

The Impact of the European Migration Crisis on the Rise of Far-Right Populism in Italy

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“If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences.”

The Child in America: Behavior problems and programs.

W.I. Thomas and D.S. Thomas, 1928

Abstract

The migration crisis that hit the European continent in 2015-16 has been a very hotly debated topic both within and outside of single country borders. The sheer amount of asylum seekers crossing the Mediterranean reaching Europe through land and sea, uncovered the precariousness of not only national policies regarding immigration but also in a more drastic way the insufficient regulations at EU level, and transformed itself into a full-fledged crisis when it couldn't be controlled anymore. In some countries more than others this has created very deep unhappiness within the native societies, which was heavily exploited by xenophobic populist parties. The right-wing parties, typically anti-immigrant, were heavily supporting closed borders and expulsions, and often during this time put their immigration agenda in the forefront of their political programmes, in order to capitalize on people's fears and issue salience. The case of Italy exemplifies how even years after the peak of the migration crisis, the topic of immigration was still given very high importance by individuals, and answering to this salience, the Lega, a right-wing populist party, headed by Matteo Salvini, was able to win over vast amounts of the general electorate, in addition to its already well established supporters in northern Italy. As based on the theory of issue voting and salience of immigration, the Lega created a sort of salience bias in their favour. It is illustrated how its growing following went hand in hand with increased salience of immigration within Italian individuals, easily surpassing the mainstream parties that directed Italian policies until then. The ability to ride this negative wave needs to be taken into account for the future framing of policies at the Italian, and also the European level, so to make sure that people are given concrete and satisfactory solutions, without exploiting their negative feelings.

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
<i>Research Problem</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Research Design.....</i>	<i>7</i>
Chapter 1 – The Refugee Crisis.....	10
<i>1.1 The Crisis and Existing EU Policies</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>1.2 EU’s Failure of Handling the Crisis</i>	<i>13</i>
Chapter 2 – The Salience of Immigration and Far-Right Parties’ Success	18
<i>2.1 The Failure as a Catalyst for Far-Right Populism</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>2.2 Increased Salience and Issue Voting.....</i>	<i>19</i>
Chapter 3 – The Case of Italy.....	24
<i>3.1 The Migration Crisis in Italy and EU’s failure to help.....</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>3.2 Italian Politics and the Rise of Far-right Populism</i>	<i>26</i>
Chapter 4 – Pre-elections Attitudes and Values	30
<i>4.1 People’s Perceptions on Immigration</i>	<i>30</i>
<i>4.2 Party Positions on Immigration</i>	<i>36</i>
<i>4.3 Italians’ Voting Behavior</i>	<i>39</i>
Discussion - Immigration: Big Problem, High Salience and Small Solutions	45
Conclusion	48
Bibliography.....	52
Appendices	60

Introduction

Research Problem

Migration has been a phenomenon affecting Europe for decades. Streams of migrants in Europe over time have largely shaped societies. While Member States in southern Europe tended to be countries with large emigration flows, in recent times, they have been at the center of the so-called 'European migration crisis', as being countries at the edge of Europe led them to be progressively transformed into countries of arrival for migrants from Africa and the Middle East. Countries such as Greece, Italy and Spain therefore, were put under pressure when they became the new destinations for international migrants. Conflicts and instability in countries such as Syria, Libya, Eritrea, are accounted to be the major forces for escapes, but other major forces such as economic inequalities, environmental and climate change, demographic change and global social networks have played important roles in driving the high influx of immigrant and asylum seekers reaching Europe (Castelli Gattinara, 2017). While to some extent the flow of migrants into Europe across the Mediterranean should not have resulted in such a big shock, due to known factors such as high population growth, low incomes and structural unemployment in home countries (e.g. Castles et al., 2013), governments in Europe were largely taken aback and showed their complete precariousness with regards to humanitarian and political consequences of such high flows of immigration, opening the doors to severe ripple effects within societies and politics of many countries.

Italy, together with Greece, being at the edge of the European continent and conveniently located in the Mediterranean Sea, was one of the countries mostly affected by illegal migration to Europe, particularly in the period of 2014-16. Italy was heavily involved in many search and rescue operations at sea, and the increase in applications of asylum uncovered the unpreparedness of the Italian authorities in handling migrant reception and transit. More and more the immigration issue led to public debates over the scale of the Italian involvement, in particular over rescue operations and overcrowdings of hosting facilities.

Moreover, it caused severe frictions with the EU, as well as generally causing worries about the effectiveness and sustainability of welcome and integration policies (Berry, Garcia-Blanco and Moore, 2016). In an already tightly constrained fiscal setting, these debates generated high additional costs and had wide-ranging and deep effects in Italian politics, with concerns about increased conflicts over religious and cultural diversity as well as protection of the borders.

Deeply overwhelmed by other major events in earlier years, such as the economic crisis, the end of the polarized bipolar party system, and the austerity measures put in place by the governing centrist-mainstream coalition, the Italian government struggled and took action with regards to EU-wide policies on the migration crisis as well as demanding a common crisis management. Consequently, political actors from the radical-right and the mainstream movement were in competition about coping mechanisms with migrants in transit, and the characterization of the humanitarian emergency (Zamponi, 2018). The issue was at the center of the public agenda; and the mainstream parties, which tend to choose to follow dismissive tactics when it comes to complex policy issues, were forced to partake in the public debate. This indicates how the arising emergency feeling, a clear symbol of the migration crisis, was a consequence not only of the actual number of migrants reaching Italy, but more so of the Italian and European governments' ineptitude in confronting the crisis.

The ongoing problems in Italy were thus troubled further by the debates around the migration crisis. The influx of migrants in Italy generated a major public controversy and consequently also had a prompting effect on other societal issues, such as effects on the economy, culture and security due to the high number of arrivals (Castelli Gattinara, 2016, 2017). Discussions on management of the migrants more and more developed into hostile talks on irreconcilable differences with regards to religion and culture in multiethnic societies. The question on national identity throughout Italy (including discussions on the Italian nationality law), as well as the EU, indicated how the actors in power ought to respond to issues raised by citizens, and on a more general level how to appropriately organise societies with regards to inclusion or exclusion of certain individuals.

Italians' unhappiness with the way the migration crisis was being treated by their own government and the EU, coupled with other concerns, such as a feeling that the system is broken and that there is a lack of opportunities for the future generations, created a general discontent with the mainstream government in power. The March 2018 general election in Italy therefore revealed itself as crucial in giving people the possibility of voicing their increased discontent with current policy conduct. In the lead-up to the elections, immigration was defined by the vast majority of Italians as among their highest priority of concerns and the increased feeling of insecurity, largely influenced by the copious coverage of the media on boat arrivals across the Mediterranean, was heavily exploited by extremist parties to gain power. Through immigration being portrayed as a narrative of invasion, and migrants being depicted as walking threats to the economy, society and national security, and due to the governing elites' incompetence, this topic proved to be a fertile ground for divisive social tales and for an update of national identity based on exclusionary terms, with the most prominent far-right party in Italy, the Lega, vowing to 'put Italians first'. When people are feeling as they are losing their identity and belonging, extremist actors are able to exploit these vulnerabilities in proposing an 'us' versus 'them' rhetoric, particularly using the unhappiness caused by the influx of migrant and refugees (Dixon *et al.*, 2018).

The two populist parties in Italy (Movimento Cinque Stelle and Lega) highly criticized the way that the previous government handled the migration crisis and heavily capitalized on the general unhappiness of the population. In particular the right-wing political party, Lega (rebranded from Lega Nord prior to the 2018 elections), put the anti-immigration policies at the centerstage of its programme and accentuated their criticisms on immigration in order to continuously build a following at the national level, beyond their core in northern Italy, where it initially campaigned for the independence of the Padania region. Although, as according to reports (e.g. Dixon *et al.*, 2018), hostility towards migrants is not in line with traditional Italian values of hospitality and welcoming sentiments to outsiders, these values seem to have been manipulated through simplistic narratives of division and associated with negative characteristics such as criminality, abuse of hospitality and loss of identity, in order to

capitalize on the fear and increase support for anti-immigrant policies such as those proposed by Lega.

This thesis will thus provide an analysis of sentiments with regards to immigrants by Italian citizens and their voting behavior in the last national elections taking into account the position on immigration taken by Lega, and will answer the question:

How much can the electoral success of Lega be attributed to their political position taken in terms of immigration policies?

Research Design

The approach taken to answer this question will be based both on a quantitative and qualitative analysis. Based on the theory of issue salience and increased share of far-right parties, it can be hypothesized that due to an increase in importance given to the issue of immigration both by the people and through the Lega's political agenda, these went hand in hand with the Lega's success during the election, having created a salience bias in some way. Understanding how party agendas have an effect on voting behavior has become increasingly important, as several studies showed that other socio-structural factors do not fully explain the choices (Abou-Chadi and Helbling, 2018). As migration is often regarded as one of the most pressing social problems, it is important to study how immigration issues affect people's votes for different parties based on their policy agendas. In order to analyze people's perceptions on immigrants and their values, various surveys and election polls will be analyzed over a time span ranging five years prior to the general elections. The Eurobarometer, a bi-annual survey on public opinion of European citizens undertaken by the European Commission, is taken into account in the analysis as it studies in-depth the motivations, feelings and reactions of some social groups with regards to a subject, through their expression in discussion groups or more commonly with non-directive interviews. Next to an analysis of the evolution of mentions of immigration in the answers to the question "*what do you think are the two most important issues facing (country) at the moment?*", a special Eurobarometer survey was conducted in October 2017 (published in April 2018),

concerning specifically the public opinion on the integration of immigrants in the European Union, and will allow for a deeper analysis of the concerns mentioned by Italians prior to the election (European Commission, 2018). To corroborate the analysis on what basis Lega showed such high success rates in some Italian districts, an evaluation of the immigration programme proposed by Lega fits within the scope. For this an assessment of their official proposed policies before the March 2018 elections will be provided and contrasted to the political agendas of the other parties in the run. Lastly, a combination of the two will be able to uphold the research question, by looking into how far people's sentiments and values on immigration were represented by the rising right-wing party and explain what caused the shift in support for political parties from the previous elections. In order to do so, the elections results will be analyzed in-depth, exploring the divide in the results.

The chapters that follow will be introduced by a general overview of the European migration crisis, looking into the existing policies at the national, as well as the European level and how these interplayed in the consequent actions taken by the incumbent Italian government. It will provide a general examination of the possible reasons for the rise of far-right populism around the topic of immigration linked to the supranationalism of the EU over Member States. Chapter two then will dive into the theory on issue salience and the subsequent consequences it has with regards to immigration and catalyzing the rise of far-right parties. Chapter three will consider the migration crisis more specifically for the case of Italy, taking into consideration the EU's 'failure' to assist Italy with this matter and will introduce the subsequent effect in Italian politics and the rise of more right-wing parties due to the increased salience of the problem. Chapter four, thereafter will provide an analysis of the aforementioned survey and election poll data, substantiating it with official statistics on migration by various sources (International Organization for Migration, the Italian institute for statistics (Istat), and European Commission). Moreover, it will provide a breakdown of the proposed policies and party attitudes on immigration through analyses of the official election programmes. Subsequently, to shed light on the main research question stated above, the voting behavior of Italian citizens is dissected, taking into account several demographic characteristics (age, employment, education level, residency) in order to verify how

comprehensively the anti-immigration stance taken by Lega affected voting behavior. Lastly, the findings will be discussed and then followed by a conclusion.

Chapter 1 – The Refugee Crisis

1.1 The Crisis and Existing EU Policies

Europe has experienced various waves of immigration throughout its history and as a political and economic union, established through the 1993 Maastricht Treaty, and it has also seen many changes with regards to its policies. Migration and particularly irregular migration have always been a matter of concern for advanced industrialized countries, but arguably the latest influx of migrants to European countries has been much more than just that. Contemporary Europe had never faced such a scale of inward migration as it has experienced in 2015-16. More than 1.5 million irregular border crossings into the EU happened between 2015 and 2016 (EASO, 2017). During the same time more than 2 million first asylum claims were made. By the end of 2015, almost one million refugees and migrants arrived to European coastlines and applied for asylum, and while around 80 percent of those that came by sea arrived to Greek shores, the rest reached Italy first, whereas only a tiny percentage came by land to Bulgaria and Greece (Miles, 2015). Around three quarters of the asylum seekers arriving to Europe in 2015 were fleeing from persecution and conflict in countries such as Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq (Spindler, 2015). More than 4000 lives were lost in the Central Mediterranean route to reach Europe (IOM, 2018). Discussions around the handling of the situation got heated fairly quickly, as the migrants and asylum seekers were not distributed in equal manners across Europe, and thus some countries were in need of more help, and the EU as a whole failed to reach a consensus that satisfied the majority (Koser, 2015).

Looking at the policies previously in place, cooperation between European Member States on topics such as asylum and migration began in 1986, when they decided to establish an Ad Hoc group on Migration (Kaunert and Léonard, 2012). The first Dublin Convention, which determined which Member State was responsible for inspecting an application for asylum, followed in 1990 (Kaunert and Léonard, 2012). The Treaty of Maastricht in 1992, identified asylum as one of the ‘matters of common interest’ in Justice and Home Affairs (Kaunert and

Léonard, 2012). These matters had to be compliant of the Geneva Convention established in 1951, also known as the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. This Convention defines ‘refugees’ as legal entities and obligates States not to banish or return refugees to regions where they would be threatened, also known as the principle of non-refoulement (Kaunert and Léonard, 2012). The institutional arrangement under the Maastricht Treaty, meant that in practice, EU countries remained the dominant actors in the development of the EU asylum policy.

When the first phase of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) began in 1999, concrete developments to the area of asylum and migration in the EU were possible. It established common minimum standards to which Member States needed to abide to when receiving asylum seekers (Buonanno, 2017). The CEAS consists of foremost the Dublin Regulation, which is a mechanism to establish the member state that is responsible for asylum applications by refugees. Asylum-seekers need to register and go through the application process in the country where they first entered the EU. During the first phase of CEAS, the ‘Eurodac’ database for storing and comparing fingerprint data was also founded, which should have led to a common procedure valid throughout the Union in the longer term (Kaunert and Léonard, 2012). The Qualification Directive of the CEAS defined ‘refugee’ and stipulated ‘subsidiary protection’ and established common rules to grant subsidiary protection or refugee status. The CEAS also contained the Reception Conditions Directive which specified standardization of rules to cut down on asylum shopping (Buonanno, 2017), which happens when asylum seekers want to apply in a specific country after passing through other states, or when they apply for asylum in multiple states.

More recently, and in view of the migratory pressure on Europe since 2014, the Commission issued the European Agenda on Migration in May 2015 (European Commission, 2015a). This was established to be able to react more quickly to the tragedy surrounding human lives in the Mediterranean Sea. This Agenda on Migration led to the search and rescue efforts being amplified, with the goal to match the intervention levels which were initially delivered under the prior Italian ‘Mare Nostrum’ operation (European Commission, 2015a). Triton and

Poseidon, two Frontex (then rebranded into European Border and Coast Guard Agency) joint operations gave assistance with capability and geographical range, so that it was possible to help provide coordination with regards to border support of pressured Member States, and also help saving migrants' lives at sea (European Commission, 2015a). Moreover, the Agenda was also started so to tackle the issue of criminal networks that were exploiting weak and helpless migrants. In order to capture and destroy smugglers' vessels, a Common Security and Defence Policy was put in place (European Commission, 2015a). The EU's law enforcement agency with regards to terrorism and crime, also known as Europol, fortified the joint maritime information (JOT MARE) to provide support against migrant smuggling (European Commission, 2015a). The hotspot approach (set up between the European Asylum Support Office (EASO); the European Border and Coast Guard Agency; and Europol), which works on the ground with Member States at the frontiers to quickly classify, register and fingerprint incoming migrants was also set up by the Agenda (European Commission, 2015a). When the crisis reached its highest point in 2015, the singular systems to deal with asylum seekers of Member States were nevertheless suffering under heavy inflows of migrants, and the domestic facilities for reception and processing were about to collapse.

Since abiding to the Dublin Regulation signified that migrants were allowed to apply for asylum only in their first country of arrival when reaching EU borders and would suffer expulsion in case of a border violation, Member States in the Mediterranean were severely hurt as they are the natural gates of entry (Aljazeera, 2016; Dagi, 2018). Although the Commission was aspiring to provide an updated version of regulations, which should have led to a more impartial sharing of the burden, this proposition failed, when after the decision by the Hungarian government to expel illegal immigrants to their receiving state, Angela Merkel willingly held herself responsible to offer unconditional asylum (Holehouse, 2015; Dagi, 2018). When Member States temporarily decided to put border controls back in place, the guarantee of free movement under the Schengen regime also therefore ended in failure

(Dagi, 2018). The Lisbon Treaty¹ permitted the governance of the supranational bodies of the EU institutions with regards to migration affairs without needing the approval of Member States. Nonetheless, negative attitudes of national governments and the public, which were affected in multiple ways by the big numbers of refugee arrivals, made making binding decisions at a supranational EU level virtually impossible, and some of the autonomous decisions of the Member States and their ‘multilateral deadlock’ on how the refugee crisis should be controlled, made the Lisbon Treaty’s principle of solidarity useless (Dagi, 2018). The clear letdown of the Union handling such pronounced issues such as migration, made the EU’s Justice and Home Affairs governance system appear to have been designed mostly for smaller troubles, and not so much for handling big, overarching issues, such as a full-fledged migration crisis (Dagi, 2018).

1.2 EU’s Failure of Handling the Crisis

According to Buonanno (2017), although the countries at the frontier had problems with immigration for quite some time, the magnitude of the influx in 2015 transformed it into a proper crisis. The former President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy, stated that Europe ‘had signals of this problem back in 2013 and 2014. [...] There was partially an inflow of people fleeing war zones and instability, but probably the majority of them were economic migrants. But still there was a problem. For months we thought we could handle it without the efforts made by the Italians’ (Vincenti, 2015). He continues by saying that new disasters at sea ended up acting as the catalyst to join forces and enable Frontex to save people. Van Rompuy maintains that nobody really had foreseen the situation that was experienced by Europe during the crisis, as it caught Europe by surprise that refugees especially those living in camps in Jordan and Turkey had no intent of returning to Syria. Yet, there were some prior signs that the crisis was preventable or at least predictable (Buonanno, 2017).

¹ Entered into force in December 2009, and amended the Maastricht Treaty (effective in 1993, from 2007 also known as the Treaty on European Union) as well as the Treaty of Rome (effective in 1958, from 2007 known as the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union), with the goal of “enhancing the efficiency and democratic legitimacy of the Union and to improving the coherence of its action.”

One warning to Europe, resulting particularly from the increasing worries felt by the Southern Mediterranean countries in 2008, which forming a coalition group called the Quadro Group started to put pressure on the Council to prioritize policies on migration and asylum, principally with regards to solidarity and burden sharing (Buonanno, 2017). Moreover, the damage to Tunisia's government after the Arab Spring of 2011, left both Italy and France in a state of uncertainty and disagreement regarding the responsibility over Tunisian immigrants under the Dublin II Regulation, as Italy issued temporary permits in order for the migrants to continue their journey to France (Buonanno, 2017). As can be seen, pressure in the Mediterranean was already felt before the 2015-16 crisis, as it was already used as a route of passage to Europe by irregular migrants. But, it can be argued that what ultimately ended up being a migration crisis, was caused by the unexpectedness of the scale of Syria's civil war which could not have been foreseen by the EU to still be so intense in 2015, as well as the failure to set up a unity government in Libya. Moreover, it can be argued that the EU was taking some action with regards to demands of southern Mediterranean states, as there was the set-up of a more integrated approach to asylum policy beginning in 2003 through various regulations and directives, including the modifications made to the CEAS in 2013 and the increased control over illegal migration routes through the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), established in 2004 and fortified in 2016 (Buonanno, 2017). The migration crisis of 2015-16 therefore could probably not have been predicted but it should have somewhat been expected, although irregular migration numbers were not yet of crisis amounts and was still largely only a concern of the countries in close vicinity to North Africa and the Middle East. And while the EU did have some policies in place, these were mostly trying to tackle how to easily spread responsibility, by defining the qualification of a migrant for international protection, rather than setting up clear rules on solidarity and burden-sharing (Buonanno, 2017).

In Europe, moreover, there was a clash between intergovernmental and supranational standpoints on possible actions to take in the area of immigration policies, which is still perturbing Union level politics, years later. Right-leaning nationalists, who were of the opinion that the migrant crisis was a threat to national security, backed a more

intergovernmental reaction (Dagi, 2018). This perspective is based on the foundation that the prospect of losing the power over their borders denotes a quasi-suicide of national sovereignty (Farage, 2015). Instead, backing a more supranational standpoint on how to deal with the migrant crisis were the left-leaning internationalists. More than a threat to the nation, they emphasized the common responsibility enshrined in international and EU laws, which gave more importance to the human security of individuals in such a crisis (Patru and Kucheryavenko, 2016). The four Central European member states were the main supporters of the ‘intergovernmentalism-cum-nationalism’ perspective (Dagi, 2018). The Hungarian prime minister, Orban, heavily resisted the Commission’s suggestion for the creation of a ‘burden-sharing regime’, but he also resulted in evoking the Dublin Regulations so to eject the irregular migrants (Dagi, 2018). The Visegrad Group supported that in cases where external border protection has been weakened, they should have the right to protect their domestic internal borders (Park, 2015). Taking the contrasting side in this debate, were the European Commission, Germany and Sweden, which were the main enthusiasts of ‘supranationalism-cum-internationalism’ (Dagi, 2018). Both Germany’s and Sweden’s policies were accepting and they welcomed more than a million migrants during 2015-16 (Connor, 2016). The EC was also encouraging other European States to possibly act against their national inclinations and to offer humanitarian support (Holehouse, 2015). To defend their view, the internationalists underlined human rights, the European welcome culture, and the potential for migrants to bring economic benefits to their national markets (Dagi, 2018).

Thus, both were prone in guarding European values, but they differed in their views on which values were actually threatened from the increasing numbers of refugees (Dagi, 2018). The backers of a more intergovernmental way of handling the issue, argued that the Western culture would not be able to accommodate the utterly different Islamic culture of the migrants (Cendrowicz, 2015). In Europe, it is often believed that the increase in Muslim immigrants goes hand in hand with jihadist assaults that caused high death tolls in cities all over Europe (Poushter, 2016). On the other hand, the supporters of a more supranationalist approach argued that what needed protection were morals such as human dignity, right for asylum and rights for minorities (Dagi, 2018). The letdown of the EU institutions and politicians led to

doubts and insecurity with regards to the best response to the crisis. In return, this public annoyance at the ineffectiveness of traditional political parties was easily exploited by the once less prominent populist and right-leaning groups. The mess in engagements caused by the outside menace of mass immigration caused an in-house growth and resurgence of nationalist populism. It was thus a great ask to reach a middle ground between the two groups as, the nationalists saw national sovereignty as the biggest concern, which would therefore need quick independent actions to protect the security of their own internal borders, as well as the European values, while the internationalists viewed it predominantly as a universal human rights issue, and therefore argue that matters of securitization of immigration would not be in line with typical European values (Dagi, 2018).

According to some (e.g. Molyneux and Osborne, 2017), where an increase in populism is attached to institutional customs that can be seen as anti-liberal or authoritarian, then populism will be greatly based on those characteristics. While, alternatively, when populism is more based on traditions that are in line with more liberal institutions and traditions, it can flourish into a dynamic, creative and disruptive force (Molyneux and Osborne, 2017). This is what Machiavelli (1976) (1532) called the ‘subject-matter’, the *subietto*, of political conduct. Indeed when populism is combined with hate, nativism, and bigotry, as is frequently the case, then it becomes dangerous from a liberal perspective (Molyneux and Osborne, 2017). European traditional leaders have commonly failed to deal with the migration crisis. As in Weber’s view, a true political leader needs to have three main qualities, which are passion, a feeling of responsibility and a sense of proportion (The Economist, 2019). Individuals that are suitable for political leadership have an internal sense of purpose and ethical backbones, which should be supported through good judgement and a deep sense of responsibility (The Economist, 2019). If these leaders continue to disregard the migration crisis and other future crisis along these lines, the populists in the EU will take the reins, more than that have already achieved in recent years. Although, in absolute numbers, the irregular migrants that wanted to enter the EU dropped to 150,000 in 2018, it is politically unsuccessful to describe the migration crisis as being over (Taylor, 2019). Truthfully, if this

ongoing issue gets avoided, Europe's leaders channel the populists even more, and give them the ability to handle the problem through soliciting fear and racist sentiments (Taylor, 2019).

Chapter 2 – The Salience of Immigration and Far-Right Parties’ Success

2.1 The Failure as a Catalyst for Far-Right Populism

The negative public opinion is probably one of the biggest side effects of the migration crisis (Buonanno, 2017). As sentiments and attitudes of people shifted towards a negative feeling of the European Union, it led to a decline in the belief of unity and solidarity within the Union. One of the levels on which the migration crisis had an effect, was therefore the increasing anti-immigrant sentiment, which also created problems when states were suggesting solutions to the migrant problems on a Union level. Moreover, following the attacks in Paris and in Brussels, when it was announced that some of the attackers had come to Europe as illegal immigrants through the Mediterranean, feelings of hospitality dropped some more. On another level, the far-right was able to become more powerful and oftentimes gain seats in governments during elections. The far-right mainly triggered in people their unhappiness with the incumbent political parties through capitalizing on nationalistic and nativist sentiments. Populism tends to be described as an ideology, a movement and a syndrome (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). But usually when analyzing the issue in a European setting, populism tends to call to mind feelings of anti-immigration and xenophobia. Most commonly used to describe others in a negative way, and rarely used to label oneself, populism is used by media outlets to describe events such as cross-class movements, a more folkloric governing style, or irresponsible economic policies (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). Populism was not a well-established phenomenon in Western Europe, up until the 1980s, when mostly due to various large social transformations, particularly mass migration, populist radical-right parties started to arise (von Beyme, 1988; Betz, 1994). In the mid-1980s, the French National Front (FN) was able to gain significant public support, but it took until the 1990s and the 2000s, to experience the entry of populist radical right parties into governments (in particular the Italian Northern League (LN) in 1994 and later in 2000, Freedom Party (FPÖ) in Austria).

Inglehart (1977) argues that radical right parties in Europe originate in the increased significance of post-materialistic values in societies and according to Ignazi (1992), the populist radical right parties in Europe arose from the ‘silent counter-revolution’ of the 1980s. This group is said to be in favour of prioritizing sociocultural problems and have post-materialistic identity values. Nativism, authoritarianism and populism are the values of the core ideology of the populist radical right parties (Mudde, 2007). They heavily criticize ‘the establishment’ (which, next to traditional political parties also includes cultural, economic and media elites) through arguments that the general will of the (native) people is disregarded due to the betrayal by false electoral competition and recognizing their (or immigrants’) interests first. Today’s populist radical right parties highlight Muslims as the outliers, focusing heavily on religion, arguing that it is vital to stop the ‘tolerance of the intolerant’ and describing themselves as the protectors of liberal values (Mudde, 2010). In turn, therefore it can be argued that the basis for right-wing populist parties to swing votes in their favour when it comes to policies on immigration is to exploit the politicization of the debate. This in turn implies a multifaceted process which includes both public visibility of the conflict (i.e., its salience) and the polarization of actors with regards to the contentious issue (De Wilde, 2011; Hutter and Grande, 2014; Grande, Schwarzbözl and Fatke, 2018).

2.2 Increased Salience and Issue Voting

The spatial model of voting tells that voters choose parties that reflect their own personal positions in an ideological dimension, in the best possible way (Downs, 1957). As people have opinions on multiple issues, which tend to fall into multiple dimensions, the salience of the issue should be taken into account when analysing people’s votes (Abou-Chadi and Helbling, 2018). A process which is known as issue voting, this includes looking at the difference between a certain preference on an issue and the overall utility of voting (Thurner, 2000; Adams, Merrill and Grofman, 2005). In this context, salience refers to the visibility of the immigration issue given by political actors with regards to other issues in the political campaigns (‘supply-side’) (Grande, Schwarzbözl and Fatke, 2018) and the relative importance and significance that voters give to an issue on the political agenda (‘demand-

side') (Oppermann and Viehrig, 2011; Dennison, 2019). According to some scholars (e.g. De Vries, 2007) the so-called issue entrepreneurs play a central role when it comes to politicizing new issues. Party elites are at the center of initiating processes making some issues more salient and attracting the electorate's attention, and rendering contentious, issues that were previously non-salient (Carmines and Stimson, 1989). With the notion thus, that voters will follow their party, these politicians make voters care more about a certain issue and are able to create larger awareness on differences in party positions (Carmines and Stimson, 1986; Abou-Chadi and Helbling, 2018). People become more aware of the importance of specific issues especially when they arise in situations of high politicization.

According to Carmines and Stimson (1989), therefore certain political disputes increasingly become more politically relevant for voting decisions when there is political conflict and when the issue is given a lot of attention by voters. It has been shown that it is in line with more polarizing parties to attract higher issue effects (among others, Mauerer, Thurner and Debus, 2015). According to Hobolt and De Vries (2015) it can be argued that in multi-party competition, these issue entrepreneurs are the driving forces behind these processes. The ways in which voters differentiate between possible policy alternatives and how they act in terms of rationality and responsibility has been a topic of discussion for a long time. When voters are faced with a favourable informational environment and when parties are clear on their intentions on the particular issues, voters do tend to take informed decisions (Kuklinski *et al.*, 2001; Gerber, Nicolet and Sciarini, 2015) and this is likely to be the case especially when the issue at hand, as in this case immigration, is highly salient and polarizing. High importance is therefore put by some political parties on being very specific on how to frame immigration and whether to shape the perception on immigration as either a threat and a challenge, or as an opportunity and an advantage.

Salience can be the result of emotional, motivational or cognitive factors, and thus at this point, and for the further discussion of Italy's case, it is worthwhile to develop the argument of the importance of issue salience in a theoretical framework, so to subsequently show the effects on policy making and electoral outcomes. Importantly, studies have shown that

individuals are prone to changing their political behavior with regards to a political problem, only if their emotions are engaged by a salient issue, as other less important issues fail at engaging their emotional system (Lazarus and Smith, 1988; Smith *et al.*, 1993; Miller, Krosnick and Fabrigar, 2017), thus somewhat creating a ‘salience bias’. Subsequently, through additional and selective exposure to relevant information, voters have more knowledge, stronger opinions, are less likely to have a neutral position, and are more likely to participate in politics through voting, petitions or protest (Weaver, 1991). They therefore then evaluate and possibly approve of policy-makers based on the issue and vote accordingly, which as a consequence affects electoral outcomes. Although commonly argued that the distribution of importance given to certain issues by individuals is highly stable over time (e.g. Krosnick, 1990), according to a study by Hatton (2017), policy attitudes and salience move differently over time reacting to different macro-level variables.

Salience, hence, can be a likely predictor of electoral behaviour. At first, the weight that voters put on the congruence of their vote with the political party of choice, as it has been shown that salience reflects the weight on policy preferences (Fournier *et al.*, 2003; Visser, Krosnick and Simmons, 2003), could sway voters to vote in favour of a party with which they agree on their most salient issue, even though they disagree on the majority of other issues (Dennison, 2019). Moreover, within the issue voting theory, it is assumed that people give their votes to whichever party in their opinion is most effective or simply associated with salient issues, which in this case leads parties to want to increase the salience of the issues in their ‘ownership’ (e.g. Riker, 1993). Supported by evidence (e.g. Bélanger and Meguid, 2008; Green and Hobolt, 2008; Clarke *et al.*, 2012), Budge (2015) argues that the prominence of the issues ‘owned’ by the party on their agenda, increases the votes in their favour. Subsequently, issue salience has been proven to have positive effects on voter participation (Weaver, 1991), and hence it can be said that when people do not put importance on many issues at stake, their emotions are less likely to be activated, and hence tends to decrease their probability of voting. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, issue salience has various interaction and direct effects, for instance, Arzheimer (2009) and Arzheimer and Carter (2006) show that the salience of immigration in the manifestos of all mainstream

parties had a positive effect on the success of the populist radical right, and that therefore, put differently, the consideration of immigration as an issue by all major parties was of benefit for right wing parties in polls. Naturally, and as will be proved in what follows, the public salience of immigration is positively correlated with support for the populist radical right (Dennison and Geddes, 2019).

Summarising, it can be argued that what matters most for voting behaviour with regards to immigration issues around 2015 was the high salience of the issue, and thus it is possible to exclude such causal effects being credited to negative media coverage, as preferences with regards to political problems are formed quite early in life and are closely linked to education, or other key formative experiences, and once they are in place they are hard to change (Dennison and Geddes, 2019). Therefore, the rise in support for anti-immigration political parties is likely to develop from an increase in importance given to the issue among their underlying value orientations among those people with pre-established dispositions against immigration (Dennison and Geddes, 2019). Accordingly, it can be claimed that the typically conservative values of security, tradition or conformity which are most deemed to be threatened by some aspects of immigration, triggered an already present anti-immigration sentiment amongst people through the migration crisis. And, since it seems to be very difficult to change people's political opinions, giving voice to their worst fears seems the way to go for the success of radical-right parties.

Lastly, this substantiates the point that it is in fact not an increase in anti-immigration sentiment but rather an increase in the importance given to the issue, which spurs the more 'conservative' value orientations of people, leading them to stress security and the importance of traditions, over values such as universalism, so to have a positive effect on the growth of right-leaning parties. It would be misleading to argue that the sole reason for the rise of anti-immigration parties is the increase in salience of immigration, yet major academic theories, such as the perceived economic effects of immigration ('economic insecurity' thesis), or the 'cultural backlash' theory (opposition of larger cultural and normative transformations) (Dennison and Geddes, 2019), are unable to justify the dramatic short-term

increase in support for anti-immigration parties, and especially around 2015, due to the reasonable stability of societies and demographics. Conclusively, issue salience and salience of immigration specifically, therefore could be the rational ‘missing link’ in explaining why there is a rise in support of anti-immigrant parties but there is seemingly no such short term increase in anti-immigration sentiments, and potentially closely complement both the ‘economic insecurity’ and the ‘cultural backlash’ theories (Dennison and Geddes, 2019). Following this argument, after a description of the case of Italy within the narrative of the European migration crisis of 2015, and the subsequent changes in the political setting that occurred, an analysis of this theory will be undertaken for Italy to prove that the increasing support for the far-right party, Lega, was likely the consequence of the increasing salience of immigration both on the supply and on the demand side.

Chapter 3 – The Case of Italy

3.1 The Migration Crisis in Italy and EU's failure to help

Migrations to Italy through the Mediterranean have been fairly common in the past decade, although what ended up forming the refugee crisis was a very recent and fast increase in migrants. According to the International Organization for Migration (2016), although numbers started to increase drastically already at the end of 2013, in 2014 as there was an escalation of conflicts in close vicinity to Europe, around 170,000 people arrived. Arrivals through the Central Mediterranean route were around 150,000 people in 2015, while around 850,000 migrants and refugees arrived to Greece using the Eastern Mediterranean route (IOM, 2016). Migrants to Italy continued in big numbers in 2016 and 2017. According to data from UNHCR (2018), more than 180,000 migrants arrived to Italian shores in 2016, and around 120,000 in 2017. After the huge number of migrants arriving to Greece in 2015, in 2016 the numbers went down again to around 170,000 reaching Europe through the Eastern Mediterranean route, and in 2017 the number decreased to 30,000 people. After Greece, Italy was the main 'country of arrival' for migrants and asylum seekers that reached Europe by sea. Due to the great numbers of refugees crossing the Mediterranean in 2015, there was more than a 30 percentage-point increase in asylum application rates per year (EASO, 2016).

The lack of concrete help from the EU, coupled with the chronic unpreparedness of the Italian authorities to handle the large influx of migrants, stirred not only frictions within the European Union, but also a large public discontent over the financial involvement of Italy in operations on water and on land (Castelli Gattinara, 2017). Actions with regards to the migration crisis in response to EU-level policies were vast in Italy. The Italian government requested a common crisis management, while political actors of the radical right strongly disagreed with the more solidary movement of NGOs and other third parties, on how to tackle the distresses caused by the incoming migrants, and on what defined the humanitarian emergency (Zamponi, 2018). Guirandon (2017) points out that although many suggestions

had been made in order to reform European policies on migration in recent years, these have generally been ineffective, as they were in line with the past notions on security which have been shown to be incapable of tackling the risks to the lives of people in need for international protection. Actions like increasing border controls and shifting the management of migration to e.g. Libya and Turkey displayed the initial little efforts by the European Commission to increase internal and external solidarity (Noll, 2015).

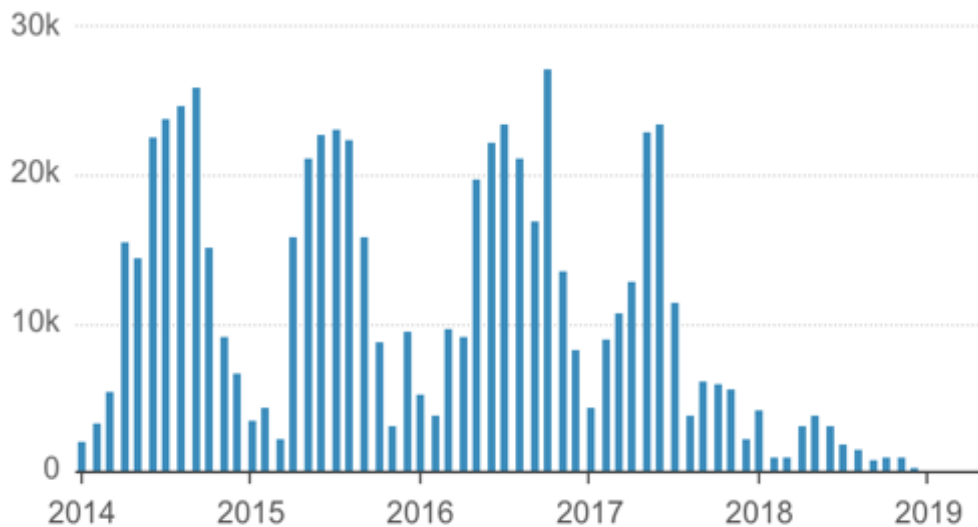


Figure 1: Sea Arrivals to Italy per month, (Source: IOM, 2019)

Taking into account the reasonings behind the flows of migrants in recent years, the policies set in place by the EU, particularly the asymmetric Dublin principle of responsibility for processing asylum claims, has resulted in the biggest strain on the EU member states along the southern border, creating vast political tensions not only within the affected countries, but also between Italy and Greece and other European states. The biggest issue can be found in the conflict between the movement of people to their preferred destinations based on Schengen, and the ability to reject migrants and send them back to their first country of arrival in Europe, based on Dublin (Bauböck, 2017). Over 400 people died in the Mediterranean in shipwrecks on 3rd and 11th October 2013, which induced the Italian government to move away from the common migration management and stand to humanitarian principles. The operation to perform search-and-rescue actions in order to save lives at sea called Mare Nostrum, also had the goal of influencing the EU for more solidarity, but according to some

this represented a ‘technical success but a political failure’ (Pastore, 2017, p. 31). The operation attracted criticisms on all levels, as Italy was receiving allegations of being too relaxed with regards to migrants’ goals of continuing their journey to other countries, repeating that the common border should be where migrant entry is managed (Attinà, 2017). In late 2014, when Mare Nostrum was replaced by Triton, it seemed that Italy was shifting back towards European policies, but it also marked the disagreements between various member states with regards to the acceptance of migrants.

3.2 Italian Politics and the Rise of Far-right Populism

As can be understood from the previous section the unsettling feelings of Italians with regards to migration, were not only caused by the numbers of migrants coming to Italian shores, but more so were a consequence of the feelings of dissatisfaction with the way that governments in the EU and more particularly in Italy, were not apt to solve what developed into a crisis. The public polemic in Italy due to unhappiness with the handling of the immigration situation, led to subsequent important debates on socioeconomic, cultural and security implications (Castelli Gattinara, 2016). The refugee crisis in Italy spurred negative opinions throughout large parts of society, in particular amongst people who were already unsatisfied by the process of European integration and the feelings of control loss over their country’s borders and politics. According to Ceobanu and Escandell (2010), although many different factors expose the appearance of negative sentiments towards immigrants, there is reverse causality with the rising popularity of the far-right and its anti-immigrant policies.

According to Castelli Gattinara (2017), both academia and the media have noted that at the core of the recent increase in populist anti-immigration parties are economic concerns and worries about terrorism and cultural integration of immigrants. Often depicted as aliens who infiltrate Europe and degrade the balance of native societies, migrants and refugees have caused parties’ increased pronouncement of worries about ‘unlimited and ‘uncontrolled’ migration (Ataç, Rygiel and Stierl, 2016; Castelli Gattinara, 2018). Italy has had experience with far-right politics for decades, but data on public opinion with regards to refugees as well

as ethnic and religious minorities, have clearly indicated the increased admiration for anti-immigration parties. Especially since the 2015 refugee crisis, exclusionist right-wing parties have gained in popularity and have exploited it in consequence. In recent years anti-immigration and anti-refugee campaigning have become increasingly more prominent in Italy. Already since the 1990s, the conservative (e.g. Forza Italia), the radical right (Lega Nord, Fratelli d'Italia) and the extreme right-wing actors (Forza Nuova, CasaPound Italia) have made their rhetoric increasingly anti-immigration, concentrating heavily on the consequences on the economy and society (Cetin, 2015). Berry, Garcia-Blanco and Moore (2016), analysing mass-media reporting of the crisis in Italy, show that the key areas of debate have been the duty of guarding EU borders, the financial implications of these actions, and the issue of redistribution of asylum applicants. High importance is given in the national media to the issue of EU responsibility in aiding Italy, in areas of finance and logistics, so to be able to control the arrival of refugees and migrants (Berry, Garcia-Blanco and Moore, 2016). Citizens' anti-immigrant sentiments benefit politicians' rhetoric, as they are also heavily influenced by the media reporting on conflicts between the local citizens and the newly arrived immigrants, specifically in areas that are used as temporary settlements.

In Italy, right-wing social movements often take the form of protests on issues related to immigration and refugee politics. Next to the basic underlying concept that Italy is replacing the native population and traditions with immigrants' ones and that it is thoroughly suffering from an 'invasion', also aspects with regards to the corruption of the political system, left-wing multiculturalism, refugee aid organisations, and the abandonment of ordinary citizens by mainstream politicians are common in the anti-immigration discourse in Italy (Castelli Gattinara, 2017). Particularly abused by the populist anti-establishment party, Movimento Cinque Stelle, this discourse facilitates anti-migrant protests to act as a collection of worries comprehending everyday threats to security, the loss of national culture and far-reaching discontent with politics. On the other hand, are the reactions of the mainstream political parties and their campaigns against immigration and against refugees. The Italian mainstream right commonly has synchronised its stances towards immigration based on bargains with the Lega, so to form governing coalitions. The mainstream left, Partito Democratico, which

governed Italy from before the beginning of the crisis up until the 2018 elections, suffered under much political campaigning by opposition parties condemning the management of immigrants and asylum applicants, besides the outcomes of negotiations with the EU (Castelli Gattinara, 2017). Due to this, the PD became harsher in their position on immigration, particularly when it was predominant in approving a new law, after having been made a matter of confidence in the government, which was severely opposed as it limited the right to asylum and the protection of basic rights (Castelli Gattinara, 2017). The so-called Minniti-Orlando decree had as one of the main goals to simplify procedures of asylum applications and inhibit the illegal migration influx. Through the adoption of bilateral agreements and expansion of the network to manage detention, the rationale behind it continued to be one of treatment of migration as an emergency phenomenon that needs repression (Castelli Gattinara, 2017). The previous secretary of the PD, together with other PD officials, started to mimic the accusations of anti-immigrants actors (e.g. ‘help them at home’ by Matteo Renzi), proposing heavier sanctions for crimes committed by refugees with Italian residence, and discriminating against migrants in local administrations (Castelli Gattinara, 2017).

The government in power at the time, therefore, chose to campaign in a similar way as the far-right, also accusing NGOs with rescue ships active in the Mediterranean Sea to conspire with smugglers to make profits out of immigrants (Castelli Gattinara, 2018). According to some, the so-called ‘business of hospitality’ and opinion that in the long run, immigration became a business, ultimately resulted in the refugee crisis (Castelli Gattinara, 2017). When outsourcing the management of the refugee crisis to charities and private entities by Italian authorities became a lucrative business, through hotels and landlords making their free space into housing for migrants, the structure broke under corruption and organized crime scandals (Castelli Gattinara, 2017). Consequently, the government aimed severe criticism at NGOs which were involved in the seas around Italy, through their inference of likely cooperation with human smugglers. With threats to shut Italian ports to NGOs, the consequences of actions by mainstream political actors were far and wide, as the public debate worsened in Italy, due to de facto having endorsed the doctrines of one of the most salient and xenophobic

contemporary conspiracy theories in Italy (Castelli Gattinara, 2017). Immigration, thus, was a central theme during the last electoral campaign and remained at the center of public discussion even in the following months, after the appointment of the Conte government. Certainly, it was a topic that contributed to the electoral success of the Lega and of Matteo Salvini himself who set up his own government (and communication) agenda as Interior Minister. However, on this subject the data available to public judgement are often patchy and sometimes presented in a "partisan" manner, stretching them to one side or the other on the basis of party interests. This in turn often contributes to projecting a distorted image of the reality of the migration phenomenon in Italy, where perceptions tend to count more than concrete data. As will be shown in the next chapter, people's knowledge on immigrants and the salience they ascribe to the problem can have far and wide effects on political outcomes.

Chapter 4 – Pre-elections Attitudes and Values

4.1 People’s Perceptions on Immigration

To analyse the impact of this distortion in the Italian case, it is useful to examine the general European case at first, in order to have a general comparison of opinions on immigrants. To this end, data provided by the special Eurobarometer (2018) on immigration, dealing with the estimates by citizens on the presence of immigrants in each of the EU Member States, helps to gauge where Italy stands in comparison to other European countries. In particular the question that was addressed to the respondents was the following: “*Per as you know, what is the percentage of immigrants compared to the total population in (country)?*”. It should be noted that, in this survey, “immigrants” means only people born outside of the borders of the European Union and currently residing legally in European countries.

The picture that emerges from this set of data signals above all a high level of uncertainty among citizens on the extent of migration in Europe. The examination of perception can be corroborated with a comparison of the estimates on percentage of immigrants provided by the interviewees with the actual data provided from Eurostat (2017) (Istituto Cattaneo, 2018b). The uncertainty and imprecision in the evaluation of the presence of immigrants are confirmed. European citizens overestimate the percentage of immigrants present in their countries quite severely: the 7.2% of non-EU immigrants ‘really’ present in the European states, are estimated by the interviewees to be 16.7%. But in this case the data concerning Italy is the most significant: the Italian respondents are the ones who show a greater detachment (in percentage points) among the percentage of non-EU immigrants actually present in Italy (7%) and the estimated, or perceived, 24.6%. The perception mistake made by Italians is the highest error among all EU countries and would remain equally high if the percentage of all immigrants present in Italy would be taken into account, which according to United Nations data, currently correspond to 10% of the population (increased by more than 6 percentage points compared to 2007). The other countries that show a ‘perceptive

error' slightly lower than the Italian one, are Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom². To the contrary, the difference between the percentage of 'real' and 'perceived' immigrants is minimal in Nordic countries and in some countries of Central and Eastern Europe³.

The perception errors on immigration in Europe therefore indicate the existence of a poor and distorted public opinion on this issue. However, as theorized above, the wrong estimate on the presence of immigrants could also derive from prejudices, rooted in the voters, that ex-ante affect each assessment. Put differently, who, in principle, has a position unfavourable towards immigrants could be induced to magnify the extent of the phenomenon or to justify their attitude by virtue of a distorted perception of the issue. To analyse this relationship in detail, the elaborate NIM index from the Pew Research Center (2018) has been taken into account, which measures the degree of nationalist, anti-immigrant and adverse sentiment to religious minorities in 15 European countries (more details in Appendix 1). This index has an interval ranging from 0 to 10, where 0 corresponds to an attitude of extreme openness towards religious minorities and immigration in general, while 10 indicates the highest level of closure and hostility towards immigrants or citizens belonging to other religions. When the NIM index is put in relation with the error of perception between 'real' immigrants and those 'perceived' by the interviewees in all countries for which both data was available, a positive relationship results between the wrong perception of the migration phenomenon and the attitude towards immigration. That is, as the hostility towards immigrants increases, the error in the assessment on presence of immigrants in their own country also increases. As before, the case for Italy is confirmed, on both sides, the country located in the 'extreme' position, characterized by the largest level of hostility towards immigration and religious minorities. Of course, from this relationship it is not possible to establish any cause-effect connection. In the sense that, the strongly negative attitude towards immigration could be the cause of an overestimation of immigrants present in society as well as it possibly being the consequence (those who believe that immigrants are 'too many' could be led to develop a

² Respectively, Portugal +14.6 p.p.; Spain +14.4 p.p.; UK +12.8 p.p.

³ Sweden +0.3 p.p.; Denmark +2.2 p.p.; Finland +2.6 p.p.; Estonia -1.1 p.p.; Croatia +0.1 p.p.

feeling of hostility towards the immigrants themselves). However, it is clear that the question of ‘perceptive error’ in reference to the migration phenomenon does not derive from a small problem or little information, but from different ‘visions’ of the world that inevitably influence the observation.

As confirmation of the above, it is possible to analyse the data exclusively concerning the Italian case. The difference between the percentage of immigrants present in Italy and that perceived by the interviewees is greatest among those who define themselves center-right or right-wing. In the latter case, the perception is 32.4%, more than seven percentage points higher compared to the national average. On the contrary, between those who define themselves as left, center-left or center, the difference between the actual and the estimated data is considerably reduced. For example, for the left-wing interviewees, immigrants in Italy are ‘only’ 18.5% compared to the average which estimates them at around 25%. Therefore, the political orientations of citizens also ‘orient’ their assessments of presence of immigrants more or less extensively. But beyond this ‘political’ factor that can explain, at least in part, the distance between reality and perception, the citizens’ level of information must also be taken into account for which, it can be assumed that respondents with a higher level of education are also those who are more informed about society and politics, and therefore, are able to provide a more precise indication of the phenomenon of immigration. This hypothesis is confirmed by the data when looking at the average value of the estimate of immigrants based on educational qualification of the interviewees. It can be inferred that, for those who have not gone beyond compulsory education, perceived immigration in Italy exceeds 28%, while among the graduates, the estimate is reduced by more than 10 percentage points, reaching 17.9%. Education and, through it, the predisposition to greater political information therefore seems to be able to limit the perceptive error of Italian citizens on the issue of immigration. Another factor able to explain the different levels in the perception on the migration phenomenon in Italy concerns the professional domain of the citizens. In particular, the manual or low-paid workers are those who consider their employment most at risk and who, therefore, can sense the presence or arrival of immigrants as a threat. On the contrary, workers who perform highly qualified tasks do not necessarily see their job being

put in danger by immigrants. Therefore, the professional occupation of the interviewees could have an effect on their orientation towards immigration. From the reported data, this seems to be the case. The workers belonging to the medium-high class tend to underestimate by about 5 percentage points the presence of immigrants in Italy, compared to the average value in the Italian sample (25%). Instead, between those who have a profession attributable to the working class (specialized and non-specialized) the percentage of immigrants tends to be further overestimated, exceeding 28%.

When looking at the estimate of the presence of immigrants in Italy based on geographical areas of belonging of the interviewees, a rather clear difference can be noticed between the residents in the north and those in the center-south. Respondents from northern Italy both east and west estimate an immigration level of around 20%, while in other areas the percentage of immigrants is indicated, on average, around 26%, representing a gap of 6 percentage points between north and south. This value is particularly significant because it completely contrasts with the reality of the diffusion of immigrants in the Italian regions/areas. When comparing the estimate on presence of immigrants according to those interviewed by the Eurobarometer with actual presence of immigrants in Italy in 2017, it can be seen that the distance between the real and the estimated values is greater when the presence of immigrants is lower (in the south, less than 5% of the population) (Istituto Cattaneo, 2018b). On the contrary, the gap between reality and perception is more limited in the northern regions, where the percentage of immigrants, corresponding to around 10% of the population, tends to be higher. Still with regard to the geography of immigration in Italy, when analysing the average perceived value of the percentage of immigrants in reference to the type of municipality of residence of the interviewees, it clearly emerges that the perception of diffusion of immigration is greater in large cities than in small municipalities or rural areas: in the former the estimate reaches almost 31%, while in the latter it stops at 21.9%. These results seem to be in line with the reality of Italian immigration, which is more concentrated in large metropolises and tends to be more diluted in small villages far from urban centers.

Following the above analysis, it can already be deducted that feelings towards immigrants are rather negative, as people largely overstate the actual numbers of immigrants in Italy. As the interviews utilized in composing these results were undertaken in the end of 2017, it is possible to assume that therefore the salience given to the issue of immigration was fundamentally emphasized by the large influx of migrants to Italy during the previous three years. In order to give a more complete look at how the issue salience increased around this point in time, further analysis is required, so to also be able to link it with the marked rise of the far-right party during the same time. As it has been argued in the theory above, partly the increased salience of the issue stems from already negative but rather stagnant predetermined preferences with regards to immigrants. A brief analysis of the European Social Survey (2018) over the years corroborates the above findings (Dennison and Dražanová, 2018). In Italy the percentage of people wanting ‘few’ or ‘no’ admission of different types of immigrants (same race or ethnic group; different race or ethnic group; poorer countries outside of Europe), as opposed to ‘some’ or ‘many’, increased for all three categories with the latter two categories receiving a percentage share above 60 in 2016 (an increase of 20 percentage points since 2012). In a different question in the ESS, the general assessment of whether respondents see immigration as good or bad for their country, the average for all Italian respondents was extremely low, with a score of 3.4 (10 being the most positive reply) in 2016.

Moreover, similarly with regards to attitude to immigrants, a question in the standard Eurobarometer asks whether the individual feels negative to immigrants from other EU member states and non-EU member states. Between 2014 and 2018 the percentage share of people feeling negatively with regards to immigrants in Italy remained quite stable, at around 80% for non-EU immigrants and 60% for EU immigrants. This data on preferences and feelings only slightly point towards more negative attitudes over the years, and therefore need to be corroborated by issue salience data in order to be suitable to argue that immigration was a possible explanation for populist radical right parties’ rise, as established in the theory above. Thanks to the high frequency of the interviews, therefore the most important question on salience that is possible to analyze over a longer time span is: *‘what do you think are the*

two most important issues facing (country) at the moment?’ (Standard Eurobarometer) (European Commission, 2018). The results for Italy clearly indicate the increased salience of the issue of immigration, as the percentage of the respondents who mentioned immigration as one of their top two issues, was very low in 2013 (under 5%) but severely increased up to 40% in 2017 (see Figure 2 for a complete overview of people’s most salient issues). In order to understand the importance of the result, the values were also analysed for the other European countries. Most countries, in 2013, started with higher percentages of respondents putting immigration as one of the two most important issues faced by the countries, compared to Italy. Similarly to Italy, due to a clear effect of the migration crisis, the salience drastically increased (highest percentage in Germany in 2015 at above 70%). Whereas in the other European countries the percentage started decreasing quite immediately after the peak, what is striking for Italy is that the salience of immigration continued to increase, up to the last measurement in March 2018, at around 35%. This clearly indicates that for Italians the issue remained of very high importance also months after the biggest arrivals of migrants to its

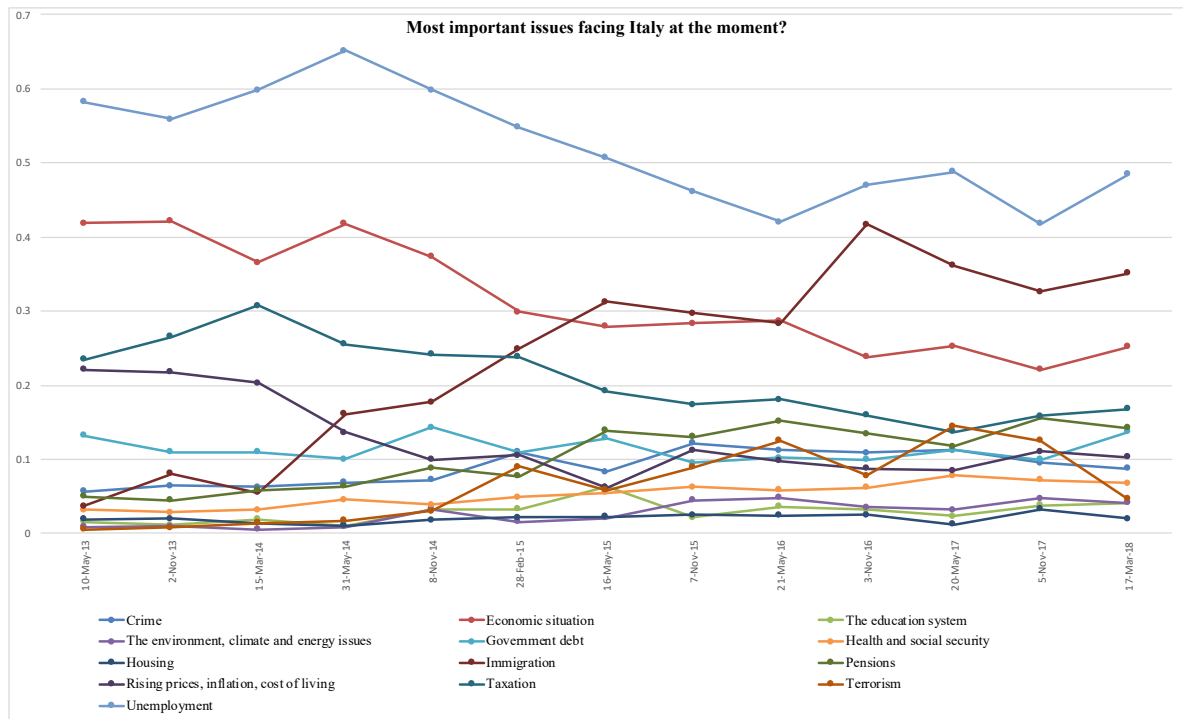


Figure 2: 'What do you think are the two most important issues facing Italy at the moment?' Source: Own illustration using data from Standard Eurobarometer, from May 2013 to November 2018

shores. With this result in mind, and for the final assessment of whether immigration played a role in the right-wing parties' rise, in the next section the different parties' political positions on immigration are summarized. Corroborated with an examination of political manifestos and election results it will be possible to argue whether the immigration crisis, which clearly had an effect on the salience of immigration, had an important role in the success of the Lega.

4.2 Party Positions on Immigration

Many political parties, movements and groups had an omnipresent theme, immigration. A hot topic, which dominated the pre-election debate. To disentangle the hodgepodge of an electoral campaign degenerated to the sound of promises more or less bombastic, it is useful to start from results showing that the shift of opinion on themes such as security and legality issues was to the detriment of other policy areas such as foreign policy and the European Union. The prominence of the security theme is symptomatic of the importance given by the public opinion to the crisis of the system of migration governance that has emerged. A theme that went hand in hand with the more or less restrictive policies in most of the electoral agendas published on the websites of the Ministry of the Interior and of the political parties and movements in the running.

The **centre-right** (Lega; Forza Italia, Fratelli d'Italia; Noi con l'Italia-Udc) converged in a unified way on proposals for protectionist and sovereign system such as: blocking of landings with assisted rejections, stipulation of treaties and agreements with the countries of origin of economic migrants, a Marshall plan for Africa and repatriation of all illegal migrants (Ministero dell'Interno, 2018). Lega's plans were along the lines of 'helping them at home' with more cooperation with Africa, so as to eliminate the economic causes of migration. To stop those who want to come, priority was given in restoring border controls and to stem the influx into the sea 'through the practice of humanitarian rejections.' Regarding the management in Italy, the return of irregular migrants and a 'strict territorial control' were in the proposals, as well as a monitoring network for the management of asylum seekers distributed in the territories (Lega, 2018). Lega's program revolved around a tightening on

relief operations, with ‘humanitarian rejections’ and forced return to countries of origin for those who are illegally in Italy. The emphasis was on agreements with the countries of origin to ‘help them at home’ as well as more controls on reception and more security (For the complete manifesto on immigration by Lega, see Appendix 2). Forza Italia called for an international intervention that blocked immigration from Libya through an international agreement with the Libyans for the creation of refugee camps and the blocking of boats carrying immigrants (Ministero dell’Interno, 2018). They were in favour of assisted rejections. They suggested a Marshall Plan with the countries of emigration to prevent departures, and they specified the need to sign treaties to bring back the illegal immigrants. The proposals by Forza Italia were on the line with what Berlusconi implemented in the government. It was therefore tight on illegal immigration (Bossi-Fini law), rejections and agreements with countries of origin. There were no innovative measures, but a general tightening, with the emphasis on safety in Italy responding to a question that came from the territory. Summarizing, the coalition of the centre-right together proposed resumption of border control, repatriation of all illegal immigrants, blocking of landings through assisted return and stipulation of treaties with the countries of origin of migrants, stipulation of a Marshall Plan for Africa, abolition of the ‘indiscriminate so-called humanitarian protection concession and the maintenance of only the right to asylum and some forms of subsidiary protection, reduction of reception costs, more security through the introduction of neighborhood policemen and the principle that ‘defense is always legitimate.’

The **centre-left** (PD; + Europa/Democratic Center; Insieme (Socialists, Greens and Area Civica); Civica Popolare) was shillyshallying on the structural weaknesses of the reception system faced by the outgoing government, mainly to reach the objective to Europeanize the migration question, intervening in managing the root causes of migration in third countries and respecting ‘the obligations of solidarity in the ambit of asylum and migration’ (Ministero dell’Interno, 2018). The Democratic Party (PD) program proposed to ‘control borders, fight human traffickers, save lives at sea and welcome those who flee from wars and persecutions.’ Moreover, it called for the revision of the Dublin Regulation, with redistribution of asylum seekers in all EU countries. It envisioned humanitarian corridors only in exceptional cases,

strengthening of regular access with the quota system and more development aid and bilateral agreements between states for readmission as well as an improvement of the reception system for asylum seekers. The PD program on immigration was in effect the continuation of the Minniti line. Agreements with transit states to stop the flow, more control over NGOs, and reception of those entitled. By equipping transit countries with resources and sending military contingents, it was hoped to block migrants before they came to Italy. The strategy had already produced a drastic drop in arrivals, but the unstable equilibrium of countries like Libya remained in the forefront. Not a lot was done in order to reduce the perception of insecurity within the population. In combination, the centre-left coalition proposed a moderate introduction of the 'jus soli' (the right to nationality or citizenship of anyone born in the territory of a state), an improvement of the reception system for asylum seekers and unaccompanied minors, border checks to fight traffickers and save lives in the Mediterranean, a strict application of laws on entry and stay, common migration policies at European level and *Migration Compact* with the United Nations. Moreover, they also proposed greater cooperation with the Mediterranean countries for the readmission of expelled or rejected citizens, for border controls and to open regular entry channels, an improvement of assisted voluntary repatriation measures, speeding up the examination of asylum applications and international protection, approval of a national plan for integration, reduction of departures, with a view to a 'sustainable target for managing arrivals'.

The anti-establishment and populist **Movimento Cinque Stelle**, in eight pages entirely dedicated to immigration, proposed positions that are not entirely dissimilar to the left, suggesting the overcoming of the regulation of Dublin and calling for the 'mandatory and automatic relocation of asylum seekers among all Member States under the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU' (Movimento Cinque Stelle, 2018). The program of the M5S, which supported the 'objective zero landings: Italy is not the European refugee camp', was very critical to the migration policies in place, and stated that 'immigration is the biggest failure of the parties', in particular referring to the Dublin Regulation. The proposals of the M5S were to remove the causes of migration: an embargo on arms sales to countries in civil war and an end of exploitation of third countries, international cooperation for the development

of countries of origin, to end exploitation and to offer real development cooperation, to increase and strengthen the territorial commissions, speeding up the procedures: asylum within six months, to create legal and safe access routes to the European Union, to evaluate the admissibility of applications for international protection directly in the countries of origin or transit, before departures (in consulates, embassies and European Union delegations), ten thousand new hires in the police and two new prisons, to increase security and legality. The M5S, was hard on NGOs and reception management, aimed principally at a revision of the Dublin agreements to obtain a redistribution not only of asylum seekers but also of economic migrants. The increase in development aid was a measure shared by many and the ‘end of exploitation’ was an enunciation as correct as it was rhetorical and generic.

4.3 Italians’ Voting Behavior

The rise of the anti-immigration parties over the years can not only be analyzed through the final elections, as for the purpose of analyzing the contemporaneous rise of salience of immigration and the rise of the Lega it is important to analyze longer trends, possible through regular opinion polling. Appendix 3 (Figure A1) provides a long run average of opinion polls performed by various different polling firms, from the last election in 2013 up until the 2018 general election. Analyzing the general trend, it is clearly possible to notice what has been suggested throughout this thesis. The Lega had very little support around the last elections, and the three major parties were the Partito Democratico, Movimento Cinque Stelle and Forza Italia (starting from the dissolution of its predecessor Partito della Libertà in 2013). Until 2014 the opinion polls for the Lega were still fairly low, and then showed a huge increase right around the influx of the majority of immigrants arriving to Italian shores. The around 10 percentage point increase in support is rather staggering, and the support remained more or less stable at around 15 percent during the years prior to the election. Clear from the graph is also the steady decline of the mainstream center-left party and the stability in polls of the anti-establishment Movimento Cinque Stelle at an average of around 25 percent, apart from an increase in support in 2015.

On 4th March 2018, the elections were held for the renewal of the Italian parliament and the results largely dismayed the country and its traditional political leaders. The coalition of the centre-right (Lega, Forza Italia, Fratelli d'Italia, Noi con l'Italia/Unione di Centro) led by Matteo Salvini of the Lega, emerged with the majority of seats in the Chamber of Deputies and in the Senate, the Movimento Cinque Stelle, under the lead of Luigi di Maio, won the highest number of votes for a single party (more than 30 percent), while the centre-left coalition, with the former Prime Minister Matteo Renzi, came third (Ministero dell'Interno, 2018). The Movimento Cinque Stelle received more than 30 percent of the votes, the Lega with 17 percent overtook Forza Italia, which stopped at 14 percent. The Democratic Party recorded the worst defeat in its history, obtaining 18 percent in the Chamber and 19 percent in the Senate (full election results can be found in the Appendix 4). Liberi e Uguali exceeded the threshold of 3 percent, while Potere al Popolo with 1.1 percent remained outside of Parliament (Ministero dell'Interno, 2018). There were no seats also for the formations of the far-right, Casa Pound and Forza Nuova, below one percent. As there was no clear majority won by any political group, it resulted in a hung parliament.

In terms of voter turnout, on 4th March, 72.9 percent of those eligible went to vote, which represents the lowest percentage since 1948 until today (Internazionale, 2018). The highest price of the abstention was likely paid by the Democratic Party. According to an Ipsos (2018) analysis, more than a fifth of the voters of the center-left coalition led by Bersani in 2013 decided to abstain. Moreover, among the first-time voters the M5S prevailed, followed ex-aequo or almost, by PD and the Lega. Abstention was high (35 percent) also in this case, and it seems to represent an escape from the PD. Especially among students it seemed that the PD had an important following, but this electorate decided to a large extent not to partake in the elections. The very high abstentionism was not a very big surprise, as people have been protesting for a long time. The negative sentiment materialized itself in abstention percentages of almost 40 percent in Sicily and Calabria, which although very high, actually represent a slight decline with respect to the previous elections (Internazionale, 2018). This picture was heavily influenced by the Movimento Cinque Stelle managing to succeed in

gaining the vote from people that in 2013 decided not to vote (Results from the 2013 elections can be found in Appendix 5).

Election Results – Chamber of Deputies

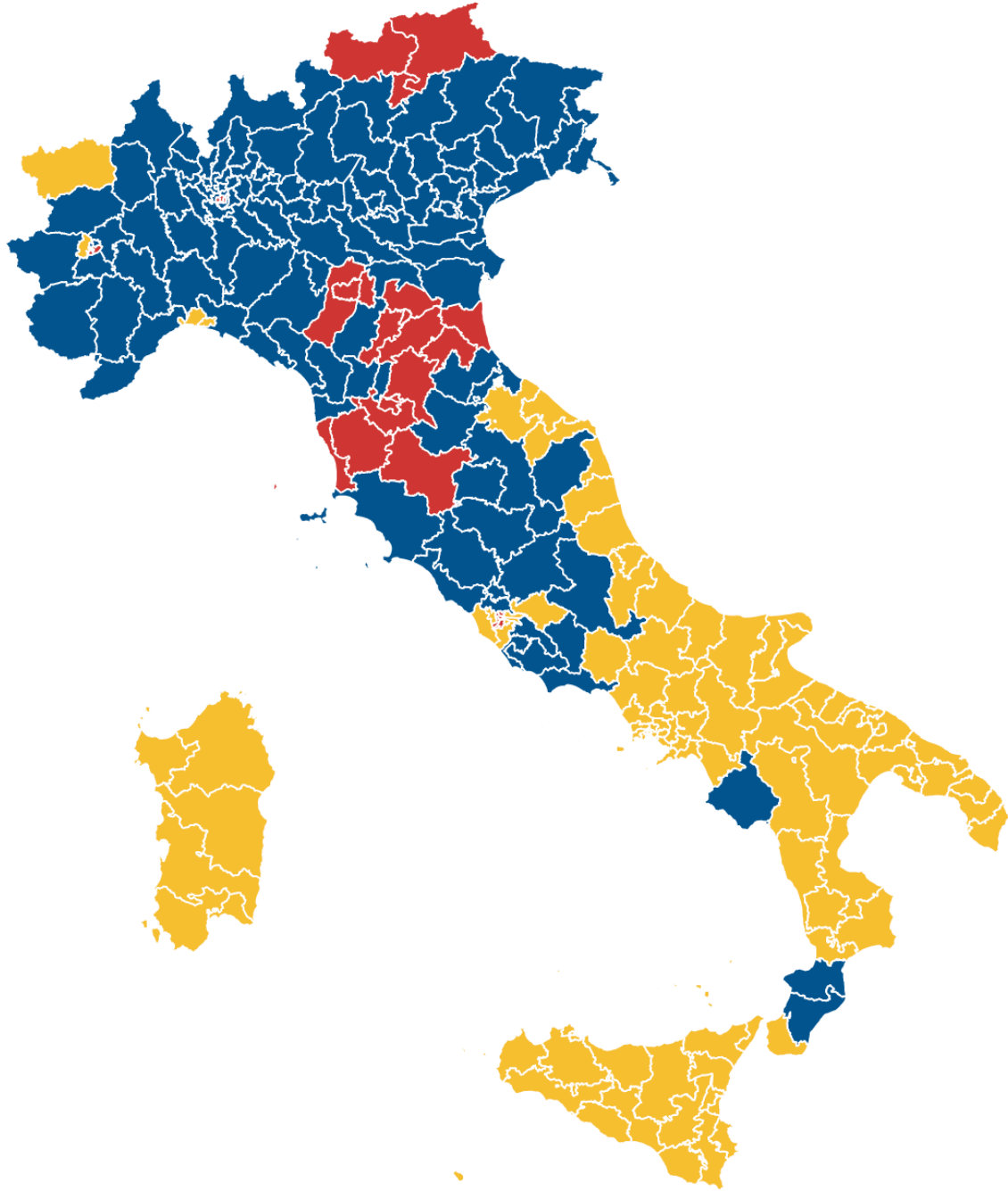


Figure 3: Election result map for the Chamber of Deputies in constituencies (Winning coalition candidate). Red: Centre-left; Blue: Centre-right; Yellow: Movimento Cinque Stelle. Source:La Repubblica (2018a)

Election Results – Senate of the Republic

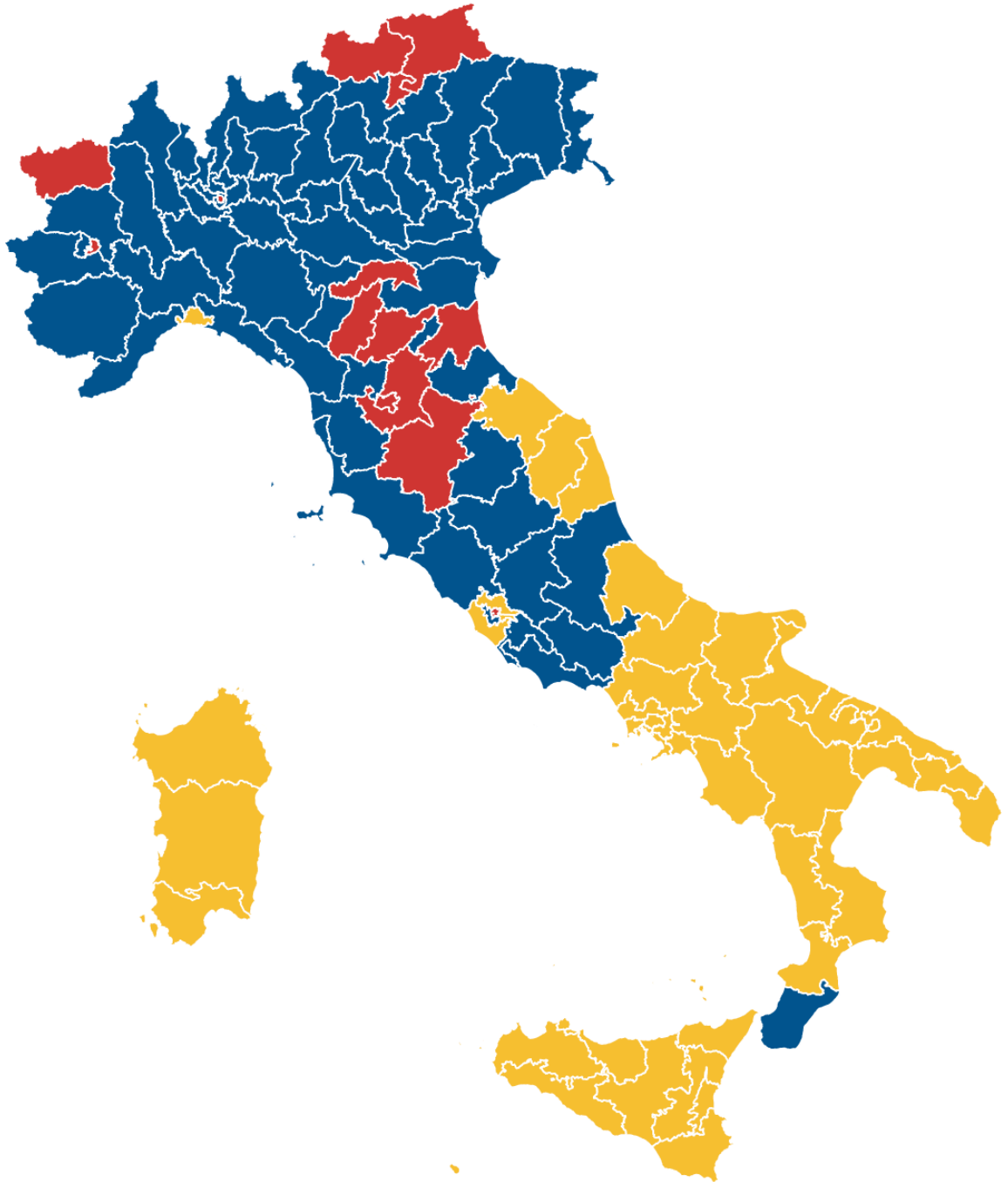


Figure 4: Election results map for the Senate of the Republic in constituencies (Winning coalition candidate). Red: Centre-left; Blue: Centre-right; Yellow: Movimento Cinque Stelle. Source: La Repubblica (2018b)

It is thanks to this ability to attract voters that the politicians of the Movimento Cinque Stelle managed to conquer southern Italy (Internazionale, 2018). From Naples to Palermo, almost 50 percent of voters voted for them. On the other hand, the majority of the other half of the country, chose the center-right led by the League (as can be seen from the Figures 3 and 4, showing the winning parties and coalitions in constituencies). The greatest successes for the Lega came from the regions of the north: in Liguria, Salvini's party won 20 percent; in Veneto 33 percent; and in Lombardy 29 percent. To be kept in mind are also other results. The Lega grabbed 15 percent in Lampedusa, 23 percent in Taormina, 9 percent in Foggia, 10 percent in Lazio. In Macerata, where 3rd February, a former militant of the Northern League then follower of the extreme right, wounded six foreigners with gunshots, the party led by Salvini passed from 0.6 percent in 2013 to 21 percent in 2018 (Internazionale, 2018). As has been shown by Emanuele and Maggini (2018), the greatest success of the Lega comes from provinces that have very high number of immigrants. An analysis by the Cattaneo Institute (2018a) acknowledges as a substantial novelty the ability of the Lega to erode the PD electorate, as it states that the issues of immigration control, and more generally of the law and order, which were the traditional heritage of the center-right electorate, are evidently themes that more recently arouse the attention and concerns even of the electorate of the left, which is partly left to being attracted by those who, like the Lega, have put these issues at the center of the political agenda.

The research institute Tecnè Italia (2018) analysed how much the topics of immigration and security mattered in the vote. The results after the vote showed that for 41 percent of voters of the Lega, the main problems are security and immigration, and this in spite of the fact the interior ministry declared that in 2017 the crimes decreased compared to 2016, as well as the arrivals of migrants. Unemployment and poverty were another key to interpreting the March 4th vote. When comparing the votes for the M5S with the areas of Italy with the high unemployment rates and risk of poverty and social exclusion, there are several concurrences. In 2016, the unemployment rate in Italy was 11.8 percent, while in Sicily it was 22.1 percent, in Campania 20.4 percent, in Apulia 19.4 percent, and in Sardinia 17.3 percent, four regions where the M5S has obtained very high percentages, and where the poverty risk recorded by

Istat is greater (Internazionale, 2018). According to the Cattaneo Institute (2018a), one of the keys of the success of the Movimento Cinque Stelle was to address their policies especially to the more marginal social sectors that have suffered the difficulties of the economic crisis, challenging the left also in terms of prerogatives and ‘material promises.’

Discussion - Immigration: Big Problem, High Salience and Small Solutions

In an electoral campaign oftentimes conducted in irresponsible and superficial ways, it is not surprising, that the enormity of the issues raised concerning immigration corresponded to tragically little proposed solutions, but still an increasingly more politicized and salient topic (Petrillo, 2018). Apart for some rare exceptions, routed either in government activity already tested or in activities aimed at monitoring it, the majority of immigration programs aimed to please the electorate, which implied, as the Law Studies Association on immigration (Bonetti, 2018) notes, that those proposals were formulated in such a way as to allow everyone to give them their personal meaning, which however made them ambiguous, not very binding and not very feasible. However, the issue of feasibility did not only touch the main issue of the financial hurdles related to budgetary constraints, but it revealed the limited cultural horizon of the incumbent ruling class when it comes to immigration. If it is hardly surprising that sovereign extra-parliamentary movements did not respect the principle of non-refoulement, it is more disconcerting that much more well-off political forces carelessly promised mass repatriations, omitting that, in Italy expulsion consists of a single piece of paper that requires leaving the territory, and that the readmission agreements signed with only four African countries (Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco and Nigeria) hardly work, both for the high management costs and for the failure to comply with the Return Directive of 2008 (Petrillo, 2018). The European Commission (2015b) observed, that “diverging Member States’ practices in the implementation of the Return Directive hamper the effectiveness of the EU return system, as irregular migrants can avoid return by moving to another State in the Schengen area.” The issue of returns itself, remains thus symbolic for the crisis, which reminded and reminds anti-European and Euro-opportunist forces that when it comes to immigration, the decisive game, like it or not, concerns the whole Union.

Political parties are able to have an important space to strategically maneuver issues around immigration (Grande, Schwarzbözl and Fatke, 2018) and how they make use of the

opportunities ultimately is decisive in their results in elections. Challenger parties, that are typically ‘issue entrepreneurs’, promote previously ignored or mishandled issues and adopt positions that are different from mainstream parties’ choices (Hobolt and De Vries, 2015), particularly the radical-right populist parties concerning immigration issues (Kitschelt, 1996; Mudde, 2007; Kriesi *et al.*, 2008; Hooghe and Marks, 2009). Similarly to a study on other European countries, by Grande, Schwarzbözl and Fatke (2018), it has been shown above that if radical right populist parties start employing issue entrepreneurial strategies in their party manifestos, especially when immigration issues are highly politicized in the electoral arena, mainstream parties can also be found to contribute to the salience of the issue (Van der Brug *et al.*, 2015). Next to the manifestos, which indicate where the parties stand with regards to immigration, in order to ultimately be able to state how much salience the different political parties give to the issue of immigration, the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (2019) provides a useful resource. Academic experts, within the survey, measured the importance/salience of immigration policy for each of the parties (scale from 0 (not important at all) to 10 (extremely important)). For Italy, the results show that the Lega and Fratelli d’Italia were the parties giving the major importance to immigration, when evaluated in 2017 (respectively, 10 and 9.9). While on the other hand the importance given to immigration by the other parties is a lot lower (PD: 6.5, M5S: 4.8, FI: 5.8). This evaluation also showed an increase in salience over the years. This analysis therefore corroborates clearly what has been established previously. Combining this with the results on the salience of immigration given by the general population in the previous section, this undoubtedly shows that the radical right parties were better at materializing people’s concerns over immigration by giving higher importance to the issue in their policies, and take advantage of the salience bias with regards to immigration. This cognitive bias pushes people to give more attention to issues that are more emotionally prominent and neglect those that are less remarkable, as has clearly been confirmed for the case of Italy in the previous chapter.

Naturally, it cannot be disregarded that this relationship is likely to be bi-directional, as it is not to be excluded that politicians cover the issue of immigration due to the already established high salience of immigration. Nonetheless, arguably, this is likely not the case in

Italy, as the Lega has always given much importance to immigration, but they were just more skillful at riding the wave of increasing salience within societies and exploiting people's unhappiness. To further emphasize the point of success of the Lega as having been a result of the increased importance given to the negative immigration rhetoric, what has been analyzed separately previously in Figures 2 and Figure A1, can be combined as in Figure 5. It clearly shows that the percentage of people naming immigration as one of the two most important issues affecting Italy and the polls for Lega are significantly correlated. All in all, it can be positively argued that the rise of the Lega, starting years prior to the election and ultimately the affirmative results on 4th March 2018, go hand in hand with and are consequential to the European migration crisis and the high numbers of asylum seekers arriving to Italy through the Central Mediterranean route. It has to be acknowledged that although the issue of immigration was very high on the list of priorities of Italians and spurred the rise of the Lega, other factors such as unemployment and the economic situations should not be neglected when analyzing the complete election results. Clearly following from the above analysis, the single party that performed the best in Italy was the Movimento Cinque Stelle, through their anti-establishment and populist manifesto, focusing more on issues such as the economy and differences to the other parties, gaining high support among the unemployed people.

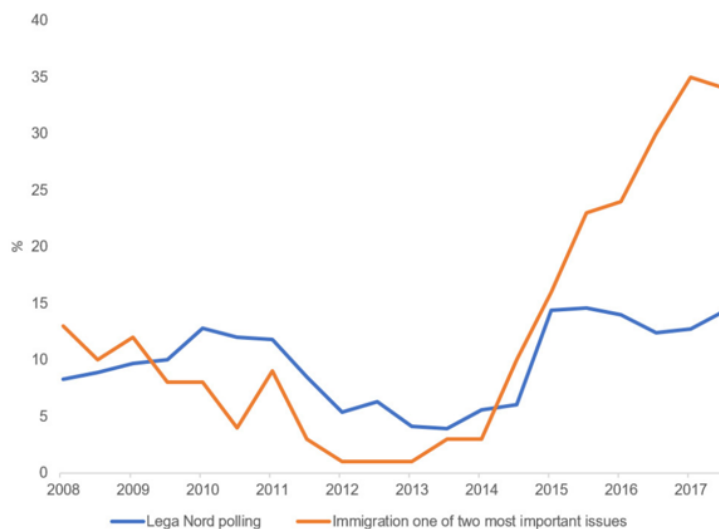


Figure 5: Salience of immigration and shares of Lega in the polls, as in Dennison and Geddes (2019).

Conclusion

The European migration crisis of 2015 has been shown to have had far and wide effects not only on individual countries in various different ways but also on a Union level. While some countries did not experience illegal border crossings through either land or sea but chose to have an open approach to asylum seekers, some countries were completely opposed to the idea of welcoming such high numbers of immigrants. Disputes were high between and within countries on the actions to be taken with regards to the arising crisis. While some argue that the phenomenon could have been more or less predicted, as the circumstances in origin countries, especially in North Africa, were not improving, the situation developed into a full-on crisis when disagreements escalated also at the European Union level. While there were clear policies in place to handle borders, transit, returns and asylum applications, these were in some cases completely disregarded, creating a big confusion and agitation around the issue. Naturally, politicians in different countries handled the crisis in different ways, and the chosen path was plus-minus accepted from the native populations. Although some countries were not troubled with people's sentiments and predispositions, some countries as exemplified for the case of Italy in this thesis, have experienced big repercussions after the immigration issue became so highly politicized, even years after the peak of arrivals.

Literature on voting theories have largely shown that people vote based on the values that are instilled in them. These values are naturally based on previous experiences and the socio-demographic situation of the individual has vaguely been shown to have an effect on their choices of political affiliation. A somewhat newer and less explored nuance of voting theories comes through the argument that people tend to decide their voting behavior not only on what they already know and believe but what they see as having a high importance in their preferences and thus which party is best endowed to tackle the situation. This theory of issue salience can also bring people to shift their vote to a different political party based on the salience they give to a specific topic and whether their preferred political party is less able than another in solving the issue, profiting from the salience bias. Issue salience has also been

shown to have an impact on people in a way that they shift to parties with completely different ideologies. This in turn can act as a big catalyst for the rise of populist right-wing parties denouncing the ways the mainstream parties are enacting their policies. Especially in the realm of such a divisive subject such as immigration and the subsequently proposed immigration policies, issue salience can have a big ripple effect on people's and parties' sentiments and preferences. Thus, subsequently when the general population is highly impacted by the crisis and starts deeming it as having high consequences on themselves and their country, the eventual rise of anti-immigration parties is clear. As radical-right parties themselves apply great salience to the issue of immigration and give it great space in their manifestos, they tend to be able to match people's discontent and increase their following. Thus, for the case of Italy, where the populist far-right party Lega saw a drastic increase in support around and after the migration crisis up to the general elections, the question stood how far their success in the elections could be attributed to their choice on actions with regards to immigration.

Through an analysis of different surveys examining people's preferences on immigration matters, the direction of the general population of Italy was validated, and clearly pointed towards increasingly more apprehensions with regards to immigration. Corroborated with findings from other authors and studies, an analysis of the different parties' election programmes, showed that clearly Lega was the party in Italy which had the biggest agenda on migration and was the biggest proponent of the undesirability of immigrants' arrivals to Italian shores and sojourn on Italian soil. This not only had the consequence of reinforcing their supporters' ideals, but also had the strength of activating the 'dormant' feeling of unwelcomeness towards immigrants in people that were not intrinsically xenophobic, and therefore also caused great realignment between political parties. In the grand scheme of things, the Lega was extremely able in riding the wave of the salience of immigration and in exploiting people's increasing concerns with regards to incoming numbers of migrants, mostly through voicing their desire of wanting to put themselves first and employing harsher measures at how to control them. Clearly, this result shows how the winners' strength were the losers' weaknesses (De Sio and Paparo, 2018). This is of high importance for the future

of devising policies around immigration and serves as a lesson to the European continent, as it is necessary to learn from the mistakes made previously to handle the very likely future immigration influxes through land and sea. Salvini, being such an able communicator and a savvy opportunist, has further confirmed the importance of a strong leader figure for a party's success. As the Lega's following has increased even more, largely surpassing the Movimento Cinque Stelle and the Partito Democratico in polls, as for instance exemplified by the recent European Parliament elections (European Parliament, 2019), similarly to France, Poland and Hungary where right-wing and nationalist parties won the majority, the worries around the future have likely intensified. Future studies on how the salience of immigration played a role in the election results of right-wing parties in the European Parliament would likely be able to complement and confirm the results found here for Italy.

Concluding, as alluded to in the quotation at the beginning of this thesis, the outcomes to certain situations mostly depend on individuals' perception of it, and not on the situation itself, and as clearly shown by the surveys and the election results in the case of Italy, if a person believes that a situation is real, the consequences of that perceived situation are also equally as real. In order to subdue the nationalistic and xenophobic values supported by Salvini and others, it will be of high importance to make efforts to positively reengage the people in society, especially the more moderate ones. Moreover, the copiousness of policies should not try to stir up distrust in the future of the country, but rather they should be based on models trying to reverse the frustrations and worries of the population. As Lega is primarily based on incarnating the resentment to the traditional powers, in the long run this will definitively continue to infringe the cohesion and solidarity of societies and thus with time, divisive political logics need to be confined (Faggiano *et al.*, 2018). Ultimately, arguments around this topic are very complex, and it is fallacious to simplify them into generalizations on views and beliefs of Italians and causes of conversions into support for extremist parties. But, hence, there is a clear need for coherent alternatives to this narrative, rather than increasingly mismanage frustrations, promises for positive change and a new, hopeful way forward should be highest on the agenda. In the case of Italy, not only are clearer solutions needed to restore order and confidence in Italy's migration system, but also to reach

out to Italians that have felt left out and neglected and to understand their sense of insecurity so to counter anti-immigrant attitudes from the bottom-up, enabling people to elect what they deeply care about, rather than being cornered into something not preferred, because of lack of alternatives and trust.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Source: Pew Research Center (2018)

“The higher the score on the scale – on which scores from zero to 10 are possible – the more likely a respondent is to express Nationalist, anti-Immigrant and anti-religious Minority views (NIM). Because the number of questions about each topic varies, each question was weighted so the three topics covered have equal impacts on the scale.

What goes into the Nationalist, anti-Immigrant and anti-Minority (NIM) scale

The following questions were combined into a scale such that questions on each of the three topics (nationalism, immigration and religious minorities) contributed equally to the scale. Scores increase by the amount noted below if a respondent says ...

Nationalism (each worth 1.11 points)

1. It is very/somewhat important to have been born in [COUNTRY] to be truly [NATIONALITY] (e.g., to have been born in France to be truly French).
2. It is very/somewhat important to have [NATIONALITY] family background to be truly [NATIONALITY] (e.g., to have French family background to be truly French).
3. I completely/mostly agree that, “Our people are not perfect, but our culture is superior to others.”

Immigration (each worth 0.48 points)

1. The number of immigrants to [COUNTRY] should be reduced.
2. Immigrants from Eastern Europe, such as those from Poland, are *not* hardworking
3. Immigrants from the Middle East, such as those from Syria, are *not* hardworking
4. Immigrants from Africa, such as those from Nigeria, are *not* hardworking
5. Immigrants from Eastern Europe, such as those from Poland, are *not* honest
6. Immigrants from the Middle East, such as those from Syria, are *not* honest
7. Immigrants from Africa, such as those from Nigeria, are *not* honest

Religious minorities (each worth 0.28 points)

1. I am *not* willing, or don't know (or declined to answer) if I'm willing, to accept Muslims as neighbors.
2. I am *not* willing, or don't know (or declined to answer) if I'm willing, to accept Muslims as family members.
3. I am *not* willing, or don't know (or declined to answer) if I'm willing, to accept Jews as neighbors.
4. I am *not* willing, or don't know (or declined to answer) if I'm willing, to accept Jews as family members.
5. I completely/mostly agree that, “In their hearts, Muslims want to impose their religious law on everyone else in [COUNTRY].”
6. I completely/mostly agree that, “Due to the number of Muslims here, I feel like a stranger in my own country.”

7. I completely/mostly agree that, “Jews always overstate how much they have suffered.”
8. I completely/mostly agree that, “Jews always pursue their own interests and not the interest of the country they live in.”
9. Islam has teachings that promote violence.
10. All/most/many Muslims in the country support violent extremist groups
11. Muslim women who live in the country should not be allowed to wear *any* religious clothing.
12. Islam is fundamentally incompatible with the country’s culture and values”

Appendix 2

Lega with Salvini Prime Minister – Programme for general elections 4th March 2018 (Translated from Italian from Lega (2018))

“Slogan: “It is time to give our children the certainty of a better future. more work, more security, less taxes, less immigration. with the pride of belonging to the most beautiful country in the world”

IMMIGRATION

No one should feel compelled to leave their country and their roots for economic reasons. We can really help the areas of the planet more disadvantaged by supporting on-site projects, certainly not welcoming everyone. There is no space for Africa in Italy!

REGULATION OF IMMIGRATION AND RETURNS

- Re-establish and implement the number of Identification and Expulsion Centers (CIE) in no less than one for each Region and, at the same time, extend the period for detention at least up to 6 months, in order to make the expulsion executable;
- Provide for the fact that the absence of documents for asylum seekers involves detention at the CIE for the purposes of identification in compliance with EU directives and requesting that the Italian State act as spokesperson in Europe to extend the possibility of detention until the asylum request procedure is completed.
- Transfer the competences for the control and management of the CIE to the Regions with the coordination of the law enforcement agencies in the area, as is currently the case in the Sicily region Sharing of databases (AFIS and SDI) with the local Police.
- Management of reception centers by the Regions and not with private custody in cooperative manners. In any case, transparency in the management of reception centers, reporting of expenses and rigorous control of the guests, with updated records of guests.
- The Regions, retaining broad powers of control and revocation of conventions, can rely on management of asylum seekers only to subjects with certified and consolidated experience in the field of reception that will be collected in a special register.
- Push the countries of origin to sign bilateral repatriation agreements, in the face of economic agreements; (Complaint of international aid agreements for non-cooperative countries).
- Evaluate that you are making a statement against the Government due to repeated omission of the application of the law which regulates immigration and lack of border control.

INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION

- Revocation of the Renzi-Alfano agreement on the rules of engagement in the "Triton" project;
- Evaluate the possibility of building reception centers in safe countries close to Libya under the auspices of the UN, with which Italy must become a proponent (in the alternative,

also evaluate the possibility of achieving reception centers in Tunisia, as already developed by the entrepreneur Ernesto Vita with relocation of the migrants to Djerba in hotels emptied of fears of attacks. Project that provides for the relocation of at least 500,000 people with spending per migrant with all the comforts of € 24 per day). The cost of both proposals are placed against a European fund, based on the one used to support reception in Turkey.

- Refusal to disembark for NGOs that are on the margins of the Libyan territorial sea due to an alarm on a self-induced shipwreck and a prelude to the exploitation of illegal immigration. Ban anyway disembarkation from NGO ships for passengers who do not have identification documents.

- Approve the DDL 3657/2016 proposed by the Lega Nord (first signatory Hon. Fedriga) on the amendments to the procedure for the recognition or revocation of refugee status which provides for the cancellation of the territorial commissions and the competence of the Honorary Peace Judge, for the purpose of greater economic efficiency and speeding up of procedures, in compliance with constitutionally guaranteed rights;

- Provide for the loss of the right to the request for international protection and the revocation, if already granted, in the case of commission of crimes such as crimes relating to terrorism, drug dealing, robbery, violence, damage, occupation of buildings and land, as well as revocation of benefits even in the event of non-compliance with the rules of the reception center.

- Prepare a list of countries deemed safe as a limit to accepting applications for international protection.

- Based on the recent decision of the EU Court of Justice to address new applications for asylum to other countries given the exceptional number that determines "the real risk of not being able to cope with the situation".

- Make agreements also with the tribes of southern Libya, and ask for the cooperation of Russia for possible agreements with General Khalif Haftar. Application of the Spanish protocol for strict control of borders on the sea, with technological tools and consequent externalization of borders.

- Provide for a budget constraint according to which for the "refugee" the State will not be able to commit resources greater than those destined to a 100% disability pension of an Italian citizen. It will also not be possible to establish greater contributions for the reception of foreigners with respect to those aimed at policies in support of Italians in poverty which, according to Istat, are about 8 million, of which 1 million and 600,000 families in absolute poverty (which correspond to four and a half million citizens). Especially families with 3 or more children who should be protected more than the others for a positive demographic policy.

- Revoke the decision of the former Minister Alfano which grants the right to issue the identity card to migrants, to get them access to the assistance of individual Municipalities.

- Commitment to host a permanent peace conference on Libya in Italy involving all forces involved in the civil war.

CRIME OF IRREGULAR IMMIGRATION

- Provide for a new type of specific crime aimed at thwarting international organizations for the trafficking in human beings and to widen the faculty of using evidence even outside those gathered by the judicial police, including also those of the judicial police of other

European countries, for the fight against illegal immigration given the extranational nature of the commissive behavior and the need to prevent terrorist acts.

- Establish the right for the judicial police to collect evidence on the fight against illegal immigration through the presence of personnel on NGO ships and to prohibit the landing of those that refuse it.
- Expulsion of non-EU prisoners with the right to make agreement with the countries of origin in the period of detention and expulsion with accompaniment.

RESIDENCY PERMIT

- Review the quota system to adopt market mechanisms, subordinating requests to verification of the availability of Italian citizens, such as direct and nominative calling, leaving the quotas to seasonal workers.
- Entrust the Municipalities, with the coordination of the Regions and not to the Police Headquarters, the competence to issue the short-term residence permit in order to speed up procedures and guarantee greater control of local police on the phenomenon of immigration and the regular stay of citizens of third countries, similar to what happens in Germany, where the release of the Aufenthaltserlaubnis (permit of short stay) is the responsibility of the local immigration office (Einwohnermeldeamt);
- Entrust to the Provincial Directorates of the Ministry of Labor (or to the Department of Education, Vocational Training, Universities and Research and Work of the Regions) and not to the Prefectures the functions of handling the practices of first hiring of foreign workers, family reunification and conversion of the permit of living room;
- Provide that the Police Headquarters issue the information to the Municipalities (Casellario, A.F.I.S. surveys, S.D.I. findings) aimed at issuing the residence permit.

STAY AND CITIZENSHIP

- Foresee the prohibition of the possibility of obtaining access to welfare benefits (request for social housing, tax relief, etc.) for non-EU immigrants through simple self-declarations and standardizing the law with that in force for Italian citizens.
- Maintenance of the current Law 91/1992, but to include in the naturalization procedure, for the purposes of citizenship, not only the 10-year residence, but also an examination of knowledge of the language, of culture and Italian traditions, for the purposes of assessing overall integration and providing for the revocation of Italian citizenship for those responsible for Islamic terrorism or apology for Islamic terrorism, such as social security tool.

RELATIONSHIP WITH ISLAM

Radicalization is fought by reiterating that in the Italian state the freedom to profess one's cult goes exercised in full compliance with all other constitutional principles. Italian law cannot be disregarded abusing the concept of religious freedom or democracy: the latter is based first of all on the respect of the laws that must be the same for everyone. There must therefore be strict observance and application of the law to Muslims also banned from Italian citizens, and therefore:

- ban on polygamy;

- rejection for students who refuse to participate in certain compulsory subjects or who refuse the due respect for female superiors;
- prohibition of occupying public land to pray, closure of abusive cultural circles, prohibition of different treatments due to assumed religious rules in public services, such as hospitals, public administrations, canteens, etc .;
- prohibition of financial or fiscal rules other than those of the country: therefore, revocation of the agreement between Coreis (Italian Islamic Religious Community) and the National Microcredit Authority, which provides for an allocation of public funds to encourage the Islamic company in Italy and help immigrants to buy a house (there is talk of 10,000 to 25,000 euros for each company).
- Obligation of transparency of the investments coming from some Countries like Qatar, Saudi Arabia, etc.
- Prohibition of the establishment of parties that are characterized by being addressed only to Muslims and to protect only this category of subjects, as unconstitutional and contrary to Italian law.

In summary, true integration that can only be implemented through strict compliance with Italian law and the relationship equal with Italian citizens.”

Appendix 3

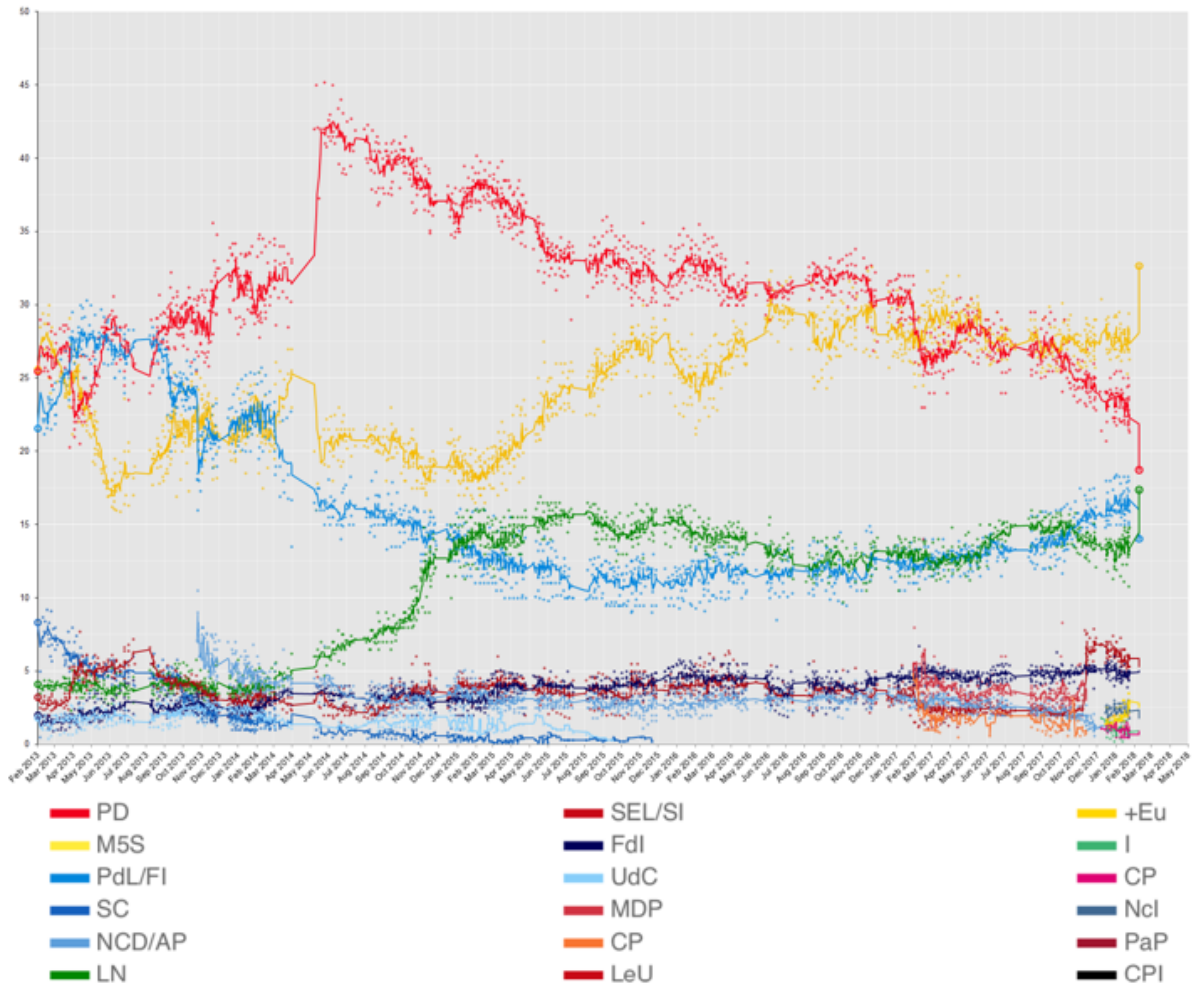


Figure A1: Opinion polling for the 2018 Italian general election, based on data collected and retrievable from the Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri (2018)

Appendix 4

March 4, 2018 Senate Election Results - Italy Totals *

Registered Electors	42,780,033	
Voters	31,231,814	73.0%
Blank or Invalid Ballots	1,021,451	3.3%
Valid Votes	30,210,561	96.7%

Ticket	Votes	%	Seats		
			Single-Member	List	Total
Forza Italia, Lega, Fratelli d'Italia, UDC	11,327,549	37.5	58	77	135
Lega	5,321,537	17.6		37	
Forza Italia	4,358,004	14.4		33	
Fratelli d'Italia	1,286,606	4.3		7	
Noi con l'Italia - UDC	361,402	1.2		0	
Movimento 5 Stelle	9,733,928	32.2	44	67	111
PD, +Europa, SVP-PATT, Civica Popolare, Italia Europa Insieme	6,947,199	23.0	13	44	57
Partito Democratico	5,783,360	19.1		43	
SVP - PATT	128,282	0.4		1	
+Europa	714,821	2.4		0	
Italia Europa Insieme	163,454	0.5		0	
Civica Popolare	157,282	0.5		0	
Liberi e Uguali	991,159	3.3	0	4	4
Potere al Popolo!	320,493	1.1	0	0	0
CasaPound Italia	259,718	0.9	0	0	0
Il Popolo della Famiglia	211,759	0.7	0	0	0
Italia agli Italiani	149,907	0.5	0	0	0
Partito Comunista	101,648	0.3	0	0	0
Others	167,201	0.6	0	0	0

March 4, 2018 Chamber of Deputies Election Results - Italy Totals *

Registered Electors	46,505,350	
Voters	33,923,321	72.9%
Blank or Invalid Ballots	1,082,296	3.2%
Valid Votes	32,841,705	96.8%

Ticket	Votes	%	Seats		
			Single-Member	List	Total
Forza Italia, Lega, Fratelli d'Italia, UDC	12,152,345	37.0	111	151	262
Lega	5,698,687	17.4		73	
Forza Italia	4,596,956	14.0		59	
Fratelli d'Italia	1,429,550	4.4		19	
Noi con l'Italia - UDC	427,152	1.3		0	
Movimento 5 Stelle	10,732,066	32.7	92	133	225
PD, +Europa, SVP-PATT, Civica Popolare, Italia Europa Insieme	7,506,723	22.9	28	88	116
Partito Democratico	6,161,896	18.8		86	
SVP - PATT	134,651	0.4		2	
+Europa	841,468	2.6		0	
Italia Europa Insieme	190,601	0.6		0	
Civica Popolare	178,107	0.5		0	
Liberi e Uguali	1,114,799	3.4	0	14	14
Potere al Popolo!	372,179	1.1	0	0	0
CasaPound Italia	312,432	1.0	0	0	0
Il Popolo della Famiglia	219,633	0.7	0	0	0
Italia agli Italiani	126,543	0.4	0	0	0
Partito Comunista	106,816	0.3	0	0	0
Others	198,169	0.6	0	0	0

* Totals exclude Valle d'Aosta

Source: Álvarez-Rivera (2018)

Appendix 5

February 24-25, 2013 Chamber of Deputies Election Results - Italy Totals *

Registered Electors	46,905,154		
Voters	35,270,926	75.2%	
Blank or Invalid Ballots	1,265,171	3.6%	
Valid Votes	34,005,755	96.5%	

List	Votes	%	Seats
Pier Luigi Bersani	10,049,393	29.6	340
Partito Democratico	8,646,034	25.4	292
Sinistra Ecologia Libertà	1,089,231	3.2	37
Centro Democratico	167,328	0.5	6
Südtiroler Volkspartei (SVP)	146,800	0.4	5
Silvio Berlusconi	9,923,600	29.2	124
Il Popolo della Libertà	7,332,134	21.6	97
Lega Nord	1,390,534	4.1	18
Fratelli d'Italia	666,765	2.0	9
La Destra	219,585	0.6	0
Grande Sud - MPA	148,248	0.4	0
MIR - Moderati in Rivoluzione	82,557	0.2	0
Partito Pensionati	54,418	0.2	0
Others (Silvio Berlusconi)	29,359	0.1	0
MoVimento 5 Stelle - beppegrillo.it	8,691,406	25.6	108
Mario Monti	3,591,541	10.6	45
Scelta Civica - Con Monti per l'Italia	2,823,842	8.3	37
Unione di Centro	608,321	1.8	8
Futuro e Libertà	159,378	0.5	0
Rivoluzione Civile	765,189	2.3	0
Fare per Fermare il Declino	380,044	1.1	0
Others	604,582	1.8	0

* Totals exclude Valle d'Aosta

February 24-25, 2013 Senate Election Results - Italy Totals *

Registered Electors	42,270,824		
Voters	31,751,350	75.1%	
Blank or Invalid Ballots	1,133,449	3.6%	
Valid Votes	30,617,901	96.4%	

Ticket	Votes	%	Seats
Silvio Berlusconi	9,405,652	30.7	116
Il Popolo della Libertà	6,828,994	22.3	98
Lega Nord	1,328,534	4.3	17
Grande Sud	122,262	0.4	1
Fratelli d'Italia	590,645	1.9	0
La Destra	221,368	0.7	0
Partito Pensionati	123,237	0.4	0
MIR - Moderati in Rivoluzione	69,838	0.2	0
MPA - Partito dei Siciliani	48,539	0.2	0
Others (Silvio Berlusconi)	72,235	0.2	0
Pier Luigi Bersani	9,685,437	31.6	113
Partito Democratico	8,400,851	27.4	105
Sinistra Ecologia Libertà	911,486	3.0	7
Il Megafono - Lista Crocetta	138,564	0.5	1
Centro Democratico	162,418	0.5	0
Partito Socialista Italiano	57,606	0.2	0
Others (Pier Luigi Bersani)	14,512	0.0	0
MoVimento 5 Stelle - beppegrillo.it	7,286,550	23.8	54
Con Monti per l'Italia	2,797,734	9.1	18
Rivoluzione Civile	551,064	1.8	0
Fare per Fermare il Declino	278,470	0.9	0
Others	612,994	2.0	0

* Totals exclude Valle d'Aosta and Trentino-Alto Adige

Source: Álvarez-Rivera (2018)