QOE IJES

Italian Journal of Electoral Studies

QOE IJES

Quaderni dell'Osservatorio elettorale
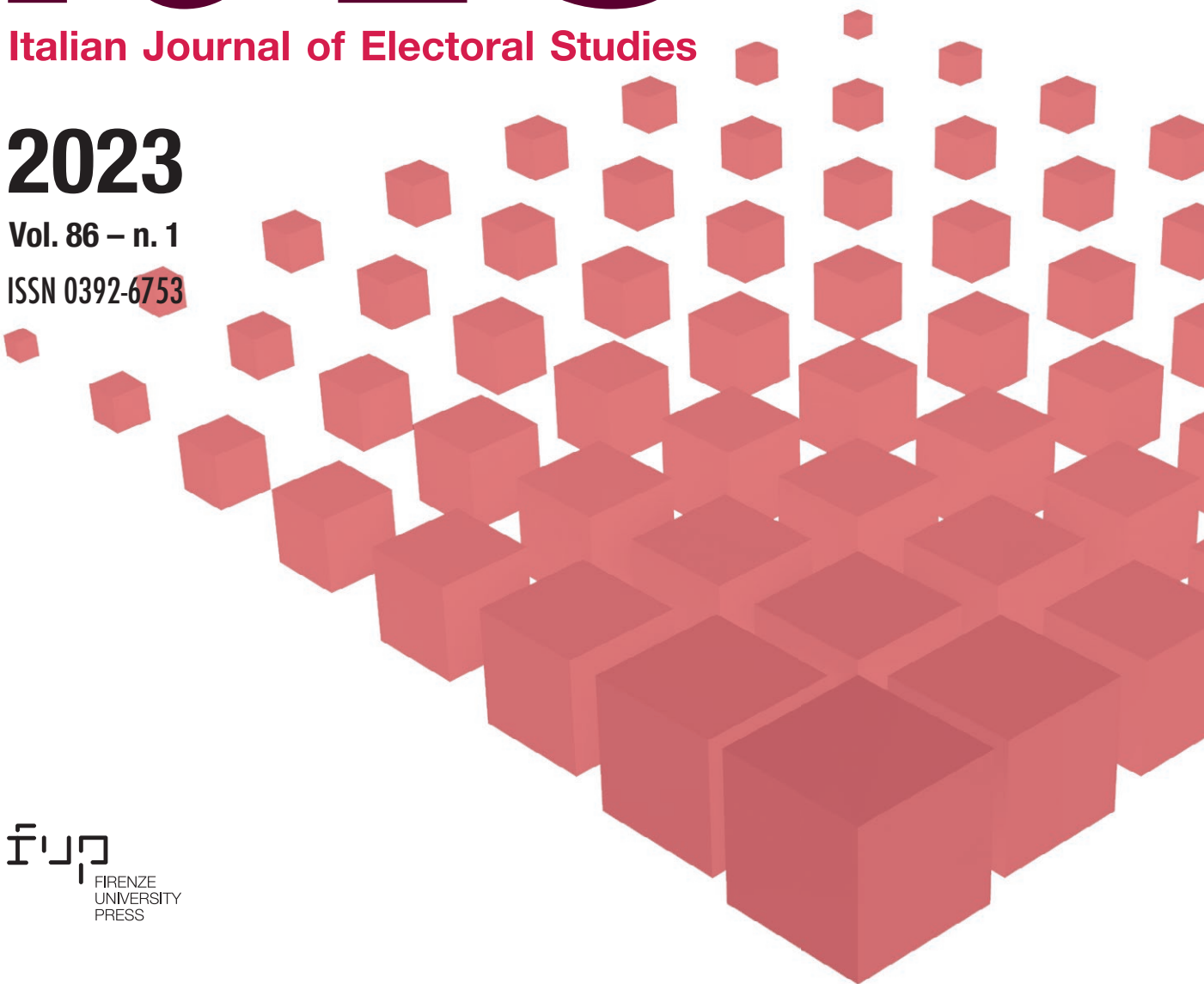## Italian Journal of Electoral Studies

Vol. 86 – n. 1 – 2023

ORCID:
AG: 0000-0002-3301-0681
MV: 0000-0002-8019-1024
DV: 0000-0001-5983-5422

The 2022 Italian general election: a political shock or the new normal?

Arianna Giovannini[1], Marco Valbruzzi[2], Davide Vampa[3,*]

[1] *De Montfort University, Leicester, United Kingdom*
[2] *University of Naples Federico II, Naples, Italy*
[3] *Aston University, Birmingham, United Kingdom*
E-mail: d.vampa@aston.ac.uk
*Corresponding author

The contributions included in this special issue of the *Italian Journal of Electoral Studies* offer a multidimensional analysis of the (early) general election held in Italy in September 2022. The electoral process has been divided into four key components that are assessed separately: 1) the pre-election phase and electoral campaign, 2) the vote count, 3) the elected representatives, and 4) the formation of the government and its first policy initiatives.

This introduction to the special issue aims to complement the individual contributions that follow by placing the 2022 election within the recent electoral history of Italy and the broader European context. Following the same multidimensional structure adopted for this collection of articles, here we address general questions regarding the significance of the last election, its dynamics, and implications. Firstly, to what extent did it represent a change compared to previous Italian elections? Secondly, can Italy still be regarded as an anomaly in the European context? Have the 2022 results widened or narrowed the political gap between the country and its neighbours?

Of course, these are complex questions that would require a lengthy and systematic analysis. By providing a longitudinal and cross-sectional overview, our aim is to suggest some interpretative keys, which, in conjunction with the rich data presented and discussed by the authors of each article, may enable readers to draw general lessons about recent developments in Italian and European politics.

Our overall argument is that, while clearly significant in its political implications – producing the most ideologically right-wing government in republican history led by the first female prime minister –, the 2022 general election did not represent a radical change from previous Italian elections. Instead, it marked a further step in the emergence of a 'new political normal' characterised by volatility, fragmentation, mainstreaming of populist ideas and actors, polarisation and the reframing of socio-economic and socio-cultural cleavages. Additionally, while Italy can be regarded as the most advanced manifestation of these transformations, we observe similar shifts in

most Western European countries, indicating that their seemingly unshakable stability is now in question.

1. THE PRE-ELECTION PHASE: PARTY COMPETITION STRATEGIES AND ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN

The article by Arturo Bertero and Gaetano Scaduto demonstrates that both continuity and change were present in the 2022 electoral campaign, which, for the first time, took place during the summer. If we look at the structure of the political supply, there were clear elements of continuity with the elections held since 2013, despite changes in the voting system – through a new electoral law that was passed in 2017 (Chiaramonte and D'Alimonte 2018). As in the election that had followed the government led by technocrat Mario Monti, also in 2022, after Mario Draghi resigned, the main parties competing for parliamentary seats and government positioned themselves in four different groupings. A 'restricted' centre-left coalition, similar to the one that had emerged around the Democratic Party (Partito Democratico, PD) led by Pier Luigi Bersani in 2013 and Matteo Renzi in 2018, was also formed in 2022 after an unsuccessful attempt to establish a broad alliance with centrist parties. The latter, led by former PD member and former minister Carlo Calenda (together with former PD secretary Renzi), gave life to what was soon renamed the 'Third Pole' (*Terzo Polo*). This was a moderate coalition which, as already attempted by the supporters of Mario Monti in 2013, aimed to continue the policies pursued by the incumbent technocratic prime minister and opposed both right-wing populism and perceived radicalism in the left-wing alliance. Unlike Monti, however, Draghi decided not to participate directly in the election. Additionally, as Bertero and Scaduto note in their contribution, Draghi's legacy was much more popular than Monti's, as he implemented expansionary policies, while Monti had to promote harsh austerity measures.

As in 2013 and 2018, the Five Star Movement (Movimento 5 Stelle, M5S) ran alone, but under the new leadership of former Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte. After governing with the right-wing League and then with the centre-left PD, and having supported Draghi's consensus-based government before contributing to its collapse, Conte decided to position the M5S as an outsider once again. However, unlike in previous elections when the party was characterised by ideological polyvalence (Pirro 2018), the M5S ran on a more clearly progressive, left-wing agenda in 2022.

The right of the political spectrum was still based on three pillars: Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia (FI), Matteo Salvini's League, and Giorgia Meloni's Brothers of Italy (Fratelli d'Italia, FdI). Yet there was a clear shift in the internal equilibria of the coalition: since 2013, the leading role had shifted from Berlusconi, to Salvini and, finally to Meloni. In sum, the 'multi-polar' character of electoral competition in 2022 was not an entire novelty in the Italian scenario. Instead, the 2013 election had already marked a deep redefinition of the political supply compared to the previous two decades (Pasquino and Valbruzzi 2015; Garzia 2013), and 2022 was just a continuation of this trend.

In terms of campaign themes, each election responds to specific political and economic circumstances. However, in the Italian context, economic insecurity has been a continuous thread linking successive campaigns since the start of the 21st century. Of course, the way this insecurity manifests and is interpreted by political actors has changed over time: debates around the effects of the financial crisis, Great Recession and Eurozone crisis in 2013 have been replaced by the post-pandemic and unstable geopolitical scenarios of 2022. Yet, generally, it is undeniable that successive waves of Italian populism emerged in a context of economic stagnation and precariousness (Vampa 2023a). A key development since 2013 has been the spreading and mainstreaming of populist themes. The Italian political system has moved from a situation in which rising populism challenged established equilibria that had consolidated in the 1990s and early 2000s to one in which interactions between multiple populist actors (FdI, League and M5S) have come to dominate party competition (Albertazzi and Vampa 2021). In this context, the classic framework focusing on the tensions between populism and mainstream does not seem to make much sense, as it appears increasingly difficult to define precisely where the political mainstream lies: have the populists become the 'new mainstream'?

As Bertero and Scaduto point out, in 2022, we can also observe a complex interplay between newer and older logics shaping the current hybrid media system. Again, a clear shift had already occurred in 2013, which was widely regarded as the year of the first 'Twitter Italian general election' (Vaccari and Valeriani 2015), with social media playing a significant new role in the mobilisation of supporters and communication of key messages to a wide electorate. Subsequent elections have seen a dramatic increase in the use of social media platforms, including newer ones such as TikTok (Albertazzi and Bonansinga 2023), by all party leaders. However, this has coexisted with a reliance on traditional media (or 'legacy' media), particularly in a country like Italy with a large share of older voters who still receive most of their information from television.

Thus, we can say that 2022 was an important year in the ongoing process of transformation of the system of inter-party interactions, leaders' priorities, campaign strategies, and communication, which had begun in the post-financial crisis scenario. Looking at general elections in other countries, we can note that even party systems that seemed solid and resilient have started showing signs of redefinition of their political space, ten years after the 2013 Italian election, which still stood as an outlier in Western Europe. The presidential and legislative elections in France, for instance, are a clear example of radical shifts in party competition dynamics (Durovic 2022). The country has moved from alternation between two relatively stable centre-left and centre-right alliances that dominated the Fifth Republic to a multi-polar system in 2022, with a new centrist party challenged on both sides by strengthening right-wing and left-wing populist movements. In Germany, the end of the Merkel era has also accelerated a process of increasing fluidity in inter-party relations. Socio-cultural issues have become more salient and have been used effectively by the Greens on the progressive side and by the Alternative for Germany (Alternative für Deutschland, AfD) on the socially conservative side, thus mobilising different constituencies that have moved away from the established Christian Democrats and Social Democrats (Pautz 2021). The Spanish party system has also become more fragmented and polarised (Simón 2020). In Sweden, the rising influence of the populist radical right has resulted in the mainstreaming of anti-immigration rhetoric, which has been embraced even by the social democratic left. This trend had already manifested in Denmark (Aylott and Bolin 2023: 1053).

Overall, in terms of strategies, electoral campaigns, and leaders' political communication, we can observe a continuation of the trends that began a decade ago, rather than significant turns in the direction of change. Compared to 2022, the 2013 election was much more disruptive since it marked the end of bipolar competition, which has not returned since then (at least in general elections). In other European countries, we also see the emergence of an increasingly complex picture, with the appearance of new dimensions of political competition, hybrid communication strategies, growing fragmentation of the political supply, and blurring lines between populism and mainstream. In all these respects, Italy is less exceptional today than it once was.

2. THE ELECTION RESULTS

For the reasons discussed so far, it is not easy to accurately describe the outcome of the 2022 Italian elec-

tion. When elements of continuity and change become intertwined almost to the point of blending into each other, determining whether an election is more or less 'critical' is indeed a complex task. However, there is a way to hold together, in a useful manner, both elements (i.e., those of continuity with those of novelty or change). This is what Sofia Marini and Gianluca Piccolino seek to achieve in their article in this special issue. Specifically, they place the outcome of the 2022 election in a long-term longitudinal perspective, trying to interpret the election results in the light not only of the political events of the penultimate, turbulent parliamentary term (2018-2022), but also of the transformations that have taken place in the Italian party system and in the voters' attitudes and behaviours. In other words, the article explains the elements of change observed in the last general election in light of the factors of continuity that have long characterised the Italian political system.

This begs a key question: what is the main element of continuity that can help explain the changes, even sudden ones, that we have observed in the Italian party system? The answer is the destructuration, deconsolidation or deinstitutionalization of political parties and their patterns of interaction. As Larry Bartels (2023: 237) recently wrote with reference to Italy, 'in a political system where anything can happen, bad things are bound to happen sometimes'. What we are interested in here is the first part of the quote and especially its political-electoral implications: in a fluid party system, where the only stable element is the instability of both electoral demand and supply, anything can happen – often very quickly. The sudden success and decline of the M5S, the meteoric rise of new political leaders (such as Matteo Renzi and Matteo Salvini) or the entry and exit of technocrats temporary lent to party politics are clear examples of this.

To the list of 'things that can happen' after the 2022 elections should be added the success of a radical right-wing party, such as Giorgia Meloni's *Fratelli d'Italia*, with a (controversial) post-fascist tradition, which has gone from 4.4 to 26 percent of the vote in just four years. The victory of a right-wing coalition (and not of the 'usual' centre-right coalition, as Marini and Piccolino rightly note) is a novelty in the history of republican Italy. It also sets a record in the history of Western European countries, with the formation of the first government led by a far-right leader and dominated by political parties placed outside the Christian Democrat, popular or conservative mainstream.

However, this novelty in Italian politics, as already anticipated, can be explained by analysing the history and condition of the Italian party system, which is now

open to every possible outcome, including the success of anti-establishment, if not anti-system, political forces.

At the same time, the outcome of the Italian elections can and should be interpreted not only from a diachronic standpoint but also from a synchronic comparative perspective on a European scale. In that case, Italian elections lose their exceptionalism and, on the contrary, fit within an electoral context characterised by the progressive expansion of the radical right in Western European countries (and beyond), especially in the aftermath of the Covid-19 health emergency and, even more so, the invasion of Ukraine by Putin's Russia. Indeed, all elections held across Europe in the past two years have seen a significant growth of far-right parties. For example, in France in the 2022 presidential election Marine Le Pen, leader of the *Rassemblement National*, 'broke a record with 11.3 million votes received by a radical right party candidate in the Fifth Republic' (Durovic 2023: 621). In the 2022 Swedish general election the far-right Sweden Democrats 'did indeed overtake the Moderates to become the second-biggest party, and the biggest on the right' (Aylott and Bolin 2023: 1055). Also in 2022, in Portugal, *Chega*, another rising star in the galaxy of the European radical right, was the party that grew the most (from 1.3 to 7.2 percent) in the country. Crucially, *Chega* was particularly successful at 'setting the agenda', 'forcing [other] political parties to state their positions on a variety of topics that had not been politicised in Portugal thus far' (Lopes 2023: 440). Furthermore, in the Finnish elections of 2023, the radical right embodied by the *True Finns* party 'finished second with 20.1% of the vote' (Raunio 2023), growing by more than 2 percentage points from the previous election.

In short, all 'those parties have become a well-established political force in many European party systems. Moreover, they currently represent the most electorally successful "brand" of populism, enjoying substantial levels of popular support across Europe' (Ivaldi and Zankina 2023:16). Within this historical framework, the outcome of the Italian elections can be considered anything but an outlier. Quite the contrary: Italy is the spearhead of the rise of the far-right, so much so that, 'considering FdI and Lega together, the electoral performance of the radical right was unprecedented in post-1945 Western European electoral history' (Chiaramonte *et al.* 2023: 8).

Of course, this unprecedented performance of the Italian far-right parties is not only the result of skilful political leaders, starting with Giorgia Meloni. As Marini and Piccolino point out, the victory of the right-wing coalition is also a reflection of the failure of opposition parties to organise and coordinate strategically for the purpose of providing voters a credible and viable

alternative to the right-wing pole (Vassallo and Verzichelli 2023). The absence of such an alternative, with a possible centre-left coalition split into three subgroups, not only amplified the victory of the right wing beyond measure (especially in the translation of votes into seats), but also prompted a part of the Italian electorate not to take part in the vote, thus recording the lowest level of turnout since the entire post-war period (63.8 percent). Clearly, such a steep decline in turnout (-9 percentage points compared to the previous election in 2018) is exceptional in relation to elections held in Western European countries over the past five years (where, on average, the decline has been less than 1 percentage point), but it fits into that trend of 'global decline in voter turnout' (Kostelka and Blais 2023) that has involved all advanced democracies for several decades now.

In short, the Italian election of 2022 can be described as 'exceptionally normal' or, from a different perspective, 'normally exceptional'. In any case, the meaning remains the same: voters' spasmodic desire for change, and the advanced state of decomposition of the party system, from which any outcome can now emerge, including that of a radical right-wing government that brings novel challenges to Italian democracy and European governance (Jones 2023), are nothing new. If it is true, as some scholars argue, that the 'distinguishing feature of the 2022 general election has been, once again, change' (Chiaramonte *et al.* 2023: 24), it is equally true that change has become the greatest form of continuity in Italian politics. This is precisely why it is useful to place these general elections in a historical perspective. If only because, in Shakespeare's words, *what's past is prologue*.

3. THE ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES

The parliament elected on 25 September 2022 is the smallest in republican history. Following a constitutional reform ratified in 2020, the total number of parliamentarians (MPs) included in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate was reduced by more than a third, from 945 to 600 (plus a number of senators for life) (Bergman and Passarelli 2023). It is too early to say how this change will impact on the role of elected representatives in the legislative process, their loyalty to their parliamentary groups and their relationship with the executive in the long term. However, the reduction in the number of seats has already had two immediate effects, which at first glance may seem contradictory. On the one hand, it has reduced the re-election opportunities for many incumbent MPs. If already in 2013, the year of the political earthquake caused by the M5S, only 344 MPs

were re-elected to the House and the Senate – a similar number occurred in 2018 –, in 2022 this figure has fallen further to its lowest level since 1994: 302. Yet, given the reduction in the overall size of both chambers, the turnover rate, which measures the share of representatives without previous parliamentary experience, has also decreased: from around 65 per cent in 2013 and 2018 to less than 50 per cent in 2022 (CISE 2013; Openpolis 2013, 2022). Consequently, many MPs failed to return to parliament in 2022, but were not replaced by a larger intake of new representatives, as the total number of seats up for grabs was reduced by a third. Thus, since the exclusion of many incumbents did not lead to an increasing relative renewal of representative institutions, 2022 does not appear to be a critical point in recent Italian democratic history comparable to 1994 or 2013.

Indeed, in their article included in this special issue, Matteo Boldrini and Selena Grimaldi show that the winner of the 2022 general election, FdI, did not trigger a process of political renewal as dramatic as that produced by the M5S in 2013 and 2018 or by Forza Italia (and its allies) in 1994. Boldrini and Grimaldi analyse the career paths followed by MPs elected in 2022 and suggest that 'it is difficult to define FdI as a new party in terms of political personnel'. This seems to be reflected in the rather 'traditional' characteristics of its parliamentary group (see also Vampa 2023b), which, controlling almost a third of the seats, carries considerable weight in shaping the overall composition of parliamentary representation. Thus, for example, the 2022 election saw a stabilisation and even a slight decline in the share of women MPs, after a sharp increase in 2013 and 2018. At the same time, while in 2013 the average age of MPs fell by 5 years in the Chamber of Deputies and by 2 years in the Senate, and fell further in 2018 (by one year in both chambers), 2022 saw a reversal of this rejuvenation trend: the average age of MPs and senators rose again (by about 5 years), approaching the peaks reached in 2006 and 2008.

The constitutional reform that downsized the parliament was purely quantitative and has not altered the type of bicameralism existing in Italy, where the two chambers perform identical functions, including the appointment of the executive. This remains an anomaly in Europe and the world (Russell 2000). Yet, when looking at some of the key characteristics of the elected MPs, we can detect similar patterns across the parliaments of the major European democracies. Just as Italy is no longer an extreme outlier in terms of electoral volatility, the continuous 'regeneration' of its parliamentary representation can also no longer be regarded as an anomaly in Western Europe. Chiaramonte and Emanuele (2022) have shown that like Italy in 2013 and 2018, also Germany in 2013 and 2017 and Spain in 2015 and 2019, have experienced sequential elections characterised by high regeneration in the parliamentary arena due to the rise of new parties. Also France, after the 2017 electoral earthquake that fundamentally reshaped its parliamentary equilibria, has seen a further shift in the political personnel elected to the National Assembly in 2022: for the first time, despite the high barriers imposed by the majoritarian electoral system, two parties of the radical left and radical right dominate the opposition in the legislative process (Durovic 2023).

Thus, also when it comes to representation, the 2022 election does not seem to have marked a new critical juncture in recent Italian history nor a widening of the gap between continuously changing parliamentary equilibria in Italy and more stable political elites in the rest of Europe. A situation of permanent fluidity seems to have spread from the electoral to the parliamentary arenas of most European countries.

Yet instability is not entirely negative for the quality of representative democracy, as it can create new opportunities for previously underrepresented groups. In 2013 and 2018, Italy made significant progress in challenging an ageing and male-dominated political elite by electing a more gender-balanced and younger political personnel, a process that saw the country converge with (and in some cases even surpass) its main European counterparts (some comparative data are provided by the International Parliamentary Union, https://data.ipu.org/). Of course, these positive trends can still come to an abrupt end or be reversed, with political dynamics remaining highly volatile but producing no improvement in the inclusiveness of democratic institutions. For instance, the 2022 election seems to have signalled a setback in the rejuvenation of Italy's political class and the expansion of women's spaces at the parliamentary level, even though at the governmental level another important milestone was achieved: the election of Italy's first female prime minister.

4. THE POST-ELECTION PROCESS: GOVERNMENT FORMATION AND NEW POLICY AGENDA

The decisive victory of the right-wing coalition, with FdI at the head, allowed Meloni to form a government quite quickly. This is in contrast with trends of the previous two general elections, where, due to the mechanics of byzantine electoral laws and precarious coalition/party-political dynamics, swearing in a new executive had been a complicated affair (Jones, 2023). In 2018, it took a record 89 days between the elections and the appoint-

ment of the Conte I government; while in 2013, Letta could form a government only 62 days after the vote. In Meloni's case, the meeting with the President of the Republic Mattarella, who appoints new PMs and their government, lasted only 11 minutes, and her executive took office 27 days after the election. Since 1992, only the Berlusconi IV government took less than that (24 days) to form. This quick turnaround can be partially explained by the fact that key economic deadlines, such as the autumn budget, were impending (Bordignon et al 2023). Yet, the rapidity of the process also recalls the political patterns of the Second Republic, reviving the narrative of the early 1990s according to which elections should produce a clear outcome: a winning coalition and a leader who becomes the head of government (Idem).

However, building a cohesive front across the governing coalition was less straightforward. As Marianna Griffini underlines in her contribution to this collection, the (male) leaders of the right-wing coalition parties did not take well Meloni's success. First, since FdI upsurge drew largely on vote haemorrhages from the Lega and FI, Salvini and Berlusconi feared that their parties could be eclipsed once in government with Meloni. Second, and related to this, the sizeable share of votes obtained by FdI gave Meloni the ability to 'pick and choose' ministers, with limited wiggle-room for bargaining within the coalition. While it is true that the Lega and FI gained important (and symbolic) roles in the Cabinet to reflect some of their key agendas (e.g. Lega's Calderoli as Minister for Regional Affairs and Autonomies), Meloni sent a strong signal to her partners as to whom held the reins of the executive – i.e. denying the Ministry of Interior to Salvini, who clearly set his sights on it; or refusing to assign any key position to Berlusconi's 'favourite' Licia Ronzulli. Until now, the honeymoon period enjoyed by the government has helped keep open frictions within the coalition at bay – but it remains to be seen whether, and for how long, the leaders of the Lega and FI will continue to be satisfied playing second fiddle to Meloni. After all, it is not the first time these parties (or their precursors) have been in government together but struggled to maintain 'good working relationships' due to shifting, internecine power dynamics (see Albertazzi and McDonnell 2015; Jones 2023).

Against this background, Griffini's contribution analyses the first 100 days of Meloni's government, assessing whether, once in power, FdI has adopted more moderate or radical stances both in its ideology and policy agenda. She finds that, in line with trends in previous Italian elections as well as across European countries where populist radical right parties (PRR) are in office, moderation has been a hallmark of Meloni's government so far – although

some radical positions have emerged, especially in the domestic sphere and on symbolic measures.

Despite fears that FdI dominance within the government would drive Italy towards a far-right or even neo-fascist backslide (The Economist 2022), Meloni has deliberately (and successfully) built the image of a competent and reliable leader for the country, through the development of what Griffini calls a 'civic façade' and by keeping steady relations with EU and international partners. In short, while Meloni portrayed herself as a radical to win power, she soon realised the need to widen her appeal and project a sense of stability to keep her position – thus reinventing herself as a moderate centrist leader. This impacted on her policy approach.

In terms of economic and foreign affairs policy agendas, the government has been more moderate than some had anticipated – adhering to institutional processes, economic rules and geopolitical positions shared with other Western European liberal democracies. On the economy, Meloni has shown continuity with Draghi's executive, and the autumn budget was orthodox and in line with EU guidelines. Fears of a Eurosceptic drift did not materialise and, indeed, Meloni's first diplomatic trip was, strategically, to Brussels. Even on the wicked issue of the PNRR (the National Recovery and Resilience Plan linked to to Next Generation EU), despite struggles, Meloni has been seeking mediation on the amendments needed to carry out the plan. On immigration, calls for a 'naval blockade' heralded during the electoral campaign have been toned down and the current government's migration policies are for the most part in continuity with those of its predecessors. Meanwhile, the approach to foreign policy remains firmly pro-NATO, and full support for Ukraine after Russia's invasion has superseded previous friendly relationships with Putin's regime.

Thus, as Griffini shows, FdI's radical rhetoric has translated into a government practice characterised by 'reasonable and accommodating' measures (Jones 2023), especially on the economy and external relations. This is, once again, an approach not too dissimilar from that of previous Italian governments in recent years, as well as with other PRR parties across Europe (e.g. see Heinisch 2003; Albertazzi and McDonnell 2015; Pappas 2019). From the anti-establishment M5S to the nativist-nationalist Lega, since 2018 political actors with radical ideologies and anti-EU views have been in office: and yet, they have ended up tempering, if not completely changing, their positions. Taking the example of the European Union, despite promoting a referendum on the Euro until 2018, once in office the M5S softened its position on the EU – and in 2019 its vote in Brussels proved key to the election

of Ursula Van Der Leyen as President of the Commission. Despite having campaigned in 2014 to 'Dump the Euro', Salvini became a supporter of former European Central Bank President Mario Draghi and joined his 'national unity' government (Giovannini and Vampa 2022). Meloni has followed suit, relegating FdI's Eurosceptic views to the past and displaying a tendency to surrender, in a pragmatic fashion, radical positions to retain power (and continue to draw essential funding from the EU).

However, on the domestic front, Meloni has played a different game. Here, as Griffini notes analysing a range of policies pursued by FdI in its first 100 days in office, some shifts towards the radical right can be registered. Meloni's government has kept fighting some of FdI's traditional, more reactionary, 'symbolic battles' to appease the elements of nostalgia that survive across party elites and sympathisers – e.g. stoking culture wars on linguistic and gender issues, or attempting to push for protectionist measures on Italian products in a quest to defend the national interest vis-à-vis the external threats of immigration and globalisation. Meloni's government has also placed particular emphasis on law and order, immigration and the national interest – in keeping with FdI electoral manifesto pledges and, more broadly, with key issues owned by PRR parties in Europe. Yet, there has been a clear gap between policy statements and actual policy implementation/effectiveness on these agendas. The 'anti-rave decree' that some feared would curb freedom of expression was considerably watered down throughout the legislative process. And, despite much boosterism on the matter, sea crossing has increased sharply since the days of Draghi's government: in the first six months since the elections, over 75,000 people have landed on Italy's shores, more than the double (about 32,000) in the same period in 2021/22 (Ministry of the Interior 2023).

In this respect, Meloni's government has been less radical than other right-wing executives in Europe. On immigration, for instance, Meloni's measures (such as the 'code of conduct for NGOs' decree assessed by Griffini), pale in comparison to the UK Conservative government Illegal Immigration Bill (which, in practice, would amount to an asylum ban – see Donald and Grogan 2023) or the restrictive positions of the new Swedish government under the Sweden Democrats' influence (e.g. cracking down on asylum legislation, revoking permanent residency on several grounds, investigating the possibility of 'overseas prisons', and drastically dropping Sweden's annual refugee quota – see Swedish Government 2023; Rothstein 2023).

Taken together, these reflections on the formation and policy agenda of Meloni's executive show elements of continuity, in the wake of moderation, with previous government experiences in the past decades – albeit with some swings to radical positions. They also suggest the presence of a distinction, in terms of discourse and practice, between the electoral phase and the transition into office of PRR actors in Italy. It is in the space between these two stages that we see the emergence of changes that, while creating turbulence on the surface, eventually abate in the wake of institutionalisation – leading to a recalibration of radical position. Read through this lens, the 2022 election did not provide the drastic watershed that many feared, neither within the Italian context or the wider European one. Indeed, as Minkenberg (2001) notes comparing the policy activity of radical right parties across Europe, holding office often produces a 'taming effect' on these actors rather than a sharp 'right turn' – and when they hold executive office, a 'right turn' occurs primarily in cultural policies. In its first 100 days, Meloni's government policy activity fits within this framework, suggesting that, despite being the only European country with a far-right PM at the helm, Italy is not an outlier – as, if anything, its agenda has been more temperate than some of its PRR counterparts.

CONCLUSION

This introduction has outlined some key themes that are explored more systematically and comprehensively in the contributions included in the special issue. Looking at four key areas (i.e. the electoral campaign, the results, the elected representatives and the government formation and policies) both from a diachronic and synchronic comparative perspective, we have shown that Italy remains a highly unstable political regime – although this inherent fluidity is now widely recognised as a stable feature of its party system. Italian elections have also ceased to surprise international observers because they no longer appear anomalous events in an increasingly turbulent European context. It is perhaps no exaggeration to assert the 'Italianisation' of European politics today, as Italy has been the spearhead of political processes that, while often being dubbed as 'radical', have indeed become increasingly common, and have emerged in many other countries. In this respect, change – prompted by volatility, fragmentation, mainstreaming of populist ideas and actors, polarisation and the reframing of socio-economic and socio-cultural cleavages – seem to have become the new normal. However, it is imperative for political scientists, analysts, and citizens to avoid complacency in the face of these consolidating trends. Indeed, the normalisation and mainstreaming of previously marginalised political paradigms may, in the long run, give

rise to more profound and consequential transformations in the democratic fabric of contemporary societies.

REFERENCES

Albertazzi, D. & Bonansinga, D. (2023). Beyond Anger: the Populist Radical Right on TikTok. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies.* DOI: 10.1080/14782804.2022.2163380

Albertazzi, D., & Vampa, D. (Eds.) (2021). *Populism and New Patterns of Political Competition in Western Europe*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge.

Aylott, N., & Bolin, N. (2023). A New Right: the Swedish Parliamentary Election of September 2022. *West European Politics*, 46(5), 1049-1062.

Bartels, L. M. (2023). *Democracy Erodes from the Top: Leaders, Citizens and the Challenge of Populism in Europe*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Bergman M. E., & Passarelli, G. (2023). Party and Leadership Effects on Referendum Voting: The Italian 2020 Constitutional Referendum. *Representation*. DOI: 10.1080/00344893.2023.2210149

Bordignon, F., Ceccarini, L., & Newell, J. L. (2023). Italian voters: where they have come and where they are going. In F. Bordignon, L., Ceccarini & J.L. Newell (Eds.) (2023, forthcoming) *The Italian General Election of 2022. The Right Strikes Back*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Chiaramonte, A., & D'Alimonte, R. (2018). The New Italian Electoral System and its Effects on Strategic Coordination and Disproportionality. *Italian Political Science, 13*(1), 8-18.

Chiaramonte, A., & Emanuele, V. (2022). *The deinstitutionalization of Western European party systems*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Chiaramonte, A., Emanuele, V., Maggini, N. & Paparo, A. (2023). Radical-Right Surge in a Deinstitutionalised Party System: The 2022 Italian General Election. *South European Society and Politics*, DOI: 10.1080/13608746.2022.2160088

CISE (2013). *Il Parlamento 2013: nuovo e al femminile.* Retrieved from https://cise.luiss.it/cise/2013/03/02/il-parlamento-2013-nuovo-e-al-femminile/

Donal, A., & Grogan, J. (2023) 'The Illegal Immigration Bill', *UK In a Changing Europe*, 25 May 2023 (available from: https://ukandeu.ac.uk/explainers/the-illegal-migration-bill/)

Durovic, A. (2023). Rising electoral fragmentation and abstention: the French elections of 2022. *West European Politics*, 46(3), 614-629.

Garzia, D. (2013). The 2013 Italian Parliamentary Elec-

tion: Changing Things So Everything Stays the Same. *West European Politics*, 36(5), 1095-1105.

Giovannini, A., & Vampa, D. (2022). Boom to Bust. Where Next for Matteo Salvini's Lega? *The Loop*. Available from: https://theloop.ecpr.eu/what-happened-to-matteo-salvinis-league/

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

Ivaldi, G., & Zankina, E. (2023). The Impacts of the Russian Invasion of Ukraine on Right-Wing Populism in Europe. *European Center for Populism Studies (ECPS) Report.*

Jones, E. (2023). Italy's Hard Truths. *Journal of Democracy*, 34(1), 21-35.

Kostelka, F., & Blais, A. (2023). The generational and institutional sources of the global decline in voter turnout. *World Politics*, 73(4), 629-667.

Lopes, H. F. (2023). An unexpected Socialist majority: the 2022 Portuguese general elections. *West European Politics,* 46(2), 437-450.

Ministry of the Interior / Ministero dell'Interno (2023). *Sbarchi e accoglienza dei migranti: tutti i dati*. Available from: https://www.interno.gov.it/it/stampa-e-comunicazione/dati-e-statistiche/sbarchi-e-accoglienza-dei-migranti-tutti-i-dati

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

Openpolis (2018). *La carriera politica dei nuovi parlamentari*. Retrieved from https://www.openpolis.it/la-carriera-politica-dei-nuovi-parlamentari/

Openpolis (2022). *La XIX legislatura e gli equilibri del nuovo parlamento*. Retrieved from https://www.openpolis.it/esercizi/la-composizione-delle-nuove-aule-parlamentari/

Pappas, T. (2019). Populists in Power. *Journal of Democracy*, 30(2), 70-84.

Pasquino, G., & Valbruzzi, M. (2015). The impact of the 2013 general election on the Italian political system: the end of bipolarism? *Journal of Modern Italian Studies, 20*(4), 438-453.

Pautz, H. (2021). Germany. In D. Albertazzi & D. Vampa (Eds.). *Populism and New Patterns of Political Competition in Western Europe*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 112-130.

Pirro, A. (2018). The polyvalent populism of the 5 Star Movement. *Journal of* Contemporary *European Studies, 26*(4), 443-458.

Raunio, T. (2023). *The pendulum swings to the right again in Finland*. LSE Europp Blog, 6 April 2023. Available from: https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2023/04/06/

the-pendulum-swings-to-the-right-again-in-finland/

Rothstein, B. (2023). The Shadow of the Swedish Right. *Journal of Democracy*, 34(1), 36-49.

Russell, M. (2000). *Reforming the House of Lords: Lessons from Overseas.* Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

Simón, P. (2020). Two-bloc Logic, Polarisation and Coalition Government: The November 2019 General Election in Spain. *South European Society and Politics*, 25(3-4), 533-563

Swedish Government (2023) *Sweden's New Migration Policy*. Available from: https://www.government.se/government-policy/swedens-new-migration-policy/

The Economist (2022). "How afraid should Europe be of Giorgia Meloni?" *The Economist*, 22 September 2022 (available from: https://www.economist.com/leaders/2022/09/22/how-afraid-should-europe-be-of-giorgia-meloni)

Vaccari, C., & Valeriani, A. (2015). Follow the leader! Direct and indirect flows of political communication during the 2013 Italian general election campaign. *New Media & Society, 17*(7), 1025-1042.

Vampa, D. (2023a). Italy: Populism and business in a stagnant economy. In M. Feldmann & G. Morgan (Eds.). *Business Elites and Populism: The Odd Couple?* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 118–137.

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

Vassallo, S., & Verzichelli, L. (Eds.) (2023). *ll bipolarismo asimmetrico. L'Italia al voto dopo il decennio populista*, Bologna: Il Mulino.

A midsummer night's dream: political communication during the Italian 2022 electoral campaign

Arturo Bertero[1], Gaetano Scaduto[2,*]

[1] *University of Milan, Milan, Italy*
[2] *University of Milan Bicocca, Milan, Italy*
*Corresponding author. E-mail g.scaduto2@campus.unimib.it

Abstract. By adopting a political communication perspective, this article describes the Italian electoral campaign of 2022. First, we reconstruct the coalition formation phase and discuss the issues at the center of the electoral campaign. Second, we describe the communicative macro-frames at the heart of the political strategies of Italian political actors and how these macro-frames are used to campaign on more specific issues. Third, we delve into the hybrid communication strategies of Italian politicians. To do so, we integrate the analysis of legacy media, showing their enduring centrality, and that of social media. We conclude that the 2022 election was marked by many novelties, such as the unusual national summer campaign, the massive use of Instagram, and the introduction of TikTok in the parties' communication strategies. At the same time, elements of continuity were present, such as leaders' reliance on traditional media and the high political instability forcing the Italian political system to intense and hurried electoral campaigns.

Keywords: Italian elections, political communication, social media, legacy media, electoral campaign.

INTRODUCTION: THE 2022 ITALIAN GENERAL ELECTION

Three governments alternated during the 18th legislature of the Italian Parliament. After the sudden end of Draghi's administration, President Mattarella called early elections on the 25th of September 2022. For the first time, the election did not take place during the first six months of the year, as it usually happens to overcome difficulties related to summer holidays and the draft of the national budget law. As a result of this unusual pattern, parties and leaders had 30 days to organize their communicative efforts while still having to form electoral coalitions. The election was characterized by a pronounced asymmetry of power among political formations since, as early as the end of August, right-wing parties were firmly ahead in the polls (Youtrend and Cattaneo & Zanetto, 2022), and eventually won the elections by a large margin (Chiaramonte *et al.*, 2023). This arrangement meant that parties and leaders had to campaign from different positions. Right-wing leaders had the dual goal of

establishing the weight of their party within the coalition, while also mobilizing their voters to vote. In contrast, the leader of the left-wing coalition was forced to chase the right-wing coalition, which dictated the public agenda, and marched undisturbed toward a decisive victory. Finally, leaders of the center parties did not join these factions, seeking to win independent voters.

This article describes the 2022 general election by adopting a political communication perspective. Therefore, we will explore the relationships between politicians, voters, and the media (McNair, 2018). Section 1 analyzes the supply and demand side of these elections. First, we briefly describe the Italian political landscape and the delicate phase of coalition formation. Then, we outline the issues that dominated the public debate showing how these were framed in different ways by political parties. Section 2 deals with the messages and content conveyed by political actors. Here we analyze the macroframe of their political communication while highlighting how this was applied to particular issues. We also discuss issue ownership and the occurrence of salient episodes that heavily influenced the development of the campaign. Finally, Section 3 delves into the hybrid political communication strategies adopted by leaders and parties. To do so, we focus on legacy media, describing leaders' presence on television channels and the impact of the social media accounts of traditional media outlets. Lastly, we examine digital media, such as TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook. Drawing on the findings of our analysis, the conclusions highlight that the 2022 Italian electoral campaign was marked by a dichotomy between continuity and discontinuity. Indeed, even if newer social media gained centrality in the political communication arena, older media retained their importance.

SECTION 1: CONTEXT AND CONSTRAINTS

In communicating with their audiences, politicians are context-dependent, as their communication strategies are usually tailored to audience perceptions (Froehlich and Rüdiger, 2006). Moreover, citizens' voting behaviors are strongly influenced by the economic and socio-political scenarios in which elections take place (Schmitt, et al., 2021). Therefore, this section highlights the key features characterizing the socio-political milieu of Italian politics on the eve of the 2022 general elections.

1.1 Supply side: the starting conditions

Italy is known for its high political instability (Gratton *et al.*, 2021; Ippolito and Cicatiello, 2019). Following

this trend, three governments ruled during the eighteenth legislature: the first Conte government, which included the Five Stars Movement [Movimento 5 Stelle – M5S], and the League [Lega]; the second Conte government, supported by a coalition that included the M5S, the Democratic party [Partito Democratico – PD], Italy Alive [Italia Viva] and Free and Equal [Liberi e Uguali]; and the technocratic government led by Mario Draghi, supported by a coalition of 'national unity', which included all parties except for Brothers of Italy [Fratelli d'Italia – FDI] and Italian Left [Sinistra Italiana – SI] (Marangoni and Kreppel, 2022; Russo and Valbruzzi 2022). Draghi was in office during the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. Oil, gas, and food prices skyrocketed in March 2022, and experts forecasted a drastic impact on European economies (Mbah and Wasum, 2022). This contributed to an increase in citizens' perceived insecurity, thus making the war and its economic consequences the most salient issues in the elections (Lami and Sahota, 2022; Mannoni *et al.*, 2022; see Section 1.2). After the end of Draghi's government in July (Corriere della Sera, 2022a), President of the Republic Sergio Mattarella called for a national election on September 25th (Ansa, 2022).

The right-wing coalition[1] included Giorgia Meloni's FDI, Matteo Salvini's League, Silvio Berlusconi's Go Italy [Forza Italia – FI], and Us Moderates [Noi Moderati – NM], led by Maurizio Lupi. The left-wing coalition included PD, led by Enrico Letta, Emma Bonino's More Europe [+Europa – +E], Luigi Di Maio's Civic Commitment [Impegno Civico], and the Greens Left Alliance [Alleanza Verdi Sinistra – AVS], a unified list of SI and Green Europe, led by Nicola Fratoianni and Angelo Bonelli. Both the M5S, led by Giuseppe Conte, and the Third Pole [TP], a centrist alliance formed between Carlo Calenda's Action [Azione – A] and Matteo Renzi's Italy Alive and led by the former (Agi, 2022; De Cicco, 2022), ran without a coalition.

At the end of August, FDI and PD were neck to neck as the most popular parties in the polls (respectively at 24 and 23.7 percent). The League was predicted to get 13.4 percent of the votes, M5S 10.9, FI 8.4, TP 5.9, AVS 3.4, and minor parties followed below the 3 percent threshold (Youtrend and Cattaneo Zanetto & Co., 2022). However, due to the mechanism of the Italian electoral law and the consequences of the 2020 constitutional referendum on the electoral constituencies (Grosso, 2021;

---

[1] Given that the ideological composition of this coalition is strongly skewed to the right, some authors (Chiaramonte, 2022; Panarari, 2022) started to question the label "center-right" for this coalition, preferring "right-center". To address this concern, we label the alliance as the "right-wing" coalition.

Legislative Decree 23/12/2020, n. 177), the right-wing coalition was predicted to win nearly two-thirds of the seats in both chambers (Youtrend and Cattaneo Zanetto & Co., 2022). In early September, FDI continued to grow in the polls, although the right-wing coalition did not increase its total vote share due to the loss of support experienced by the League. M5S made an unexpected comeback, and less rapidly, though steadily, TP also gained support. FI's percentages remained stable throughout the campaign (Politico, 2022). The share of abstainers and undecided voters remained constant throughout the summer and eventually coincided with the percentage of voters who abstained (SWG, 2022).

1.2 Demand side: "It's the economy, stupid!"

Political issues are often conceived as exogenous variables explaining voting behavior. Scholars tend to distinguish between valence (Stokes, 1963) and position issues (Green, 2007). The formers are broadly supported by voters, and parties can only argue about who is the most credible actor to achieve the goal; the latter are divisive, and parties tend to take sides for or against such issues, politicizing social cleavages (Congleton *et al.*, 2018). From a communicative point of view, valence issues are topics on which parties try to present themselves as the best interpreters of the popular will, while building their own identity by selecting the position issue most valued by their constituents. Therefore, it is important to highlight how valence issues are framed in political manifestos, while stressing which position issue they cover or neglect.

Tables 1 and 2 present CISE data (Mannoni *et al.*, 2022, fielded between August and September 2022) on the perceived salience of valence and position issues. Regarding valence issues, Italians were particularly concerned about the economy. The energy crisis, unemployment, poverty alleviation, inflation, economic growth, tax cuts, and tax evasion were among the most salient issues. The most important non-economic issues were the fight against gender violence and environmental issues (supported by 89 and 82 percent of the sample).

Political manifestos greatly emphasized valence issues, and the difference in the communication frames was particularly visible for what concerns unemployment. Both the PD and M5S insisted on youth unemployment. The PD proposed a "dowry for 18-year-olds", which would provide economic support for leaving the household. In contrast, the M5S insisted on enhancing "citizenship income" and reducing working hours. FDI proposed strengthening basic training courses, also using European funds. Finally, the League's manifesto

Table 1. Valence issues.

Valence issue	Salience
Ensuring sustainable gas and electricity prices	92%
Fighting unemployment	90%
Fighting violence against women	89%
Reducing poverty in Italy	87%
Supporting economic growth	86%
Fighting inflation	86%
Reduce jobs taxation	86%
Fighting tax evasion	84%
Fighting global warming	82%
Making Italy count more in Europe	72%

Source: CISE data (Mannoni *et al.*, 2022, fielded between August and September 2022).

mentioned "unemployment" only when discussing the integration of migrants into Italian society. In particular, the League supported the extension of residence permits only in cases of involuntary unemployment, to avoid situations of "social marginality".

Table 2 shows position issues grouped by categories. The most salient economic topics were minimum wage, citizen income, retirement age, and tax progressivity. Regarding the economy in general and taxation in particular, the audience was anchored on progressive positions, with 78 percent of the sample willing to preserve progressivity and 67 percent supporting higher inheritance taxes. In the M5S and PD manifestos, the minimum wage is discussed and defended in specific sections. In contrast, FDI did not mention the topic. The pattern recurred for citizenship income, which the M5S wants to expand, and the PD to improve and maintain. Additionally, the PD and M5S supported an increase in minimum pensions and the introduction of special funds for young workers. Also, FDI proposed an increase in minimum and disability pensions. The League, instead, suggested lowering the retirement age.

The second category of Table 2 is climate policies. As shown in Table 1, 82 percent of respondents were concerned about fighting climate change. However, this consensus is fragmented when looking at concrete policies. Nearly 70 percent of the sample prioritized climate defense over economic growth and supported the 110% bonus, which incentivizes building refurbishing for thermic efficiency. Yet, these intentions come up against the public rejection of nuclear power plants and regasifiers. The PD and M5S greatly emphasized this issue. In the PD's manifesto, the environment is the "first pillar" of the "Italy 2027 Plan". For the M5S, "there are three main axes of sustainability: PEOPLE, ENVIRONMENT,

Table 2. Position issues.

Position issue	Approval	Disapproval	Salience
Economy			
Introduce a minimum wage	84%	16%	79%
Maintain citizenship income	39%	61%	76%
Reduce retirement age	79%	21%	76%
Maintain tax progressivity	78%	22%	75%
Reduce income differences	79%	21%	69%
Increase inheritance tax	67%	33%	53%
Climate			
Preserve the ban on nuclear power	47%	53%	74%
Prioritize environmental protection	66%	34%	74%
Reject new gasifiers	24%	76%	65%
Keep the 110% super bonus	69%	31%	63%
International issues			
Suspend sanctions toward Russia	43%	57%	75%
Stop the supply of weapons to Ukraine	59%	41%	72%
Remain in the EU	72%	28%	70%
Remain in NATO	73%	27%	63%
Values and Identity			
Keep welcoming migrants	32%	68%	73%
Legalize euthanasia	86%	14%	70%
Ensure that abortion is available	82%	18%	68%
Increase punishment for homophobia	71%	29%	61%
Ease legislation on citizenship	57%	43%	52%
Legalize soft drugs	56%	44%	49%

Source: CISE data (Mannoni *et al.*, 2022, fielded between August and September 2022).

and DEVELOPMENT" (Movimento Cinque Stelle, 2022, p. 11). A trade-off between economic growth and environmental protection emerged in their programs. In contrast, right-wing parties framed the climate crisis as an economic challenge. The League had a section of its program titled "Respecting the environment while protecting jobs", and FDI never used the expression "climate change", even claiming that tourism represents Italy's "happy growth", alluding to a critique of the concept of happy degrowth, defended instead by the M5S (Damiani and Viviani, 2019).

The third category groups international issues. A relative majority of the sample supported NATO and the EU, but the former was quite marginal in parties' manifestos. The M5S did not even mention it. FDI was silent on this issue, only stating that: "Italy must return to standing tall in international fora, as a full member of the G7 and as a founding state of the EU and NATO" (Fratelli d'Italia, 2022, p. 4). In contrast, though, the League and PD explicitly endorsed NATO. Support for the EU was present across the board, but the war in Ukraine divided Italian parties. The PD framed it as "Putin's war". The M5S avoided the topic but expressed a generic rejection of any war. According to the League, however, "the war in Ukraine proves [...] that peace is precarious and by no means a foregone conclusion, therefore [...] defense investments are necessary to implement the principle of deterrence" (Lega, 2022, p.40).

The last category relates to Values and Identity issues. Almost 90 percent of the sample endorsed euthanasia, and 82 percent said abortion should be more strongly and efficiently guaranteed. Euthanasia is explicitly condemned by the League and not mentioned by FDI. In contrast, the M5S cited it as a virtuous example of a propositional referendum. Discrimination against LGBTQ people and the legalization of soft drugs were both slightly less endorsed and considerably less central in the public arena. Italians were generally less progressive on immigration. More than 40 percent of the sample opposed easing citizenship legislation for immigrants and 68 percent wanted to restrict immigration. Interestingly, immigration was less salient than in the previous electoral campaign, during which the League pushed aggressively on it (Roncarolo and Mancini, 2018; Maggini and Chiaramonte, 2019). Nevertheless, immigration remained a pillar of right-wing programs. FDI framed this issue as an attack on the security of Italian citizens, alongside the "Mafia, terrorism, and corruption" (Fratelli d'Italia, 2022, p. 31). The League dedicated an entire section to the topic, stating that "we can really help the most disadvantaged areas of the planet by supporting projects there, certainly not by welcoming everyone. Africa in Italy does not fit!" (Lega, 2022, p. 91).

Besides examining public attitudes and political manifestos, it is also important to assess how different policy proposals captured different electorates. Indeed, crucial information can be obtained by CISE data examining the profiles of voters of the main Italian parties (Improta *et al.*, 2022). Supporters of both FDI and the League were characterized by a low level of education and tended to be middle class. Voters of FI tended to be upper class, and this party was particularly appealing to voters aged 18-29 and 30-44. Similarly, PD voters were usually either very young (18-29) or very old (65+) but showed a higher educational level. This party was supported by members of the upper class, mirroring the results of the general election of 2018, where the PD was labeled as the "Elite's party" (De Sio, 2018). Finally,

M5S's electorate was particularly heterogeneous, suggesting that Conte intercepted different population strata with the same efficacy.

1.3 Continuity and Discontinuity in Italian Politics

The dichotomy continuity/discontinuity provides a suitable means to interpret Italian politics on the eve of the 2022 election. On the one hand, the previous legislature generated three different parliamentary majorities, one of which was led by a technocrat. Since 1948, Italy has been governed by 68 prime ministers. Although the Italian Constitution provides for a five-year term, governments have lasted an average of about 400 days, and the longest one has been in office for less than four years (Berlusconi II, from June 2001 to April 2005). Moreover, the executive led by Draghi represents Italy's fourth technical government. The first two date back to the 1990s (Ciampi and Dini), and the third was the Monti government, in office between 2011 and 2013 (Giannetti, 2013). These data hide another trend in Italian politics: executives are often composed by ministers not affiliated with any party. This was visible since the beginning of the Republic, but it intensified in the Conte I government, which was led by several experts (Valbruzzi, 2018).

On the other hand, the political context before the 2022 elections also presented some elements of discontinuity. First, Draghi's technocratic government was profoundly different from Monti's (Garzia and Karremans, 2021). The latter was a "fully technocratic government", since all its ministers were experts with no party affiliation. In contrast, Draghi headed a "technocratic-led partisan government", since most of his ministers were not technocrats (McDonnell and Valbruzzi, 2014). Moreover, unlike Monti, Draghi enjoyed higher popularity rates and, as a result, received higher parliamentary support (Garzia and Karremans, 2021). Furthermore, unlike previous technocratic governments, Draghi was in charge of managing the most impressive package of expansionary policies in the post-World War II period, rather than being compelled to implement *austerity* measures. Third, the eighteenth legislature ended during a tragic international context – the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. Finally, for the first time in the history of the Italian Republic, national elections were held in the second part of the year.

SECTION 2: MESSAGES AND CONTENT

This section describes the messages and communicative style adopted by Italian political actors. Section 2.1 presents the macro-frame of their political communication. Section 2.2 shows how these general claims were applied to particular issues. Finally, we present important events of the electoral campaign to show how the left coalition systematically chased the right into its field rather than being able to impose more favorable issues in the political arena.

2.1 The parties' communication macro-frames

In the last weeks of August, the communication frames adopted by Italian parties were revealed through the static billboards that appeared all over the country, in a revival of a strong tradition of Italian political communication (Novelli, 2021). FDI used images of Meloni's calm and smiling face with the claim "Pronti – A risollevare l'Italia" ("Ready – To make Italy rise again"). The League portrayed a smiling Salvini accompanied by the claim "Credo" ("I believe"), which was applied to different issues related to League's electoral program. This claim was later framed in two ways: as a statement of belief in certain issue positions and a statement of faith towards the leader and his party (Corriere della Sera, 2022b). The M5S used the claim "Dalla Parte Giusta" ("On the just side[2]"), with pictures of a smiling Conte. This phrase recalled the idea of moral integrity and social justice, in continuity with the populist discourse of the M5S (Bordignon and Ceccarini, 2015). +E initially used Bonino's pictures and the claim "Io sono Emma" ("I am Emma", mocking an old viral speech from Meloni), underlining the differences between the only two women leaders in this election. In a subsequent phase, they used the campaign slogan "Cara Italia, il 25 settembre, resta libera" ("Dear Italy, stay free on September 25th"). By including the idea of freedom in their claim, +E established continuity with its roots in the Italian Radical Party and its fights for civil rights issues (Bonfreschi, 2019). TP used Calenda's image with his arms folded and the claim "L'Italia, sul serio" ("Italy, seriously"), aiming to depict themselves as the most credible and competent alternative, competing with the PD in depicting themselves as the option in continuity with Draghi's government. FI used a smiling picture of Berlusconi with the claim "Una scelta di campo" ("A choice of field"), the same claim he used in his 1994 political debut (Lauria, 2022), while also using text-only billboards containing policy proposals. AVS used pictures of their candidates holding signs containing handwrit-

---

[2] "Dalla parte giusta" also translates as "On the right side". We opted for an alternative translation to maintain the framing aspects related to the theme of justice.

Figure 1. Static billboards of the main political parties.

ten policy proposals, with the claim "Facciamolo" ("Let's do this"). Finally, the PD opted for a two-phase strategy: in the first weeks of the campaign the billboards only included written text regarding their policy proposals and party symbol; starting from September, billboards included a comparison between a policy position imputed to the right-wing coalition on a dark gray background and a policy position of the PD with a bright red background with Letta's smiling face claiming "Scegli" ("You choose"). Hence, the two-fold PD's communicative plan featured a final phase characterized by a negative campaign toward the right-wing coalition. This is not surprising and could be intended as a political communication strategy matching the well-known propensity of Italian voters to rely on negative voting (Bordigon and Ceccarini, 2021; Garzia and Passarelli, 2021).

Although some authors suggested that static billboards lost relevance in the communicative strategies of the parties because of their cost and the fact that cities were less populated during summer holidays (Panarari, 2022), parties adapted to this setting, presenting in the billboards a series of communication frames that could be remixed (Mazzoleni and Bracciale, 2018), in both ironic and more serious context, through the hybrid media system (Chadwick, 2017). Enrico Letta tried to force the *memization* of the center-left communication strategy by publishing – on the very same day that the "You choose" billboards appeared – a meme that used "You choose" as a macro (Mazzoleni and Bracciale, 2019) to ironically comment on culinary debates (Panarari, 2022). The League used its claim on various issues, producing different graphics that appeared both on static billboards and social media which stated "I believe – In a safe Italy" regarding migration, "I believe – In a clean Italy" regarding nuclear energy, and "I believe – No Italian should be left behind" regarding the lowering of taxes, among others.

The campaigns' discourses mainly focused on the economic consequences of the war in Ukraine. Cost of living, inflation, taxes, salaries, and subsidies dominated the public discourse in September. The main economic talking points of the right were the *flat tax*, a single-rate fiscal regime, and the abolition of the citizenship income. Salvini also used as a flagship proposal the reintroduction of nuclear power plants in Italy, linking it to the rising energy costs. The PD tried to present itself as in continuity with Draghi's government, especially on foreign and economic policies, regarding tax cuts for the working class and the introduction of a minimum wage. The AVS mainly focused its communication on the environment and income inequalities, while +E focused on civil rights. M5S also focused on economic policies, centering its communication on the defense of citizenship income and the introduction of a minimum wage. The TP competed with the PD in presenting themselves as the true heirs of Draghi's policies, called "The Draghi Agenda".

The communication strategies of the parties diverged depending on their role and their position in the polls. While FDI was focused on reassuring voters, by depicting itself as a mature party ready to govern and showing its most moderate side, the League tried to shift the public debate towards economic themes that were included in their program (above all, the *flat tax*). The

PD tried to polarize the debate (Panarari, 2022), framing the campaign as a duel between them and FDI, giving visibility to FDI's proposal in a negative frame while depicting themselves as the only viable alternative. +E, AVS, M5S, FI, and TP campaigned mostly on issues they owned: civil rights (especially euthanasia and legalization of soft drugs) for +E, the citizenship income for the M5S, the environment for AVS, tax cuts for FI, and energy policies for TP, trying to distinguish themselves from all the other parties while seeking to exploit the narrative of the "useful vote" (Sanchez, 2002).

2.2 Issue ownership and positions

Section 2.1 discussed the macro-frames of each party's political communication. These frames were adapted in different forms and styles on the most salient campaign issues. This section delves into the communication strategy of the main Italian parties on these specific issues.

As anticipated in Section 1.2, the left-wing coalition, the M5S, and the TP agreed on the need for a minimum wage (Pagella Politica, 2022). The PD dedicated a billboard to this topic with the slogan: 'Work is dignity. Minimum wage, fight against precariousness and undeclared work', thus insisting on the individual right to have an adequate job. The M5S supported this battle since 2019 and described this measure as an act of social justice that aligns Italy with the European context (Il Manifesto, 2022). Finally, TP proposed a minimum wage of 9 euros per hour and provided details on the budget coverage of this measure emphasizing the importance of economic competence (Azione, 2022).

PD and M5S also agreed on keeping the citizenship income (Pisaniello, 2022). In particular, the M5S praised the social consequences of this policy. For example, Conte stated that the citizenship income "has also represented a concrete possibility for many who, although squeezed by the yoke of hunger, have been able to escape the blackmail of criminal organizations" (Pertici, 2022).

Surprisingly, the right-wing coalition managed to politicize tax progressivity, a right guaranteed by Article 53 of the Italian constitution. In particular, the League formulated an alternative policy, the *flat tax*, and FDI and FI supported the measure, proposing only minor changes (Carli *et al.*, 2022). The League also released a billboard that reads "Pay less to pay all. Flat Tax at 15%". Interestingly, this slogan seems to stress that taxes must be cut to enable all Italian citizens to abide by the law.

PD campaigned aggressively on civil rights but was penalized by the low level of salience accorded to these issues, as reported in Section 1.2. Its strategy on this point is particularly interesting. These issues were emphasized through the manifesto and static billboards. In the latter, the PD used its communication macro-frame as follows: "Discrimination/Rights. You choose" (See Figure 1). Finally, the importance of civil rights was emphasized in a series of TikTok videos published by MP Alessandro Zan, who was the proposer of a law against homo and transphobia. In this way, the PD ensured that its messages were conveyed by a credible speaker.

Regarding immigration, TP and M5S aligned with the center-left coalition again. Here, PD strongly campaigned in favor of the *ius scholae*, a law recognizing citizenship for migrants who were born in Italy or arrived before the age of 12, reside legally, and have attended at least five years of school in Italy. On this issue, the right-wing coalition balanced institutional tones in political manifestos with more heated communicative styles on social media. For example, a tweet by Meloni proposed the *naval blockade* as the only solution to stop irregular immigration (Twitter, 2022a).

Finally, parties diverged even regarding their proposal to face climate change. The first difference lies in party manifestos. Right-wing political platforms mainly focused on concrete policies to develop energy production infrastructures. In contrast, both PD and M5S put the climate issue at the center of their political vision (see Section 1.2). The PD also applied its communication macro-frame in a poster with the slogan "Fossil fuels/Renewable energies. You choose". A second difference concerns the policies advocated by the two largest coalitions. The right-wing coalition promoted nuclear power plants. As mentioned in Section 2.1, the League insisted on this issue through static billboards with the slogan "I believe – In a clean Italy". Instead, the TP and, more tepidly, the center-left coalition, insisted on the installation of new regasifier systems. In particular, the PD electoral program was unclear on this point. The PD endorsed "The European FitFor55 package, with its goal of reducing net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55 percent by 2030 and achieving climate neutrality by 2050" (Partito Democratico, 2022, p. 6), but it did not lay out precise guidelines on how to achieve it.

To assess the effectiveness of these communication strategies, it is important to investigate parties' and leaders' issue ownership. A party holds ownership of an issue if voters perceive it as the most appropriate political actor to address it (Petrocik, 1996). CISE data shows that Meloni was considered trustworthy mainly on cultural issues, especially regarding restrictions on immigration and fighting against women's violence. Salvini scored positively on immigration, and he was also perceived as credible on tax reduction and suppression of

citizen income. FI was unparalleled in economic issues and was considered the optimal actor for tax reduction and GDP growth. TP campaigned decisively against Euroscepticism. Consequently, voters trusted the position of Calenda, who declared to be aligned with NATO and the EU. Yet, the PD was considered the most credible actor when promising to remain in the EU and owned the issues related to civil and social rights, like those of the LGBTQ+ segment and those of immigrants (De Sio *et al.*, 2022).

2.3 Salient episodes of the electoral campaigns

Single episodes can shape political campaigns by attributing salience to certain issues or by giving visibility to political leaders. The first relevant event occurred when Meloni shared on social media the video of a woman being raped by an immigrant in Piacenza (Sky Tg24, 2022). Meloni managed to set the public agenda on order and security issues, a field in which right-wing parties retain strong issue ownership, forcing Letta and Calenda to chase her in this field.

Another episode revolved around the hashtag "#devianze" ("deviances"). Meloni published a Facebook video proposing to fight drugs, violence, and deviance – allegedly spreading among the youngest – by reinforcing sports public policies (Facebook, 2022a). Letta replied with a tweet (Twitter, 2022b), trying to overturn the hashtag as "#vivaledevianze" ("Long life to deviances"). Therefore, the left chased the right once again, being forced to take a stance on a right-owned issue rather than being capable of giving salience to more favorable topics.

Another relevant episode is mediatic in kind. In the urge of communicating to the young generation, and given the atypical summer campaign, many leaders created their own TikTok accounts. This has received considerable attention from the mainstream media. Several newspapers reported on the use of TikTok by Italian politicians. For example, La Repubblica covered Berlusconi's arrival on this platform in an article discussing the development of the campaign (Vecchio, 2022). Meanwhile, the newspaper Il Corriere and the website Pagella Politica published a piece dedicated to the political use of TikTok, comparing the accounts of the main leaders (Corriere della Sera, 2022c; Loguercio, 2022).

Another important mediatic event was the debate between Meloni and Letta, hosted by the website of Corriere della Sera (2022d). This practice is unusual in Italy, although famous precedents include Berlusconi's debates with Occhetto and Prodi (Cacciotto, 2019). Meloni accepted to take part in a debate with Letta, with director Fontana as the moderator. The leaders were allowed

to interact and answer some shared questions as well as questions tailored to their electoral program. The main topics were international relations, measures against the rising prices of gas, economics, and security issues.

SECTION 3: MEANS AND CHANNELS

Section 3 examines the communicative strategies adopted by the main parties and leaders. First, we situate these tactics into the theoretical frame of the hybrid media system. Second, we discuss the enduring relevance of legacy media. Third, we focus on digital media strategies.

3.1 Hybrid political communication strategies

In the third phase of political communication (Blumler and Kavanagh, 1999), marked by a mediatic model of political communication (Mazzoleni, 2012) and mass self-communication (Castells, 2013), the concept of media logic (Altheide and Snow, 1979) cannot be applied if not used in its plural form. It is precisely the interplay between newer and older logics that shapes the current hybrid media system. In an attempt to update the literature on this topic, Klinger and Svennson (2015) have recently proposed the concept of network media logic. According to the authors, this logic features non-professionality and bottom-up content publication at the core of media production (Bruns, 2008). Media distribution is no longer chained to institutionalized media players, and spreadable content (Jenkins *et al.*, 2018) flows through homophilic relationships (McPherson *et al.*, 2001). More specifically, social media use is characterized by interactions with like-minded others, and, while doing so, users indirectly tailor what information they will hear about. In other words, "users construct and organize their social realities through networks" (Klinger and Svensson, 2015; p. 1250), also thanks to the role social media algorithms play in this process (Klinger and Svensson, 2018). These characteristics of social media websites were immediately linked to the great success of European populist parties, for which it was essential to find freedom from the press (Mazzoleni, 2008; 2014) while also opening new channels of communication with their atomized public (Gerbaudo, 2018). However, social media has rapidly become central in the communicative strategies of all Italian political leaders (Mazzoleni and Bracciale, 2018). Thus, all the political actors employed hybrid communication campaigns.

In Section 2.3 we have already described an event that exemplifies the functioning of the hybrid media system. Most politicians opened a TikTok account to ful-

fill a double objective. Firstly, TikTok's adoption must be intended through the lens of *pop politics* in general (Mazzoleni and Sfardini 2009), and *meme politics* in particular (Mazzoleni and Bracciale 2019). Having to engage in the nerve-wracking mission of communicating to an uninterested public, Italian politicians tried to establish a common ground with them by exploiting and shaping popular culture. Therefore, the first objective of Italian politicians was to create dedicated content for TikTok to intercept the youth audience. Moreover, an analysis of videos posted between 2021 and 2022 showed that Salvini's communication on this platform is rarely negative. Most of his content on TikTok aims to create engagement or entertainment (Albertazzi and Bonansinga, 2023). This means that Salvini has well-differentiated his political communication according to the logic of the platform on which he publishes: he spreads messages characterized by negative emotions on Facebook (Bobba, 2019), while generally displaying positive emotions on Instagram (Scaduto and Mancosu, 2022). Secondly, by subscribing to TikTok politicians sought to receive legacy media coverage. This allowed them to interact with younger audiences – directly on TikTok – and the older public – through the intermediation of newspapers.

Table 3 shows that the leaders adopted TikTok at different times and that this resulted in varying audience sizes. Salvini has been a member since 2019 and has the largest fanbase. Meloni and Berlusconi quickly gained many followers by posting soft and funny content. Indeed, a quantitative analysis of TikTok videos published by the major political leaders in the summer of 2022 revealed that Berlusconi produced the two best-performing posts. Interestingly, both were on the character of Berlusconi and not on his policy proposals (Battista, 2023). Conte posted only after the end of his government but accumulated a conspicuous number of followers. Finally, Letta and Bonino are the only leaders without personal accounts.

3.2 Legacy media: older does not mean marginal

Legacy media – like television and the press – play a relevant role in the Italian hybrid media system (Chadwick, 2017), since they retain vast audiences and high trust (Newman *et al.*, 2021). However, Meloni and Letta could not have a television debate. The confrontation between them took place on a newspaper's website, to respect Italian law regulating media political coverage (Adnkronos, 2022). Nevertheless, every leader sought collaboration with traditional media as part of his or her communicative strategy. Meloni published a series of Facebook videos in English, French, and Spanish, introducing herself as the leader of the "Italian conservative party" (Facebook, 2022b). These videos aimed at demarcating the distance between FDI and the fascist party, reassuring the international press. A few days later, Letta copied this strategy, delivering a speech in the same languages (Facebook, 2022c). His speech highlighted the importance of the EU within PD's political platform, while also attacking Meloni, portrayed as a Euro-skeptical, nationalistic, and far-right leader. Once again, the macro-frame of this electoral campaign was set by the right forcing the left coalition to chase.

Table 4 shows that leaders managed their national television time with three strategies. Conte was the only leader steadily increasing his television time approaching the election. Calenda adopted the opposite tactic, spending most of his minutes in the early stages of the campaign. The others were less present between 3 to 20 August, slightly increasing their presence in the second half of the month, and then reducing their quotas in the period between 4 to 10 September.

Television played an important role also at the end of the electoral campaign. On the 23rd of September, the anchorman of La7 Enrico Mentana interviewed all political leaders. Talks lasted between 11 and 29 minutes and were re-mediatized, becoming a playlist on YouTube

Table 3. Leaders on TikTok[1] by followers (thousands).

Position issue	Followers	First post
Salvini (League)	756	December 11, 2019
Meloni (FDI)	752	March 2, 2022
Berlusconi (FI)	713	September 1, 2022
Conte (M5S)	488	April 22, 2022
Calenda (TP)	26	August 26, 2022
+Europa	17	September 14, 2022
Democratic Party	7	September 1, 2022

Source: TikTok data. Lastly checked on 02/11/2022.
[1] Lastly checked on 02/11/2022.

Table 4. Minutes spent talking on television by leaders.

Leader (party)	3-20 August	21-3 September	4-10 September
Calenda (TP)	556	280	153
Berlusconi (FI)	511	397	261
Letta (PD)	457	547	313
Salvini (League)	380	487	324
Conte (M5S)	350	363	486
Meloni (FDI)	323	401	218

Source: Data collected by Sensemakers (2022a). News channels monitored were: Rai 1, Rai 2, Rai 3, Rai News 24, Rete 4, Canale 5, Italia 1, TgCom24, La7, La7d, Nove, Tv8, Cielo, Sky Tg24.

Table 5. Cumulative interactions of media outlets on Facebook (FB) and Instagram (IG).

Media outlet	Total interactions		Reactions		Comments		Shares
	FB	IG	FB	IG	FB	IG	FB
La Republica	10.87M	7.22M	6.78M	7.10M	3.51M	117.9K	573.0K
Il Corriere della Sera	7.11M	6.83M	4.65M	6.71M	2.10M	115.2K	356.3K
Il Fatto Quotidiano	7.12M	707.0K	3.75M	641.2K	2.94M	65.9K	423.9K
La Stampa	2.46M	1.22M	1.62M	1.17M	665.0K	47.6K	172.5K
Il Messaggero	4.24M	297.2K	2.54M	285.9K	1.47M	11.3K	236.2K
Il Giornale	973.6K	94.6K	467.6K	81.6K	441.0K	13.0K	65.0K

Source: Crowdtangle data.

(Youtube, 2022) and a series of videos on La7's website (La7, 2022).

Italian legacy media also manage social media accounts, being more followed on Facebook than on Instagram. Table 5 shows the cumulative interactions obtained by the seven biggest national media outlets on Facebook and Instagram. On the latter, Corriere della Sera and La Repubblica obtain almost half of the total interactions, while on Facebook the distribution was more diversified. It is interesting to investigate the best-performing post published by each outlet on Facebook, between August and September. Il Messaggero's best post reports the news of Letta serving tables at a restaurant (Facebook, 2022d). Il Giornale's, Libero's, and La Stampa's best-performing posts revolve around politics as well (Facebook, 2022e,f,g), and comment respectively the influencer Chiara Ferragni attacking the right-wing coalition, an Italian singer refusing to sing "Bella Ciao"[3], and a left-leaning comment regarding the episode related to "#deviances" (see Section 2.3). Il Fatto Quotidiano's, Il Corriere della Sera's, and La Repubblica's top posts are instead not political (Facebook, 2022h,i,l). They deal with the death of Queen Elisabeth II, the death of the Italian intellectual Piero Angela, and with the athlete Crippa winning the gold medal in long-distance running.

3.3 Digital media: the quest to maximize engagement

Electoral campaigns are costly enterprises. Table 6 shows the budget for online political advertising. Some trends emerge. First, Google ads were completely managed by parties since the leaders did not pay directly for them. Moreover, Google's budget was considerably smaller than that of Instagram and Facebook ("Meta", in Table 6). Thirdly, Google advertising was used almost exclusively by the right-wing coalition and +E. Meta

advertising was implemented with two different strategies. The PD, M5S, +E, AVS, and FDI, mostly advertised parties' posts. Meanwhile, most of the budget of the League, TP, FI, and NM sponsored leaders' posts. Therefore, from a quantitative point of view, the social media strategies of these parties were more personalized and candidate-centric. At the macro level, the right-wing parties dominated this ranking. FDI and the League spent respectively 784.000 and 443.000 euros; whilst the other parties combined spent a total of €1.209.000.

We will not look at the leaders' metrics regarding their communication strategies on Facebook and Instagram. Data reported in the rest of this Section refer to the timespan from August 25, 2022, to September 24, 2022, and are collected through CrowdTangle. We start by observing the number of followers at the end of the campaign and the growth percentages of followers on Instagram and Facebook.

In terms of the gross number of followers, both on Instagram and on Facebook, Salvini, Conte, and Meloni dominated the field. As shown by the comparison with the growth percentages, the success of Conte and Salvini

Table 6. Budget for Meta and Google advertising (thousands of Euros).

Leader (party)	Meta	Google	Leader	Total
Bonino (+E)	132	62	6	200
Meloni (FDI)	209	132	102	443
Letta (PD)	292	0	1	293
Berlusconi (FI)	51	0	107	158
Frantoianni (AVS)	79	3	37	119
Salvini (League)	101	67	616	784
Conte (M5S)	62	0	39	101
Lupi (NM)	0	0	62	62
Calenda (TP)	68	2	219	289

Source: Ad Library (2022) and Ads Transparency (2022) data for the period between August 25 and September 25.

---

[3] Bella Ciao is a song symbolizing the fight against fascism.

Table 7. Followers and growth on Facebook (FB) and Instagram (IG).

Leader (party)	Total		Growth		% Growth	
	FB	IG	FB	IG	FB	IG
Bonino (+E)	106.9K	42.7K	944	6.9K	0,89	19,44
Meloni (FDI)	2.40M	1.05M	30.5K	29.5K	1,29	2,90
Letta (PD)	150.1K	96.6K	2.9K	7K	1,94	7,81
Berlusconi (FI)	1.12M	477.4K	5.0K	28.0K	0,45	6,24
Frantoianni (AVS)	139.8K	60.9K	1.3K	3.6K	0,96	6,32
Salvini (League)	5.05M	2.20M	9.0K	4.5K	0,18	0,20
Conte (M5S)	4.53M	1.78M	709	7.6K	0,02	0,43
Lupi (NM)	58.2K	4.3K	845	460	1,47	12,04
Calenda (TP)	296.9K	138.6K	18.9K	11.1K	6,80	8,71

Source: Crowdtangle data.

Table 8. Posts published by each leader on Facebook (FB) and Instagram (IG).

Leader (party)	Total		% Total	
	FB	IG	FB	IG
Bonino (+E)	49	29	2,44	2,63
Meloni (FDI)	190	105	9,46	9,51
Letta (PD)	318	200	15,84	18,12
Berlusconi (FI)	178	76	8,86	6,88
Frantoianni (AVS)	132	106	6,57	9,60
Salvini (League)	406	194	20,22	17,57
Conte (M5S)	187	84	9,31	7,61
Lupi (NM)	59	21	2,94	1,90
Calenda (TP)	489	298	24,35	26,18

Source: Crowdtangle data.

preceded August 2022: Salvini gained only 9.000 new followers during the electoral campaign, while Conte just 700. Conte gained a considerable amount of followers thanks to his role during the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in Italy (Bertero, 2021), while Salvini steadily grew his fanbase over the years. Meloni managed to gain an important number of followers during this campaign, both on Facebook (+30.5k, +1.29 percent) and on Instagram (29.5k, +2.9 percent), but her accounts were still substantially smaller than those of Conte and Salvini.

While on Instagram leaders of small parties (Bonino and Lupi) have gained more followers, because they did not have a successful account before the electoral campaign, on Facebook Calenda is the one that grew the most, by more than 6% in one month. This could be the result of a very active posting strategy, as shown in Table 8. Indeed, Calenda was the most prolific poster of the campaign both on Facebook and Instagram. On Facebook, he posted 489 posts in 31 days, averaging almost 16 posts per day, while on Instagram he posted 289 posts, with an average of more than 9 posts per day. Enrico Letta and Matteo Salvini were also among the most active, although very distant from Calenda. On Facebook, Letta published 318 posts (more than 10 posts per day) and Salvini 406 (more than 13 per day), while on Instagram Letta shared 200 posts and Salvini 194 (more than 6 per day). Maurizio Lupi and Emma Bonino have been the ones who posted less on both social networks.

Table 9 presents the overall interactions generated by leaders' accounts. Importantly, these numbers are conditioned by the number of followers of each profile. Hence, even if they do not provide information about the success in terms of relative engagement, they are nonetheless useful to observe the dominance of Meloni, Salvini, and (only on Facebook) Conte in abso-

Table 9. Leaders' engagement on Facebook (FB) and Instagram (IG).

Leader (party)	Reactions		Comments		Shares
	FB	IG	FB	IG	FB
Bonino (+E)	30.7K	101.1K	2.6K	2.1K	3.5K
Meloni (FDI)	4.51M	2.13M	971.6K	157.3K	375.9K
Letta (PD)	256.1K	268.3K	147.4K	33.5K	15.9K
Berlusconi (FI)	360.1K	334.3K	101.8K	8.8K	26.3K
Frantoianni (AVS)	212.7K	152.2K	38.7K	7.0K	30.2K
Salvini (League)	2.14M	2.19M	552.4K	143.5K	166.1K
Conte (M5S)	4.61M	692.4K	574.0K	24.2	633.4K
Lupi (NM)	81.4K	0	34.0K	87	3.8K
Calenda (TP)	824.8K	614.9K	204.7K	25.4K	61.3K

Source: Crowdtangle data.

lute terms. Interestingly, while on Facebook Conte and Meloni had a very similar number of total interactions and total reactions, Conte's posts were 70 percent more shared than Meloni's, while her posts were 75 percent more commented on than Conte's. Salvini came third, with less than half of the total interactions of Conte and Meloni, but still distancing all the other leaders. On Instagram, Salvini had the highest number of interactions, while Meloni closely followed. Conte was a distant third. Calenda's performance is also worth mentioning, with more than 640 thousand interactions.

Finally, Table 10 shows the interaction rate of each page, which is computed as the number of total interactions divided by the product between the number of posts and the average number of followers over the timeframe considered. Leaders of small parties achieved the highest interaction rate on Facebook and Instagram.

Table 10. Interaction rate on Facebook and Instagram.

Valence issue	FB	IG
Bonino (+E)	0,75%	7,78%
Meloni (FDI)	1,29%	2,08%
Letta (PD)	0,96%	1,67%
Berlusconi (FI)	0,25%	1,04%
Frantoianni (AVS)	1,55%	2,91%
Salvini (League)	0,14%	0,54%
Conte (M5S)	0,69%	0,46%
Lupi (NM)	3,20%	0,12%
Calenda (TP)	0,78%	1,68%

Source: Crowdtangle data.

Lupi and Fratoianni scored the highest on this metric on Facebook (3.20 and 1.55 percent), although Meloni's performance is worth mentioning (1.29 percent), especially considering the great difference in the number of followers between her and small party leaders. Bonino achieved an average interaction rate of 7.78 percent on Instagram, almost three times as much as Fratoianni (2.91 percent), who comes second. Still worth of mention is Giorgia Meloni's Instagram interaction rate (2.08 percent). Berlusconi strongly underperformed on Facebook (0.25 percent) but not on Instagram (1.04 percent), where his successful TikTok content was largely reshared. Salvini and Conte also had low interaction rates on Facebook (0.14 percent and 0.69 percent) and on Instagram (0.54 and 0.46 percent). Letta and Calenda share similar percentages on Facebook (0.96 and 0.78 percent) and Instagram (1.67 and 1.68 percent), performing better on the latter.

CONCLUSIONS

This contribution shed light on the electoral campaign of the 2022 Italian political election. Section 1 investigated the Italian political scenario. The sudden fall of Draghi's government led to the formation of coalitions in a very narrow timeframe. Moreover, the political competition was characterized by a marked asymmetry of power, since the right-wing coalition was firmly ahead in the polls and won the elections by a wide margin. Section 2 showed that the electorate was mainly interested in economic issues, strongly owned by FDI, the League, and FI. In contrast, cultural issues such as immigration and civil rights emerged as position issues. The PD campaigned mainly on these polarizing issues, which contributed to its lack of electoral success. Moreover, the PD was repeatedly forced to chase the right-wing

coalition by discussing order and security issues, rather than being capable of setting the agenda on other topics. Finally, Section 3 showed that all parties and leaders adopted hybrid political communication strategies, engaging in cross-platform campaigns. Legacy media were important actors with which politicians had to negotiate their framing and agenda-setting power. Finally, the competition for social media engagement was won by the right-wing coalition parties and leaders. Indeed, Salvini and Meloni strongly performed on Facebook and Instagram, and Berlusconi obtained unexpected success on TikTok. Therefore, political communication strategies can also be interpreted through the continuity-discontinuity dichotomy that was used to describe the Italian political landscape in Section 1.3. On the one hand, leaders and parties adapted to the challenge of the first national summer campaign by employing newer media and by diluting their messages with entertainment. In this regard, TikTok and Instagram are among the novelties of this campaign. The former represents a clear attempt to make politics more palatable for the younger generations, while the latter was employed with unprecedented efforts. On the other hand, Facebook and legacy media retained their centrality. The former is still the largest platform in Italy by number of subscribers. The latter remain powerful gatekeepers with whom parties and leaders have had to interact to reach a wider and older audience.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

REFERENCES

Albertazzi, D., & Bonansinga, D. (2023). Beyond anger: the populist radical right on TikTok. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 1-17.

Altheide, D. L., & Snow, R. P. (1979) *Media Logic*. Sage.

Battista, D. (2023). For better or for worse: politics marries pop culture (TikTok and the 2022 Italian elections). *Society Register, 7*(1), 117-142.

Bertero, A. (2021). The COVID-19 Related Communication of Italian Politicians and Its Success on Facebook. In *Current Populism in Europe: Gender-Backlash and Counter-strategies* (pp. 79-94). HBS Prague.

Blumler, J. G., & Kavanagh, D. (1999). The third age of political communication: Influences and features. *Political communication*, *16*(3), 209-230.

Bobba, G. (2019). Social media populism: Features and 'likeability'of Lega Nord communication on Facebook. *European Political Science*, *18*, 11-23.

Bonfreschi, L. (2019). Becoming the 'party of civil rights': the Radical Party, 1962–1979. *Journal of Modern Italian Studies, 24*(4), 600-617.

Bordignon, F., & Ceccarini, L. (2015). The Five-Star Movement: A hybrid actor in the net of state institutions. *Journal of Modern Italian Studies, 20*(4), 454-473.

Bruns, A. (2008). *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and beyond: From production to produsage* (Vol. 45). Peter Lang.

Cacciotto, M. (2019). *Il nuovo marketing politico: vincere le elezioni e governare al tempo della politica veloce*. Il Mulino.

Castells, M. (2013). *Communication power*. Oxford University Press.

Chadwick, A. (2017). *The hybrid media system: Politics and power*. Oxford University Press.

Chiaramonte, A. (2022). Ritorno al proporzionale? *Il Mulino, 2,* 47–56.

Chiaramonte, A., Emanuele, V., Maggini, N., & Paparo, A. (2022). Radical-Right Surge in a Deinstitutionalised Party System: The 2022 Italian General Election. *South European Society and Politics, 27*(3), 329–357.

Congleton, R. D., Grofman, B. N., & Voigt, S. (Eds.). (2018). *The Oxford Handbook of Public Choice, Volume 2*. Oxford University Press.

De Sio, L. (2018). Il ritorno del voto di classe, ma al contrario (ovvero: se il PD è il partito delle élite). In *Gli sfidanti al governo. Disincanto, nuovi conflitti e diverse strategie dietro il voto del 4 marzo 2018* (pp. 133-137). LUISS University Press.

Decreto Legislativo 23 dicembre 2020, n. 177. (2020, December 29th). "Determinazione dei collegi elettorali uninominali e plurinominali per l'elezione della Camera dei deputati e del Senato della Repubblica, a norma dell'articolo 3 della legge 27 maggio 2019". Italy. *Gazzetta ufficiale* (321).

Froehlich, R., & Rüdiger, B. (2006). Framing political public relations: Measuring success of political communication strategies in Germany. *Public Relations Review, 32*(1), 18-25.

Garzia, D., & Karremans, J. (2021). Super Mario 2: comparing the technocrat-led Monti and Draghi governments in Italy. *Contemporary Italian Politics, 13*(1), 105-115.

Garzia, D., & Passarelli, G. (2021). Italy in times of protest and negative voting: An introduction. *Quaderni dell'Osservatorio elettorale – Italian Journal of Electoral Studies 84*(2), 3-7.

Gerbaudo, P. (2018). Social media and populism: an elective affinity?. *Media, culture & society, 40*(5), 745-753.

Giannetti, D. (2013). Mario Monti's Technocratic Government. *Italian Politics, 28*(1), 133-152.

Gratton, G., Guiso, L., Michelacci, C., & Morelli, M. (2021). From Weber to Kafka: Political instability and the overproduction of laws. *American Economic Review, 111*(9), 2964-3003.

Green, J. (2007). When Voters and Parties Agree: Valence Issues and Party Competition. *Political Studies, 55*(3), 629–655.

Grosso, E. (2021). I problematici effetti della riduzione del numero dei parlamentari: spunti introduttivi. *Consulta Online*, (1), 13-23.

Improta, M., Mannoni, E., Marcellino, C., & Trastulli, F. E. (2022). Voters, issues, and party loyalty: The 2022 Italian election under the magnifying glass. *Quaderni dell'Osservatorio elettorale – Italian Journal of Electoral Studies, 85*(2), 3-27.

Ippolito, M., & Cicatiello, L. (2019). Political instability, economic inequality and social conflict: The case in Italy. *Panoeconomicus, 66*(3), 365-383.

Jenkins, H., Ford, S., & Green, J. (2013). Spreadable media. In *Spreadable media*. New York University Press.

Klinger, U., & Svensson, J. (2015). The emergence of network media logic in political communication: A theoretical approach. *New media & society*, *17*(8), 1241-1257.

Klinger, U., & Svensson, J. (2018). The end of media logics? On algorithms and agency. *New Media & Society*, *20*(12), 4653-4670.

Lami, G., & Sahota, S. K. (2022). The Russian invasion of Ukraine: some readings from Italian newspapers (20 February–5 March 2022). *Modern Italy*, *27*(3), 199-206.

Maggini, N., & Chiaramonte, A. (2019). Euroscepticism behind the Victory of Eurosceptic Parties in the 2018 Italian General Election? Not Exactly. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies, 57*(S1), 77–89.

Marangoni, F., & Kreppel, A. (2022). From the 'yellow-red' to the technocratic government in the pandemic era. The formation and activity of the Draghi government during its first nine months in charge. *Contemporary Italian Politics*, *14*(2), 133-150.

Mazzoleni, G. (2008). Populism and the media. In *Twenty-first century populism: The spectre of Western European democracy* (pp. 49-64). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Mazzoleni, G. (2012). *La Comunicazione Politica*. Il Mulino.

Mazzoleni, G. (2014). Mediatization and political populism. In *Mediatization of politics: Understanding the transformation of western democracies* (pp. 42-56). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Mazzoleni, G., & Bracciale, R. (2018). Socially mediated populism: the communicative strategies of political leaders on Facebook. *Palgrave Communications*, *4*(1).

Mazzoleni, G., & Bracciale, R. (2019). *La politica pop online. I meme e le nuove sfide della comunicazione politica*. Il Mulino.

Mazzoleni, G., & Sfardini, A. (2009). *Politica pop*. Il Mulino.

Mbah, R. E., & Wasum, D. F. (2022). Russian-Ukraine 2022 War: A review of the economic impact of Russian-Ukraine crisis on the USA, UK, Canada, and Europe. *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal*, 9(3), 144-153.

McDonnell, D., & Valbruzzi, M. (2014). Defining and classifying technocrat-led and technocratic governments. *European Journal of Political Research*, *53*(4), 654-671.

McNair, B. (2018). *An introduction to political communication*. Routledge.

McPherson, M., Smith-Lovin, L., & Cook, J. M. (2001). Birds of a feather: Homophily in social networks. *Annual review of sociology*, *27*(1), 415-444.

Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Robertson, C. T., Eddy, K., & Nielsen, R. K. (2021). Reuters Institute digital news report 2022. *Reuters Institute for the study of Journalism*.

Novelli, E. (2021). *I manifesti politici. Storie e immagini dell'Italia repubblicana*. Carrocci.

Panarari, M. (2022). A Voce Alta. Sguardi sulla campagna. Campaigning, marketing e framing delle elezioni politiche del 25 settembre 2022. *Comunicazione politica*, *23*(3), 441-448.

Petrocik, J. R. (1996). Issue ownership in presidential elections, with a 1980 case study. *American Journal of Political Science*, 825-850.

Roncarolo, F., & Mancini, P. (2018). The traditional media, political parallelism and public opinion on contentious issues in the 2018 Italian election campaign. *Contemporary Italian Politics*, *10*(3), 243-266.

Russo, L., & Valbruzzi, M. (2022). The impact of the pandemic on the Italian party system. The Draghi government and the 'new'polarisation. *Contemporary Italian Politics*, *14*(2), 172-190.

Sanchez, O. (2002). An open-ended transition: the effects of electoral reform in Italy. *Journal of European Area Studies, 10*(2), 259-281.

Sani, G., & Sartori, G. (1978). Frammentazione, polarizzazione e cleavages: democrazie facili e difficili. *Italian Political Science Review/Rivista Italiana Di Scienza Politica*, *8*(3), 339-361.

Scaduto, G., & Mancosu, M. (2022). Lacrime di coccodrillo? Variazioni nel contenuto visuale su Instagram dei politici populisti e mainstream durante la pandemia. *Comunicazione Politica, 23*(2), 255-276.

Schmitt, H., Segatti, P., & van der Ejik, C. (2021). *Consequences of context: How the social, political, and economic environment affects voting*. ECPR Press.

Stokes, D. (1963). Spatial Models of Party Competition. *American Political Science Review*, *57*(2), 368-377.

Valbruzzi, M. (2018). When populists meet technocrats. The Italian innovation in government formation. *Journal of Modern Italian Studies, 23*(4), 460-480.

LIST OF WEBSITES

Ad Library (2022). https://www.facebook.com/ads/library/?active_status=all&ad_type=political_and_issue_ads&country=IT&media_type=all

Ads Transparency (2022). https://adstransparency.google.com/political?political&region=IT

Adnkronos (2022, August 24). "Confronto tv Meloni-Letta, Agcom: <<Non rispetta par condicio>>". https://www.adnkronos.com/confronto-tv-meloni-letta-agcom-non-rispetta-par-condicio_17nnWvhjerWV5HKEiP7H8e

Agi. (2022, August 11). "Accordo tra Calenda e Renzi, nasce il terzo polo". Agi. https://www.agi.it/politica/news/2022-08-11/renzi-calenda-accordo-fatto-terzo-polo-17726189/

Ansa (2022, July 21). "Mattarella scioglie le Camere". Ansa. https://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/topnews/2022/07/21/mattarella-scioglie-le-camere_27d673e1-a397-4224-bce9-e2dfe7c2bbc0.html

Azione (2022). "La nostra proposta sul Salario Minimo". Azione. https://www.azione.it/le-nostre-proposte-sul-salario-minimo/

Carli, A., Ferrazza, R., and Gagliardi, A. (2022, September 22). "Elezioni, programmi elettorali a confronto: dalla flat tax alle pensioni". Il Sole 24 Ore. https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/flat-tax-pensioni-sanzioni-russia-ecco-partito-partito-programmi-temi-chiave-AEZley1B

Corriere della Sera (2022a, July 22). "Mario Draghi, le dimissioni: come si è arrivati alla crisi di governo". https://www.corriere.it/politica/22_luglio_21/draghi-dimissioni-governo-ad4926de-0835-11ed-bd15-abd-29857fc36.shtml

Correre della Sera (2022b, September 10). "«Credo in Salvini», la campagna video dei sindaci leghisti per il leader". https://www.corriere.it/politica/22_settembre_10/credo-salvini-campagna-video-sindaci-leghisti-il-leader-6678a582-3133-11ed-92ac-f2f5ef48b384.shtml

Corriere della Sera (2022c, September 12). "Da Berlusconi a Renzi, tutti i politici che sono sbarcati su TikTok". https://video.corriere.it/politica/da-berlusconi-renzi-tutti-politici-che-sono-sbarcati-tiktok/0ccb1688-29ee-11ed-8963-d54a3aeaa2d9

Corriere della Sera (2022d, September 12). "Letta-Meloni, il confronto video tra i due leader sul Corriere: la diretta integrale". https://video.corriere.it/letta-meloni-confronto-video/5978343c-32a6-11ed-aa4e-c1e08594c6e6

De Cicco, F. (2022). Prove di terzo polo, Renzi a Calenda: "Fai tu il leader". Ma c'è il nodo firme.Repubblica. https://www.repubblica.it/politica/2022/08/08/news/renzi_nuovo_centro_calenda-360777805/

De Sio, L., Boldrini, M., Trastulli, F. (2022, September 8). "Domande degli elettori e offerta dei partiti: declino dei temi economici (tranne M5S) e polarizzazione indotta". https://cise.luiss.it/cise/2022/09/08/domande-degli-elettori-e-offerta-dei-partiti-declino-dei-temi-economici-tranne-m5s-e-polarizzazione-indotta/

Facebook (2022a, August 21). "Pronti a valorizzare lo sport e gli stili di vita sani". https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=646201306574969

Facebook (2022b, August 10). "La mia risposta alla stampa internazionale per spiegare chi siamo". https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1179850086190765

Facebook (2022c, August 13). "Letta, il video messaggio in tre lingue alla stampa estera". https://m.facebook.com/watch/?v=1408137679709731&paipv=0&eav=AfZNFiBNjaVeqxiEy2nPAWljNON_MIOPpntRJWZx-aZjiB-k6uubgOFYrivgP8JiMrQ&_rdr

Facebook (2022d, September 2). "Milano, Letta serve pizza ai tavoli nel locale in cui lavorano ragazzi autistici". https://www.facebook.com/124918220854917/posts/6459911430688866

Facebook (2022e, September 15). "Nuovo attacco via Instagram della #ChiaraFerragni verso #ForzaItalia, #FdI e #Lega". https://www.facebook.com/323950777458/posts/10160232479027459

Facebook (2022f, September 13). "Incredibile polemica su #LauraPausini che alla tv spagnola rifiuta di cantare #BellaCiao". https://www.facebook.com/188776981163133/posts/8492898980750850

Facebook (2022g, August 23). "Quando in un Paese qualcuno comincia a indire crociate contro la "devianza" dovrebbe scattare un segnale d'allarme". https://www.facebook.com/63873785957/posts/10159670596545958

Facebook (2022h, September 10). "Nuvola con la sagoma della regina Elisabetta". https://www.facebook.com/132707500076838/posts/6830567263624128

Facebook (2022i, August 14). "L'omaggio di Giannelli a Piero Angela". https://www.facebook.com/284515247529/posts/10160236742207530

Facebook (2022l, August 14). "Vengo dall'orfanotrofio, ho lottato anche per un letto". https://www.facebook.com/179618821150/posts/10162394245871151

Fratelli d'Italia. (2022). "Il programma". Fratelli d'Italia. https://www.fratelli-italia.it/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Brochure_programma_FdI_qr_def.pdf

Il Manifesto (2022, June 9). "Catalfo: «Salario minimo, una soglia dignitosa valga per tutti»". Il Manifesto. https://ilmanifesto.it/catalfo-salario-minimo-una-soglia-dignitosa-valga-per-tutti

La7 (2022). "Elezioni politiche 2022: i video". La 7. https://www.la7.it/elezioni-politiche-2022/video

Lauria, E. (2022). "Berlusconi, ritorno al passato: in corsa con la strategia del '94". Repubblica. https://www.repubblica.it/politica/2022/08/03/news/berlusconi_scelta_di_campo-360197030/

Lega. (2022). "Programma di governo". Lega. https://static.legaonline.it/files/Programma_Lega_2022.pdf

Loguercio, L. (2022, August 24). "Com'è la campagna elettorale su TikTok". Pagella politica. https://pagellapolitica.it/articoli/politici-partiti-tiktok-elezioni-2022

Mannoni, E., Maggini, N., Angelucci, D. (2022, September 9). "Cosa vogliono gli elettori?". Luiss. https://cise.luiss.it/cise/2022/09/09/cosa-vogliono-gli-elettori/

Movimento Cinque Stelle. (2022). "Elezioni politiche 2022 – Programma M5S". Movimento Cinque Stelle. https://www.movimento5stelle.eu/elezioni-politiche-2022-programma-m5s/

Pagella Politica. (2022). "Il Movimento 5 stelle non è l'unico a proporre il salario minimo a 9 euro". https://pagellapolitica.it/fact-checking/salario-minimo-elezioni-2022

Partito Democratico. (2022, Aug, 17). Scarica il programma elettorale 2022 e gli allegati. Partito democratico. https://www.partitodemocratico.it/primo-piano/scarica-il-programma-elettorale-2022-2/

Pisaniello, V. (2022, September). "I partiti che vogliono cancellare il reddito di cittadinanza". TheWam. https://thewam.net/cancellare-il-reddito-di-cittadinanza-elezioni-2022/#4

Pertici, L. (2022, July 10). "Il leader M5S Conte: <<Il reddito di cittadinanza non si tocca, ha tolto braccia alle mafie>>". La Repubblica. https://palermo.repubblica.

it/politica/2022/07/10/news/il_leader_m5s_conte_
il_reddito_di_cittadinanza_non_si_tocca_ha_tolto_
braccia_alle_mafie-357348486/

Politico. (2022). "Italy — National parliament vot-
ing intention": Politico.eu. https://www.politico.eu/
europe-poll-of-polls/italy/

Sensemakers (2022a, August 5). "I leader politici sui
social e in TV: la campagna elettorale per le polit-
iche 2022". https://www.sensemakers.it/news/i-leader-
politici-sui-social-e-in-TV-la-campagna-elettorale-
per-le-politiche-2022

Sky Tg24 (2022, August 22). "Meloni posta sui social
il video dello stupro di Piacenza, è polemica. Let-
ta: <<Indecente>>". https://www.agi.it/cronaca/
news/2022-08-22/elezioni-video-stupro-piacenza-
scontro-letta-meloni-17822494/

SWG. (2022). "Il sondaggio politico di lunedì 8 ago-
sto 2022". TgLa7. https://tg.la7.it/politica/il-
sondaggio-politico-di-luned%C3%AC-8-giug-
no-2022-08-08-2022-174677

Twitter (2022a, July 27). "Le politiche immigrazioniste
hanno gettato nel caos la Nazione". https://twitter.
com/GiorgiaMeloni/status/1552212411662336001

Twitter (2022b, August 22). "Io lo penso e lo dico, #Viv-
aLeDevianze". https://twitter.com/EnricoLetta/
status/1561653490618773504?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw
%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E15616
53490618773504%7Ctwgr%5Ee070057fc4eae1a808
e4728daa4469279aad6d7a%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ref_
url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.repubblica.it%2Fpolitica
%2F2022%2F08%2F22%2Fnews%2Fdevianze_melo-
ni_letta_fdi_tweet_polemiche-362596517%2F

Vecchio, C. (2022, September 25). "Aeroplanini, ecobus,
video TikTok e baci: le follie dei 66 giorni di cam-
pagna elettorale". Repubblica. https://www.repub-
blica.it/politica/2022/09/25/news/campagna_eletto-
rale_2022_migliori_peggiori-367100552/

Youtrend and Cattaneo Zanetto & Co. (2022, August
13th). "Elezioni, cosa succederebbe se si votasse oggi:
la simulazione sui collegi uninominali". SkyTG24.
https://tg24.sky.it/politica/2022/08/12/elezioni-polit-
iche-simulazione-collegi-sondaggi#00

Youtube (2022). "Playlist: Elezioni politiche 2022".
La 7 attualità. https://www.youtube.com/
playlist?list=PLTQLA-sdhEzSj2edW2aoHH7j5JnrvC-
CGq

ORCID:
SM: 0000-0003-0264-1592
GP: 0000-0002-2877-7052

Right-wing victory in the 2022 italian parliamentary election: territorial patterns and systemic implications

Sofia Marini[1,*], Gianluca Piccolino[2]

[1] *University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria*
[2] *Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies, Pisa, Italy*
E-mail: sofia.marini@univie.ac.at
*Corresponding author.

Abstract. The snap election held in September 2022 saw the victory of the right-wing coalition, with a remarkable performance of the populist radical right party Fratelli d'Italia and its leader, Giorgia Meloni, who has become the first female Prime Minister of the country. Another unprecedented element concerns participation, which was the lowest in post-war Italy for a national election. Throughout this article, we first shed light on the background of this election, by highlighting how the specificities of the electoral system and previous developments during the last legislature affected the alliances among of political parties. We then proceed to the illustration of the results, with a territorial analysis of participation figures, vote share and competitiveness of electoral constituencies. Finally, we assess the implications of this election for the institutionalization of the party system. What emerges is a picture of growing abstention, disproportionality, fragmentation and electoral volatility, which suggests an overall consolidation of instability.

Keywords: general elections, Italian politics, Fratelli d'Italia, voting patterns

1. INTRODUCTION

The 2022 Italian election was called before the natural end of a turbulent legislative term, during which the country witnessed the alternation of three different cabinets. Despite the rushed electoral campaign conducted over the summer, the dilemma of which alliances should be formed and the uncertainty about the effects of the electoral system after the significant reduction in the number of MPs, the results confirmed the prediction of the polls. The right-wing coalition[1] prevailed, bolstered in particular by the impressive result of the populist radical right party Fratelli d'Italia (FdI, *Brothers of Italy*) – whose leader, Giorgia Meloni, swore in as the head of a new government one month after the election.

---

[1] We will refer to this coalition as "right-wing" rather than "centre-right", given that in 2022 the weight of the right-wing parties – Fratelli d'Italia (*Brothers of Italy*) and Lega (*League*) – made the former label much more suitable than the latter (see also Chiaramonte *et al.*, 2023).

Throughout this article, our goal is to gain a deeper understanding of the territorial variations in electoral outcomes and to evaluate the impact of this election on the Italian party system. The first section is devoted to describing the political context in which the election took place and in particular the coordination of parties in response to the incentives of the electoral system. In the second section, we illustrate the results by party and electoral coalition. We provide both national and provincial data on abstention, which reached its highest level in post-war Italy for general elections. Subsequently, we analyse the overall results and the spatial voting patterns, focusing on larger geographical areas, as well as electoral districts and municipalities.

The third and last section aims at assessing to what extent the election results have affected the overall party system dynamics. Employing four key indicators of party system institutionalization (Casal Bértoa & Enyedi, 2021; Casal Bértoa, 2023), we detect higher levels of volatility, fragmentation and disproportionality, among others. These elements contribute to a picture of consolidated instability, marked by a large share of the electorate deeply disaffected and prone to vote switching. In the conclusion, we summarise the main implications of the election for the country.

2. THE CONTEXT OF THE ELECTION

2.1 A Parliament in turmoil

The XVIII legislative term of the Italian Parliament (2018-2022) mirrored the deinstitutionalization of the country's party system (Chiaramonte & Emanuele, 2014; Chiaramonte et al., 2018). Born in the context of a hung parliament, it has seen the takeover of three cabinets with (very) different ideological mix-ups, an unprecedented event in the so-called Second Republic.[2] After the 2018 election, the Parliament was fractured among the centre-right coalition, with just over 40% of seats; the Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S, *Five Star Movement*), by far the largest party with roughly one-third of MPs; and the rest belonging to the centre-left, which ran the election separately with a coalition led by the Partito Democratico (PD, *Democratic Party*) and another list which

aggregated some leftist parties, Liberi e Uguali (LeU, *Free and Equal*). Several months of negotiations followed, leading in June 2018 to the formation of the first full-fledged populist government in a major country of Western Europe (Garzia, 2019), composed of the M5S and Matteo Salvini's Lega (*League*). The cabinet was led by a figure chosen outside the Parliament, the academic Giuseppe Conte, an independent widely considered close to the M5S.

The government fell already in August 2019. After the European election, which saw a clear success of the Lega and the electoral collapse of the M5S (Chiaramonte et al., 2020), Salvini tried to exploit his popularity by calling for a snap election. Within a few weeks, however, the M5S and the PD reached an agreement for a new government and in September the second Conte cabinet was born. This move involved a crucial role for the former PM Matteo Renzi, who earlier that month had left the PD to form his own party, Italia Viva (IV, *Italy Alive*). Only a few months later, the second Conte cabinet was confronted with the Covid-19 emergency, responding with several containment measures. After an initial phase in which also opposition parties exhibited relative unity in the response to the emergency (Albertazzi et al., 2021), the right-wing parties – Fratelli d'Italia and Lega in particular – became vocally critical of the government on the most important issues related to the management of the pandemic, such as the closure of the economic activities, or mask and vaccine mandates.

Tensions erupted quickly also among government parties, in particular between Italia Viva and the rest of the coalition. Already in the late Spring of 2020, Renzi's party criticised the government for the management of the economic consequences of the pandemic. Italia Viva then pushed the government to accept the special funds coming from the European Stability Mechanism (ESM), a proposal to which the M5S was opposed (Cavatorto et al., 2021). The rift between Renzi and the other governing coalition partners became irremediable on another issue related to the EU. Conte had been able to claim a personal victory from the success of the negotiation that led to the adoption of Next Generation EU, but the overall governance behind the draft of the country's National Recovery and Resilience Plan paved the way for the government crisis. Renzi's party withdrew its support in January 2021; lacking a viable majority in both houses, the cabinet resigned. To overcome the crisis, several leaders and commentators had voiced their support for a government led by Mario Draghi already in 2020. The former president of the European Central Bank had never held an electoral mandate before, but at the time he was widely considered the front-runner

---

[2] Although it had happened that three or more cabinets alternated in power during the same legislative term, this was the first time that the parliamentary majorities presented different ideological mix-ups. In the 1996-2001 legislature, for instance, the four governments were basically an expression of the then centre-left coalition – with important changes between the first and the following three cabinets – while in the 2013-2018 legislative term the three cabinets were all led by the Partito Democratico in alliance with centre-right parties.

for the (parliamentary) election of the President of the Republic in 2022. Draghi accepted the task to lead a new cabinet, which took the form of a national unity government supported by all major parties except Fratelli d'Italia.

During his term, Draghi had a hard time holding together such a heterogeneous governing coalition. In particular, during 2022 the cabinet faced pressures on two fronts. On the one hand, although the M5S succeeded to deliver several of its policy proposals during the legislature, it was expected to face large severe electoral losses. The risk of becoming irrelevant prompted Conte, as the new head of the M5S, to progressively re-position the party profile as much more progressive compared to 2018 (Carteny & Puleo, 2022). On the other hand, Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia (FI, *Go Italy*) and the Lega began to distance themselves from the government on several key issues, suffering the electoral pressure of FdI's steady growth in the polls. The government thus resigned in July after a confidence vote in the Senate, where it obtained the support only of a relative majority, given the abstention of the senators of the M5S and the absence of those belonging to Forza Italia and Lega. Given the impossibility of forming a cabinet until the end of the legislature, an early election was called on September 25.

2.2 Rules of the game and strategic coordination

For the second time, Italians voted with the mixed system introduced in 2017 (Chiaramonte & D'Alimonte, 2018). Two constitutional reforms, however, changed the rules of the game starting from this election, even though they were not directed to the electoral law *per se*. First, the voting age for the two chambers was unified at 18 years; previously, it was set at 25 for the Senate. Second, and perhaps most importantly, the number of MPs was reduced from 630 to 400 in the Chamber of Deputies and from 315 to 200 in the Senate. This reform, strongly supported by the Movimento 5 Stelle and confirmed by a national referendum in 2020, drastically changed the constituencies of the election.

Leaving aside some technicalities, the electoral system is rather similar between the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. Apart from the seats for Italians living abroad (2% of the total), roughly 37% of seats in both chambers are allocated through single-member constituencies (SMCs, first-past-the-post system) and 61% are distributed proportionally to party lists in multi-member constituencies (MMCs). Each candidate in the SMCs must be associated with a list competing in MMCs and different lists may form an electoral coalition to support common candidates in the SMCs (in such eventuality,

candidates' votes in SMCs will be associated with the whole coalition).[3] Split voting is not allowed, i.e. it is not possible to vote for a given candidate in the SMC and a list in the MMC different from those supporting such candidate. Seats in MMCs are allocated starting from the national level for the lower Chamber and region wide for the Senate. The representation threshold for lists is 3% at the national level – 10% for coalitions – or 20% at the regional level (only for the Senate or for lists representing linguistic minorities). Thus, while the system is mainly proportional and the electoral threshold is rather attainable for small- and medium-sized actors, it does provide clear incentives for coordination of parties in the form of pre-electoral alliances to compete with common candidates in SMCs, where victory is fundamental to achieve a governing majority. However, like in 2018 (De Lucia & Paparo, 2019; Chiaramonte *et al.*, 2019), parties reacted very differently to such incentives.

On the Right, it was possible to find an agreement for a coalition that mirrored the one presented in 2018, based on three main pillars – Forza Italia, Lega and Fratelli d'Italia – plus a residual centrist list, Noi Moderati (*We the Moderates*). Even though the members of this coalition had never collectively supported any of the three cabinets of the legislature, they had come closer together in the previous months. As in 2018, one of the main uncertainties concerned who was actually in charge of it. In 2018, Salvini and Berlusconi fought for the supremacy of this area, with FdI in a much less competitive position. The Lega was ultimately able to get more votes than Forza Italia – the first time Berlusconi was ousted as the main actor of the centre-right. In the latest electoral campaign, it was clear which party would have won the most votes: the impressive rise of Fratelli d'Italia in the polls in the two years before the election, and the simultaneous decline of the Lega (Crulli, 2022: 7-10), made Giorgia Meloni the undisputed front-runner of the election. However, it was no secret that Salvini and Berlusconi would have probably joined their forces to question her leadership of a future government, had the sum of the votes of their parties exceeded those for FdI.

The main opponents of the right-wing coalition had an electoral strength that made them – in theory – competitive in the election, but they failed to overcome their disagreements. Ideological divisions and personal rivalries played different roles in such an outcome, but we can iden-

---

[3] If a voter choose only a list in the MMC, her/his vote is automatically translated to the corresponding candidate supported by the list in the SMC. Voters can also simply just vote for a candidate in their SMC: in this case, the vote is transferred to the corresponding list in the MMC or, in case of a coalition, distributed proportionally among the various lists, based on their vote shares in that SMC.

tify the main cleavage in their different attitudes toward the Draghi cabinet. The pivotal actor of this front was the Partito Democratico. After the poor results obtained in 2018, the party changed three leaders during the legislature and was led in the electoral campaign by Enrico Letta, a former PM who tried to combine a firm loyalty to Draghi with an open dialogue with all parties opposing the right-wing coalition. Unlike in 2018, the M5S was available for a pre-election alliance with the centre-left, already tested – with mixed results – in some local elections. However, the fall of the Draghi cabinet created an unsolvable rift with Letta, widely perceived as the main supporter of the continuation of the Draghi government.

Besides the impossibility of running with the M5S, the PD faced other difficulties in building its coalition. On its right, there was a liberal-centrist area with clear technocratic veins. The three actors of this turf shared similar ideological stances, profound distances from the right-wing coalition, and complete loyalty to Draghi, but they had different relationships with the PD. The party most inclined to coalesce with Letta was +Europa (*More Europe*), led by former EU commissioner Emma Bonino, while Matteo Renzi's Italia Viva had much more tense relations with the PD. This was due to both the personal strife between the party leaders and Renzi's constant tactical manoeuvres over the years. Finally, the main player in this area was considered to be Azione (*Action*), a party founded in 2019 by MEP Carlo Calenda, a former minister in Renzi's cabinet. While Calenda was elected in the 2019 European election within the PD list, he took an increasingly autonomous position that received a fairly positive response in opinion polls. To consolidate his position, he harboured several former key members of Forza Italia who opposed the party's anti-Draghi turn, a choice that caused discontent in the other centre-left parties.

At the beginning of August, the Partito Democratico signed two separate deals – rather than a comprehensive coalition agreement – to form a pre-electoral alliance with both +Europa and Azione, on the one hand, and a left-wing list composed of Sinistra Italiana (*Italian Left*) and Europa Verde (*Green Europe*), called Alleanza Verdi Sinistra (AVS, *Green-Left Alliance*), on the other. Calenda, however, backtracked on the agreement, considering it impossible for his party to run together with political forces that opposed Draghi, and formed a unitary list with Italia Viva. The PD thus gathered a small coalition, which lacked competitiveness in the SMCs, composed of PD,[4] +Europa, AVS and Impegno Civico-

Centro Democratico (*Civic Commitment-Democratic Centre*), a negligible list led by the former M5S leader and Foreign Affairs Minister Luigi Di Maio, who left the party with some loyal MPs to keep supporting the Draghi government.

In such a scenario, the electoral campaign was not so much about *who* would win the election, but rather *how large* the parliamentary majority of the right-wing coalition would be. On the opposite front, the three blocks instead sought to lose *as little as possible*, in order to maintain the party leadership (Letta), keep the party electorally alive (Conte), or be decisive in the event of future realignments (Calenda and Renzi).

3. A LARGE VICTORY IN A DISAFFECTED COUNTRY

3.1 Participation and abstention: the sub-national and territorial level

Participation in this end-of-summer snap election was at a record low (Figure 1). National turnout reached 63.9%, which is not only the lowest in the post-war history of the country but also corresponds to the largest drop in participation between consecutive elections (Garzia, 2022), with a decrease of around 9 percentage points. In addition to participation, a further element worth analysing is the combination of blank and invalid votes. As reported in Figure 2, the share of blank and invalid ballots in the 2022 election was 1.1% and 1.7% of the whole electorate, respectively. This corresponds to a non-negligible increase compared to 2018 and can be connected to growing sentiments of disaffection among Italian voters (Chiaramonte, 2023). To sum up these data, just 61% of eligible voters cast a valid ballot in the election.

Figure 3 explores the evolution of the turnout in the general elections of the so-called Second Republic, according to geo-political macro-areas.[5] It was obtained through a ratio between the turnout in each area and the national score. As in the past, for instance, the South performed worse than the other areas, where we find results either in line with the national level (Centre-South) or higher than that (former Red Zone and North-

---

[4] The lists of the PD included also candidates from Articolo 1-Movimento Democratico e Progressista (*Article 1-Democratic and Progressive Movement*), a party that in 2018 led the Liberi e Uguali list.

[5] More than geographical divisions, such areas refer to different territorial political subcultures (Diamanti, 2010; Trigilia, 1981). While there is not a univocal way to identify such areas (for recent examples in literature see Vegetti *et al.*, 2013; Vassallo and Shin, 2019; Chiaramonte *et al.*, 2023; Improta *et al.*, 2022), we have decided to group them as follows: North-West (Aosta Valley, Liguria, Lombardy and Piedmont); North-East (Friuli-Venezia Giulia; Trentino-Alto Adige/South Tyrol, Veneto); former Red Zone (Emilia-Romagna, Marche, Tuscany and Umbria); Centre-South (Abruzzo, Latium, Molise); South (Apulia, Basilicata, Calabria, Campania, Sardinia and Sicily).
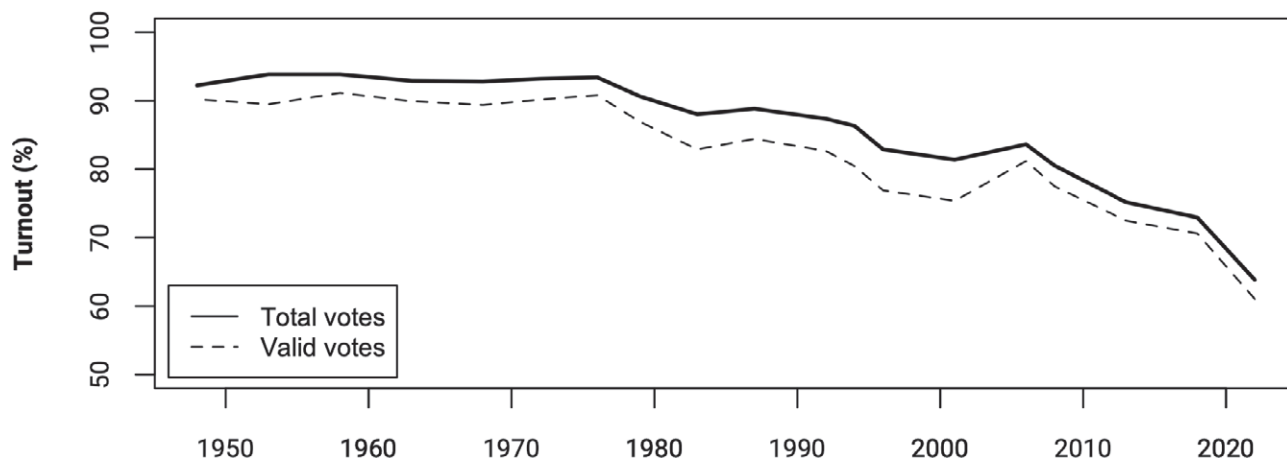
Figure 1. General turnout and valid ballots in Italian elections since 1948 (% of the electorate; Chamber of Deputies). Source: authors' elaboration based on Ministry of the Interior data. Abroad constituency not included.
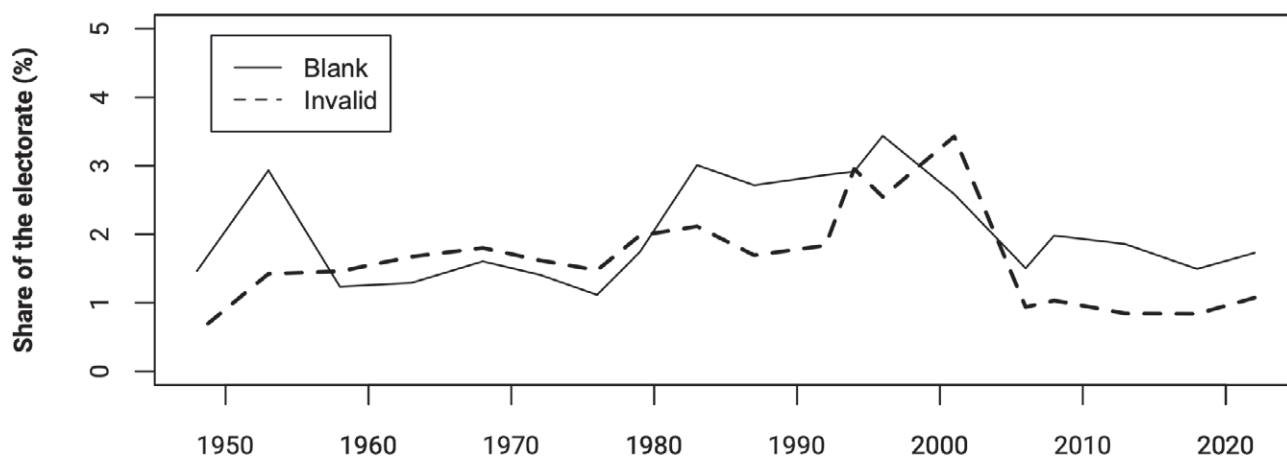
Figure 2. Blank and invalid ballots in Italian elections since 1948 (% of the electorate; Chamber of Deputies). Source: authors' elaboration based on Ministry of the Interior data. Abroad constituency not included.

ern regions). Moreover, in 2022 this gap was accentuated compared to the past.

This pattern is evident from the map on the left side of Figure 4, showing participation rates in the 2022 election, at the provincial level. This helps us provide an even more fine-grained analysis compared to research looking at macro-areas. We notice that turnout was overall higher in the North, especially in Emilia Romagna (around 71%), followed by Lombardy, Veneto and Tuscany, slightly below 70%. Conversely, the South witnessed markedly lower participation, especially in Calabria and Sardinia, two regions where the turnout was just over 50% of votes. This trend is shown also in the map in the right panel of Figure 4, where the results of 2022 are compared to those of 2018. We can see severe drops in participation in most of the South. An exception is Sicily, where the national election was

paired with the regional one, thus encouraging higher turnout rates (or at least, lower losses compared to previous elections).

3.2 The results

As long announced by the polls (see Garzia, 2022), the clear winner of the election was the right-wing coalition and in particular Giorgia Meloni, whose party Fratelli d'Italia gained almost 26% of the votes – with an impressive increase of over 21 percentage points compared to 2018. Looking within the right-wing coalition, the excellent performance of FdI somehow compensated the disappointing results of Forza Italia, scoring 8.1% (it had won 13.9% in 2018), and Lega, dropping to only 8.8% from 17.3% of four years earlier. The fourth coalition partner, Noi Moderati, only got 0.9% of the votes.

Figure 3. Ratios between macro-areas and national turnout (Chamber of Deputies). Source: authors' elaboration based on Ministry of the Interior data. Abroad constituencies not included.

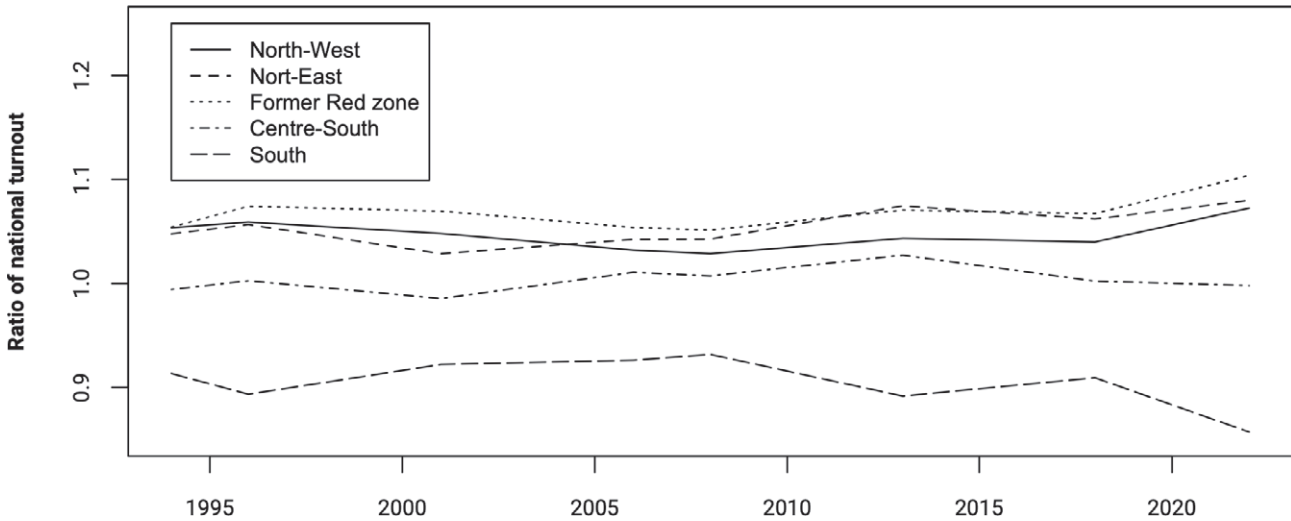The centre-left coalition gathered 26.1% of the votes overall, with a slight increase in its share from 2018.[6] The Partito Democratico obtained 19%, a slight increase in the vote share compared to 2018 but not enough to avoid a personal defeat for Letta. Among its coalition partners, AVS won 3.6% of votes, while +Europa and Impegno Civico failed to reach the 3% threshold. The Movimento 5 Stelle came in third place with 15.4% of the votes, a sharp drop compared to the 32.7% of 2018, but enough to keep the party relevant in the political landscape. Finally, the new centrist list consisting of Azione and Italia Viva (A-IV, the so-called Terzo Polo, *Third Pole*) gained 7.8% of the votes.

The vote share of 43.8% obtained by the right-wing coalition earned them a clear majority of seats, 237 in the Chamber of Deputies and 115 in the Senate. Among the remaining seats, around 21% were distributed in each house to the centre-left coalition, 13-14% to the M5S and around 5% to Azione Italia-Viva, plus a handful of SMCs won by the Südtiroler Volkspartei (SVP, *South Tyrolean People's Party*), lists representing Italians abroad, and other regionalist parties.

The overall performance of the right-wing coalition in the single-member constituencies was remarkable: it won more than 82% of the SMCs for the lower Chamber and just under 80% for the Senate. Despite a difference of more than 10% of votes, the centre-left and the M5S won a similar number of SMCs for the Chamber of Deputies

– 12 vs. 10 – and the Senate – 6 vs. 5. Finally, Azione-Italia Viva did not win any SMC, but only seats in the proportional part. Table 1 summarises these results for the Chamber of Deputies (above) and the Senate (below).

Figure 5 shows the percentage of seats obtained by the winning pre-electoral alliance[7] since the election of 1994, starting year of the so-called Second Republic, when the creation of pre-election alliances became a constant trait of the Italian political landscape. We can see that for the first time since 2008 a pre-electoral coalition obtained the absolute majority in both Chambers. Moreover, the share of seats of the right-wing coalition in 2022 is the highest obtained by a pre-electoral alliance in both chambers. Interestingly, the number of seats obtained by the right-wing coalition is quite similar between the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, an event that has not regularly occurred in the past.

3.3 Territorial distribution of the vote

After looking at the national results, we can examine the territorial differences in party performances. In Figure 6 we have a measure of the nationalisation of the vote for the main parties in this election. We selected the parties within the main coalitions that got at least

---

[6] It must be noted that in 2022 the coalition was different compared to 2018, since four years earlier the centre-left did not include some leftist parties that run with the list Liberi e Uguali. At the same time, in 2018 it was led by Matteo Renzi, a rival of the centre-left coalition in 2022.

[7] The data for the first two elections consider the total seats won by the centre-right (1994) and the centre-left (1996). Although these coalitions did not run those elections under the same pre-electoral alliance, but rather with different formulas, we have grouped them since the presentation of candidatures in the SMCs was generally agreed among the parties composing each coalition.
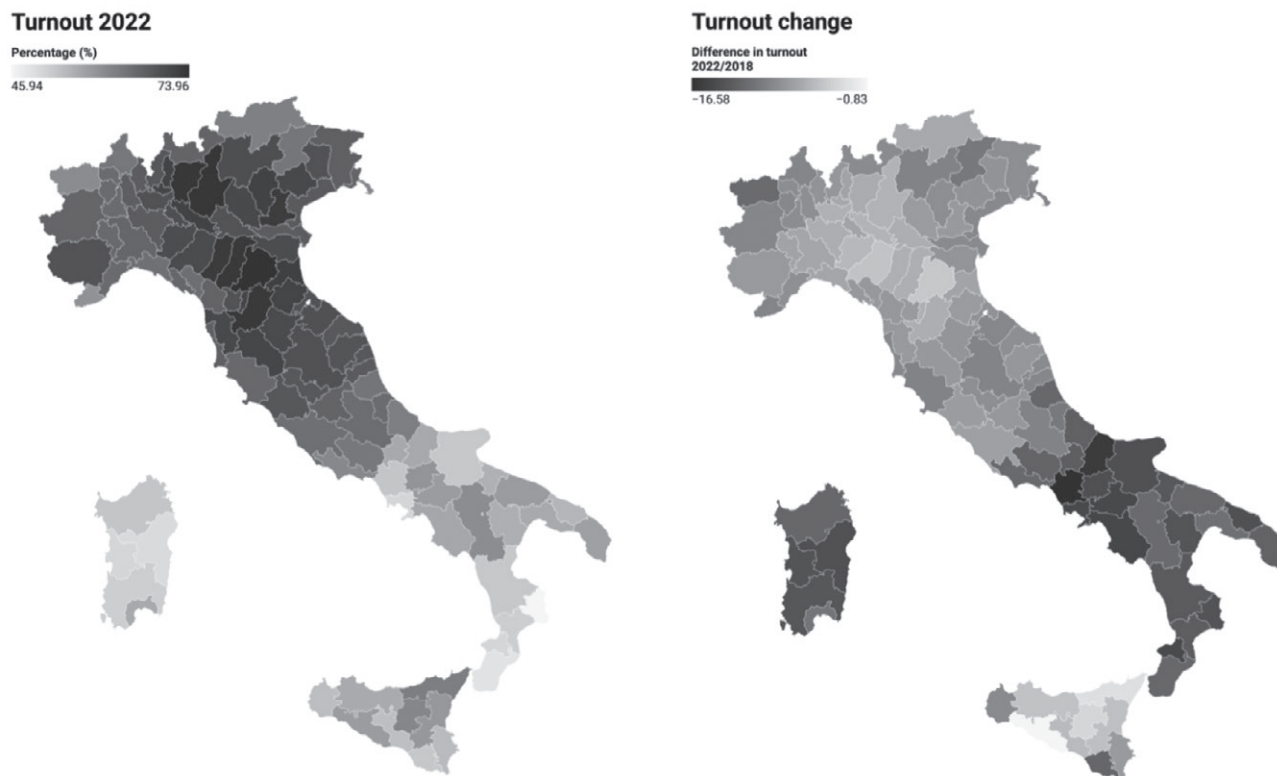
Figure 4. Turnout in 2022 (left) and difference between 2022 and 2018 turnout (right) (Chamber of Deputies). Source: authors' elaboration based on Ministry of the Interior data.

1% of the votes, plus M5S and A-IV. We present the results for the Party Nationalization Score (standardised and weighted - PNS_{sw}), a measure introduced by Bochsler (2010) based on the Gini coefficient of parties' vote shares at the sub-national level. It could theoretically range from 0 (complete absence of nationalisation) to 1 (party vote perfectly nationalised).[8]

Two parties stand out immediately. First, Fratelli d'Italia was the most nationalised party in the election. This finding puts FdI rather in continuity with its 2018 results, but represents a shift from its political tradition – especially compared to former parties with which FdI has deep historical ties (Puleo & Piccolino, 2022), namely Movimento Sociale Italiano (*Italian Social Movement*) and Alleanza Nazionale (*National Alliance*). According to the historical data of such scores, the former was never

one of the most nationalised parties of the system, while the latter had mixed results over time (Kollman *et al.*, 2019), specifically due to their better performances in the Centre-South and South of the country (Ignazi, 1998). The Movimento 5 Stelle indeed shows a sharp decrease in its degree of nationalisation, another last step of what can be called the "Southernisation" of the party. The M5S had one of the most homogeneous distributions ever recorded for a major Italian party at its first exploit in the 2013 election, but by 2018 its distribution was already markedly concentrated in the Southern regions (Chiaramonte & Emanuele, 2018: 147).

In Table 2 we can further explore the results of each party, by single macro-area. FdI greatly increased its vote share in all macro-areas compared to 2018, in particular in the Northern regions. Conversely, its allies lost votes in all macro-areas and presented a rather distinct electoral geography: FI had its best results in the South, while the Lega performed better in the North. However, the Lega lost less in the Southern regions compared to the other areas. In other words, as we have also seen in Figure 6, the party became more nationalised while losing votes. The winning coalition increased its vote share

---

[8] We used the *circoscrizione* (*circumscription*) as unit of analysis. This level roughly corresponds to the regions – some of them are divided in more than a *circoscrizione*. They include one or more MMCs and mostly serve to distribute the seats allocated nationwide for the Chamber of Deputies. We chose them in order to ensure the highest degree of comparability, since that level has been left unchanged with the reduction of the number of MPs.

Table 1. Electoral results, votes and seats.

List or *coalition*	Votes				Seats				
	National constituencies		Abroad		MMCs	SMCs	Abroad	Total	%
	N (000s)	%	N (000s)	%					
Chamber of Deputies									
Fratelli d'Italia	7,301	25.9	-	-	69	49	-	119	29.8
Lega	2,470	8.8	-	-	23	42	-	66	16.5
Forza Italia	2,279	8.1	-	-	22	23	-	45	11.3
Noi Moderati	254	0.9	-	-	0	7	-	7	1.8
Common lists[a]	16	0.1	283	26.1	-	0	2[a]	-	-
Total right-wing coalition	*12,321*	*43.8*	*283*	*26.1*	*114*	*121*	*2*	*237*	*59.3*
Partito Democratico	5,349	19	306	28.2	57	8	4	69	17.3
Alleanza Verdi Sinistra	1,022	3.6	53	4.9	11	1	0	12	3.0
+Europa	796	2.8	30	2.8	0	2	0	2	0.5
Impegno civico-Centro Democratico	174	0.6	12	1.1	0	1	0	1	0.3
Total centre-left coalition[b]	*7,340*	*26.1*	*401*	*36.9*	*68*	*12*	*4*	*84*	*21*
Movimento 5 Stelle[b]	4,335	15.4	93	8.6	41	10	1	52	13
Azione-Italia Viva[b]	2,186	7.8	60	5.6	21	0	0	21	5.3
Other parties	1,970	7	249	22.9	1	4	1	6	1.5
Total	28,152	100	1,086	100	245	147	8	400	100
Senate									
Fratelli d'Italia	7,169	25.5			34	32	-	66	33
Lega	2,437	8.7			13	16	-	29	14.5
Forza Italia	2,281	8.1			9	9	-	18	9
Noi Moderati	248	0.9			0	2	-	2	1
Common lists[c]	156	0.6	295	27.1	0	3[c]	0	-	-
Total right-wing coalition	*12,291*	*43.7*	*295*	*27.1*	*56*	*59*	*0*	*115*	*57.5*
Partito Democratico[d,e]	5,230	18.6	371	34	31	4	3	39	19.5
Alleanza Verdi Sinistra[d,e]	990	3.5			3	1	0	4	2
+Europa	810	2.9			0	0	-	0	0
Impegno civico	162	0.6	15	1.3	0	0	0	0	0
Common list[f]	22	0.1	-	-	0	1[f]	-	-	-
Total centre-left coalition[d,e]	*7,214*	*25.6*	*385*	*35.3*	*34*	*6*	*3*	*43*	*21.5*
Movimento 5 Stelle[e]	4,319	15.4	102	9.3	23	5	0	28	14
Azione-Italia Viva[e]	2,138	7.6	76	7	9	0	0	9	4.5
Campobase[g]	101	0.4	-	-	0	1	-	1	0.5
Other parties	2,064	7.3	231	21.2	0	3	1	4	2
Total	28,127	100	1,090	100	122	74	4	200	100

Source: authors' elaboration based on Ministry of the Interior; Chamber of Deputies and Senate websites.

[a] Data refers to common lists presented in the Aosta Valley and overseas constituency. The elected MPs abroad Lega (1) and Fratelli d'Italia (1) – were re-distributed to their parties in the total column of seats.

[b] It does not include data of Aosta Valley, where PD and A-IV supported a regionalist candidate and AVS and M5S were in another leftist list. The SMC was won by the candidate supported by PD and A-IV and belonging to a regionalist party.

[c] Data refers to common lists presented in Aosta Valley (1 elected MP), Trentino-Alto Adige/South Tyrol (2 elected MPs) and overseas constituencies. The elected MPs belong to Lega (2) and Noi Moderati (1) and were re-distributed to their parties in the total column of seats.

[d] It includes the votes for candidates in two SMCs of Trentino-Alto Adige/South Tyrol where PD and AVS presented competing candidates.

[e] It does not include data from Aosta Valley, where PD and A-IV supported a regionalist candidate and AVS and M5S were in another leftist list.

[f] Common list presented in one SMC of Trentino-Alto Adige/South Tyrol. The elected MP belongs to the PD and was re-distributed to its party in the total column of seats.

[g] Common list presented by centre-left and A-IV in three SMCs of Trentino-Alto Adige/South Tyrol. The seat was won by a local candidate.
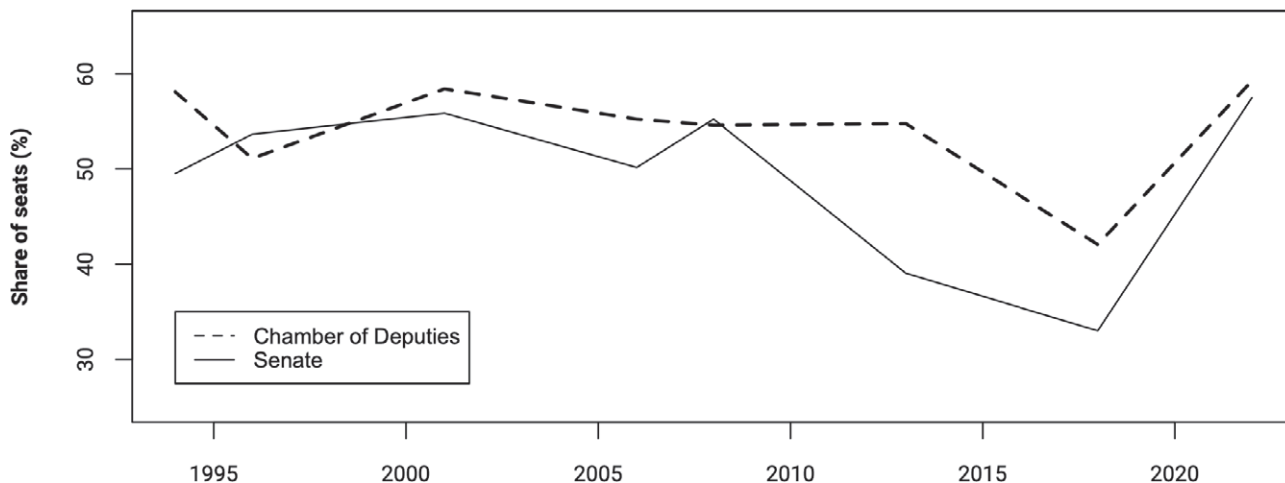
Figure 5. Percentage of seats obtained by the alliance winning most of the votes in Italian elections since 1994 (%). Source: authors' elaboration based on Ministry of the Interior data. Calculations for the Senate do not include senators for life.
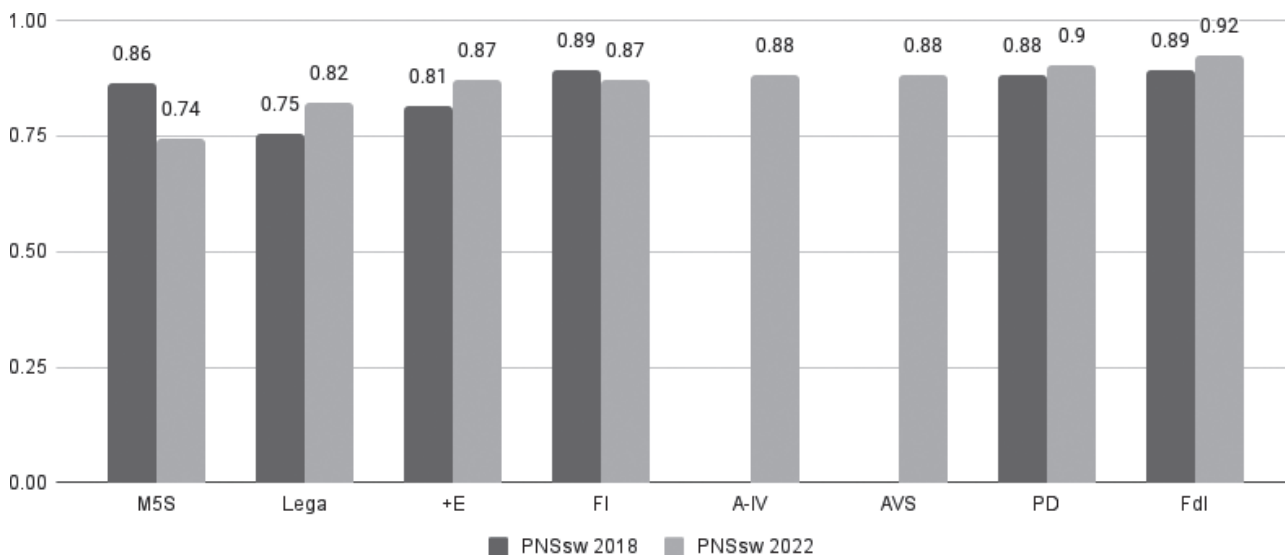
Figure 6. Party-level PNSsw in 2018 and 2022 election (Chamber of Deputies). Source: authors' elaboration of Ministry of the Interior data based on Bochsler (2010) and (Kollman *et al.*, 2019).

in all macro-areas, from a minimum gain of 4.2% in the North-West to a maximum of 10.1% in the Centre-South.

The centre-left slightly increased its vote share in each macro-area, but such gains were not enough to prevail in any of them. Significantly, the distance from the right-wing coalition has grown in every macro-area, including the former Red Zone. The electoral decline of the M5S has not affected all macro-areas in the same way: it was particularly sharp in the Northern regions, while in the South the party was able to limit the damages remaining the largest party of this area. As a result, while this area accounts for roughly 27% of total votes,

the proportion of M5S votes coming from the South reaches 52.6% (compared to 42.5% in 2018).

Fratelli d'Italia was the largest party in the majority of SMCs, 86 out of 147 (Table 3), while its allies obtained this result only in one SMC (with Forza Italia). The strength of the M5S in the South was remarkable: the party came in first place in most of the SMCs of that area. As a result, despite a lower national vote share compared to the PD, the M5S came in first place in more SMCs: 36 for the M5S, just 19 for the PD.

In Figure 7 below we present further data regarding the prevalence of Fratelli d'Italia within the right-wing

Table 2. Results of coalitions and main lists by macro-areas (Chamber of Deputies, % of valid votes).

		FdI	Lega	FI	*RWC*	PD	AVS	+E	*CLC*	M5S	A-IV
2022	NW	27.7	12.2	7.7	*48.5*	19.5	3.9	3.7	*27.6*	8.7	9.6
	NE	30.5	13.1	6.4	*51.7*	16.8	3.7	3.1	*23.9*	5.9	8.1
	FRZ	26.4	7.3	6	*40.2*	25.8	4.4	2.9	*33.4*	11.1	8.7
	CS	30.1	6.9	7.7	*45.3*	18.8	3.6	2.7	*25.7*	16	7.8
	S	20	5.2	10.9	*37*	15.1	2.8	1.9	*20.8*	29.5	5.1
	National	26	8.8	8.1	*43.8*	19	3.6	2.8	*26.1*	15.4	7.8
2018	NW	4.0	25.8	13.6	*44.3*	20.8	-	3.5	*25.2*	23.6	-
	NE	4.2	29.4	10.1	*44.7*	16.8	-	2.8	*20.6*	23.7	-
	FRZ	4.0	18.4	10.0	*33.0*	26.7	-	2.8	*30.6*	27.7	-
	CS	7.3	13.2	13.5	*35.2*	17.7	-	2.9	*21.7*	34.9	-
	S	3.7	5.7	18.6	*30.4*	13.2	-	1.3	*15.9*	46.9	-
	National	4.4	17.4	14	*37*	18.8	-	2.6	*22.9*	32.7	-

Source: authors' elaboration based on Ministry of the Interior data. Aosta Valley not included. RWC: right-wing coalition; CLC: centre-left coalition; NW: North-West; NE: North-East; FRZ: former Red Zone; CS: Centre-South; S: South.

Table 3. Winners and first party in SMCs (Chamber of Deputies).

	Winners by macro-area (N SMCs)					First party by macro-area (N SMCs)					
	RWC	CLC	M5S	Others	Total	FdI	PD	M5S	FI	Others	Total
North-West	33	4	0	1	38	30	7	0	0	1	38
North-East	17	0	0	2	19	17	0	0	0	2	19
Former Red Zone	20	6	0	0	26	15	11	0	0	0	26
Centre-South	16	2	0	0	18	16	1	1	0	0	18
South	35	0	10	1	46	8	0	35	1	2	46
Total	121	12	10	4	147	86	19	36	1	5	147

SMCs won by vote share (N SMCs)

	Right-wing coalition	Centre-left coalition	M5S	Others	Total
> 60%	6	0	0	0	6
50-60%	36	0	0	1	37
40-50%	48	3	5	0	56
30-40%	31	9	5	3	48
Total	121	12	10	4	147

Source: authors' elaboration based on Ministry of the Interior data.

coalition. Meloni's party outperformed its coalition partners combined in 134 out of 146 SMCs. However, as a demonstration of the relatively homogeneous territorial distribution of this party, it obtained more than 30% of the votes in only 37 of them, and in none did it exceed 40%. Finally, we calculated that in 59 SMCs Fratelli d'Italia outperformed not only its allies taken together, but also the centre-left coalition and the other parties. This finding is interesting because candidates belonging to FdI won *fewer* SMCs (49) in the Chamber of Deputies. Of course, we cannot infer from these data how many seats FdI would have won in the (very hypothetical) case it had run alone, but they show how much the size of the party's victory had been underestimated also during the negotiations for the joint candidatures of the right-wing coalition.[9]

---

[9] It should in any case be noted that at the Senate the final distribution of seats better reflected the different strengths of right-wing parties.
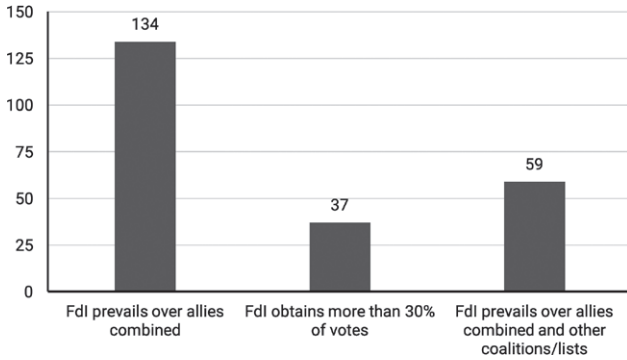
Figure 7. Assessment of FdI's strenght in SMCs (Chamber of Deputies). Source: authors' elaboration based on Ministry of the Interior data.

The overwhelming prevalence of the right-wing coalition across the peninsula is clearly illustrated by the map in Figure 8 below. Out of 43 SMCs won with the absolute majority of votes, 42 were won by the right-wing coalition (and one by the SVP). Out of the 12 SMCs won by the centre-left, half were in the former Red Zone and the other six came from large metropolitan areas (Genoa, Milan, Rome and Turin). Unsurprisingly, all the SMCs won by the M5S came from the South. The party obtained a particularly impressive result in the province

of Naples, where it won all the SMCs, plus a SMC each in the regions of Calabria, Apulia and Sicily. Results by MMCs (on the right) saw the right-wing coalition prevailing in all districts – and in 13 of them with more than 50% – except for the constituencies around Florence and Bologna (won by the centre-left) and Campania 1, which includes the province of Naples and it was won by the M5S. In brief, the right-wing coalition won all the SMCs in the North-East except for those in the province of Bolzano. Only the limited success of the centre-left in the large cities prevented the right-wing coalition from winning all the SMCs in the North-West and the Centre-South as well. The Former Red Zone and the South were instead more competitive.

The territorial distribution of support for the main coalitions and lists is illustrated more in detail in the maps in Figures 9 to 12, comparing their vote share in the Chamber of Deputies by SMC in 2022 and 2018. From Figure 9, we can see that the highest vote share of the right-wing coalition came from the Northern regions and the Centre-South. The lowest results were instead achieved in the largest cities and in most of the South and the former Red Zone, besides Aosta Valley and South Tyrol, where regionalist parties prevailed.[10]

---

[10] It should be noted that the Aosta Valley is not a multi-member constituency, but only a single-member one.
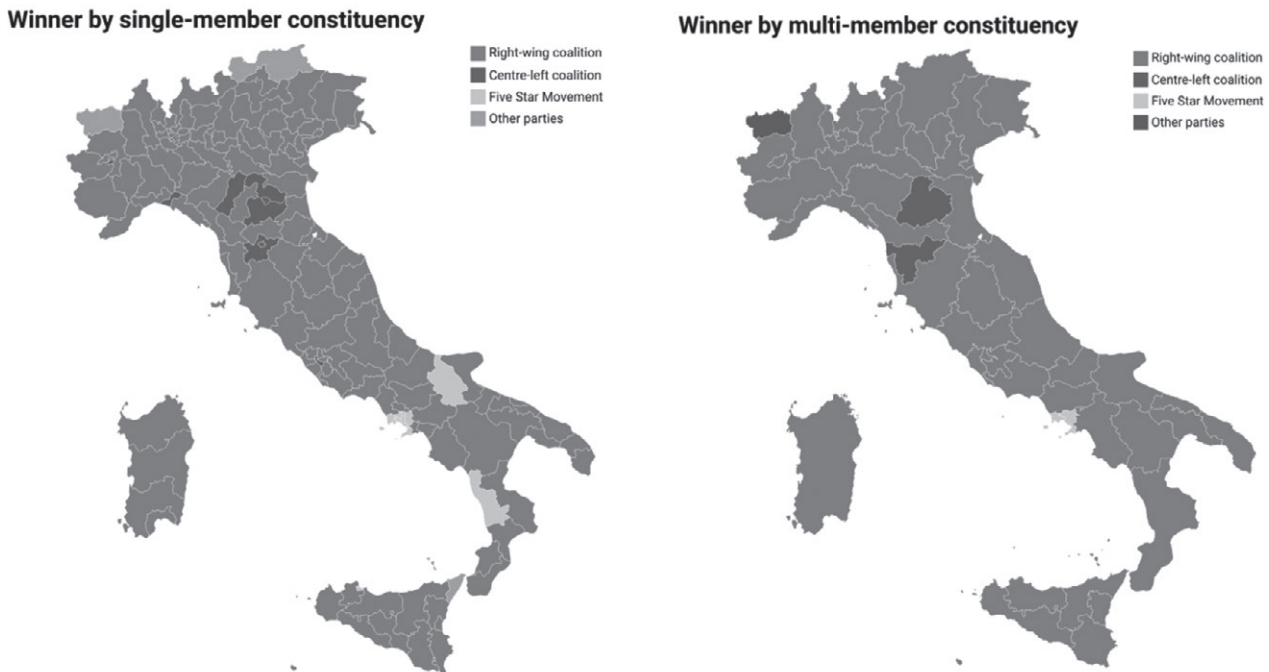
Figure 8. Winning coalition or list by SMC (left) and MMC (right) (Chamber of Deputies). Source: authors' elaboration based on Ministry of the Interior data.

The performance of the centre-left coalition (Figure 10) was the mirror image of the results of the Right. Indeed, it gathered most of its votes from Emilia Romagna and Tuscany and in the largest cities, and in some SMCs of these areas it won over 35% of votes. The support for the coalition was lowest in the South, where it performed even worse compared to the Northern regions. Looking at the 2018 results by SMC (on the right of Figure 10), we can see that support for the coalition was more homogeneous across the peninsula in 2018 compared to 2022 (on the left in the figure).

The highest percentages for M5S were reached in Campania, Apulia and Calabria – as is visible in Figure 11. The M5S obtained more than 20% in all Southern SMCs except one, while it reached 10% in only twelve SMCs in the North-West and none in the North-East. Moreover, the M5S got more than 40% of votes in five SMCs – a result that no other party achieved. In 2018, the M5S was instead able to win a large majority of the SMCs in the South and also some in other macro-areas (Emanuele & Vassallo, 2018).

Finally, the territorial distribution of Azione-Italia Viva (Figure 12) is quite similar to that of the centre-left coalition. Indeed, the share obtained by A-IV in the SMCs has a non-negligible positive correlation with that of the centre-left coalition (Pearson's r=0.62) and a rather high one with +Europa, a party largely similar in terms of ideological placement (Pearson's r=0.82). As we can see from Table 4, no other pair of parties enjoyed such a high level of correlation, even though there are other interesting associations, such as the positive correlation between FdI and Lega.

As an earlier analysis (Vassallo & Vegetti, 2022) showed, the sum of votes of the centre-left coalition and Azione-Italia Viva outperformed the right-wing coalition only in 14 additional SMCs. These two actors share indeed many of their areas of strength – former Red Zone and metropolitan areas. For example, out of the 17 SMCs in which Azione-Italia Viva obtained more than 10% of votes, 7 had already been won by the centre-left coalition. Moreover, the 4 SMCs where A-IV had its best results were *all* won by the centre-left coalition.

Overall, the territorial distribution of the vote for each coalition is therefore rather distinctive, with the centre-left retrenched in some parts of the former Red Zone and large urban centres and the M5S in the South – against a background of the predominance of the right-wing coalition in the large part of the country.

A further level to explore is that of municipalities, in order to assess the extent to which the urban-rural divide affected the results of the parties. For such analysis, we rely on the classification of Italian comuni

(*municipalities*) made by the Agenzia per la Coesione Territoriale (*Agency for Territorial Cohesion*) in the framework of the Strategia Nazionale Aree Interne (SNAI, *National Strategy for Internal Areas*), with some modifications.[11] This classification has the advantage of not merely relying on the population size of the sub-units, but rather taking into account the presence of or distance from public services and crucial infrastructure. Accordingly, Table 5 displays the vote share obtained by the main parties by municipal category; the darker shades of grey indicate results above the national share, and the lighter ones those below.

Support for the centre-left parties and Azione-Italia Viva shows quite clearly how those actors performed better in most central municipalities. Conversely, Forza Italia and Lega performed better outside the main centres. Fratelli d'Italia shows a rather homogeneous distribution among the various categories. Meloni's party as well performed below its national share in most central municipalities, but the same applies for the most peripheral ones. Instead, its best vote shares were obtained in a "Middle Italy" of urban belt and intermediate municipalities. Finally, the M5S also has a rather homogeneous distribution.

Breaking down this analysis by macro-areas, we see (Table 6) that the centre-left parties and Azione-Italia Viva, on the one hand, and Forza Italia and Lega, on the other, tend to replicate the national trend, albeit with some exceptions. Fratelli d'Italia shows instead a more complex picture. In the North-West and the former Red Zone, its vote share tends to increase as the centrality of the municipality decreases, but the same does not apply in the other areas, where the party confirms its strength in intermediate categories. Finally, the Movimento 5 Stelle has its electoral strongholds in major cities and the urban belt of the South.

3.4 Competitiveness and Contestability

All in all, is this electoral geography stable over time? Italy's high degree of electoral volatility (Chiaramonte & Emanuele, 2013; Chiaramonte *et al.*, 2018) enables changes in voting behaviour that may shift the territorial distribution of the vote. It seems therefore appropriate to discuss the extent to which these elections were competitive – namely, how contested

---

[11] For the national figure, we differentiated the cities labelled as "Pole" or "Intercommunal pole" (indicating the most central category) into three categories: largest cities (population above 500,000 inhabitants) and the remaining poles between those above/below 100,000. In the analysis by macro-area, however, we unified all poles, as in some areas their overall number was too small.

Figure 9

Right-wing coalition 2022

Vote percentage (%)

10.4   64.42

Right-wing coalition 2018

Vote percentage (%)

10.93   59.39

Figure 10

Centre-left coalition 2022
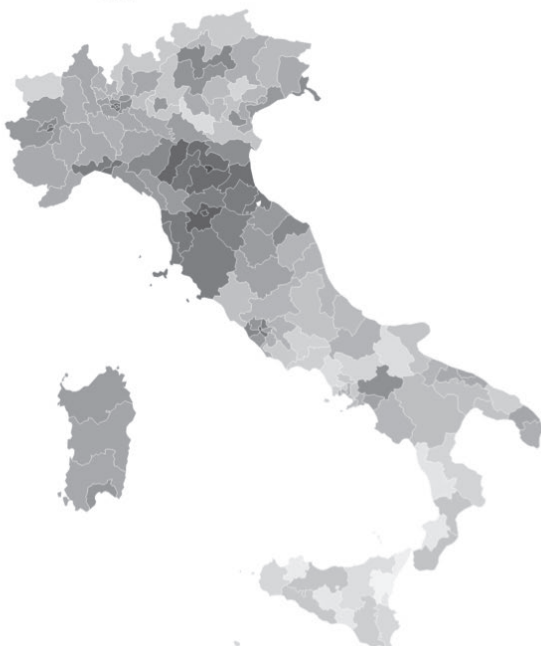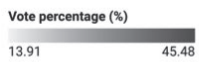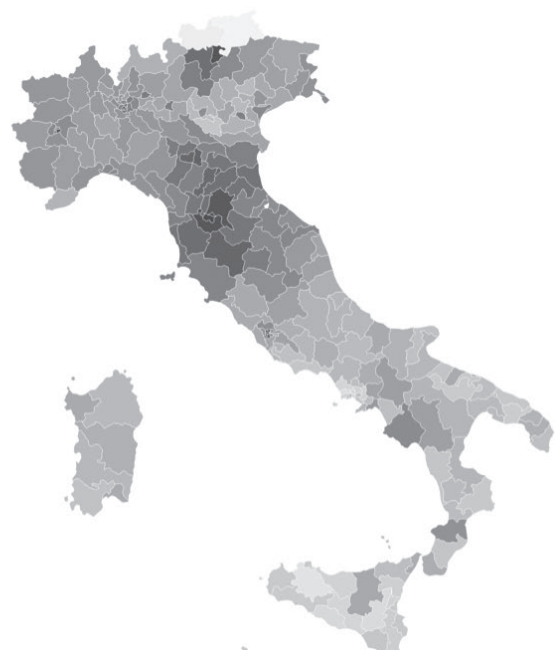
Vote percentage (%)

13.91   45.48

Centre-left coalition 2018

Vote percentage (%)

6.86   43.24

Figures 9-12. Vote share of main coalitions/parties by SMC in 2022 (left) and 2018 (right) (Chamber of Deputies). Source: authors' elaboration based on Ministry of the Interior data.

Figure 11
Movimento 5 Stelle 2022

Vote percentage (%)

2.18   47.2

Movimento 5 Stelle 2018

Vote percentage (%)

9.45   63.42

Figure 12
Azione-Italia Viva 2022

Vote percentage (%)

1.29   23.05

Figures 9-12. Vote share of main coalitions/parties by SMC in 2022 (left) and 2018 (right) (Chamber of Deputies). Source: authors' elaboration based on Ministry of the Interior data.

Table 4. Correlation matrix among vote shares obtained in SMCs.

	FdI	PD	M5S	Lega	FI	A-IV	AVS	+E
FdI	1	0.07	-0.65	0.71	-0.19	0.28	-0.13	0.2
PD	0.07	1	-0.4	-0.12	-0.57	0.54	0.61	0.57
M5S	-0.65	-0.4	1	-0.67	0.5	-0.6	-0.4	-0.59
Lega	0.71	-0.12	-0.67	1	-0.11	0.28	-0.14	0.27
FI	-0.19	-0.57	0.5	-0.11	1	-0.48	-0.7	-0.6
A-IV	0.28	0.54	-0.6	0.28	-0.48	1	0.48	0.82
AVS	-0.13	0.61	-0.4	-0.14	-0.7	0.48	1	0.65
+E	0.2	0.57	-0.59	0.27	-0.6	0.82	0.65	1

Source: authors' elaboration based on Ministry of the Interior data. Aosta Valley not included.

the constituencies were among coalitions. Looking at the difference in percentage points between the winning coalition and the one that came in second place, we can see how contestable each electoral district was. Figure 13 below shows a map of such gaps between the first and second coalition in every single- and multi-member constituency. The contestability (the darker shades in the map, corresponding to smaller differences) was higher in the former Red Zone and in the South, as well as in Milan, Turin and Rome. Indeed, no SMC in the former Red Zone and the South was won with an absolute majority of the votes. Overall, 47 single-member districts (and 14 MMCs) were won by a margin of 10 percentage points or less. Among them, 22 (and 6 MMCs) were highly contestable, with a distance of 5 percentage points or less.

In Table 7, we can see the distribution by macro-area of the coalition or party that came in second place in the SMCs of the lower Chamber won by the right-wing coalition. They show very clearly the specular geographical distribution of the centre-left coalition and the M5S – as suggested by our correlation matrix above,

which indicates a negative correlation between the vote for the M5S and the parties of the coalition. The centre-left coalition arrived in second place in all the SMCs won by the right-wing coalition in the Northern regions and the former Red Zone and in most of the Centre-South. In the Southern regions, the situation is radically different. Conte's party prevailed over the centre-left coalition in 24 SMCs – 34 in total, taking into account those won by the M5S – while Letta's coalition outperformed the Movimento 5 Stelle in only 10 SMCs. Finally, Azione-Italia Viva did not come in second place in any SMC, also considering those not won by the right.

4. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE ITALIAN PARTY SYSTEM

Previous literature considers Italy as an outlier among other Western European countries, due to its low level of party system institutionalization. As Emanuele and Chiaramonte (2020) note, based on the high innovation and volatility in the electoral, parliamentary, and governmental arenas, the Italian system is in fact de-institutionalized. The same conclusion is also reached both by broader comparative studies on party system institutionalization (see Casal Bértoa, 2017; Chiaramonte & Emanuele, 2019) and by analyses assessing the Italian electoral results, that show overall low levels of stability and predictability of party competition, especially since 2013 (Chiaramonte & Emanuele, 2014; Chiaramonte *et al.*, 2019; Chiaramonte *et al.*, 2023). In this section, we briefly analyse four classic indicators of party system institutionalisation, placing the figures for the 2022 election in the framework of the country's overall historical trends. In the remainder of this section, we therefore discuss disproportionality, fragmentation, party system innovation and electoral volatility. All the indicators are calculated for the Chamber of Deputies.

Table 5. Vote share of major parties, by municipality type.

	Largest cities (above 500,000)	Poles above 100,000	Poles below 100,000	Urban belt	Intermediate	Peripheral	Ultra-peripheral
Fratelli d'Italia	22.5	23.2	25.4	28.2	27.1	25.6	24.4
Partito Democratico	22.6	23.3	20.3	17.4	17.2	16.3	15.6
Movimento 5 Stelle	17.7	14.8	15	14.3	16.8	17.9	14.8
Lega	5.0	6.4	8.3	10.7	9.0	8.8	9.9
Forza Italia	5.5	6.4	7.9	8.6	9.8	10.3	10.1
Azione-Italia Viva	10.3	8.9	8.3	7.1	6.0	6.1	6.4
Alleanza Verdi Sinistra	5.1	4.9	3.9	3.2	2.8	2.6	3.2
+ Europa	4.0	3.3	3.0	2.7	2.1	1.8	1.7

Source: authors' elaboration based on Ministry of the Interior data. Only list votes are considered. Aosta Valley not included. Dark grey: results above the national share. Light grey: results below the national share.

Table 6. Vote share of main parties across municipality types, by geo-political macro-area.

	FDI	PD	M5S	Lega	FI	A-IV	AVS	+E
North-West								
Milan	20.6	25.5	7.7	6.4	5.9	15.7	6.4	5.5
Turin	20.8	25.4	12	6.7	5.6	10.5	6.4	5.4
Genoa	19.8	26.1	14.9	7.9	5.1	8	5.4	3.7
Poles	25.9	21.6	9.1	10.5	7.4	10.6	4.2	3.9
Urban belt	29.9	17.7	8.4	13.8	8.4	8.5	3.4	3.3
Intermediate	31.7	16.8	7.6	15.2	8.5	7.6	2.9	2.8
Peripheral	35	14	5.1	18.5	8.9	7.4	2.5	2.5
Ultra-peripheral	37.3	13.2	4.1	19.5	8.8	7.4	2.1	2.4
North-East[a]								
Poles	27.1	21.4	7.1	10.1	5.8	9.9	4.9	3.9
Urban belt	33.6	15	5.6	15.2	7	7.5	3	2.8
Intermediate	29.8	13.8	5.3	13.3	6.6	6.4	3.7	2.4
Peripheral	26.8	12.7	4	11.8	5.3	5.3	4	2.3
Ultra-peripheral	16.6	9.1	2.7	7.5	2.9	3.5	5.2	2.1
Former Red Zone								
Poles	24.6	27.2	11.0	6.2	5.3	9.5	5.2	3.3
Urban belt	27.7	24.7	11.3	8.0	6.4	7.8	3.9	2.7
Intermediate	27.8	25.9	10.5	8.2	6.6	7.8	3.5	2.5
Peripheral	30.3	23.5	10.3	8.8	6.8	7.4	3.3	2.3
Ultra-peripheral	35.5	19.4	8.2	9.8	8.0	6.8	3.2	1.9
Centre-South								
Rome	28.6	23.2	13.9	4.3	4.5	10.4	4.9	3.9
Poles	30.2	16.8	16.6	8.3	9.2	6.8	3.2	2.4
Urban belt	32.7	15.3	17.0	7.9	10.2	5.9	2.8	2.0
Intermediate	32.9	15.9	16.5	8.4	9.8	5.7	2.8	2.0
Peripheral	28.6	17.2	19.1	8.9	10.0	5.5	2.7	1.6
Ultra-peripheral	29.1	16.0	16.8	7.9	12.6	5.0	2.4	1.4
South								
Naples	12.3	16.0	43.2	1.9	6.4	6.0	3.6	2.0
Palermo	16.5	13.9	36.1	3.3	8.7	5.5	2.5	2.6
Poles	19.8	15.8	29.1	4.8	9.9	5.3	3.4	2.0
Urban belt	20.1	14.4	31.7	5.1	11.0	4.6	2.6	1.9
Intermediate	22.3	14.1	26.5	6.1	12.7	4.5	2.3	1.6
Peripheral	21.2	14.2	24.8	6.5	12.7	5.5	2.1	1.5
Ultra-peripheral	21.3	16.5	20.3	8.9	12.1	6.9	3.0	1.5

Source: authors' elaboration based on Ministry of the Interior data. Only list votes are considered. Aosta Valley not included.
[a] Shares in the Peripheral and Ultra-Peripheral municipalities of this area must take into account the results of the SVP, which scored in them 18.9% and 41.1% respectively.

### 4.1 Electoral disproportionality

In section 3, we already highlighted the mismatch between the vote shares of political parties and the share of seats, due to the majoritarian component of the electoral system. To capture (and visually inspect) this gap between votes and seats, we rely on the formula pro-posed by Gallagher (1991, 2023).[12] As we can see from Figure 14 below, disproportionality was quite low during the First Republic, thanks to a proportional formula with extremely attainable representation thresholds. After 1994, Italy experienced different electoral systems

[12] The indicator is calculated as the square root of the sum of squared differences between each party's percentage of votes and of seats, divided by 2.
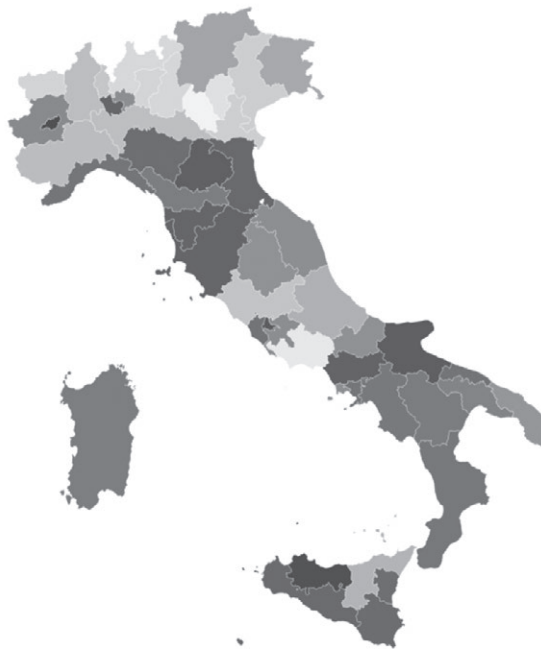
Contestability of single-member constituencies

Difference in vote percentage
between the first two coalitions

0.02   47.45
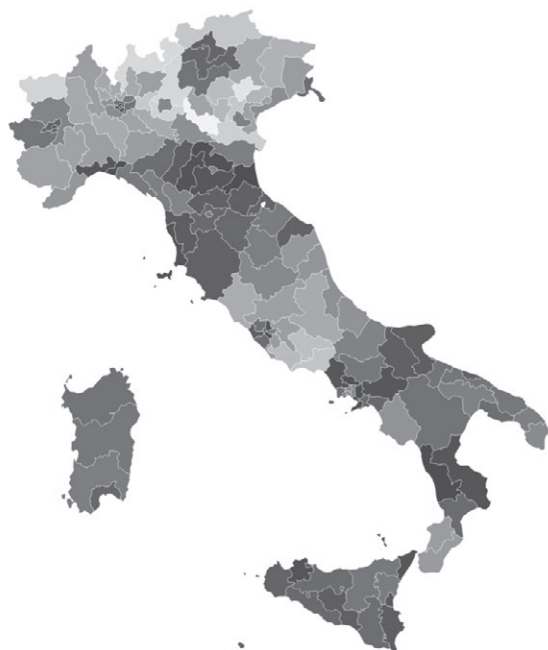
Contestability of multi-member constituencies

Difference in vote percentage
between the first two coalitions

0.05   37.72

Figure 13. Contestability of SMCs (left) and MMCs (right) (Chamber of Deputies). Source: authors' elaboration based on Ministry of the Interior data.

and each of them incorporated – to varying degrees – some majoritarian components. This is reflected in the level of electoral disproportionality, which has been higher since then (Pasquino & Valbruzzi, 2023). After the exceptional levels reached in 2013, the 2022 election showcases another clear increase compared to the 2018 election – although held with the same electoral system.

As we have already seen in our analysis of the contestability of the SMCs, the right-wing coalition, with a vote share of 44%, won around 80% of SMCs in both chambers while in 2018 the dominant actor (again the right-wing coalition) obtained just over 40% of seats with 37% of votes. The disproportional effect of the electoral system thus was displayed in full force in 2022. Four years earlier, in fact, the territorial differentiation among the three main blocks somehow "hid" the majoritarian effects of the electoral system (Emanuele & Vassallo, 2018).

4.2 Fragmentation

Italy is generally considered a rather fragmented party system, due to the high number of political actors competing at the national level (but see, for

Table 7. Coalition/list in second place in SMCs won by the right-wing coalition (Chamber of Deputies).

	Centre-left coalition	Movimento 5 Stelle	Others	Total
North-West	33	0	0	33
North-East	17	0	0	17
Former Red Zone	20	0	0	20
Centre-South	15	1	0	16
South	10	24	1[a]	35
Total	95	25	1	121

Source: authors' elaboration based on Ministry of the Interior data.
[a] In this constituency the second party was the regionalist list Sud Chiama Nord (*South Calls North*), founded by the former mayor of Messina Cateno de Luca.

instance, Vampa, 2015, for the regional level). This is not an entirely new phenomenon. Although fragmentation had peaked already in the 1990s (cf. Morlino, 1996; D'Alimonte & Bartolini, 1997), the subsequent electoral laws offered increasing incentives to coalesce and structure political competition around a smaller number of "blocs", thus reducing the overall level of fragmentation.
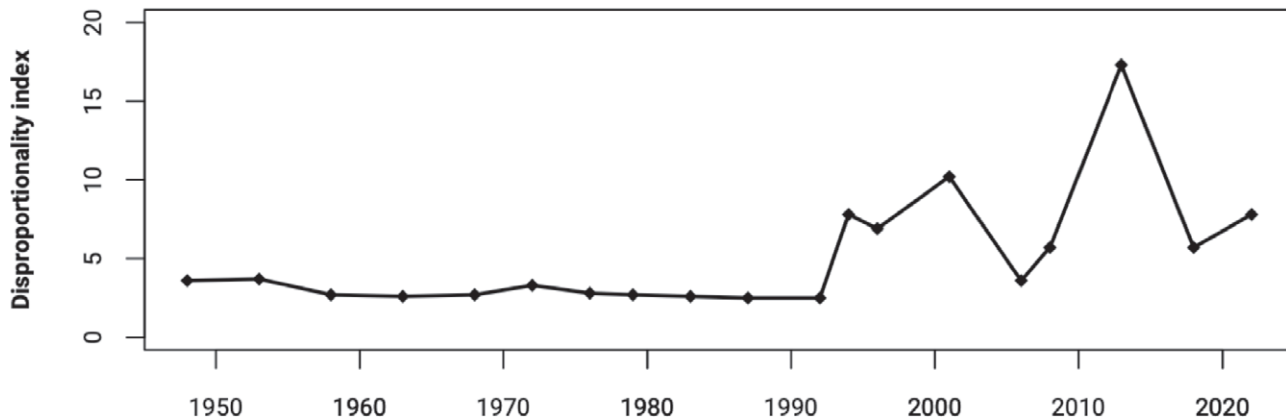
Figure 14. Electoral disproportionality in Italian elections since 1948. Source: authors' elaboration based on Gallagher (2023) and Ministry of the Interior data.
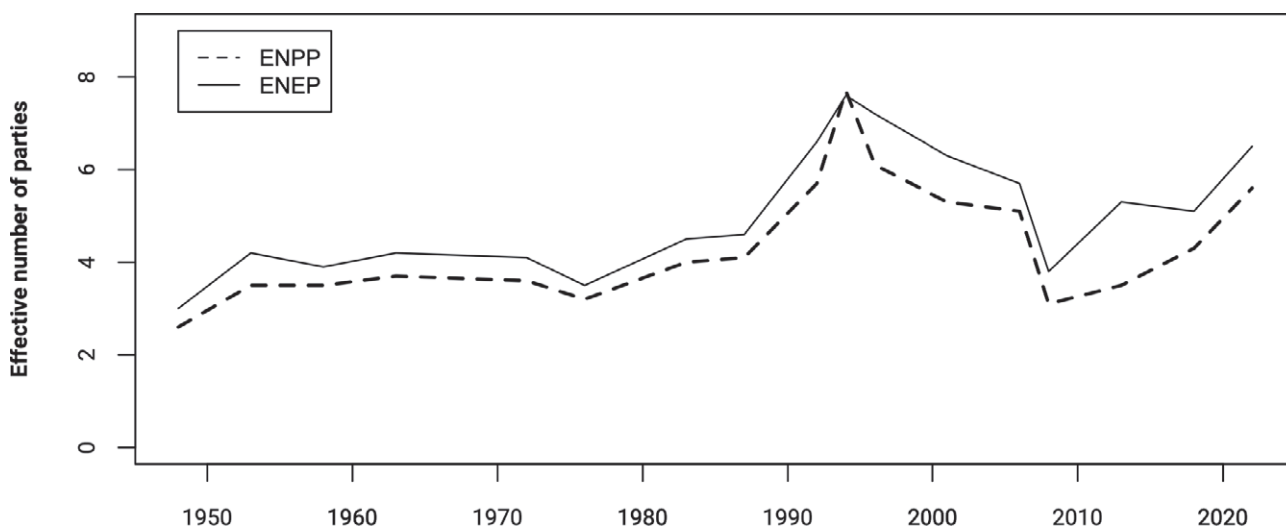

Figure 15. Effective number of parties in Italian elections since 1948. Source: authors' elaboration based on Gallagher (2023).
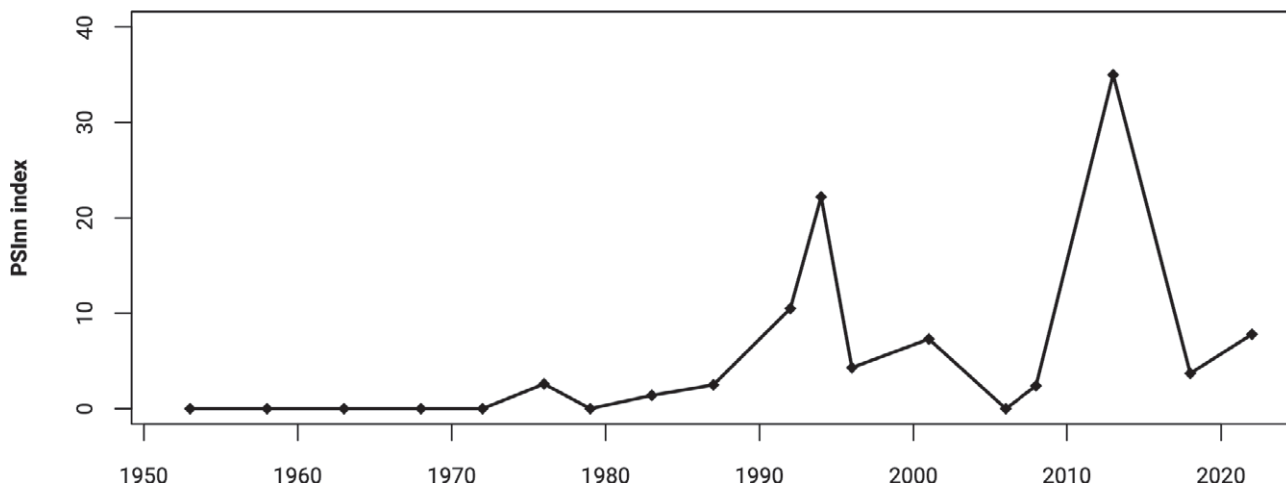

Figure 16. Degree of party system innovation in Italian elections since 1948. Source: authors' elaboration based on Emanuele (2016).
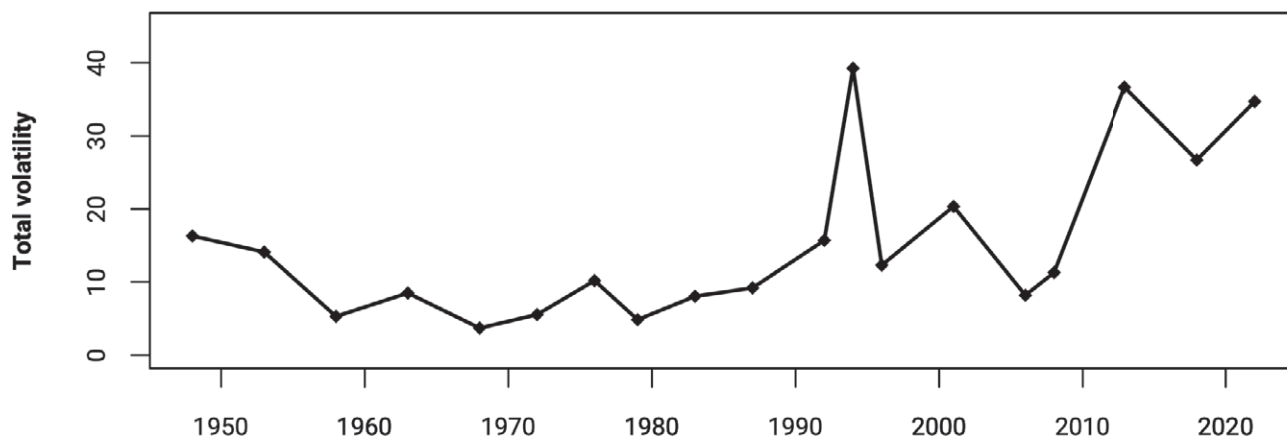
Figure 17. Degree of electoral volatility in Italian elections since 1948. Source: authors' elaboration based on Emanuele (2016).

The degree of fragmentation of a party system can be expressed through the effective number of political parties. The most common measure thereof is the index proposed by Laakso and Taagepera (1979; cf. Gallagher, 2023), which weighs parties according to their size and can be applied both in the electoral and the parliamentary context. Figure 15 shows the effective number of parliamentary parties (ENPP) and the number of electoral parties (ENEP).[13] We can see that the level of fragmentation had been stable in the so-called First Republic, then experiencing the sharpest increase in the early 1990s. In 2001-2008, where the party system approximated a "weakly institutionalised" (Chiaramonte *et al.*, 2023: 23) bipolarism, the fragmentation decreased to then increase from 2013 onwards. In other words, the effects of the majoritarian elements introduced by the electoral laws adopted since 1994 have been at best mixed, and fragmentation has been increasing in the last three elections, in which the competition was characterised by the presence of three main blocs – centre-left, (former) centre-right, M5S – plus other national lists able to enter the Parliament (a centrist actor in 2013 and 2022; a left-wing one in 2018 in particular).

4.3 Innovation

The number of new actors in the system – excluding coalitions or mergers of previous parties – is useful to understand how innovative the political landscape is in terms of supply. Those new actors, however, do not necessarily have a disruptive effect on the party system

merely because of their existence; much depends on their coalition and/or blackmail potential (Sartori 1976), connected to the support they gather. To grasp such dynamics, we rely on the data by Emanuele (2016) to calculate an index of party system innovation. Such an index aggregates the vote shares of new parties reaching 1% of votes nationwide and indicates how much (or how little) the emergence of new parties affects the political balance in a country.

As is visible in Figure 16 below, after the peak in 1994, with the radical re-structuring of the party system and the start of the so-called Second Republic, 2013 witnessed another radical election in terms of innovation, mainly due to the rise of the M5S. The latter finding is in line with the simultaneous developments in other European countries, and it may be connected to the rise of challenger actors across Europe in the aftermath of the 2008-2009 financial crisis. In 2018 the degree of innovation was overall rather low, while in 2022 the index of innovation increased again from 3.7 to 7.8, thanks to the rather good result of the newly formed Terzo Polo.

4.4 Electoral volatility

Electoral volatility can be understood as the amount of change in the configuration of the party system that is due to individual vote transfers: in short, it measures the extent to which voters switch from one party to another between elections. It therefore provides a measure of the stability of electoral competition and the loyalty of voters to the same party from one election to the other. It is thus strongly connected with the effective number of parties and with party system innovation (cf. Emanuele, 2015).

---

[13] The indices are calculated dividing 1 by the summation of the squared share of seats (for ENPP) or votes (for ENEP) of each party in the system.

For an index of the total electoral volatility of the Italian party system, we rely on the Dataset of Electoral Volatility and its internal components in Western Europe (1945-2015) published by Emanuele (2015) and updated to the latest election (see Emanuele & Marino, 2022). We show the historical trends thereof in Figure 17 above, which reports the score of the Pedersen (1979) index.[14] Unsurprisingly, the highest values correspond to 1994 – the first election after the collapse of the so-called First Republic – and 2013, when the M5S made its impressive electoral debut. In other words, elections in which the emergence of new actors led to a deep restructuring of the party system. Nevertheless, the value for the 2022 election is the third highest and comes after an election – that of 2018 – that still presented a high level of volatility. Indeed, the figure of volatility in the last three Italian elections is unprecedented across Western Europe (Chiaramonte *et al.*, 2023: 22).

6. CONCLUSIONS

The outcome of the 2022 election did not come as a surprise: Fratelli d'Italia's success and the formation of the Meloni government confirmed the predictions of the polls. The right-wing coalition gathered support across the whole country. The opposition parties appeared too ideologically fragmented to coordinate effectively against the right-wing coalition, thus paving the way for it to win a large parliamentary majority – the first time since 2008 that a pre-electoral alliance was able to do so. The only real winner of the election can therefore be considered Fratelli d'Italia, the most nationalised party in terms of geographical distribution and even relatively homogeneous in terms of urban-rural divide. Its allies obtained disappointing results compared to 2018 and rarely exceeded – combined – the electoral strength of FdI at the local level.

The structure of competition, however, has remained substantially tripolar, despite the changes in the internal balance of the right-wing coalition. The disproportional effects of the electoral system have been fully displayed, but still failed to reduce the fragmentation in both the electoral and parliamentary arena, where the effective number of parties has increased compared to 2018. In fact, the share of votes received by new political parties has also increased. The electorate itself appears to be fickle, each time supporting the actor that portrays itself as the outsider: indeed, the total volatility of the system almost reached the levels of 2013.

These elements paint a picture of fragmentation and instability, that characterize the low degree of institutionalization of the Italian party system. This could be especially problematic in a context of record low turnout where political dissatisfaction seems to remain the protagonist, with less than two out of three voters casting a valid ballot. The resulting trend, therefore, marks a paradox: a consolidation of instability itself.

REFERENCES

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

Bochsler, D. (2010). Measuring party nationalisation: A new Gini-based indicator that corrects for the number of units. *Electoral studies*, *29*(1), 155-168.

Carteny, G. & Puleo, F. (2022). Verso un M5S a trazione socialdemocratica?, rivistailmulino.it, available at: https://www.rivistailmulino.it/a/verso-un-m5s-a-trazione-socialdemocratica (last accessed May 31, 2023).

Casal Bértoa, F. (2017). Political parties or party systems? Assessing the 'myth'of institutionalisation and democracy. *West European Politics*, *40*(2), 402-429.

Casal Bértoa, F. (2023). Database on WHO GOVERNS in Europe and beyond, PSGo. Available at: whogoverns.eu (last accessed May 31, 2023).

Casal Bértoa, F., & Enyedi, Z. (2021). Party system closure: Party alliances, government alternatives, and democracy in Europe. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Cavatorto, S., De Giorgi, E., & Piccolino, G. (2021). Next Generation EU nel governo parlamentare italiano. *Rivista Italiana di Politiche Pubbliche*, *16*(3), 377-403.

Chiaramonte, A. (2023). Italy at the polls. Four lessons to learn from the 2022 general election. *Contemporary Italian Politics*, 1-13.

Chiaramonte, A., & Emanuele, V. (2014). Bipolarismo addio? Il sistema partitico tra cambiamento e de-istituzionalizzazione. In A. Chiaramonte, & L. De Sio (Eds.), *Terremoto Elettorale. Le Elezioni Politiche del 2013* (pp. 233–262). Il Mulino.

Chiaramonte, A., & D'Alimonte, R. (2018). The new Italian electoral system and its effects on strategic coordination and disproportionality. *Italian Political Science*, 13(1), 8-18.

Chiaramonte, A., & Emanuele, V. (2013). Volatile and tripolar: the new Italian party system. In L. De Sio, V. Emanuele, N. Maggini, & A. Paparo, (Eds.), *The Ital-*

---

[14] The index is calculated as the summation of the vote change in consecutive elections for each party, divided by 2.

ian General Elections of 2013: A dangerous stalemate? (pp. 63-68). CISE.

Chiaramonte, A., & Emanuele, V. (2018). L'onda sismica non si arresta. Il mutamento del sistema partitico italiano dopo le elezioni 2018. In V. Emanuele, & A. Paparo (Eds.), *Gli sfidanti al governo. Disincanto, nuovi conflitti e diverse strategie dietro il voto del 4 marzo* (pp. 143-152). CISE.

Chiaramonte, A., D'Alimonte, R., & Paparo, A. (2019). Tra proporzionale e maggioritario: gli effetti 'misti' del nuovo sistema elettorale. In A. Chiaramonte, & L. De Sio (Eds.), *Il voto del cambiamento. Le elezioni politiche del 2018* (pp. 177-207). Il Mulino.

Chiaramonte, A., De Sio, L., & Emanuele, V. (2020). Salvini's success and the collapse of the Five-star Movement: The European elections of 2019. *Contemporary Italian Politics*, *12*(2), 140-154.

Chiaramonte, A., Emanuele, V., Maggini, N., & Paparo, A. (2018). Populist success in a hung parliament: The 2018 general election in Italy. *South European Society and Politics*, *23*(4), 479-501.

Chiaramonte, A., Emanuele, V., Maggini, N., & Paparo, A. (2023). Radical-Right Surge in a Deinstitutionalised Party System: The 2022 Italian General Election. *South European Society and Politics*, 1-29.

Crulli, M. (2022). Unmet expectations? The impact of the Coronavirus crisis on radical right populism in North-Western and Southern Europe. *European Journal of Cultural and Political Sociology*, 1-23.

D'Alimonte, R., & Bartolini, S. (1997). 'Electoral transition' and party system change in Italy. *West European Politics*, *20*(1), 110-134.

De Lucia, F., & Paparo, A. (2019). 'L'offerta elettorale fra regole inedite e conflitti vecchi e nuovi'. In A. Chiaramonte, & L. De Sio (Eds.), *Il voto del cambiamento. Le elezioni politiche del 2018* (pp. 13–60). Il Mulino.

Diamanti, I. (2010). Le subculture territoriali sono finite. Quindi r(esistono). In C. Baccetti, S. Bolgherini, R. D'Amico, & G. Riccamboni (Eds.), *La politica e le radici* (pp. 45–60). Liviana.

Emanuele, V. (2015). Dataset of Electoral Volatility and its internal components in Western Europe (1945-2015). *Data File Version 1.0.0, https://doi.org/10.7802/1112.*

Emanuele, V. (2016). Dataset of New Parties and Party System Innovation in Western Europe since 1945. *Data File Version 1.0.0, https://doi.org/10.7802/1363.*

Emanuele, V., & Chiaramonte, A. (2018), "A growing impact of new parties: myth or reality? Party system innovation in Western Europe after 1945", *Party Politics, 24*(5), 475–487.

Emanuele, V., & Marino, B. (2022), "Volatilità elettorale sopra i 30 punti: sistema partitico instabile per la terza elezione di fila", Blog CISE, 16 September 2022. Accessible at: https://cise.luiss.it/cise/2022/09/26/volatilita-elettorale-sopra-i-30-punti-sistema-partitico-instabile-per-la-terza-elezione-di-fila/ (last accessed May 31, 2023)

Emanuele, V., & Vassallo, S. (2018). Gli effetti del Rosatellum e la nuova geografia del voto. In *Vox populi. Il voto ad alta voce del 2018*. Il Mulino, Bologna, pp. 17-35.

Gallagher, M. (1991). Proportionality, disproportionality and electoral systems. *Electoral Studies, 10*(1), 33–51.

Gallagher, M. (2023). Election indices dataset. Available at: https://www.tcd.ie/Political_Science/about/people/michael_gallagher/ElSystems/Docts/ElectionIndices.pdf, last accessed August 2023.

Garzia, D. (2019). The Italian election of 2018 and the first populist government of Western Europe. *West European Politics*, *42*(3), 670-680.

Garzia, D. (2022). The Italian parliamentary election of 2022: the populist radical right takes charge. *West European Politics*, 1-11.

Ignazi, P. (1998). *Il polo escluso: profilo storico del Movimento sociale italiano*. Il Mulino.

Improta, M., Mannoni, E., Marcellino, C., & Trastulli, F. (2022). Voters, issues, and party loyalty: The 2022 Italian election under the magnifying glass. *Italian Journal of Electoral Studies* QOE-IJES, *85*(2), 3–27.

Kollman, K., Hicken, A., Caramani, D., Backer, D., & Lublin, D. (2019). Constituency-level elections archive [data file and codebook]. Ann Arbor, MI: Center for Political Studies, University of Michigan [producer and distributor]. Retrieved from http://www.electiondataarchive.org.

Laakso, M., & Taagepera, R. (1979). "Effective" number of parties: a measure with application to west Europe, *Comparative Political Studies 12*(1), 3–27.

Morlino, L. (1996). Crisis of parties and change of party system in Italy. *Party politics, 2*(1), 5-30.

Pasquino, G., & Valbruzzi, M. (2023). The 2022 general Italian elections. The long-awaited victory of the right. *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, *28*(1), 1–21.

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

Sartori, G. (1976). *Parties and Party Systems. A Framework for Analysis*. Cambridge University Press.

Trigilia, C. (1981). Le subculture politiche territoriali. Quaderni Della Fondazione Feltrinelli, 16, 3–171.

Vampa, D. (2015). The 2015 regional election in Italy: Fragmentation and crisis of subnational representative democracy. *Regional & Federal Studies*, *25*(4), 365-378.

Vassallo, S., & Shin, M. (2019). The new map of political consensus. What is new in the wave of support for the populists? *Contemporary Italian Politics*, *11*(3), 220-235.

Vassallo, S., & Vegetti, F. (2022). Elezioni 2022: la contendibilità dei collegi. Istituto Cattaneo. Available at: https://www.cattaneo.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/2022-09-20_Collegi.pdf (last accessed May 30, 2023).

Vegetti, F., Poletti, M., & Segatti, P. (2013). When responsibility is blurred. Italian national elections in times of economic crisis, technocratic government, and ever-growing populism. *Rivista italiana di scienza politica*, *43*(3), 329-352.

ORCID:
MB: 0000-0002-2571-649X
SG: 0000-0003-2110-9622

Career models in the new tripolar order. political profiles of the italian MPs after the 2022 general elections

Matteo Boldrini[1,*], Selena Grimaldi[2]

[1] Department of Political Science, Luiss Guido Carli, Rome, Italy
[2] Department of Political Science, Communication and International Relations, University of Macerata, Macerata, Italy
E-mail: mboldrini@luiss.it
*Corresponding author

Abstract. The 2022 general election confirmed the instability of the Italian political system and in its shift from a bipolar to a tripolar competition dynamic. The article explores similarities and differences among MPs elected in 2022 during such electoral turmoil, aiming to understand their profiles and career paths. Specifically, the research investigates whether certain elements such as gender and affiliation with an organisational thick or thin party may influence the MPs' career models. We run a multinomial logistic regression to test the effects on multilevel career patterns by relying on an original dataset which comprises the socio-economic and political characteristics of the current MPS and their career trajectories for a total of 588 observations. Our findings show that women are often newcomers, and they are more likely to display an alternative career model. They struggle to fully capitalize on the opportunities offered by multilevel democracy, both before and after attaining their position as MPs. Furthermore, MPs belonging to a party with a strong organisation are more likely to develop unidirectional and integrated models, indicating their ability to navigate the multilevel context with well-planned and structured career paths.

Keywords: political careers; political professionalization; parliamentarians; multi-level systems; gendered career models, 2022 Italian general election.

INTRODUCTION

The Italian party system has experienced significant changes over the past two decades. It transitioned from an imperfect bipolar system (D'Alimonte & Chiaramonte, 2010) – influenced by electoral law changes that introduced a majoritarian perspective (such as the Mattarellum and Porcellum) – to a new tripolar phase (Chiaramonte & De Sio, 2015). Following the 2013 general elections, mainstream parties of the centre-right and centre-left, which had dominated the political landscape from the late 1990s to the late 2000s, began losing votes. Concurrently, new populist parties like the Five Star Movement (*Movimento Cinque Stelle*, M5S) (Chiapponi, 2017), and radi-

cal parties like the League under the leadership of Matteo Salvini (Passarelli & Tuorto, 2018), as well as Brothers of Italy (*Fratelli d'Italia*, FDI) under the leadership of Giorgia Meloni (Baldini, Tronconi & Angelucci, 2023), saw an increase in their vote share.

Starting from 2013, the major party on the left of the political spectrum, the Democratic Party (PD), despite experiencing a decline in votes, maintained an average vote share of around 20%. In contrast, the centre-right political camp underwent several power shifts. In 2013, Silvio Berlusconi's People of Freedom (*Popolo della Libertà*, PDL) emerged as the largest party with a vote share of 21.6%. Later that same year, it became Forza Italia (FI), returning to its original name. In 2018, Matteo Salvini's League gained prominence with a vote share of 17.4%, and in 2022, Giorgia Meloni's FDI became the leading party with a vote share of 26%.

The third political pole, represented by the Five Star Movement (M5s), exhibited fluctuating results. Between 2013 and 2018, the M5s experienced a remarkable increase in vote share, rising from 25.5% to 32.8%. However, in the most recent election, their vote share declined to 15.6%.

Moreover, an important institutional change took place before the 2022 elections. The constitutional law n. 1/2020 reduced the number of parliamentarians by 600 MPs, impacting both the Chamber of Deputies (from 630 to 400) and the Senate (from 315 to 200). Consequently, this significant change in the rules of the game intensified competition for parliamentary seats for both incumbents and newcomers.

Against this backdrop, our article aims to examine whether the profiles of MPs belonging to different parties are similar or different in this new phase, and whether these electoral and institutional changes have resulted in coherent changes in the profiles of political personnel. Specifically, this paper addresses a gap in the literature by attempting to assess whether a specific career model is characteristic of women MPs. Despite the extensive body of research on women's under-representation in legislative bodies, it remains unclear whether a distinct pattern has emerged for women or not.

Additionally, drawing on the party organizational literature that distinguishes between "thick" and "thin" parties (Gunther & Diamond, 2003), we can anticipate that parties with a well-defined territorial structure are more likely to present similar political figures, especially in terms of their political careers. Conversely, parties with lower levels of institutionalization tend to offer candidates from diverse backgrounds, resulting in less predictable and stable career paths.

To examine these dynamics, we have compiled an original dataset from the 2022 general election, which includes socio-economic data and political career experiences of 392 deputies and 196 senators, totalling 588 MPs.

This article is structured as follows: Section 1 presents our theoretical framework and outlines our main hypotheses; Section 2 explains our methodological approach and choices; Section 3 provides a descriptive analysis of our dataset; and Section 4 presents our findings. Finally, Section 5 concludes the article.

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH DESIGN

The study of parliamentarians holds a significant place in the field of political science and has long been associated with the concept of political professionalization (Weber, 1919). In fact, a substantial body of contemporary European and American literature on political professionalization primarily revolves around parliamentarians, encompassing both country-specific analyses and comparative studies. (e.g. Squire 1993; Searing, 1994; Norris 1997; Saalfeld 1997; Shabad & Slomczynski, 2002; Borchert, 2003; Cairney, 2007; Koop & Bittner, 2011; Siavelis & Morgenstern, 2012, Heuwieser, 2018; Allen 2018; Ohmura *et al.*, 2018). However, so far in Europe the most important comparative work with a longitudinal perspective is that of Best and Cotta (2000), which has analysed the socio-economic background, the political experience and turnover rates of the European parliamentary representatives from 1948 to 2000.

From a theoretical point of view, the research on political careers can be distinguished between actor-oriented and context-oriented approaches (Jahr & Edinger, 2015), which focus respectively on individual characteristics and on contextual features as explaining factors.

Vercesi (2018) provides a systematic framework for reviewing both approaches in the study of political careers. Notably, among the former, the *personality approach* suggests that individual personality traits have an impact on career trajectories (Lasswell, 1948; Caprara & Silvester, 2018). The *ambition theory approach* (Schlesinger, 1966; Nicholls, 1991; Lawless, 2012) posits that politicians are office seeking and pursue different career paths based on their ambitions. The *social background and socialization approach* (Putnam, 1976; Pilet *et al.*, 2014) asserts that specific offices can only be attained by politicians with particular social characteristics and expertise. Lastly, the *selection and deselection approach* (Searing, 1994; Dowding & Dumont, 2015) operates within a rational choice framework, suggesting that politicians (as agents) are chosen based on their previous experiences.

In contrast, context-oriented approaches in the study of political careers encompass the following per-

spectives. The *opportunity structure approach* (Botella *et al.*, 2010; Stolz, 2003, 2015; Stolz & Fisher, 2014; Grimaldi & Vercesi, 2018) asserts that career paths are influenced by the availability, accessibility, and desirability of political positions. The *intra-organizational approach* (Thurber, 1976; Hazan & Rahat, 2010; Peters, 2010) suggests that career choices and opportunities within an organization are shaped by formal and informal organizational rules and procedures. The *supply and demand approach* (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995; Krook, 2010; Carnes, 2016) focuses on individuals representing specific social sectors (e.g., women, workers) whose resources and motivations contribute to the supply, while the demand is determined by elite preferences that act as gatekeeping factors. In summary, this approach posits that political careers evolve through a step-by-step process influenced by the interplay of supply and demand dynamics.

Our paper builds on the opportunity structure approach which proved to be the most suitable when it comes to consider the broad contextual factors that characterised multi-level democracies. In fact, in Italy, as in all multi-level democracies, politicians have tended to exploit all possible offices from local to regional and national level as opportunities for their political career (e.g. Grimaldi & Vercesi, 2018; Di Capua *et al.* 2022). By relying on Borchert' work (2011) which distinguished three career models based on the hierarchy of the political offices and the direction of career paths, the article investigates what career model prevail among MPs of the XIX legislature in Italy and to what extent such models are affected by the politicians' social background and by the structure of their party organisation. To recall, according to Borchert (2011) in multi-level democracies three career models are likely to emerge, *the unidirectional model* refers to a political system in which a clear hierarchy of political offices exists, and it implies a movement from local to regional to national or European level. *The alternative model* implies a less clear hierarchy of offices with a high degree of autonomy between the levels of government and scarce possibility of "multi-level jumps". Consequently, national and subnational careers are clearly separate as there is no movement from regional to national or European level. Finally, *the integrated model* implies that there is no hierarchy among territorial levels and, thus, movements from the European or the national level to the regional and local level are more likely. Party experience is excluded from this analysis since the career model framework only concerns the occupation of previous institutional positions.

In order to explain the prevalence of one of the three career models mentioned above, we identified specific

drivers that draw from the social background and socialization approach, the intra-organizational approach, and the influence of party organizational structures on career paths. In Italy, previous research (Grimaldi & Vercesi, 2018) have proved that, as a result of institutional changes towards greater regionalization, all such career models may coexist at the same time. On the one hand, MPs' socio-economic characteristics seem to be quite similar in comparative perspective (Best & Cotta, 2000) and thus we can assume that certain specific features matter in their selection process. In particular, several studies pointed out that there is a systematic under-representation of women in the legislative assemblies (e.g. Philipps, 1995; Caul, 1999; Matland, 2005; Matland & Montgomery 2003; Norris, 1996; Tremblay, 2008). Despite the introduction of rules to favour gender balance (Dahlerup, 2007; Krook ,2007; Franceschet *et al*, 2012; Hughes *et al,*. 2019) in many European contexts, women continue to represent a minority and in addition, they also have less stable career paths than their male counterparts (Vanlangenakker *et al.*, 2013, Brown *et al.*, 2019; Kerevel, 2019; Kroeber & Hüffelmann, 2021), whereas their longevity in parliamentary office shows mixed evidence (e.g. Praino & Stockemer, 2018; Lazarus *et al.* 2023). The most recent data on women MPs in Europe confirm that by the end of 2022 women were on average 31.1% of MPs in the Lower Chambers and 30.5% in the Upper Chambers (IPU, 2022). However, despite the numerous research on female parliamentary representation, the existence of a specific career model for female MPs has not been widely explored so far. In fact, differently from Verzichelli *et al.* (2022), our purpose is not only to emphasize the huge impact of newcomers and especially of the "female beginners" in the last legislatures (namely from 2013) but to understand if a different career model emerges for female MPs by considering those who show a certain degree of political experience. Consequently, our paper aims to fill this gap in literature.

On the other hand, the existence of a direct connection between the organisational dimension of political parties and the career model has been emphasized repeatedly in the literature (Janda, 1980; Panebianco, 1982; Gunther & Diamond; 2003; Deschouwer, 2006; Thorlakson, 2013). In a nutshell, a strong party organisation at the territorial level is correlated with the presence of more linear, stable and easily predictable career paths, while more fluid organisations may be more susceptible to "horizontal" inflows of political personnel (Panebianco, 1982). However, with a progressive party institutionalisation, the specialisation of internal roles and a greater vertical integration between the political elites of the different levels, career paths become considerably

long and stable (Tronconi & Verzichelli, 2019). The reasons for such influence must be sought precisely in the intermediary role that political parties play in recruiting the political class.

In line with these premises, our research questions are the following:

1. Which characteristics do MPs elected in 2022 have? Are there similarities or differences in terms of socio-economic features?
2. What is the most widespread career model among the MPs of the XIX legislature?
3. Does social background and in particular gender affects the MPs' type of career?
4. Do party features affect the MPs' type of career?

To answer these questions, we rely on different streams of literature related to political class studies with a gender perspective and to organisational party literature.

In line with the international literature on women under-representation, the Italian case is not an exception. Although some researches have pointed out that important steps forward have occurred since the mid-1990s, especially at the local level (Carbone & Farina, 2020), gender equality is still far from being achieved, both in the national parliamentary arena (Verzichelli, 2010; Tronconi & Verzichelli 2015; 2019; Marino *et al.*, 2019; Sampugnaro & Montemagno, 2020), and in the local and regional ones (Carbone & Farina, 2020).

Notwithstanding the introduction of a strong system of quota provision since 2017 (i.e. art. 1.10, e law 165/2017), recent studies pointed out that parties seem to have learned how to circumvent such formal requirements by exploiting the electoral rules and in particular the possibility of multiple-candidacies, so much so that most of the female candidates have not been elected (Regalia 2021; Pansardi & Pedrazzani, 2022). Furthermore, many parties filled in the electoral lists with female political outsiders to comply with the norms (Pansardi & Pinto 2020) and therefore in the XVIII legislature more than 70% of the female newcomers have never held a political office before (Sampugnaro & Montemagno, 2020).

Additionally, as Verzichelli *et al.* (2022) have illustrated, following the peak in 2013, approximately 40% of newly elected female politicians were re-elected in subsequent elections. Consequently, these women exclusively gained political experience within the parliamentary arena, thereby exemplifying an alternative career model. Similarly, prior to the implementation of quota systems, studies by Sampugnaro and Montemagno (2020) revealed that a significant number of incumbent women

MPs had previously held solely national offices, further highlighting an alternative career trajectory. If these observations hold true for the XIX legislature, it implies that women not only continue to constitute a minority in Parliament, but regardless of their political affiliation, they seldom exhibit a "planned political career" characterized by ascending from lower-level territorial offices to higher-prestige positions.

Consequently, it is more likely for women MPs being picked up without previous experience to fill in party lists – also to comply with the formal regulations on gender balance – and later they gain political experience limited to the national level in comparison to their male counterparts. Therefore, our first hypothesis is that:

H1: *Women MPs are more likely to develop an alternative career model in comparison to men MPs.*

A second set of hypotheses is related to the territorial organisation of political parties. Party organisation represents one of the most investigated concepts in political science (Krouwel, 2006) and it is one of the most important criteria to classify political parties from the very beginning. Despite numerous scientific research having highlighted the diminishing importance of the organisational dimension (Kircheimer, 1966; Katz & Mair, 1995; Carty, 2004; Bolleyer, 2009), a strong heterogeneity among the different parties still exists and it should be considered, especially when it comes to evaluate mainstream versus new challenger or populist parties (Heinisch & Mazzoleni, 2016; Scarrow *et al.*, 2017; Vittori, 2020).

In our paper we explicitly rely on Gunther and Diamond's (2003) classification of parties according to their organisational strength. They have made a distinction between "organisational thick parties" as parties characterised by a strong territorial structure, a large mass membership base and a strong collateral associative network and "organisational thin parties" as parties mainly centred on networks of personal relationships and with a weak (if not absent) territorial organisational structure. Therefore, according to this classification, parties of cadres or notables, purely personal parties (Blondel *et al.*, 2010; Calise, 2015; Pedersen & Rahat, 2021), but also movement parties (Kitschelt, 2006; Della Porta *et al.*, 2017), would be classified as "thin" parties as they are all characterised by a low level of organisational articulation; on the contrary, traditional mass parties and their heirs, endowed with a strong organisational structure, would be classified as "thick" parties.

In particular, in line with such distinction it is likely that thick parties- due to their strong territorial organisation in sections- may facilitate the movement of party personnel between the different levels of

government, thus favouring the affirmation of the unidirectional career model and (to a lesser extent) of the integrated model, whereas thin parties with scarce territorial organisation would favour the affirmation of the alternative career model (Pilet *et al.* 2014; Tronconi, 2018, p. 618) by allowing people to gain a political office and maintain it for a while to achieve a certain degree of specialisation .

Therefore, parties would constitute the instrument through which politicians could make the most of the career opportunities offered by the multi-level democracy. We expect that:

H2: *MPs belonging to thick parties with strong territorial organisation are more likely to develop a unidirectional career model in comparison to MPs affiliated with thin parties.*

H2 *bis*: *MPs belonging to thick parties are more likely to develop an integrated career model in comparison to MPs affiliated with thin parties.*

2. DATA & METHODS

The paper explores the profile of the parliamentary class (both from the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate) elected after the 2022 general election. The analysis has a twofold aim. First, it aims at pinpointing if similar profiles in terms of socio-economic characteristics and career models emerge among MPs affiliated with different political parties in the aftermath of the new tripolar phase of the Italian party system. Secondly, it has an exploratory purpose, investigating whether there is an influence of gender or party features in shaping the career profiles of the different MPs. In this sense, the choice to focus on both deputies and senators (notwithstanding the specificity of the Italian Senate among the European Upper Chambers) was due to the desire to investigate as much as possible the transformations of the Italian parliamentary class. Moreover, for the sake of comparability, we focused only on national MPs, thus excluding the representatives elected in the foreign constituencies. Consequently, our population is composed of 588 MPs (392 from the Chamber and 196 from the Senate).

To investigate the MPs' profiles and how gender and party characteristics affect their model of career, we deemed a quantitative analysis to be the most appropriate choice.

Bivariate analysis and descriptive statistics were used to check similarities and differences among the MPs' profiles related to gender, age cohort, education, profession, the career model and the party membership.

Then, a multinomial logistic regression was used to test our initial hypotheses, namely, to check to what extent gender and party territorial organisation affect the development of a specific career model.

Variables were operationally defined in the following ways. On the one hand, the career model, which constitutes the dependent variable of the logit regression model, is operationalised as a three-way polytomous variable related to the three different types of careers: "unidirectional", "integrated" and "alternative".

A career was labelled as "unidirectional" whether it occurred incrementally among different levels of government (municipal, provincial, regional, and national/European), regardless of the initial level and of the length of the career. For example, in the unidirectional career type fall MPs such as Chiara Appendino (M5s), municipal councillor (2011-2016) and then mayor of Turin between 2016 and 2021 and finally deputy (in the current legislature), and Beatrice Lorenzin (PD), municipal councillor in Rome between 2001 and 2006, then MP since the 2006 General election and currently senator.

Conversely, a career model was operationalised as "integrated" if it is not possible to trace a linearity in the career trajectories, due to the alternation of offices in the national and in the local governmental levels. This category includes politicians such as Matteo Renzi (IV), President of the Province (2004-2009), then mayor of Florence between 2009 and 2014, then Prime Minister and MP, but also Matteo Salvini (League), European parliamentarian between 2009 and 2018 and concurrently uninterruptedly municipal councillor in Milan.

Finally, a career type was considered as "alternative" if it was characterised only by experience at the national or at the European level (thus devoid of previous local or regional offices). Subjects such as Pierferdinando Casini (PD), MP continuously since 1983 and currently senator and Giuseppe Conte (M5S), Prime Minister between 2018 and 2021 and currently deputy, belong to this category. It is worth mentioning that we drop from the analysis the newcomers without any previous political experience such as Ilaria Cucchi who never held institutional positions and now she is senator among the ranks of Green – Italian Left Alliance. As a consequence, our analysis was run on a total of 516 observations. The alternative model represents the reference category of the multivariate analysis[1]. In Italy, it is important to note

[1] Conventionally, in multinomial logistic regression in which the dependent variable is not ordinal, the most numerous categories is used as a reference category (the unidirectional model in our case). However, for the purposes of the analysis that is proposing to test what affects the development of a unidirectional or integrated career, it seemed more appropriate to use the alternative model as a reference category.

that a parliamentarian can hold concurrent positions as a municipal councillor, municipal executive, and mayor of municipalities with a population under 15,000. However, it is not possible for the dates of assuming office to coincide in two different positions at different governance levels. Therefore, we can always distinguish between the unidirectional model (when entry into local office occurred first) and the integrated model (when entry into national office occurred after).

On the other hand, party organisation and MPs' gender were considered as independent variables. Both variables were operationalized in a dichotomous way.

Indeed, in accordance with Gunther and Diamond's (2003) classification, we opted to categorize parties as thin (assigned a value of 0) or thick (assigned a value of 1) based on their organizational structure. The choice of a dichotomous representation of such characteristic, although it constitutes a simplification of reality, was dictated both by reasons of practicality and comparability. We are aware that starting from the important studies of Janda (1980) and Panebianco (1986), scientific literature proposed a series of indicators to measure the territorial organisational strength of parties (e.g. Katz *et al.*, 1992; Harmel & Janda, 1996; Tavits, 2012; Poguntke *et al.*, 2016). However, some authors have pointed out that some of such indicators cannot be easily applied to new personal or populist parties (Vercesi, 2015, Musella & Vercesi, 2019), making their use in contemporary political systems more complex or scarcely reliable. Moreover, the collection with relative certainty of some of these indicators for small, newly founded parties or for electoral lists that include several different parties may be complex. For these reasons, we deemed the choice of a dichotomous, albeit simple, operationalization as the most appropriate.

Consequently, basing our evaluation on the rich scholarly literature on Italian party organisations (Diamanti, 2009; Ignazi, 2013, Ignazi & Pizzimenti, 2014; Ignazi & Bordandini, 2018, Pizzimenti, 2020; Vittori; 2020; Bordandini *et al.*, 2023), the Democratic Party (PD), the League and Brothers of Italy (FDI) were defined as "thick" parties, whereas Go Italy (FI), the Five Star Movement (M5S), *Noi Moderati* (NM), + Europe (+E), *Azione – Italia Viva* (AZ-IV) and the Green – Italian Left Alliance (AVS) were defined as "thin" parties[2]. Table 1 summarises the modalities of such a variable.

Table 1. Distribution of organisation type and party type in 2022 General elections.

	Thin/Thick
AVS	Thin
PD	Thick
+E	Thin
SVP	Thick
AZ-IV	Thin
NM	Thin
FI	Thin
Lega	Thick
FDI	Thick
M5S	Thin
SCN	Thin

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Lastly, we operationalized gender as a dichotomous variable with value 0 if the MP is male and 1 if is female.

Specific control variables were also used to increase the robustness of the analysis.

The first set of control variables are linked to the MPs' socio biographical profiles. First, we consider age in years from the year of birth to 2022. Scientific literature (Verzichelli, 2010) underlined that most politicians reach the greatest availability of political capital and resources in the middle-aged cohorts 45-55. To avoid a bias related to the non-linear relationship between age and political career, in the multivariate analysis we chose to operationalize age as the square distance between the age of the MP and the apex of the career (50 years)[3].

We incorporated also these other control variables: education (due to the small number of subjects with less than a bachelor's degree, operationalized as a dichotomous variable with value 1 assigned to bachelor's degree) and original profession, operationalised as polytomous variable divided in six modalities: professional politicians; entrepreneurs, managers and directors; professionals (lawyers, doctors, accountants, etc.); public employees; private employees; other professions.

We also included some context related control variables, such as the House in which the MPs are elected (value 0 for the Chamber of Deputies and 1 for the Sen-

---

[2] Beyond party organisational features, another aspect we had considered when analysing political career trajectories, is when the party organisation was founded. In fact, parties that have been active in the political scene for long (or that were founded in contexts of greater stability) are likely to make the most of the territorial dimension compared to recently founded parties (Sikk, 2011, Emanuele & Chiaramonte, 2023) . From an empirical point of view, this aspect has been raised in

some recent research on Italian political personnel (Tronconi & Verzichelli, 2015; 2019), which highlighted how recently established parties tend to recruit eccentric parliamentarians compared to the others. We discussed this aspect in the Supplementary material where we also replace our thin and thick parties variable with a specific new and old parties variable as robustness test.

[3] This operationalisation, although more complex than an operationalisation with an ordinal variable, allows to avoid some distortions related to the numerosity of some categories (eg. the 25-29, the 70 or more).

ate), whether MPs are elected in a single-member district (SMD) or not and the geographical area of election of each MP, operationalised as a variable with three modalities, North, Red-Belt and South[4].

Data were extracted from the National Registry of the Local and Regional Administrators available on the website of the Ministry of the Interior[5], from the Chamber website and from the Senate website[6].

3. DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS: THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS AND THE CAREER MODELS OF THE MPS OF THE XIX LEGISLATURE

In this section we focus on the socio-economic characteristics and career models of the Italian MPs of the XIX legislature by pinpointing differences and similarities among parliamentary parties.

The over-representation of men in the Italian Parliament compared to women comes as no surprise. However, this time the share of women in the Chamber (Fig. 1) is less in comparison with that in the Senate (Fig. 2), namely 32.7% vs. 34.7%, and there was a drop in comparison to the last legislature (where women were 36% in the Chambers and 34% in the Senate, Tronconi & Verzichelli, 2019).

Fig. 1 and Fig. 2 show the Deputies and Senators distribution per parties and gender. Starting with right-wing parties in the Chamber of Deputies, both the League and Go Italy (FI) elected around 72% of men and 27% of women. Similarly, the electoral cartel "Noi Moderati" which comprises several centrist parties (like UDC which has been present in Parliament since 2002) elected 75% of men and 25% of women to the Chamber. Among centre-left parties both the Democratic Party and the Greens with the Left elected around 66% of men and 33% of women. In the Senate, only the PD and FI have less women than in the Chamber of Deputies, whereas the general trend is an increase of women in the Senate. On the left of the political spectrum AVS elected 50% of women, and in the centre-right Noi Moderati reached 40% of women and, on the right, even the League elected 37.9% of women.

The M5S and AZ-IV have the most gender-balanced parliamentary delegation. In fact, both parties elected
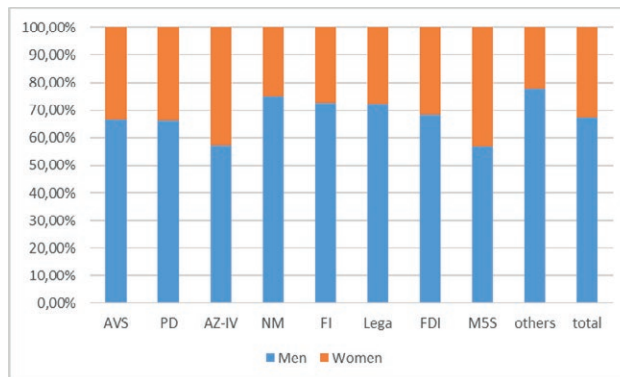
[4] The North includes the following regions: Aosta Valley, Piedmont, Liguria, Lombardy, Veneto, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Trentino-Alto Adige. The Red Belt comprises: Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany, Umbria and the Marche. Finally, the South and islands comprises: Lazio, Abruzzi, Campania, Basilicata, Molise, Apulia, Calabria, Sicily and Sardinia.
[5] See: https://dait.interno.gov.it/elezioni/anagrafe-amministratori
[6] See: https://www.camera.it/leg19/28 and https://www.senato.it/leg/19/BGT/Schede/Attsen/Sena.html

Figure 1. Deputies distribution per gender and parties. (Percentage values). Source: Authors' elaboration.
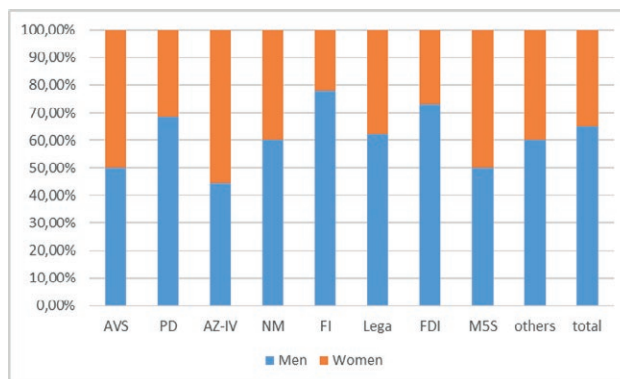

Figure 2. Senators distribution per gender and parties. (Percentage values). Source: Authors' elaboration.

around 57% of men and 43% of women to the Chamber and in the Senate, they elected 50% of women or even more (AZ-IV 55.6%). This does not hold for FDI as it elected 31.6% of women to the Chambers and only 27% to the Senate. This result is probably due to the fact that the bulk of FDI personnel comes from the post-fascist National Alliance (AN), which was founded in 1995 and merged into the People of Freedom (PdL) in 2009, notwithstanding the current FDI emerged from a right-wing split within Silvio Berlusconi's party.

Turning to the age of MPs, the difference between the two Chambers is impressive as 53.1% of the deputies are younger than 50 years old whereas 73% of the senators are 50 and above. In fact, the majority of deputies are in the 40-49 years old categories (37.2%) and in the 50-59 cohort (29.6%). Among senators the most frequent cohort is 50-59 years old (46.4%) followed by that of 40-49 (27%) (Tab. 2).

In the Chamber of Deputies there are only two parties that elected a high number of people over 50s: the

Table 2. Deputies (C) and senators (S), distribution per Age cohorts and parties. (Percentage values).

	25-29 C	30-39 C	40-49 C	50-59 C	60-69 C	70+ C	40-49 S	50-59 S	60-69 S	70+ S
AVS	0.0	8.3	50.0	8.3	25.0	8.3	25.0	50.0	0.0	25.0
PD	1.5	9.2	33.8	41.5	10.8	3.1	14.3	60.0	25.7	0.0
AZ-IV	0.0	9.5	42.9	38.1	9.5	0.0	66.7	33.3	0.0	0.0
NM	0.0	0.0	50.0	25.0	12.5	12.5	0.0	40.0	40.0	20.0
FI	0.0	13.6	22.7	31.8	27.3	4.5	11.1	27.8	50.0	11.1
Lega	0.0	21.5	44.6	23.1	7.7	3.1	41.4	51.7	6.9	0.0
FDI	0.9	12.0	40.2	28.2	15.4	3.4	19.0	50.8	23.8	6.3
M5S	3.9	29.4	33.3	21.6	9.8	2.0	46.4	39.3	3.6	10.7
Total	1.0	14.8	37.2	29.6	13.8	3.6	27.0	46.4	20.9	5.6

Source: Authors' elaboration.

PD (55.4%) and FI (63.6%). In the case of FI, the second most frequent cohort among deputies is that of 60-69 (27.3%). Conversely only the League and the M5s elected a high share of people under 50s, both around 66%. In fact, these are the only parties where the 30-39 cohort is above 20% (21.5% for the League and 29.4% for the M5s). Therefore, not all old parties have relatively old political personnel, as the League is undoubtedly the exception. On the other hand, most of the deputies of the other parties are younger than 50 but as mentioned only the M5s has a high share of under 40s. Among the senators the most frequent age cohort is the 50-59, as already mentioned, but with some important exceptions. In fact, 50% of the FI senators and 40% of NM senators are in the cohort 60-69. Thus, they are older than the average. Conversely, the most frequent cohort for AZ-IV and the M5s is that of 40-49 years old, respectively 66.7% and 46.4% of the senators. Furthermore, despite the most frequent cohort being 50-59, 41.4% of senators of the League are between 30 and 39 years old, confirming that the political personnel of the League is generally young. The case of FDI is peculiar since their senators are generally old. The representatives mostly belong to the 50-59 (50.8%) and 60-69 (23.8%) age categories like those of the PD.

As far as education is concerned, there are no relevant differences among the MPs of different parties, since most of the deputies (76.3%) and senators (74%) of all parties have a degree.

Looking at the original profession both in the Chamber and in the Senate the three most frequent categories are: liberal professionals (respectively 40.3% and 48%), managers or entrepreneurs (respectively 16.1% and 19.9%) and employees in the private sector (13.8% and 11.7%). However, in the Chamber of deputies there is also a consistent number of political professionals (12.5%).

For almost all parties, the majority of deputies are liberal professionals, followed by managers or entrepre-

neurs. The only exceptions are the AVS, where a significant portion of deputies (25%) are employed in the public sector, and the PD, where the majority of deputies (27.7%) are political professionals. Other peculiarities are the following. For AZ-IV it is worth mentioning that the second most frequent category is that of employees in the private sector (28.6%) rather than manager-entrepreneurs and that there is a high share of political professionals (19.1%). For NM the most frequent category is that of managers-entrepreneurs (37.5%) rather than liberal professionals which is the second category along with employees in the private sector (both 16.9%). For the League, the second cohort is that of managers-entrepreneurs and employees in the private sector (both 16.9%) whereas the third is that of political professionals (12.3%).

Most of the senators, irrespective of their party affiliation, are liberal professionals. The only exception in this respect is that of Greens and the Left, where a large portion of senators are union officials (50%) and employees in the public sector (25%). The second most frequent category is that of manager-entrepreneurs for all parties with the exceptions of the PD and the M5s. In the former case, the second most frequent category is that of union officials (14.3%), in the latter case that of artisans and shopkeepers (17.9%). Finally, it is worth mentioning that 13.8% of the League senators are political professionals. All in all, deputies and senators seem to be a rather homogeneous class with regards to the original profession. There are only a few differences among parties, and these are typical of leftist parties and the M5S. On one hand, for the leftist parties (AVS and PD), having a background as union officials remains an important factor for serving as MPs.[7] On the other hand, particularly with regards to the M5S senators, the pro-

---

[7] For the purposes of the analysis, trade unions officials were included in the "private employees" category.

files are most dissimilar compared to those of other parties, as both artisans and shopkeepers, as well as public employees, are highly represented.

When it comes to the career models of MPs, the unidirectional model is the most frequent (respectively 44.1% of the deputies and 41.8% of the senators), followed by the integrated model (23.2% of the deputies and 25% of the senators) whereas the alternative model is the least widespread (respectively 20.2% of the deputies and 21.9% of the senators). In addition, the share of newcomers is quite similar in both chambers (respectively, 12.5% and 11.2%).

However, when analysing gender-based data, it was found that despite the unidirectional model being the most common for both men and women, there is a notable proportion of female deputies (30.5%) and female senators (26.5%) who follow an alternative career model, which ranks as the second most frequent in both cases. Furthermore, a significant percentage of female MPs (15.6% in the Chamber and 17.7% in the Senate) are newcomers without prior political experience. Consequently, considering both categories, it becomes apparent that women face challenges in fully harnessing the opportunities provided by multilevel democracy, as the integrated model remains marginal, and the unidirectional model falls well below the 50% mark for both female deputies and senators. Moreover, there are certain interesting differences in the career paths of deputies and senators according to their party affiliation.

Starting with the Chamber of Deputies, the most common model for most deputies, regardless of their political affiliation, is the unidirectional model, followed by the integrated model. This indicates that deputies are generally more inclined to pursue political offices by taking advantage of the opportunities offered by a multilevel democracy, moving between different territorial levels when political positions are available, rather than solely focusing on national posts. Specifically, this is particularly true for AZ-IV and the League, where the integrated model is characteristic of 33.3% and 38.5% of their deputies, respectively.

In contrast, the M5S is the party where approximately 65% of deputies follow an alternative model. Specifically, most M5S deputies have only experienced national political positions or are newcomers without previous experience (17.6%), while a minority (15.7%) had some prior experience at the subnational level (Fig. 3).

When examining the senators (Fig. 4), both AZ-IV and League senators confirm the distribution observed among the deputies. In both cases, the most frequent
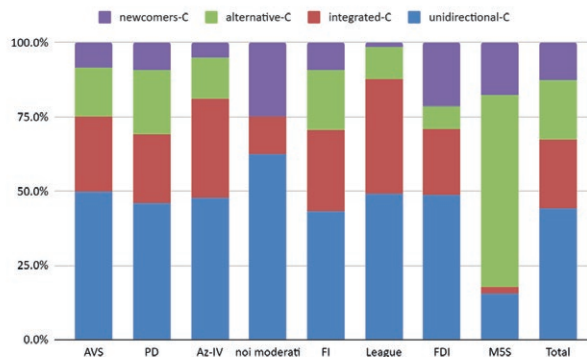

Figure 3. Career models of Deputies per party (percentage values). Source: Authors' elaboration.
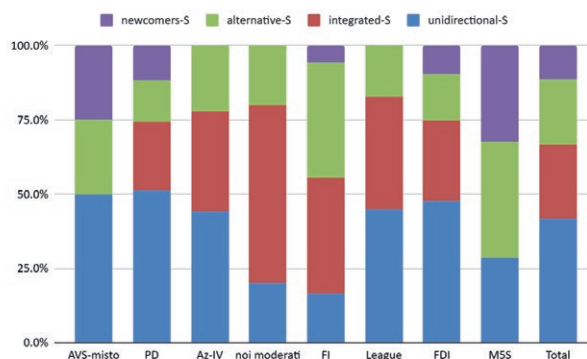

Figure 4 Career models of senators per party (Percentage values). Source: Authors' elaboration.

career model remains the unidirectional model (44.4% for AZ-IV and 48.8% for League), followed by the integrated model (33.3% for AZ-IV and 37.9% for League). Additionally, the same pattern observed among deputies holds true for M5S senators as well, with the alternative model being the most widespread (39.3%), despite an increase in the unidirectional model (28.6%) and the presence of newcomers (32.1%). However, the career paths of senators in two parties (NM, FI) diverge from those of deputies. Among NM senators, 60% followed an integrated model, while the remaining two models appear marginal (both 20%). As for FI senators, the most prevalent career models become the alternative and the integrated ones (both 38.9%). Overall, the integrated model is more common among senators compared to deputies for most parties, except for AVS where the alternative model is prominent, and M5S where the unidirectional model experiences a slight increase.

4. FINDINGS

As stated before, we tested our hypothesis with a multinomial logistic regression with the alternative career type as a base reference. The results of the logit regression are displayed in Table 3; the first part of the table shows the effect on the unidirectional versus the alternative career type whereas the following shows the results on the integrated versus the alternative career type. In the second column is also presented the relative risk ratio (RRR)[8].

As shown in Table 3, both gender and the party organizational feature are statistically significant in the two different models. Regarding gender, the correlation is negative, indicating that women MPs are less likely to develop a unidirectional or integrated career pattern compared to men. Instead, they are more likely to develop an alternative career pattern. This result confirms our initial expectation that women face challenges in developing a linear career trajectory that progresses through various territorial levels and eventually leads to parliamentary positions. On the other hand, women are frequently elected directly to national bodies without having prior political experience. Therefore, hypothesis H1 is confirmed.

Regarding the organizational nature of parties, the data reveal a significantly positive correlation with "thick" parties. This finding aligns with our expectations, indicating that highly structured and organized parties are more inclined to provide their MPs with stronger and more linear career planning. Furthermore, these parties demonstrate a greater ability to leverage the various institutional incentives that characterize a multilevel system compared to parties with limited structure. The relationship is particularly strong, as indicated by the high RRR values.

The analysis demonstrates that women are less than half as likely as men (0.404 and 0.29, respectively) to develop a unidirectional or integrated career pattern. On the other hand, representatives of thick parties are more than three times as likely (3.103 and 3.201, respectively) to develop these two career patterns. Overall, the results appear to confirm the initially proposed hypotheses, H2 and H2 bis.

Finally, although not originally included in our set of hypotheses and not being the primary focus of our analysis, we briefly discuss the results of the control variables. While providing definitive interpretations is challenging, we can speculate on these variables, which may suggest potential directions for future research.

Within model 1, we observe a negative correlation between age and the unidirectional model. This implies that as age deviates further from the central age group, the probability of developing the unidirectional career model slightly decreases (RRR equals 0.99) compared to the reference group (the alternative model). We can speculate that the impact of age is likely attributed to the relative ease of accessing political office within the political system.

In other words, politicians belonging to the central age group are likely to have longer political and institutional experience, which enhances their ability to navigate the institutional system and move more seamlessly between different levels of government. On the contrary, younger or older politicians are more prone to direct election to national institutions, bypassing intermediate levels. These speculations highlight the potential influence of age on career patterns and warrant further investigation.

Furthermore, the regression analysis reveals a significant negative effect of being elected in the South in both Model 1 and Model 2 (coefficients -0.839 and -0.783, RRR 0.43 and 0.46). This finding is somewhat surprising considering the existing literature, which suggests that southern politicians often have career patterns characterized by extensive local experience before ascending to national positions (Emanuele & Marino, 2016). However, we believe that this result can be attributed to the strong emergence of the M5S (Five Star Movement) in the South.

In other words, the M5S's substantial electoral success in the southern region resulted in a higher proportion of Southern MPs without significant local experience. This may have contributed to the observed negative effect. Nevertheless, these speculations warrant further empirical investigation to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the underlying dynamics.

5. CONCLUSION

This article examined the composition of the Italian parliamentary class that emerged from the last general elections in 2022. More precisely, through a quantitative statistical analysis, the research highlights the similarities and differences of the socio-political characteristics among parliamentarians of different party groups both in the Chamber and in the Senate and it also provides

---

[8] When a multinomial logistic regression is used, the relative risk ratio is used more frequently (Kleinbaum & Klein, 2010). It is calculated exponentiating the multinomial logit coefficients and it shows the risk of the outcome falling in the comparison group compared to the risk of the outcome falling in the referent group changes with the variable in question.

Table 3. Results of multinomial logistic regression.

	Model 1 (Unidirectional vs. alternative)		Model 2 (Integrated vs. alternative)	
	B	RRR	B	RRR
Independent variables				
Female	-0.906***	0.404	-1.235***	0.29
	(0.262)	(0. 106)	(0.285)	(0.082)
Thick Party	1.132***	3.103	1.146***	3.201
	(0.250)	(0.776)	(0.279)	(0.894)
Control Variables				
Age	-0.00393***	0.99	-0.000132	0.99
	(0.000971)	(0.001)	(0.0008)	(0.000)
Degree	-0.215	0.80	-0.400	0.670
	(0.310)	(0.249)	(0.347)	(0.232)
Senate	-0.143	0.867	-0.0632	1.065
	(0.266)	(0.230)	(0.300)	(0.319)
Single-Member District	0.523*	1.688	0.638*	1.829
	(0.256)	(0.432)	(0.279)	(0.527)
Profession (Reference category: Professional Politicians)				
Entrepreneurs, Managers and Directors	0.0712	1.073	-0.680	0.506
	(0.501)	(0.538)	(0.544)	(0.275)
Professionals	1.288	3.62	0.795	2.213
	(0.703)	(2.548)	(0.763)	(1.689)
Public Employees	0.277	1.318	-0.273	0.760
	(0.450)	(0.593)	(0.485)	(0.368)
Private Employees	1.020	2.771	0.297	1.345
	(0.545)	(1.510	(0.582)	(0.782)
Other Professions	-0.1	0.8	-1.210	0.298
	(0.590)	(0. 486)	(0.667)	(0.198)
Geographical zone of election (Reference category: North)				
Red Belt	-0.317	0.728	-0.0572	0.944
	(0.369)	(0.269)	(0.399)	(0.376)
South	-0.839***	0.432	-0.783*	0.456
	(0.278)	(0.120)	(0.309)	(0.323)
Constant	1.134	3.106	0.995	2.075
	(0.745)	(2.313)	(0.846)	(2.228)
N	516		516	
Pseudo R2	0.104		0.104	

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, ** p<0.001***.
Robust standard errors in parentheses.

an exploratory analysis on those factors that can influence their career model.

The results of the research have a double relevance, both on empirical and theoretical grounds.

From a theoretical point of view, the research proved that personal and organisational factors such as gender and the nature of the party to which MPs belong, influence their career models.

Indeed, the analysis has highlighted how, at least in the Italian context, women are not only fewer in number than men, but also have less structured and concentrated career models.

In other words, our findings show that, despite the amount of time women invest in politics, their career model often diverges from that of men. Specifically, our data indicates that women face challenges in fully lever-

aging the range of political positions available in a multi-level democracy when compared to men. This observation remains consistent regardless of the level of institutionalization within their respective parties.

Moreover, the research has emphasized the impact of the organizational dimension of a party on the development of specific career patterns. It has been observed that highly organized parties are more effective in leveraging the opportunities presented by the multilevel institutional system. These parties are better equipped to plan career trajectories, resulting in a higher likelihood of unidirectional or integrated career models.

Consequently, our research has made a valuable contribution to the ongoing debate on gender disparities in politics. It has shed light on the predominant career models among women and has explored party structure as a key driver of these models, thereby addressing intra-organizational approaches. In doing so, our study has partially bridged the gap in the existing literature by examining the influence of party institutionalization on career models.

From an empirical point of view, the analysis underlined that socio-demographic characteristics do not differ particularly from those found for MPs elected in previous electoral rounds. Parliamentarians are in fact generally men, with a high level of education, performing highly qualified professions and with previous political experience at the local level. Specifically, by looking at the gender dimension, the Parliament elected in 2022 has a lower number of women than in 2018, halting the path towards an increase of gender balance that seemed to have started in the two previous legislatures.

Giorgia Meloni's party, the actual winner of the 2022 elections, being a "novelty" within the Italian political system, may have exhibited certain peculiarities in terms of its parliamentary class recruitment patterns. However, the data indicate that the party largely follows the recruitment methods of traditional parties. Despite having the first female party leader who became the Prime Minister, this novelty did not have a significant impact on the party's recruitment of political personnel. The parliamentary class primarily consists of male politicians who were already active in politics during the so-called Second Republic (and in some cases, even during the First Republic). Moreover, when women are present, they tend to be newcomers or exhibit less structured career models. Therefore, Meloni's leadership not only failed to affect the political agenda in terms of increasing gender-related issues (De Giorgi *et al.*, 2023), but it also did not result in a gender-balanced recruitment of political personnel, at least until now.

In contrast, the M5S seems to maintain its distinctiveness. Contrary to common expectations, there was no normalization of the party, which continues to primarily recruit political outsiders. The new leadership under former Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte, who benefited from the departure of numerous historical figures (including former Minister Luigi Di Maio), managed to maintain this distinctive trait of the M5S. It remains to be seen in the future whether the M5S can sustain this specificity and deviate from traditional political and institutional socialization patterns.

Our findings suggest interesting avenues for future research, particularly by expanding the analysis through longitudinal and comparative perspectives or by adopting a more comprehensive and multidimensional operationalization of the party organizational dimension.

REFERENCES

Allen, P. (2018). *The political class: Why it matters who our politicians are*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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

Best, H., & Cotta, M. (Eds.) (2000). P*arliamentary representatives in Europe, 1848-2000: legislative recruitment and careers in eleven European countries*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Blondel, J., Thiebault, J-L., Czernika, K., Inoguchi, T., Pathmanad, U., & Venturino F. (2010). *Political leadership, parties and citizens: the personalisation of leadership,* London; New York: Routledge.

Borchert, J. (2003). *Professional politicians: Towards a comparative perspective. The political class in advanced democracies,* Oxford: Oxford University Press

Borchert, J., & Stolz, K. (2011). Introduction: Political careers in multi-level systems. *Regional and Federal Studies*, 21(2), 107-115.

Botella, J., Teruel, J. R., Barbera, O., & Barrio, A. (2010). A new political elite in Western Europe? The political careers of regional prime ministers in newly decentralised countries. *French Politics*, 8, 42-61.

Brown, R., Mansour, H., O'Connell, S., & Reeves, J. (2019). Gender Differences in Political Career Progression: Evidence from U.S. Elections, CESifo Working Paper, No. 7821, Center for Economic Studies and ifo Institute (CESifo), Munich.

Cairney, P. (2007). The professionalisation of MPs: Refining the 'politics-facilitating'explanation. *Parliamentary Affairs*, 60(2), 212-233.

Calise, M. (2015). The personal party: an analytical framework. *Italian Political Science Review/Rivista Italiana di Scienza Politica*, 45(3), 301-315.

Caprara, G., & Silvester, J. (2018). The Personality Attributes of Political Elites in Best, H., & Higley, J. (Eds.) *The Palgrave Handbook of Political elites*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 467-487

Carbone, D., & Farina, F. (2020). Women in the local political system in Italy. A longitudinal perspective. *Contemporary Italian Politics*, 12(3), 314-328.

Carnes, N. (2016). Why are there so few working-class people in political office? Evidence from state legislatures. *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, 4(1), 84-109.

Caul, M. (1999). Women's Representation in Parliament: The Role of Political Parties. *Party Politics*, 5(1), 79–98. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068899005001005

Chiapponi, F. (2017). *Democrazia, populismo e leadership: Il Movimento 5 Stelle.* Novi Ligure: Epoké.

Chiaramonte, A., & De Sio, L. (Eds.) (2015). *Terremoto elettorale. Le elezioni politiche del 2014.* Bologna: Il Mulino.

D'Alimonte, R., & Chiaramonte, A. (Eds.) (2010). *Proporzionale se vi pare. Le elezioni politiche del 2008.* Bologna: Il Mulino

Dahlerup, D. (2007). Electoral Gender Quotas, Between Equality of Opportunity and

Equality of Result, *Representation,* 43(2), 73–92.

Della Porta, D., Fernández, J., Kouki, H., & Mosca, L. (2017). *Movement parties against austerity.* John Wiley & Sons.

De Giorgi, E., Cavalieri A., & Feo, F. (2023). From Opposition Leader to Prime Minister: Giorgia Meloni and Women's Issues in the Italian Radical Right, *Politics and Governance*, 11(1), 108–118.

Deschouwer, K. (2006). Political Parties as Multi-Level Organizations. in Katz, R., S. & Crotty, W. J. (Eds.), *Handbook of Party Politics*. London: Sage, 291-300

Di Capua, R., Pilotti, A., Mach, A., & Lasseb, K. (2022). Political professionalization and transformations of political career patterns in multi-level states: The case of Switzerland. *Regional & Federal Studies*, 32(1), 95-114.

Diamanti, I. (2009). *Mappe dell'Italia politica.* Bologna: Il Mulino

Dowding, K., & Dumont, P. (2015). Agency Rent, Adverse Selection and Moral Hazard, in K. Dowding, K., & Dumont, P. (Eds.) (2014). *The Selection of Ministers around the World*. London and New York: Routledge.

Emanuele, V., & Chiaramonte, A. (2022). *The Deinstitutionalisation of Western European Party System*, London: Palgrave.

Emanuele, V., & Marino, B. (2016). Follow the candidates not the parties. *Regional & Federal Studies*, 26(4), 531-554.

Franceschet S., Krook, M. L., & Piscopo J. M. (Eds.) (2012). *The Impact of Gender Quota.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gunther, R., & Diamond, L. (2003). Species of Political Parties: A New Typology. *Party Politics*, 9 (2), 167-199. https://doi.org/10.1177/13540688030092003

Grimaldi, S., & Vercesi, M. (2018). Political careers in multi-level systems: Regional chief executives in Italy, 1970–2015. *Regional & Federal Studies*, 28(2), 125-149.

Hazan, R. Y., & Rahat, G. (2010). *Democracy within parties: Candidate selection methods and their political consequences.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Harmel, R., & Janda K. (1996). *The Party Change Project*, available at http://www-polisci.tamu.edu/programs/cross/data/

Heuwieser, R. J. (2018). Submissive Lobby Fodder or Assertive Political Actors? Party Loyalty of Career Politicians in the UK House of Commons, 2005–15. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 43(2), 305-341.

Hughes, M., Paxton, P., Clayton, A., & Zetterberg, P. (2019). Global gender quota adoption, implementation, and reform. *Comparative Politics*, 51(2), 219–238.

Ignazi, P. (2013). *Forza senza legittimità: il vicolo cieco dei partiti.* Bari: Gius. Laterza & Figli Spa.

Ignazi, P., & Pizzimenti, E. (2014). The reins of intra-party power in the Italian political parties (1990-2011). *Rivista italiana di scienza politica*, 44(3), 223-246.

Ignazi, P., & Bordandini, P. (2018). *I muscoli del partito. Il ruolo dei quadri intermedi nella politica atrofizzata.* Bologna: Il Mulino.

IPU-Parline:https://data.ipu.org/women-averages?month=12&year=2022&op=Show+averages&form_build_id=form-yBNrbNWEZcykRpimJs2xOzxHhmgl9vDv0jzp01_65xc&form_id=ipu__women_averages_filter_form

Jahr, S., & Edinger, M. (2015). *Political Careers in Europe. Career Patterns in Multi-Level Systems*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing,

Janda, K. (1980). *Political Parties: A Cross-National Survey.* New York: The Free Press,

Katz, R. S., & Mair, P. (1992). The membership of political parties in European democracies, 1960–1990, *European Journal of Political Research*, 22(3), 329–345

Kleinbaum D. G., & Klein, M. (2010). *Logistic Regression. A Self-Learning Text.* New York: Springer

Kerevel, Y. (2019). Empowering women? Gender quotas and women's political careers. *The Journal of Politics*, 81(4), 1167-1180.

Kitschelt H. (2006). Movement Parties, in Katz, R. S. & Crotty W., J. (Eds.), *Handbook of Party Politics*, New York: Sage, 278-290.

Koop, R., & Bittner, A. (2011). Parachuted into Parliament: candidate nomination, appointed candidates, and legislative roles in Canada. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion & Parties*, 21(4), 431-452.

Krook, M. L. (2007). Candidate gender quotas: A framework for analysis. *European Journal of Political Research*, 46(3), 367-394.

Krook, M. L. (2010). *Quotas for women in politics: Gender and candidate selection reform worldwide*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lasswell, H. (1948). *Power & Personality*, New York: Chapmann & Hall

Lawless, J. (2012). *Becoming a Candidate. Political Ambition and the Decision to Run for Office,* Cambridge University Press.

Lazarus, J., Steigerwalt, A., & Clark, M. (2023). Time spent in the house: Gender and the political careers of US house members. *Politics & Gender*, *19*(1), 97-132.

Matland, R. E. (2005). Enhancing women's political participation: legislative recruitment and electoral systems. *Women in parliament: Beyond numbers*, 2, 93-111.

Matland, R. E., & Montgomery, K. A (Eds.) (2003). *Women's Access to Political*

Power in Post-Communist Eastern Europe. New York: Oxford University Press.

Marino, B., Martocchia Diodati, N., & Verzichelli, L. (2019). Members of the Chamber of Deputies. *The Italian General Election of 2018: Italy in Uncharted Territory*, 271-295.

Musella, F., & Vercesi, M. (2019). Definitions and measures of party institutionalization in new personal politics: The case of the 5 Star Movement. *Zeitschrift für vergleichende politikwissenschaft*, 13(2), 225-247.

Nicholls, K. (1991). The Dynamics of National Executive Service: Ambition Theory and the Careers of Presidential Cabinet Members. *Western Political Quarterly*, 44(1), 149–172. https://doi.org/10.1177/106591299104400109

Norris, P. (1996). Legislative Recruitment. in LeDuc L, Niemi, R. G. & Norris, P. (Eds.) *Comparing Democracies. Elections and Voting in Global Perspective*, Thousand Oaks: Sage, 184 –215.

Norris, P. (Ed.). (1997). *Passages to power: Legislative recruitment in advanced democracies*. Cambridge University Press.

Ohmura, T., Bailer, S., Meiβner, P., & Selb, P. (2018). Party animals, career changers and other pathways into parliament. *West European Politics*, 41(1), 169-195.

Panebianco, A. (1982). *Modelli di partito. Organizzazione e potere nei partiti politici*, Bologna: Il Mulino.

Pansardi, P., & Pedrazzani, A. (2022). Do (strong) gender quotas make a difference? Multiple candidacies as a party gatekeeping strategy in Italy. *Party Politics*. 1–15. doi:10.1177/13540688221091052..

Pansardi, P., & Pinto, L. (2020). Gender penalty and electoral outcomes in the 2018 Italian elections, *Contemporary Italian Politics*, 12(3), 300-313.

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

Pedersen, H. H., & Rahat, G. (2021). Political personalization and personalized politics within and beyond the behavioural arena. *Party Politics*, 27(2), 211-219.

Peters, B. G. (2010). *The Politics of Bureaucracy. An Introduction to Comparative Public Administration. Sixth Edition.* Abingdon: Routledge

Pilet, J-B., Tronconi, F., Onate, P., & Verzichelli, L. (2014). Career patterns in multilevel systems, in Deschouwer K. & Depauw, S. (Eds.) *Representing the People: A Survey Among Members of Statewide and Substate Parliaments*, Oxford University Press, 209-226

Pizzimenti, E. (2020). *Tigri di carta. Debolezza dei partiti e instabilità sistemica in Italia (1994-2018).* Pisa: Pisa University Press.

Poguntke, T., Scarrow, S. E., Webb, P. D., Allern, E. H., Aylott, N., Van Biezen, I., … & Verge, T. (2016). Party rules, party resources and the politics of parliamentary democracies: How parties organize in the 21st century. *Party politics*, 22(6), 661-678.

Praino, R., & Stockemer, D. (2018). The Career Length and Service of Female Policymakers in the US House of Representatives. *Government and Opposition*, 53(3), 437–460.

Putnam, R. D. (1976). *The Comparative Study of Political Elites*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.

Regalia, M. (2021). *Una democrazia dimezzata.* Milano: Egea.

Saalfeld, T. (1997). Professionalisation of parliamentary roles in Germany: An aggregate-level analysis, 1949–94. *The Journal of Legislative Studies,* 3(1), 32-54.

Sampugnaro, R., & Montemagno, F. (2020). Women and the Italian general election of 2018: selection, constraints and resources in the definition of candidate profiles. *Contemporary Italian Politics*, 12(3), 329-349.

Schlesinger, J. A. (1966). *Ambition and Politics*, Chicago: Rand McNally and Co.

Searing, D. (1994). *Westminster's world: understanding political roles*. Harvard University Press.

Shabad, G., & Slomczynski, K. M. (2002). The Emergence of Career Politicians in Post-Communist Democracies: Poland and the Czech Republic. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 27(3), 333-359.

Siavelis, P., & Morgenstern, S. (2008). *Pathways to Power: Political Recruitment and Candidate Selection in Latin America*. Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press

Squire, P. (1993). Professionalization and Public Opinion of State Legislatures. *Journal of Politics*, 55(2), 479–491.

Stolz, K. (2003). Moving up, moving down: Political careers across territorial levels. *European Journal of Political Research*, 42(2), 223-248.

Stolz, K., & Fischer, J. (2014). Post-cabinet careers of regional ministers in Germany, 1990–2011. *German Politics*, 23(3), 157-173.

Tavits, M. (2012). Organizing for success: party organizational strength and electoral performance in post-communist Europe. *The Journal of Politics*, 74(1), 83-97.

Thorlakson, L. (2013). Measuring Vertical Integration in Parties with Multi-level Systems Data. *Party Politics*, 19(5), 713–734.

Tremblay, M. (Ed.) (2008). *Women and Legislative Representation: Electoral Systems,*

Political Parties, and Sex Quotas. New York: Palgrave Macmillan

Thurber, J. A. (1976). The Impact of Party Recruitment Activity upon Legislative Role Orientations: A Path Analysis. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 533-549.

Tronconi, F. (2018). Sub-national Political Elites, in Best, H., & Higley, J., (eds.) *The Palgrave Handbook of Political elites*, London: Palgrave Macmillan

Tronconi, F., & Verzichelli, L. (2015). La nuova rivoluzione nel ceto parlamentare. Effetti congiunturali e interpretazioni diacroniche, in Chiaramonte, A., & De Sio, L. *Terremoto elettorale. Le elezioni politiche del 2014*. Bologna: Il Mulino.

Tronconi, F., & Verzichelli, L. (2019). Il ceto parlamentare al tempo del populismo, in Chiaramonte, A., & De Sio, L. *Il voto del cambiamento. Le elezioni politiche del 2018*. Bologna: Il Mulino

Vanlangenakker, I., Wauters, B., & Maddens, B. (2013). Pushed toward the exit? How female MPs leave parliament. *Politics & Gender*, 9(1), 61-75.

Vercesi, M. (2015). Owner parties and party institutionalisation in Italy: is the Northern League exceptional?. *Modern Italy*, 20(4), 395-410.

Vercesi, M. (2018). Approaches and lessons in political career research: Babel or pieces of patchwork?. *Revista Espanola de Ciencia Politica*, 48, 183-206, https://doi.org/10.21308/recp.48.07

Verzichelli, L. (2010). *Vivere di politica: come (non) cambiano le carriere politiche in Italia*. Bologna: Il Mulino.

Verzichelli, L., Marino, B., Marangoni, F., & Russo, F. (2022). The Impossible Stability? The Italian Lower House Parliamentary Elite After a "Decade of Crises". *Frontiers in Political Science*, 4, 1-15.

Weber, M. (1919). *Politik als Beruf. In: Geistige Arbeit als Beruf. Vier Vorträge vor dem Freistudentischen Bund*. München: Zweiter Vortrag.

Walking on the tightrope between moderation and radicalisation: the first 100 days of the Meloni government

Marianna Griffini

King's College London, 22 Aldwych London WC2B 4DD
E-mail: marianna.1.griffini@kcl.ac.uk

Abstract. As the fatal grip of the Covid-19 pandemic started to ease, in summer 2022 Italy underwent seismic political developments, which saw the establishment of the first totally populist radical right government in Italian history. On 25 September 2022, the general elections shook up the Italian political scene, with Fratelli d'Italia (FdI) scoring a resounding victory that earned the party the seat of the Prime Minister. Despite fears of a radicalisation of FdI resulting in a neofascist government, evidence points in a different direction. Therefore, the aim of this article is to investigate whether, in the first 100 days in government, FdI moderated, radicalised, or displayed continuity with its trademark ideology and manifesto pledges. While acknowledging the copious amount of bills, decrees, and laws proposed by the governing coalition, as well as a plethora of speeches they released, in the interest of space, the scope of this article is circumscribed to the analysis of the new executive, with a special emphasis on FdI, in the timeframe between the election results and the first 100 days of the new government. Considering this evidence, this article argues that FdI is definitely acting as a populist radical right party, tilted towards moderation, and, mostly, continuity with the 2022 electoral pledges, albeit with some oscillations to radicalisation.

Keywords: populist radical right, gender, immigration, Fratelli d'Italia.

INTRODUCTION

As for the new government born on 22 October 2022, it will face a number of immediate and serious challenges (…) leaving aside the need for PM Meloni and her party to reassure Europe that they have distanced themselves from their beginnings and also from the very radical anti-European positions. (Chiaramonte et al. 2023, p. 25).

This quote well encapsulates the conundrum this article tackles: in the first 100 days of Meloni's government, did Fratelli d'Italia (FdI) moderate? In July 2022, after the collapse of the technocratic government headed by former European Central Bank President Mario Draghi, international media and pundits expressed concerns for the outcome of the 25 September 2022 Italian national elections, which saw the populist radical right party FdI

score a resounding victory. The *Washington Post* published an article titled "Italy is on its way to being run by 'post-fascists'" (Tharoor, 2022), which captured the fear about the reappearance in government of a party featuring a fascist lineage, and neofascist politicians and ideological remnants (Mammone, 2018). However, FdI's leader Giorgia Meloni, as Italy's first female Prime Minister, steered a more moderate course than expected, despite swift oscillations to radicalisation. Therefore, the aim of this article is to contribute to the budding literature on the recently installed Meloni government, by assessing the behaviour of FdI in public office. Although Italy represents a unique case study (as it is the first wholly populist radical right government in Western Europe), this article yields interesting results regarding the behaviour of wholly populist radical right governments that are not an unlikely prospective in Western Europe.

Methodologically, this article is explorative: it acknowledges that the first 100 days of Meloni's government are not representative of Meloni's government behaviour. Nevertheless, the first 100 days of government are a significant indicator of the government agenda and prioritised policies. This article applies qualitative text analysis to a variegated body of policy documents (bills, law decrees, and laws), the 2022 FdI manifesto, and speeches by members of the executive relayed through different media channels and delivered at critical junctures, such as on election night after the announcement of results, at the swearing-in ceremony and opening of the new Parliament (when the Meloni agenda was laid out), as well as in the social vlog series Meloni launched on her Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok accounts. This communication choice reflects recent trends with politicians reaching out to an audience cutting across different ages and levels of education through Twitter (see, for instance, Albertazzi, Bonansinga, Zulianello, 2021), and TikTok (see, for instance, Albertazzi, Bonansinga, 2023).

Political speeches and policy documents embody the outward image of the party in power, both in institutional and in less formal social media settings and allow to gauge the extent of its moderation vis-à-vis its attachment to radical roots, or continuity with the electoral pledges. The outward portrayal of a party has the drawback of conveying a homogeneous image of it, thus hiding the heterogeneity of voices animating parliamentary debates.

In this article, FdI speeches and policies are given historical depth by comparing then with the 2022 FdI manifesto pledges. The focal areas examined here are law and order, through the analysis of the so-called Anti-rave Decree; immigration policy, through the analysis of the NGO conduct decree; and economic policy,

through the analysis of the *Manovra*, i.e., the Annual Budget and the economic and financial directions laid out for the next three years. These three policy areas do not constitute the entirety of the Meloni agenda but are indicative of the priorities of the government. In order to enhance the breadth of analysis of the Meloni agenda, this article also probes policy stances in two additional pivotal areas: foreign policy and gender policy.

Theoretically, this article contributes to the literature on populist party behaviour and aims at shedding light on the FdI's trajectory once in government. In so doing, it builds on the scholarly debates on the populist radical right ideology, policies, and behaviour when in government. The entry into government of populist radical right parties results in a host of different behaviours of which moderation is only one (Akkerman *et al.*, 2016).

In line with the focus of this special issue on Meloni's government, this article demonstrates that Meloni's government presents us with a curious mix-bag of elements of moderation, of continuity, and the occasional brief swings to radicalisation. Moderation is evident in the FdI's further blunting of anti-EU attitudes, which was already present in the 2022 manifesto pledge of continuity with the Draghi agenda centred on international respectability and economic stability. Meloni, through strategic ambivalence, blends elements of moderation/continuity with the 2022 FdI manifesto pledges, such as supposedly pro-women's rights, and an emphasis on security and on the fight of irregular immigration, with hints of radicalisation, such as a tough stance on law and order, reactionary views on gender, and nativism.

This article unfolds in the following way. A brief overview of the historical trajectory and the ideological makeup of FdI is provided, within the context of the 2022 snap elections called after the Draghi government's shutdown. Afterwards, the article examines the mainstreaming efforts by FdI evident in the new government composition, which is juxtaposed to the ministries' nomenclature portending potentials swings to radicalism. Then, the article unpacks the new government agenda, focusing on a selection of the most significant policies marking the first 100 days of Meloni's government. In the conclusion, the article restates the protean entanglement of radical strands into a pattern largely marked by continuity and moderation.

AN UNCOMFORTABLE LINEAGE AND AN UNCOMFORTABLE MARRIAGE

Since its formation in 2012 until 2022, FdI had been consistently a bulwark of opposition in the Italian Par-

liament. FdI arose in 2012 from the ashes of the defunct Alleanza Nazionale (AN) as a nativist party calling for a strong state and putting forward an anti-elite and pro-people narrative. Following Mudde's seminal work (2007), this article recognises in FdI the core ideological attributes of the populist radical right: nativism, a strong state, and populism (which this article breaks down into people-centrism and anti-elitism)[1]. FdI's trademark ideology developed since 2014 (Vampa, 2023) is undoubtedly marked by the call for the state to act tough against the perceived decline plaguing crisis-ridden Italy, by enforcing compliance with law and order and with socially reactionary values (Vampa, 2023); appeals to the ordinary people set against the negligent political elites (chiefly embodied by the EU and competing political parties) and against the out-group that allegedly menaces the national in-group composed of native Italians (Griffini, 2021; Puleo, Piccolino, 2022).

The categorisation of FdI within the populist radical right is not uncontested. Bruno (2023) defines FdI as 'far-right', which has moderated and mainstreamed. Jones (2023) concurs with this opinion, adding that, despite the FdI's backward-facing attitude looking at the past to protect the Italian nation from contemporary changes, the party has now been undergoing a transformation from the radical right towards the mainstream. While agreeing with the point about FdI's current trajectory from the right end of the political spectrum towards the centre, this article posits that FdI's ideology is better captured by the label 'populist radical right', which is one of the two strands of the far-right umbrella category, together with extreme right parties. What sets the populist radical right apart from the extreme right is the lack of the use of violence and neofascist symbolism in the former (Pirro, 2022). In fact, extremism broadly and neofascism specifically are not a hallmark of FdI, even if its descendance from AN carries a heavy legacy. AN was the post-fascist metamorphosis of the first Italian neofascist party, the Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI), although the extent of AN's allegedly complete distancing from the neofascist legacy of the MSI is debatable (Newell, 2000). What is undebatable is that FdI is rooted in the postfascist tradition, but it estranged itself from its neofascist ancestors, and successfully inserted itself into the Italian democratic arena (Vampa, 2023), exponentially increasing its electoral gains. At the general elections in 2013 it polled at 1.94% (Greco, 2013); in 2018, it polled at 4.3% (Diamanti, 2018); in 2022, it gathered an extortionate share of votes with 26% (Ministero dell'Interno,

2022). Already in 2021, Albertazzi and Vampa had predicted the high probability of a populist radical right coalition running Italy, although the balance of power significantly tilted in favour of FdI at the expense of the Lega was hard to foresee.

The watershed was the summer 2022 government crisis, which provided a golden opportunity for FdI to cut a credible and well-reputed figure and make inroads into government. On 21 July 2022, then Prime Minister Draghi, a highly esteemed and trusted character at international level, lost parliamentary majority. Once the precarious compromise between ideologically disparate political forces underlying the political equilibrium had faltered, Draghi tendered his resignations. Italy's epochal political change was just around the corner and materialised as a result of the snap elections held on 25 September 2022. The populist radical right FdI joined forces with the populist radical right Lega and the populist right Forza Italia (FI) in the so-called 'centre-right' coalition (Bruno, 2023). Both the Lega and FI share an emphasis on conservative values, the protection of the national in-group, law and order, people-centrism and anti-elitism. These ideological features are, however, toned down in FI and more accentuated in the Lega, which promotes a strong state, nativism, and sharper populism, here articulated around the axes of people-centrism and anti-elitism.

FdI's coalition partners have a longer historical trajectory, starting with the opportunity, offered by the corruption scandal of *Tangentopoli*[2] in 1993, of arising as alleged defenders of the 'people' vis-à-vis the corrupt political system (Albertazzi, Vampa, 2021b). The Lega is also different from FdI in its initial essence: it started out as a regionalist party defending and demanding the autonomy of the so-called *Padania* (i.e., an imagined territory and community located in the North of the Italian peninsula), vis-à-vis the national government (Albertazzi, Vampa, 2021b). When the Lega founder Umberto Bossi fell into disregard and Matteo Salvini took on party leadership in 2013, the Lega underwent a nationalist shift away from regionalism and towards fully-fledged nationalism (Albertazzi, Giovannini, Seddone, 2018). Furthermore, both Silvio Berlusconi and Matteo Salvini boast a career at the helm of government, with Berlusconi heading three governments (1994; 2011-2006; 2008-2011), and Salvini co-heading the 2018-2019 Conte I government.

Given the different histories, leadership experiences, and ideological nuances characterising the centre-right coalition, internal squabbles are unsurprising. Berlusco-

---

[1] Following March's (2017) distinction of populism into people-centrism, anti-elitism, and popular sovereignty claims.

[2] Literally, *bribe city*.

ni's antics outlasted his electoral success, with Berlusconi being caught on camera in Parliament with a handwritten list of degrading adjectives branding Meloni as "opinionated, domineering, arrogant and offensive" (Kazmin, 2022). This was the result of frustration at Meloni's refusal to give Berlusconi's pupil Licia Ronzulli a key ministry. The scribbled note came under the limelight when Berlusconi had an altercation with the Speaker of the Senate Ignazio La Russa (FdI), apparently over Berlusconi's order to FI senators not to vote for La Russa as Speaker of the Senate. While avoiding explicit fights with Meloni, Salvini still resists being side-lined by her. In his speech given on 26 September 2022, in the wake of the Lega's electoral defeat and the FdI's victory, Salvini sternly recognised Meloni's achievements, but cleverly concealed his party's defeat under a mantle of glorification for the Lega's achievements and its important task of being part of the winning centre-right coalition: "We shoulder a huge burden. (…) The Lega is the second party in government", Salvini boisterously claimed. Berlusconi's and Salvini's resistance to Meloni's leadership goes beyond anecdotal value, since it captures well their fear of being eclipsed by the undisputable winner of the elections.

FROM THE RIGHT…TO THE CENTRE?

The undeniable victory of FdI over its coalition partners raised apprehension among scholars and pundits, due to the neofascist lineage that sets FdI apart from FI and the Lega. While in the section above this article already set out its categorisation of FdI within the populist radical right, the move of FdI into power has implied moderating shifts towards the centre, and continuity with manifesto pledges, alternated with radicalising shifts towards the farther right end of the political spectrum. Indeed, the entry into government of the populist radical right does not unequivocally portend utter moderation or utter radicalisation across the board. In certain cases, participation in government has become a proxy for moderation, but taking up government positions is not the only condition for moderation, which may be driven by other factors, such as the need to broaden the electorate by co-opting ideological elements of mainstream parties. Moreover, entering government does not necessarily result in moderation. Instead, three possible scenarios open up when a party takes up governmental seats: moderation, radicalisation, or continuity. According to the inclusion-moderation hypothesis (Berman, 2008), some parties may moderate when entering public office, in order to appeal to

the median voter, develop policies, attend to day-to-day business, and reach compromises with coalition partners (Akkerman *et al.*, 2016; Berman, 2008). First, following the Downsian logic, parties entering democratic institutions strive to appeal to voters positioned at the middle of the political spectrum to enlarge their electorate and maintain their office (Akkerman *et al.*, 2016). Plus, parties in public office are committed to policymaking and implementation, in addition to running day-to-day administration (according to the so-called pothole logic) (Berman, 2008).

In the Italian milieu, FdI's need to attract the median voter and project themselves as responsible and responsive administrators tending to daily business and to the design and implementation of policies seems to be a plausible scenario supporting the inclusion-moderation theory. Even if FdI is the majority party in the centre-right coalition, they still need to keep the majority to stay in their leading position, by securing broad electoral consent. Digging deeper into the past behaviour of the Italian populist radical right when in power, one finds no scholarly consensus around the applicability of the inclusion-moderation thesis. Cavalieri and Froio (2021), using the analysis of parliamentary questions from 1996 to 2019 in Italy, demonstrate that populist parties in office do not behave radically, given institutional constraints and the desire to present themselves as responsible. Heinisch (2003) shows that the Lega in the 1994 centre-right coalition government did not deliver on its radical promises. However, institutionalisation does not always have a taming effect. Zulianello (2019) theorises that, through negative integration, populist parties in government retain their ideology challenging liberal democratic values of checks and balances and of pluralism. Minkenberg (2001) demonstrates that populists in government radicalised their positions on immigration, and Albertazzi and McDonnell (2005) argue that the Lega in centre-right government coalitions steered a middle course and kept "one foot in, and one foot out" of government. More recently, Schwörer (2021), based on the analysis of political communication on Facebook, shows that the Lega did not moderate its nativist messages when in the Conte I government with the Movimento Cinque Stelle (M5S) (2018-2019).

FdI's leading role in government is itself a sign of the mainstreaming of this political party that, after building its reputation as an opposition party, was catapulted into public office. The Meloni government was quickly formed, compared to past governments that entailed a much longer negotiation period (Vampa, 2023), thus signalling responsiveness to and responsibility towards the 'people'. Despite vetoes on portfolio

allocation and intra-coalition disagreements, the resulting government composition reflects the FdI's trajectory into mainstream political power. Due to the compromise necessary to alleviate intra-coalition tensions, the number of ministries allocated to each party corresponds to the weight of said parties within the winning coalition. Out of 25 ministries, FdI gained 10 key ministries, twice as many as the Lega and FI pooled together (Openpolis, 2022). The presence of 5 so-called technical ministries is a testament of the intentions of FdI not to create a radical government, but to rely on experts allegedly without political affiliation. Nevertheless, most of the technical ministers are considered close to Italian right-wing parties, including Ministry of the Interior Matteo Piantedosi (former chief-of-staff of Salvini when he was Minister of the Interior), Minister of Culture Gennaro Sangiuliano, and Minister of Sports and Youth Andrea Abodi, whose political histories intersect with that of the MSI.

In the first few months of its life, Meloni's government combined moderate "reasonable and accommodating" measures and discourse, with a "frightening rhetoric" (Jones 2023, pp. 21-22), complemented with occasional slippages into more radical undertones. This clever combination has been boosted by a very well-thought-out marketing and communication strategy, led by the FdI's spin-doctor Tommaso Longobardi, who has carefully optimised messages and tailored them to a vast array of social media channels, including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and TikTok (Pregliasco, 2022), acting as echo chambers to amplify Meloni's messages. When officially presenting herself in her new role as Prime Minister, Meloni projected a soft-spoken and sugarcoated image of herself as a politician, a mother, and a woman, through an appeal to her ordinariness, and her phenomenal rise to prominence from humble origins (Meloni Discorso alle Elezioni, 2022). Meloni's self-representation as an underdog (Meloni Discorso in Camera, 2022), fighting her way from a marginalised neighbourhood in Rome to the Prime Minister role, is in line with the appeal to the people as the ordinary women and men struggling with their daily lives. In such a way, the FdI's appeal extends beyond the hardliners and involves a broader electorate: Meloni captures not necessarily radical voters, but also those seeking change and fresh air, disenchanted at the management of security, immigration, the economy, foreign relations, and the gender question by previous governing parties. FdI is now very satisfactorily polling at 29.7% (Quorum/YouTrend, 2023), and the first 100 days of Meloni's government have been judged as positive or fairly positive by 46% of survey respondents (Quorum/YouTrend, 2023). Moreover, the Global Leaders Approval Ratings produced for the last week of January 2023 by The Morning Consult ranked Meloni sixth among the leaders of 22 countries (Morning Consult, 2023). Despite the sample being very limited and the geographical scope for comparison restricted, the mere fact that Meloni garnered 52% of approval from Italians is revealing of her unwaning popularity (Morning Consult, 2023).

MELONI'S MAKEOVER

Meloni's elision of her own political persona with the figure of an ordinary woman and an underdog has a twofold significance for the conundrum over the continuity, moderation or radicalisation of the party in power. First, Meloni signals her "closeness to the people", which is a key feature of populist parties (Albertazzi, van Kessel, 2021, p. 366). This does not imply any radical swing, and links back to Meloni's anti-elitist and people-centric stance that has been on display since the FdI's inception. It is a case in point that the 2022 FdI manifesto mentioned the terms "popular sovereignty" and "people sovereignty". Second, an aura of "civicness" as opposed to radicalism (Griffini, 2021) permeates all of Meloni's speeches through an emphasis on civic values, such as the respect for the EU, the rule of law, national security, and women's rights. These claims to ordinariness and civicness erect a façade that invisibilises more radical authoritarian, nativist, and reactionary ideological aspects of the new government led by FdI's Meloni. The strategy of building a civic façade has been observed in populist radical right parties across Europe (Halikiopoulou, Mock, Vasilopoulou, 2013), as an effort towards moderation of ideology and policies, and mainstreaming into leading positions of power.

Meloni's makeover as a moderate politician takes place not just in the domestic, but also in the international sphere, in the EU and beyond. This choice aligns with the FdI 2022 manifesto pledge to relaunch the EU as evidenced by the strategic selection of the EU as the destination of Meloni's first foreign trip, including a meeting with President of the EU Commission Ursula von der Leyen (who had previously expressed scepticism about Meloni's ability to rule), and with President of the EU Parliament Charles Michel (Roberts, Ross, 2022). The destination choice is a powerful statement of respect for the EU and of Meloni's commitment to the EU to ensure Italian economic stability. Clearly, Meloni backtracked on her fervent Euroscepticism (Puleo, Piccolino, 2022), despite being President of the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) EU parliamentary group since 2021, which is located further to the right compared to

the more established European Popular Party (EPP) parliamentary group. Von der Leyen's visit to Meloni in Rome in January 2023 has been perceived as part of the attempt made by the EPP (to which von der Leyen belongs) to start a cooperation with the ECR led by Meloni (Vinocur, Barigazzi, 2023). FdI, indeed, before the 2022 elections enacted a moderating shift away from radical conflictual stances against the EU, towards the centre, with a pondered acceptance of the EU. This shift is aimed at gaining a respectable reputation abroad, thus ensuring beneficial and profitable international agreements on matters ranging from energy security to border security and economic funding. A well-respected international standing, in turn, enhances domestic popularity among the electorate. A moderate stance in the international arena could be already made out during the electoral campaign, in which FdI pledged its respect for the EU as an institution, but aimed at renegotiating with the EU the terms of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (known in Italy as with the acronym PNRR) (Garzia, 2022),[3] on the grounds of their alleged unfairness to Italy (FdI 2022 manifesto).

Furthermore, Meloni has so far boosted her moderation and acceptance within a mainstream electorate, by remaining faithful to her electoral pledges of Atlanticism and support for Ukraine against the Russian invader (Chiaramonte *et al.*, 2023; FdI manifesto, 2022). The close diplomatic ties with Ukraine and with the EU are confirmed by Meloni's notable meeting in Kiev with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyi (Giuffrida, 2023). In the run-up to the 2022 elections, the foreign policy positions on Russia's invasion of Ukraine distinguished Meloni from Salvini, who failed to unequivocally condemn Putin's invasion of Ukraine, and displayed erratic behaviour. First, in March 2022, he clumsily visited Przemyls, a Polish town on the border with Ukraine, which resulted in him being ridiculed by the town mayor owing to Salvini's past friendship records with Putin (Il Sole 24 Ore, 2022). Then, in June 2022, he unsuccessfully attempted a visit to Moscow (Posaner, 2022). Meloni's and Salvini's diverging positions on the war in Ukraine created a fissure within the government coalition, and underlined Meloni's moderate stance with regards to the matter.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Meloni's domestic and international self-representation is at odds with the modest oscillation to radicalism visible in the naming of certain ministries and in the choice of the highest parliamentary officeholders.[4] FdI's founder Ignazio La Russa was elected Speaker of the Senate, after thunderous contestation, because of his vaunted neofascist roots evidently belied by the fascist memorabilia on display in his home (Castaldo, 2018). La Russa's counterpart in the Chamber of Deputies is Lorenzo Fontana, former Lega MEP, Eurosceptic and ultra-reactionary, amongst the founders of the World Congress of Families, an ultra-Christian association opposing LGBTQ+ rights and abortion (Migliaccio, 2022). Although the Speakers of the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies are elected by the parliament, they represent the second and third highest offices of the state, they moderate and steer parliamentary activities, and represent the PM in her absence. Their election, therefore, symbolises the parliamentary majority's slight swing away from the centre.

The nomenclature of newly created or rebranded ministries is a further sign of centrifugal forces, although it reflects principles already enunciated in the FdI 2022 manifesto. The renaming of the Ministry of Economic Development into Ministry of Business and *Made in Italy*, and the rebranding of the Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies Agriculture with the addition of the term *sovereignty* reveal continuity with the FdI 2022 manifesto pledge to valorise "Italian excellence in the cultural, gastronomic, architectural, luxury, and entrepreneurial fields", and to bolster the agricultural sector, "one of the pillars of our Nation". The promise has also resulted in the creation of a fund for the Made in Italy, worth €5 million in 2023 and €95 million in 2024, and the allocation of a fund worth €25 million in the period 2023-26 for matters related to food sovereignty (Legge n.129, 29/12/22). The rebranding of these two ministries is in line with the Lega's and FdI's call for "taking back control" of the Italian economy that has been affected by processes of globalisation (Basile, Borri, 2022, pp. 366-367). Hence, the populist radical right aims at restoring sovereignty over national economic policy, which is blended with anti-globalism and a tenuous Euroscepticism (Mazzoleni, Ruzza, 2018). In doing so, populist radical right parties defend the national interest of the state vis-à-vis external threats, embodied, in this case, by the EU regulations on trade and agriculture, and by the global commodity chain that

---

[3] In Italian, *Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza*. It refers to the funds granted by the EU to Italy, upon approval of Draghi's demands, as part of Next Generation EU, to facilitate economic recovery after the Covid-19 pandemic. The amount of funds is divided into different instalments, whose disbursement is contingent upon meeting the criteria established jointly by the EU member state and the EU. The PNRR main pillars are green transition, digital transition, and social inclusion (Albanese, Simoni, 2022).

[4] For the full list of ministries and minister, see the Decreto-Legge 11 November 2022, n. 173.

sees Italian products as niche ones, and outcompeted by cheaper products manufactured in countries where the cost of labour and of means of production is cheaper.

The centrifugal force that sometimes entraps FdI is obvious in the rebranding of the Ministry for Family and Equal Opportunities with the insertion of the term *natality* as the centre-piece of the Ministry. The latter is headed by Eugenia Maria Roccella, whose appointment indicates a possible drift towards radical threats to abortion and LGBTQ+ rights. Although Meloni and Roccella swore they would protect the right of abortion, they epitomise the ambivalent gender policies of the populist radical right. On one hand, they allegedly protect women's rights; on the other hand, they are bound to a reactionary view of abortion rights, of women as intrinsically tied to motherhood, and of the sceptically-defined "gender theory", i.e. awareness of LGBTQ+ rights (see FdI representatives' declaration in Alliva, 2022).

Let's unravel the government's duplicity on gender matters more in depth. Meloni portrays herself as the embodiment of the emancipation of women, since she managed to break the glass ceiling of male-dominated politics. In her maiden speech in Parliament, she proudly affirmed: "I am the first woman to become Italy's Prime Minister. I have an enormous responsibility towards women who are victims of difficulties and injustice preventing them to affirm their talent or have their daily sacrifices recognised. (…) I owe a debt of gratitude to the women who enabled me to rise up the ladder and break the glass ceiling" (TG la7, 2022). Aligning with the FdI 2022 manifesto pledge of facilitating women's juggling of professional lives and motherhood, Meloni forcefully represents herself as a protector of women's rights and their affirmation inside and outside of the domestic sphere, thus alleviating "women's double-burden".[5] Fiscal relief for families depending on the number of children, which is included in the end-of-year Budget Law (discussed below), can be interpreted as a non-radical measure geared towards the protection of women's rights.

However, undisputable evidence shows a shift of the new government away from moderation. Meloni's enduring alliance with the Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orbán and Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki (Jones, 2023), infamously known for their anti-abortion and anti-LGBTQ+ rights, casts a shadow over Meloni's claim of supporting women's rights. On the prickly issue of abortion, lack of specificity in the FdI 2022 manifesto regarding the "prevention" of abor-

tion allowed FdI to defuse criticism about a potential threat to abortion rights, while nodding at reactionary hostility to abortion. Roccella publicly stated that abortion is, "unfortunately", a women's right (La Stampa, 2023), and in the first 100 days of government, already four parliamentarians from FdI and their coalitional allies Lega and FI proposed bills insisting on the rights of the foetus. This hesitant stance on abortion rights risks infringing on women's reproductive rights and turning women's rights protection into a battle for the survival of the nation through the increase in natality rates (Colella, 2022). The 2022 FdI manifesto implies that abortion may be averted through financial aid to single mothers-to-be or pregnant women in financial hardships. This abortion prevention policy is meant to increase natality rates, which have been constantly dwindling. Indeed, benefits have been introduced for families with children, which would in turn increase natality. Other reactionary and radical gender-related principles guiding the new government are the protection of the supposedly 'traditional family' and of women's motherhood. Judging by the ministerial picks, the government is leaning towards a harsh rejection of the so-called "womb for rent", i.e., surrogacy, and of the right of adoption for civil partnerships (which in Italy lack legal equivalence to civil or religious marriage) as anticipated in the FdI 2022 manifesto.

FIRST THINGS FIRST: DOMESTIC SECURITY AND THE ANTI-RAVE DECREE

Not only boosting natality, but another government recipe to protect the nation is to boost security, in accordance with the FdI 2022 manifesto pledge of combating "degradation, drugs, and illegal activities". The protection of security and legality is not a guiding principle exclusive to the populist radical right. However, the scale of the emphasis put on law and order in the new government stands out. The very first bill proposed was, indeed, a decree-law against rave parties. Amidst the energy crisis, the cost-of-living crisis, the Ukrainian conflict, and the transition out of the pandemic, it sounds odd that the fixation of FdI was on raves, which are public gatherings held illegally on public or private soil, featuring loud techno music and drugs. Following the event of a banal rave party being held in Modena, the newly-sworn-in Minister of the Interior Piantedosi issued the so-called Anti-Rave Decree, which, at a closer reading, does not mention raves, but gatherings characterised by "the arbitrary invasion of public or private property, carried out by a group of more than 50 peo-

---

[5] The double-burden, or 'double-shift', refers to the dual involvement of women in paid work outside their household, and in the unpaid care work inside their household (Hochschield, Machung, 2012).

ple [...] which *may* be a danger for public order or public health and safety" (Decreto-Legge n.162, 2022). In constitutional terms public gatherings may be banned only if they show evidence of menacing public order (Pini, 2022). However, in the Anti-Rave Decree the *evidence* of threat to public order as grounds for banning gatherings is replaced by the *possibility* of a threat to public order, as Partito Democratico (PD) representative Giuditta Pini (2022) criticises. Despite the criticism, the Anti-Rave Decree was turned into law at the eleventh-hour before the expiration of its validity, albeit with some modifications. In fact, the vagueness of the characterisation of "public gatherings" in the decree-law was overcome through a more precise definition of the banned public gatherings: the scope of such definition has been limited to "musical gatherings", thus excluding the spectre of an authoritarian state precluding the right of assembly criminalising strikes or any other public gatherings of more than 50 people; moreover, forbidden gatherings have to pose a "concrete danger for public health and safety", due to drug-smuggling and non-compliance with health and safety measures (Legge n. 199, 2022).[6]

Raves, therefore, became a flashpoint for the securitisation of society, through the introduction of a new crime type, which gives power to arrest, detain from 3 to 6 years, and give a fine between €1,000 and €10,000 to the event organisers (Decreto-Legge n.162, 2022). The Anti-Rave Decree is symptomatic of the construction of an emergency over unauthorised public events. "For a long time there have been people from all over Europe flocking to Italy to organise illegal gatherings plagued with violence and drugs, for the sake of having fun. Why are they choosing Italy as their destination, and they do not choose to go to France or Spain? Because we allow them [to hold these parties]", claimed Meloni (Appunti di Giorgia, 3/12/2022). Also the Lega Chair of the Parliamentary Group on Justice Erika Stefani joined in the construction of a rave emergency, by affirming that raves bring insecurity, danger and critical consequences (ANSA, 2022). National security is heavy on the government's mind: Meloni said goodbye to 2022 with the promise of defending the rule of law, because Italy is not a "banana republic" (Appunti di Giorgia, 30/12/22), and she welcomed 2023 by proudly announcing that in 9 days, the government operation *stazioni sicure* (literally, *safe stations*) had yielded satisfactory results: 1.5 kg of drugs were confiscated and 93 illegal migrants had been expelled (Appunti di Giorgia, 29/01/23).

The perception of emergency, though, is often subjective and may be subject to instrumentalisation by

populist radical right parties pandering to the fear of the ordinary people, in order to make shows of strength and bypass the regular parliamentary route of law-making. Indeed, decree laws (which need to be approved by Parliament within 60 days in order to become laws) are used to push for the government agenda by avoiding the ordinary lengthier and more contentious parliamentary route (Giannetti *et al.*, 2020). The Anti-Rave Decree was turned into law last-minute on 30 December 2022 (Il Sole 24 Ore, 2022). Despite its authoritarian tendencies, in her maiden speech in Parliament, Meloni relentlessly proclaimed FdI's pledge to liberty and democracy (2022), thus putting an accent on the FdI's trajectory towards the centre. Moreover, on the same occasion, Meloni made a major statement and denied any sympathy for anti-democratic regimes, including fascism; she denounced the 1938 racial laws as shameful, and vowed to combat racism and anti-Semitism (2022). This ingenious mix of moderate statements with more radical ones results in strategic ambivalence (Wodak, 2015), which is a discursive strategy deployed both to appeal to the core radical electorate and to extend the appeal to the median voter.

THE IMMIGRATION QUESTION AND DIPLOMATIC SKIRMISHES

National security is fostered also through the management of the immigration question. The FdI 2022 manifesto clearly proposed to control illegal immigration by stopping migrant arrivals, enacting a naval blockade, and establishing hot-spots in North Africa jointly with EU member states working together for an even distribution of regular migrants. Incidentally, the puzzles magazine handed out by FdI in the latest electoral campaign, contained a quiz asking what FdI's proposal for irregular immigration was. The correct reply was "naval blockade", among the unlikely options "open ports" and "money to people-smugglers" (Enigmistica dei patrioti, 2022). Apart from anecdotal evidence of the FdI's tough stance on immigration proving its strong state and nativist hues, the occasion to test the manifesto pledge arose early and triggered a diplomatic incident with France. In October 2022, the vessel *Ocean Viking*, belonging to the NGO *SOS Méditerranée*, was redirected by Minister of the Interior Piantedosi from Italian ports to the French Port of Toulon. France Minister of the Interior Gerald Darmanin deemed the Italian decision as incomprehensible and, in revenge, encouraged all EU member states to follow France in suspending the reception of refugees now transiting in Italy. The government's insistence on the reception of migrants on the part of France is con-

---

[6] For the full text, see Legge 30 December 2022, n. 199.

sistent with Meloni's emphasis on the need for a concerted effort, likened to the Marshall Plan, on the part of European states to share the burden of migrant reception (Meloni Discorso alla Camera, 2022). Minister of Foreign Affairs Antonio Tajani saw France retaliations as "disproportionate measures", and Minister of the Interior Piantedosi labelled them as "incomprehensible" (ANSA 2022). When faced with France's firm response, the government's audaciousness died out as Meloni tried to quell the controversy (Jones, 2023).

This dispute between Italy and France on migration matters had wider resonances in terms of migration policy and nativism. The very first decree that the government passed in 2023 was the Decree-Law n. 1, 2 January 2023, labelled by pundits as "code of conduct for NGOs", which further limits the cases that qualify for a waiver of the government's right to ban migrant boats from docking in Italian ports. This suggests continuity with the FdI 2022 manifesto pledge to "contrast NGO's facilitating irregular immigration", and also with the FdI's core nativist ideology, which perceives immigrants as dangerous Others not belonging to the national ingroup and possibly menacing the security, wealth, culture, public health of the Italian nation (Griffini, 2021). According to Meloni's argument put forward in her vlog series *Appunti di Giorgia* two days before the decree-law on NGOs was passed, Italy must rescue only the migrants fortuitously found at sea or the migrants risking their lives (Appunti di Giorgia, 30/12/22). In keeping with the civic mantle cloaking less civic core values, and with strategic ambiguity, the populist radical right has stressed its respect for international migrant rights, with the caveat that Italy cannot provide "taxies for people smugglers" and that the government must have "the courage to look straight without looking at anyone in their eyes" (Appunti di Giorgia, 30/12/23). While, at the time of writing, whether the decree will be converted into law and with which amendments is unknown, it is certain that this decree-law contravenes the international right of being rescued when stranded at sea, despite Meloni forcefully arguing that "if somebody risks their life, they must be saved; they must not be exploited by human smugglers" (Appunti di Giorgia, 30/12/22). The "necessity and urgency to adopt rules on search and rescue operations" is a clear nod at the logics of emergency discussed in the previous section on the Anti-Rave Decree (Decreto-Legge n. 1, 2023), tightly knit with the populist radical right's call for a strong state.

The diplomatic skirmish and the consequent decree-law point in two oddly conjoined positions: continuity and radicalisation. Meloni's securitisation of borders is in line with her manifesto pledges and with her trademark nativism. Securitisation of borders hinges on the perception of immigrant' disembarking as a threat to national security, thus resulting in their criminalisation (Berti, 2021; Rosina, 2022), and on the differentiation of immigration between allegedly deserving refugees and allegedly undeserving economic migrants, which goes hand-in-hand with the criminalisation of irregular migrants (Griffini, 2022). The 2022 FdI manifesto even declared that irregular immigration should be fought with the deployment of a naval blockade. Overall, a naval blockade has not been implemented (yet), but the blocking of NGOs from rescuing migrants stranded at sea is a step beyond the contrast to NGO's aid to irregular immigration enunciated in the FdI 2022 manifesto. Indeed, it is a sign of a move towards the farther right end of the political spectrum.

More broadly on the nativist front, Meloni is more solidly anchored to the right end than to the centre of the political spectrum: the championing of the nation above any partisan interest, as declared in her maiden speech in Parliament (2022), transmutes into a veneer for the championing of the so-called Western civilisation, grounded in the Judeo-Christian tradition, and allegedly based on the principles of liberty, equality, and democracy. Even if Meloni explicitly eschews racism, the identification of the West as the cradle of liberal democracy acts as a civic mantle to hide otherwise racist implications inherent to the representation of non-Western immigrant as alien to democracy and Western values. The Othering of the immigrant as cast in neat opposition to the Italian nation transpires from Meloni's maiden speech in Parliament, when she addressed the black activist and trade unionist Aboubakaré Soumahoro,[7] the only elected Black MP, using the Italian informal way, i.e. "tu" (Corriere della Sera, 2022). While this may have gone unnoticed to many, some more critical listeners spotted the colonial echoes intrinsic to addressing the Other with the informal "tu". MP Soumahoro himself denounced Meloni's reproduction of colonial rhetoric that seeks to belittle and patronise the Other by addressing them in an informal manner, as stated in a Twitter post.

AN ELEVENTH-HOUR BUDGET, ECONOMIC, AND FINANCIAL LAW

The FdI government has embarked on the complicated path of conjuring up an image of political and

---

[7] Soumahoro became later entangled in a scandal charging his in-laws of fraud and migrant exploitation in Italian cooperatives employing immigrant workers. Soumahoro, who himself had gone through the toiling on Italian fields and the struggle against gangmasters, was accused of being aware of his in-laws' wrongdoings (Broder, 2023).

economic stability. Meloni was tasked with filling in big shoes after Draghi's responsible and moderate economic trajectory. So far, in this field, Meloni has steered a moderate course. In one episode of her series "Gli Appunti di Giorgia", Meloni proudly praised the government efficiency in passing the *Manovra*, which, she stresses, is in line with the FdI 2022 manifesto pledges about increasing employment and natality rates, helping new mothers and mothers-to-be as well as small and medium-sized enterprises (Appunti di Giorgia, 30/12/22). The goal is to comply with EU recommendations on fiscal matters (Jones, 2023). The *Manovra* entailed a €10 billion budget; while an analysis of the ideological influences on the *Manovra* deserves a whole separate article, this article will limit its scope to the main measures introduced, which may signal the party's moderation or radicalisation.

First of all, the *Manovra* (Legge n. 129, 29/12/22) fulfilled the 2022 FdI manifesto pledge of keeping fiscal reliefs for buildings renovations and ameliorations, in order to fuel economic development. The so-called *bonus mobili[8]* consisting of tax reductions on the purchase of environmental-friendly new furniture and home appliances was extended, and its scope broadened to cover expenses up to €8,000; the so-called *superbonus* applying to building renovations and ameliorations in the interest of improving energy efficiency was extended, even if the average amount of tax reductions was brought down from 110% to 90% for most interventions. These measures appeased the coalition, but also the M5S, which had pressed the Draghi government to extend and enhance the *superbonus*. They also clearly align with the government's goal to ease the economic crisis, and benefit homeowners, as well as small and medium enterprises involved in the renovations. This goal is not entailing any shift of the government on the moderation v. radicalisation axis.

The activity and financial sustainability of small and medium-sized enterprises are also facilitated by tax credits (Legge n. 129, 29/12/22). While the *superbonus* and *bonus mobili* involved the whole population, fiscal incentives to hire on a permanent contract those holding a fixed-term contract is meant to spur employment, which converges with the 2022 FdI manifesto pledges. What is interesting is that incentives to firms to hire new personnel on permanent contracts are especially aimed at under-36 women and at those receiving the universal basic income. This is not an insignificant detail. First, it is the incarnation of the 2022 FdI manifesto promise to enhance women's employment and to eliminate the universal basic income, which is to be phased out for those able to work by 2024. Clearly, this

move has been passed to the dismay of the M5S, who backstabbed the Draghi government because of Draghi's lack of support for the universal basic income introduced by the Lega-M5S government (2018-2019). Second, in keeping with Meloni's slogan "I am a woman, I am a mother", it is predictable that families play a protagonist role within the *Manovra*. Indeed, financial aid disbursed to families with three or more children has been increased by 100%, while for families with less than three children the increase would be by 50% (Legge n. 129, 29/12/22). Pro-natality measures include also a better paid parental leave (Legge n. 129, 29/12/22).

Indicative of Italy's reliance on cash and hesitancy in using card payments, as well as Italy's scourge of rampant tax evasion, the focal point of public and political debate around the *Manovra* became the question of the threshold of the amount of cash that could be withdrawn monthly from banks, which rose from €1,000 to €5,000 (Legge n. 129, 29/12/22). This measure was dubiously justified as helping small enterprises. Another issue of contention was the removal of the excise duty relief measures introduced by Draghi. This decision was corroborated by detailed statistical evidence about the null if not minimal impact of this policy on fuel prices, showing Meloni's close attention to ordinary people's apprehension over fuel prices (Gli Appunti di Giorgia, 11/1/23). Indeed, the funds saved from excise duty relief were channelled into other priority areas: healthcare; families, depending on the number of children they had; small and medium-sized enterprises. The goal of the whole *Manovra*, was, therefore, the moderate one of helping those in need, families with children, the ordinary people, and small and medium-sized enterprises, with the overall aim to "increase social justice" (Gli Appunti di Giorgia, 11/1/23).

Although no policy contained by the *Manovra* went undebated, the pivotal point of and the main tug-of-war between the Lega and FdI during the electoral campaign was the definition of the scope of the flat tax (FdI Comizio, 2022). In the realm of fiscal policy, Meloni blunted the edges of Salvini's overly ambitious proposal of a flat tax fixed at 15% for the self-employed and the employees. Instead, the new government increased the self-employed income ceiling (to which the 15% flat tax is applied) from €65,000 to €85,000 (Legge n. 129, 29/12/22). Moreover, the flat tax set at 15% is paid on incremental income calculated on the basis of the income gained in the previous three years (Legge n. 129, 29/12/22). The flat tax has been hailed by FdI frontman La Russa and frontwoman Santanché as the fair measure to reward those who generate employment, as "it is the wealthy who create jobs" (FdI Comizio, 2022). Unsur-

---

[8] Literally, *furniture bonus*.

prisingly, the flat tax has been criticised by experts as an "indication that [the Meloni government] is wedded to neo-liberal orthodoxy and trickle-down economics" (Newell, 2023, 2). It is a case in point that Meloni claimed that the *Manovra* mirrors the 2022 FdI manifesto promise to provide incentives to "those who want to produce wealth" and "those who roll up their sleeves" (Appunti di Giorgia, 30/12/2022). Overall, apart from the flat tax bowing to the interests of the wealthy, the entrepreneurs, and the self-employed, the *Manovra* cannot be rigidly encased within a neoliberal ideology, as, in a statist and welfarist way, it demonstrates the closeness of the government to the ordinary people, especially the unemployed, small and medium entrepreneurs, mothers, and families. Therefore, it is definitely not a radical measure. Instead, Meloni, in her first 100 days of government, cultivated an image of continuity with the Draghi moderate economic agenda. This is an offshoot of the shift enacted by the populist radical right towards moderate economic positions (De Lange, 2007).

CONCLUSION

In 2022 Italy experienced a particularly heated political summer, after Draghi's resignation as Prime Minister triggered a political crisis and a feverish political campaign. Draghi's technocratic government left the political stage to the first wholly populist radical right government in Italy where the populist radical right is not a junior party.[9] FdI emerged as the major political force in the 'centre-right coalition' and whether FdI would moderate or radicalise once in power became a puzzle for many commentators. Despite being set up in the relatively short period of one month, the composition of the new government spearheaded by Meloni entailed complex negotiations between FdI, and its government coalition partners FI and Lega. The rebranding and renaming of ministries, and the appointment of posts ranging from ministers, to Speakers of the Chamber of Deputies and of the Senate portended seismic political changes. However, once the government was sworn in, the Meloni agenda was framed in a moderate way, to deflect possible criticisms of being imbued with neofascist legacies and radical elements. Meloni seems to have been successful at wooing the public. In January 2023, a poll gauging Italian's trust in Meloni's first 100 days of government revealed that close to 40% of Ital-

ians believe the government's debut has been positive or fairly positive, with foreign policy (20%), energy policy (20%), economic policy (20%), immigration policy (14%), and security policy (13%) ranking in the first five places in the areas Meloni's government is garnering most of the Italians' appreciation (Quorum/YouTrend, 2023).

Seeking to enrich the bourgeoning debate in the literature on the behaviour of Meloni's FdI when in government, the central argument framed by this article is that Meloni's government is walking on the tightrope between moderate and radical ideological elements, as well as elements of continuity with the FdI 2022 manifesto. The balance is skewed in favour of the moderation and continuity. This is not to ignore that the ghost of the neofascist roots of FdI are sometimes embarrassingly resurfacing in the problematic presence of neofascist loose cannons within the party[10], and in the appointment to high office positions within the state of figures toying with radical reactionary ideology, such as the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies Fontana, and figures with an unquestionable neofascist lineage, such as the Speaker of the Senate La Russa. In addition to ministers who have been raised in the ranks of AN and the MSI. The government composition as well as rebranding and renaming of ministries championing economic and agricultural sovereignty, as well as reactionary pro-natality measures, capture a snapshot of radical remnants within the government. Oscillations towards the right end of the spectrum and away from the centre are also perceivable in the government's stance on gender policy, immigration policy, and law and order. However, now these fluctuations have not determined a neat radicalisation of the government. Indeed, they are counterbalanced by oscillations towards the centre, suggestive of an underlying moderation. Such moderation is palpable in Meloni's self-portrayal as ordinary and legitimate, in her (ambiguous) protection of women's rights, in the government's respect for the EU, its condemnation of the Russian aggression in Ukraine, and in the government's budget, fiscal and labour policy. Time will tell whether the predominant stance of moderation and continuity taken by the Meloni government is genuine, or if it is merely a strategic and cosmetic change to boost popularity in polls, bolster international credibility, and please the EU, which is due to disburse €21 billion as the second tranche of the PNRR.

---

[9] FdI always clanged to opposition (Garzia, Karremans, 2021). The populist radical right Lega participated in three Berlusconi-led coalition governments, where it was one of the junior parties, while FI held the majority.

[10] See, for instance, FdI MEP Carlo Fidanza, at the centre of the scandal of the so-called *Lobby Nera* (i.e. Black Lobby) (Fanpage, 2021) uncovering antisemitic and fascist discourse and actions; and Romano La Russa, Ignazio's brother, who was caught on camera making the fascist salute at a funeral the week before the elections, to Meloni's and Ignazio's shame (Berizzi, 2022).

Overall, this article offers a significant contribution to the literature on the behaviour of populist radical right upon entering office, and uncovers interesting new avenues for research. First, a precise and complete assessment of the behaviour of Meloni's government can be delivered only when her term in office expires; second, the literature on populist parties in government would benefit from the comparison between the first Western European wholly populist radical right government and its counterparts in Central and Eastern Europe (e.g. Orbán in Hungary and Morawiecki in Poland), in order to construct a comprehensive typology of populist parties' behaviour when in government based on their coalition partners, if any, and on the country-specific political history and institutional setup.

REFERENCES

Albanese, C., & Simoni, M. (2022, December 8) PNRR e altri acronimi spiegati bene [Audio podcast episode]. In *Politics*. Il Post. https://www.ilpost.it/podcasts/politics/

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

Albertazzi, D., & Bonansinga, D. (2023). Beyond anger: the populist radical right on TikTok. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, DOI: 10.1080/14782804.2022.2163380

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

Albertazzi, D., & McDonnell, D. (2005). The Lega Nord in the second Berlusconi government: In a league of its own. *West European Politics*, 28(5), 952-972. DOI: 10.1080/01402380500310600

Albertazzi, D., & Vampa, D. (2021a). *Populism and New Patterns of Political Competition in Western Europe.* Routledge.

Albertazzi, D., & Vampa, D. (2021b). *Populism in Europe lessons from Umberto Bossi's Northern League.* Manchester University Press.

Albertazzi, D., & van Kessel, S. (2021). Right-Wing Populist Party Organisation Across Europe: The Survival of the Mass-Party? Introduction to the Thematic Issue. *Politics and Governance*, 9(4). https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v9i4.5002

Alliva, S. (2022, October 9). La Destra porta in Parlamento i Pro-Vita: tra cimiteri dei feti e ministeri anti-gender, chi sono i nuovi Pillon. *L'Espresso*. https://espresso.repubblica.it/politica/2022/10/18/news/destra_provita_parlamento-370607707/

Ansa Redazione (2023, January 9). Soumahoro quits Green-Left caucus. *Ansa*. https://www.ansa.it/english/news/politics/2023/01/09/soumahoro-quits-green-left-caucus_08ba3b8d-55cc-4a36-bc62-da5acfd0a9e2.html

Baldini, G., Tronconi, F., & Angelucci, D. (2023). Yet Another Populist Party? Understanding the Rise of Brothers of Italy. *South European Society and Politics*. DOI: 10.1080/13608746.2022.2159625

Berizzi, P. (2022, September 21). Romano La Russa, l'assessore lombardo (fratello di Ignazio) fa il saluto fascista al funerale di un militante di estrema destra. *La Repubblica*. https://milano.repubblica.it/cronaca/2022/09/21/news/romano_la_russa_ignazio_saluto_romano_fascista-366599585/

Berman, S. (2008). Taming Extremist Parties: Lessons from Europe. *Journal of Democracy*, 19(1).

Berti, C. (2021). Right-wing populism and the criminalization of sea-rescue NGOs: the 'Sea-Watch 3' case in Italy, and Matteo Salvini's communication on Facebook. *Media, culture & society*, 4 (3), 532–550.

Broder, D. (2023, January 12). Italy's Only Black MP Is Tangled in In-Laws' Migrant Exploitation Scandal. *Foreign Policy*. https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/01/12/italys-only-black-mp-is-tangled-in-in-laws-migrant-exploitation-scandal/

Bruno, V. A. (2023). 'Centre right? What centre right?' Italy's right-wing coalition: Forza Italia's political 'heritage' and the mainstreaming of the far right. In V. A. Bruno (Ed.), *Populism and Far-Right. Trends in Europe* (pp. 163-19). EDUCatt.

Castaldo, A. (2018, June 7). La Russa e la sua collezione di busti mussoliniani: «Quella volta che presi a schiaffi il leader della Statale. Ancora se li ricorda». *Corriere TV*. https://video.corriere.it/russa-sua-collezione-busti-mussoliniani-quella-volta-che-presi-schiaffi-leader-statale-ancora-se-li-ricorda/e538e85e-680c-11e8-b57b-459a23472be0.

Cavalieri, A., & Froio, C. (2021). The behaviour of populist parties in parliament. The policy agendas of populist and other political parties in the Italian question time. *Italian Political Science Review/Rivista Italiana di Scienza Politica*, 1-14.

Chiaramonte, A., Vincenzo E., Maggini, N., & Paparo, A. (2023). Radical-Right Surge in a Deinstitutionalised Party System: The 2022 Italian General Election. *South European Society and Politics*. DOI: 10.1080/13608746.2022.2160088

Colella, D. (2021). Femonationalism and anti-gender backlash: the instrumental use of gender equality in the nationalist discourse of the Fratelli d'Italia party. *Gender & Development*, 29(2-3), 269-289.

Corriere Redazione (2022, October 25). Meloni dà del tu al deputato Soumahoro e poi chiede scusa: «Ho sbagliato». *Corriere della Sera*. https://video.corriere.it/politica/meloni-da-tu-deputato-soumahoro-poi-chiede-scusa/57511658-5482-11ed-a58a-ad027d5a5146

Decreto-Legge n. 162. 31 October 2022. https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2022/10/31/22G00176/sg

Decreto-Legge n. 173. 11 November 2022. https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2022/11/11/22G00185/sg

Decreto-Legge n. 199. 30 December 2022. https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2022/12/30/22G00209/sg

Decreto-Legge n.1. 2 January 2023. https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/gu/2023/01/02/1/sg/pdf

De Lange, S. L. (2007). A new winning formula? The programmatic appeal of the radical right. *Party Politics,* 13(4), 411–435.

Diamanti, G. (2018, May 26). Il posizionamento di Fratelli d'Italia. *YouTrend*. https://www.youtrend.it/2018/05/26/blog-il-posizionamento-di-fratelli-d-italia-giorgia-meloni/

Fanpage (2022, October 7). Lobby Nera. Inchiesta sulla destra neofascista. *Fanpage*. https://www.fanpage.it/backstair/story/lobby-nera/

Fratelli d'Italia (2022, September 9). *Comizio elettorale a Cremona*.

Fratelli d'Italia (2022). *Il Programma. Pronti a risollevare l'Italia*. https://www.fratelli-italia.it/programma/

Fratelli d'Italia (2022). *L'enigmistica dei patrioti*.

Garzia, D. (2022). The Italian parliamentary election of 2022: the populist radical right takes charge. *West European Politics*. DOI: 10.1080/01402382.2022.2148603

Garzia, D., & Karremans, J. (2021). Super Mario 2: comparing the technocrat-led Monti and Draghi governments in Italy. *Contemporary Italian Politics*. DOI: 10.1080/23248823.2021.1903175

Giannetti, D., Pinto, L., & Plescia, C. (2020). The first Conte government: 'government of change' or business as usual?. *Contemporary Italian Politics*, 12(2), 182-199. DOI: 10.1080/23248823.2020.1745512

Giuffrida, A. (2023, February 21). Italian PM Meloni in Kyiv amid tensions over war within her coalition. *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/feb/21/giorgia-meloni-visit-kyiv-ukraine-voldymyr-zelenskiy-italy

Greco, F. (2013, July 10). Fratelli d'Italia, un trend in crescita. *YouTrend*. https://www.youtrend.it/2013/07/10/fratelli-ditalia-trend-crescita/

Griffini, M. (2022) .'How can you feel guilty for colonialism? it is a folly': colonial memory in the Italian populist radical right. *European Politics and Society*. DOI: 10.1080/23745118.2022.2058753

Griffini, M. (2021). The civic discourse: Representing immigrants in the Italian far right. In A. Auer & J. Thornburn (Eds), *Approaches to migration, language, and identity* (pp. 133–167). Peter Lang.

Halikiopoulou, D., Mock, S., & Vasilopoulou, S. (2013). The civic zeitgeist. *Nations and Nationalism*, 19, 107-127. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-8129.2012.00550.x

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

Il Sole 24 Ore Redazione (2022, March 8). Salvini contestato a Przemysl. Il sindaco: non la ricevo. *Il Sole 24 Ore*. https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/salvini-contestato-przemysl-sindaco-non-ricevo-AEaGEmIB

Il Sole 24 Ore Redazione (2022, December 30). Decreto Rave, scatta la «ghigliottina»: via libera definitivo al testo. «No vax», reintegro dei medici e rinvio multe. *Il Sole 24 Ore*. https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/decreto-rave-perche-scontro-norme-anti-raduno-reintegro-no-vax-e-reati-contro-pa-AEbHcRSC?refresh_ce=1

Jones, E. (2023). Italy's Hard Truths. *Journal of Democracy,* 34(1), 21-35.

Kazmin, A. (2022, October 22). Berlusconi's antics complicate start for Italy's new leader Meloni. *Financial Times*. https://www.ft.com/content/dbc0279b-92e8-469f-ab27-eba663a0ee62

La Stampa Redazione (2023, January 21). Le pari opportunità secondo la ministra Roccella: 'L'aborto è un diritto delle donne? Purtroppo sì'. *La Stampa*. https://www.lastampa.it/politica/2023/01/21/news/le_pari_opportunita_secondo_la_ministra_roccella_laborto_e_un_diritto_delle_donne_purtroppo_si-12596610/

Machung, A., & Hochschild, A. (2012). *The Second Shift: Working Families and the Revolution at Home*. Penguin Publishing Group.

Mammone, A. (2018). È tempo di patrioti. In C. Fumagalli & S. Puttini (Eds), *Destra* (pp. 34-46). Feltrinelli.

March, L. (2017). Left and right populism compared: The British case. *British Journal of Politics & International Relations*, 19(2), 282–303.

Mazzoleni, O., & Ruzza, C. (2018). Combining regionalism and nationalism: the Lega in Italy and the Lega dei Ticinesi in Switzerland. *Comparative European Politics*, 16(6), 976–992.

Meloni, G. (2022). Cerimonia di insediamento del Governo Meloni a Palazzo Chigi, 23 October 2022. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=etvrHwm5S8k

Meloni, G. (2022) Discorso alla Camera, 23 October 2022. https://www.governo.it/it/articolo/le-dichiarazioni-programmatiche-del-governo-meloni/20770

Meloni, G. (2022). Discorso alle elezioni, 25 September 2022. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y9uEZUQ0bfI

Meloni, G. (2022). Gli Appunti di Giorgia, 6 December 2022. https://twitter.com/giorgiameloni/status/1600103836454031360?s=12

Meloni, G. (2022). Gli Appunti di Giorgia, 14 December 2022. https://twitter.com/GiorgiaMeloni/status/1603069556431687681

Meloni, G. (2022). Gli Appunti di Giorgia, 30 December 2022. https://twitter.com/GiorgiaMeloni/status/1608847928625434625

Meloni, G. (2023). Gli Appunti di Giorgia. 11 January 2023. https://twitter.com/GiorgiaMeloni/status/1613125928456159235

Meloni, G. (2023). Gli Appunti di Giorgia. 29 January 2023. https://twitter.com/GiorgiaMeloni/status/1619692196755644422

Migliaccio, A. (2022, October 14). Italy Parliament Names Same-Sex Family Denier as Its New Speaker. *Bloomberg News*. https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-10-14/italy-parliament-names-same-sex-family-denier-as-its-new-speaker?leadSource=uverify%20wall

Ministero dell'Interno (2022). Affluenza e risultati delle elezioni. http://www.prefettura.it/reggiocalabria/contenuti/2022_affluenza_e_risultati_delle_elezioni-12363426.htm

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

Morning Consult (2023, February 2). *Global Leaders Approval ratings*. https://morningconsult.com/global-leader-approval/

Newell, J. (2023). Italian politics at the start of 2023. *Contemporary Italian Politics*. DOI: 10.1080/23248823.2023.2167317

Openpolis (2022, October 25). La composizione del consiglio dei ministri del governo Meloni. *Openpolis*. https://www.openpolis.it/numeri/la-composizione-del-consiglio-dei-ministri-del-governo-meloni/

Pini, G. (2022). Cos'è il "decreto rave"? [Audio podcast episode]. In *Chiedilo alla Pini*. https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/cos%C3%A8-il-decreto-rave/id1633977549?i=1000585288738

Pirro, A. L. P. (2022). Far right: The significance of an umbrella concept. *Nations and Nationalism*, 1-12. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12860

Posaner, J. (2022, June 12). Italy's Salvini under fire over failed Russia trip. *POLITICO*. https://www.politico.eu/article/matteo-salvini-russia-vladimir-putin-trip-moscow-ukraine-war/

Pregliasco, L. (2022, September 14). La strategia di Giorgia Meloni [Audio podcast episode]. In *Elezione Straordinaria*. https://podtail.com/de/podcast/elezione-straordinaria/elezione-straordinaria-ep-19-le-strategie-di-giorg/

Puleo, L., & Piccolino, G. (2022). Back to the Post-Fascist Past or Landing in the Populist Radical Right? The Brothers of Italy Between Continuity and Change. *South European Society and Politics*. DOI: 10.1080/13608746.2022.2126247

Quorum/YouTrend (2023, January 27). *Sondaggio Quorum/YouTrend per SkyTG24*. https://tg24.sky.it/politica/2023/01/27/sondaggi-politici-governo-meloni-regionali

Roberts, H., & Ross, T. (2022, November 3). Italy's Meloni has a message for Brussels: I'm here. *POLITICO*. https://www.politico.eu/article/italy-giorgia-meloni-message-brussels-eu/

Rosina, M. (2022). *The Criminalisation of Irregular Migration in Europe: Globalisation, Deterrence, and Vicious Cycles*. Palgrave.

Schwörer, J. (2021). Less Populist in Power? Online Communication of Populist Parties in Coalition Governments. *Government and Opposition*, 1(27).

TG la7 (2022, October 25). Meloni: "Rotto il tetto di cristallo. Ringrazio le donne che hanno osato. *TG la7*. https://tg.la7.it/politica/meloni-rotto-il-tetto-di-cristallo-ringrazio-le-donne-che-hanno-osato-25-10-2022-177014

Tharoor, I. (2022, July 26). Italy is on its way to being run by 'post-fascists'. *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/07/26/italy-meloni-post-fascists/

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

Vinocur, N., & Barigazzi, J. (2023, January 24). Europe's conservatives want a piece of Giorgia Meloni. *Politico*. https://www.politico.eu/article/far-right-italy-giorgia-meloni-europe-conservatives-want-a-piece/

Zulianello, M. (2019). *Anti-System Parties From Parliamentary Breakthrough to Government*. Routledge.

Special Issue
The 2022 Italian general election
Guest Editors: Arianna Giovannini, Marco Valbruzzi, Davide Vampa