo il par. 2).

Per quantificare l'impatto delle diverse tecniche di conduzione delle interviste sulla procedura di selezio-

Tabella 2. Percentuali medie di indecisi più astenuti per tecnica di conduzione delle interviste.

	n	media	sqm
cati-cami-cawi	487	39,26	5,15
cawi (panel online)	371	21,24	22,08
cati-cawi	213	42,16	8,59
cati	50	50,86	9,98
cati-cami	74	33,72	8,17
totale	1195	37,43	14,45

sqm = scarto quadratico medio.
eta = 0,351; eta quadrato 0,123; F = 41,68 p. = 0,000.

Tabella 4. Rapporto numero contatti su numero interviste effettuate per tecnica di conduzione delle interviste.

	n	media	sqm
cati-cami-cawi	553	5,34	2,28
cawi (panel online)	259	1,40	0,64
cati-cawi	261	7,61	4,33
cati	108	5,24	1,28
cati-cami	96	4,91	2,96
totale	1277	4,96	3,32

sqm = scarto quadratico medio.
eta = 0,61; eta quadrato = 0,37; F = 187,05 p. = 0,000.

ne degli intervistati, abbiamo calcolato il rapporto fra il numero dei contatti, quando questa informazione è stata dichiarata (1.277 sondaggi su 1.537), e il numero di interviste effettuate. La media è 4,97 contatti per ciascuna intervista effettuata (valore minimo 1,1; valore massimo 18,6) il che significa che in media per effettuare un'intervista è stato necessario contattare cinque soggetti, ottenendo quattro esiti negativi.

Possiamo ora valutare come varia il rapporto contatti/interviste rispetto alla tecnica di rilevazione[13]. Esaminando i dati della tabella 4 è possibile riscontrare un sensibile effetto della tecnica di rilevazione sul rapporto contatti/interviste. Anche per questa relazione abbiamo condotto il test della differenza delle medie: le differenze riscontrate fra i diversi rapporti rispetto alla tecnica di conduzione delle interviste risultano statisticamente significative (p = 0,000). La combinazione cati-cawi risulta quella con il rapporto meno favorevole: per ogni intervista effettuata in media sono occorsi quasi otto contatti.

All'opposto i sondaggi condotti con il cawi e/o su panel online, essendo il campione costituito da soggetti che accettano di essere intervistati ripetutamente nel tempo, in cambio di qualche retribuzione presentano valori medi del rapporto poco superiori a uno.

Benché, da un lato, i panel online offrano un ottimo rendimento nel rapporto contatti/interviste, dall'altro presentano almeno due problemi: il primo riguarda i soggetti che permangono a lungo nel panel. In questo caso si presenta il rischio di un effetto che potremmo definire di "professionalizzazione dell'intervistato". In breve, un soggetto che ripetutamente viene intervistato tende ad accrescere la sua sensibilità e le sue informazioni sui temi su cui dovrà rispondere e in questo modo acquisisce delle competenze che altrimenti non avrebbe

divenendo così un intervistato professionista e non più un semplice intervistato; infine, il secondo è il fenomeno degli *heavy internet users* descritto nel paragrafo 2.

La tabella 5 presenta i valori medi del rapporto contatti/interviste per le prime quattordici agenzie che hanno condotto i sondaggi da noi analizzati quando hanno fornito le informazioni a tale riguardo.

Lasciamo ai lettori l'analisi minuziosa dei dati in tabella 5. Ci limitiamo a segnalare che in generale ciascuna agenzia ha una *performance* nel rapporto contatti/interviste piuttosto stabile (vedi i rispettivi valori degli scarti quadratici medi). Le agenzie Piepoli (13,96), Demos&Pi (10,83) e Ixè (7,65) presentano valori del rapporto decisamente più alti rispetto alla media generale. Di converso Emg acqua (1,30), Bidimedia b3 (1,92), Euromedia Research (2,44) e Demopolis (3,24) decisamente più bassi.

In altri termini se per alcune agenzie è stato necessario contattare quattordici o undici potenziali intervistandi per effettuare una intervista, per altre è bastato contattarne solo uno o due. Non avendo a disposizione informazioni più dettagliate sulle procedure attuate dalle diverse agenzie, le spiegazioni plausibili consistono nell'adozione di una consistente quota di interviste cawi; la possibile stesura di elenchi di abbonati alla telefonia fissa che in passato hanno risposto a precedenti sondaggi dello stesso istituto e/o di utenti in possesso di numero cellulare e/o di abbonamento internet che si sono registrati su qualche sito web. Quindi anziché campionare i soggetti dagli elenchi telefonici, o tramite composizione casuale di numeri telefonici, alcune agenzie, per ridurre

Tabella 5. Rapporto numero contatti su numero interviste effettuate per agenzia che ha condotto il sondaggio.

	n	media	sqm
tecnè	224	5,53	1,18
emg acqua	190	1,30	0,64
swg	185	4,59	0,24
index research	125	5,42	0,69
euromedia research	109	2,44	0,27
ixè	101	7,65	1,49
piepoli	70	13,96	1,37
demopolis	68	3,24	0,45
ipsos	57	5,57	1,47
bidimedia bi3	46	1,92	0,41
demos&pi	42	10,83	3,54
quorum	14	5,39	1,08
totale	1277	4,96	3,32

sqm = scarto quadratico medio.
eta = 0,95; eta quadrato 0,89; F = 473,03 p. = 0,000.

[13] Informiamo i lettori che per i 463 sondaggi condotti con il cawi solo in 259 casi (55,9%) è stata fornita l'informazione sul numero di soggetti contattati.

il numero di rifiuti e quindi i tempi e i costi della rilevazione, attingono a elenchi di soggetti per i quali è più alta la possibilità di ottenere un'intervista. Se fosse questa la ragione della differenza fra i valori del rapporto contatti/interviste che abbiamo rilevato, significherebbe che alcune agenzie sono disposte ad accettare gravi problemi di copertura dei loro campioni rispetto alla popolazione di riferimento, ovviamente omettendo di dichiarare nel documento informativo la presenza di tali possibili errori sistematici. Inoltre, per valutare in modo approfondito l'impatto delle diverse tecniche di rilevazione, o delle diverse combinazioni di tecniche, sul rapporto contatti/interviste avremmo bisogno di conoscere sia la percentuale di interviste fatte con ciascuna tecnica, sia i rispettivi numeri di contatti e interviste effettuate. Come detto queste informazioni sono sistematicamente eluse da tutte le agenzie, con le poche eccezioni sopra riportate.

Per valutare complessivamente la qualità delle informazioni fornite nei documenti abbiamo elaborato un indice di completezza delle informazioni dei sondaggi sommando la presenza dei seguenti sei elementi sui quali abbiamo rilevato le maggiori criticità:

1. la presenza delle proporzioni nella ripartizione delle interviste condotte con tecniche miste di rilevazione;
2. l'indicazione dell'intervallo di fiducia per le stime;
3. l'indicazione del numero dei soggetti contattati;
4. l'indicazione dei rifiuti e/o sostituzioni per le interviste realizzate;
5. l'indicazione della percentuale degli indecisi;
6. l'indicazione della percentuale degli astenuti.

Abbiamo codificato ciascun elemento con il valore uno quando è presente e con il valore zero quando è assente. Abbiamo poi normalizzato i valori dell'indice dividendo la somma degli elementi presenti per il numero totale degli stessi per ottenere valori compresi nell'intervallo fra zero (che rappresenta l'assenza di tutti i sei

elementi) e uno (quando tutti i sei elementi sono presenti). I risultati dell'indice sono presentati nella tabella 6.

Colpisce che solo in 27 sondaggi su 1.537 (1,8%) si registra il valore massimo. Ribadiamo tutti i documenti dovrebbero contenere tutte le informazioni richieste e pertanto i valori dell'indice dovrebbero essere sempre uguali a uno. Invece nel 98,2% dei casi si registra un valore inferiore. La media generale dell'indice è 0,56, lo scarto quadratico medio 0,18. Nel 62,5% dei casi l'indice presenta il valore compreso fra uno e tre elementi. In 160 casi (10,4%) il valore 0,83 indica la presenza di cinque elementi su sei.

Esaminando i valori dell'indice di completezza delle informazioni per l'agenzia che ha realizzato i sondaggi (vedi tabella 7), possiamo constatare in quali casi si registrano le maggiori criticità.

Gli istituti Piepoli (0,75) Bidimedia b3 (0,67), Euromedia research (0,68) e Emg acqua (0,68) presentano i valori più alti; Termometro Politico (0,33) e Winpoll (0,27) quelli più bassi: entrambi conducono i loro sondaggi solo con interviste cawi.

Per corroborare i risultati fin qui presentati, possiamo considerare le tabelle 8, 9, 10, 11 e 12 dove riportiamo le differenze, in scarti di punti percentuali, delle stime dei cinque principali partiti, Fratelli d'Italia, Lega, Forza Italia, Pd e M5s, rispetto alle percentuali medie calcolate considerando tutti i sondaggi effettuati nei mesi di luglio, agosto e settembre 2022, ossia a partire dalla data nella quale sono state indette le elezioni politiche del 25 settembre 2022. Abbiamo scelto di considerare i tre mesi

Tabella 6. Distribuzione dei valori dell'indice di completezza delle informazioni richieste.

indice completezza	frequenza	percentuale	% cumulata
0,17	57	3,7	3,7
0,33	220	14,3	18,0
0,50	683	44,4	62,5
0,67	390	25,4	87,8
0,83	160	10,4	98,2
1,00	27	1,8	100,0
totale	1537	100,0	

Tabella 7. Indice di completezza delle informazioni per agenzia che ha condotto il sondaggio.

	n	media	sqm
tecnè	252	0,47	0,10
emg acqua	190	0,68	0,12
swg	186	0,50	0,03
termometro politico	142	0,33	0,00
index research	125	0,55	0,19
euromedia research	109	0,68	0,04
ixè	101	0,61	0,08
bidimedia bi3	72	0,69	0,32
piepoli	70	0,75	0,09
demopolis	68	0,65	0,06
ipsos	57	0,50	0,06
demos&pi	42	0,51	0,05
winpoll	42	0,27	0,15
quorum	32	0,58	0,13
totale	1537	0,55	0,17

eta = 0,72; eta quadrato 0,52; F = 61,50 p. = 0,000.

Tabella 8. Scarto percentuale fra le stime di nove istituti e la percentuale media dei risultati di Fratelli d'Italia calcolata sul totale dei sondaggi per ciascun mese (luglio, agosto e settembre 2022).

	lug. 2022	ago. 2022	set. 2022
tecnè	0,05	0,15	0,11
emg acqua	-0,91	-1,03	-0,84
swg	0,61	0,07	0,81
term. politico	0,12	0,27	0,01
euromedia res.	-0,81	0,37	-0,29
bidimedia bi3	-0,38	0,09	0,21
demopolis	0,09	-0,08	-0,24
ipsos	-0,11	-0,23	0,31
demos&pi	-1,11	-0,83	-0,39
% media tot. sondaggi mensili	23,41 (N = 26)	24,23 (N = 29)	24,99 (N = 26)

eta = 0,49; eta quadrato 0,24; F = 3,34 p. = 0,000.

Tabella 9. Scarto percentuale fra le stime di nove istituti e la percentuale media dei risultati della Lega calcolata sul totale dei sondaggi per ciascun mese (luglio, agosto e settembre 2022).

	lug. 2022	ago. 2022	set. 2022
tecnè	0,17	-0,24	-0,4
emg acqua	-1,73	-0,42	0
swg	-0,79	-0,72	-0,05
term. politico	1,37	1,08	1,45
euromedia res.	0,14	-0,72	-0,35
bidimedia bi3	0,3	0,06	0,08
demopolis	-0,03	1,63	1,4
ipsos	-0,73	0,18	0
demos&pi	1,37	-0,02	-0,15
% media tot. sondaggi mensili	14,23 (N = 26)	13,22 (N = 29)	12,15 (N = 26)

eta = 0,49; eta quadrato 0,24; F = 3,39 p. = 0,000.

antecedenti le elezioni per valutare se con l'approssimarsi delle elezioni le differenze fra le stime degli istituti convergessero vero la media generale o se, al contrario, le differenze rimanessero costanti. Per contenere la dimensione delle tabelle abbiamo considerato solo nove istituti con il maggior numero di sondaggi effettuati nel periodo preso in considerazione e nell'ultima riga intestata "% media tot. sondaggi mensili" è riportata la percentuale media considerando tutti i sondaggi effettuati per ciascun mese. Il totale dei sondaggi sono 26 in luglio, 29 in agosto e 26 in settembre. In calce a ciascuna tabella sono riportati i coefficienti eta ed eta quadrato, il test F e il valore della significatività statistica.

Per il partito di Giorgia Meloni i nove istituti da noi considerati tendenzialmente tendono a sottostimare i risultati rispetto alle percentuali medie mensili. L'istituto Tecnè è quello che presenta i risultati più simili alle rispettive medie mensili; Emg acqua, e Demos&pi tendono a sottostimare i risultati durante i tre mesi, anche se il secondo istituto migliora le stime, passando da -1,11 di luglio a -0,39 di settembre.

Per la Lega le differenze sono molto più marcate fra gli istituti (vedi tab. 9). I sondaggi di Termometro politico sovrastimano di un punto percentuale e più in ciascuno dei tre mesi.

Il risultato più anomalo lo troviamo nella tabella 10 dove sono riportate le stime elettorali di Forza Italia. In questo caso Tecnè fornisce stime decisamente più alte (rispettivamente 2,33 a luglio, 3,1 a agosto e 2,67 a settembre; vedi tab. 10) rispetto a tutti gli altri istituti.

Per il Pd (vedi tab. 11) i risultati di Emg acqua sono i più difformi con un andamento che passa da una sovrastima nel mese di luglio (1,77) e sottostime nei mesi successivi (rispettivamente -1,56 e -1,41).

Tabella 10. Scarto percentuale fra le stime di nove istituti e la percentuale media dei risultati di Forza Italia calcolata sul totale dei sondaggi per ciascun mese (luglio, agosto e settembre 2022).

	lug. 2022	ago. 2022	set. 2022
tecnè	2,33	3,10	2,67
emg acqua	-1,15	0,36	0,47
swg	-0,71	-0,54	-0,93
term. politico	-0,55	-0,79	-0,53
euromedia res.	0,05	-1,04	-0,43
bidimedia bi3	-1,12	-1,46	-0,95
demopolis	-1,65	-1,14	-0,58
ipsos	0,85	-0,04	0,37
demos&pi	-0,15	0,26	0,07
% media tot. sondaggi mensili	8,15 (N = 26)	8,04 (N = 29)	7,63 (N = 26)

eta = 0,93; eta quadrato 0,87; F = 68,50 p. = 0,000.

Le stime del Movimento 5 stelle sono molto difformi fra i diversi istituti con scarti percentuali anche di più di due punti percentuali (vedi tab. 12). Gli istituti Tecné, Bidimedia b3 e Demopolis sottostimano sistematicamente i risultati nei tre mesi considerati; Ipsos e Demos&pi, al contrario li sovrastimano sistematicamente. Altri istituti, come Swg, Euromedia research e Emg acqua presentano stime altalenanti nel corso dei tre mesi, a volte sovrastimando e a volte sottostimando.

Lasciando ai lettori l'analisi dettagliata delle tabelle 8, 9, 10, 11 e 12, ci limitiamo a considerare che in tutti i casi il test delle differenze delle medie dà esito statisticamente significativo.

Concludiamo la nostra analisi cercando di rispondere alla domanda più importane: quanto incide la tec-

Tabella 11. Scarto percentuale fra le stime di nove istituti e la percentuale media dei risultati del Partito Democratico calcolata sul totale dei sondaggi per ciascun mese (luglio, agosto e settembre 2022).

	lug. 2022	ago. 2022	set. 2022
tecnè	0,51	0,36	0,14
emg acqua	1,77	-1,56	-1,41
swg	-0,23	-0,06	-0,21
term. politico	-0,23	0,54	0,99
euromedia res.	-0,73	0,24	0,19
bidimedia bi3	-0,1	1,42	1,49
demopolis	-0,43	-0,16	0,79
ipsos	0,47	0,14	-0,56
demos&pi	-1,73	-0,76	0,79
% media tot. sondaggi mensili	22,73 (N = 26)	22,86 (N = 29)	21,61 (N = 26)

eta = 0,63; eta quadrato 0,39; F = 6,81 p. = 0,000.

Tabella 12. Scarto percentuale fra le stime di nove istituti e la percentuale media dei risultati del Movimento 5 Stelle calcolata sul totale dei sondaggi per ciascun mese (luglio, agosto e settembre 2022).

	lug. 2022	ago. 2022	set. 2022
tecnè	-1,02	-0,84	-1,03
emg acqua	0	0,68	-0,58
swg	0,3	-0,02	-1,18
term. politico	1,53	-0,12	-0,63
euromedia res.	-0,1	1,28	-0,08
bidimedia bi3	-0,3	-0,94	-0,83
demopolis	-0,7	-0,22	-0,53
ipsos	0,8	2,38	1,57
demos&pi	2,9	0,28	0,72
% media tot. sondaggi mensili	10,50 (N = 26)	11,02 (N = 29)	13,08 (N = 26)

eta = 0,55; eta quadrato 0,31; F = 4,65 p. = 0,000.

nica di rilevazione/campionamento sui risultati ottenuti da un sondaggio? Per quantificare l'influenza della tecnica di rilevazione abbiamo impostato un modello di regressione lineare multipla definendo come variabile dipendente la percentuale di astensioni e incerti e come variabili indipendenti e di controllo le seguenti cinque: l'indice di completezza del sondaggio, l'errore di campionamento, il rapporto contatti/interviste, e due variabili booleane (con valori zero = assenza e uno = presenza) che indicano la presenza delle tecniche di rilevazione cawi e cati-cawi. Abbiamo operativizzato le due variabili booleane perché siamo interessati a valutare l'effetto delle tecniche di rilevazione basate sul web o in modo

Tabella 13. I coefficienti di regressione multipla di cinque variabili indipendenti sulla percentuale di astenuti e incerti.

	b	e. s.	beta	t	sig.
(costante)	46,614	1,920		24,273	0,000
cawi	-2,229	1,018	-0,102	-2,189	0,029
ind. comp.zza sondaggio	28,421	2,348	0,441	12,106	0,000
errore	-7,114	0,767	-0,400	-9,274	0,000
cati_cawi	5,589	0,642	0,262	8,700	0,000
rapp_cont	-0,528	0,118	-0,167	-4,466	0,000

e.s. = errore standard della stima.

esclusivo (cawi) o in associazione con la tecnica cati. L'analisi è stata condotta su tutti i sondaggi che riportavano le stime degli indecisi e astenuti (958 casi).

Il modello riproduce il 31% della varianza della variabile dipendente (R = 0,563; R quadrato = 0,32, R quadrato corretto = 0,31). Questa quota di varianza riprodotta risulta essere statisticamente significativa (F = 90,70, sig. 0,000), così come le statistiche sui residui del modello (media = 0 e scarto quadratico medio = 1) confermano la bontà di adattamento del modello di regressione.

Nella tabella 13 riportiamo i coefficienti, non standardizzati (b) e standardizzati (beta) delle variabili indipendenti del modello di regressione con i rispettivi valori di significatività statistica.

L'analisi dei coefficienti di regressione multipla standardizzati conferma che i sondaggi effettuati solo con la tecnica cawi, con o senza panel online, tendono a sottostimare i valori degli astenuti e degli indecisi (beta = -0,102) in modo statisticamente significativo, ossia non per effetto del caso introducendo una distorsione sistematica nei risultati forniti dal sondaggio di entità non trascurabile. Al contrario la tecnica cati-cawi (beta = 0,262) incrementa la stima della percentuale di astenuti e indecisi con un peso doppio rispetto alla tecnica cawi. Anche le altre variabili indipendenti inserite nel modello esibiscono effetti significativi sulla stima della variabile dipendente e, fra queste, l'indice di completezza del sondaggio e l'errore di campionamento sono quelle che presentano gli impatti maggiori (rispettivamente beta = 0,44 per l'indice di completezza del sondaggio e beta = 0,40 per l'errore di campionamento).

5. CONCLUSIONI

A seguito dei risultati delle nostre analisi sarebbe necessario che gli operatori dell'informazione, gli attori politici e istituzionali chiedessero l'adozione di criteri

più trasparenti e rigorosi nella divulgazione dei risultati dei sondaggi con particolare cura delle informazioni metodologiche. Queste informazioni sono necessarie per fornire una informazione chiara e responsabile ai cittadini-elettori che seguono le vicende politiche durante la campagna elettorale perché costituiscono la condizione necessaria per consentire a tutti gli interessati di controllare in maniera effettiva l'attendibilità delle informazioni provenienti dai sondaggi e veicolate dai mezzi di informazione.

In Italia manca una cultura dei sondaggi soprattutto da parte di chi li commissiona. In primo luogo i mass media e gli attori politici. In definitiva il potere è nelle mani del committente perché con i suoi soldi si realizza il sondaggio. Come per qualsiasi altro prodotto che si acquista sul mercato, è la domanda che stabilisce i criteri che determinano il rapporto qualità/prezzo.

Immaginiamo un consumatore interessato ad acquistare un prodotto, ad esempio un capo di abbigliamento. Egli può valutare diverse marche e diversi articoli sulla base delle caratteristiche che ritiene più importanti. Può anche decidere di rivolgersi al mercato parallelo dei prodotti sottomarca o a quelli contraffatti. Ad esempio, può immaginare che nel suo caso anche un prodotto contraffatto possa soddisfare le sue esigenze. In questo caso effettuerà il suo acquisto su una bancarella di un mercatino e con pochi euro potrà concludere la transazione. Ora, mettendo da parte gli aspetti legali dell'esempio che qui non interessano, quello che è importante notare è che il nostro acquirente nella grande maggioranza dei casi è del tutto consapevole che ha acquistato un prodotto che non rispetta i requisiti e gli standard di qualità previsti, implicitamente o esplicitamente, nei prodotti legali che presentano ben altro prezzo sul mercato, escludendo cioè la possibilità che sia talmente ingenuo da non sapere che acquistando a soli dieci euro un prodotto che sul mercato costa duecento euro sta acquistando un prodotto falso.

Questo esempio permette di evidenziare una differenza sostanziale con il mercato dei sondaggi elettorali. La gran parte dei committenti, i mass media e gli attori politici, non è in grado di valutare la qualità del prodotto-sondaggio che acquista e di fronte a questa incompetenza non può che affidarsi a criteri più o meno razionali (ad esempio il costo, la velocità di realizzazione, il prestigio dell'istituto a cui si rivolge, ecc.).

Si dirà a questo punto che in Italia esistono delle leggi e una Autorità di garanzia preposte al controllo della qualità dei sondaggi elettorali. Queste istituzioni dovrebbero svolgere un'azione di vigilanza e di controllo nell'interesse sia dei committenti sia del pubblico in generale nel momento in cui i sondaggi vengono diffusi

sui mezzi di comunicazione di massa. Il problema è che il controllo esercitato dall'Autorità è del tutto formale e non garantisce in alcun modo la qualità dei sondaggi elettorali che vengono diffusi sui mass media.

Un altro aspetto fondamentale riguarda la valutazione degli effetti dovuti al crescente impiego di campioni formati sempre più sul web, con o senza panel online. Fino a quando la tecnica di rilevazione era il cati era possibile sostenere che i risultati dei sondaggi erano generalizzabili all'intera popolazione di riferimento, gli abbonati alla telefonia fissa, entro i margini dell'errore di campionamento. Negli ultimi due decenni tutti gli istituti si sono dovuti adattare ai cambiamenti tecnologici e di stile di vita degli elettori e quindi sono intervenute tutte le innovazioni di cui abbiamo discusso nel nostro contributo. La valutazione di questi cambiamenti, almeno con riguardo all'Italia e in relazione agli ultimi anni da noi presi in considerazione, mostra un bilancio decisamente negativo rispetto alla situazione precedente, soprattutto a causa delle procedure di reclutamento che sono in auge sul web, tanto che a proposito della selezione degli intervistati alcuni istituti hanno adottato – peraltro senza dichiararlo in modo chiaro e trasparente nei loro documenti informativi – una scelta radicale che consiste nell'abbandono del campionamento probabilistico classico. Ormai, diversi istituti conducono i loro sondaggi reclutando panel composti da volontari che partecipano a uno o più sondaggi per ricevere un qualche tipo di incentivo. Occorre sottolineare la grande differenza che corre fra un sondaggio condotto su un campione probabilistico e un sondaggio condotto su un campione web o panel online. Nel primo caso l'inferenza dei risultati alla popolazione di riferimento è sostenuta della teoria della probabilità e dai teoremi dell'inferenza statistica; nel secondo caso l'inferenza si basa su modelli induttivi che non hanno fondamenti teorici comparabili (vedi a tale riguardo il paragrafo 2). I sostenitori dei panel online affermano che i loro modelli induttivi funzionano abbastanza bene e in alcuni casi anche meglio dei campioni probabilistici, specie quando si registrano tassi di rifiuto tanto alti da rendere questi campioni di fatto frutto dell'auto-selezione dei rispondenti.

In ogni caso il futuro delle indagini demoscopiche dipenderà dal loro adattamento alle nuove tecnologie di comunicazione che sono e sempre più saranno riconducibili a livello del singolo individuo. Nell'era precedente, quando dominava la tecnica cati, il mezzo di comunicazione usato era l'utenza telefonica domestica che faceva riferimento al nucleo familiare: quindi i soggetti intervistati si selezionavano all'interno del nucleo familiare. La diffusione dei mezzi di comunicazione a livello personale sta modificando sostanzialmente il legame fra individui

e famiglie. Anche su questo tema il dibattito è in corso e non sono chiare le conseguenze in termini di rappresentatività dei campioni raggiunti.

Un altro scenario possibile per il futuro prossimo potrà riguardare l'integrazione fra i dati dei sondaggi on line e altri dati provenienti da fonti diverse, sempre attingibili sul web, ad esempio, fonti e registri amministrativi, dati relativi all'uso dei social media, big data, ecc.

In ogni caso la combinazione dei dati dei sondaggi con altre fonti di informazioni può da un lato offrire risultati promettenti ma, dall'altro, nuove sfide e seri problemi metodologici e anche di natura etica e deontologica (tutela della privacy).

Tornando al tempo presente, un primo passo importante sarebbe quello di migliorare decisamente la comunicazione delle informazioni metodologiche a corredo di un sondaggio per consentire agli utenti interessati una valutazione complessiva dei risultati.

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APPENDICE

Di seguito riportiamo integralmente le definizioni dei campioni e le tecniche di conduzione delle interviste che i quattordici istituti con più sondaggi effettuati nel periodo da noi analizzato forniscono nei documenti informativi.

Tecnè

Metodo di campionamento: campione probabilistico articolato per sesso, età, area geografica, ampiezza centri – ponderazione sociodemografico e politico.
Rappresentatività del campione: Campione rappresentativo della popolazione > 18 anni residente in Italia - Margine di errore: +/- 3,1% (sui risultati a livello dell'intero campione).
Metodo raccolta informazioni: cati-cawi o cati-cami-cawi.

Emg Acqua

Metodo di campionamento: Campione rappresentativo della popolazione italiana maggiorenne per sesso, età, regione, classe d'ampiezza demografica dei comuni
Rappresentatività del campione: Universo: popolazione italiana maggiorenne; campione: 1.472 casi; intervallo fiduciario delle stime: ±2,3%; totale contatti: 2.000 (tasso di risposta: 74%); rifiuti/sostituzioni: 528 (tasso di rifiuti: 26%).
Metodo raccolta informazioni: rilevazione telematica su panel.

Swg

Metodo di campionamento: stratificato per zona di residenza e quote per età e genere e ponderato successivamente per le variabili di età, genere, zona di residenza, titolo di studio e voto alle ultime elezioni europee.
Rappresentatività del campione: campione rappresentativo dell'universo di riferimento per genere, età, zona, ampiezza del comune di residenza. margine di errore +/- 2,8%.
Metodo raccolta informazioni: sondaggio realizzato con tecnica di rilevazione online cawi, telefonica cati e cami.

Termometro politico

Metodo di campionamento: Campione rappresentativo dell'universo di riferimento per sesso, età, area geografica e condizione professionale – Campionamento probabilistico - Ponderazione dei dati per il riporto alle proporzioni presenti nell'universo di riferimento.
Rappresentatività del campione: Il campione è ripartito per sesso, fasce di età, istruzione, occupazione e zona di residenza (su dati ISTAT 2018). Margine di errore +/- 3%
Metodo raccolta informazioni: metodologia cawi. Interviste web. Elaborazioni Spss

Index Research

Metodo di campionamento: Campionamento casuale di tipo probabilistico stratificato per sesso, classi di età, aree geografiche.
Rappresentatività del campione: Campione rappresentativo della popolazione italiana maggiorenne. Margine di errore: 3,5%.
Metodo raccolta informazioni: interviste con metodologia cati-cami-cawi con questionario strutturato.

Euromedia Research

Metodo di campionamento: Campione casuale nazionale rappresentativo della popolazione italiana maggiorenne secondo genere, età, livello di scolarità, area geografica di residenza, dimensione del comune di residenza.
Rappresentatività del campione: (1.000 interviste): 1.000 intervistati (interviste valide) - numero dei non rispondenti/rifiuti all'intervista: 1.095 - totale contatti effettuati: 2.095.
Metodo raccolta informazioni: interviste telefoniche o metodologia cati-cami-cawi.

Ixè

Metodo di campionamento: Campione casuale probabilistico stratificato di 1.000 soggetti maggiorenni rappresentativo rispetto ai parametri di sesso, età e macro area di residenza.
Rappresentatività del campione: Margine di errore (livello di rappresentatività del campione al livello di confidenza del 95%): ± 3,1%.
Metodo raccolta informazioni: interviste telefoniche su utenze fisse e cellulari (cati-cami) e interviste on line (cawi)

Piepoli

Metodo di campionamento: campione casuale rappresentativo della popolazione italiana maschi e femmi-

ne dai 18 anni in su, segmentato per sesso, età, Grandi Ripartizioni Geografiche e Ampiezza Centri proporzionalmente all'universo della popolazione italiana.

Rappresentatività del campione: margine di errore (con livello di confidenza 95%) su 508 ± 4.37%.

Metodo raccolta informazioni: metodologia mista cati-cawi.

Bidimedia Bi3

Metodo di campionamento: Campione rappresentativo della popolazione di riferimento per genere, istruzione, età, condizione lavorativa, regione e dimensione del comune di residenza.

Rappresentatività del campione: +/- 2,1% per una percentuale stimata del 50%, con un intervallo di confidenza al 95%.

Metodo raccolta informazioni: rilevazione telematica su panel.

Demopolis

Metodo di campionamento: Campione probabilistico statisticamente rappresentativo dell'universo di riferimento, stratificato per genere, età ed area di residenza.

Rappresentatività del campione: Campione rappresentativo della popolazione italiana maggiorenne; margine massimo di errore 3%.

Metodo raccolta informazioni: cawi-cati per la somministrazione del questionario di rilevazione.

Ipsos

Metodo di campionamento: campione casuale nazionale rappresentativo della popolazione italiana maggiorenne secondo genere, età, livello di scolarità, area geografica di residenza, ampiezza del comune di residenza.

Rappresentatività del campione: 1000 casi rappresentativi della popolazione italiana maggiorenne; margine di errore compreso tra +/- 0,6% e +/- 3,1% sulle stime relative al totale degli intervistati.

Metodo raccolta informazioni: mixed mode cati-cami-cawi.

Winpoll

Metodo di campionamento: Metodo di campionamento: stratificato per regioni, casuale ponderato per genere, fasce di età, titolo di studio ed intenzioni di voto alle ultime europee

Rappresentatività del campione: Margine di errore con intervallo di confidenza al 99%: 2,2%.

Metodo raccolta informazioni: metodologia delle interviste: interviste cati-cami

Demos&pi

Metodo di campionamento: Campione casuale rappresentativo della popolazione di riferimento per 4 caratteri socio-demografici (genere, età) e la distribuzione territoriale (area geografica e dimensione urbana).

Rappresentatività del campione: Il livello di rappresentatività del campione è del 95% e il margine di errore relativo ai risultati del sondaggio è +/- 3.1 per i valori percentuali relativi al totale degli intervistati (1000 casi).

Metodo raccolta informazioni: metodo cati-cami-cawi.

Quorum

Metodo di campionamento: Campione rappresentativo della popolazione italiana, suddiviso per quote di genere ed età incrociate, stratificate per titolo di studio e ripartizione ISTAT di residenza.

Rappresentatività del campione: Margine d'errore generale è del +/- 3,1%, con un intervallo di confidenza del 95%.

Metodo raccolta informazioni: cawi.

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