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Special Issue: 'Governo del Cambiamento'? Italian Politics under the Yellow-Green Government

Introduction to the Special Issue: 'Governo del cambiamento'? Italian politics under the yellow-green government

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An exceptional government coalition?

The general elections of March 2018 opened, once again, a turbulent phase in Italian politics. While no coalition or party obtained an absolute majority of parliamentary seats, both the Five Star Movement (*Movimento 5 stelle*, M5S) and the League (*Lega*) claimed a win in the wake of the elections. The M5S turned out to be the most voted party in Italy, with as much as one-third of the popular vote. Surpassing its traditional coalition partner Forward Italy (*Forza Italia*, FI), the League became the leader of the most voted electoral cartel, as the centre-right bloc received as a whole about 37% of the vote. After a long government-formation process characterised by many twists and turns, a new cabinet was sworn in June 2018, including the M5S and the League as coalition partners and featuring law professor Giuseppe Conte as Prime Minister (PM). To mark a difference with the party system and policy processes which had characterised Italian political life since the mid-1990s, the leaders of the two ruling parties – M5S's Luigi di Maio and the League's Matteo Salvini – defined the new cabinet as the 'government of change'. The latter was indeed formed by parties that were (the M5S) or had recently been (the League) outside the mainstream of the Italian party system. For the first time, the two political forces which had shaped electoral competition and had alternated in government almost uninterruptedly since 1994 – centre-right Forward Italy and centre-left Democratic Party (*Partito democratico*, PD) and its forerunners – were together put out of power.

The novelty of the Conte government, also known as the 'yellow-green' government, captured the attention of political observers around the world. In this regard, the headlines of some prominent newspapers published the day after Conte took the oath of office – 'People power' (*The Times*, June 2 2018), 'Italy's populists take power' (*Washington Post*, June 2 2018) – are telling. Following the elections, Di Maio himself had stated: 'Today the third republic commences, which will be at last the republic of Italian citizens' (March 5 2018).

In a comparative perspective, the outcome of the Italian elections of March 2018 and the formation of a 'populist' executive potentially fit well into more general patterns of restructuring of well-established party systems across Europe, especially as a

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consequence of the 'Great Recession' (Chiaramonte and Emanuele 2017; Hernández and Kriesi 2016; Hooghe and Marks 2018). Moreover, these developments seem consistent with the increasing politicisation of issues other than the economic left-right in the most recent period in Italy and in the rest of Europe (Giannetti, Pedrazzani, and Pinto 2017; Kriesi et al. 2012).

Nonetheless, leaving aside the rhetoric of party leaders and possible media sensationalism, the formation of the so-called 'government of change' has undoubtedly introduced several novel elements into the Italian political system. The first and most apparent 'change' with the past is the (almost) unprecedented nature of the coalition members. The Conte government is supported by a 'populist' majority in the parliament, as the two coalition parties took strong anti-Europe and anti-establishment stances before and after the elections. The distinction between 'the elite' and 'the people' (Mudde 2004) is coupled with a call for instruments of direct democracy in the case of the M5S (Bordignon and Ceccarini 2013; Corbetta 2017), and with nativist, anti-immigration attitudes in the case of the League (Passarelli and Tuorto 2018). In an attempt not to become part of the *casta*, the former seems to have retained some of its original characteristics and aspirations of radical renovation of the political process (Tronconi 2018). The latter, which was previously known as the Northern League (*Lega Nord*, LN), is indeed the oldest party in the Italian party system. However, it chose to remain outside the government starting from the end of 2011, when technocrat Mario Monti was appointed PM during the most acute phase of the economic crisis. Under the leadership of Salvini, the League gradually turned from a federalist party to a typical nationalist, radical right force. In the 2018 elections, both the M5S and the League succeeded in channelling citizens' frustrations with Italian traditional parties and with the European Union (EU) (Itanes 2018; Valbruzzi and Vignati 2018).

A second point of discontinuity regards the peculiar ministerial composition of the Conte cabinet, where a number of technocrats stand beside ministers coming from the two 'populist' coalition parties. To begin with, the two ruling parties chose as PM a virtually unknown figure without any previous political or parliamentary experience. The appointment of a non-partisan PM is not new in Italy. However, unlike Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, Lamberto Dini and Monti – who headed a semi-technocratic cabinet in 1993 and fully technocratic cabinets in 1995 and 2011, respectively –Conte is neither a high-ranking bureaucrat nor a renowned economist. His primary task seems to be that of ensuring coordination between the two coalition partners in the course of day-to-day policymaking. As a whole, the yellow-green cabinet has a strong technocratic connotation, as it presents the highest share of 'technical' ministerial personnel among all the Italian partisan governments (Valbruzzi 2018). Besides the PM office, five of the nineteen ministerial positions were given to non-partisan figures. In particular, to ensure the credibility of Italy abroad, two independents were appointed in the key portfolios of Foreign Affairs and Economy. The latter element is actually in line with the past, as the economic portfolios of Italian governments have been heavily controlled by non-partisan ministers since the 1990s (Verzichelli and Cotta 2018). However, the ministerial personnel of the M5S-League cabinet exhibits the highest degree of volatility – i.e., a share of ministers belonging to parties that were not in power in the previous cabinet – in Italy's post-war history (Calossi and Cicchi 2018).

Compared with the usual patterns of government formation in Italy, the presence of a formal coalition contract represents a third innovation. The government formation process bringing to the Conte cabinet was similar to the process leading to the Letta cabinet in many respects. Just as in the spring of 2013, the yellow-green government coalition was not based on an alliance formed before the election, but was built after a long bargaining period in which one of the pre-electoral coalitions was broken and the President of the Republic played a crucial role (Curini and Pinto 2017). Yet, for the first time in Italian republican history, the yellow-green cabinet relies upon a formal post-electoral contract signed by the leaders of the coalition parties. While absent until 1994, some forms of coalition agreements made their appearance in Italy during the Second Republic. However, these were much less formalised than the coalition treaties that can be found in other European countries. In fact, they were simply the joint electoral manifesto that the winning coalition had issued before the election (Cotta and Marangoni 2015; Moury 2013). The coalition contract between the M5S and the League is more similar to the pacts that are common in countries like Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands. Not only is it a public document officially signed by the two party leaders after the election, but it also sets up mechanisms for handling possible conflicts within the coalition along with a list of policy priorities.

Shifting the focus from the executive to legislative institutions, a fourth change with the recent past is a regained congruence in the partisan composition of the two houses of the Italian Parliament. While being almost perfectly congruent throughout the First Republic, starting from 1994 the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate had increasingly diverged in terms of the distribution of seats among parties owing to the electoral reforms of 1993 and, above all, of 2005 (Zucchini 2013). As a result, less than half of the cabinets from 1994 onward controlled a majority of seats in both houses(Pedrazzani 2017). The new electoral system used in March 2018 – the Rosato law – produced very limited distortion in the translation of votes into seats (Chiaramonte and D'Alimonte 2018), creating two congruent houses in terms of partisan composition. Consequently, the Conte government is a minimal winning coalition in both the Chamber and the Senate.

Finally, a fifth novelty in the political landscape under the yellow-green cabinet deals with the big policy reforms that the M5S's and League's leaders pledged to enhance. During the electoral campaign, the M5S promised a universal scheme of basic income while the League outlined a block of immigration and tax cuts in the form of a flat tax on income. Both parties were committed to repealing several policy measures adopted by previous governments: among these, an unpopular pension restructuring that was enacted under the Monti executive and a controversial law increasing compulsory vaccinations that was approved under the outgoing Gentiloni cabinet. Although the leaders of M5S and the League did not openly declare to be willing to abandon the Euro currency, they also vowed to use tough tactics to force the other EU members to accept Italy's new spending plans. The reforms promised by the yellow-green coalition would then radically change the status quo in several crucial policy domains.

Why this Special Issue

For all the above-mentioned reasons, the birth of the 'government of change' can be a true turning point in the most recent evolution of the Italian political system. Moreover, the

'populist' government coalition formed in Italy can be an extremely interesting object of study also in comparative perspective. The aim of this Special Issue is to shed some initial light on the new political phase under the M5S-League government. We make no claim to provide a comprehensive account of the formation, dynamics and policy production of the new cabinet, as just a few months have passed since its swearing in on 1 June 2018. Nonetheless, this Special Issue can offer to the scholarly community in Italy and abroad some analytic tools and initial empirical findings to develop further research.

The Special Issue consists of seven research articles analysing a number of topics related to the functioning of the Italian political system under the 'government of change': the traits of the new parliamentary class elected in March 2018, the restructuring in the party system and in the space of party competition, the organisational evolution of the M5S in its route to power, the differences and commonalities of the two ruling parties along new salient dimensions of competition and in terms of their behaviour in parliament, the characteristics of the coalition contract upon which the yellow-green government is based, and some initial assessment of the way the M5S and the League are about to implement the new policy priorities in the government's agenda. In spite of the different theoretical and methodological approaches, all the articles offer fresh, descriptive (but theory grounded) accounts that help us to understand Italian politics under the 'government of change'. On the whole, this Special Issue can give some useful hints about the degree of cohesiveness of the yellow-green government and the issues that might put the coalition under strain.

Content and findings of the Special Issue

The analysis of the Italian political system under the 'government of change' provided by this Special Issue starts with an evaluation of some key characteristics of the parliament which gave birth to that government – in particular, the traits of the new parliamentary class elected in March 2018. In their article, Bruno Marino, Nicola Martocchia Diodati and Luca Verzichelli analyse data on members of the Chamber of Deputies taken from the database of the Centre for the Study of Political Change (CIRCaP), showing that the general elections of 2018 did not engender any radical renewal of Italian parliamentary class. The authors put forward a typology of members of parliament (MPs) based on their previous experience at the local government level, career within the party and parliamentary seniority, which is used as an analytical tool to explore patterns of elite recruitment and circulation. Although a noticeable number of fresh new parliamentarians were elected in March 2018 (especially within the M5S ranks), well-established politicians at the national level currently represent more than half of Italian deputies. Newcomers are almost absent in the League's group, where experience in sub-national governments or in the local party appears to be extremely relevant in order to be recruited and become an MP. For most Italian parties, MPs who are more experienced and central in the party organisation also benefited from the use of multi-candidacies in the last election. With regard to the selection of parliamentary and ministerial offices, the analysis reveals that, in spite of parties' rhetoric associated with the 'government of change', the patterns adopted by the two coalition partners are rather traditional. The most prestigious offices tend to be given to those MPs who had already been elected in 2013 in the case of the M5S, and to top-experienced politicians in the case of the League.

A crucial task in a study of Italian politics under the 'government of change' is to understand the very birth of the yellow-green cabinet in light of well-grounded theoretical perspectives developed in the scholarly literature on government formation. To this purpose, the article by Daniela Giannetti, Andrea Pedrazzani and Luca Pinto offers an account of the formation of the Conte cabinet based on a spatial approach to party competition and on the policy-seeking motivations of the parties involved in the coalition bargaining process. The authors assess the dimensionality of Italian policy space and build bi-dimensional maps of party competition on the basis of the salience parties attribute to various issues and the parties' positions on those issues. The analysis relies on original expert survey data on Italian parties collected by the authors following the election of March 2018. The 2018 data are compared with similar data covering Italian national elections since 2001. As the authors point out, the formation of the M5S-League cabinet can hardly be explained if we assume that the classical economic left-right represented the main axis of party competition in the general election of 2018. Indeed, the policy platforms of the two ruling parties are far from each other in economic terms. However, a diachronic analysis highlights dramatic changes in Italy's policy space, with a decline of economic issues and a significant rise in the salience of non-economic issues such as European integration and immigration. The formation of the Conte government was then decisively influenced by long-term processes in Italian politics, and can be explained in light of the policy positions held by the M5S and the League on non-economic domains.

The differences and commonalities between the M5S and the League are investigated more in depth by two articles in this Special Issue. One of these is the contribution by Benedetta Carlotti and Stella Gianfreda, who analyse how two highly politicised topics connected to the general integration-demarcation cleavage – the EU and immigration – are framed by the two coalition partners in the legislative arena. The authors outline a multi-dimensional (re-)conceptualisation of the EU and immigration issues aimed at untangling the various specific aspects of these two multi-faceted dimensions. To assess possible differences between the two coalition parties in the political arguments used to frame European integration and immigration, an original dataset was constructed comprising the legislative speeches delivered by M5S and League representatives in the Italian and European parliament. The data, which cover debates held between May 2014 and December 2016, were coded through computer-assisted discourse analysis. Results highlight that M5S legislators tend to emphasise an anti-elite position when talking about immigration and the EU, while the League's speeches reflect more of a cultural-identitarian and sovereigntist framing strategy. In particular, the League opposes immigration, relying most of all on arguments related to nativism and law and order logics. Moreover, Salvini's party criticises the EU from a typically sovereigntist point of view, whereby supra-national institutions are blamed for seizing fundamental decision-making powers from the member states. Conversely, the M5S frames its opposition to European integration by stressing the lack of democratic accountability of the EU-level elites, while M5S's speeches about immigration tend to focus on the mismanagement of the refugee crisis. The analysis also shows the Movement's adaptation to different institutional settings, as its members frame immigration-related topics using distinct arguments in the Italian parliament and in the European parliament. Such differences in how the two parties

position themselves on the integration-demarcation dimension can point to possible 'wedges' in the current governing coalition in Italy.

The common traits and differences between the two ruling parties are the primary object of study of another contribution in this Special Issue. In particular, the article by Elisabetta De Giorgi and António Dias compares the legislative activities of the M5S and the League when these parties entered Parliament as new challengers. As underlined by the authors, the M5S entered the Italian Parliament after the start of the Great Recession. Similarly, the (Northern) League had crossed the representation threshold more than twenty years previously, amid Italy's political and economic crisis of the late 1980s-early 1990s. The authors apply social network analysis to bill proposals in order to empirically evaluate the extent to which each of the two parties cooperated with other opposition groups during its first term in the Italian Parliament – that is, the 1992-1994 legislature for the League and the 2013-2018 legislature for the M5S. The analysed patterns of bill co-sponsorship in the Chamber of Deputies highlight strong similarities in the legislative behaviour of the M5S and the League when they first entered Parliament as new challengers, as both parties chose to stand apart from the other parliamentary groups, whether in government or in opposition. Such a strategy served the same purpose: both the M5S and the League sought to present themselves to voters as an alternative to all the existing political parties. Interestingly, under Salvini the League revived this strategy in the 2013-2018 legislature, in an attempt to (re-)build for itself a reputation as an anti-establishment political force. Altogether, these findings suggest that the new 'relational' dimension investigated by the authors – i.e., the patterns of cooperation with other parties in the legislative arena – can be fruitfully employed as a further dimension of analysis in future research on new challenger parties.

Whereas the League has long experience in political institutions and has consequently been extensively studied by scholars in Italy and abroad, the M5S is a much newer political actor and hence is a much less known subject in the political science literature. To help fill this gap, the article by Davide Vittori provides a theory-grounded account of the organisational evolution of the Movement from its early days before the economic crisis to its participation in the Conte executive. In analysing the transformation of the M5S from a challenger party into a government member, the author makes a compelling comparison with the Greek Syriza, whose route to power has been very similar to that of the M5S in spite of a different ideological profile. As demonstrated in the article, for these two (formerly) anti-establishment parties, elections represented a crucial factor for bringing change within the party organisation. Although a link between electoral shocks and internal reforms is normally found also in the case of mainstream parties, for Syriza and the M5S party change was triggered by an unexpected good performance (in 2012 and 2013, respectively) rather than by an electoral defeat. Following electoral breakthrough, both policy-seeking Syriza and democracy-seeking M5S became more oriented towards a purely vote-seeking strategy. In both cases, internal reforms were introduced in an attempt to anticipate future challenges coming from a new electoral shock – i.e., an even better electoral result and possible participation in the government. The author also underlines that organisational changes in Syriza and the M5S followed the same pattern characterising mainstream parties, as centralisation was strengthened and the institutionalisation process was steered by the most powerful party face at the time of the

internal reform. In the case of the M5S, internal reforms reinforced a structure based on dual leadership: an organisational leadership (the internet and publishing company *Casaleggio Associati*) that controls the party in central office, and a political leadership (Di Maio, who has replaced Belle Grillo) that controls the party in public office. In many respects, then, anti-establishment parties do not really differ from mainstream parties when it comes to taking or managing power.

As discussed above, the presence of a formal post-electoral contract between the M5S and the League undoubtedly represents a major innovation in the patterns of government formation in Italy. The article by José Santana-Pereira and Catherine Moury is devoted precisely to such an agreement, which was dubbed 'Contract for the government of change' (*Contratto per il governo del cambiamento*) by its drafters. As the authors stress, the coalition agreement at the basis of the yellow-green coalition is exceptional in several ways in the Italian context: it is the first post-electoral coalition treaty in Italy's republican history, and came out of negotiations between parties that had very different policy priorities and no record of cooperation in the past. In this article, the 2018 coalition contract is compared with former coalition documents adopted in Italy since the mid-1990s as well as with the party manifestos issued by the M5S and the League before the 2018 general elections. During the Italian Second Republic, the joint electoral programme of the winning pre-electoral coalition – often a long, comprehensive but vague document – served also as a bargaining platform for the government. Although no less vague, the M5S-League agreement contrasts with those documents because it was formalised after the election and was specifically conceived of as a programmatic basis for the government. Both the M5S and the League had to compromise in the 2018 contract, in which they also toned down their Euroscepticism. Altogether, the authors suggest that the lack of precision in the coalition contract may grant a great deal of autonomy to cabinet ministers in the course of the legislative term.

Certainly, the label 'government of change' itself hints at big policy reforms that, according to the public pledges of the M5S's and League's leaders, the Conte cabinet is willing to bring about. Since just six months have passed since the birth of the government, it is of course too early to evaluate the implementation of its new policy agenda. However, some initial clue about how the two coalition partners are about to enact the promised changes can already be found. In this regard, the final article in this Special Issue deals with one of the policy fields in which the yellow-green government is supposed to alter the status quo – that is, childhood vaccination. In particular, Mattia Casula and Federico Toth analyse how the two ruling parties are coping with a possible reform of the controversial 'Lorenzin decree', which was approved in 2017 and increased the number of compulsory vaccinations. As illustrated by the authors, both the M5S and the League are in favour of modifying the Lorenzin decree, but they do not agree on the strategy to be followed. The article provides a rich account of the debate surrounding mandatory vaccination in Italy, a topic that has divided both the public opinion and the political parties. In this debate, the M5S was apparently on the same side of the League, although the former seemed to wink at the so-called 'no vax' movement, and the latter held a much more pragmatic position. In addition, the authors formulate some plausible hypotheses about how the yellow-green government will tackle the issue of infant vaccinations, suggesting that the choice will probably depend on the balance of power within the coalition.

Although focusing on a single policy topic, this article may be useful for understanding how the M5S-League coalition will deal with other controversial issues such as the construction of high-speed rail networks (TAV) and the building of a natural gas pipeline (TAP) on Italian territory.

Open issues and avenues for future research

Summing up, the articles of this Special Issue have sketched a tentative account of the Italian political system under the 'government of change'. Although a number of crucial topics have been touched upon, the picture is of course far from being complete. This is because just a few months have passed since the swearing in of the Conte executive. Moreover, a final word on the functioning of the political system under the M5S-League government cannot be provided as Italy's political situation is still evolving in many respects. In particular, several important issues remain uncertain and may open up avenues for future enquiry.

First, the Italian party system may undergo further transformations. At the time of writing, it seems indeed hard to tell whether the tripolar party system that has emerged since 2013 will stabilise or a new bipolar phase will begin. In this regard, much will depend on the electoral rules as well as on the relevance of the 'integration-demarcation' cleavage, whose salience appears to have increased in Italy in the most recent period. Second, the fundamental actors in the party system are themselves subject to a process of internal change: the M5S is experiencing the evolution from an anti-establishment political force to a government party, the League seems oriented to fully becoming a right-wing party seeking votes on the entire national territory, the PD is in search of a new leader and FI is coping with the decline of its historical leader. Third, the possible duration of the M5S-League cabinet is uncertain. On the one hand, tensions in the day-to-day relationships between the two coalition parties are not unexpected. On the other hand, the outcome of the European Parliament election of May 2019 can open up new possibilities for either the M5S or the League, which can undermine the stability of the government.

Fourth, and related to the former point, it is unclear which model of decision-making will prevail in the coalition. While a prime ministerial model does not seem to apply to the Conte cabinet, it is probably too early to know whether individual ministers are left free to set policy in their department or ministerial discretion is somehow mitigated through specific mechanisms. So far, a lot of 'position-taking' activity can be observed, as Salvini and Di Maio tend to publicly take positions that please their own party constituency, sometimes in spite of the agreed-on coalition compromise. At the same time, the 'conciliation committee', an instrument specifically established for settling intra-cabinet divergences, does not seem to have been used yet to enforce the M5S-League contract. The most severe conflicts within the coalition are handled through semi-informal meetings involving Di Maio, Salvini and the PM, and possibly other key ministers. Fifth, at the time of writing it is not possible to know if the 'government of change' will indeed be able to enact the promised radical policy reforms. The process of approval of the government's budgetary bill that is currently taking place in the Italian parliament is highlighting not only the importance of external 'hurdles' such as economic and financial constraints, but also the policy divergences between the two coalition partners.

Furthermore, the implementation of the coalition treaty can be hindered by the appearance of unexpected new issues on the policy agenda. Finally, it is not clear whether the government will try to make only reforms at the policy level or it will also – and more ambitiously – attempt to change the 'rules of the game', modifying the electoral system and the constitution.

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From demolition to re-composition?

The 2018 Italian Lower House MPs and their careers: novelty and continuity

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Abstract

The 2018 Italian general election marked the consolidation of a three-pole party system. However, the contours of parliamentary elites seem to be still in motion. This article aims, at first, to describe the main features of Italian Lower House MPs by recurring to a five-fold classification, where different MPs' career features are taken into consideration. Then, it puts forward an analysis of the connection between this classification and the tool of multi-candidacies. Subsequently, the article presents the features of parliamentarian and governmental elites, before concluding by underlying the presence of both innovations and traditional patterns of career and pointing towards future avenues of research.

Introduction

The rates of electoral change and volatility in the 2018 Italian general election (Chiaramonte and Emanuele 2018; Emanuele 2018) mark it as a patent example of a *critical election*. This immediately leads us to raise questions about related changes in the features of the parliamentary elites and, consequently, in the whole profile of the ruling class. Indeed, the notion of critical election has always been associated with the problem of elite change, from the pioneering study produced more than one century ago by Pareto on political circulation to the modern comparative assessments on the long-term transformation of political elites (for a recent review, see Verzichelli 2018). Articulated theories have been developed about the linkages between party and party system changes on the one hand, and the changing structure of opportunities for the political elites (Norris 1997; Cotta and Best 2007) on the other, with important implications for the effective qualities of representatives (for a review, see Best and Vogel 2014).

The effects of the economic crisis (e.g., see Hernández and Kriesi 2016) and the growth of populist and challenger parties (e.g., see Pappas and Kriesi 2015) have recently triggered a quest for the persistence of the traditional patterns of elite formation and circulation, producing empirical and normative analyses of the prospective evolution of the democratic ruling class (for instance, see Caramani 2017). Many wonder what the future

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of representative elites will be without some iron law of oligarchy (Cordero and Coller 2018). However, it is precisely the consolidation of the new actors and their access to the executive institutions that are supposed to stabilise some kinds of new pattern of elite circulation.

These implications look particularly relevant in the analysis of the Italian parliamentary ruling class after the 2018 Italian general election. Several pundits have stressed interesting pieces of evidence: among them, a new step in the path of gender balance among the candidates to parliament (Pedrazzani, Pinto and Segatti 2018), a very relevant rate of parliamentary turnover (Salvati and Vercesi 2018), and new and significant records of rejuvenation of the political personnel (Marino, Martocchia Diodati and Verzichelli forthcoming).

However, can these signs be considered as a prelude to a significant transformation of parliamentary democracy in Italy? Indeed, one may stress the contradiction between the extraordinary parliamentary turnover rate and the persistence of some traditional features of parliamentary recruitment, like the 'consensus control' in the hands of a significant number of local politicians and the frequent accumulation of different political mandates. This dilemma certainly cannot be solved in a few pages on the basis of limited data groundwork. However, we can raise a few specific questions concerning the limited or controversial implications of such an important electoral turning point.

Such questions are, in short, related to the most relevant political-experience-related characteristics of the Members of Parliament belonging to the Lower House after the 2018 Italian general election, to the relationship between these different clusters and the features of their candidacy, and to the new structure of opportunities opened to the parliamentary elites in terms of (parliamentary and governmental) career prospects.

Such questions are particularly timely in the Italian scenario. In this short contribution, we argue that, notwithstanding the manifest novelties that have emerged in the selection of the parliamentary elite, the consolidation of a remarkably diverse ruling class seems to be far from taking place. The 'revolutionary' changes, stressed by the same party actors and by some observers of the descriptive representation (see Salvati and Vercesi 2018, Marino, Martocchia Diodati and Verzichelli forthcoming), can be scaled down to a sort of 'adaptive' pattern of differentiation. In other words, all the parties – including those supporting the *Governo del Cambiamento* (the Government of Change), i.e. the coalition between the *Movimento Cinque Stelle* (M5S) and the *Lega* (League), since June 2018 – have proven themselves unable to radically transform the nature of the patterns of circulation of their political representatives. This does not mean that changes have not occurred at all, but that a sort of resilient power of highly-ranked politicians concerning, say, parliamentary or governmental offices can still be found.

The article is organised as follows: in the next section, we discuss some innovative characteristics in the profiles of the 2018 Italian Lower House MPs and put forward a five-fold typology able to distinguish between different clusters of parliamentarians. We focus on the Lower House both for data-availability reasons and to foster comparisons with other Western Lower Houses and MPs. The second section is instead devoted to a more in-depth analysis of the tool of multi-candidacies and its link with different MP profiles. The third section explores the patterns of elite circulation from the same chamber to the 'inner circle' of institutional leaders both in parliament and in the new Conte

government. The concluding section discusses some of the implications deriving from our analysis in light of foreseeable future research.

1. The new Lower House Parliamentary elite

The primary empirical question we aim to answer in this section is the following: what are the most innovative characteristics of the 2018 Italian Lower House MPs? To detect possible differences or similarities between parties in the Italian Lower House after the 2018 general election, we have relied on the classification put forward in Marino, Martocchia Diodati and Verzichelli (forthcoming), based on different clusters of MPs: the *Intruders*, the *Local Party Machine* MPs, the *Local Untouchables*, the *National Untouchables*, and, finally, the *National Mandarins*. We have relied on the data on Italian Lower House MPs collected by the CIRCaP, the University of Siena's Centre for the Study of Political Change, focusing on the six largest political formations in the Italian Lower House in terms of seats held: the *Movimento Cinque Stelle* (M5S), the *Partito Democratico* (PD), the *Lega* (the League), *Forza Italia* (FI), the far left cartel of *Liberi e Uguali* (LeU), and *Fratelli d'Italia* (FdI), a small extreme right party included in the centre-right coalition. Moreover, special attention is paid to the two parties supporting the Government of Change, i.e. the League and the M5S.

As more extensively shown in Marino, Martocchia Diodati and Verzichelli (forthcoming), the five mutually-exclusive categories have been formed starting with three MP features[1]: in particular, each category has been defined by taking into consideration each MP's experience at the local government level (e.g., having been a mayor, or a regional MP), each MP's career within political parties (e.g., having been part of a central organ of a political formation, like National Direction or a National Executive Office), and, finally, each MP's parliamentary tenure. Starting with the *Intruders*, these represent a type of parliamentarian which goes against the classic stereotype of the party-career politician: indeed, they are MPs without local-government or party-related positions and who had also never been elected to parliament before 2018[2]. Their profile could, therefore, resemble that of 'technocrats' attracted by the political arena, or also that of a prominent representative of civil society. The second class, the *Local Party Machine* MPs, includes those Lower House parliamentarians who have not had experience in local governments or parliament, but instead have held some positions within a political party (from the local to the regional level), thus capturing the exclusive role of grassroots party activism in providing a chance for being recruited as a prospective parliamentarian.

Two clusters have been labeled as *Untouchables* to stress the robustness of MPs' backgrounds from the viewpoint of a more traditional pattern of political career. On the one hand, we find the *Local Untouchable* cluster, made up of MPs with local government

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[1] Such features are related to the moment parliamentarians entered parliament for the first time. We have classified MPs according to the highest office ever held both at the party and the institutional level.
[2] Other authors, such as Samuels and Shugart (2010) or Carreras (2012), use the term 'outsider', although there are differences between our definition and theirs. Unlike Samuels and Shugart (2010), we do not consider politicians with subnational party-related experience as Intruders (see discussion in Samuels and Shugart 2010: 67; Carreras 2012: 1456); moreover, unlike Carreras (2012: 1456), we do not include contesting elections as independents or with new political formations as one of the possible characteristics of Intruders.

experience who might have had party experience up to the regional offices. In this cluster, we find those MPs endowed with specific party- or local-government-related characteristics that make them potential protagonists of the parliamentary life of a party. For instance, parliamentarians with experience as regional MPs could be extremely useful for parties because of their competence concerning specific pieces of legislation.

Conversely, the *National Untouchables* cluster is composed of two different groups of MPs: on the one hand, those who have not had parliamentary experience but have held national office in a political party; on the other hand, those parliamentarians who have served one term in the Italian parliament but who are not professional politicians (i.e. their main profession before entering the parliament was not politics).

Finally, the cluster we have called *National Mandarins* includes parliamentarians who are already professional politicians and well known as such. Two types of MPs are included in this cluster: either parliamentarians who have served one term in parliament but are indeed professional politicians (i.e. they lived off politics for a significant time span before entering parliament), or those MPs who have already been in the Italian parliament for more than one term.

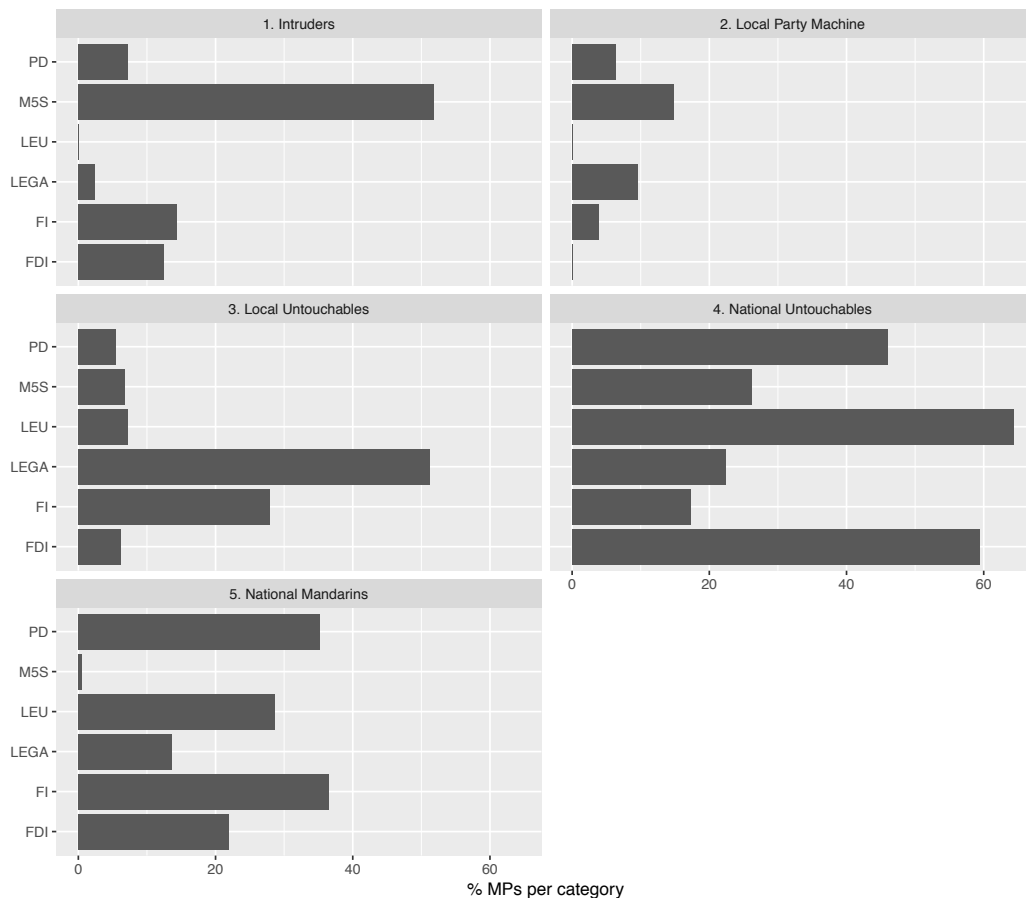**Figure 1.** Clusters of 2018 Italian Lower House MPs per party.

Figure 1 above reports the percentage of Lower House MPs who are members of the abovementioned five clusters and belong to the main political formations which ran in the 2018 Italian general election. Notice that, overall, 23.7% of the MPs are *Intruders*, while 9.1% are *Local Party Machine*, 18.8% are *Local Untouchables*, 30.7% are *National Untouchables*, and, finally, 17.8% are *National Mandarins*.

As Figure 1 above shows, there are interesting differences between the main parties in the Italian Lower House in the aftermath of the 2018 general election. Starting from some general considerations, despite the rhetoric surrounding the 18th Italian legislature concerning the rate of renewal of the parliamentary class, what emerges from Figure 1 is that there is undoubtedly a high degree of *Intruder* MPs, especially for the M5S, but two phenomena have tempered such renewal. On the one hand, other parties show a substantially lower degree of *Intruders* (in particular, LeU, the PD, and the League). On the other hand, despite the partial exception of the M5S, MPs belonging to the *National Untouchables* and *National Mandarins* clusters – that is, the two categories including well-established politicians at the national level – still constitute a noticeable proportion of the Italian Lower House's 18th parliamentary class.

Let us now turn to the analysis of parties. One interesting piece of evidence emerging from Figure 1 is that, on the centre-left flank of the political spectrum, the PD and LeU parliamentary groups are somewhat similar to one another. Despite the presence of some *Intruders* and *Local Party Machine* MPs in the PD group (while such clusters have no parliamentarians coming from the smaller LeU group), a wide proportion of MPs coming from centre-left parties are, to a small extent, *Local Untouchables* and, to a much larger extent, *National Untouchables* and *National Mandarins*. In other words, many centre-left MPs are politicians with specific parliamentary or party-related experience, and this might signal the fact that the formation of the new PD and LeU parliamentary groups has followed a rather traditional pattern of party 'central control' (Wertman 1988) in the selection of representatives. The picture is entirely different if one looks at the centre-right: the parliamentary groups of the three parties that contested the 2018 Italian general election under the centre-right flag do not have a very compatible profile concerning the five clusters under examination.

Finally, the M5S group shows a very peculiar composition: more than 50% of its Lower House MPs are people with no previous experience whatsoever (*Intruders*), paired with a certain percentage of *National Untouchables* and also a lower proportion of *Party Machine* parliamentarians[3]. In this regard, and from a speculative viewpoint, a 'top-down' perspective of political selection might help us to decipher the situation of M5S parliamentary elite. Indeed, the confirmation of a substantial number of MPs elected in 2013 who had remained loyal to the party provides the core of a bunch of *National Untouchables*, but the impressive increase in the number of seats for the M5S after the 2018 Italian general election gave many people who were substantially unknown to local government structures, to the party (in the sense they did not hold any office), and to parliament, the chance to enter the Lower House (the *Intruders*). Again, this very last point could also be understood, for the time being only at the speculative level, by

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[3] To account for the peculiar party structure of the M5S, in the CIRCaP dataset, when dealing with party-related experience, M5S MPs who were at the top of a party's local meet-up have been categorised as if they had a city-level office in the party.

connecting it with the relevance of central party organs (in this case the party leadership and possibly top party cadres as well) in the selection of candidates. Indeed, *Intruder* MPs would have had little chance of entering parliament on their own (given the constraints imposed by the electoral law), while top party cadres had many incentives to select these people and favour their election. More in detail, despite the fact that M5S repeated, before the 2018 general election, the same candidate selection procedure of 2013, the *parlamentarie*, where 'certified members' could preliminarily select the candidates for the general election (Movimento 5 Stelle, 2018b)*,* the final decision on the party's lists remained in the hands of Luigi di Maio (Movimento 5 Stelle, 2018a), who was able to personally select a group of 'high profile' personalities, such as university professors or entrepreneurs. This type of selection could have been made for a number of reasons: to polish the public image of the party and make it appear a more competent and trustworthy actor also from a governmental viewpoint, or even to present viable candidates in some specific arenas of competition (e.g., single-member districts), where some argue it is important for parties to put forward 'high-valence candidates' (Galasso and Nannicini 2011). This sort of 'personalised' parliamentary party model, involving MPs' qualities and also leaders' powers in selecting them, is not surprising when one refers to the M5S (e.g., see Vignati 2015). Finally, and this is another hint that could be confirmed in future empirical analyses, the selection of M5S candidates and would-be MPs who could not revert to party- or local-government-related resources could also be seen as a way of building a more loyal parliamentary group: indeed, *Intruders* would be more likely to be loyal to the party majority or the party whip so as to increase the chances of continuing their parliamentary career (see also the discussion in Marino and Martocchia Diodati 2017).

Other compelling considerations can be drawn if we move closer to the other party forming the parliamentary basis of the *Governo del Cambiamento* (Government of Change), that is, the League. Indeed, the parliamentary group of Matteo Salvini's party seems to have a more 'bottom-up' composition of the parliamentarian class, where local-government or subnational party-related experience might have played an important role. There is an extremely low percentage of *Intruders* and, conversely, a very high proportion of MPs who are *Local* or *National Untouchables* (along with a certain percentage of highly ranked *National Mandarins*). This model might resemble what has happened in the Italian *Seconda Repubblica* (i.e. the period from 1994-today), concerning the connection either with local rank-and-file or specific experience with the party machinery (e.g., see Verzichelli 2010). All in all, the League seems to have a parliamentary party structure with solid local-government-related and party-related roots, where experience gained, say, as a regional MP or as a mayor is extremely important for MPs with specific connections with their constituencies and party structures. This might also resemble a sort of *cursus honorum* of professional politicians which was, especially in the past, almost necessary to have specific parliamentary or governmental careers (Verzichelli 2010; see also Marino and Martocchia Diodati 2017; Martocchia Diodati and Verzichelli 2017). Finally, it is worth noting that the importance of local government experience and presence in party structures is not surprising when connected to the League given, for instance, the persistence of a particular net of local organisational structures within the party (e.g., see McDonnell and Vampa 2016).

All in all, in this section, we have tried to tackle some interesting features of MPs belonging to the most important parties represented in the Italian Lower House after 4th March 2018. Nonetheless, there is one further element which has not yet been analysed and could give us further food for thought when analysing the Italian parliamentary elite: multi-candidacies. In the next section, we try to sketch some connections between such tools and the five clusters of MPs we have presented.

2. Multi-candidacies and MP clusters

Is it possible to find interesting differences in the connection between, on the one hand, multi-candidacies and, on the other, the proportion of *Intruders*, *Local Party Machine* MPs, *Local* and *National Untouchables*, and *National Mandarins* for the parties under consideration in the 18th Italian Lower House legislature? Let us first clarify the issue of multi-candidacies under the *Rosatellum* law, i.e. the electoral law used to select Italian parliamentarians on 4th March 2018 (for more information, see Chiaramonte and D'Alimonte 2018).

Let us distinguish between, on the one hand, those MPs who were candidates in just a single-member district or in a single multi-member constituency and, on the other, those MPs who were candidates in more than one multi-member constituency (or at least in one constituency and one single-member district). Indeed, the *Rosatellum* allowed each prospective MP to be a candidate just in a single-member district, or just in one or more multi-member constituencies (up to five), or in both a single-member district and in one or more (up to five) multi-member constituencies (see again Chiaramonte and D'Alimonte 2018). All in all, multi-candidacies could easily have been put forward, in different fashions.

Multi-candidacies can be approached from different viewpoints. For small parties, like LeU or FdI, this tool can be used in order to maximise the exposure of the few appealing national party leaders while securing, at the same time, a seat for (almost) all of them. This applies particularly to LeU, whose party group in the Lower Chamber, as shown above, is almost entirely composed of *National Untouchables* and *National Mandarins*, i.e. by top national politicians who had joined this little cartel either from the PD or the far-left galaxy.

Conversely, for bigger parties, a multi-candidacy is a good way to 'protect' a politician against the risk of losing a specific race in a single-member or a multi-member constituency. In other words, multi-candidacies can represent, on the one hand, the willingness of party leaders and elites to increase the chances of election for a particular candidate but can also be, on the other, a sign of the noticeable bargaining power of a single candidate, who could more easily secure his/her re-election (for more information on multi-candidacies in the 2018 Italian general election, see for instance Pinto, Tronconi, and Valbruzzi 2018). All in all, the analysis of multi-candidacies, connected to parties' specific clusters of MPs, can lead to useful insights concerning the phase preceding 4th March 2018.

Figure 2 shows the percentage of MPs, for each party and each of the five clusters under analysis, who received a multi-candidacy, while the vertical red line represents

the mean percentage of each party's MPs who received a multi-candidacy[4]. For instance, approximately 40% of FI *Intruder* MPs were multi-candidate. On the contrary, approximately 25% of all FI MPs received a multi-candidacy.

Figure 2. Percentage of 2018 Lower House MPs with a multi-candidacy, per category
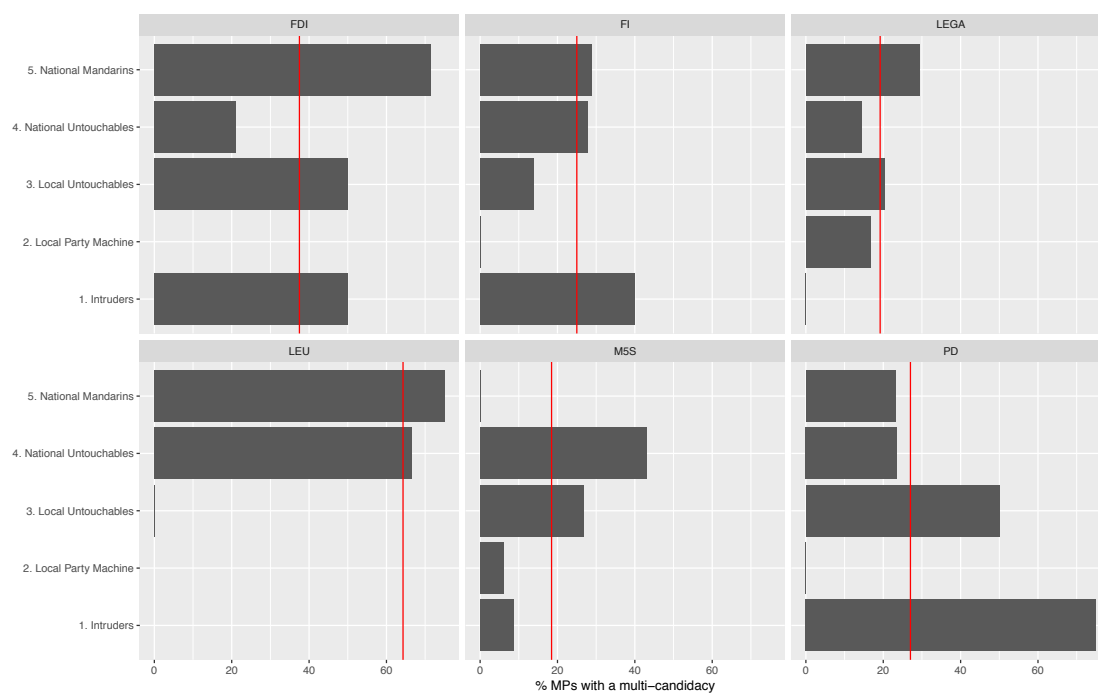
Let us start with a general consideration concerning all MPs coming from each party. There seems to be a clear distinction between, on the one hand, FdI and LeU and, on the other, FI, the League, M5S, and the PD. In the former cases, either slightly less than 40% (FdI) or more than 60% (LeU) of MPs received a multi-candidacy, while in the latter cases this percentage goes from 18% to 27%. This is possibly in line with the discussion that introduced our Section 2: such a difference between smaller and bigger parties could be related to a different use of the multi-candidacies. All in all, it could be argued that, for FdI and LeU, multi-candidacies have represented a way to secure the (re)-election of some crucial figures. Indeed, given the projected small share of votes that these formations would have received, it could have been necessary to protect some candidates from the uncertainty of the electoral process. This is also possibly shown by the high percentage of *Untouchables* and *National Mandarins* from FdI and LeU who had a multi-candidacy at their disposal.

A different discourse can be made with reference to the other four parties: the PD has only slightly more than 20% of its *National Untouchables* and *National Mandarins* who received a multi-candidacy (while MPs belonging to these two clusters represent an extremely high percentage of the total parliamentary group of the party, see Figure 1 above); conversely, among the less numerous PD *Intruders* and *Local Untouchables*,

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[4] Notice that no Intruder MPs belonging to the League, no Party Machine MPs belonging to FI and the PD, no Local Untouchable MPs belonging to LeU have received a multi-candidacy.

there are many MPs who were multi-candidate. The high percentage of *Intruders* with a multi-candidacy makes the PD similar to FI (despite Silvio Berlusconi's party showing a more homogeneous distribution of multi-candidacies among the five clusters). These elements might signal that a 'top-down' attempt of renewal could have been put in place by each party's leadership, favouring the entrance of newcomers endowed with the parachute of a multi-candidacy. Finally, concerning the M5S and the League, it is interesting to note that, for both parties, the cluster with the highest percentage of MPs with a multi-candidacy is a top-national one: the *National Untouchables* for the M5S and the *National Mandarins* for the League. In this sense, the attempt to 'protect' the national politicians of the parties under consideration might be something worth analysing in future empirical research, possibly in connection with (multi-)candidacies in safer or riskier districts or constituencies.

3. Towards the *Governo del Cambiamento*: career prospects within the new parliamentary elite

We have reached the final level of our analysis, in our attempt to assess the effective impact of the 2018 Italian general election on the structure of the Italian parliamentary ruling class. We now focus on the formation of an 'inner circle' of institutional leaders, both in parliament and the executive. This exploration could allow us to answer two other fundamental questions about the true meaning of the 2018 Italian general election: to what extent does the renewal of the overall parliamentary class correspond to an effective change in the patterns of selection for parliamentary or governmental offices? Finally, is there any difference in the pattern of selection for parliamentary and governmental offices according to the five-fold typology used in this contribution?

To answer these questions, we started with the same CIRCaP dataset (see Section 1) but, this time, controlling our descriptive data for a narrower population of MPs who have been promoted to certain parliamentary and governmental positions. More precisely, we considered 119 MPs elected to different offices of the Lower House[5] and 34 deputies included in the different positions – full minister, minister without portfolio, vice-minister, undersecretary – of the new Conte Government.

Figure 3 below reports the differences between the mean seniority (in parliamentary terms) of all the MPs (by party) and that of MPs who have been appointed within the core of parliamentary/executive institutions (called Institutional Leaders). Moreover, the ratio (again, in parliamentary terms) between the mean seniority of the former and that of the latter is also provided (orange points). For instance, the League's Institutional Leaders have a mean seniority which is twice as large as the seniority of all MPs coming from Matteo Salvini's party (see the orange dot for the League positioned above 2). The figure provides a preliminary but incontestable answer to the first question cited above: the rule of seniority is still quite evident in the circulation of the parliamentary elite.

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[5] We have considered the following institutional apical positions: Chairman of the Lower Chamber, vice-Chairmen, quaestors and secretaries, the chairman of a legislative committee, vice-chairmen and the secretaries of legislative committees, the chairman and vice-chairmen of the parliamentary party group. Notice that the distribution of offices (and the related ratio between Institutional Leaders and all MPs) of the parties included in the analysis could also be influenced by belonging to a governing party or not.

Indeed, MPs with parliamentary or executive offices are much more experienced in comparison to the whole cohort of MPs.

Figure 3. Average seniority of 2018 Lower House MPs (All MPs vs Institutional Leaders)
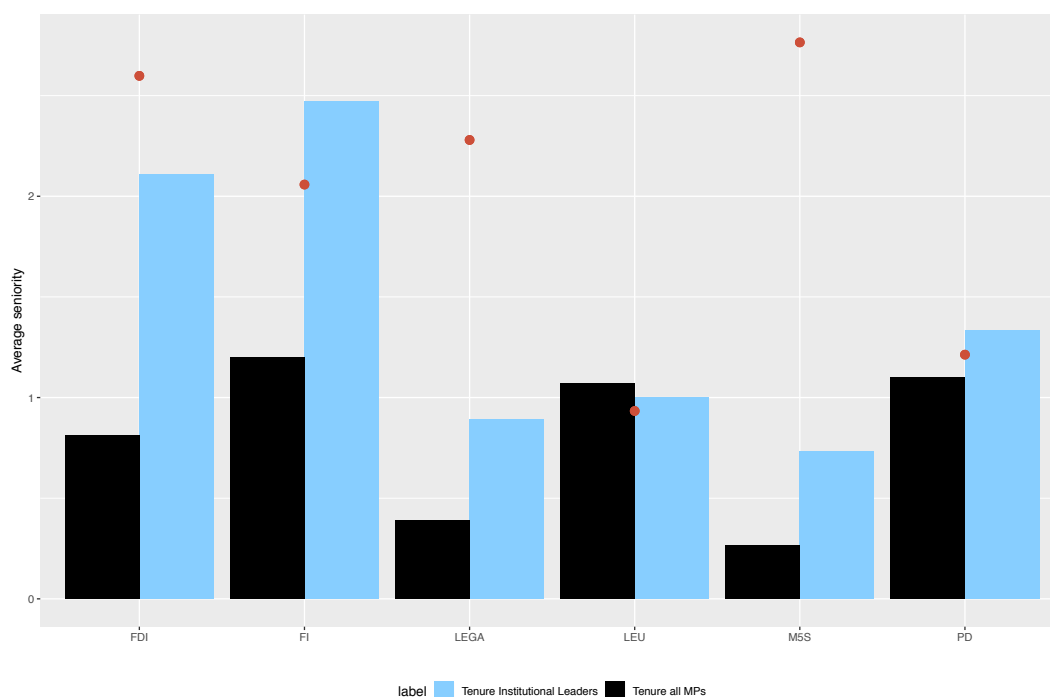
Quite an interesting take from Figure 3 is that the higher seniority of those we have called Institutional Leaders applies to all parliamentary groups, with the sole exception of the small group of LeU. In short, there is a tendency to appoint more experienced MPs to important parliamentary or governmental positions. More in detail, noticeable differences can be found between Institutional Leaders and MPs of the M5S (average tenure of Institutional Leaders of 0.73 vs. average tenure of all MPs of the party equal to 0.26), the League (0.89 vs. 0.39), or FdI (2.11 vs. 0.81). This is not surprising and is consistent, after all, with the classic idea of institutionalisation of parliamentary actors (e.g., see Polsby 1968).

However, the comparative analysis concerning the M5S and the League, the two parties now in government, looks somewhat surprising. Indeed, notwithstanding the noticeable percentage of newcomer MPs from the M5S (see above), its Institutional Leaders have a mean seniority which is almost three times higher than that of all the MPS coming from the party. Notice also that the difference in the M5S between the average seniority of Institutional Leaders and that of all MPs is the highest among all the parties considered in this analysis. All in all, incumbency seems to have played an important role within the M5S ranks (given that M5S MPs entered parliament for the first time, at best, after the 2013 Italian general election). This partly applies to the League as well, where the ratio between Institutional Leaders and the whole parliamentary party group is quite high (2.3), albeit not as high as in the case of the M5S.

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We conclude with two figures which analyse parliamentary and governmental offices in greater detail and connect them with our five clusters of Lower House MPs. More in detail, Figure 4 below reports the relevance of the parliamentary offices (X-axis), for each party under consideration, held by each MP cluster (Y-axis). We have assigned a value of 0 to MPs without any parliamentary office, 1 to MPs selected for a collective office (like quaestors), 2 to vice presidents of parliamentary groups and committees and the vice president of the Chamber, and 3 to the president of groups, committees, and of the Chamber. The red vertical line indicates, for each party, the mean relevance of parliamentary offices held.

Figure 4. Relevance of the parliamentary offices held by the five MP clusters, per party, 2018 Lower House MPs
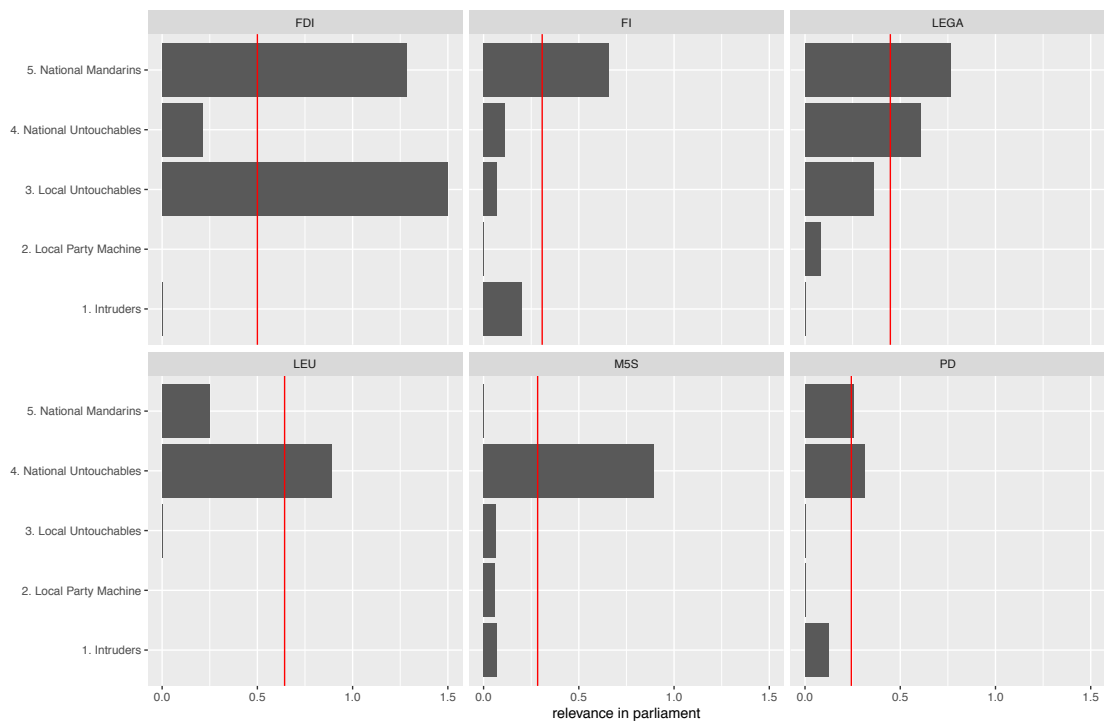

Figure 4 above tells us that if we consider the relevance of parliamentary offices, top national politicians get the lion's share: indeed, especially *National Untouchables* and *National Mandarins* occupy, on average, very relevant offices, regardless of the parties under analysis. The figure above shows that the six parties considered in this article have parliamentary office distributions substantially skewed towards such highly ranked politicians. This might indeed be another element to consider when analysing the rate of change brought about by the 2018 Italian general election: when one deals with parliamentary offices, it seems that clusters of more prominent and experienced politicians obtain, on average, more important positions than lower-level clusters of parliamentarians. All in all, even from this viewpoint, the renewal of MPs has also been tempered by the 'old-style politics' centrality of highly-ranked and more tenured parliamentarians (see Cotta 1982, Verzichelli 2006).

Figure 4 is related to parliamentary offices. Is it possible to find some differences, or similarities, when dealing with governmental offices? Figure 5 below attempts to answer this question by reporting, for the two governing coalition partners, the League and the M5S, the relevance of governmental positions held by each one of the five clusters considered here. More in detail, we have assigned to the undersecretaries of the government a value of 1, while to vice ministers we have given a value of 2, and to ministers a value of 3. The other members of the parliamentary groups that have not been appointed to a governmental office have been given 0. Finally, the vertical red line is the mean of the relevancy of governmental positions held by each party.

Figure 5. Relevance of the governmental offices held by the five MP clusters, for the League and the M5S, 2018 Lower House MPs
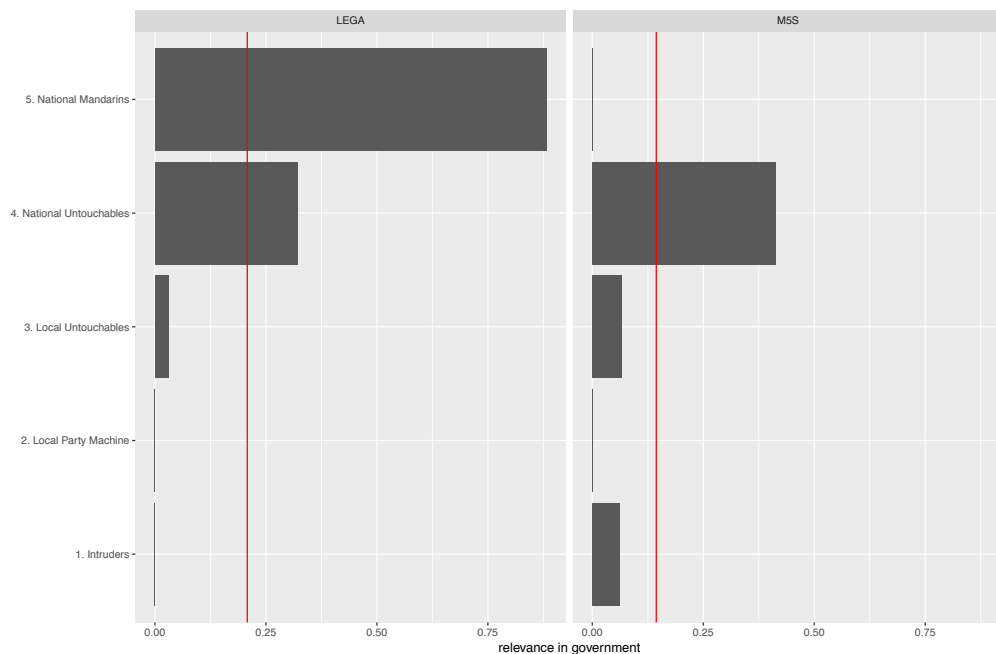

Figure 5 shows that, as expected, the predominance of the highest clusters of nation-wide established MPs is quite evident. In other words, also when dealing with governmental offices, more important and ranked parliamentarians obtain more central offices in government. More in detail, the League's *National Mandarins* have been given, on average, the most relevant governmental positions, followed by the *National* and *Local Untouchables*. A somewhat different picture is that of the *Movimento Cinque Stelle*, where it is the *National Untouchables* cluster to have received the most important offices in the Conte government (followed by *Local Untouchables* and *Intruders*). Let us remember that *National Untouchables* are, for the M5S, basically incumbent MPS (see Section 1): this cluster is, on average, the typical target of the 'super-selection' to apical governmental offices, while the League presents a more mixed model.

Summarising the results of this section, it is of course too early to provide an ultimate assessment, but it seems that there might be some signs of a sort of resilience of a more classical framework of political careers (see De Winter 1991). Indeed, party elites,

in charge of the parliamentary and ministerial selection, seem to be able to recompose and conduct the pattern of elite circulation even among the new 'populist' actors emerging in Italy (i.e., the M5S and the new 'nation-wide' League led by Matteo Salvini, see the discussion in Ivaldi, Lanzone and Woods 2017). However, we also note that, as far as the M5S is concerned, the control operated by the party leadership (however we define it, see for instance Tronconi 2018) seems to be oriented towards establishing a rigid pattern of circulation based on parliamentary incumbency (also given the thin organisational structure of the party), while the framework of career opportunities within the League appears much more compound, with a relevant role played by long-term MPs, by professional party functionaries, and also by territorial leaders with relevant local administrative experience.

4. Conclusions

In this article, we have analysed the main features of the Italian Lower House parliamentary elite after 4th March 2018. We have focused on the *Movimento Cinque Stelle* (M5S), the *Partito Democratico* (PD), the *Lega* (the League), *Forza Italia* (FI), *Liberi e Uguali* (LeU), and *Fratelli d'Italia* (FdI). More in detail, after having described the main features of Lower House MPs in Section 1 by reverting to a five-fold typology, in Section 2, we investigated the use of the tool of multi-candidacies in each of the main parties according to this typology. Finally, Section 3 has been devoted to the analysis of patterns of selection for parliamentary and governmental offices.

A preliminary element to underline is that the rate of parliamentary turnover brought about by the 2018 Italian general election has inevitably determined a number of interesting elements of innovation in the parliamentary elite. A relevant number of newcomer MPs have entered the Lower House, and this is surely something worth underlining. Moreover, the use of multi-candidacies has been somehow differentiated between smaller (LeU and FdI) and bigger parties, and also among more prominent political formations, where different clusters of parliamentarians have been differently 'protected' by the use of this tool (more experienced and central MPs have, from a very general point of view, received many multi-candidacies, notwithstanding party-related differences, as for the PD). Finally, concerning the selection for parliamentary and governmental offices, the relevance of top politicians remains evident, even if the different features of the League and the M5S – the two parties included in the coalition supporting the Conte government – determine some differences in their patterns of elite circulation. However, 'more traditional' parliamentary seniority and parliamentary or party-related centrality are important characteristics showing that the pattern of elite formation does not seem to have changed in a univocal and dramatic way (see also Pasquino 1999; Verzichelli 2010).

So, what are the tentative conclusions? Let us start with the innovative hints. At first, a clear differentiation can be seen by looking at the number in parliamentary groups of external 'genuine' newcomers. These are strongly represented within the M5S ranks and almost absent among the MPs from the League. Smaller parties are also committed to offering a considerable bulk of the available spoils to more experienced and central politicians and, generally, to candidates coming from party or local government structures. These latter received, on average, also more multi-candidacies before the

general election, and this is extremely interesting when analysing both smaller and larger political formations and also different parties. All in all, some kinds of mixed model have emerged: there is undoubtedly the absence of a clear framework of change but also the (maybe declining yet still relevant) importance of top parliamentarians, in line with more classic accounts of elite circulation and selection.

Furthermore, the selection for parliamentary and ministerial offices clearly shows the ambivalence in the procedure of formation of the Government of Change. On the one hand, the formation of the Conte government is without any doubt a rather innovative episode in the Italian constitutional and political chronicles. On the other hand, the mechanisms of political selection behind such an important event unveil the signs of a more traditional, accommodative process. Both party delegations (the M5S and the League) show a noticeable weight given to more experienced and central parliamentarians: the MPs elected in 2013 among the M5S ranks, and a more compound list of top-experienced politicians among the ministers and junior ministers of the League.

To sum up, the analysis carried out in this article leads us to conclude by pointing at some implications for future analyses. For instance, future research could investigate the path towards the formation of a robust and more stable parliamentary elite, able to project a selected set of national rulers in future parliamentary or governmental offices. Despite the presence of central and more experienced politicians also within the ranks of the M5S and the League, there are other elements to be taken into consideration. Indeed, a more consolidated elite circulation is connected to the stability of the party system, but also to other conditions, both general (i.e. the features of electoral rules) or party-specific ones (i.e. the persistence of primary elections to select candidates for general elections). The fuzziness of the Italian political scenario after the 2018 general election does not allow us to envisage a clear-cut forecast. It might indeed be possible that in the (more or less) near future we will witness a period of very uncertain and permeable models of political representation, possibly with noticeable differences between Italian parties.

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The rising importance of non-economic policy dimensions and the formation of the Conte government in Italy

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Abstract

Due to key differences in the policy priorities of the League and the Five Star Movement, the formation of the yellow-green cabinet, appointed in Italy after the general election of March 2018, cannot adequately be explained by interpreting the main axis of party competition in terms of the classic left-right divide. Relying on a multi-dimensional spatial approach to party competition, this paper attempts to account for the formation of the Conte cabinet by looking at the policy positions of political parties on a number of substantive policy dimensions. We analyse changes in the dimensionality of the policy space of party competition by using data from an expert survey fielded in the aftermath of the 2018 election and by comparing these data with similar expert survey data collected since 2001. Results highlight dramatic changes in the last two decades, showing a gradual decline in the salience of economic issues vis-à-vis an increase in the salience of non-economic domains such as European integration and immigration. We show that the formation of the Conte executive can be understood in light of the closeness of the positions of the two coalition partners on non-economic policy dimensions.

1. Introduction

After three months of negotiations following the Italian general election of March 4, 2018, the Five Start Movement (*Movimento 5 stelle*, M5S) and the League (*Lega*) agreed on the formation of a government which was regarded as 'populist' by many observers. Such a judgement is due to the fact that the two coalition partners share a common view that pits 'a virtuous and homogenous people' against elites and dangerous 'others' (Mudde 2004). Elites and 'others' are together blamed for 'depriving (or attempting to deprive) the sovereign people of their rights, values, prosperity, identity and voice'(Albertazzi and McDonnell 2015:5).

Indeed, the M5S and the League often mark the distinction between 'the elite' and 'the people', each seen as a homogeneous group with contrasting interests and values. Both parties speak of the people as a 'pure' entity whose general will and 'common sense' should be translated into political choices. In their communication strategy, the elite is depicted as a major enemy of the people because of its corruption or its technocratic nature (Bobba and Roncarolo 2018). This applies to the elite operating in the supranational

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institutions of the European Union (EU) and – especially in M5S rhetoric – to the politicians belonging to the mainstream Italian parties.

Apart from sharing a common anti-establishment rhetoric, the 'thin-centred ideology' of populism (Mudde 2004) appears in combination with different features and ideological traditions of the members of the so-called yellow-green government.[1] The two parties do not seem to have much in common in programmatic terms. This is particularly apparent in the key areas of fiscal and welfare policies, as during the campaign the League promised a flat tax rate on income while the M5S pledged to establish a universal scheme of basic income ('citizens basic income').[2]

Because of such differences between the League and the M5S, the formation of the Conte government might simply be attributed to the shared anti-establishment attitudes of the two coalition partners, as well as to their party leaders' desire to obtain prestigious offices in the new cabinet. In this view, the cohesion of the cabinet would rest exclusively upon a shared opposition to traditional political and economic elites.[3] The so-called 'government of change' would hence be bound to encounter enormous difficulties when making crucial decisions of public policy.

However, before labelling the Conte executive a mere populist cabinet and/or a government formed on the basis of a purely office-seeking logic, it is worth analysing the policy positions of the two coalition partners in a more systematic way. To this purpose we adopt a spatial approach to party competition and coalition formation. In particular, we rely on expert survey data collected in March 2018 to assess the dimensionality of the policy space in the last general election and estimate the policy positions of Italian parties in a two-dimensional space. To analyse changes in the policy space of party competition, we compare the 2018 data with similar data collected since the 2001 Italian general elections.

Our findings highlight major changes in the policy space, with a significant rise in the importance of non-economic issues. The formation of the Conte government can hence be explained in light of the policy positions of the two key political actors, i.e. the M5S and the League, on those issues. This article is organized as follows. The next section introduces the spatial approach to party competition, while the third one discusses the expert survey methodology. The following two sections are empirical and illustrate the data on policy space in Italy. More precisely, in the fourth section we highlight the main changes occurring over time, while in the fifth section we show how the Italian parties were located within the policy space. Concluding remarks follow in the final section.

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[1] The nativist and anti-immigration attitudes of the League make this party an example of exclusionary populism, while the call for instruments of direct democracy as a way to return power to the people moves the M5S towards an inclusionary form of populism (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013). Scholars noted that, starting from 1994, Italy can be considered a sort of 'laboratory' for the study of populism due to the numerous parties defined as populist that entered the party system (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2015).

[2] The importance of programmatic differences between the M5S and the League seems to be demonstrated by the fact that the two coalition partners signed a formal coalition treaty before reaching an agreement on the new government.

[3] According to Chapel Hill expert survey data, the League and M5S are very close to each other on a 0-10 scale measuring parties' anti-elitist attitudes (Polk et al. 2017).

2. The spatial approach to party competition

Rational choice approach to party competition is grounded on the assumption that candidates/parties attempt to maximize their electoral support by positioning themselves along one or more policy dimensions that are meaningful for voters (Downs 1957).Voters evaluate candidates on the basis of their policy positions and select candidates who are closer to their policy preferences (proximity theory). Models based on these assumptions are labelled spatial theories as they assume that each policy issue or cluster of related issues can be represented on a single dimension or axis (e.g., from most liberal to most conservative), that each voter/candidate has a preferred position on each issue or dimension (e.g., a point on that axis), and that distances between voters/candidates or between candidates themselves can be calculated from the vectors of their policy positions.[4]

Uni-dimensional spatial models represent the policy space in terms of a single underlying axis or policy dimension, typically understood as 'left-right'. This axis has been defined in terms of both economic and social policies. Such a dimension has been considered accurate enough to analyse party competition in most Western countries at least up to the 1990s (Bartolini and Mair 1990).

A single dimension is not always sufficient to provide a valid representation of politics in a given context. Two-dimensional models of party competition have proven to be more persuasive in analysing electoral and post-electoral politics in multi-party systems (Laver and Shepsle 1996). Using comparative expert survey data, Benoit and Laver (2006) estimated two-dimensional maps of policy spaces for most European countries on the basis of their salience for political actors. The authors showed that issues relating to the economy defined the most salient policy dimension in nearly all Western European democracies. They also singled out a second relevant policy dimension labelled as social liberalism identifying a liberal-conservative divide on social policies. Such two-dimensional maps were generated using an *a priori* approach for comparative purposes, as the aim of the authors was to provide a data-set of party positions within common policy spaces. However, they also provided examples of two-dimensional policy spaces generated through an inductive approach, i.e. by empirically examining the relative salience of different issues or set of issues and their degree of correlation in a given setting.

Benoit and Laver (2006) aptly stressed the point that ascertaining the dimensionality of the policy space is an empirical matter, as a dimension may assume different meanings across time and space and new dimensions may become salient, redefining the policy space of party competition. More recently, a number of studies have highlighted the rise of policy dimensions related to the opening up of national borders in economic, political and cultural terms due to globalization processes. These dimensions have been conceptualized and labelled in various ways by scholars: as 'libertarian-authoritarian' (Kitschelt 1994), as 'green/alternative/libertarian vs traditional/authoritarian/nationalist' (GAL-TAN) (Hooghe, Marks and Wilson 2002), as 'cultural' contrasting universalistic and traditionalist-communitarian values (Bornschier 2010), and finally as 'demarcation-integration' incorporating social liberalism vs social conservatism, pro- vs anti-immigration positions, and pro- vs anti- EU attitudes (Kriesi et al. 2012). While the

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[4]Within this approach a policy dimension (for example social policy) can be generated by looking at a set of correlated preferences over similar issues (same sex marriage, abortion, euthanasia, etc.). See Benoit and Laver (2006) for a discussion.

increasing politicisation of new dimensions has given rise to a tri-polar party configuration – including the left, the moderate right and the populist radical right – in North-Western Europe, the same does not seem to have occurred in Southern European countries. Since the onset of the Eurozone crisis, party competition in Southern Europe appears dominated by an economic conflict over austerity and an often overlapping conflict over political renewal (Hutter, Kriesi, and Vidal 2018).

Recent research on the dimensionality of policy space in Italy highlighted not only the restructuring of the competitive space brought about by new challenger parties such as the M5S (Conti and Memoli 2015), but also the emergence of a distinct pro-/anti-EU axis of competition, orthogonal to the socio-economic divide in the 2013 election (Giannetti, Pedrazzani and Pinto 2017; Di Virgilio et al. 2015). Focusing on the 2018 elections, this paper attempts to assess to what extent the formation of the Conte cabinet may be explained on the basis of shifting policy positions of political parties along with significant changes of the main dimensions defining policy space.

3. The expert survey methodology

To assess the dimensionality of policy space in Italy we use data from an expert survey fielded in March 2018. Several methods have been used to estimate the policy positions of political actors. One prominent source of data is the Manifesto Research Group/Comparative Manifestos Project, which has been manually coding the electoral platforms of parties in 60 countries since 1945 (Budge et al. 2001). The content of party manifestos has also been coded by using techniques of computerized text analysis (Laver, Benoit, and Garry 2003; Slapin and Proksch 2008). Data on legislative voting behaviour have been used to infer party positions (Poole and Rosenthal 1997), while other scholars have relied on surveys administered to voters, political elites or experts (Laver and Budge 1992).

In this paper we examine party system change in Italy using expert survey data collected by following the format used by Benoit and Laver (2006). The expert survey methodology is characterized by an *a priori* approach whereby policy dimensions or scales are predefined and parties are located on these scales by country experts. Estimates of party positions are therefore the aggregated results of expert judgements. Following the research methodology developed by Benoit and Laver, a survey among Italian experts was fielded in March 2018. We asked political experts to locate Italian parties on the general left-right axis as well as on a set of substantive policy issues or dimensions using 20-point scales. The nine dimensions are as follows: *Taxes vs spending* (measuring parties' support for public spending [1] vis-à-vis lower taxes [20]), *Deregulation* (capturing the preferred degree of state regulation of the market, from full control [1] to complete deregulation [20]), *Decentralization* (ranging from territorial decentralization [1] to full centralization [20] of decision-making), *Civil rights* (promotion of liberal [1] vs conservative [20] policies on matters such as abortion, gay rights, and euthanasia), *Immigration* (level of support for integration of immigrants into society, from high [1] to low [20]), *Environment* (environmental protection [1] vs economic growth [20]), *EU Authority* (scope of EU intervention, from broad [1] to narrow [20]), *EU Accountability* (role of the European Parliament [1] vs national governments [20] as democratic accountability mechanisms), and *EU Security* (parties' support for Italy's involvement in

European military operations, from high [1] to low [20]).[5] For each of these nine policy domains, experts were also asked to give each party a score on a scale measuring the importance or salience of the dimension for that party. This scale ranges from '1' (not important at all) to '20' (very important).

Italian experts were asked to locate on the above-mentioned scales the most politically relevant parties – that is, only those parties that won at least one percent of the popular vote in the 2018 elections.[6] Table 1 presents some summary statistics from the survey data reporting the mean and the standard error of the expert placements for each party on each policy dimension. In addition, the first column of the table reports the overall importance score of each dimension, as well as the associated standard error. We measured the overall salience for each policy dimension in the 2018 election by computing, for each issue, the mean of the party-specific salience scores and weighting it by the vote share received by each party.

Table 1. Experts' placement of parties and salience of policy dimensions in the Italian general election of 2018

Votes/Policy dimensions		Importance	+EU	FDI	FI	LEU	LEGA	M5S	NCI	PAP	PD
Vote share 2018			*2.56*	*4.35*	*14.00*	*3.39*	*17.35*	*32.68*	*1.30*	*1.13*	*18.76*
Taxes vs spending	Mean	13.94	11.97	11.31	15.35	5.46	14.43	9.74	11.83	3.94	9.36
	SE	0.21	0.55	0.42	0.47	0.44	0.43	0.43	0.34	0.57	0.34
Deregulation	Mean	12.68	14.74	10.18	16.90	4.83	13.54	8.69	10.79	2.34	10.33
	SE	0.22	0.51	0.53	0.29	0.35	0.48	0.41	0.36	0.20	0.39
Decentralization	Mean	10.34	10.17	13.20	8.70	12.88	5.17	11.22	11.61	15.07	10.59
	SE	0.36	0.62	0.64	0.42	0.47	0.58	0.49	0.46	0.68	0.47
Civil rights	Mean	11.47	3.29	17.15	13.44	4.77	16.30	9.52	16.78	3.67	5.74
	SE	0.32	0.53	0.48	0.49	0.49	0.46	0.40	0.48	0.47	0.45
Immigration	Mean	15.09	5.28	19.00	16.30	4.11	19.43	13.82	12.41	2.85	7.13
	SE	0.32	0.44	0.17	0.30	0.38	0.13	0.39	0.47	0.34	0.43
Environment	Mean	10.45	9.68	15.25	16.94	6.44	16.49	5.76	13.64	5.67	9.34
	SE	0.48	0.47	0.45	0.35	0.44	0.39	0.51	0.41	0.62	0.36
EU Authority	Mean	15.38	3.20	17.99	14.47	9.48	18.79	15.69	10.53	14.60	7.59
	SE	0.19	0.48	0.37	0.41	0.39	0.32	0.42	0.47	0.72	0.42
EU Accountability	Mean	12.53	3.48	16.82	14.65	7.67	17.34	11.74	10.68	10.10	7.31
	SE	0.17	0.49	0.52	0.56	0.53	0.52	0.72	0.48	1.08	0.45
EU Security	Mean	10.77	3.71	11.98	7.46	11.98	13.52	14.74	8.00	17.59	4.96
	SE	0.16	0.51	0.72	0.51	0.66	0.69	0.64	0.56	0.72	0.40
Left-Right	Mean	–	9.66	18.38	15.27	4.31	18.32	11.52	12.71	1.92	7.99
	SE	–	0.34	0.29	0.21	0.36	0.29	0.38	0.25	0.30	0.25

Notes: Expert survey data gathered by the authors in March 2018 using Benoit and Laver's (2006) format. Vote share refers to the election of the Chamber of Deputies (source: Ministry of Interior).

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[5] See Appendix 1 for the exact phrasing of the survey's questions.

[6] Experts were selected from members of the Italian Political Science Association (SISP). We sent an email invitation to 316 experts, 71 of whom completed the questionnaire, with a response rate of about 22.5 percent.

As Table 1 shows, none of the two policy issues dealing with economic matters – *Taxes vs spending* and *Deregulation* – was judged by our sample of experts to be the most salient dimension in Italian politics during the 2018 general election. The two most important policy domains were instead not (directly) related to the economy: *EU Authority*, measuring parties' propensity to increase/reduce the set of areas subject to European intervention, and *Immigration*, capturing parties' support for policies designed to help asylum-seekers and integrate immigrants into Italian society. The fact that the latter two issues – and not the economic ones – were the top-rated ones in March 2018 give a first hint of the dynamics underlying the formation of the Conte government. A quick glance at Table 1 suggests for example that, while being far from each other on the *Taxes vs spending* domain, the M5S and the League were rather close on all the EU-related issues except for *EU Accountability*. Before attempting to account for the formation of the M5S-League coalition government from a spatial perspective, we provide a more systematic analysis of the evolution of the policy space in Italy.

4. The changing salience of policy dimensions over time

As parties attach different degrees of importance to various policy issues, party salience scores enable us to understand which dimensions are the most relevant at the time of a given election. The fact that the space of party competition in March 2018 seems structured by non-economic issues rather than by economic ones may certainly help to explain the formation of a government coalition between parties that are relatively distant in terms of fiscal and welfare policies. However, any account of the formation of such an unusual cabinet would benefit from understanding whether the configuration of Italian policy space in 2018 was historically exceptional or was rather the outcome of a long-term process of change.

To answer this question, we rely on a time series of surveys administered to Italian experts covering the last five elections (2001, 2006, 2008, 2013 and 2018).[7] In each study, experts were asked to place the most significant political parties competing in the elections on the general left-right scale as well as on the nine substantive policy dimensions mentioned above, and to give each party a score expressing the salience the party attributes to every dimension. Therefore, the five surveys together allow us to trace the evolution of policy space in Italy over a relatively long time span. In what follows, we use the salience scores attached by each party to the nine specific policy dimensions to understand how the relative salience of the policy domains has changed in the last two decades.

For each election covered by the data we rank the various policy domains according to their overall importance. We obtain the overall salience for each policy dimension in a given election by calculating, for each dimension, the mean of the party-specific salience scores and weighting it by the vote share received by each party. Figure 1 displays the ranking of the above-mentioned nine policy dimensions for each election from 2001 to 2018. Generally speaking, we can observe that the space of party competition in Italy has changed substantially in less than two decades. The relevance of the two issues dealing with the economy – *Taxes vs spending* and *Deregulation*, both referring to the

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[7] See Appendix 2 for further details.

traditional opposition between state and market – has declined over time. Such a trend has been countervailed by an increase in the salience of the issues related to the functioning of the European Union – *EU Authority* and, to a much lesser degree, *EU Accountability*. The decline of economic domains, starting after 2008, is rather surprising in light of the dramatic impact that the Eurozone crisis had on the party system and the functioning of political institutions in Italy and in other Southern European countries (Bosco and Verney 2016; Charalambous, Conti, and Pedrazzani 2018; Conti, Hutter, and Nanou 2018; Moury and De Giorgi 2015; Pedrazzani, Pellegata, and Pinto 2018). Although we could have expected an increase in the salience of economic matters in times of severe economic hardship, the simultaneous increase in the emphasis on EU-related issues signals the peculiar ways in which Italian parties have framed domestic economic problems connected to the Great Recession. Indeed, several parties put the blame much more on the Euro currency and European institutions than on Italy's fiscal and budgetary weaknesses.

Figure 1. Ranking of policy domains according to their salience in Italy, 2001-2018.
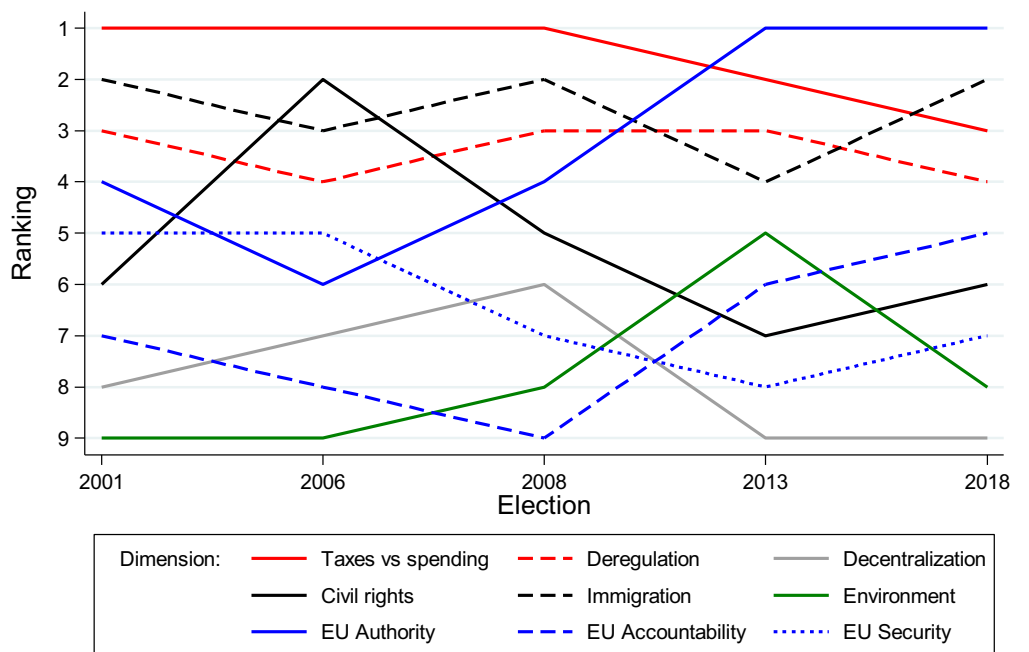

Figure 1 also shows that *Immigration* has always been among the top three dimensions of competition among Italian parties, with the only exception being the 2013 election. In contrast, the *Civil rights* domain has waned in importance after a peak observed in 2006, when social policy issues were politicised from a liberal point of view by the radical-socialist Rose in the Fist (*Rosa nel pugno*, RNP) and from a conservative perspective by the Christian Democratic Centrist Union (*Unione di centro*, UDC). A general decline over time can be observed also in the relevance of the dimension capturing the parties' degree of support for military operations involving Italy together with other EU member states (*EU Security*). This trend parallels the gradual disengagement of the Italian armed forces from Iraq and Afghanistan and is not affected by the outbreak of more

recent political crises in a number of non-democratic regimes in North Africa and the Middle East, implying the potential military involvement of European countries.

Environment and *Decentralization* have constantly been at the bottom of the issues' salience ranking. The environmental domain has always been last or second to last except for 2013, when it was particularly important for the leftist Left Ecology Freedom (*Sinistra Ecologia Libertà*, SEL) and most of all for the M5S. In its electoral manifesto, the latter put primary emphasis on topics such as the protection of common goods and the environment, sustainable development, and support of eco-friendly lifestyles (Bordignon and Ceccarini 2013; Pedrazzani and Pinto 2015).[8] The territorial decentralization of administration and decision-making has traditionally been promoted by the League, which was known as the Northern League (*Lega Nord*, LN) until the 2018 electoral campaign. Indeed, since Matteo Salvini was appointed secretary of the party in the late 2013, the League has moved away from its original federalist commitment typical of a party representing Northern Italy and has become a radical right party with a national message (Passarelli and Tuorto 2018).[9]

Looking at the ranking of policy issues election by election, we observe that party competition in Italy was largely shaped by economic issues up to the 2008 elections. In 2001, *Taxes vs spending* represented the most salient issue ahead of *Immigration*, and *Deregulation* was the third most salient domain. Five years later, *Taxes vs spending* was still at the top of the ranking, followed by *Civil rights* and *Immigration*. The policy ranking of 2008 was very similar to that estimated for the 2001 elections, with *Taxes vs spending*, *Immigration* and *Deregulation* being the three most relevant issues. A substantial change occurred in 2013, when one of the issues relating to the EU (*EU Authority*) replaced *Taxes vs spending* at the top of the policy ranking. Before 2013, the only party attaching high salience scores to EU-related matters was the League, which has also expressed fairly Eurosceptic positions. In 2013, the *EU Authority* domain was judged as particularly salient also for two pro-EU parties: the Democratic Party (*Partito democratico*, PD) and – even more – Civic Choice (*Scelta civica*, SC) founded by the technocrat and former Prime Minister Mario Monti (Giannetti et al. 2017).

EU Authority remained at the top of the ranking also in 2018, when it resulted particularly relevant – with a salience score greater than 15 on a 1-20 scale – for most Italian parties. These include the PD and its electoral ally +Europe (*+Europa*, +EU) on the pro-European side, and the League, the M5S, the radical right-wing Brothers of Italy (*Fratelli d'Italia*, FDI) and the radical left Power to the People (*Potere al popolo*, PAP) on the much more populated and heterogeneous anti-European side. Remarkably, in 2018 *EU Authority* was followed in the policy ranking not by the *Taxes vs spending* domain as it was in 2013, but by another non-economic issue (*Immigration*). This marks a further discontinuity with the past, implying that in less than two decades the structure of the Italian policy space changed dramatically, with a decline in the importance of economic issues – typically considered as crucial and associated with the general left-right axis – and the

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[8] After entering the legislative arena in 2013, the M5S seems to have undergone a process of normalization from an institutional and a programmatic point of view (Tronconi 2018).

[9] Such a shift is reflected in the expert survey data. The salience score attached to *Decentralization* by the League was 15.9 in 2018, while it was never below 18.5 in all the elections from 2001 to 2013.

increasing salience of non-economic issues such as attitudes towards the EU and immigration.

5. The structure of policy space in the 2013 and 2018 Italian elections

Salience scores can be combined with party position estimates to build spatial maps of policy space in Italy. Accordingly, we now look at the policy positions of the main political parties on the most salient dimensions structuring the policy space, focusing on the two most recent elections. In particular, for the elections of 2013 and 2018 we analyse the positions of the most relevant Italian parties in two-dimensional spaces constructed using the three most salient dimensions identified in the previous section. These policy spaces are represented in Figures 2 and 3. For each election we build two policy spaces: one built using the first and second most salient domains (left panel of each picture) and one built using the first and third most salient domains (right panel). These graphs also hint at the extent to which the most important dimensions of party competition are related to each other and shed some light on the dynamics underlying the formation of Italian governments.[10]

Party positions in the 2013 Italian elections are illustrated in Figure 2. The left and right panels show that the two dimensions dealing with economy – *Taxes vs spending* and *Deregulation* – almost perfectly overlapped, while being completely unrelated to the *EU Authority* domain which was found to be by far the most important dimension in 2013.[11] The main actors of the 2013 elections were three multiparty pre-electoral coalitions and a number of other single-party lists, among which the M5S. The centre-left cartel was located in the pro-EU and economically leftist quadrant of the policy space, with the PD more on Euro-enthusiastic positions and SEL more on the economic left. The members of the centre-right coalition shared a weaker or stronger anti-EU stance, in spite of holding heterogeneous positions concerning taxation and market deregulation. While People of Freedom (*Popolo della libertà*, PDL) and LN were judged to be anti-taxes, FDI was rather centrist in economic terms and the post-fascist The Right (*La destra*, DX) was clearly against market deregulation and slightly in favour of increasing taxation to increase public spending. The members of the centrist coalition headed by Monti – SC, UDC and Future and Freedom for Italy (*Futuro e libertà per l'Italia*, FLI) – were more or less neutral on the trade-off between increasing taxes and cutting public services, as well as on the scale measuring the desired degree of state regulation of markets. However, they were slightly more heterogeneous in terms of their attitudes towards the EU.

The M5S was placed by Italian experts among the most anti-EU parties: Beppe Grillo's Movement was judged to be just marginally less in favour of reducing EU authority than LN and DX. The position of the M5S on economic matters was slightly to the left of the centre, although with a very large standard deviation (3.82 on *Tax vs spending*, 4.38

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[10] For ease of exposition, our discussion of the process of government formation in Italy only marginally draws on well-established formal spatial models based on policy-seeking assumptions. See Laver (1998) for a review.

[11] The Pearson correlation is 0.015 between *EU Authority* and *Taxes vs spending* (0.304 if we calculate the correlation weighting parties by their vote shares), -0.183 (0.102 weighted) between *EU Authority* and *Deregulation*, and 0.972 (0.975 weighted) between *Taxes vs spending* and *Deregulation*.

on *Deregulation*). The economic liberal Act to Stop the Decline (*Fare per fermare il declino*, FARE) and the left-wing Civil Revolution (*Rivoluzione civile*, RIV) – which did not enter Parliament and disappeared soon after the election – were on opposite sides in economic terms. However, they shared a similar neutral position on increasing the scope of EU authority.

Figure 2. Two-dimensional maps of Italian policy space in 2013
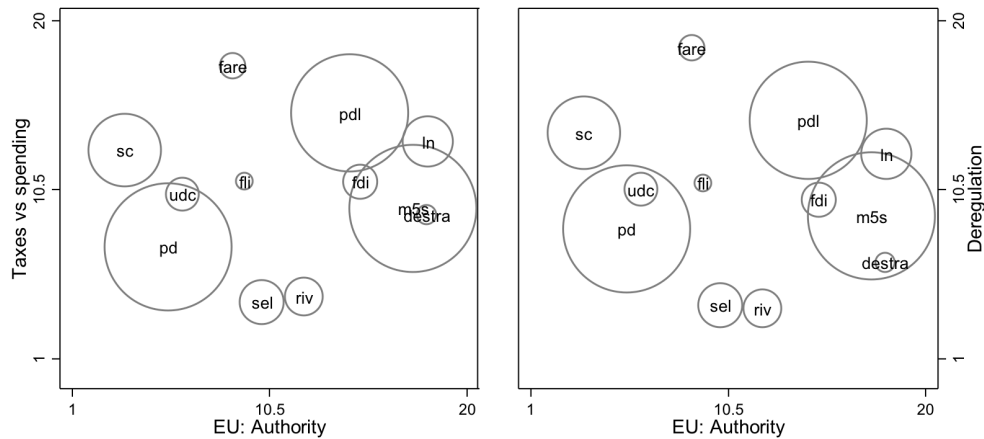

Notes: Data taken from Di Virgilio et al.'s (2015) expert survey. The size of the markers varies according to party vote share.

After an attempt to involve the M5S in the government, the PD formed a 'grand coalition' cabinet together with PDL, SC and UDC. The legislative majority supporting Enrico Letta's executive was rather divided on the main policy issues (Di Virgilio et al. 2015). The Letta cabinet lasted indeed less than 10 months. During this period, the PDL withdrew from the government, renaming itself FI and Matteo Renzi became secretary of the PD. A new cabinet headed by Renzi formed in early 2014, relying on the parliamentary support of PD, SC, UDC and a new centrist party called New Centre-Right (*Nuovo centrodestra*, NCD), a PDL splinter.

Figure 3 represents policy positions along the most salient dimensions in the Italian elections of 2018. Two electoral cartels contested the March 2018 election. The centre-right cartel led by FI and the League included the extreme right FDI and a centrist list named Us with Italy (*Noi con l'Italia*, NCI). The centre-left coalition led by the PD involved several minor lists among which the radical Euro-enthusiastic +Europe. The election was also contested by a number of single-party lists like the M5S, extreme left PAP and a left-wing PD splinter called Free and Equal (*Liberi e uguali*, LEU). As we discussed earlier, the most salient policy issue in March 2018 was *EU Authority*, followed by another non-economic policy (*Immigration*) and then by the *Taxes vs spending* domain. The two graphs of Figure 3 suggest that the positions of Italian parties on the scope of EU authority were strongly related to their attitudes towards immigrants, but not to their positions on the trade-off between increasing services and cutting taxes. At the same time, there was some correlation between *Immigration* and *Taxes vs spending*.[12]

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[12] Correlation is 0.712 between *EU Authority* and *Immigration* (0.901 weighted), 0.174 between *EU Authority* and *Taxes vs spending* (0.445 weighted), and 0.766 between *Immigration* and *Taxes vs spending* (0.753 weighted).

Figure 3. Two-dimensional maps of Italian policy space in 2018
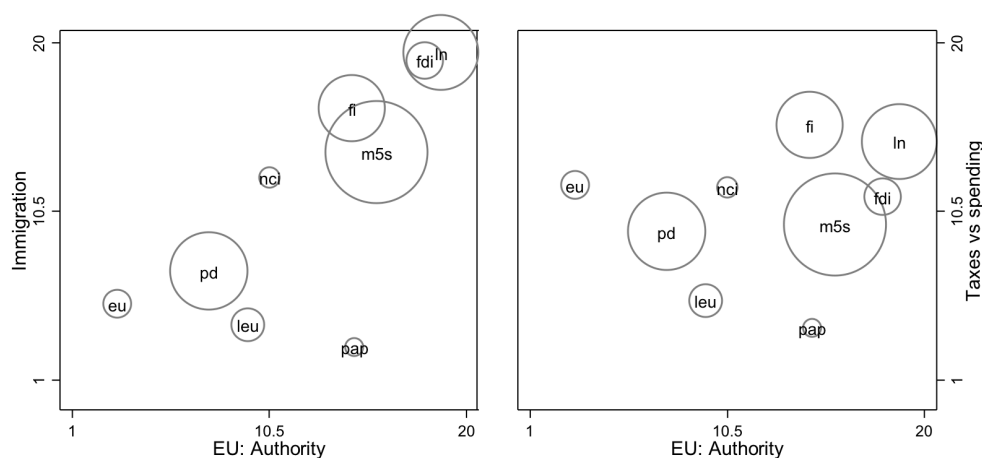
Notes: Expert survey data gathered by the authors in March 2018 using Benoit and Laver's (2006) format. The size of the markers varies according to party vote share.

If we look at the left panel of Figure 3 – where the two most salient issues are represented – we observe that most Italian parties lie on a hypothetical 45-degree line. This indicates that, in March 2018, parties that were more against immigration also tended to support reductions in the range of areas in which the EU can set policy. Conversely, parties more in favour of immigration were also likely to promote an expansion of the policy areas decided at the EU level. The significant overlapping of immigration and European integration may provide a clue to the likely emergence of a 'demarcation-integration' axis of political competition in Italy, which would capture parties' attitudes on the so-called 'new cultural issues' (Kriesi et al. 2012).

In March 2018, Italian parties seemed to be grouped in two distinct clusters. On the one hand, there appeared to be a cluster of pro-EU and pro-immigration parties: PD, +Europe and LEU. On the other hand, a cluster of anti-EU and anti-immigration parties included all the parties belonging to the centre-right electoral cartel plus the M5S. Even more than in 2013, in 2018 the M5S was closer to the centre-right parties than to the PD and other centre-left lists in policy terms. Within the 'pro-demarcation' cluster, we can further distinguish between extreme parties like the League and FDI and a bunch of parties – FI, NCI and M5S – holding more moderate positions about immigration and the EU. In the 2018 elections, the main 'outlier' in the positioning of Italian parties was represented by PAP, which had the most pro-immigration position but at the same time was as Eurosceptic as FI.

The right panel of Figure 3 reveals that, according to Italian experts, PD and M5S had virtually the same position on key economic matters. On the *Taxes vs spending* trade-off, both parties were slightly in favour of expanding social services even at the cost of increasing taxes. The other two large parties – League and FI – were instead more prone to reducing public spending in order to cut taxes.

The configuration of Italian policy space can help explain some crucial choices made by key political actors after the elections of March 2018 and the outcome of negotiations over government formation. Although particularly cohesive in policy terms, the centre-right coalition failed to obtain a majority of seats in Parliament. This led the

largest member of the centre-right coalition – the League – to search for possible coalition partners outside the centre-right bloc, starting with the M5S. Despite being close to centre-right parties on the main axes of policy competition – European integration and immigration – the M5S refused to negotiate over a new government with FI because of the numerous judicial scandals involving its leader Silvio Berlusconi. This broke the centre-right cartel and finally led to a deal between the M5S and the League (Valbruzzi 2018). During the long bargaining process, the M5S always seemed to prefer the League over the PD as a coalition partner. The spatial analysis of party competition shows that the M5S strategy was not only due to a refusal to make an agreement with a party which had been in government since 2011, but was also grounded on policy concerns about the most salient issues shaping Italian politics.[13]

Figure 4. M5S's distance from League and PD on nine policy dimensions, Italy 2018
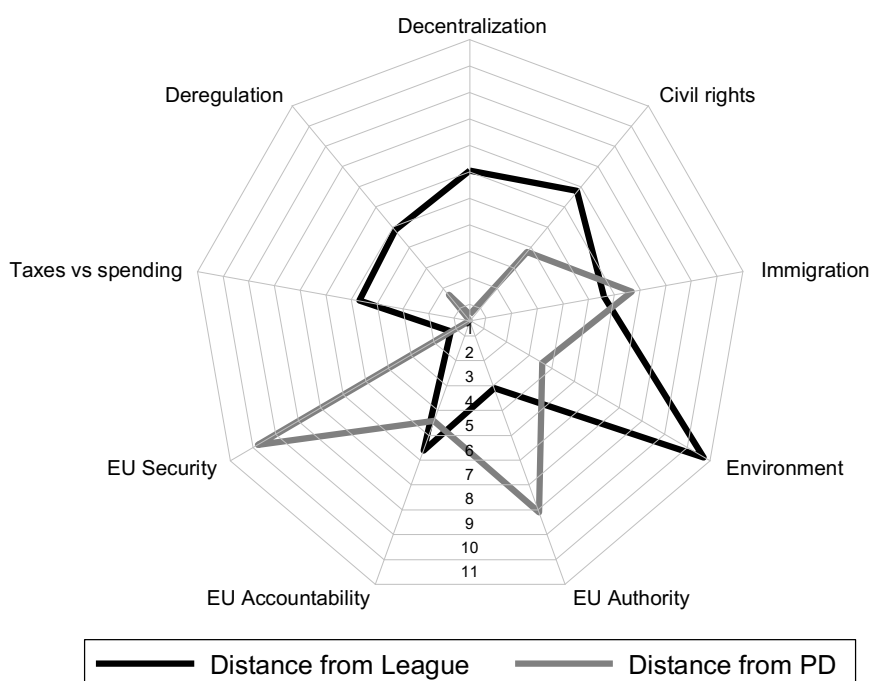
The radar plot in Figure 4 shows how distant the M5S was in absolute terms from the League and the PD, along the nine policy dimensions considered in the 2018 expert survey. The M5S was certainly closer to the PD than to the League on a number of domains such as the economic ones: the M5S had almost the same position of the PD on the *Taxes vs spending* dimension and was very close to the party led by Renzi on *Deregulation* (less than two points on a 1-20 scale). Furthermore, the M5S and the PD shared roughly the same position on territorial decentralization of decision-making and the distance between the two was lower than 4 points if we consider civil rights and the environment. On these dimensions, the M5S was much farther from the League. However, all these issues were not so relevant in the aftermath of the 2018 elections. On the most important domains, the M5S was closer to the League than to the PD. In particular, M5S's distance

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[13]See Valbruzzi (2018) for an account of the formation of the Conte government emphasizing the strategies of party leaders and the role of the President of the Republic.

from the League was just three points on *EU Authority* (the most prominent dimension in 2018) while being eight points from the PD, and was 5.6 points on *Immigration* while being 6.7 from the PD.[14]

8. Conclusions

Clear differences in the economic platforms of the League and the Five Star Movement have led many commentators to call into question the cohesion of the Conte government as well as its possible duration in office. Indeed, the very birth of the yellow-green cabinet is inadequately explained by adopting a uni-dimensional model of electoral and post-electoral politics based on the classical left-right divide. Relying on a more persuasive two-dimensional approach to party competition, this paper has offered a simple account of the formation of the League-M5S government by looking at the closeness of the two coalition partners' policy positions on substantive domains other than the economic ones.

We analysed the dimensionality of Italian policy space using data from an expert survey conducted in the aftermath of the election of March 2018 and compared these data with similar expert survey data collected in the past. Our study emphasizes major changes in the last two decades, with a decline in the salience of economic issues and a simultaneous increase in the salience of non-economic issues such as European integration and immigration. Such an analysis of the evolution of policy space in Italy resonates with the literature showing the recent emergence of an integration-demarcation axis of party competition in Western Europe.

The emergence in Italy of a new political dimension that is primarily centred on cultural issues helps explain the formation of the Conte executive, whose coalition members are far from each other on the (relatively less salient) economic dimension, but much closer on particularly important domains like European integration and immigration. However, other factors have contributed to the formation of the yellow-green government, such as M5S's abandonment of their previous uncompromising position towards entering any coalition.

Several findings of this study deserve further investigation. To begin with, a deeper analysis of the relations between the several policy domains covered by expert surveys is needed. Although we showed that the economic domains have gradually become less salient, the policy issue that seems to have replaced them as the most prominent one deals with the scope of EU authority, which has clearly some fundamental economic implications. We leave to future work the task to specify the extent to which party positions on policies aimed at regaining national sovereignty vis-à-vis the EU are related to financial and monetary aspects. Moreover, our analysis showed that the issues dealing with the EU do not necessarily overlap, as for example the M5S's position was judged by experts close to that of the League on two EU-related domains, but not on the domain concerning democratic accountability in the EU.

A second research avenue we leave for future work has to do with the growing importance of valence issues or non-policy factors (social identities, personalities and so on) in explaining party competition. We believe that, as the proximity theory of party

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[14] These considerations hold if we use 2017 Chapel Hill expert survey data to measure distances among parties' positions. Correlations between Chapel Hill data and ours range from 0.95 for the economic dimension to 0.99 for the left-right continuum.

competition upon which the spatial approach is based is definitely an essential step in analysing electoral and post-electoral parties' behaviour, it needs to be complemented by a focus on valence effects or non-policy information. These aspects appear to be strongly related to the populist attributes that many scholars correctly point out as important features in explaining the Conte government's formation.

Appendix 1: Italian expert survey policy dimensions

Taxes vs. Spending
- Promotes raising taxes to increase public services. (1)
- Promotes cutting public services to cut taxes. (20)

Deregulation
- Favours high levels of state regulation and control of the market. (1)
- Favours deregulation of markets at every opportunity. (20)

Decentralization
- Promotes decentralization of all administration and decision-making. (1)
- Opposes any decentralization of administration and decision-making. (20)

Civil Rights
- Favours liberal policies on matters such as abortion, homosexuality, and euthanasia. (1)
- Opposes liberal policies on matters such as abortion, homosexuality, and euthanasia. (20)

Immigration
- Favours policies designed to help asylum-seekers and immigrants integrate into Italy's society. (1)
- Favours policies designed to help asylum-seekers and immigrants return to their country of origin. (20)

Environment
- Supports protection of the environment, even at the cost of economic growth. (1)
- Supports economic growth, even at the cost of damage to the environment. (20)

EU: Authority
- Favours increasing the range of areas in which the EU can set policy. (1)
- Favours reducing the range of areas in which the EU can set policy. (20)

EU: Accountability
- Promotes the direct accountability of the EU to citizens via institutions such as the European Parliament. (1)
- Promotes the indirect accountability of the EU to citizens via their own national governments. (20)

EU: Security
- Favours Italy's involvement in European security and peacekeeping missions. (1)
- Opposes any Italian involvement in European military affairs. (20)

The General Left–Right Dimension
Please locate each party on a general left–right dimension, taking all aspects of party policy into account:
- Left. (1)
- Right. (20)

Appendix 2: Some details of the Italian expert surveys, 2001-2018

Criteria	2001	2006	2008	2013	2018
N. relevant parties	13	16	8	12	9
N. of respondents	54	40	54	95	71
N. of dimensions	10	10	10	10	10
Survey type	Web	Web	Web	Web	Web
Election date	May 2001	Apr 2006	Apr 2008	Feb 2013	Mar 2018
Field	Sep-Dec 2003	Mar-May 2006	Jul-Aug 2008	Feb-Mar 2013	Mar-Apr 2018

Notes: Data on 2001 were taken from Benoit, K. and Laver, M. (2006). Party Policy in Modern Democracies. London: Routledge. Data on 2008 were taken from Curini, L. and Iacus, S. (2008). 'Italian Spatial Competition between 2006 and 2008: A Changing Party System?' Paper presented at the XXII Congress of the Italian Political Science Society (SISP), Pavia, 5-8 September 2008. We thank Kenneth Benoit for sharing with us expert survey data for the 2006 election. Data on 2013 were taken from Di Virgilio, A., Giannetti, D., Pedrazzani, A. and Pinto, L. (2015). 'Party Competition in the 2013 Italian Elections: Evidence from an Expert Survey'. Government and Opposition 50(1):65–89.

Appendix 3: Two-dimensional maps of Italian policy space, 2001-2008

Figure A1. Two-dimensional maps of Italian policy space in 2001.
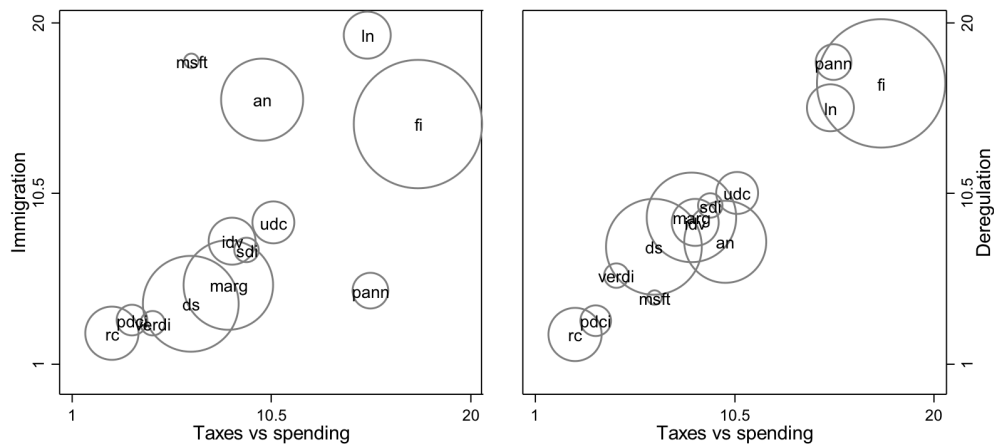
Notes: Data taken from Benoit and Laver's (2006) expert survey. The size of the markers varies according to party vote share.

Figure A2. Two-dimensional maps of Italian policy space in 2006.

Notes: Expert survey data provided by Kenneth Benoit. The size of the markers varies according to party vote share.

Figure A3. Two-dimensional maps of Italian policy space in 2008.

Notes: Data taken from Curini and Iacus' (2008) expert survey. The size of the markers varies according to party vote share.

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The different twins:

A multilevel analysis of the positions of the Northern League and the Five Star Movement on the integration-demarcation dimension

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Abstract

According to several scholars, the politicization of issues connected to immigration and the European Union (EU) has generated a new cleavage that now structures political competition in Western Europe. Italy is an interesting case for studying this process, as two 'different' populist-Eurosceptic parties, namely the Northern League (LN) and the Five Star Movement (M5S), significantly increased their share of votes in the last round of national elections and eventually managed to form a governmental coalition by politicizing these two issues. This paper proposes a multifaceted conceptualisation of the EU and immigration issues in order to investigate how LN and M5S position themselves across their multiple sub-dimensions. The empirical analysis is based on an original dataset of parliamentary speeches delivered by the two parties' representatives in two distinct institutional arenas: the Italian one and the European Parliament. The results show that LN's positions are guided by cultural-identitarian and sovereignist arguments, while M5S mobilizes the two issues to boost its anti-elitist claims. Therefore, the paper claims that the governmental coalition between the two parties is driven by office-seeking motivations, rather than by a policy-seeking strategy.

1. Introduction

Recent studies show that political conflicts over supranational issues have transformed the structure of political competition, giving birth to a new 'integration-demarcation' cleavage, opposing the 'winners' and the 'losers' of globalisation (Kriesi *et al.* 2012, 73). In particular, 'European integration and immigration correspond to the new political and cultural forms of competition linked with globalization' (Kriesi *et al.* 2006, 924). In this vein, Hooghe and Marks (2018) claim that the impact of immigration and European integration has been no less disruptive on European politics than the previous junctures identified by Lipset and Rokkan (1967) as cleavage politics. In their words:

> 'Just as the Bolshevik revolution was a critical juncture in the expression of the class cleavage, so the euro crisis and the migration crisis can be considered as critical for the emergence of a transnational cleavage' (p. 116)

According to several scholars, the politicization of this transnational cleavage is a key factor in explaining the electoral success of so-called Eurosceptic/populist parties,

generally excluded from the governmental arena (Akkerman *et al.* 2016; Wolinetz and Zalslove 2018).

Italy is a privileged case for observing these trends given that two different populist parties, namely the League (former Northern League – LN[1]) and the Five Star Movement (M5S), significantly increased their share of votes in the last round of general elections (March 2018) by mobilizing immigration and European affairs. The literature agrees that these two parties form a coalition that transcends the left-right ideological continuum. In fact, the demarcation-integration divide is a more suitable explanation for this type of coalition. Our work provides a multidimensional empirical assessment of LN and M5S positions along this divide by comparing their stances on issues relating to immigration and the European Union in two distinct political arenas: the national parliament and the European parliament (EP).

In so doing, it answers the following research questions: what arguments do LN and M5S use to talk about the EU and migration? Do they hold similar positions? Do they frame the two issues differently between the two arenas?

The paper starts by presenting a multidimensional (re-)conceptualisation of both the EU (Section 2) and immigration issues (Section 3). It then applies a computer-assisted discourse analysis (CADA) (Partington 2010) method to an original dataset of 533 speeches delivered in the national and the supranational parliamentary arenas. The paper compares the two issues from a multilevel perspective: 1) an inter-parties comparison within the national arena; 2) an inter-parties comparison within the supranational arena, and 3) an inter-arenas comparison, between the national and the supranational parliaments. A conclusive section summarizes the obtained findings.

2. The EU as a multi-dimensional issue

Academics in the field have generally regarded party positioning on the EU as a Manichean concept, distinguishing parties either as critical (Eurosceptic) or as supporters (Europeanist) of the European integration process. However, the distinction Euroscepticism/Europeanist is generally too limited to understand the variegated nature of the phenomenon.

Nonetheless, researchers widely rely on the dichotomous distinction elaborated by Taggart and Szczerbiak (2001), distinguishing parties either as 'hard' or as 'soft' Eurosceptics, the former rejecting the very idea of the EU and European integration, the latter proposing a softer criticism of both the policies and the architecture of the EU. Several categories have been formulated to disentangle and better define the phenomenon of Euroscepticism from both a popular and a party-based perspective (see Vasilopoulou 2013 for an extensive review). Although these efforts increase our knowledge of Euroscepticism, they 'differentiate between the degrees of the phenomenon without formulating satisfactory definitions' (Crespy and Verschueren 2009, 381).

Instead of proposing a new category, this chapter relies on the assumption that the EU is a political system (Kreppel 2002; Brack 2018) constituted by a set of *political objects* (Easton 1965, 436) that parties may support or oppose to define their overall positioning *vis-à-vis* the EU. In particular, we classify the targets of party positioning as the EU-elite;

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[1] The party changed its name in 2017. For simplicity we use its former denomination throughout the paper.

the EU-institutions; the EU-community and EU-policies. As emerges from Table 1 below, the EU issue is constituted by two broad dimensions: 'what the EU does' identifying the *output* of the EU-political system and 'what the EU is' referring to the components of the EU-political system.

Table 1. EU issue dimensions

'What the EU does'		'What the EU is'	
Policy dimension	*Elite dimension*	*Institutional dimension*	*Community dimension*
EU-policies: • Objectives • Instruments. • Financial endowments.	EU-elite: Performance and moral characteristics: • Bureaucrats. • Politicians. • Functionaries	EU-regime: Performance, values and norms: • European Commission (EC). • European Parliament (EP). • Council of Ministers (Council). • Other institutions.	EU-community: • EU values and norms (identity). • EU-competencies (deepening). • EU-enlargement (widening). Sub-dimensions of the EU-community: territorial areas of application of some specific EU-policies: • Euro-area: common monetary policy. • Schengen area: protection of both internal and external borders.

EU-policies are conceived as the EU political system's *output*: parties can either support or criticise a specific policy, its objectives, the implied instruments and its financial endowment. The EU-elite dimension refers to the complex of 'public officials and institutional actors that exercise EU governance' (Serricchio, Tsakatica and Quaglia 2013). The EU-regime is constituted by the institutions composing the EU (the EP, the European Commission, the Council of Ministers and so on). Parties can evaluate both the performance (Krouwel and Abts 2007) and the values and norms underpinning the EU institutions (e.g., rule of law, representativeness, democracy). The EU-community dimension is intended as the physical community composed of member states. When taking a stance on the EU community, parties refer to its competencies (along the national-supranational axis), to its potential enlargement to new member states (widening), or to their country's membership in the community on the basis of identitarian or cost-benefit arguments. The EU community entails two further sub-dimensions identifying the two main territorial areas of application of some specific EU-policies: the Euro-area and the Schengen area (Carlotti 2017).

3. Immigration as a multidimensional issue

Immigration has also been widely regarded as a multi-dimensional concept (e.g. Givens and Luedtke 2005). The widely accepted conceptualization by Hammar (1985) distinguishes between 'immigration control policies' and 'immigrant policies' (Table 2 below).

Table 2. The immigration issue's dimensions.

***Control* dimension**	***Integration* dimension**
Measures regulating immigrants:	Measures regulating immigrants' integration:
• Admission and entrance.	• Civic rights.
• Residence status.	• Socio-economic rights.
• Expulsion.	• Cultural and religious rights.
	• Political rights.

Immigration control policies refer to the normative framework regulating the selection, admission, settlement and deportation of foreign citizens, defining the degree to which a nation opens its borders to the entry and residence of foreign citizens. On the contrary, immigrant policies regulate third-country nationals' socio-economic, cultural-religious and political integration in the host society and define the degree of membership in the host society. In particular, integration is composed of three elements (Marshall & Bottomore, 1992): the civic element includes individual freedoms, e.g. freedom of the person, freedom of speech, freedom of expression, right to justice. The social element encompasses the right to share the welfare of the receiving society, namely access to social services, healthcare, housing, labour market, education, etc. Finally, the political element refers to the right to vote and to citizenship.

4. LN and M5S: Eurosceptic, Populist, or Anti-Immigration?

This work is a comparative case study of the currently Italian governing parties (LN and M5S). Although LN and M5S differ in terms of both their origins and ideological orientations and belong to different EP Party Groups (EPPGs), they are widely regarded as Eurosceptic and populist parties (Bulli and Soare 2018).

LN was first founded as an alliance of regionalist leagues in the north of Italy[2] in 1989, merging into the Northern League in 1991 (Tarchi 2002). LN's history can be summarized along three main phases: during the first two decades of its evolution, the party advocated the secession of so-called Padania (a 'mythological region' in the north of Italy) from the rest of the country. From the '90s onwards, due to the growth of immigration flows from Eastern European countries, immigration became LN's main concern. In addition, after the 9/11 terrorist attack, anti-immigration claims assumed a strong Islamophobic character, connected to an appeal to security and the defence of Italian Christianity (Ignazi 2005). During this second phase, LN strengthened its already critical position *vis-à-vis* the European integration process and the adoption of the Euro, perceived as a threat to national customs and values (Pirro and Van Kessel 2018). Finally, under the leadership of Matteo Salvini (from 2013 onwards), the party completed a process of nationalization: the reference community has been strategically broadened to include all native Italians, and the economic, cultural and political immigration threat has been linked to the collusion of the Roman elite with EU technocrats and criminal networks, which penalise native Italians (Bulli and Soare 2018, 141). In line

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[2] The alliance was composed of: Lega Lombarda, Lega Veneta, PiemontAutonomista, Unione Ligure, Lega Emiliano Romagnola and Alleanza Toscana.

with this nativist turn, since June 2015 the LN has been allied with the French Front National (FN) in the Europe of the Nations and Freedom EPPG. As this brief overview shows, LN can be classified as belonging to the populist family particularly within the sub-group of radical-right populists combining nativism, authoritarianism, and populism (Mudde 2007).

Differently, the M5S grew as a response to a general dissatisfaction with national politics. It mainly advocates for direct democracy (under the mantra of 'everyone is worth one')[3], overcoming the mechanism of representation through the use of the Internet. Even if the party is identified under several labels– 'anti-party' (Diamanti and Natale 2013), 'anti-establishment party' (Mosca 2014), 'strange animal' or 'web-populist' (Corbetta and Gualmini 2015) – scholars agree on its populist features, i.e. anti-elitism, emphasis on direct democracy, Manichean visions, charismatic leadership, etc. (Taggart 1995, Mosca 2014). After the last EP election, the party became a member of the Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy EPPG (EFDD), together with the Eurosceptic United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP).

M5S's position on immigration is not clear: while some empirical analyses suggest a discrepancy between the more conservative party leadership and the more liberal party activists (Bulli and Soare 2018, 147; Ivaldi, Lanzone and Sozzi 2016), the party's official message does not contain any expressions of xenophobia or socio-cultural discrimination (Lanzone 2014, 61) but rather endorses an instrumental approach to immigration. In other words, opposition to immigration is not based on xenophobic, welfare-chauvinist or nationalistic arguments, as in LN's case, but rather denounces the political mismanagement of the *res publica* and the elite's alleged collusion with organized crime (Bulli and Soare 2018, 148).

Even if the major targets of M5S criticism have always been the banks and big economic and political elites, since 2011 the party has directed its criticism toward Italy's membership in the Eurozone and the legitimacy of EU institutions in general. By the end of 2011, M5S had held an internal referendum concerning withdrawal from the Eurozone (Pirro and Van Kessel 2018).

In this article, we hypothesise a relation between the ideological natures of LN and M5S and their positions on immigration and the EU. Being a populist radical right party, the LN is expected to talk about issues relating to immigration, mainly using cultural-identitarian, law and order and securitarian arguments (*H1*). Similarly, we expect this party to reject the project of European integration in the name of sovereignist claims (*H2*). On the contrary, since M5S is a purely populist party, we expect it to mobilize issues relating to immigration and the EU to boost its anti-elitist claims, highlighting corruption and mismanagement of the national elite as well as the lack of legitimacy and democratic accountability of the EU-elite (*H3*). The last formulated hypothesis (*H4*) aims at assessing whether there is homogeneity in the two parties' framing strategies between the national and the supranational arena. In line with previous research in the field (e.g. McElory and Benoit 2011), we expect LN and M5S delegations in the EP to hold positions similar to their national counterparts with regard to the EU and the immigration issues.

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[3] This mantra is also the title of the M5S anthem as reported in the movement's official blog http://www.beppegrillo.it/movimento/2010/07/ognuno-vale-uno.html

5. Research Design and Method

Parliament is chosen as a privileged viewpoint, as the institution *par excellence* where political conflicts on legislation and governmental policies unfold. Both the Italian and the European parliaments function as decision-making institutions at the heart of democratic representation: directly elected arenas where parties' representatives work together on the same topic at the same time, having access to a public profile that is of great importance when there is media attention on some specific issues (Usherwood 2017).

Previous literature concerning parties' position-taking in parliaments usually relies on patterns of voting behaviour as an empirical data-source. However, Roll Call Votes (RCVs) are not free from problems (see Carrubba et al. 2006 for an exhaustive review). Therefore, we believe that parliamentary speeches are a fine-grained and less-biased source of data to assess parties' positions (Wendler 2014). Even if, differently from RCVs, speeches do not result in tangible conclusions, participating in plenary debates is an opportunity for parliamentarians to provide a public justification for the entirety of the legislative process (e.g. Lord 2013, 253).

LN and M5S representatives' speeches delivered between May 2014 and December 2016[4] are analysed in both the Italian and the European parliaments (MPs and MEPs respectively). During this period, two specific events took place: the peak of the migration crisis in mid-2015 and the Brexit referendum in June 2016. Analysing LN's and M5S's speeches in this time frame allows us to provide an in-depth description of their stances towards the two issues studied. We used a list of keywords related to both the EU and the immigration issue to select and retrieve the speeches from the official webpages of both the EP and the Italian parliament[5]. The collected speeches are organised in four corpora[6]: one for each issue and level of observation (see Table 1 in the Appendix presenting the four corpora's descriptive statistics).

A total of 533 speeches were collected for both parties in both parliamentary arenas. Speeches are divided into natural sentences and manually codified using MaxQDA[7] on the basis of a codebook that assigns to each dimension, detailed in Sections 2 and 3, three categories expressing the 'direction' of the positioning: positive, negative or neutral for the EU issue and permissive, restrictive or neutral for the immigration issue (see Table 2 in the Appendix for more details about the coding procedure[8]).

The coding procedure recognizes the character of the expressed positioning either as principled or as pragmatic. Sentences coded as pragmatic refer to '[m]eans-ends type of rationality where actors are considered to take decisions made on calculations of utility based on a given set of interests' (Sjursen 2002, 494). On the contrary, sentences expressing a principled positioning refer to normative arguments based on claims about values or moral standards of justice and legitimacy (Wendler 2016). The

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[4] This period corresponds to the first two years of the VIII EP legislature, which is also the first legislature of the M5S.

[5] Detailed information about speech selection and analysis (codebook and coding criteria) are available upon request.

[6] A corpus is a collection of texts in machine-readable format.

[7] Further information at https://www.maxqda.com/

[8] A detailed version of the applied codebook is available upon request.

pragmatic/principled distinction is made by assigning to each sentence a value of 1 in the case of principled character and of 0 otherwise.

The analysis assumes that the more a specific dimension of the two issues is important to the parties, the more they emphasise it. In the same way, a lack of reference towards one of the specific dimensions signals a lack of saliency to the party of that specific dimension (Budge 1994; Lowe et al. 2011).

The frequencies of coded sentences are then used to build an additive index of party positioning on each of the theorised issues' targets that sum both the direction (opposition or support) and the character (principled or pragmatic) of party position.

To construct the index we firstly considered the frequency of coded sentences to assess the direction of party positioning as:

$$Q = \frac{\log CX + 1}{\log N + 1} - \frac{\log CY + 1}{\log N + 1}(1)$$

Where CX represents the total number of sentences coded negatively/restrictively for each of the analysed categories, CY is the total number of coded positively/permissively sentences in each of the analysed categories, and N is the total number of coded sentences (including neutral sentences). The proposed formula is an adaptation of Prosser's re-elaboration of Lowe et al.'s 'logit scale of position' (Lowe et al. 2011; Prosser 2014) which is, in turn, an improvement of the Comparative Manifesto Project's left-right scale (the so-called RILE index)[9]. The value of 1 is added to each index component to keep them consistently 0, since $log_{(1)} = 0$ (Prosser 2014). The result is a continuous variable ranging between 1 and -1 indicating the highest opposition or the highest support for the considered targets respectively. Whenever the variable takes the value of 0, it indicates either a lack of salience to the party of the specific target or that the same proportion of coded negative/positive or coded restrictive/permissive sentences is present.

Secondly, to complete the positioning index we included a value indicating the character: principled or pragmatic. To assign this we look at the resulting direction: if a party displays a positive direction (denoting opposition) and if the majority of the coded-negative/restrictive sentences are principled in character (value of 1), then the party is exercising a principled opposition and vice-versa:

$$(Q \pm q) * 100(2)$$

Where Q represents the continuous variable mentioned above and q refers to the character of the expressed positioning. The formula presents the $\pm$ operator to obtain a symmetric scale of positioning: if Q is positive the value of q is added whereas, if Q is negative, the value of q is subtracted. The index ranges between +200 and -200 indicating the maximum degrees of principled opposition and principled support respectively, whereas a value of +100 or -100 indicates the maximum degree of pragmatic opposition or pragmatic support respectively. If the index takes the value of 0 it indicates a neutral position of the parties.

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[9] The Comparative Manifesto Project provides researchers with party positioning on several issues deriving from the content analysis of their electoral manifestos. Further information at https://manifesto-project.wzb.eu/

The obtained index is used to graphically represent M5S's and LN's positioning on the two issues studied (see spider-plots in section 5). Furthermore, using WMatrix[10] we perform keywords-analysis allowing the identification of keywords[11] for each corpus avoiding potential biases in their selections since WMatrix objectively establishes the keywords according to their statistical significance or 'keyness'[12]. The identified keywords are used to report quotes from the analysed speeches in an objective way, providing the reader with a qualitative hint of party positioning.

6. Results

This section compares the indexes of positioning obtained for LN and M5S, relying on spider plots (Fig. 1-4). To each plot's vertex corresponds one target of positioning while the coloured lines report – in green for LN and in yellow for M5S – the party positioning towards the observed targets. On the black continuous line (the 0 line), the index takes the value of 0. Whenever opposition to the target is present, the coloured lines are drawn on the positive side of each graph. The black patterned lines highlight the distinction between the principled and pragmatic character of party positioning (principled positioning above ± 100).

Starting from M5S's and LN's positions on the EU (Fig. 1 and 2 below), the two parties behave similarly in the national arena. They are both principally opposed to the EU-community, the EU-regime and the EU-elite. However, M5S's opposition towards the EU-elite target is higher (+ 132). Interestingly, both parties use populist arguments to oppose EU polity: they both criticize the technocratic nature and lack of democratic accountability of the EU (see the presence of *cittadini* – citizens and *popolo* – people, among the keywords in Table 5 below).

> 'According to the LN, there is a genetic bias in this *Europe*: it has been founded on flexibility but without the *people*, without democracy' (Giancarlo Giorgetti, LN's MP, 16/09/2014)[13]
>
> '[...] it is enough to observe what is happening nowadays. The *EU* is strictly tied to finance, *banks*, big powers, to this absolute technocracy. Everything is possible under the guide of this European government ruled by *banks* [...]' (Daniele Pesco, M5S's MP, 30/06/2015)

Nevertheless, while M5S endorses a pragmatic opposition towards EU-policies (+ 45), LN opposes this target in a principled way (+ 138). Moreover, M5S focuses its attention on two targets, namely the Euro area (+145) and the Schengen area (+106), which are not salient for the LN.

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[10] WMatrix is an open-source software for corpus analysis and comparison. See http://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/wmatrix/

[11] A keyword is 'a word which occurs with unusual frequency in a given text. This does not mean high frequency but unusual frequency, by comparison with a reference corpus of some kind' (Scott 1997: 236).

[12] A high value of 'keyness' indicates a prototypical word in a given corpus. We consider as statistically significant only those items with a 'keyness' value over 7, since 6.63 is the cut-off point for 99% confidence of significance (Rayson 2012).

[13] From now on, keywords are in italics.

'We want a Government that strongly advocates against the Fiscal Compact, against the budgetary equilibrium, in order to give to *Italy* the possibility to regain its *monetary* sovereignty, because this is the key of our future: sovereignty!' (Luca Frusone, M5S's MP, 14/10/2015)

Table 3. Top 10 keywords by Arena (EU-issue)

	National Arena		EP	
	Keywords	*Keyness*	*Keywords*	*Keyness*
M5S	*unione*	21.751	*austerità*	31.934
	piano	20.657	*europeo*	17.195
	Dublino	20.463	*sociale*	17.195
	cittadini	19.616	*crisi*	16.299
	europea	19.571	*istituzioni*	14.739
	euro	19.267	*greca*	12.282
	Europa	18.761	*mafia*	12.282
	banche	18.729	*rubato*	12.282
	Italia	18.329	*misure*	11.86
	moneta	15.493	*politica*	11.86
LN	*problema*	32.82	*Europa*	46.867
	Europa	24.998	*qualcuno*	21.757
	popolo	22.49	*zero*	19.581
	consenso	21.62	*europea*	17.101
	immigrazione	19.727	*immigrazione*	15.877
	parte	19.258	*Isis*	15.23
	fenomeno	17.018	*commissione*	13.902
	risposte	17.018	*palazzo*	13.054
	priorità	16.239	*Turchia*	13.054
	modo	15.524	*difesa*	10.879

Note: keywords are ordered according to 'keyness'. Only items with log likelihood (LL) value ≥ 7 are reported.

Looking at the spider-plot concerning the EU issue at supranational level (Fig. 2 below), it is noteworthy that LN's stance does not change much. The party's Euroscepticism remains almost unchanged between the two levels with principled criticism toward EU-policies (+168); the EU-community (+167), and the EU-regime (+130). LN opposes the EU-regime and the EU-community using sovereignist arguments related both to the EU power-grab *vis-à-vis* member states and the lack of democracy at the EU level and heavily criticising the lack of electoral accountability of the EU-regime *vis-à-vis* democratically elected national authorities.

'This surreal debate confirms that those who govern this *Europe* – the European *Commission* – are strong powers and a few dangerous subjects' (Matteo Salvini, LN's leader)

While M5S and LN are similar in their critique of the EU in the national arena, M5S's position is different in the EP. Its criticism is, in fact, pragmatic and focused on EU-policy (+49) using reformist arguments to criticize both the EU-community (+65) and the EU-regime (+29). M5S stresses the need to inject democracy at the supranational level but does not reject the existence of the Union. On the contrary, it proposes

alternatives to reform the EU-community starting from its core values (e.g., solidarity) expressed in the Treaties (see the presence of *sociale* – social – among the keywords in Table 5 below):

> 'We want to change: we want a different Europe, firstly and foremost in terms of treaties, agreements, and policies. We have fervently talked about treaties such as the Fiscal Compact, but we have never heard a speech on the *Social* Compact or on some *social* measure of rebalancing, a subject that you obviously do not care about' (Ignazio Corrao, M5S' MEP)

Figure 1. Spider-plot of LN's and M5S' positions on the EU-issue. National arena.
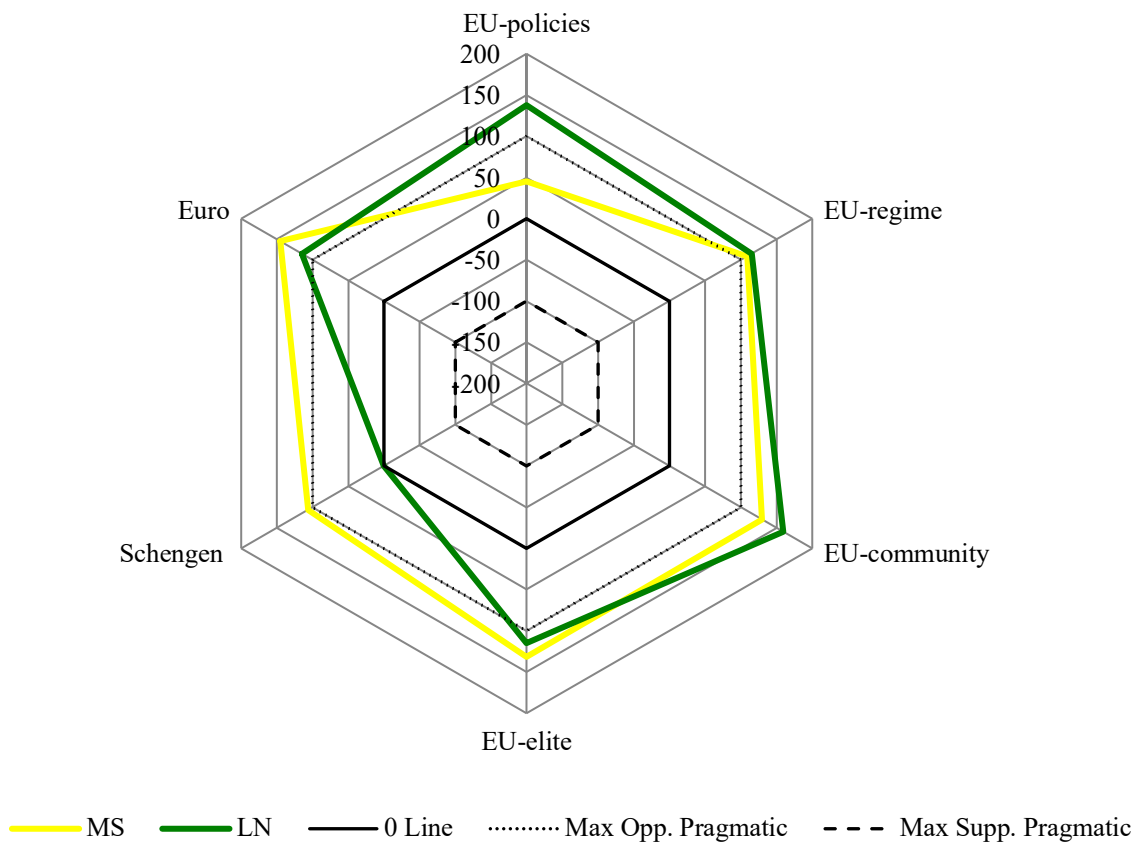
Both parties are equated by a similarly strong and principled criticism of the EU-elite, contesting its moral values and its alleged connections with lobbies and big financial/economic powers to the detriment of EU citizens. Furthermore, both parties reject on a principled basis the Euro area geometry (scoring +130 and +146 respectively), considered to be the cardinal mistake of the EU causing macro-economic divergences between member states, and propose an exit from it.

> 'One single road is left to rebuild a Europe of peoples from its foundations: abandoning the crazy project of the euro that has accelerated its disintegration instead of reducing divergences among member states [...]. Markets have blackmailed and dismantled the *European* project that can now be rebuilt only by

betting on democracy, common goods, real economy, labour and *social* welfare' (Marco Valli, M5S's MEP)

Similarly to the national arena, LN does not consider the Schengen area geometry a salient target. On the contrary, M5S's principled opposition to the Schengen area in the national parliament is transformed into a lack of salience of this target within the supra-national arena.

Figure 2. Spider-plot of LN and M5S' positions on the EU-issue. EP Arena.
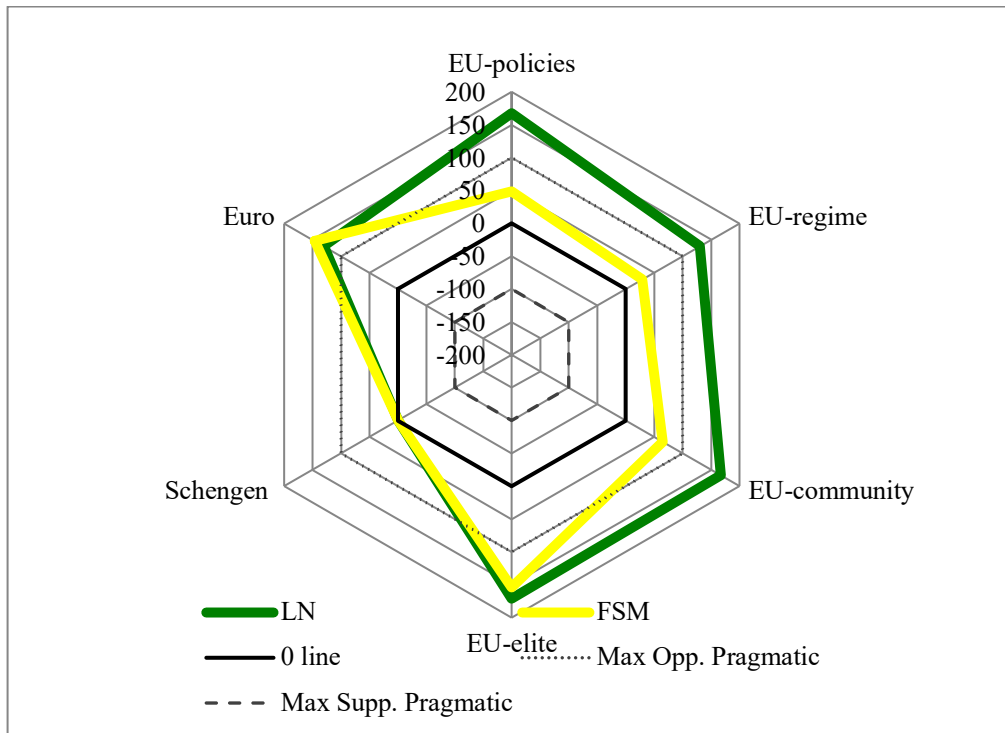
Moving our attention to the immigration issue, Figure 3 below shows that LN and M5S frame migration in two substantially different ways in the national context. LN advocates stronger border control (-157) and expresses a principled opposition towards the socio-economic (+149), cultural-religious (+140), and civic integration (+135) of migrants. It frames the 'immigration fluxes' as an 'invasion' threatening the national and cultural unity of the country. Indeed, words such as 'illegal immigrants' (*clandestini* in Italian), 'invasion', 'deportation' are among the top 10 keywords used by LN MPs to talk about migration (Table 6 below).

'The victims of immigration are a collateral effect of an emergency created by those who did not want to manage the immigration flows which have now become a true invasion' (Marco Rondini, LN's MP, 12/04/2014)

Table 4. Top 10 keywords by Arena (immigration-issue)

	National Arena		EP	
	Keywords	*Keyness*	*Keywords*	*Keyness*
M5S	*minori*	212.373	*membri*	31.934
	migranti	113.222	*stati*	17.195
	accompagnati	107.244	*solidarietà*	17.195
	accoglienza	89.848	*ricollocazione*	16.299
	stranieri	79.253	*equa*	14.739
	Italia	48.934	*responsabilità*	12.282
	età	48.193	*ripartizione*	12.282
	prima	43.036	*meccanismo*	12.282
	sistema	41.081	*permanente*	11.86
	bambini	40.696	*ricollocare*	11.86
LN	*clandestini*	150.191	*Europa*	46.867
	immigrazione	115.117	*immigrazione*	21.757
	immigrati	105.343	*clandestini*	19.581
	clandestina	77.066	*milioni*	17.101
	paese	72.277	*persone*	15.877
	cittadini	71.375	*politica*	15.23
	invasione	63.234	*immigrati*	13.902
	cento	59.455	*mare*	13.054
	CIE	59.119	*guerra*	13.054
	espulsione	52.413	*confini*	10.879

Note: keywords are ordered according to 'keyness'. Only items with log likelihood (LL) value ≥ 7 are reported.

Differently from the LN, the M5S holds a more ambiguous position towards migration, scoring values close to 0 on all the targets with the sole exception of humanitarian migration, which is endorsed on a principled basis (-119). Indeed, Table 6 above shows that M5S MPs often refer to 'minors' and 'children'.

> 'Let's start from a basic concept: in this parliament we all agree that human rights and, as a consequence, *migrants'* lives must be protected' (Manlio Di Stefano, M5S's MP, 16/10/2014)

In particular, with reference to the socio-economic dimension of migrants' integration, LN is concerned with the redistribution of national services perceived to be unfairly allocated in favour of irregular migrants, at the expense of Italians.

> 'You exercise a form of reverse racism: who cares about the old retired man of Lecco, who after having been evicted from his house has killed himself? Your priority is to recognize the victims of *immigration*' (Polo Grimoldi, LN's MP, 15/04/2015)

Another category that plays a central role in the national debate is the reception of migrants. Both parties endorse a restrictive pragmatic stance toward this category, associating the mismanagement of the reception system to the corruption of the national political elite (Gianfreda 2018).

Mineo[14] is the centre of illicit interests. It is the most relevant example of how the migration phenomenon can be exploited by those who want to earn from emergencies. Mineo represents the complete failure of the *reception* system, both from an economic and from a human rights perspective. (Marialucia L'Orefice, M5S MP, 10/03/2016)

Figure 3. Spider-plot of LN and M5S positions on the migration-issue. National Arena.
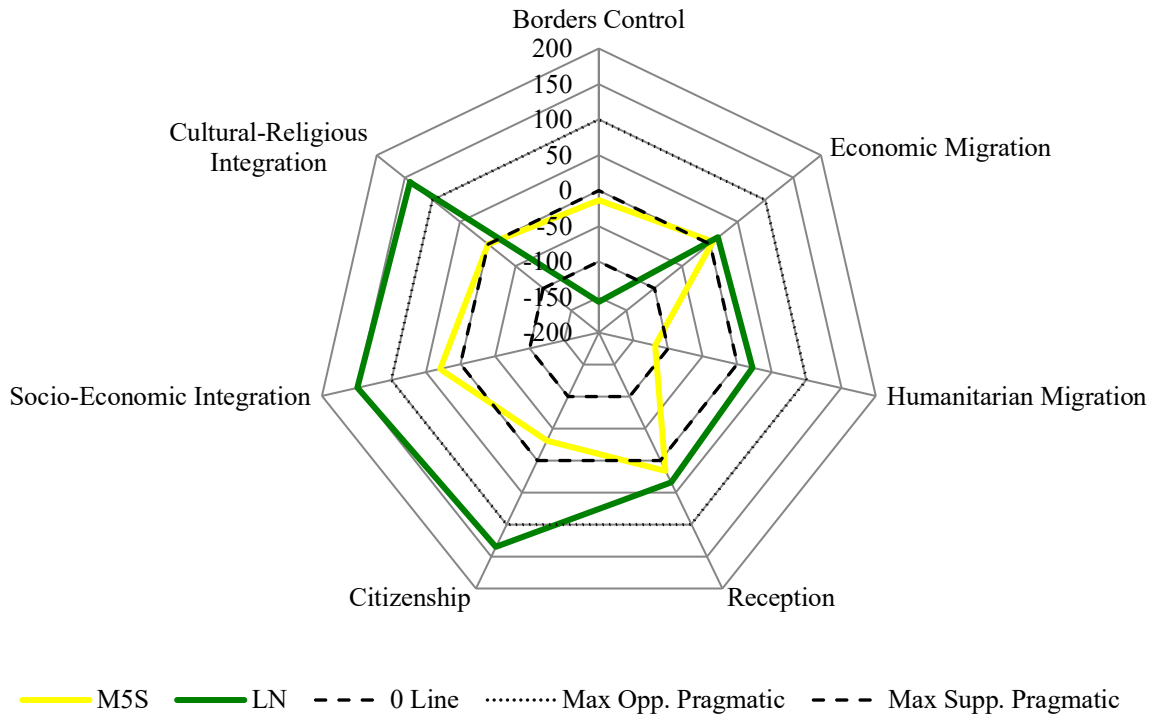
Looking at both parties' positions in the EP (see Fig. 4 above), we observe a substantial confirmation of LN's positioning with a strong principled endorsement of border control (-177) and a strong principled opposition to the cultural/religious (+136) and socio-economic (+140) integration of migrants. However, LN is opposed in principle to the reception of migrants in the EU territory, differently from the national level where the party endorses a more moderate approach.

'Years and years of foolish reception, without the necessary checks, have allowed thousands of illegal migrants (*clandestini*) to enter Europe, without leaving any record. [...] *Illegal migrants* and *Islamic terrorists* wander around unhindered' (Mara Bizzotto, LN MEP)

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[14] Mineo is the name of a reception centre in the province of Catania (Sicily), which has been in the spotlight for corruption and human rights violations. For further details: https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/feb/01/migrants-more-profitable-than-drugs-how-mafia-infiltrated-italy-asylum-system.

Differently from the national arena, the M5S position on the migration issue is more delineated in the EP. The M5S delegation places little emphasis on immigration control (+16), while it holds a positive and principled stance towards humanitarian migration (-147) and socio-economic integration of migrants (-142). Indeed, as already noticed, in the national arena M5S often stresses the need to address the root causes of migration – namely wars and weapons trade – and enforce human rights protection across the EU.

> 'The socio-economic integration of *refugees* is a complex process that needs to be based on the principles of *solidarity* and *fair* distribution of *responsibilities* among Member States. [...]. Refugees' access to the *labour* market [...] can reduce the costs of reception [...] and contribute to the economy of host societies' (Laura Ferrera M5S MEP)

Figure 4. Spider-plot of LN and M5S positions on the migration issue. EP Arena.
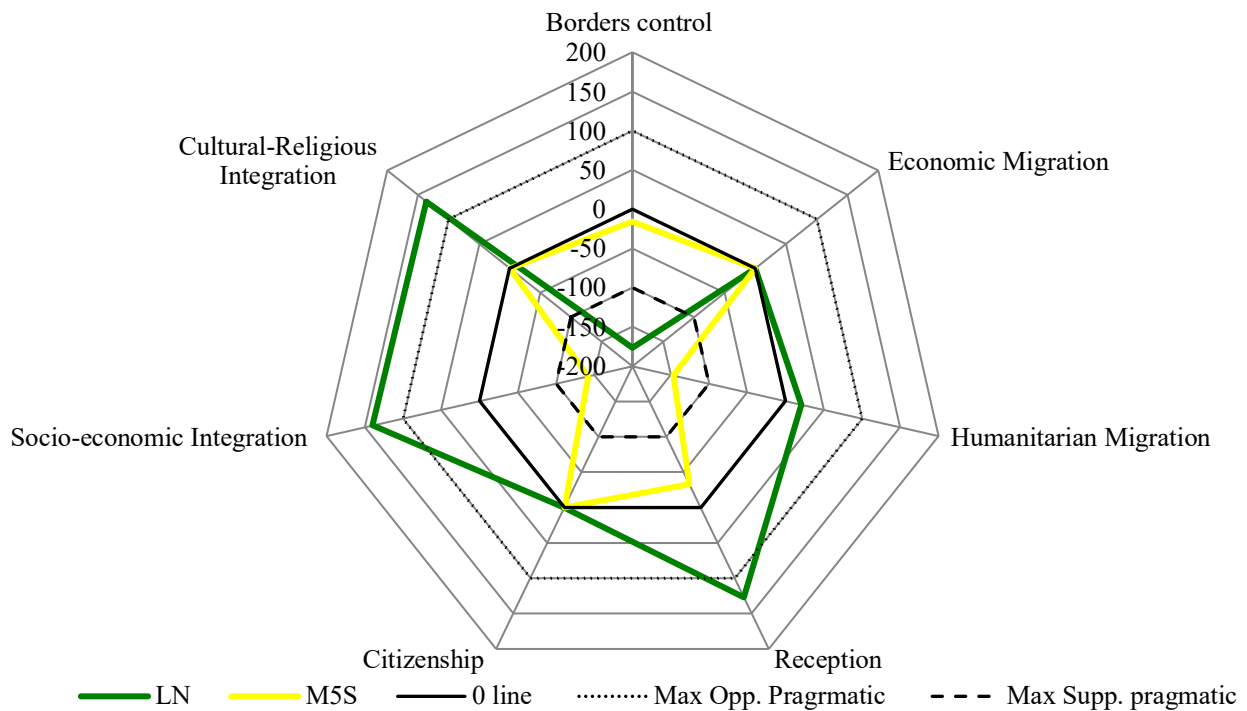
Two further considerations are noteworthy: firstly, M5S's pragmatic opposition towards the reception system at the national level (+16) is turned into pragmatic support in the European arena (-33). Secondly, the 'citizenship' target is not salient either for M5S or for LN in the EP. This hints at the influence of institutional settings on parties' framing strategies. While LN's positioning across institutional arenas seems to be driven by its ideological characterization – a radical-right populist party with nativist and xenophobic claims – M5S's framing strategies appear to be influenced by the institutional settings in which the party operates. Indeed, if at the national level the party mainly frames immigration issues in terms of opposition to the government, in the EP normative arguments, such as respect for human rights, prevail. Similarly, the lack of salience of the citizenship target is strictly connected to the fact that naturalization is a typical issue dealt by sovereign states (Brubakar 2010).

7. Conclusions

The empirical analysis conducted in this paper has shown that LN and M5S hold different positions *vis-à-vis* the EU and immigration issues. In particular, as expected (H1), LN opposes immigration mainly relying on cultural identitarian, securitarian and law and order arguments in both the observed arenas, thus confirming itself as a populist radical-right party (Mudde 2007). Similarly, LN frames its opposition to the EU-community within sovereigntist arguments and accusing the EU of grabbing power *vis-à-vis* sovereign member states and authorities (H2 confirmed).

Conversely, the M5S mobilizes the issues studied to boost its anti-elitist claims (H3), focusing on the mismanagement of the immigration crisis (and in particular the reception system) by the national elite and on the technocratic nature of the European institutions that lack democratic accountability.

Interestingly, in the national parliament, both the M5S and the LN use populist rhetoric to attack mainstream governing parties, following a government vs. opposition dynamic. On the contrary, at the supranational level the two parties behave differently. While the M5S proposes a principled attack on the EU-elite but pragmatic and constructive opposition to EU-policies, the LN endorses principled criticism toward the EU-elite, the EU-regime and the EU-community, thus constituting a sort of anti-systemic opposition to the EU (Mair 2007). Consequently, H4 is confirmed only with reference to the LN that combines nativism, welfare chauvinism and principled opposition to the EU in both arenas. In other words, LN behaves as an opposition, anti-immigration and Eurosceptic party both at the national and at the supranational level. Conversely, M5S adapts itself to the institutional setting in which it operates.

Furthermore, the analysis shows marked differences between LN and M5S Euroscepticism. While the former sees the EU as a threat to national territorial/cultural unity, the latter mainly stresses the lack of democracy and democratic accountability of the EU-elite, highlighting the elite vs. people distinction typical of a populist party (Mudde 2007).

Given the substantial differences that exist between LN's and M5S's positions on the 'integration-demarcation' axis of the political competition, we suggest that this divergence might lead to the formation of possible 'wedges' in the current yellow-green Italian governmental coalition, something that might be consequential for its duration.

Appendix 1

Table A1. Corpora's descriptive statistics

Party name	EU-issue		Immigration issue	
	Total number of speeches	Average speech length in tokens (standard deviation in parenthesis)	Total number of speeches	Average speech length in tokens (standard deviation in parenthesis)
Corpora National Parliament				
M5S	44	878 (695)	112	820 (745)
LN	27	946 (1129)	137	458 (491)
Total	71		249	

		Corpora EP		
M5S	47	285, 5 (145)	66	252 (103)
LN	19	282 (141)	81	192 (102)
Total	66		147	
Total overall	137	--	396	--

Table A2. Coding scheme (the full coding scheme can be obtained upon request)

Variable	Category	Definition	Example	Coding rules
EU Community	A1: Negative	Opposition to the EU community, which means: • to be against further European integration; • to be against the process of EU enlargement; • to be against the transfer of competences towards the EU; • to be against EU values and identity.	'We are tired of Europe imposing illogical rules on us' Paola Carinelli, M5S, 19/03/2014	All four aspects of the definition need to point to strong opposition. Otherwise A2: Neutral
	A2: Neutral	Neither opposition to nor support of the EU community, which means: • to affirm a matter of fact • to describe situations in an 'objective' manner • to report statements by other MPs/Ministers/journalists	'The economic crisis has affected the European Union as a whole' Sergio Battelli, M5S, 27/06/2016	If not all aspects of definition point to 'opposition' or 'support'
	A3: Positive	Support of the EU community, which means: • to be in favour of further EU integration; • to be in favour of the process of EU enlargement; • to be in favour of EU values and identity.	'The Europe we want is the citizens' Europe. We must build it together!' Sergio Battelli, M5S, 6/08/2015	All three aspects point to 'support', otherwise A1: opposition.
Immigration control	B1: Restrictive	Support for immigration control, which means: • to be in favour of stricter borders controls; • to advocate for stricter immigration rules and procedures; • to be in favour of administrative detention of migrants.	'A dignified reception must be reserved for those who have the right to stay and not forall foreign minors without any distinction' Marco Rondini, LN, 24/10/2016	All four aspects of the definition need to point to strong opposition. Otherwise B2: Neutral
	A2: Neutral	Neither opposition to nor support for the EU community, which means: • to affirm a matter of fact • to describe situations in an 'objective' manner • to report statements by other MPs/Ministers/journalists	'94% of unaccompanied minor refugees are men, while 5.7% are women'. Marco Rondini, LN, 26/10/2016	If not all aspects of definition point to 'opposition' or 'support'
	B3: Permissive	Against immigration control, which means: • to be in favour of save and rescue operations; • to stress the need to respect international law and conventions; • to advocate for the respect of migrants' rights.	'The Northern League speaks of closing the borders without having any idea of the international agreements that Italy has signed in the EU'. Maria Edera Spadoni, M5S, 21/05/2015	All three aspects point to 'support', otherwise B1: opposition.

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Standing apart together?

Analysing Lega (Nord) and Movimento 5 Stelle as new challenger parties in Parliament

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Abstract

Following the 2018 election and a long phase of negotiations, Lega and the Five Star Movement (FSM) appointed the first cabinet in Western Europe that does not include any mainstream party family. The 'elective affinities' between the electorates of these two challenger parties had been quite evident for some time, but in the present work we argue that there are further traits that the two parties had shared well before 2018 that could help to further prove their proximity. We propose a new dimension of analysis that should be taken into consideration when studying (new) challenger parties: their relationship vis-à-vis the other opposition parties. We would expect them to enter parliament for the first time with both the goals usually related to the two different opposition status (temporary vs. permanent) in mind: leaving the opposition and exploiting the opposition. Furthermore, we would expect them to stand apart from the other parties, no matter whether the latter are in government or in opposition. This is, in fact, one of the main reasons for their electoral success and, in the end, their essence. We will test these expectations by employing Social Network Analysis methods and analysing and comparing the cooperation attitudes of the Lega and FSM with the other opposition parties, using as an indicator the amount of legislative co-sponsorship during their first term in parliament (respectively 1992-1994 and 2013-2018) and the amount passed together while in opposition (2013-2018).

Introduction

T he political landscape across Europe has changed remarkably in recent years. The most visible change has been the fall of mainstream parties and the rise of challenger parties in several European countries. Examples of such an escalation in the aftermath of the crisis are many and include both the success of new challenger parties and the rise in support for older radical (right-wing) parties (Hobolt and Tilley 2016). Within the category of challenger parties, in fact, we find very different actors, some of them whom were already present on the European scene before the Eurozone crisis, others appearing only afterwards.

Italy is a good example of such a transformation of the party and parliamentary landscapes, as it has recently witnessed both the success of a new strong challenger party and the rise in support of an old one. The 2013 election saw the fall of both the centre left and the centre right mainstream parties and, simultaneously, the emergence of the new Five Star Movement (M5S). In 2018 the tripolar competition resulting from that election

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was consolidated (De Giorgi 2018), but with the balance of power among the three polit-ical poles radically changed. The two main challenger parties – the M5S and the Lega[1] – achieved the majority of votes and no government was possible without the support of at least one of the two (Chiaramonte et al. 2018). After a long phase of negotiations, the two parties were able to appoint the first cabinet in Western Europe that does not include any mainstream party family (Paparo 2018).

What do these two new government partners have in common? Despite their appar-ent programme differences, the 'elective affinities' between the electorates of these two challenger parties had been evident for some time,[2] above all as regards their common anti-system profile based on a distrust of both national and European institutions (Franchino and Negri 2018). But the two parties also share the capacity to transform widespread feelings of insecurity and discomfort in different fields – economic, cultural, etc. but all attributable to the effects of globalisation – into consensus (Bordignon and Ceccarini 2017). Furthermore, starting from a green, libertarian platform, the M5S 'has gradually evolved, incorporating issues such as anti-taxation and Euroscepticism that could also attract right-wing voters, while remaining rather elusive on the crucial issue of immigration' (Mosca and Tronconi 2017, p.1). The Movement's turn to the right was, in a sense, preceded also by its agreement with the UK Independence Party (UKIP) in the European parliament in 2014, although, at the same time, it 'has maintained typical leftist positions on the issue of guaranteed minimum income, as well as continuing to hold its environmentalist stance' (Ibid., p.1). So, despite a further shift to the right of the Lega and its voters in recent years (Passarelli 2013), the ambiguous and contradictory ideological positioning of the M5S (Bordignon and Ceccarini 2013; Mosca 2014; Ma-nucci and Amsler 2017) together with its electorate's preferences in terms of party alliances[3], has favoured the achievement of an agreement between the two parties built on common or negotiated policy goals.

Besides these considerations, and the political opportunity that clearly neither party wanted to miss, we argue that further traits have been shared by the two actors since well before 2018 that could help further prove their proximity. These traits are re-lated to the strategy adopted by the two parties once in parliament and are ascribable to their (initial) nature as challenger parties. Although in different periods, in fact, both the Lega and the M5S entered the Italian parliament as new challenger parties. The political and economic crisis of the late 1980s/early 1990s saw the rise of the Lega Nord, while the political and economic crisis beginning in 2008 facilitated the success of the Five Star Movement. We propose a new dimension of analysis that should be taken into consider-ation when studying this type of party, i.e. their relationship vis-à-vis other opposition actors. How do they behave once the representation threshold has been crossed? Do they tend to remain isolated or do they start some kind of socialisation process, meaning in-creased collaboration with some of the other opposition forces? We assume that, albeit in very different political periods, the two parties, on entering parliament, adopted a

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[1] Running for the first time without the word Nord (North) in its symbol, with the aim of expanding its electoral support.

[2] See, among others, the results of the polls administered by Demos & Pi in 2016 (http://www.demos.it/a01374.php) and 2017 (http://www.demos.it/a01396.php).

[3] See also the results of the polls administered by Demos & Pi in 2016 (http://www.demos.it/a01374.php) and 2017 (http://www.demos.it/a01396.php).

highly similar strategy in their relationship with the other political actors, and in particular with the other opposition parties, attempting to send the same message to their respective electorates: we represent an alternative to the existing political parties, regardless of whether they are in government or in opposition, and we will behave accordingly in parliament. Furthermore, we assume that Salvini's Lega revived this strategy, trying to go back to the party origins in the last legislature (2013-2018), i.e. the one that directly followed the Eurozone crisis and saw the entrance of the M5S in the parliamentary arena.

We will test these expectations by analysing and comparing the attitudes to cooperation of the two challenger parties with the other opposition groups, using as an indicator the amount of legislative co-sponsorship during their first term in parliament (respectively, in 1992-1994 and 2013-2018) and in the term they spent together in opposition that preceded their government agreement. Since we are fundamentally interested in a relational dimension, that is the relationship between the new challenger parties and the other opposition parties in parliament, we will employ Social Network Analysis (SNA) methods. These methods have been applied in the context of bill proposals in other parliaments (Fowler 2010; Kirkland 2011) and have unearthed novel dynamics that lie beneath parliamentary activity. Thus, we expect that SNA will give us new insights also into new challenger parties' behaviour and, in particular, into the two new government partners in Italy.

The objective of this work is twofold: first, to verify whether the Lega and M5S have shown similar behaviour during their first years in parliament and, in so doing, to contribute to the knowledge of the nature of such an unprecedented coalition in Italy and second, to understand whether we can employ this possible common behaviour as one further variable for distinguishing the new challenger parties from others in parliament.

1. How challenger parties behave when they enter the parliamentary arena: expectations

Following Hobolt and Tilley (2016), we define challenger parties as those parties that 'seek to challenge the mainstream political consensus and do not ordinarily enter government' (p.972). Challenger parties may be on the right, left, or even neither of the two, as their ideological position does not contribute to the definition of their challenger status; their non-involvement in government does.[4] Reams of articles, academic and non-academic, have been written on these (new) protagonists of the political scenario and the reasons for their electoral success, but there is still little knowledge of the behaviour of these parties once in parliament.[5] The main purpose of this paper is to start filling this gap through the analysis of the case of the Italian Lega and M5S when they first entered the parliamentary arena, respectively in 1992 and 2013.

As we said, we aim to introduce a new dimension of analysis into the study of this kind of party, i.e. their relationship with the other opposition actors. No matter how much consensus- or conflict-oriented their action in parliament,[6] we expect all

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[4] There are some exceptions, of course, mainly in Central and Eastern Europe (Grotz and Weber 2016).
[5] With some exceptions such as Albertazzi and McDonnell 2005 or Pinto and Pedrazzani 2015.
[6] Some studies have already proven the tendency of these parties to behave in a rather adversarial way in parliament (De Giorgi 2016; De Giorgi and Ilonszki 2018).

challenger parties to adopt one distinctive strategy: to stand apart from other parties, no matter whether the latter are in government or in opposition. This is, in fact, one of the main reasons for their electoral success and, in the end, their essence. Hence, we expect them to keep a distance from and not cooperate with either the temporary or the permanent opposition parties. In other words, we expect to find a significant distance between them and the other opposition parties in terms of action in parliament and how this action is (or better, is not) related to the others.

We will measure the new challenger parties' distance from the other opposition parties and its possible evolution over time by employing a social network analysis of bill co-sponsorship during the 11th (1992-1994) and 17th (2013-2018) legislatures, i.e. the first legislative terms in parliament of the Lega Nord and Five Star Movement respectively. Many studies, mainly focused on the US context, have shown that co-sponsorship is related to ideological proximity (Braton and Rouse 2011; Aléman et al. 2009) but it is also a moment for representatives to signal other political actors (Wilson and Young 1997). So, we expect that the new challenger members of parliament (MPs) will collaborate less with the other opposition parties, as a way of signalling their distinctiveness. Other research has shown that in parliamentary systems with unified parties, co-sponsorship is mainly driven by specialisation: MPs introduce resolutions and amendments together with those who work on similar topics (Louwerse and Otjes 2015). This can be one further reason for the isolation of the new challenger parliamentary party groups (PPGs) who have no previous experience and are not well known by the other PPGs members, as they have entered parliament for the first time and with lack of experience as their best calling card against the established political parties. Of course, also the other parties matter. How established parties react to the challengers' presence in parliament is equally important. Despite their ideological proximity, in fact, parties are not always inclined to collaborate with the new challengers,[7] although they might try to react to their issue attention, notably when in opposition (Van de Wardt 2015) if they see the possibility of some electoral benefit (Meguid 2005). For all these reasons, we will test two main research hypotheses: first, the new challenger parties – and in our case the Lega (Nord) and M5S – do not co-sponsor the other opposition parties' legislative initiative much during their first legislature in parliament; second, the other parties do not collaborate either with the new challenger parties and their respective legislative proposals.

2. Data and Methods

Our empirical analysis focuses on legislation co-sponsorship and relies on one source of data, i.e. the Italian lower chamber's (*Camera dei Deputati*) data archive.[8] As we said, in this paper we consider two main periods of analysis: the first legislature of the Lega Nord in Parliament, the 11th (1992-1994), and the first legislature of the M5S in parliament, the 17th (2013-2018), divided into individual governments for each term.[9]

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[7] See the attitudes of the centre-right parties towards the extreme right, as in Germany since the recent entrance of Alternative for Germany in the Bundestag or in Belgium with the principle of non-collaboration of all parties with the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang.

[8] Data was collected by the project "Opposition parties in Europe under pressure. Far from power, close to citizens?" (IF/00926/2015). Source: www.dati.camera.it.

[9] Amato I and Ciampi in the period 1992-1994 and Letta, Renzi and Gentiloni in the period 2013-2018.

We ran two different kinds of analysis. First, we employed a simple SNA representation to draw a graph showing the co-sponsorship network of the Italian parliament in the 11th and 17th legislatures. This simple exercise is quite helpful in showing the party cooperation attitude, or its absence, when proposing new bills. In our graphs each node, or point, represents an MP, whose colour represents her/his party, and each line between nodes, edges, represents the co-sponsorship of a certain bill.

For an easier representation of the co-sponsorship patterns we employed the Fruchterman and Reingold (1991) algorithm to distribute the different nodes along the graph. Using this algorithm, the position of each node is determined by its connections, in a fashion similar to that of recoil springs. If two MPs share a connection they will be drawn closer together, while other MPs that do not share any connection with these two are drawn further away. By calculating all these relative positions and combining the results, these graphs can be intuitively read as placing closer together those nodes that have connections while drawing apart those that do not share connections.

Though very informative, these graphs fail to present a clear and systematic point of reference which is needed in order to compare the different parties more precisely. To do this, we created an index of *intra-opposition party bill differentiation.* This index is a simple sum, for each period, of two different percentages. The first is the percentage of co-sponsors (*altri firmatari*) of bills initiated by *party x* that belong to the same party, i.e. the percentage of co-sponsors that are from the same party as the bill's initiator (*primo firmatario*). The second percentage represents, of all the bills co-sponsored by MPs of *party x*, the percentage of those initiated by *party x*. The combination of these two percentages can vary from 0, in cases where no bill presented by a member of *party x* is co-sponsored by any member of *party x* and members of *party x* are only co-sponsors of bills that were not introduced by *party x*, to 2 in cases where all co-sponsorship connections are made by members of *party x*. To ensure the statistical significance of these indices, we also ran a regression analysis that tested whether co-sponsorship with these parties was in fact lower during their first term.

3. Analysis

Turning our attention to the empirical analysis, we plotted the social network by connecting each MP, represented by a dot (node), with any other MP that also signed a bill proposed by her/him. In all plots, the colours represent the parties and the position of each MP in the graph is related to his/her relationship with other MPs, with cooperation bringing MPs closer to each other. Figures 1 to 5 plot the co-sponsorship network during each government within the 11th and the 17th legislatures.

In both figures 1 and 2,[10] Lega Nord clearly stands apart from the rest of the opposition parties' MPs. When compared to the other opposition parties, the Lega's MPs

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[10] For the 11th Legislature the party acronyms refer to: Centro Cristiano Democratico (Christian Democratic Centre – CCD); Democrazia Cristiana - Partito Popolare Italiano (Christian Democracy - Italian Popular Party – DC-PPI); Federalisti Europei (European Federalist – FE); Lega Nord (Northern League – LEGA); Movimento Per La Democrazia: La Rete (Movement fo Democracy - The Net – Rete); Movimento Sociale Italiano - Destra Nazionale (Italian Social Movement - National Right – MSI-DN); Partito Democratico Della Sinistra (Left Democratic Party – PDS); Partito Liberale Italiano (Italian Liberal Party – PLI); Partito Repubblicano Italiano (Italian Republican Party – PRI); Partito Socialista Democratico

cooperate less when it comes to jointly proposing legislation with other parties, and vice versa: the other opposition parties are not inclined to collaborate with the Lega's MPs when the latter initiate their own legislation. The distinction between the new challenger Lega Nord at that time and the other parties is particularly noteworthy when compared with other permanent (radical) opposition parties: in both figures, we can observe that both the Communist Refoundation Party (*Rifondazione Comunista* - RC) and the Radicals (*Federazione Europa* – FE) are more inclined to propose new legislation with other opposition parties. The only party that seems to adopt similar, whilst more moderate behaviour in the 11th legislature is the extreme right Italian Social Movement (MSI-DN), which had a history of non-collaboration with the other PPGs, and vice versa, since the beginning of the so-called First Republic.

In Figures 3, 4 and 5,[11] the M5S is equally, if not more, distinguishable in the co-sponsorship dimension, notably during the Gentiloni government. All throughout the legislature, its MPs were internally quite cohesive when introducing legislative proposals and very rarely cooperated with other parties. So, when comparing the first legislative term in parliament of the two challenger parties we find a similar distinctive pattern in the behaviour of the Lega and M5S.

Figure 1. Social network plot of bill co-sponsorship during the first Amato Government.

LEGA	FE
PLI	MISTO
RETE	DC-PPI
MSI-DN	PSI
PSDI	PDS
PRI	VERDI
RC	CCD
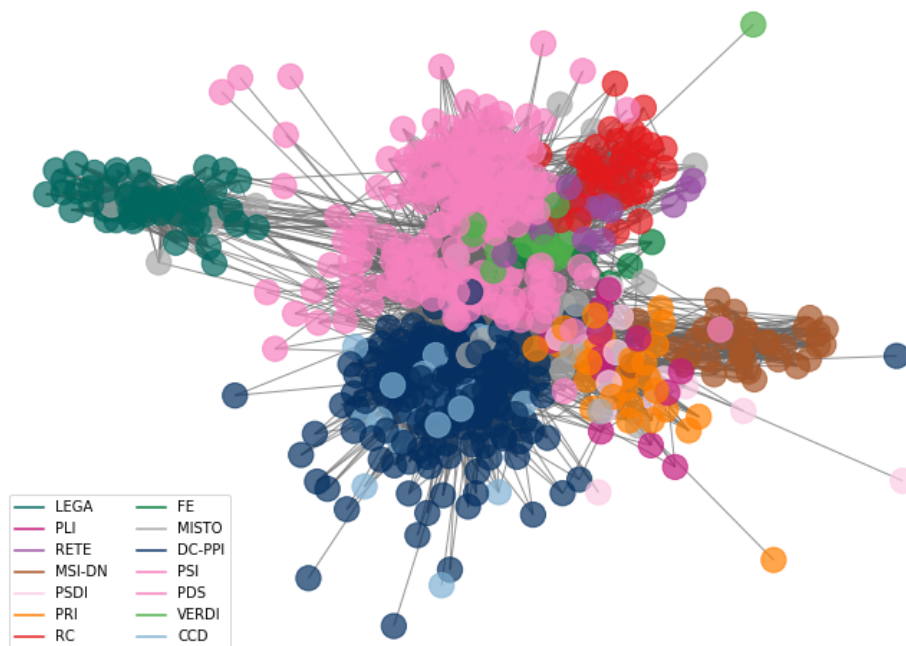
Italiano (Italian Social Democratic Party – PSDI); Partito Socialista Italiano (Italian Socialist Party – PSI); Rifondazione Comunista (Communist Refoundation Party – RC); Verdi (Greens).

[11] For the 17th Legislature the party acronyms refer to: Nuovo Centro Destra (New Centre Right – NCD); Articolo 1 - Movimento Democratico E Progressista (Article 1 - Democratic and Progressive Movement – MDP); Democrazia Solidale - Centro Democratico (Supportive Democracy - Democratic Centre – DEMSOL); Forza Italia - Il Popolo Della Liberta' (Forza Italia - Freedom People – FI); Fratelli D'italia (Brothers of Italy – FDI); Lega Nord (Northern League - LEGA); Movimento 5 Stelle (Five Star Movement – M5S); Scelta Civica Per L'Italia (Civic Choice for Italy – SCPI); Partito Democratico (Democratic Party – PD); Sinistra Ecologia Libertà (Left Ecology and Freedom - SEL); Civici e Innovatori (Civic and Innovator – CI).

Figure 2. Social network plot of bill co-sponsorship during the Ciampi Government.
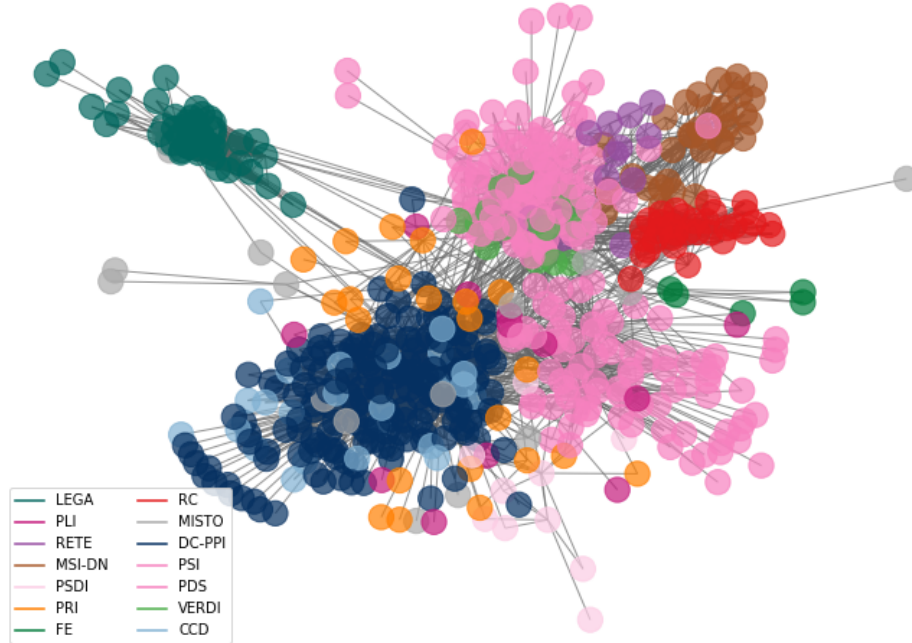

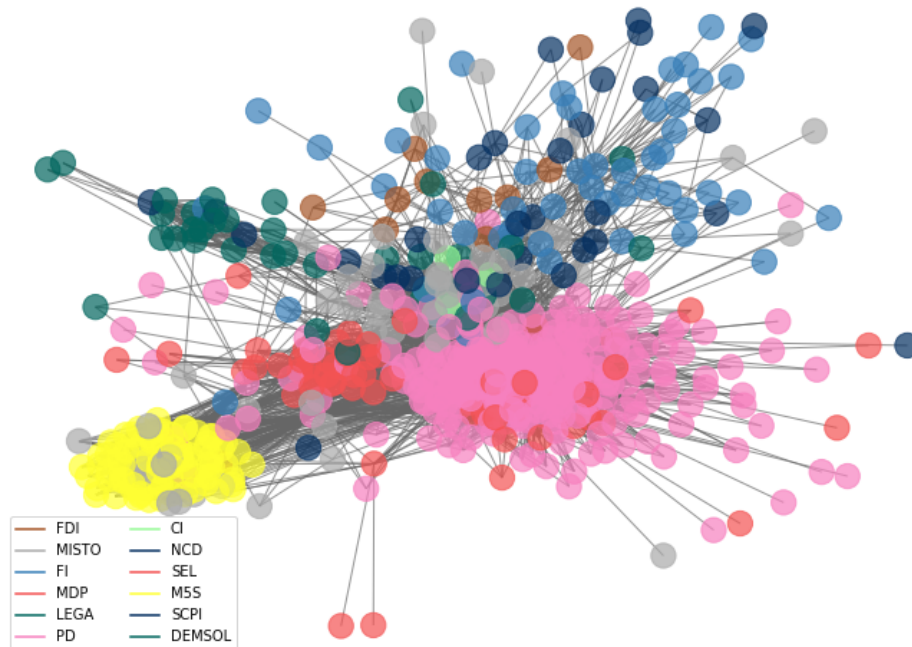**Figure 3.** Social network plot of bill co-sponsorship during Letta government

Figure 4. Social network plot of bill co-sponsorship during Renzi government
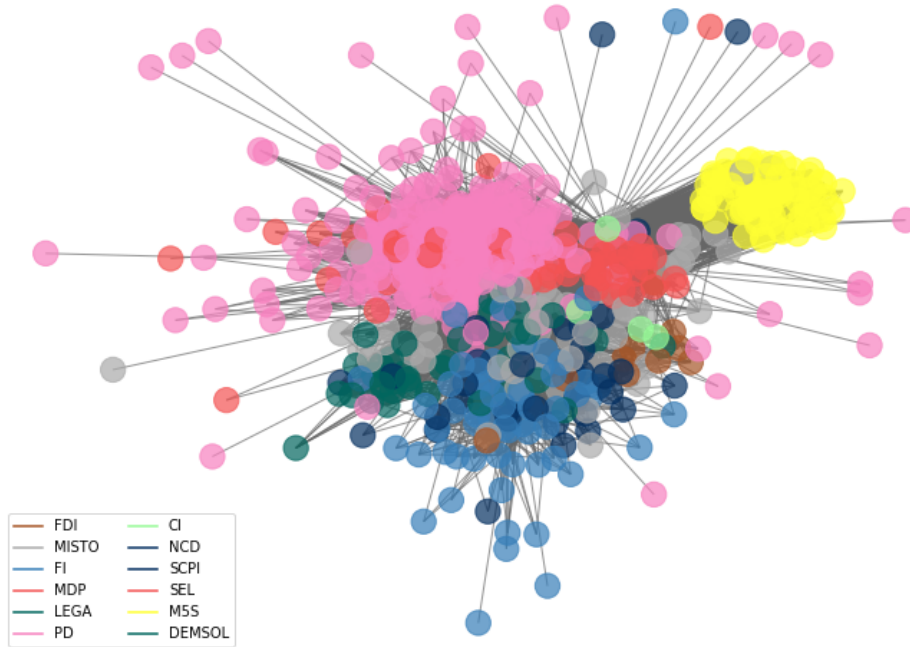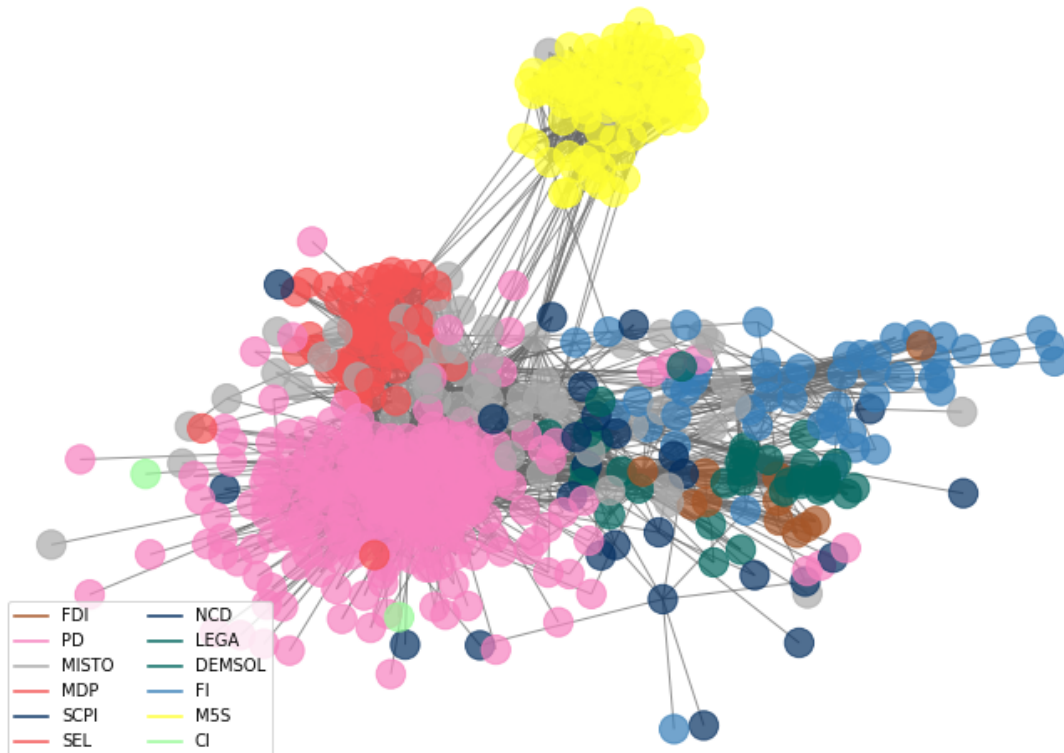

Figure 5. Social network plot of bill co-sponsorship during Gentiloni government.

A different and more systematic way of analysing this data is to look at the percentages of co-sponsorships between members of the same party. Hence, we calculated an *intra-opposition party bill differentiation index* for each party in both legislatures. The results for the 11th and 17th legislatures are respectively shown in Tables 1 and 2. Looking at the first table, we find once again that between 1992 and 1994 the Lega relied on intra-party co-sponsorship more than any other opposition party group, achieving almost a perfect score of 2 during both the Amato and Ciampi governments. The only party with a similar score is the MSI-DN, while other opposition parties, even the Radicals or RC, cooperated more with each other. When comparing this table with Figure 1 we can conclude that, during its first legislature in parliament, the Lega's strategy was to distinguish itself by standing apart from and not collaborating with any of the other opposition parties (and vice versa).

A very similar conclusion can be drawn from Table 2. Between 2013 and 2018, the M5S was the party that cooperated the least when presenting bills throughout, with only one party exceeding its score during Letta's government. It is striking how high the indexes for M5S remain during the legislature when the size of their group in parliament is taken into consideration. When compared with the figures for FI-PDL, which started with about the same number of MPs, or even with PD, which had a group twice as big, M5S scores do still seem to stand out.

It is crucial to point out that even small differences in these indexes can have big effects on the social network plots. The centrifugal effect witnessed in the figures above does not correspond solely to these scores, which indicate that relational factors, including the size of the party and the variety of parties or MPs that cooperated with the Lega and M5S during their parliament debut, are also relevant.

Table 1. Intra-Opposition Bill Differentiation Index for each party during the 11th Legislature.

	Lega	MSI-DN	DC-PPI	PDS	RC	PSI	PRI	VERDI	PSDI	FE	Rete	PLI
Amato	1.983	1.956	1.893	1.749	1.507	1.476	1.674	1.295	1.596	0.746	0.555	1.449
Ciampi	1.984	1.915	1.787	1.785	1.803	1.530	1.674	1.480	0.813	1.210	1.234	0.236

Table 2. Intra-Opposition Bill Differentiation Index for each party during the 17th Legislature.

	M5S	Lega	PD	SEL	FDI	FI-PDL	CI	DEmsol
Letta	1.948	1.970	1.865	1.637	1.784	1.495	1.434	0.609
Renzi	1.900	1.847	1.773	1.596	1.416	1.395	0.994	0.701
Gentiloni	1.953	1.950	1.849	1.645	1.649	1.706	1.341	1.320

So far, we have overlooked the Lega's performance during the 17th legislature. But it should be noted that this party's behaviour was similar to that during its first term in parliament in the period 2013-2018. Albeit overshadowed by M5S, the Lega shows high scores in the dimension taken into consideration here. This raises the question: is this

intra-opposition party differentiation a consistently distinctive feature of this party or only a strategy recently reintroduced to improve its electoral performance? Figure 5 would indicate the second option. This behaviour, in fact, seems rather strategical. In this last figure, we plot the evolution of the Lega's *intra-opposition party bill differentiation* index since its debut in parliament. We can see that while, in general, the Lega cooperated very little over the years, it behaved more similarly to the other parties during the governments led by Dini (1995-1996) and Prodi II (2006-2008). So, it seems that its tendency to differentiate itself from the other (opposition) parties has been mainly tactical over the years. It was revived, in particular, after the outbreak of the Eurozone crisis, which coincided with the party's return to opposition – first with the Monti government and then with the grand coalition led by the Democratic Party following the 2013 electoral earthquake and the entrance of the M5S in parliament – and the change in the party leadership, with the election of Matteo Salvini.

One last noteworthy point is that, despite sharing a similar differentiation strategy during the 17th Legislature, there was almost no collaboration between the Lega and M5S during the whole legislative term. Neither of the two parties co-signed any single bill initiated by the other during the Renzi and Gentiloni governments. The only two exceptions to this pattern were two bills proposed by the M5S, co-sponsored respectively by one and three Lega MPs and concerning regional identity and banking issues. Neither bill reached the final voting stage and in both cases MPs from other parties had also co-sponsored them. It seems that the non-cooperation strategy that the two new government partners shared in the 17th legislature applied also to each other.

Figure 6. Evolution of Intra Opposition Bill Differentiation Index for Lega from the 11th to the 17th legislature.
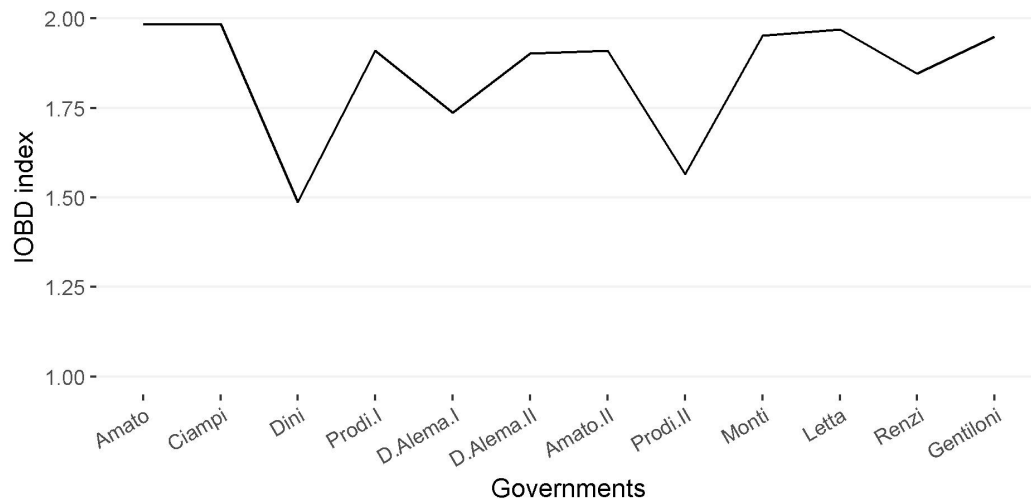
Finally, to ensure the statistical significance of this *new challenger effect* we employed a simple multilinear regression, based on a Poisson distribution for each legislature, in which the dependent variable was the number of bills co-sponsored between each possible pair of legislators. Our main independent variable of interest is a dummy variable that differentiates if one of the two MPs in each possible pair was from

the Lega, in the 13th legislature, or M5S in the 17th. To control for other factors that might also have an effect on co-sponsorship relations between MPs, we included further variables, namely one dummy variable considering the case of both MPs belonging to the same party; one dummy variable considering the case of one of the MPs being a newcomer; one dummy variable considering the case of both MPs coming from the same constituency and one variable representing an absolute ideological difference between the two MPs' respective parties.[12]

Table 3. Summary results of regression analysis with number of co-sponsorships between each possible pair of MPs as the dependent variable.

	Dependent variable:	
	Number of Co-sponsorships	
	(1)	(2)
Same Party	3.347***	3.435***
	(0.013)	(0.013)
Same Constituency	0.314***	0.467***
	(0.013)	(0.009)
L-R Distance[13]	-0.010***	0.029***
	(0.001)	(0.001)
New MP	-0.328***	-0.366***
	(0.007)	(0.005)
New Challenger	-2.368***	-2.011***
	(0.065)	(0.033)
Constant	-2.972***	-3.265***
	(0.013)	(0.013)
Observations	394,384	643,204
Log Likelihood	-301,599.700	-494,214.600
Akaike Inf. Crit.	603,211.300	988,441.200

Note: *p**p***p<0.01

The results from both regression models, presented in Table 3, do support the hypothesis that both Lega and M5S MPs cooperated less with other parties during their first legislature in parliament. Any possible connection that involves one MP from each party has a statistically significant lower probability of co-sponsorship. Moreover, this effect does not seem to be only attributable to their lack of previous experience, as the effect persists even when controlling for this variable.

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[12] A table with more details about the variables just mentioned can be found in annex (Table 4).

[13] We based our analysis on the Comparative Manifesto Project (MARPOR) dataset, which only analyses ideological variation based on the economic dimension. This might generate some problems. For instance, during the 17th legislature the M5S is placed more to the left than Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà (SEL) with a score that is twice as high. We expect that this might impact the real ideological differences between parties and lead to misleading coefficients.

Of course, these results should be read with caution. First, we are only looking at a single country during two different time periods. While there might be some evidence that the patterns exhibited by the Lega and M5S are also present in other opposition parties in other countries, a further and larger analysis is necessary to evaluate how this hypothesis scales to a regional scope. Secondly, in both regression models we assume that co-sponsorship between each pair of MPs is independent, which might not be the case. Since these are social relationships, they can have some reciprocal effects. For instance, we should expect reciprocity, i.e. if MP y supports a bill proposed by MP x, then it might be more likely that MP x supports a bill proposed by MP y. Still, the figures, the indexes and these results point to the same phenomenon: both the Lega and M5S began their parliamentary experience in quite a distinctive way.

8. Conclusions

This work had two main aims: first, we wanted to prove the existence of one further trait that the new Italian government partners might have in common, as a result of the nature of (new) challenger parties they shared when they entered parliament for the first time. What we expected to find was a common tendency of the Lega and M5S to distinguish themselves in parliament by standing apart from the other party groups, regardless of whether the latter are in government or in opposition. Second, we aimed to understand whether we can employ this possible common behaviour as one further variable for distinguishing the new challenger parties from others in parliament.

We have tried to do so by introducing a new dimension of analysis – that is, the relationship between the new challenger parties and the other opposition parties – and applying that to the study of the Lega and M5S. We measured the distance between the Lega and M5S on the one hand and the traditional opposition parties on the other, and its possible evolution over time, by employing a social network analysis of bill co-sponsorship during their respective first legislative term in parliament. The data employed gave clear support to our main expectations: once in parliament, the Lega and M5S pursued a very similar strategy. They tried to stand out by keeping their distance from and not cooperating with any of the other opposition parties. And while the Lega's history shows that this strategy may not necessarily be permanent, it also shows that it can be revived when needed. Going by their recent electoral performance it is still a successful one. In fact, the behaviour of Salvini's Lega during the 17th legislature (2013-2018) proved very similar to both that of its first legislature in parliament and that of the M5S. So, besides the elective affinities shared by the two parties before 2018, they also shared very similar behaviour in parliament as far as their (non-)relationship with the other parties is concerned.

Further research is undoubtedly required to confirm the results obtained so far – above all, a comparative analysis would clearly be crucial to corroborate our findings. Nonetheless, results on the two Italian parties taken into consideration here have proved sufficiently effective to suggest that this relational dimension might be employed in future research as one further variable for distinguishing the new challenger parties from the other opposition parties in parliament and, in so doing, contributing to a new empirically based definition of this party type.

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Party change in 'populist' parties in government: the case of the Five Star Movement and SYRIZA

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Abstract

FSM and SYRIZA are the main anti-establishment parties which seized power during the Great Recession. As in the Greek case in 2015, when SYRIZA coalesced with right-wing party ANEL, FSM coalesced with a radical-right party (The League). Regardless of their different ideological backgrounds, both SYRIZA and FSM were relatively 'new' parties at the time of their first relevant electoral performance. While the literature has sofar tackled the issue of the growth of these two parties in their political system, their organizations and their electorates, little has been said in comparative perspective on the internal reforms that the two parties undertook and their institutionalization process. The aim of this paper is to enquire into the nature of the party reforms within those parties, which the literature has labelled as anti-establishment or populist. To what extent do their reforms correspond to the theoretical frameworks that were designed in the past for mainstream parties? And, secondly, are these changes that the parties have undergone similar? In what ways? The findings show that, albeit following different paths, party changes in the two parties followed the same pattern as mainstream parties.

Introduction

In January 2015, for the first time since Greece's transition to democracy, the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA) obtained a relative majority in the Greek Parliament and made an alliance with a newly-established radical-right party, the Independent Greeks (ANEL) (Katsourides 2015). Three years later, another 'populist' (Vittori 2017a) party in Italy, the Five Star Movement (M5S), had the same result and allied with a radical-right party (The League), the main difference from the Greek case being the enduring bargain between FSM and the League for government formation. However, just as for SYRIZA, the M5S electoral success in 2018 was preceded by another outstanding performance in the 2013 elections (see below). Regardless of their different ideological backgrounds, both SYRIZA and M5S were relatively 'new' parties (for a precise classification of party newness, see Bartolini and Mair 1990, Bolleyer 2013, Mainwaring et al. 2017, Powell and Tucker 2014) at the time of their first relevant electoral performance. SYRIZA had existed as a coalition since 2004, but it became a unified party only in 2013; M5S was founded in 2009. While the literature has so far tackled the issue of the growth of these two parties in their political systems, their organizations and their electorates (see among others Bordignon and Ceccarini 2015, Katsourides 2016, Gualmini and Corbetta 2013, Tronconi 2015), little has been said from a comparative perspective on the internal reforms that the two parties have undergone and their institutionalization process. The aim of this paper is to enquire into the nature of the reforms within those parties, which the literature has labelled as populist (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis 2014, Vittori 2017b). Firstly, to what extent do their reforms correspond to

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the theoretical frameworks designed in the past for mainstream parties? And, secondly, are the changes (and the institutionalization processes) similar? In what ways? The article proceeds as follows: drawing from the main work in the field, the first part is devoted to the analytical framework of party changes. The second part contextualizes the Italian and Greek cases. The third and fourth parts are the core of the paper, as both provide an analysis of the main party changes occurring within the two organizations in recent years. Finally, I draw some tentative conclusions with regard to party change in anti-establishment parties. The most important of these is that, albeit following different paths, party changes followed the same pattern as those of mainstream parties, since in both cases the party reforms and the institutionalization process followed the desiderata of the party faces which held most power in its hand.

1. Party Change: How? When?

Despite being 'conservative' organizations, which tend to resist change (Panebianco 1982, Harmel and Janda 1994), parties do change. Most of the time they adjust slowly to either internal or external changes. Following Harmel and Janda (1994), party change can occur when the leadership changes, when the dominant faction is overturned by a new majority within the party or when external stimuli force party change. More recent contributions (Webb et al. 2012) have emphasized that the analysis of party change should also include the growing relevance of 'presidentialized' (Poguntke and Webb 2005) or 'personalized' (Blondel et al. 2012) leadership within the party. The fact that party leaderships tend to be more unconstrained and, accordingly, tend to concentrate power into their own hands, may hamper internal changes. Be as it may, three patterns of change may be identified: internally induced changes, externally induced changes and a combination of the two.

In a ground-breaking analysis on party change, which included mainstream parties both big and small from an electoral standpoint, Harmel et al. (1995) found that external factors, notably poor electoral performance, are crucial drivers for change, but sub-party factors may play a role as well. Still, for 'new' parties, more than any embryonal form of factionalism, it is the first electoral breakthrough that represents a crucial phase in the internal life of the party, since new demands emerge from within and outside the party and considerable adaptation is required for the party's survival (Bolleyer 2013: 4).

Party reforms and institutionalization processes have so far been analysed using mainstream parties as points of reference. From the seminal work by Michels to the more recent work on party organizations (Panebianco 1982, Harmel and Tan 2003, Gauja 2015), scholars take mainstream parties into consideration, while less attention has been given to non-mainstream party families (with the notable exceptions of Pedersen 1982, Bolleyer 2013, Scarrow et al. 2017). This gap is unsurprising: mainstream and old-established parties are usually where a) information is available more easily and b) it is possible to compare party reforms diachronically, since they are usually older (Levitsky 1998). Party institutionalization is a crucial component for organization survival. Still, new parties are more exposed to both external and internal shocks, due to their lack of institutionalization. When shocks occur, the most likely reaction for the party elite is either to implement change or resist/anticipate the attempts to change, which are supposed to come from inside and/or outside. Here I define institutionalization as a

process involving a) the routinization of political practice, through which the rules and norms applied within the party become internalized and routinized by members and the élite, and b) value infusion, through which the perpetuation of the organization becomes a value in itself.

While previous work on mainstream parties is useful for analysing party reforms of non-mainstream parties, (see Bolleyer 2013), it should not be taken as a *given* that 'new' parties behave similarly to 'old' parties; nor should it be assumed that their institutionalization is a process which is in all ways similar to older counterparts. Since 'new' parties tend to campaign by arguing their more or less radical difference from traditional parties, it may be the case that they prefer stressing their differences even in organizational aspects. Nonetheless, change and the institutionalization processes for both traditional and non-traditional parties do not occur in a vacuum. Firstly, parties, like any other complex organizations, are path-dependent, i.e. their genesis and first internal power configuration matter when it comes to the options of party elites (Panebianco 1982). These factors narrow down even further when the party faces the heterogony of its ends, i.e. the survival of the organization becomes an end in itself, while the primary policy goals lose their centrality. Secondly, there must be a clear reason for change and a power configuration that facilitates it (Harmel and Tan 2003). Thirdly, party goals, according to Harmel and Janda (1994: 281), determine the nature of the party change: 'for vote-seeking parties [...], the more pronounced their electoral failure, the more likely they are to change'. For office-seeking parties, the pressure for change is higher when they achieve executive office, for policy-seeking parties the failure to accommodate their clientele drives change, while for democracy-seeking parties, dissatisfaction with party procedures leads to party change. Party goals, following Harmel and Janda, are crucial for detecting the nature of changes within the party. The cause of the changes may be either internal or external, since parties may be forced to change even when the external conditions do not 'require' the organization to adapt to the new context. What the authors assume is that, regardless of the primary party goal at t0, i.e. before the external or internal shock, the consequence of a given shock, i.e. electoral performance, impacts in t1 more significantly on a party whose primary goal is related to that shock, i.e. vote-seeking goal. When this happens, the magnitude of the change should be greater than in other cases.

2. External shocks and emergence of new parties: the financial crisis in Italy and Greece

In order to grasp the nature of change within the two parties under analysis it is crucial to start with the major external shock, the Great Recession, behind the political changes which occurred in Greece in 2012 and in Italy in 2013. Both parties were founded either before (SYRIZA, as a coalition of parties) or in the immediate aftermath of the crisis (M5S).

Greece

Greece is the European country where the Great Recession had the heaviest impact on both society and the political system. The four Greek governments in charge from 2009 to September 2015 signed three Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) through which they agreed to implement heavy fiscal adjustments to receive financial assistance.

On 4 October 2009, the Greek PM, George Papandreou, announced that the annual deficit of the State would be 12.7%, instead of 6.7%. In a few months, the Greek economy collapsed. The consequence of the crisis was a private lenders' debt haircut (50%) in 2011. However, the SYRIZA electoral breakthrough occurred four years after the outburst of the crisis (May-June 2012).

Between 2009 and 2012 three elections took place: one legislative (2009), one at the European level (2009) and elections in thirteen administrative regions (2010). In the 2009 legislative election (October 2009), the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) obtained an absolute majority in Parliament (43.92% of votes) and SYRIZA 4.6%. Previously, in the European elections (June 2009), SYRIZA had a similar share of votes (4.7%). Despite the financial turmoil, the regional elections held in 2010 guaranteed to PASOK control over seven regions, while the conservative New Democracy (ND) won in five. The SYRIZA result was unsatisfactory (Gemenis 2012). The intensification of the financial crisis and the failed attempt by Socialist PM George Papandreou to call for a referendum on the MoU caused his resignation (November 2011). The provisional government supported by PASOK, ND and the Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS) and led by the former Governor of the Bank of Greece, Lucas Papademos, lasted about six months. In the May 2012 elections (Table 1), SYRIZA (16.79%) was the second most voted party, behind ND (18.85%).

Figure 1. Total volatility in Greece and Italy legislative elections (1990–2018)
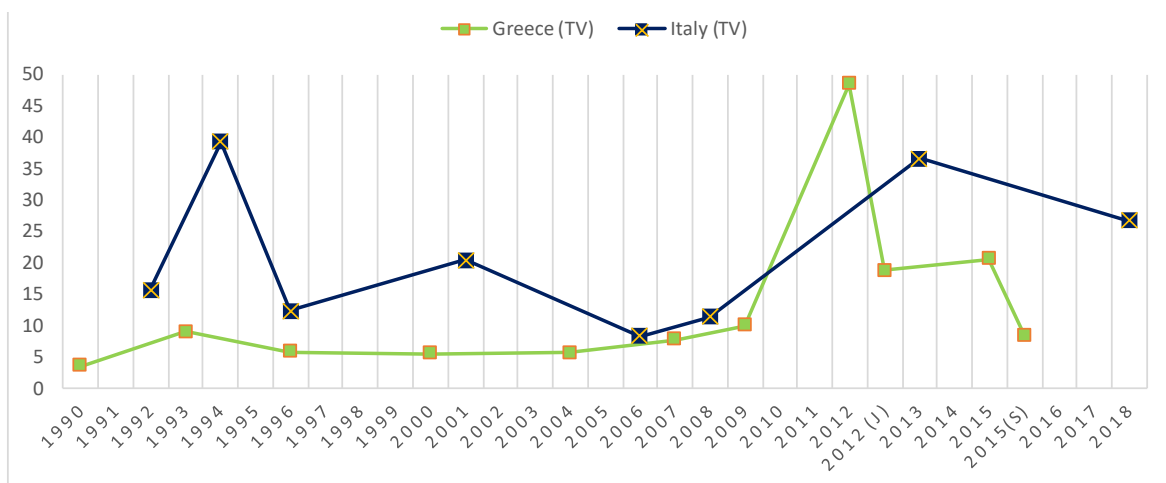
Source: Own elaboration from Emanuele (2015). Legend: Total volatility: total electoral volatility in the party system.

The Greek political system was revolutionized in less than three years (Figure 1). After being almost stable for two decades, total volatility in the 2012 election rose to 48.5. The three parties which participated in the last government were severely punished by the electorate: PASOK lost 30.7% of the votes, ND 14.6% and LAOS 2.74%. SYRIZA's leader, Alexis Tsipras, refused to participate in any pro-austerity government, thus using its blackmail potential to force new elections (June 2012). SYRIZA increased its share of votes (26.89%). Thanks to the support of PASOK and DIMAR, a social democratic split from SYRIZA, ND (29,66%) formed a new governing coalition. The following regional elections (18 May 2014) were problematic for SYRIZA. Despite good results in the Ionian

Islands and in Attica, SYRIZA lost about 9% of the votes (17.7%) with respect to the previous legislative elections. Nonetheless, in the following European elections (22-25 May 2014) SYRIZA was the most voted party (26.6%). The legislative election in January 2015 gave to SYRIZA (36.3%) a relative majority, very close to an absolute majority in Parliament. KKE refused to enter into coalition with SYRIZA. Thus, out of the only two anti-memorandum parties in Parliament, ANEL and Golden Dawn (XA), only ANEL was a 'coalitionable' partner under a shared anti-austerity programme.

Italy

The intensification of the Great Recession in Italy (2009-2011) and the doubts cast by the European institutions as well as by heads of states of European countries, namely France and Germany, over the Berlusconi government's (2008-2011) ability to pursue a fiscal adjustment generated a large-scale panic in the markets. The crisis reached its zenith in November 2011 with Berlusconi's resignation. In the meantime, the already huge public debt (103.3% in 2007) skyrocketed to an unprecedented 132.6% in 2011. Accordingly, the annual public deficit endangered public finance stability (it was -5.25% in 2009, -4.21% in 2010 and -3.68% in 2011). Although Italy avoided a European bailout programme, the chronically weak economic growth and the rise of total and youth unemployment cast doubts over Italian recovery.

M5S became a relevant player in the Italian political system in 2013. Leaving aside the early and somewhat successful attempts to participate in local elections with civic lists associated with the Beppe Grillo symbol, the very first significant sub-national elections for M5S were the regional ones in 2010. The most encouraging results for M5S were in Piedmont (3.67 %, sixth most voted list) and Emilia-Romagna (6%, fifth most voted list). In 2012, M5S became the most voted party (18.17%) in the Sicilian regional elections, but the centre-left coalition obtained a relative majority (30.47 %) and formed a minority government led by Rosario Crocetta.

Table 1. SYRIZA and M5S electoral results.

SYRIZA	M5S
5% (2007) P	3.4% (2010) ** R
4.6% (2009) P	14.9 (2012) *** R
4.7% (2009) E	25.56% (2013) P
4.1% (2010) *† R	16.2(2014) *** R
16.8% (May 2012) P	21.16% (2014) E
26.9% (June 2012) P	15.7% (2015) *** R
17.7% (2014) R	32.7% (2018) P
26.57% (2014) E	
36.3% (January. 2015) P	
35.5% (September 2015) P	

Source: own elaboration from Greek and Italian Ministries of Internal Affairs. * % with allies; †% of Total Vote; ** % vote list obtained in 5 regions in which M5S participated to the elections; *** % of List Vote. Legend: R= Regional elections, E = European elections; P = parliamentary elections.

The 2013 legislative elections (Table 1) – along with three regional elections (Lombardy, Lazio and Molise) – marked a breakthrough for M5S and, consequently, an

earthquake for the Italian political system. Total volatility in the elections reached the 1994 level, when Forza Italia erupted onto the Italian political system (Figure 1). M5S (25.56% in the lower Chamber) was the most voted party before the Partito Democratico (PD). M5S blackmail potential was used to force traditional parties to form an oversized coalition government between centre-left and centre-right parties. M5S made it even clearer to the electorate that the party was unwilling to pursue a political agreement with the other traditional and non-traditional parties. M5S performance in the following elections – European and local – was unsatisfactory. In the European elections, PD reached the best result (40.81%) in its history, while M5S performed considerably worse (21.16%). Its second electoral breakthrough in the 2018 legislative elections granted to M5S a relative majority in Parliament (32.7%).

3. Party reforms within SYRIZA: the government takes all?

SYRIZA was officially founded in 2004 as a multifaceted coalition of political parties, social movements and leftist associations (Tsakatika and Eleftheriou 2013). The participants within SYRIZA have changed over time, even though the most relevant party, and the protagonist of the unification of this coalition into a political party, Synaspismos (SYN), has never abandoned the coalition.

SYRIZA, thus, relied mainly on the resources provided by SYN, the only political force to have had political representation in Parliament. An analysis of SYN transformation is beyond the scope of this paper. However, in line with the theoretical framework provided by Janda and Harmel (1994), the main driver behind the creation of a coalition of different organizations to the left of PASOK and in competition with the 'anti-system' (March 2011) Greek Communist Party (KKE), was the decreasing electoral support that SYN had suffered between 1991 and 2004 (Davellanos 2016). The 4th SYN congress in December 2004 marked a watershed for the Greek left. It is called the left-turn congress, since a radical faction headed by Alecos Alavanos won the congress, thus marginalizing the reformist group. The latter founded a new party (DIMAR) in contraposition to the overly confrontational posture of SYRIZA vis-à-vis PASOK. SYRIZA strategy was based on the creation of a new organizational tool which was able to reconnect the left with society and its lower strata (Spourdoulakis 2014).

As a coalition of different organizations, SYRIZA's founders retained their own structures, while obtaining representation in the highest political organ of SYRIZA (Nikolakakis, 2016). Due to the pre-eminence of an old-established and ideologized party (SYN) (Tsatatika and Eleftheriou 2013), value infusion was not a primary concern for SYRIZA, despite enduring differences within the Greek left (Kalyvas and Marantzidis 2002). Rather, routinization was the main obstacle to institutionalization. Contrary to traditional communist guiding principles, SYRIZA rejected democratic centralism in order to make the coalition more fluid and more representative of all sensibilities within the Greek left. Whatever the definition used to describe SYRIZA – party movement, community organizer or mass connective party (Della Porta et al. 2017, Damiani 2016, Spourdalakis 2014) – scholars agree that the organizational structure of SYRIZA on the eve of the Great Recession was weak, lacking both a defined hierarchy and financial resources compared to other mainstream parties (for the latter point see Vernadakis 2014).

While organizationally weak, SYRIZA, through SYN, was able to rejuvenate its leadership. In 2007, SYN leader Alecos Alavanos stepped back during the 5th party congress to favour the ascendancy of Alexis Tsipras. During the second within-crisis elections (May 2012), SYRIZA performed outstandingly and in the following election (June 2012) overcame PASOK, becoming the main party of the left.

While not as unexpected as in the case of M5S, the good electoral results of two consecutive elections posed a conundrum for the party, i.e. either to maintain a poorly-organized structure or to transform itself into a party with its autonomous structures. SYRIZA opted for the latter, while trying to counterbalance centralization, allowing the SYRIZA founders to dissolve their own organization only in a second phase (see Davanellos 2016 and SYRIZA Statute 2013). In the first congress (2013), Tsipras had the absolute majority, while the left factions, which grouped the SYN leftist faction and left-to-SYN movements, won representation in the central committee. Before the Great Recession, SYN and SYRIZA were primarily policy-seeking organizations, since both staunchly opposed what they called PASOK's path towards neoliberalism (Nikolakakis 2016) and, more importantly, they lacked the electoral support to be considered 'relevant' in the Greek political system. The policy-seeking strategy was pursued also in the first phase of the Great Recession since SYRIZA participated in several anti-austerity protests, the most relevant being the so-called Indignant (Aganaktismeni) protest (Simiti 2014 and Tarditi 2015). However, the policy-seeking strategy was counterbalanced by a more vote-seeking oriented strategy, which included the introduction of an inclusive populist discourse (Starvakais and Katsambekis 2014) aimed at counterbalancing the image of the party as a marginal radical socialist party. Moreover, since the electoral law gives a majority bonus for the most voted party, SYRIZA had no incentives to merge with other centre-left parties: indeed, the polls suggested that the party would be the most voted.

This centralization was criticized by minority factions, which were worried about party institutionalization where the previous porous and poorly-organized structure was only formal. The Central Committee, controlled by Tsipras and by the SYN majority faction, organized the party following the classic mass-membership organization, despite the relatively low number of party members (Tsatatika and Eleftheriou, 2013). The Party on the Ground, thus, was relatively limited and the Party in Public Office (PPO) was mostly new, since SYRIZA had never had a relevant parliamentary group before 2012: the Party in Central Office (PCO) emerged from the founding congress as the main party face and, consequently, the main protagonist of party centralization. The planned dissolution of the former components of SYRIZA served this purpose, i.e., allowing the PCO to better control centrifugal forces within the party, including the one coming from the minority factions.

The second phase of SYRIZA institutionalization started when the party won a relative majority in the January 2015 elections and formed a coalition government with the right-wing party Independent Greeks (ANEL). In a few months, the new PM, Alexis Tsipras, started difficult negotiations with EU institutions and the IMF concerning the conditions for new loans to Greece. The MoU was rejected by Tsipras, who called for a referendum in July, endorsing the No-position. Once the No prevailed, Tsipras signed a new memorandum, which the leftist factions within SYRIZA considered too prone to austerity. After the referendum, 38 of SYRIZA's 149 MPs voted against the new

memorandum, threatening the SYRIZA-led majority in Parliament, while another group called 53+ backed the government, albeit expressing concerns about the consequences of the memorandum. SYRIZA, as a new governing party, faced a new external stimulus, this time related to policy-making rather than elections, i.e. disagreement on a crucial party programme: Grexit and relations with the EU. The party in government needed a new value infusion in order to make the PoG and PCO accept the agreement.

Tsipras forced new snap elections in September, whose outcome was a new coalition government with ANEL. The main leftist faction left the party before the elections, forming a new party (Popular Unity), which eventually failed to reach the electoral threshold. Once the leftist faction had abandoned the party, value infusion was eased as no formally structured opposition remained within the party. In this troublesome phase, it was the PPO and the Party Government that emerged as the most relevant actors within SYRIZA.

Following the September 2015 elections, SYRIZA held a new congress, in which it continued its path towards centralization. Tsipras kept his position as party leader, while serving as PM, thus implicitly linking the destiny of SYRIZA with the government. The renewal of the composition of the Central Committee was the most critical issue for the leadership. Tsipras managed to reduce the total number of Central Committee members, while at the same time guaranteeing up to 25% of such members to government officials. Considering the large number of MPs in the remaining 75%, the overlap between PPO/Party in government and the PCO becomes evident (Tarditi and Vittori 2017). Tsipras was the only candidate for party leadership: he was re-elected with 93.5% of the total votes. Since the left platform had left the party, there were no minority factions that openly questioned party leadership. This second congress may have marked a new phase for SYRIZA, in which the routinization of decision-making and value infusion were both finally accomplished. The extent to which both aspects will resist external stimuli is nonetheless difficult to predict.

4 Party reforms within M5S: from a failed institutionalization attempt to new party leadership?

Officially founded in October 2009, the M5S organizational structure had been drafted by Grillo and Gianroberto Casaleggio a few years previously. This was due to Grillo's blog, whose platform was managed by the Casaleggio Associati, a new media company founded by G. Casaleggio, and to the online platform meetup.com, which allowed the formation of informal Grillo supporters at the local level. Grillo's blog became known to a wider public after the success of nationwide rallies, named Vaffanculo Day (Fuck-Off Day), in Bologna (2007) and Turin (2008).

These first years were characterized by expansion through penetration (Panebianco 1982), i.e. from the centre to the periphery. Local members were free to organize and establish local units through the meet-up platform and to stand for sub-national elections once their list had obtained certification from the Casaleggio Associati (Vittori 2017a). Value infusion was only partial in this phase: the only programme drafted by M5S was the Firenze Chart, a very concise manifesto for local elections and Grillo's blog. The Firenze Chart resembled a pro-environmentalist attitude with a focus on sustainable environment, transparency and the promotion of direct-democracy procedures

(especially within the party) (Gualmini and Corbetta 2013). Casaleggio Associati and Beppe Grillo registered the M5S logo as a trademark, whose rights belonged to them.

In this phase, the supporting staff were people working within Casaleggio Associati: thus, the PCO – as intended by Katz and Mair (1994) – overlapped entirely with the dual party leadership, while the PPO was absent. Although the structure of M5S was not yet developed, the main focus of M5S was direct democracy as envisaged by articles 1 and 5 of the first version of the Statute of the Party (Movimento 5 Stelle, 2009). Despite its populist vote-seeking appeal, M5S could be considered a democracy-seeking movement in this phase. Still, the lack of any formal procedure for the implementation of direct democracy (Vittori 2017b), made routinization impossible to achieve at that time. Moreover, the expulsion of several prominent local figures and the voluntary departure of others highlighted internal tensions over the alleged lack of democracy and transparency with regards to rules. In a nutshell, the routinization of party rules had far to go. The external shock – i.e. the results of the 2013 elections – forced M5S leadership to implement party changes in order to accelerate the party's institutionalization. The worsening health conditions of G. Casaleggio, as well as the fact that it was impossible for Grillo to oversee the functioning of the party (Grillo 2014), accelerated the first attempt to institutionalize the party through the formation of a 'real' party in Central Office, the so-called Direttorio, whose aim, among others, was to coordinate Parliament and the local level. The Direttorio was not included in the first version of the Statute of the party. However, the institutionalization process was not yet complete: firstly, value infusion was still incomplete, since no detailed party programmes were presented with the exception of the 2013 manifesto and 7-bullet points that served as the party programme for the European elections. Furthermore, the rules in the internal life of the party were not yet routinized, since the Direttorio was soon dissolved. The other relevant (and permanent) party change was the elimination, voted by M5S membership, of the website name (beppegrillo.it) from the party symbol.

Before the new elections (2018), M5S undertook a more resilient institutionalization process. Firstly, after two reforms of the Statute (2015-2016), the first of which added one article comprising an online link to the internal rule of the party (Movimento 5 Stelle 2016), M5S started its routinization process, which increased the asymmetry between the leadership and the other party faces (Vittori 2017a). Secondly, M5S implemented another Statute reform in 2017-2018. As Di Maio (2018) stated when introducing the online consultation for the new Statute of the party, 'it's time to think big: new statues and rules for the candidates'. Di Maio argued that the party was ready to govern and, consequently, the change in the Statute served to unify into one person the PM candidate and the political leader of the party. After the 2013 electoral shock, thus, the party made internal changes in order to comply with a renewed vote-seeking strategy.

The 2017 version of the Statue was drafted by the leadership and introduced a distinction between the Capo Politico (Head of the Party) and the Guarantor (Beppe Grillo). The Capo Politico, thanks to the new internal rule for the M5S Parliamentary Group, controls PPO (Movimento 5 Stelle 2018). Still, along with the Guarantor, D. Casaleggio and the newly created Associazione Rousseau (see below) represent de facto the organizational leadership of the party. Curiously enough, the M5S Head of the Party exists only as long as this figure is necessary to compete in the election (art. 7a, Movimento 5 Stelle

2017). Though an unstable position, she/he has extensive power within the party since she/he leads the party in all internal aspects of the organization. However, this power is counterbalanced by the Guarantor (Beppe Grillo). Contrary to the Head of the Party, who can serve only for two consecutive mandates, the Guarantor has a limitless mandate.

Apart from these Statute reforms, routinization comprised another crucial aspect for the party, i.e. the introduction of a new party online platform, called Rousseau, which replaced the less user-friendly Lex. Rousseau is the operating system through which members vote, discuss issues with elected representatives, make donations to the party and share best practices. Rousseau is not controlled by M5S; rather it belongs to an external association, founded by D. Casaleggio, local councillor and PM-assistant Massimo Bugani and former MEP David Borrelli.

Value infusion was improved – at least formally – through two documents: a) the first is the party programme, the longest (about 350 pages) and the most elaborate among Italian political parties in the 2018 elections, which was voted issue by issue by the membership and b) the so-called governing contract signed by M5S and The League when the two parties formed a coalition government. The party programme was drawn up long before the elections (the first online consultation took place in April 2017) and it took almost eight months to complete. As for the Statute reform, this party manifesto was more than a programme: it was meant to be a governing programme for the party. M5S organized a three-days conference in Pescara before the elections (January 2018) aimed at training participants in what M5S called a 'governing programme'.

Table 2. Party reforms and party change in SYRIZA and Five Star Movement.

Party	Stimuli	Party primary goal in *t0* and *t1*	What changed after the reform	Procedure	Driver of the change	Consequences of the change
Five Star Movement	Electoral Breakthrough (2013)	From democracy-seeking to vote-seeking	Strengthening Centralization	Party's statue Changes (2016 and 2017) through internal consultations	Party Leadership (2013, 2016 and 2017)	Dual Leadership: • Party organizational leadership (Casaleggio Associati) controls the PCO. • The political leadership (Di Maio) controls the PPO.
SYRIZA	Electoral Breakthrough (2012)	From policy-seeking to vote-seeking	Strengthening Centralization	Founding Congress (2013) and Post-Referendum Congress (2016)	Party in Central Office (2013) and Party in Government (2015-2016)	The party leadership (Tsipras) controls both PCO and PPO.

Source: own elaboration.

5. Conclusions

The aim of this paper was twofold. It was intended to a) enquire whether anti-establishment parties followed mainstream patterns when introducing internal reforms and b) attempt to analyse the similarities and differences between the institutionalization processes of SYRIZA and M5S. As relatively new parties, external stimuli (i.e. elections) were the main drivers of party change in both cases, even though the institutionalization process within SYRIZA suffered a main setback after the referendum. As in mainstream parties, elections represent a crucial variable for bringing about change within the party. The peculiarity here is that rather than electoral defeat, unexpected good performances pushed the two parties to start a process of internal reforms and institutionalization. In both cases this was mainly due to the young age of the organizations, whose value infusion (M5S) and routinization (M5S and SYRIZA) were not completed before their success.

Furthermore, party changes followed the same pattern as mainstream parties, since in institutionalization, processes were led by the most powerful party-face at the time of the internal reforms, i.e. the party leadership in the M5S case and the PCO (2013) and the party in government (2015-2016) in SYRIZA. However, contrary to the Harmel and Janda framework, for which the strategy of the party influences party change when facing either an external or internal shock, in these two cases the external stimuli were not in line with the party strategy and they led to a substantial modification of the overall party strategies, shifting party priorities from t0 to t1 towards a more vote-seeking strategy (see Table 2). In both cases the party changes were oriented to the anticipation of a likely new electoral shock, i.e. victory in the election and participation in the government. Both M5S and SYRIZA, rather than being passive actors, pro-actively attempted to modify the organization of the party in order to anticipate challenges coming from new external stimuli. What is more surprising is that, despite their departure from different ideological and organizational backgrounds, in both cases the institutionalization process led to the centralization of the competences into the most relevant party face. Despite the similarities between the two parties (first three columns in Table 2), SYRIZA and M5S followed different paths towards institutionalization (fourth to sixth columns in Table 2). As Panebianco (1982) points out, different genetic traits and different organizations impact on both the procedures through which change is pursued and on the drivers of the change. M5S's unbounded leadership (Vittori 2017a) was able through internal consultation to modify the Statute without calling for a congress, while it took two congresses (and one internal split) for SYRIZA to complete its institutionalization attempt. In the latter case, it was the PCO (1st Congress) and the Party Government (2nd Congress) which led the process.

Finally, the consequences of the change were different. M5S was founded through an entrepreneurial leadership, one political (Grillo) and one organizational (G. Casaleggio/Casaleggio Associati). The outcome of its internal changes did not modify the structure of internal power, which at the time of writing has a new political leader (Di Maio) and a new organizational leadership (D. Casaleggio/Associazione Rousseau). In SYRIZA, the overlapping between Party Secretary and Greek PM led to a concentration of the power in the hands of one party: that in government. Like other organizations which faced unexpected growth, the party élite in M5S and SYRIZA tried to create a structure that allows tighter control over centrifugal forces: anti-establishment parties

are not appreciably different from other parties when it comes to the ultimate party goal, i.e. taking (or maintaining) power.

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Planning the 'government of change': The 2018 Italian coalition agreement in comparative perspective

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Abstract

Coalition agreements in the Italian Second Republic have traditionally been pre-electoral, often long, comprehensive but vague documents serving also as electoral manifestos for centre-right or centre-left coalitions. In this article, we analyse the 2018 post-electoral coalition agreement between the Movimento Cinque Stelle and Lega in comparative perspective, contrasting this agreement with former coalition programmes enforced since the mid-1990s in Italy and the pre-election manifestos published by these two political parties. The analysis reported here allows us to conclude that the first post-electoral coalition agreement in Italy is shorter than most centre-left documents, as vague as previous agreements, and constitutes a compromise committing the Lega to less right-wing positions, the 'grillini' to less progressive stances, and both political forces to tone down their Euroscepticism. The extent to which these commitments are solid and longstanding is unknown.

1. Introduction

Coalition agreements are binding written documents composed of policy intentions endorsed by parties involved in a coalition government solution before they take office, thus constituting a key feature of coalition governance (Strøm and Müller 1999, Müller and Strøm 2000, 2008, Moury and Timmermans 2013). Initially seen by the coalition politics literature as window dressing, composed of general statements aimed at winning everyone's agreement (e.g. Luebbert 1986, Laver and Budge 1992), more recent empirical research has portrayed coalition agreements rather differently, stressing their importance both in communicating with voters and binding the decision-making process within the coalition (e.g. Müller and Strøm 2000, 2008, Timmermans 2006, Moury 2013, Eichorst 2014).

Italy has often been the focus of individual or comparative studies of coalition agreements (e.g. Moury, 2010, 2011a, Moury and Timmermans 2008, 2013). The country has been described as an underdeveloped system of coalition agreements, unlike polities such as Belgium and the Netherlands (Vassallo 2007, Moury and Timmermans 2008). This is both due to the number of coalition agreements drafted (virtually none during the First Republic and only four since 1994) and the features of the negotiation process (Moury, 2010, 2011a). It is noteworthy that, with the exception of the 2018 document, coalition

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agreements in Italy have been pre-electoral, serving as electoral manifestos and, when victory is secured, as a bargained basis for government.

The 2018 coalition agreement, dubbed *Contratto per il Governo del Cambiamento* (Contract for the Government of Change) by its drafters *Movimento Cinque Stelle* (M5S, Five Star Movement) and *Lega* (League), is an exceptional document in the Italian context both due to its post-electoral nature and the distinct nature of the parties involved in the negotiation. The former is an anti-establishment populist party not easily positioned in the left-right continuum (D'Alimonte 2013), while the latter, under the leadership of Matteo Salvini, abandoned its pro-north stance and became a classic nationalist radical right-wing party (Tarchi 2018). Except for their Euroscepticism and populist stances and style, these parties are ideologically quite distinct, and during the campaign both had refused the possibility of reaching an agreement after the election.

The aim of this article is to report a comparative analysis of this exceptional 2018 post-election coalition agreement in Italy, resorting to existing knowledge on the nature and features of these agreements in Italy and elsewhere. This article is structured as follows. First, we review the main steps of the coalition agreement specification process and the core roles that these documents fulfil in terms of coalition governance and electoral politics. Second, we present an overview of coalition agreements in the Italian Second Republic before 2018 and discuss the literature that explored them in longitudinal and comparative terms. We then describe the 2018 coalition formation process and the contents of the M5S-*Lega* coalition agreement, comparing some of its features to those of previous documents and also to the electoral manifestos published by the incumbent parties during the campaign. The article ends with some remarks on the future prospects of the incumbent coalition.

2. Coalition agreements: goals and process

Coalition agreements are, in several consensual democracies, a common instrument of coalition governance. Strøm and Müller (1999) show that, in a sample of 223 Western European coalition cabinets in office between 1945 and 1996, 61 per cent have produced an identifiable coalition agreement, more often after the elections (post-electoral agreements took place almost two-thirds of the time) than before election day. Their longitudinal analysis disclosed that there is a trend of greater use of coalition agreements over time, with the proportion of coalitions based on written agreements shifting from less than 50 per cent in the late 1940s to 70 per cent in the early 1990s.

When coalitional agreements are pre-electoral, they have an important informative role during the campaign. Electoral manifestos are assumed to be the best indicators of what parties communicate to the voters, not because voters actually read them, but because they determine the political discourse of party officials (Klingemann et al. 1994). In Ireland and the Netherlands, for instance, media coverage of the campaign often includes a considerable amount of information on the specific pledges of the main political parties (Timmermans 2003, Costello and Thomson 2008). The importance of this informative role is linked with the 'promissory representation model' by Mansbridge (2003). The model describes a system where voters choose parties according to the policies they propose and, once in power, the parties enact these policies. Consequently, it is the voters' choice in the

elections that indirectly controls political decisions, given that the political party fulfils their pledges (Pierce, 1999, Klingemann et al. 1994, Royed 1996, Thomson 2001).

The communicational or advertising role of coalition agreements is important during the electoral campaign (in the case of pre-electoral agreements, such as those of the Italian Second Republic until 2018) but also afterwards, since 'voters can use them to make relatively accurate predictions regarding the direction of government policy, and retrospectively judge the completion of those promises that served as the basis of the coalition' (Eichorst, 2014, p. 99). It is therefore not surprising to find that more than 80 per cent of the coalition agreements drafted by Western European coalitions in the second half of the twentieth century were intended for publication (Strøm and Müller 1999).

Coalition agreements also serve a second, perhaps more important, purpose: they list the policy intentions to which the parties in the coalition are committed, binding them to this commitment. In Strøm and Müller's (1999) words, such an agreement is 'the most authoritative document that constrains party behaviour' (pp.263-265). Parties anticipate conflict and commit to deals on major policy issues, while maintaining the ability to differentiate their party positions over issues that were not included in the agreement. In most countries, common policy platforms effectively help coalition parties to accommodate their differences and produce decisions (De Winter et al. 2000; Timmermans 2006). In terms of coalition performance, these agreements include policy conflicts, commit parties to their contents, are key instruments in reducing within-party and inter-party conflict (namely by limiting agency loss in the process of delegation from parties to individual ministers), are good predictors of the legislative agenda and a majority of the testable claims within these documents become formal cabinet decisions (Timmermans 2003, Walgrave et al. 2006, Moury and Timmermans 2008, Müller and Strøm 2008, Moury 2011a, 2013).

Coalition agreements are mostly devoted to policy deals, but may also contain other relevant compromises, such as the procedural rules the coalition partners agree to respect and the distribution of offices and competencies. In the cited Strøm and Müller's (1999) comparative work, Portuguese and Austrian agreements devoted on average almost one-third of their space to laying out the procedural rules of the coalitional game, while references to the distribution of offices and competences between the coalition partners are much less common.

But how do coalition agreements come to be? In countries in which coalitions are common, the formation of coalition governments is preceded by extensive negotiations, led by party leaders who often become ministers and are subsequently designated to guide the cabinet's actions. Often, the main negotiators for the coalition agreements are party leaders, accompanied by party members who are experts in different policy domains and are subsequently given cabinet portfolios (Müller and Strøm 2000). The resulting document is then presented to the parties for ratification. This process fosters commitment due to two reasons: first, drafters of the coalition agreement, as party leaders, can impose commitment to the ratified document; second, ministers who participate in the drafting of the document internalize the deals, being therefore more likely to implement them (Timmermans 2006). In the next section we show that in the case of Italy the patterns of coalition agreement specification have often been different.

3. Coalition Agreements in Italy

In the Italian First Republic, party leaders usually dedicated much more attention to the allocation of ministries than the definition of policy, given the executive's difficulty in controlling its own parliamentary majority and adopting significant reforms (Di Palma 1977). Unsurprisingly, coalition agreements were virtually non-existent in Italy until the mid-1990s (Strøm and Müller1999). The electoral reform of 1993 profoundly changed the Italian political system, having a strong impact in terms of party system and electoral competition dynamics (Bartolini et al. 2004). The First Republic was over, and a Second Republic was born. In the succeeding elections, two coalitions (centre-left and centre-right) were presented to the voters, often with a common electoral platform. This manifesto fulfilled the role of coalition agreement for the winners of the 1996, 2001 and 2006 elections.

The first coalition agreement in the Italian Second Republic was prepared and implemented by the Prodi I government (1996-1998). After losing the 1994 election, the *Partito Democratico della Sinistra* (PDS, Democratic Party of the Left) decided to open up to the centre and accepted Romano Prodi's proposal of a coalition between several parties, named *Ulivo* (Olive Tree) (Di Virgilio 1996). Six months before the elections, Prodi and a group of seven 'wise men' started to prepare the common electoral programme: the *'tesi dell'Ulivo'*. None of these former technocratic ministers and university professors had a leading role in their parties, but all became ministers. This ambitious and very long programme (more than 40,000 words), covering a broad range of issues, was presented to the pre-electoral coalition parties' congresses for ratification. It was rejected by three small parties, which, nevertheless, stayed in the coalition and obtained seats in government (Moury 2011a).

The second coalition agreement (Berlusconi II) was drafted before the general election of June 2001 by the six parties comprising the *Casa delle Libertà* (House of Freedoms) coalition: Silvio Berlusconi's *Forza Italia* (FI; Forward Italy), the post-fascist *Alleanza Nazionale* (AN, National Alliance), the right-wing ethno-regionalist *Lega Nord* (LN, Northern League) and three other very small parties. This centre-right coalition presented several electoral programmes, including a letter to the Italian people (sent to centre-right activists and published on FI's website) and a contract with the Italian people (signed live on television by Berlusconi himself), composed of five broad pledges and Berlusconi's commitment to abandon politics in the case of non-fulfilment. The official coalition agreement was, however, published only a few days before the elections, after centre-left politicians had accused FI of not having a programme. This comparatively short manifesto (less than 10,000 words) was later recognized by all coalition parties as their official manifesto, but never formally ratified by their rank and file. It represented a compromise between FI and the other parties, with the country's federalization ('devolution'), LN's central claim, included in the programme along with certain elements of the other parties' demands (Diamanti 2007, Moury 2010, 2011a).

The Prodi II coalition agreement was enacted by the government elected in 2006, based on a coalition between the former *Ulivo* partners and other parties, for a total of nine independent political forces with considerable ideological differences. The extremely long (92,000 words) coalition agreement of this *Unione* (Union) was prepared one year before the elections by its disputed leader, Romano Prodi. He coordinated

several workshops aimed at drafting the programme, which was finally amended by Prodi, party leaders and specialists, being ratified by all coalition members except one (Moury 2010).

The history of formal pre-electoral coalition agreements ends here. The 2008 elections gave the victory to *Popolo della Libertà* (PdL), resulting from the merger of FI and AN, coalescing only with the LN. There was no pre-electoral agreement, as both parties drafted their independent manifestos. By and large, the PdL's programme was adopted, with a few fundamental claims by the *Lega*. Berlusconi himself, together with a handful of future cabinet members, conducted a very hierarchical process, generating a short document (nine pages) with specific proposals. The governments that followed have not produced coalition agreements.

As mentioned above, there is a difference in the process of coalition agreement drafting in Italy, when compared with the common practice of consensual democracies such as the Netherlands or Belgium. To be sure, the process has seldom included all coalition party leaders and the documents have rarely been ratified by party bodies. As we have seen, the common manifesto of the Prodi I government was drafted by Prodi himself and a group of seven experts that did not include the party leaders, though they all became ministers. Negotiators internalized the policies included in the document but lacked the authority to impose a strong commitment to these deals. Also, the fact that some coalition parties refused to ratify the resulting manifesto paved the way for disloyal behaviour afterwards. The formulation of the Prodi II common manifesto resembled the common practice in countries such as Belgium and the Netherlands more closely, as it involved both experts and party leaders, most of whom became members of the cabinet. Nevertheless, again, not all parties ratified the document which had been prepared over one year of negotiations. Instead, the Berlusconi II agreement was mainly drafted by Berlusconi's collaborators, in just seven days, and was not formally ratified by the other coalition partners.

In terms of fulfilment of pledges in the coalition agreements, Italian institutional features are seen as obstacles: the Constitution, the electoral law and the parliamentary procedure rules contribute to the existence of two parliamentary chambers with inconsistent majorities, in which each law must be passed and within which individual MPs and group leaders and committees enjoy substantial prerogatives (Capano and Giuliani 2003). Additionally, researchers have shown that congruence – measured by party seat distribution or legislative data such as the time for adopting legislation in both Chambers – has declined since 2001 (Zucchini 2008, Pedrazzani 2017).

Interestingly enough, Moury (2013) shows that almost all (former) ministers or junior ministers she interviewed feel constrained, at least to some extent, by the coalition agreement when making decisions, a finding that underlines the relevance of the institutional framework as a constraining factor. But just how limited has pledge fulfilment been? Looking at the Prodi I and II and Berlusconi II governments, Moury (2010) observed that important pledges, recurrently emphasized during the campaign, were not adopted. Governments fulfilled – at least partially – on average half of all their pledges, with a minimum for the short-lived Prodi I cabinet (40.7 per cent) and a maximum for Berlusconi II (58.7 per cent). Unsurprisingly, the fulfilment score of the Prodi I and II governments, which were minority (or quasi-minority) governments that did not

complete their mandates, is lower than that of the Berlusconi II government, which relied on a large parliamentary majority and lasted four years. Nevertheless, in a comparative study of coalition agreements and records in Italy, Belgium and the Netherlands, Moury (2011b) found that around 60 per cent of all cabinet decisions originated in the coalition agreements, this figure being similar for the seven coalitions analysed (including the Prodi I and Berlusconi II governments).

The remarkable difference in length between common centre-left and centre-right manifestos illustrates their different approach in addressing voters: in the first case, long before the elections, voters are presented with a book-length document – obviously very difficult to read and understand; in the second, a few days before election day, citizens receive a short and well-structured programme through the mailbox. Interestingly enough, in a comparative study of coalition agreements in Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy and Germany, the Italian documents are outliers due to their dimension – the Prodi II document is the largest of the eleven considered, and the Berlusconi II agreement the second shortest (Moury and Timmermans 2013). Not surprisingly, long documents like these are remarkably complete; however, they tend to lack precision (Moury 2010). Although the Prodi I and II and Berlusconi II coalition agreements contained more pledges than the average (due, of course, to their length), they also had a lower number of very precise pledges: an average of 13%, vis-à-vis a total average of almost 40% in the eleven documents analysed in Moury and Timmermans's (2013) comparative study. This inverse relationship between size and precision in the Italian documents may be due to the fact that these are pre-electoral agreements, which discourages parties from presenting the voters with clear commitments on key issues – and thus risking punishment by the electorate (Moury and Timmermans 2013).

Coalition agreements have been, of course, different for centre-right and centre-left coalitions not only in communication terms but also with regard to coalition governance. The centre-left, due to the fragmentation of the coalitions, was very aware of the necessity to draft a long and precise coalition agreement in order to foster the efficiency of the governmental and legislative decision-making process. On the centre-right, given the larger ideological coherence of the coalition and the lower number of actors involved, the question on whether ministers and MPs committed to the coalition programme was indeed less of an issue. Nevertheless, their role in terms of management of interparty-policy conflict has been portrayed as inefficient. Given the nature of the negotiating process, Italian common manifestos do not represent an obligation for parliamentary parties to deliver. Conflict is often followed by non-decision, even when disagreement regards deals included in the coalition agreement (Moury 2010).

Finally, it is worth noting that coalition agreements are not the only tool for a coalition to put its priorities on the agenda: government speeches might serve a similar purpose. The prime minister, before the investiture, has to deliver official speeches in the lower and upper house. On both occasions, the premier expounds in detail the government's future policy proposals and, after each speech, party representatives are allowed to speak and comment (Curini 2011). This investiture speech addresses a wide range of issues that disclose policy proposals of the future government (Ieraci 2006, Cotta and Marangoni 2015). In that line, for example, Borghetto and al. (2017) have

shown that governments with different ideologies will prioritize different policy issues in their government speeches.

4. The 2018 coalition agreement

In the Italian general election of 4 March 2018, no political group or party was able to secure an outright majority. The centre-right alliance composed of Silvio Berlusconi's FI, Matteo Salvini's *Lega* and Giorgia Meloni's *Fratelli d'Italia* (FdI, Brothers of Italy, named after the country's national anthem) won a plurality of seats in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, while the M5S, led by Luigi di Maio, was the party with the largest number of votes (Paparo 2018). No clear government solution arose from these elections, and a process of almost three months of negotiations was necessary for the formation of a coalition cabinet.

During this period, several possibilities – including new elections or the establishment of a technical government – were discussed. Both Di Maio and Salvini asked for the president to recognize their prerogatives as *formateurs* as, respectively, leaders of the most voted party and pre-electoral coalition. The M5S assumed a leading role in the government formation process, and March-April saw the implementation of its 'two oven' (*due forni*) strategy, the *grillini* being open to negotiations both with the *Lega* (but not the centre-right coalition as a whole) and the centre-left *Partito Democratico* (which was divided regarding this matter). In early May, *Lega* and M5S asked the President for some additional time to come up with a government agreement. On 13 May, they reached an agreement about procedures and policies, described in a document entitled 'Contract for the government of change' (*Contratto per il governo del cambiamento*), but an agreement on who would be the prime minister and the other cabinet members was harder to reach. The final version of this document[1] was published on 18 May and approved by a majority of the M5S and *Lega* electorates (in online and offline consultations, respectively) shortly afterwards.

The process of coalition agreement drafting was, of course, rather different from the ones described in the previous section. First, it took place after the elections and involved two political forces which were apparently rather unwilling to govern together, at least according to the declarations made during the election campaign. The agreement drafting process was much quicker than those of the Prodi agreements (six months to one year), but nevertheless longer than the drafting of the definitive Berlusconi II agreement: Di Maio and Salvini needed about three weeks to come up with their coalition government programme. While this is a relatively short period of time, it does not denote carelessness in this process, since, unlike the other Italian agreements, drawn up from scratch, the M5S-*Lega* contract was informed by the electoral manifestos and pledges of both parties before the elections. Therefore, most of this time was presumably not spent in drafting realistic/sophisticated pledges but in reaching agreements regarding which individual party pledges could be adopted, in part or completely, by the coalition.

The *Contratto per il governo del cambiamento* is a 58-page, 18,500-word document covering 30 specific topics. In comparative terms, it is notably longer than the Berlusconi II agreement (twice as long) but shorter than the centre-left documents. The

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[1] Available here: http://download.repubblica.it/pdf/2018/politica/contratto_governo.pdf.

document focuses mainly on policy, but the first section is devoted to procedure: readers are informed of how cooperation between the two parties and their parliamentary groups will take place (for instance, there is a Conciliation Committee – *Comitato di Conciliazione* – to solve divergences and find agreement on controversial topics), as well as the political coordination with the European institutions. This section also comprises an ethical code for government members and the promise that the cabinet's record will be assessed after the first half of the current legislature. The policy areas are not organized according to their relevance for the parties (as in the two parties' electoral platforms)[2], but in alphabetical order – from Public Water (*Acqua Pubblica*) to University and Research (*Università e Ricerca*).

The coalition agreement encompasses several concepts that are dear to the M5S, such as green economy, a State owned and controlled investment bank (even if the word bank appears between quotation marks), conflicts of interest, the *reddito di cittadinanza* (a sort of basic income policy), direct democracy and cuts in the 'costs of politics'. Instead, one of the main ideas of the *Lega*'s electoral manifesto, the flat tax, is central in this coalition agreement, although two tax rates are proposed, instead of one, which is obviously a stretching of the flat tax concept. On issues such as pensions, the need to discuss European treaties or immigration, the ideas of both parties were congruent enough (even though *Lega* tends to be more extreme and make these issues more salient in the public arena). The title of the section devoted to the last of these issues actually reproduces two M5S electoral platform sound bites: to end the 'immigration business' and the repatriation of irregular immigrants.

As regards saliency attributed to specific issues, the analysis carried out by the *Istituto Cattaneo*[3] shows that the coalition programme confers much less space to law and order issues (16.2 vs. 40 per cent of quasi-sentences) and much more to welfare and education (27.6 vs. 13.3 per cent) than the *Lega* manifesto. Instead, it devotes a smaller proportion of space to environmental issues than the M5S electoral programme. This same analysis places this coalition agreement almost to the centre within the left-right and pro-/anti-EU dimensions and shows that it is closer to the positions held by M5S that to those of the *Lega*. The main features of this centrist position are the statist approach to welfare and the economy, a dilution of the most drastic securitarian measures initially proposed by Salvini and a moderation of the Euroscepticism present in both manifestos. Nevertheless, the agreement moves away from M5S and becomes closer to *Lega* on the progressive-conservative axis, resulting from the disappearance of the *grillini*'s expansion of a civil rights agenda.

Still according to the *Istituto Cattaneo*'s report, 56 per cent of the contents of this agreement are very general, which resonates with Moury's (2010) conclusion regarding the lack of precision of pre-electoral agreements in the Italian Second Republic. Indeed, most pledges are presented in a very general fashion, lacking precision, which will make pledge fulfilment assessments – by experts and the citizenry – rather tricky. Generally speaking, vagueness is also the main trait of the investiture speech made by Giuseppe

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[2] For instance, the first four topics of Lega's programme were the most salient issues for this party: Taxes, Pensions, Immigration and Europe.

[3] Available here: http://www.cattaneo.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Analisi-Istituto-Cattaneo-Il-governo-M5s-e-Lega-23-maggio-2018-1.pdf.

Conte in the two chambers of the Italian parliament.[4] However, a comparison between the 2018 coalition agreement and the electoral manifestos published by M5S and *Lega* shows that the degree of concreteness of the former is considerably higher – in fact, about three in every four quasi-sentences[5] in the electoral manifestos were generic. The coalition agreement is remarkably specific on issues such as law and order (in which the *Lega*'s contribution is clear) and institutional and public administration reform (with one in every two quasi-sentences presenting policy proposals), and considerably vague on issues such as welfare, employment and foreign policy.

The relative lack of precision in this agreement makes it less useful than necessary both in terms of communication with voters and coalition governance. Not only do Italian citizens not know exactly what to expect in several policy areas (namely welfare, employment and foreign policy), but also individual ministers from both parties have more room for manoeuvre, with the corollary risk of conflict and dissidence. The deplorable mid-October 2018 scandal over the *pace fiscale* agreement, with Di Maio accusing a 'little hand' of having changed the final law proposal in accordance with the *Lega*'s initial stance on this issue, is an example of how easily dissidences and conflicts may arise and be made public in the current coalition cabinet. The generic nature of the coalition agreement also blurs analysis of the extent to which the coalition has governed in accordance with what was promised. This is despite political declarations such as those of the vice prime-minister Di Maio who states that in four months of government, half of the policies contained in the M5S manifesto[6] had been delivered (interestingly enough, the comparison was made with his manifesto and not with the coalition agreement).

5. Concluding remarks

The 2018 Italian coalition agreement is exceptional in several ways: it is the first post-electoral coalition agreement in the history of this consensual democracy, and required negotiations between parties that had no record of cooperation nor willingness to govern together, as well as completely different positions in the conservative-progressive and left-right policy dimensions, though being similarly Eurosceptic.[7] The post-electoral negotiations resulting from a hung parliament granting political prominence to M5S (the most voted party) and *Lega* (the largest party within the most voted pre-electoral coalition), led to the establishment of an unexpected coalition cabinet and the publication of a comparatively long and complete, but imprecise, coalition agreement. The *grillini* seem to have been able to place the policy proposals closer to their own position in the left-wing spectrum, but the *Lega*'s intervention in this process has caused the agreement to be more conservative and therefore more distant from the moderate to progressive

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[4] Speech given on 5 June 2018, available here: https://documenti.camera.it/leg18/resoconti/assemblea/html/sed0011/stenografico.pdf.

[5] The Istituto Cattaneo adopted the concept of quasi-sentences used in the Comparative Manifesto Project, meaning one bit of text regarding one specific political object. Some natural sentences are quasi-sentences, others contain two or more quasi-sentences.

[6] Available here: https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2018/10/29/m5s-di-maio-vili-attacchi-contro-di-noi-restiamo-compatti-come-una-testuggine-romana-chi-attacca-m5s-attacca-litalia/4727012/.

[7] According to the analysis carried out by Istituto Cattaneo based on their 2018 electoral manifestos, available here: http://www.cattaneo.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Analisi-Istituto-Cattaneo-Il-governo-M5s-e-Lega-23-maggio-2018-1.pdf.

M5S stances. These negotiations, and arguably the interventions of the President of the Republic, has also caused both parties to shift from a position of blatant Euroscepticism to a slightly more moderate critical stance towards the EU.

In comparative terms, the 2018 coalition agreement is shorter than centre-left deals and longer than centre-right deals and resulted from a rather quick process which benefited from the fact that there were already two consolidated pre-election manifestos to work from. In spite of this, and similarly to the pre-electoral coalition agreements implemented in the previous two decades, the M5S-*Lega* agreement lacks precision, which gives a great deal of room for manoeuvre to cabinet members and makes conflict resolution slightly trickier.

Over and above these patterns, it is worth mentioning that the extent to which this coalition agreement will indeed be the basis for the government of Italy in the next years is unknown. On the one hand, two of the most important pledges – the flat tax and the basic income – require an increase in public expenditure that fails to comply with European requirements in terms of deficit. In late October 2018, the European Union indeed rejected the Italian 2019 budget proposed by the incumbent coalition on these grounds.[8] On the other, the polls have shown that *Lega* is increasing its electoral appeal (going from 20 per cent of vote intentions in late March to 31 per cent in late October 2018), while M5S is losing consensus (from 34 to 28 per cent in the same time span), in a context in which all the other electoral forces display some degree of stability.[9] This may hinder the coalition's cohesiveness either because M5S decides to interrupt its electoral haemorrhage or because *Lega* understands that it may well win subsequent elections and either govern alone or with more natural political allies. The history of the first post-electoral coalition agreement and its implementation might be a very short one.

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[8]More information here: https://www.ft.com/content/db7a59ac-d6c9-11e8-ab8e-6be0dcf18713.

[9] Poll trends available at https://www.termometropolitico.it/.

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The Yellow-Green Government and the Thorny Issue of Routine Childhood Vaccination

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Abstract

During recent years, routine childhood vaccination has become a divisive and politically salient topic in Italy. During the spring of 2017, for example, the Lorenzin decree (No. 73 of 2017), which contained urgent provisions on vaccination prevention, divided public opinion and national political forces. In particular, both the League and the Five Star Movement immediately opposed the introduction of ten mandatory vaccinations. Moreover, the routine child immunization topic was once again at the centre of the political debate during the summer of 2018. The aim of this article is to present the contours of the problem relating to childhood vaccinations in Italy, and to reconstruct the current debate on mandatory vaccinations. It is not yet clear how the newly elected yellow-green government intends to tackle the problem: in the conclusions we will try to formulate some hypotheses.

Introduction

In the last few years, routine childhood vaccination has become a divisive and politically salient topic in Italy. During the spring of 2017, the Lorenzin decree (decree law no. 73), which increased the number of compulsory vaccinations, divided public opinion and political parties. Opposing the Lorenzin decree were, above all, the League and the Five Star Movement, the two parties currently in government.

When the Conte government took office in June 2018, the issue of childhood vaccination returned to the centre of the debate. Both the coalition partners are in favour of modifying the Lorenzin decree, but they do not seem to agree on the strategy to follow.

The League has always opposed the vaccination obligation and believes that information and persuasion strategy should be preferred over the use of obligations and sanctions: parents must be free to decide what is best for their children.

In relation to vaccines, the Five Star Movement has so far assumed an ambivalent position. Especially before the 2018 elections, several exponents of the Five Star Movement showed scepticism towards vaccinations, expressing opinions very similar to those of the 'no-vax' movement. After the elections, some leaders of the Movement instead issued more cautious statements: the Five Star Movement declares itself in favour of childhood vaccination, but believes that the provisions contained in the Lorenzin decree should be made more flexible and should differentiate from region to region.

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The aim of this article is to trace the contours of the problem related to childhood vaccination in Italy, and to describe the current debate on mandatory vaccinations. It is not yet clear how the newly elected yellow-green government intends to tackle the problem. We will try in the conclusions to formulate some hypotheses about it.

1. The problem: an overview of childhood vaccination coverage in Italy

Childhood vaccinations are considered among the most effective, and cost-effective, public health interventions to prevent infectious diseases [Ehreth 2003; Bloom et al. 2005; Andre et al. 2008; Doherty et al. 2016]. According to the World Health Organization, routine childhood vaccinations make it possible to avoid between 2 and 3 million deaths in the world every year due to diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis and measles [WHO 2017]. Nonetheless, over the past few years in Italy a substantial decrease in immunization coverage has been recorded [WHO 2017; EpiCentro 2018; Ministry of Health 2018]. The decreasing trend in immunization coverage is fuelled by the belief that vaccines are not effective and might instead cause serious adverse effects [Montanari Vergallo et al. 2018].

The decrease in vaccination coverage is a concern not only for non-immunized individuals, but also for society as a whole. As a matter of fact, so-called herd immunity is reached only when a high percentage of the population is immune to a given infectious disease. Once herd immunity is achieved, a given pathogen cannot spread further [Fox et al. 1971; Anderson and May 1985; Fine 1993; John and Samuel 2000; Fine et al. 2011]. Herd immunity is therefore a form of indirect protection against infectious diseases, since it also preserves the few individuals who have not been immunized [Fine 1993; John and Samuel 2000; Doherty et al. 2016]. World Health Organization recommendations [WHO 2013, 2014] indicate that herd immunity of some infectious diseases is reached when the vaccination coverage achieves 95% of each birth cohort. This is, for example, the case of measles.

Despite the recommendations of the World Health Organization, in the last few years vaccination coverage in Italy has not reached the recommended 95% threshold. For example, in 2016, coverage of the so-called 'hexavalent vaccines' – i.e., anti-polio, anti-diphtheria, anti-tetanus, anti-pertussis, anti-hepatitis B, and anti-type B Haemophilus influenzae – stood at around 93.4% as national average [Ministry of Health 2018]. Vaccination coverage, however, was not uniform all over the country: while some regions exceeded the 95% threshold, others were far below it [Montanari Vergallo et al. 2018]. The vaccination coverage for measles, mumps and rubella was much lower: as a national average, in 2016, coverage was around 87%, and no Italian region reached the recommended threshold of 95%. Moreover, the anti-chickenpox (varicella) coverage rate was around 46% as a national average. The data just reported are the consequence of a decrease in childhood vaccination coverage in Italy over the last decade or so. While the coverage rates for vaccinations included in the hexavalent vaccines were around 96.5% in 2006, from 2008 onwards the coverage rates have been decreasing. While measles, mumps and rubella vaccinations exceeded 90.5% of coverage in 2010, they were around 87% in 2016.

Finally, measles epidemics are a particular cause for concern. In fact, in the year 2017, the recorded cases of measles in the EU/EEA area were just under 14,500, of which more than a third were in Italy. There were 82 cases of measles per million inhabitants in Italy, compared to a European average equal to 28 cases per million [ECDC 2018]. In proportion to the population, only Romania and Greece report more cases of measles than Italy.

2. The Lorenzin decree law of June 2017

In May 2017, on the impulse of the Italian Minister of Health, Beatrice Lorenzin, the Gentiloni government approved a decree law containing 'urgent provisions on vaccination prevention'. With the general aim of reversing the decline in immunization coverage, the Lorenzin decree (decree law no. 73) increased the number of mandatory vaccinations for children. The decree law was passed by the Council of Ministers on 19 May, and it was then signed by the President of the Republic on 7 June. The innovations introduced by the Lorenzin decree are described below.

COMPULSORY VACCINATIONS. Until decree law no. 73 came into effect, there were four mandatory vaccinations (against poliomyelitis, tetanus, diphtheria, and hepatitis B). By virtue of the Lorenzin decree the number of mandatory vaccinations was increased from four to twelve. The eight additional vaccinations were those against pertussis, Haemophilus influenzae type B (Hib), measles, rubella, mumps, chickenpox (varicella), meningococcus B and meningococcus C. Most of these were previously considered as merely 'recommended' by Italian legislation. These twelve vaccinations would have been compulsorily administered to all children born from 2017 onwards and would have become a mandatory requirement to access nursery schools and kindergartens.

ECONOMIC PENALTIES. In addition to the exclusion of children from pre-school educational services, the violation of the vaccination mandate would have also involved the application of pecuniary sanctions to be paid by defaulting parents. The economic penalties could have varied from a minimum of 500 euros up to a maximum of 7,500 euros.

EXEMPTIONS. The Lorenzin decree envisaged that two categories of children would be exempt from the vaccination obligation: 1) those already immunized as a result of natural illness (such as children who have already contracted the disease); and 2) those who are in specific clinical conditions that represent a contraindication to vaccinations (such as, immunocompromised children). Both exemptions should be attested by the family doctor.

PUBLIC COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGNS. The decree law attributed to the Ministry of Health the task of promoting initiatives of public communication to spread the culture of vaccination among the population. In particular, the Ministry of Health had to agree with the Ministry of Education on some awareness-raising initiatives for pupils and teaching staff in schools. For these initiatives, 200,000 euros were allocated for the year 2017.

3. The conversion law (and the main differences with the decree law)

In Italy, decree laws expire within sixty days unless converted into law by Parliament. As a consequence, the Lorenzin decree should have obtained the approval of both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate by 6 August 2017.

During the examination of the conversion law in the Senate, several amendments to the original text of the decree law were approved within the 'Hygiene and Health' committee. The conversion law containing these amendments was voted on 20 July 2017. The votes in favour were 171, while those against were 63, with 19 abstainers. The Democratic Party, Alternativa Popolare and the Group for Autonomy voted in favour of the conversion law, as well as most of the Senators of Forza Italia, Ala-Scelta Civica, and art.1-Mdp. On the contrary, the League and the Five Star Movement voted against it.

After Senate approval, the bill passed to the Chamber of Deputies. To prevent the expiration of the Lorenzin decree 60 days after its approval, no further changes were made to the text, and the government opted for a vote of confidence. On 28 July, the same draft previously passed by the Senate was approved by the Chamber as well. The votes in favour were 292, while those against were 92, with 15 abstainers. As in the case of the Senate vote, while the Democratic Party, Alternativa Popolare, Ala-Scelta Civica and the majority of the deputies of Forza Italia and Art.1-Mdp voted in favour of the conversion law, the Five Star Movement and the League voted against. Sinistra Italiana and Fratelli d'Italia abstained.

3.1 Differences between the conversion law and the original text of the Lorenzin decree

As already mentioned, in the course of the examination in the Senate committee, the original draft of the Lorenzin decree underwent some substantial changes. The main differences between the two texts are as follows.

COMPULSORY VACCINATIONS: 6+4. The mandatory vaccinations would no longer be twelve as required by the decree law but ten, namely: anti-polio, anti-diphtheria, anti-tetanus, anti-hepatitis B, anti-pertussis, anti-Haemophilus influenzae B, in addition to vaccinations against measles, rubella, mumps and varicella. The compulsoriness of the last four is, however, to be reviewed every three years, based on data on vaccination coverage and any reported adverse reactions. Moreover, the conversion law made explicit that the compulsory vaccines also applied to unaccompanied foreign minors.

FOUR 'RECOMMENDED' VACCINATIONS. In addition to the ten mandatory vaccinations, four vaccines are considered 'recommended'. This means that the public health service will offer them free of charge, but without any obligation. The recommended vaccinations are now anti-meningococcal B, anti-meningococcal C, anti-pneumococcal, and anti-rotavirus.

SANCTIONS. The conversion law confirmed that compulsory vaccinations constitute a requirement to access kindergartens and nursery schools, but not for other degrees of education (such as primary and secondary school). The economic penalties which can be levied in case of failure to comply with the mandate were significantly reduced: by

virtue of the conversion law, the minimum penalty is now 200 euros, while the maximum fine is 500 euros (instead of 7,500).

EXEMPTIONS. As far as the exemptions are concerned, the conversion law confirms what was already stated by the decree law, namely that the following categories are exempted from the obligation: 1) children affected by health problems for which vaccination is contraindicated; and 2) children already immunized as a result of natural illness.

TASKS ASSIGNED TO AIFA. The conversion law attributes to AIFA (the Italian Medicines Agency) some tasks that were not mentioned in the previous decree law. First, AIFA is required to prepare an annual report – to be submitted to the Ministry of Health and then to the Chambers – on the outcomes of the vaccination programmes and on the impact of adverse reactions to vaccines. AIFA is also responsible for negotiating the prices of vaccines with pharmaceutical companies.

COMPENSATION FOR VACCINE DAMAGE. The conversion law includes some provisions, which did not appear in the decree law, regarding compensation for damage caused by vaccines. Approximately one and a half million euros are allocated for the years 2017 and 2018 to meet any compensation claims.

NATIONAL VACCINE REGISTRY. A final provision included in the conversion law is the establishment of a National Vaccine Registry within the Ministry of Health, with the aim of monitoring the implementation of the vaccination programmes. This would be a national computerized tracking system through which all vaccinated children are registered, as well as those not yet vaccinated, the doses and timing of vaccine administration, and any undesired effects recorded. For the realization of this national vaccine registry, 300,000 euros are made available (for the year 2018).

4. The parliamentary debate: favourable, sceptical and contrary parties to the Lorenzin decree

The main parties represented in the Italian Parliament were divided between those that supported the conversion law, and those that never shared its basic approach and voted against it. In addition, it is possible to identify a third group of parties who voted in favour of the conversion law, despite having shown scepticism towards the approach inspiring the Lorenzin decree.

The Democratic Party, Alternativa Popolare and Ala-Scelta Civica were in favour of the introduction of the vaccination obligation. They immediately promoted public campaigns to raise awareness about the safety of vaccines and also the usefulness of herd immunity. Even though they share the approach of the Lorenzin decree, these parties positively welcomed the changes introduced during the Senate discussion, considering the amendments the result of a constructive parliamentary debate.

On the contrary, the Five Star Movement and the League are the main parties that had been opposed to the use of coercive measures since the presentation of the Lorenzin decree. In their opinion, the strategy to follow must rely on information and persuasion, not on obligation and sanctions. They thus required a ministerial information campaign to inform parents about the benefits and potential side effects of childhood vaccinations.

In this way, families would be given freedom of choice in deciding about the vaccination of their children.

Finally, Forza Italia, Fratelli d'Italia and Art.1-Mdp can be included in a third group of parties which, though initially sceptical towards the Lorenzin decree, finally voted in favour of the conversion law. They recognized that the parliamentary debate led to the introduction of relevant amendments that greatly improved the bill. In addition, they were aware that a rejection of the conversion law would have given their electorate the impression of being against vaccines.

5. The League's position on vaccination

The League's position on the issue of routine childhood vaccination has remained unchanged since the presentation of the Lorenzin decree. During the parliamentary debate, the League expressed opposition to the decree, accusing it of violating Article 32 of the Italian Constitution, as it infringes on the freedom of care of minors. For this reason, the League's parliamentarians voted against the conversion law. In particular, they declared themselves to be against the sanctions foreseen by the decree in the case of non-compliance with the vaccination obligation.

The national leaders of the League have repeatedly stated that they are supporters of the strategy adopted in Veneto. The latter is one of the two Italian regions (the other is Lombardy) currently governed by a League politician.

The Veneto Region, in accordance with regional law no. 7/2007, has abolished any form of vaccination mandate. This means that from 2007 to the approval of the Lorenzin decree, four vaccinations (anti-polio, anti-diphtheria, anti-tetanus and anti-hepatitis B) were mandatory in most Italian regions, but not in Veneto.

The advantages of the Veneto model have been repeatedly underlined by the president of this region, Luca Zaia (one of the most influential leaders of the League): '*Veneto is not against vaccines, but we are convinced that obligation is counterproductive, and leads to increased scepticism towards vaccines. Veneto is the only Italian region that does not provide mandatory vaccinations. We prefer to convince parents, leaving them free to choose. This is the strategy adopted in other 15 European countries, including Germany, Spain, the United Kingdom and many northern European countries*' (interview with Il Sole 24 Ore, 6 July 2017).

In Luca Zaia's opinion, the Veneto region model, based on the removal of the vaccination mandate and the elimination of any sanctions, should be extended to the entire nation.

This position continues to be supported by League members, as stated on different occasions by its leader, Matteo Salvini. The latter has publicly said that ten vaccines are '*too many*' and that the choice over whether or not to vaccinate children should be left to parents.

'*Like many doctors, I believe that it is better to educate to vaccines than to oblige*', said Salvini during an interview with the economic newspaper Il Sole 24 Ore (June 22, 2018). '*I vaccinated my children. Some vaccines save lives, but ten vaccines for some children are useless and even dangerous. I'm not anti-vaccination, but there are so many documented adverse reactions to vaccines. No child should be excluded from school or kindergarten*'.

The League's position against the vaccination obligation was revealed by a tweet released by Matteo Salvini on January 2018, in the middle of the election campaign. Salvini wrote: '*We will delete Lorenzin rules. Vaccines yes, obligation no*'. This tweet generated strong friction with Forza Italia and its leader Silvio Berlusconi, who expressed his total opposition to the opinion expressed by his coalition ally. This explains the decision not to include any reference to the issue of vaccines within the centre-right coalition's electoral programme for the March 2018 general elections (the League did not present its own separate electoral programme, but a unique coalition programme, together with Forza Italia and Fratelli d'Italia).

6. The Five Star Movement and its ambivalence about vaccination

Similarly to the League, the Five Star Movement has also maintained a position against the Lorenzin decree. The parliamentarians of the Five Star Movement declared themselves against the sanctions envisaged by the Lorenzin decree and by the respective conversion law. To better understand the position of the Five Star Movement in relation to vaccinations, it is worth making a brief reference to the 'no-vax' movement.

THE NO-VAX MOVEMENT. For some years now, the movement in Italy against vaccination has become increasingly important. The so-called 'no-vax' movement initially developed on the Internet and on social networks, but later also organized public meetings, events, and supported the publication of some books against vaccines and vaccination obligations.

As the no-vax movement has no recognized leader and has fed on the web, it does not have a univocal and official position on the issue of vaccines. Different opinions and arguments coexist within the movement. In general, no-vax supporters believe that vaccines are potentially dangerous, and therefore childhood immunization should not be mandatory. Some believe there is a link between immunization and serious diseases, such as autism. Others believe that vaccines are part of a conspiracy orchestrated by pharmaceutical companies, and that the strategy of vaccination obligation is actually dictated by economic interests. Most believe that the State should not interfere with the freedom of individuals, and that the choice to vaccinate children belongs to their parents. According to some commentators, two factions can be distinguished within the movement: on the one hand are those who are properly 'no-vax' (vaccinations are harmful and must therefore be avoided); on the other hand are those who are simply 'free-vax' (vaccines are not dangerous, but they do not have to be mandatory).

The Five Star Movement is the party that appears to be closer to the anti-vaccination movement, but it is not clear whether the Movement belongs to the 'no-vax' faction or to the 'free-vax' one. The Five Stars seem to deliberately maintain an ambiguous position.

The official position of the Five Star Movement towards the thorny issue of childhood vaccination was recently made explicit by the leader of the movement, Luigi Di

Maio. He stated that the Five Star Movement is not against immunization, but rather the introduction of a vaccination mandate:

'*I want to silence some unhealthy ideas about vaccines. Since I have been the political leader of the Movement, we have never been against it, we want it to be done. What we are not in favour of is linking obligation to school attendance, instead of introducing it when there is a risk of epidemics*' (*Corriere della Sera*, August 13, 2018).

This clarification must be interpreted as Di Maio's willingness to respond to the accusations directed at the Movement of supporting and sharing the positions of anti-vaccination activists.

In May 2017, an article published in the New York Times accused the Five Star Movement of promoting an online anti-vaccine campaign, raising the fear of a link between vaccines and autism. Beppe Grillo, the founder of the Five Star Movement, responded to this attack by accusing the NYT of 'fake news', and claiming that 'there is no campaign promoted by the Five Star Movement against vaccines'.

Later, the Movement published on its blog a statement in which the official position of the movement on the subject of vaccinations was made explicit. The Five Star Movement declares itself in favour of vaccinations, and to make vaccines mandatory just in the case of a genuine epidemic emergency.

Moreover, the Movement is in favour of the creation of a national vaccine registry, through which immunization coverage would be monitored in real time at both national and regional level.

Despite official denials, the impression is that both during the 2018 election campaign and in the early months of the yellow-green government some members of the Five Star Movement have expressed opinions very similar to those of anti-vaccination activists.

The Five Star Movement seems deliberately ambiguous with regard to vaccinations: on the one hand, it reassures public opinion with moderate official statements (in favour of immunization), on the other hand it winks at anti-vaccination activists.

7. Health Minister Giulia Grillo and the 'flexible obligation'

With the establishment of the new yellow-green government led by Giuseppe Conte, Giulia Grillo, previously the Five Star Movement whip in the Chamber of Deputies, was appointed as Minister of Health.

It is not easy to understand whether the League and the Five Star Movement have a shared position on routine vaccinations. Regarding this issue, the 'government contract' is rather ambiguous. As stated in the 'contract for the government of change' signed by Matteo Salvini and Luigi Di Maio:

'*With the aim of protecting individual and collective health, guaranteeing the necessary vaccination coverage, the issue of the right balance between the right to education and the right to health will be addressed, protecting pre-school and school children who may be at risk of social exclusion*'. It is not clear what this means in practice.

In recently released interviews, the new Health Minister Giulia Grillo advocates the introduction of a 'flexible obligation', which should result in differentiated measures according to the rate of vaccination coverage registered at regional level.

As emphasized by the minister herself: '*There are regions which reach 97% of immunization coverage, and other regions with just 87%. Hence the need for a flexible obligation, the most rational thing to do*' (interview with the La7 TV channel).

While waiting for the proposal for the 'flexible obligation' to materialize in a bill, so far the new yellow-green government has not approved any substantial changes to the Lorenzin decree. A recent ministerial circular (July 2018) envisages the extension of self-certification for the 2018-2019 school year (the possibility of self-certificating vaccinations was already envisaged by the Lorenzin decree, but only for the 2017-18 school year).

8. Conclusions: what will the yellow-green coalition government do about vaccines?

On the basis of what has been illustrated in the previous sections, it is natural to ask what measures the newly elected yellow-green government will adopt on the subject of infant vaccinations. At present, it is legitimate to hypothesize four alternative scenarios.

First option: to leave the situation as it is, without modifying the Lorenzin decree. The issue of vaccines, as we said, is politically delicate and divisive. One can assume that the majority of Italians are in favour of infant vaccinations: this emerges from some recent surveys [Observa 2017; Giambi *et al.* 2018] and it is shown by the fact that, even before the Lorenzin decree, the vast majority of Italian children received vaccines that were just 'recommended' (but not mandatory). Abolishing the Lorenzin decree could then turn out to be a boomerang: to pursue a no-vax minority, the yellow-green government could displease the majority of voters.

Second option: to introduce the principle of 'flexible obligation'. It is not yet completely clear what the Minister Giulia Grillo intends with this expression. The logic should, however, be the following: the obligation to vaccinate children is introduced only when the immunization coverage (for a given disease) falls below a certain threshold of alarm (that of herd immunization). As soon as the coverage threshold is reached, the vaccination obligation can be removed. The decisions regarding the introduction or elimination of the vaccination mandate would be taken on the basis of the National Vaccine Registry data, which should allow the monitoring, in real time, of immunization coverage all over the country. The 'flexible obligation' principle should also include the possibility of adopting differentiated measures depending on the region.

Third option: return to the situation prior to the Lorenzin decree, repealing the latter. The situation before the decree provided for only four mandatory vaccinations (and not ten), without the sanction of the exclusion of unvaccinated children from kindergartens. Given the high number of cases of measles recently registered in Italy, some speculate that in this third option the mandatory vaccines could become five, including that against measles.

Fourth option: extend to the whole country the model adopted since 2007 by the Veneto region. This would mean approving a new law that transforms the ten currently mandatory vaccinations into 'recommended' (and therefore voluntary) ones.

It's not easy at this stage to predict which of the four options will eventually be adopted by the yellow-green government. The decision could depend on the balance of power within the Conte government.

Matteo Salvini and the League seem to favour the fourth option, but maybe also the third one.

The Five Star Movement, on the subject of vaccination, may not share a common position. One faction (presumably a minority) of the movement seems close to 'no-vax' positions and considers vaccines dangerous: this faction is in favour of the fourth option (no mandatory vaccination). The majority of the Five Star Movement – among them the leader Di Maio and the Minister Grillo – have more moderate positions: they declare themselves in favour of vaccinations, and they seem to support the second option, that of 'flexible obligation'.

If the authors of this article had to bet a euro on one of the four options, we would perhaps bet on the first solution (to do nothing). In recent polls, both the Five Star Movement and the League have seen their popularity grow: intervening on a sensitive issue such as that of vaccines could prove to be an own goal, which could lead both coalition partners to lose consensus. Why would they risk that?

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