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Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde? The Approaches of the Conte Governments to the European Union

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Abstract

Over the past few years, interdependence and the increasing importance of external constraints on Member State governments' domestic policies have deepened relations between the European Union (EU) and European cabinets. This article investigates the Conte I and Conte II governments' approach to the EU. Drawing on cleavage theory, we hypothesise that the PD exercised a 'mitigation effect' on M5S Euroscepticism, leading to a change in the government's attitude towards the EU. We test this hypothesis through a small-*n* comparative analysis based on the two governments' political programmes, composition, and budgetary policy in the framework of the European Semester. The article is structured as follows: First, we build the theoretical framework on cleavage theory and the 'mitigation effect' hypothesis. Second, we illustrate the transition from the Conte I to the Conte II government. Third, we discuss the method and research strategy. Finally, we examine the Conte governments' political programmes, composition and budgetary policy with a view to testing the 'mitigation effect'. Our analysis shows that a shift in Italy's orientation towards the EU occurred in the transition from Conte I to Conte II, owing much to the PD's involvement in the latter.

1. Introduction

In the XVIII parliamentary term, Italy has already had three governments. Two of them were headed by Giuseppe Conte, a nonpartisan figure who previously worked as a lawyer and academic. The first coalition government was formed in June 2018 by the Five Star Movement (M5S) and the League, and fell after the government crisis of August 2019. The subsequent cabinet, composed of M5S, Democratic Party (PD), Italy Alive (IV), and Free and Equals (LeU), took office one month after that crisis.

Several studies have investigated the formation of the first Conte government (Marangoni and Verzichelli 2019), its policy agenda (Giannetti *et al.* 2020), and early termination (Conti *et al.* 2020). Others have discussed the relationship between Italy and the European Union (EU), highlighting patterns of 'continuity and change' (Quaglia 2007). To this effect, Silvio Berlusconi's government represents the first shift in Italy's traditionally Europeanist orientation, standing in sharp contrast to the Europeanist approach of the previous Prodi government (Carbone 2009). The literature has recently emphasised the discontinuity between the Conte I and Gentiloni governments in their relations with the EU (Fabbrini and Zgaga 2019). In addition to European dynamics, the study of Italian governments' approaches towards the EU also helps to shed light on

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domestic politics. The link between the two has become apparent over time, fostering increasing academic attention (Fabbrini and Piattoni 2008).

This article analyses the approach of the Conte governments vis-à-vis the EU. It raises a two-fold research question: did Italy's approach to the European Union change in the transition from the Conte I to the Conte II government? And if so, why? Building on cleavage theory, we hypothesise that the PD exercised a 'mitigation effect' on M5S Euroscepticism, leading to a change in the government's attitude towards the EU. Specifically, we expect the Conte II government to adopt a more Europeanist approach compared to the previous government, due to the PD's involvement in the second coalition. We test this hypothesis through a small-*n* comparison based on the two governments' political programmes, composition, and budgetary policy in the framework of the European Semester.

The remainder of this article is organised as follows. The second section presents the theoretical framework of the analysis. The third section deals with the turbulent transition from Conte I to Conte II. The fourth section illustrates the method and research strategy. The fifth and sixth sections analyse the political programme, composition and budgetary policy of Conte II and Conte I respectively. The final section discusses implications for future research and concludes.

2. Theoretical Framework: Cleavage Theory meets Mainstream-Eurosceptic Coalition Governments

For many years, the European integration project had little impact on national party systems (Mair 2000) while enjoying widespread approval among citizens. Such a 'permissive consensus' (Hooghe and Marks 2009) owed much to the European public's scarce perception of European integration outcomes (Carrieri 2020a). However, the 1992 Maastricht Treaty fostered the emergence of the EU as a relevant policy issue for Member States domestically, standing out as a 'critical juncture' (Fabbrini 2015). Moreover, the Euro crisis further consolidated the EU as a positional issue, thus 'awakening the Sleeping Giant' (Carrieri 2019). For its part, Italy has long been one of the most Euro-enthusiastic countries in the Union (Conti 2003). However, despite a pro-integrationist tradition, Italian public attitudes towards the EU have recently declined (Conti and Memoli 2015). Also, party positioning along the EU issue has been crucial in Italy's government formation process over the last few years. Specifically, a common anti-EU sentiment among the League and the M5S paved the way for the yellow-green coalition (Giannetti *et al.* 2018). Overall, the Italian party system has been characterised by an increasing politicisation of the EU issue, leading to polarised EU-based competition (Carrieri 2020b).

Interestingly, cleavage theory contends that mainstream parties have escaped such politicisation (Carrieri 2020b). These parties, defined as 'the electorally dominant actors in the centre-left, centre and centre-right blocs on the Left-Right political spectrum' (Hooghe et al. 2002), originated from four dividing lines: Centre versus Periphery, State versus Church, Industry versus Land, Owners versus Workers. Such a long-standing system of social cleavages has constrained mainstream parties' attitudes towards the EU. Mainstream parties have historically taken centre stage in the launch and advancement of European integration, thus incorporating pro-Europeanism into their traditional ideological commitments. In the European Parliament, mainstream parties form the backbone of the

European People's Party (EPP), the Party of European Socialists/Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (PES/S&D), the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe/Renew Europe (ALDE/RE), and the Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens-EFA). Because of their ideological uniformity regarding the EU issue, these formations are invariably defined as 'mainstream pro-European parties' (Carrieri 2020b).

Cleavage theory suggests that mainstream parties cannot move along the EU issue dimension. They hold an inflexible pro-European position due to embedded reputations, ideological commitments and government responsibility. In this light, party system change did not occur because mainstream parties reneged on Europeanism, but because voters rewarded parties with strong views on the new pro/anti-EU cleavage (Hooghe and Marks 2018). As a matter of fact, even during the Euro crisis, mainstream parties showed continued responsibility to the EU by supporting and implementing austerity policies (Carrieri 2020b). Cleavage theory thus implies that mainstream parties are not willing to negotiate on pro-Europeanism when holding government office. We ask whether this applies to coalitions between mainstream and Eurosceptic parties, with Italy's Conte II government between the PD and the M5S as a case study.

From a comparative perspective, the Conte II's governing formula does not constitute a rarity in Western Europe.[1] Indeed, as Table 1 shows, Eurosceptic parties are in coalition governments with mainstream parties in Spain and Finland. Specifically, We Can (*Podemos*) in Spain and the Left Alliance (*Vasemmistoliitto)* in Finland both stand as junior coalition partners to the Social Democrats - i.e., the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) and the Finnish Social Democratic Party (SDP). Such government experiences suggest that when a mainstream party joins a coalition with a Eurosceptic party, that government ends up with a pro-European approach. Specifically, in Spain, the Eurosceptic We Can underwent a normalization process during its partnership with the PSOE (Mazzolini and Borriello 2021) while the Marin government in Finland adopted the pro-EU programme of the previous Rinne cabinet (Palonen 2020).

Along these lines, we hypothesise that the PD exercised a 'mitigation effect' on M5S Euroscepticism, leading to a change in the government's attitude towards the EU. Specifically, we expect the Conte II government to adopt a more Europeanist approach compared to Conte I, due to the PD's involvement in the second coalition. To be sure, such a 'mitigation effect' does not imply that the PD turned the M5S into a pro-EU party. It does imply, however, that the PD was able to induce a pro-EU shift in the coalition government. We identify three observable implications of the 'mitigation effect'. First, we expect Conte II to emphasise pro-Europeanism as a key component of its political programme following negotiations between the M5S and the PD. Second, we expect Conte II to appoint PD members to key government positions in relations with Brussels and to nominate a PD member for the post of European Commissioner. Third, we expect Conte II to adopt an accommodating approach to the EU in negotiations over budgetary policy within the European Semester and to show a clear commitment to the Commission's country-specific recommendations and Stability and Growth Pact (SGP) rules.

[1] In attributing the 'Eurosceptic' and 'mainstream' categories, we rely on Rooduijn (2019) and Taggart and Szczerbiak (2004) for the former, and Döring and Manow (2020) for the latter. We have considered both the mainstream partiesa of the centre-left and centre-right, based on the ParlGov party family identifier.

Table 1. Party composition of 16 West European governments.

Country	Prime Minister	Cabinet parties	Eurosceptic in government	Mainstream in government
Austria	Kurz	Austrian People's Party The Greens		◉
Belgium	Croo	Party of Liberty and Progress Reformist Movement Christian Democratic and Flemish Greens Socialist Party Socialist Party Differently		◉
Cyprus	Anastasiades	Democratic Rally		◉
Denmark	Frederiksen	Social Democrats		◉
Finland	Marin	Social Democratic Party Centre Party Green League Left Alliance Swedish People's Party	◉	◉
France	Castex	The Republic on the Move Democratic Movement Radical Movement Act		
Germany	Merkel	Christian Democratic Union of Germany Christian Social Union in Bavaria Social Democratic Party of Germany		◉
Greece	Mitsotakis	New Democracy		◉
Ireland	Martin	Republican Party United Ireland Green Alliance		◉
Italy	Conte	Five Star Movement Democratic Party Free and Equals Italy Alive	◉	◉
Luxembourg	Bettel	Democratic Party Socialist Workers' Party The Greens		◉
Malta	Abela	Labour Party		◉
Netherlands	Rutte	People's Party for Freedom and Democracy Christian Democratic Appeal Democrats 66 Christian Union		◉
Portugal	Costa	Socialist Party		◉
Spain	Sánchez	Spanish Socialist Workers' Party We Can Communist Party of Spain United Left	◉	◉
Sweden	Löfven	Social Democrats Green Party		◉

Sources: own elaboration of original data; Rooduijn (2019); Taggart and Szczerbiak (2004); Döring and Manow (2020).
Note: date of observation is January 2020.

3. The Fall of Conte I and the Birth of the Eurosceptic-Mainstream Coalition

In recent years, Italy and other European countries have experienced turbulent times, particularly in the electoral arena (Chiaramonte and Emanuele 2019). The increasing levels of electoral volatility and the emergence of new parties have led to the formation of innovative government coalitions, reshaping the patterns of political competition. In Italy, new challenger parties, such as the M5S, have obtained enough electoral support to reach governmental office. The 2013 general election and, to a greater extent, the 2018 election have ushered in what has been labelled as the 'Third Republic'.[2] While the former was an 'electoral earthquake' (Chiaramonte and De Sio 2014), the two elections' combined effect was deemed 'the apocalypse of the Italian democracy' (Schadee *et al.* 2019).

Following the 2018 general election, many scholars emphasised the success of new challenger parties (Bellucci 2018), the role of social media, new communication strategies (Bobba and Roncarolo 2018), and increasing polarization (Bobba and Seddone 2018). Forza Italia's Silvio Berlusconi, until then the undisputed leader of the centre-right coalition, was blatantly outclassed by the League's Matteo Salvini in the intra-coalitional competition. The M5S obtained almost 33% of the votes, gaining electoral support in many areas of the country, especially in the South (D'Alimonte 2018; Emanuele and Maggini 2018). The PD obtained most of its vote share from the upper middle class, thus overturning the class vote (De Sio 2018). However, it bore the costs of governing and lost votes to the M5S.

The outcome of the 2018 general election confirmed the Italian political system's fluidity (Chiaramonte *et al.* 2018), bringing to the office the so-called '*Governo del Cambiamento'* (Pedrazzani 2018), formed by the M5S and the League, and headed by Giuseppe Conte. The formation of this unprecedented coalition government prompted a considerable scholarly interest. While some authors have considered the Conte I cabinet as 'populist' and 'nationalist' (Kriesi 2018), others have preferred the 'sovereigntist' label (Fabbrini 2019).

The Conte I political experiment had a short life: the cabinet remained in office from June 2018 to September 2019. During the bargaining process, a coalition agreement was drawn up and then subscribed to in May 2018 by Luigi Di Maio and Matteo Salvini. However, such a coalition agreement ('*Contratto per il governo del cambiamento*') turned out to be ineffective in curbing squabbles between the ruling parties (Conti *et al.* 2020). To explain the reasons underpinning the Conte I government formation, scholars have emphasised the role of office-seeking considerations (Gianfreda and Carlotti 2018), issues related to European integration and immigration (Giannetti *et al.* 2018), and the parties' policy positions along multiple dimensions (Giannetti *et al.* 2021). From the early stage of the cabinet's life, its durability was constantly at risk, particularly considering delays in bargaining, and conflicts with the *Quirinale* regarding ministerial appointments (Marangoni and Verzichelli 2019).

[2] It is worth noting that in Republican Italy no radical regime change occurred. Therefore, such terminology is often overused in the public and political debate. As Pasquino noted (2016), political and institutional changes have not caused any changes in the Republic, thus any new 'number' is not justified.

The increasing levels of popular consent obtained by Matteo Salvini in the opinion polls during his time in office ultimately undermined the coalition's stability. In particular, the electoral success of the League and the simultaneous collapse of the M5S in the 2019 European election were significant factors in the reversal of the coalition's informal balance of power. To exploit the large vote share gained in May, Salvini decided to break the deal with his coalition partner and threatened a vote of no confidence against the government. This event led PM Giuseppe Conte to resign on 20 August, 2019. Thus, as has been noted, internal competition contributed to undermining the already fragile coalition (Giannetti *et al.* 2020).

These incidents opened up the 2019 Italian government crisis. While the League's Salvini asked the President of the Republic to call a snap election, the M5S struck a coalition agreement with the PD, which led to the formation of a new Conte government. The Conte II cabinet was hailed with relief and satisfaction by international and European political leaders (Fabbrini 2021), who particularly welcomed the appointment of Roberto Gualtieri as Minister of Economy and Finance (MEF) (Ansa 2019).

Table 2. Features of the Conte cabinets.

	Conte I	**Conte II**
Formation	2018	2019
Deputy Prime Ministers	Luigi Di Maio Matteo Salvini	
Composition	M5S, League	M5S, PD, LeU, IV
Opposition parties	PD, FI, FDI, LeU	League, FI, FDI
Minister of Economy and Finance	Giovanni Tria	Roberto Gualtieri
Minister of European Affairs	Paolo Savona* Lorenzo Fontana	Vincenzo Amendola
Total number of ministers	20	23
Technocrats in government (%)	30	8.7
Left parties' weight in government (%)	0	43.5
Leading party	M5S	M5S
Number of ministers of the leading party	9	10
Governing formula	Innovative	Innovative
Effective number of government parties	2.82	2.86
Seat share (%)	53.8	55
Pre-election coalition	No	No
Coalition agreement	Yes	No

Source: own elaboration on original data; Note: seat share (Lower House); *until 8 March, 2019.

Although the Prime Minister did not change, the features of Conte II are quite different compared to the previous executive. Table 2 shows a decreased presence of technocratic ministers in the government from 30% to 8.7%. Crucially, the key cabinet

office of Minister of Economy and Finance went back to a partisan figure after being entrusted to a technocrat in the first Conte government. Moreover, despite the increased number of ministers and government fragmentation, Conte was able to achieve greater autonomy by reinforcing the position of *Palazzo Chigi*, as displayed by the absence of 'watchdog' Deputy Prime Ministers.

Table 3. Party orientations (1-7 scale) on European integration and EU authority over budgetary policy

Party	**2014**		**2019**	
	EU position	EU budgets	EU position	EU budgets
M5S	1.42	1.28	3.47	2.21
PD	6.57	5.14	6.78	5.75

Source: Chapel Hill Expert Survey trend file (Bakker et al. 2020).
Note: strongly opposed (1), opposed (2), somewhat opposed (3), neutral (4), somewhat in favour (5), in favour (6), strongly in favour (7).

Numerous studies have shown the Conte I government's negative attitudes towards the EU (Basile and Borri 2018; Fabbrini and Zgaga 2019). Such a government was supported by a 'populist' majority in Parliament, as the two coalition parties took strong anti-Europe stances before and after the election (Pedrazzani 2018).

With the transition from Conte I to Conte II, Italy witnessed the formation of the first coalition government between a mainstream and a Eurosceptic party in its recent history. Table 3 shows the orientations of the yellow-red coalition partners, i.e., M5S and the PD, towards European integration and EU authority over budgetary and economic policies in 2014 and 2019.[3] Interestingly, it emerges that while the M5S became slightly more pro-Europeanist over time, it remained 'somewhat opposed' to European integration and 'opposed' to EU authority over national budgets throughout 2019. On the other hand, and in line with its pro-EU tradition, the PD favoured both European integration and EU power over national budgetary policies throughout.

M5S support for Ursula von der Leyen's appointment to the post of European Commission President in 2019 is in line with its positional shift along the EU dimension. Such a decision was not without consequence, as it led to party members voting against it and to subsequent defections from the parliamentary group. To defuse a party crisis, the M5S published an official blog post highlighting the vote's strategic nature and its unaltered will to set their agenda in Europe.[4] In line with their continued anti-Europeanism, the *pentastellati* tried to establish an agreement with several Eurosceptic formations during that election campaign. On 9 February 2019, Luigi Di Maio and other M5S representatives liaised with leading figures of the French anti-EU and anti-establishment movement '*Gilet Jaunes*'. After further negotiations, the M5S established a formal alliance called 'Pan-European Electoral Alliance' with four Eurosceptic parties:

[3] The Chapel Hill expert surveys estimate party positioning on European integration, ideology and policy issues for national parties in a variety of European countries (Bakker et al. 2020).
[4] See 'La verità sulla Von der Leyen votata anche dai sovranisti', available at: https://www.ilblogdellestelle.it/2019/07/la-verita-sulla-von-der-leyen-votata-anche-dai-sovranisti.html.

Zivi Zid (Croatia), Kukiz '15 (Poland), Liike Nyt (Finland), and Akkel (Greece). Due to an unsuccessful electoral performance, such a coalition was not able to form a party in the European Parliament, confining the M5S to the Non-Inscrits group.

4. Methods and Research Strategy

This article adopts a qualitative research method. It embarks on a small-*n* comparative analysis of the Conte I and Conte II governments, focussing on *a)* the political programme and composition of each cabinet and *b)* their budgetary policy in the framework of the European Semester. The comparison aims to understand what approach the two governments adopted in relation to the EU, whether that changed in the transition from Conte I to Conte II, how it changed and why. Since research on party attitudes towards the EU has highlighted the importance of pre-existing ideological position constraints (Marks and Wilson 2000; Marks *et al.* 2002), the analysis considers the cabinets' preferences by investigating political programmes and composition. Moreover, the paper includes budgetary policy in the framework of the European Semester for analysing the relationship between the EU and national governments consistently with the previous literature focussing on the Italian case (Fabbrini and Zgaga 2019).

The period considered goes from June 2018 to December 2018 (for Conte I) and from September 2019 to March 2020 (for Conte II), as the outbreak of Covid-19 forced the Italian government into continued revisions of its fiscal targets throughout the 2020 European Semester's second half. The article relies on both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include: official political programmes and policy statements of the two governments; the European Commission's 2018 and 2019 country-specific recommendations for Italy; Italy's 2019 and 2020 draft budgetary plans and Italy's 2020 revised budgetary plan; the Commission's opinion on Italy's 2019 and 2020 draft budgetary plans and on Italy's 2020 revised budgetary plan; letters from the European Commission to Italy and from Italy to the European Commission; statements of the Economic and Financial Affairs Council; European Council conclusions; the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU); the SGP, and the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union (Fiscal Compact). Secondary sources consist of: news reports; academic books and articles; newspaper articles; and existing interviews with EU authorities.

5. The Conte II Cabinet and the EU: A Pro-European Turn?

5.1. Political programme and composition

After turbulent weeks of back-room negotiations between the Quirinale and parliamentary delegations, the Conte II government formally took office on 5 September 2019. The previous Conte-led coalition government between the M5S and the League split up over nominations to the post of European Commission President (Fabbrini 2019). On that occasion, Conte and the M5S aligned with mainstream groups at the EU level in supporting former German Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen. In an attempt to call for snap elections and gain more power, the League's Secretary Matteo Salvini stepped back from the coalition, triggering a government crisis. Despite this, the centre-left pro-

European PD joined forces with the M5S and replaced the League in Conte II. This ushered in the first Italian ruling alliance between a mainstream party and a self-declared populist movement (Barigazzi and Brown 2019).

The joint 'yellow-red' policy programme of Conte II was the first sign of the government's changing orientation towards the EU. In his policy statement to the Chamber of Deputies on 9 September, PM Giuseppe Conte set out a clear pro-EU agenda. While stressing the need for a 'more solid, more inclusive' Europe, Conte conceded that rising economic and environmental challenges 'can only be addressed with success, to the benefit of the national interest, if European institutions come out strengthened' (Conte 2019). In his speech to the lower house, Conte framed the concept of national interest within the broader European governance system, breaking with previous isolationist tendencies. He emphasized he had been able to avoid two infringement proceedings on the part of the EU, and concluded that the wellbeing of Italians is to be found 'within the perimeter of the European Union' (*ibidem* 2019).

The government's new attitude towards the EU owes much to the role of the coalition's junior partner: the PD. By the time the Conte I government formally stepped down, PD Secretary Nicola Zingaretti had already laid down the negotiating policy guidelines with the M5S for the upcoming coalition. As the PD made clear, Europe was to be the undisputed pillar of the new government's actions. The pressing challenge of migration flows and the economic downturn were now to be discussed in a spirit of open cooperation with the EU, ending the populist drift of the previous coalition. Zingaretti stressed the need for shared policy objectives to be in line with the principles of liberal democracy and the European perspective. In particular, he reiterated Italy's continued 'commitment and loyal belonging to the EU' as a top policy marker (La Repubblica 2019). The PD made pro-Europeanism a precondition for joining the coalition partnership with the M5S. It was able to realise its 'coalition-bargaining potential' (Sartori 1976, 108) on the European issue for its 'clearance' was key to ruling out snap elections. Conte and the M5S found themselves faced with a choice between ending their government experience or giving in to the Democrats' demands. This seems to confirm our expectation that the PD exercised a 'mitigation effect' on M5S Euroscepticism, urging its coalition partner to adopt a pro-EU political programme.

If anything, the composition of the new cabinet further underscores the new government's changing stance on the EU. As anticipated, the PD was able to secure two top government positions. Roberto Gualtieri, a long-time MEP and former chair of the Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee of the European Parliament, was appointed Minister of Economy and Finance. Gualtieri is an experienced Brussels insider who knows European institutions and how they work. European Central Bank President Christine Lagarde soon welcomed Gualtieri's appointment as a 'good thing for Italy and Europe' (Ansa 2019a). Then European Commissioner Pierre Moscovici also congratulated Gualtieri, tweeting he was 'looking forward to seeing [him] in Helsinki and to working closely with [him] in the coming weeks' (Moscovici 2019). Conte sent another signal of change appointing a pro-European PD member, Vincenzo Amendola, formerly responsible for Foreign Affairs, as European Affairs Minister in the new government. Amendola succeeded League's Lorenzo Fontana, an ultraconservative who set out to defend Italy's national interests in Europe (Carli 2019).

Overall, the Conte II cabinet consisted of 10 ministers from the M5S, including Luigi di Maio as Minister of Foreign Affairs, seven ministers from the PD, four independents, including PM Giuseppe Conte; two ministers from Italy Alive, and one from Free and Equals. Following the new government's first Cabinet meeting, Conte officially proposed former Italian Premier Paolo Gentiloni (PD) for the post of European Commissioner. A long-time Europeanist, Gentiloni boasted very good relationships with both German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron. After talks with Ursula von der Leyen, Paolo Gentiloni was nominated European Commissioner for Economy, and started his mandate in December 2019. Days before taking office in Brussels, he declared: 'I am a patriot and I will try to make it clear that the best way to protect the national interest is to do so in the European dimension' (Gentiloni 2019).

The Conte II government was hailed with favour by EU policymakers. Conte's political programme and the composition of the new cabinet contributed to reassuring supranational leaders as to the accommodating line of Conte II in its relations with Brussels. On the same day as the government took office, the then European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker sent a letter of congratulations to Giuseppe Conte saying he was 'convinced that Italy will be able to play an important role in addressing European challenges' and will 'live up to its responsibility as a founding member of our Union' (Ansa 2019b). Such an endorsement from Juncker is all the more remarkable since it came from an outspoken critic of the previous Conte I government. Vice President of the European Commission, Frans Timmermans, whose relations with Conte I and its budgetary policy was at least as tumultuous, also greeted the new government, acknowledging 'it is good for Europe that we've got a government in Italy that is clearly committed to pro-European lines and finding common solutions with the rest of the European Union' (Timmermans 2019). The PD's impact on the composition of the cabinet and on the nomination of Italy's European Commissioner reinforces our 'mitigation effect' hypothesis. The PD's 'mitigation effect' on M5S Euroscepticism is also reflected in how EU authorities welcomed the formation of Conte II, despite troubled relations with the previous Conte government.

Conte II's political programme and composition pointed to the government's changed orientation towards the EU. However, in his inaugural address to Parliament, Conte did not provide any clarity as to actual budgetary policy choices in view of the Italian draft budget due by October 2019 as per the European Semester. The next paragraph explores the Conte II government's approach to the EU with reference to its budgetary policy.

5.2. Budgetary Policy and the European Semester during Conte II

While monetary policy is centralised in the European Central Bank (ECB), EU Member States retain responsibility over their budgetary policies. These, however, are integrated at the EU level within the intergovernmental governance framework of the European Semester. A six-month cycle of economic policy coordination and surveillance, the European Semester aims, *inter alia*, to ensure sound public finances and prevent

excessive macroeconomic imbalances in the EU.[5] With respect to the European Semester, the European Council (or Euro Summit for the Eurozone) and the Economic and Financial Affairs Council (ECOFIN, or Eurogroup for the Eurozone) – two intergovernmental fora – exercise core decision-making functions, while the European Commission deals with technical implementation, surveillance and monitoring. The European Parliament is confined to a marginal, often consultative role,[6] and the European Court of Justice adjudicates on inter-state disputes. To ensure that the underlying fiscal position of Member States is conducive to fiscal sustainability, the European Semester is based on three macroeconomic criteria, enshrined in the SGP and the Fiscal Compact. First, the annual nominal deficit to GDP ratio must not exceed 3%; second, the annual government debt to GDP ratio must not exceed 60%; third, the annual structural deficit to GDP ratio must not exceed 0.5% and must aim at a balance or surplus. To this effect, the ECOFIN may initiate, on a Commission proposal, an Excessive Deficit Procedure (EDP) against any Member State found in significant deviation from such targets.

On 5 June 2019, the European Commission released its country-specific recommendations for all Member States. The recommendations were discussed and approved by the European Council on 20 June. The ECOFIN later approved the economic and budgetary parts on 8 July, before the Council adopted the final version of the recommendations on 9 July. The Council's adoption of country-specific recommendations on the initial Commission proposal is the final phase of the 2019 European Semester, and sets the stage for Member States' draft budgetary plans (DBPs) due in October (start of the 2020 European Semester).[7] The Commission's recommendation to Italy required a nominal reduction of net government expenditure of 0.1% in 2020, amounting to an annual structural adjustment of 0.6% of GDP, and the reduction of the general government debt ratio (European Commission 2019a). On 16 October, Roberto Gualtieri submitted Italy's DBP, which planned a deterioration of the annual structural balance of 0.1% of GDP and a nominal growth of net primary government expenditure of 1.9% in 2020. The DBP requested a margin of flexibility to recognise the budgetary impact of exceptional circumstances, such as seismic and meteorological events, amounting to 0.2% of GDP (Ministry of the Economy and Finance 2019).

Five days later, in a joint letter to Gualtieri, the Vice President of the European Commission Valdis Dombrovskis and Pierre Moscovici (2019) asked for clarifications regarding Italy's DBP. They noted that, as it stood, the plan fell short of the budgetary policy requirements as per the country-specific recommendations, pointing to a risk of significant deviation in 2019 and 2020. Italy's response was not long in coming. The following day, Gualtieri (2019) sent a letter of reply, reiterating the Italian government's commitment to the Medium-Term Budgetary Objectives (MTOs) of the SGP. While

[5] See 'The European Semester Goals' available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/economic-and-fiscal-policy-coordination/eu-economic-governance-monitoring-prevention-correction/european-semester/framework/european-semester-why-and-how_en.

[6] Art. 121(2) TFEU states: 'The European Council shall [...] discuss a conclusion on the broad guidelines of the economic policies of the Member States and of the Union. On the basis of this conclusion, the Council shall adopt a recommendation setting out these broad guidelines. The Council shall inform the European Parliament of its recommendation'.

[7] See 'European Semester' at https://consilium.europa.eu.

confirming a 'slight deterioration' in the structural balance of 0.1% of GDP in 2020, the Italian Minister claimed 'the DBP then foresees a subsequent reduction in the deficit to 1.8% of GDP in 2021 and 1.4% in 2022, which would entail structural improvements of 0.2% per annum' (Gualtieri 2019). In the letter, Gualtieri recalled Italy's application for a margin of flexibility worth 0.2% of GDP in 2020, sure that such additional fiscal space would prevent a significant deviation in the annual structural balance.

On 20 November 2019, the European Commission issued its formal opinion on Italy's DBP. Based on the Commission forecast, both the expenditure benchmark and the structural balance pointed to a risk of a significant deviation in 2020 and over 2019 and 2020 as a whole. The adjustment path towards Italy's 2020 MTO was also at risk of significant deviation, and this would not change even if the requested additional fiscal space of 0.2% of GDP was accorded for 2019 and 2020. According to the Commission, Italy was not in the process of complying with the debt reduction benchmark in 2019, nor in 2020. Overall, the Commission's opinion of Italy's DBP prefigured a risk of non-compliance with the requirements of the SGP (European Commission 2019b). Despite the clear warning, the European Commission eventually gave the 'green light' to Italy's DBP, acknowledging the Italian government's progress with respect to the structural side of the country-specific recommendations and inviting Italian authorities to take further action. During the elaboration of the Commission's opinion, Pierre Moscovici had already announced that it would not result in the rejection of the budget or the opening of a procedure (Reuters 2019), as was instead the case with the previous 2018 Italian DBP presented by the Conte I government a year before (see further below).

Arguably, the Conte II government's accommodating approach to the EU and its renewed commitment to the European Semester's budgetary policy requirements played a role in the Commission's decision not to ask for a resubmission of the DBP. While the DBP was not quite in line with the requirements of the SGP, the Italian government remarked that it 'dutifully [takes] note of the Council recommendation' (Gualtieri 2019) throughout its exchange with the European authorities. Moscovici himself revealed that 'discussions with the current government have been much easier on the 2020 budget than with the previous government on the 2019 draft', noting that 'this government has a pro-European stance, knows what the rules are about and wants to be compliant' (Strupczewski 2019). On behalf of the European Commission, Moscovici appreciated Italy's efforts to foster economic growth and to respect the rules of the SGP (*ibidem* 2019).

The outbreak of Covid-19 in Europe in early March 2020 significantly altered the normal course of the European Semester. On 5 March, in a letter to Dombrovskis and Gentiloni (by this time serving as Commissioner for Economy), Roberto Gualtieri (2020) informed the Commission of the government's intention to deviate from structural deficit targets in response to the health crisis, while reiterating its commitment to resuming the debt-reduction strategy after the crisis. The following day, Dombrovskis and Gentiloni (2020) expressed their solidarity with the country, and stressed that any one-off budgetary measure in response to Covid-19 would be excluded from the compliance assessments of the EU. After yet another letter exchange between March 10 and 12, and as Covid-19 turned into a global pandemic on March 11, European authorities opted for an extraordinary measure. On 23 March, acting on a Commission proposal, the

ECOFIN (2020) triggered the 'general escape clause', thus temporarily suspending the budgetary requirements of the SGP for the whole Union.

Importantly, the analysis of the Conte II's budgetary policy validates our hypothesis that the PD was able to exercise a 'mitigation effect' on the coalition partner's Euroscepticism. The Italian government took the Commission's country-specific recommendations and SGP rules seriously, showing a clear commitment to the European Semester's parameters. Despite the fact that Italy's DBP failed to meet such parameters adequately, the EU acknowledged the Conte II's accommodating approach to Europe and decided not to ask for a resubmission of the budget.

6. A Brief Window of Discontinuity: The 'Sovereigntist' Coalition Goes to Brussels

6.1. Political Programme and Composition

The Italian general elections of March 2018 witnessed the emergence of the M5S and the League as the leading parties in the country. Combined, they obtained 50.3% of the people's votes and 56% of seats in the Chamber of Deputies, while the outgoing centre-left coalition which had supported the previous Gentiloni government stopped at 22.85 and 19.86 percent respectively. After almost three months of tight negotiations, an unprecedented coalition government was sworn in on 1 June 2018 with Giuseppe Conte at its head. The M5S populist programme and the League's nationalist claims laid the groundwork for the first 'sovereigntist' government experience in Western Europe.

Conte I was born out of a 'Contract of the government of change' (hereafter, 'Contract'), which Di Maio and Salvini signed on 17 May 2018. Although several policy divergences emerge from an in-depth read of the governing parties' electoral manifestos, their common ground concerned their adverse orientation towards the EU. Indeed, when the government took office, Italy's relationship with Europe became the most salient issue in the public debate (D'Alimonte 2019). While downplaying their anti-EU positions during the electoral campaign, the M5S and the League later put Euroscepticism at the service of the former's claims about direct democracy and of the latter's intention to restore full national sovereignty.

The Contract itself testified to the important bridging role anti-Europeanism played in the governing coalition's action, particularly with respect to budgetary policy. The Contract envisaged the parties' intention to boost economic growth through public investments, increased welfare and tax cuts,[8] in open contrast to SGP rules. In order to foster domestic demand and support families' purchasing power, it also hinted at an 'appropriate and limited recourse to deficit spending' (Contract 2018). But it is with respect to the broader question of the EU's economic governance that Conte I's Euroscepticism became apparent. The governing parties committed themselves to reforming the Treaties in order to exclude public investments from the Commission's assessments of annual structural deficits. The M5S and the League agreed to re-negotiate the EU's Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) to make it consistent with the Contract's

[8] The Contract provided for the introduction of a 15% 'flat tax' in a broader mechanism of progressive deductions.

objectives. They also set out to revise the economic governance architecture at the EU level, including monetary policy, the SGP, Fiscal Compact and European Stability Mechanism (ESM), which were seen as 'based on the market's predominance over the wider economic and social dimension' (Contract 2018).

The cabinet's composition also speaks to the government's adverse attitude to the EU (Fabbrini and Zgaga 2019). Luigi Di Maio and Matteo Salvini took office as Minister of Economic Development and Minister of the Interior respectively, in addition to both serving as deputy prime ministers to Giuseppe Conte. Paolo Savona, an anti-EU hardliner, became European Affairs Minister after his appointment to the Ministry of Economy and Finance was vetoed by Italy's Head of State Sergio Mattarella over fears that this could lead to Italy's exit from the currency union (Capussela 2018). Savona had widely expressed his Euroscepticism in interviews, papers and books (Savona 2018), going so far as to define the Eurozone as 'a German cage' (Rachman 2018). The Conte I cabinet comprised eight ministers from the M5S; five to six ministers from the League;[9] and five to six independents,[10] including PM Conte, Minister of Foreign Affairs Enzo Moavero Milanesi, and Minister of Economy and Finance Giovanni Tria. It is to the latter that the government entrusted responsibility for the Italian budget.

6.2. Budgetary Policy and the European Semester during Conte I

On 23 May 2018, the Commission published its country-specific recommendations, requiring Italy to ensure that the growth of net primary government expenditure would not exceed 0.1% in 2019, amounting to an annual structural adjustment of 0.6% of GDP. It also called upon Italy to reduce the government debt ratio (European Commission 2018a), which had reached a peak of around 130% of GDP. On 4 October, in an unprecedented move before the submission of Italy's 2019 DBP, Economy and Finance Minister Tria notified the European Commission of the government's intention to alter Italy's fiscal targets, envisaging an increase in the nominal deficit to 2.4% of GDP in 2019, and an increase in the annual structural balance of 0.8% of GDP (Tria 2018a). M5S members blatantly celebrated such a turnaround on the balcony of Palazzo Chigi, the official residence of the Prime Minister (Fabbrini and Zgaga 2019). The following day, in a letter to Italy on behalf of the Commission, Dombrovskis and Moscovici took note of Tria's update but said any formal exchanges in the framework of the European Semester would only take place after Italy's submission of its 2019 DBP. They limited themselves to observing that the country-specific recommendations were unanimously endorsed by the European Council on 28 June and approved by the Council on 13 July, with Italy's consent. They concluded that 'Italy's revised budgetary targets appear *prima facie* to point to a significant deviation from the fiscal path recommended by the Council' (Dombrovskis and Moscovici 2018a).

On 15 October, Italy submitted its official 2019 DBP, which confirmed the announced deviation from the country-specific recommendations the Italian government itself had endorsed a few months earlier at the EU level. In a letter ahead of its formal opinion on Italy's DBP, the Commission addressed Giovanni Tria in search of reasons

[9] In July 2019, then Minister for Family and Disability Lorenzo Fontana (League) replaced Paolo Savona (independent) as European Affairs Minister.
[10] See Footnote 6.

behind such a significant deviation from both the recommendations and the SGP, underlining that the Italian budget was a source of serious concern (Dombrovskis and Moscovici 2018b). Italy replied on 22 October, recognising that its DBP would not fulfil the rules of the SGP while adding that 'it was a difficult but necessary decision' in a context of prolonged economic crisis (Tria 2018b). Italy's obstinate approach paved the way for the Commission's opinion, which came on 23 October. The Commission found in Italy's DBP a 'particularly serious non-compliance' with the country-specific recommendations in relation to both the expenditure benchmark and the structural balance. According to the Commission's opinion, Italy was not projected to comply with the debt reduction target either. It therefore rejected Italy's DBP, and allowed the Italian government three weeks to present a new one (European Commission 2018b). This was the first time the European Commission had formally turned down a Member State's budget in the framework of the European Semester.

On 13 November, Italy resubmitted its 2019 DBP, which provided for an increase in the target for the sale of public assets to 1% of GDP in order to expedite the reduction of the government debt ratio. It also included exceptional expenditures of around 0.2% of GDP in 2019, 2020 and 2021, due to extraordinary events that exposed Italy's hydrogeological vulnerability (Ministry of the Economy and Finance 2018). In a letter attached to the revised budget, Giovanni Tria reiterated that 'the fiscal expansion decided by the government is confined to what is strictly necessary to counter the slowdown in the business cycle' (Tria 2018c). A few days later, in its formal opinion of Italy's revised DBP, the Commission noted that changes to the previous version were 'very limited, mainly consisting in a higher privatisation target for 2019' (European Commission 2018c). It thus confirmed that both the expenditure benchmark and the structural balance pointed to a serious non-compliance with the country-specific recommendations, and that the government debt ratio would in any case not decrease at a sufficient pace. Along with its opinion, and under Art. 126(3) TFEU, the Commission presented Italy with a formal report on the debt criterion, which represents the first step in the EDP. The report remarked Italy's lack of compliance with the debt reduction benchmark, pointing to the existence of an excessive deficit as per the SGP. Net of all relevant factors, the report concluded that the debt criterion 'should be considered as not complied with, and that a debt-based EDP is thus warranted' (European Commission 2018d). The Economic and Financial Committee and the Eurogroup also endorsed the Commission's report while welcoming the ongoing dialogue between Italian authorities and the Commission itself.

After an initial phase of outright contestation on the part of government leaders,[11] the threatening prospect of an EDP, as well as fast-rising bond yields, pushed the Italian government to give in to European demands. On 18 December, in a letter to the Commission, the government said it was willing to intervene and adjust its budgetary policy in line with the Commission's opinion. In particular, it set out to reduce its net primary expenditure and to increase its fiscal revenue. Given the circumstances, the letter was exceptionally signed by PM Conte, along with Minister of the Economy Tria (Conte and Tria 2018). The following day, the Commission replied to Italy, appreciating the Italian government's efforts to amend the draft budget consistently with EU rules. While

[11] Following the Commission's opinion of Italy's revised DBP, Matteo Salvini sarcastically declared he was 'also waiting for a letter from Santa' (Il Messaggero 2018).

remaining committed to monitoring budgetary developments in the country, the Commission said Italy's announced measures would allow for a stop to the EDP if approved before the end of the year (Juncker *et al.* 2018).

Despite a last-minute deal between EU authorities and the Italian government, Conte I's relationship with Europe was pretty turbulent overall. Born as an unprecedented sovereigntist coalition, the Conte I government gave ample proof of its Euroscepticism in the definition of its budgetary policy. Not only did Italy's 2019 DBP flout the Commission's country-specific recommendations and SGP rules, but the government's approach to the EU remained confrontational throughout the European Semester.

7. Conclusions

This article has compared the Conte I and Conte II governments' orientation towards the EU. With an eye to the composition of the two cabinets, their political programme and their budgetary policy in the framework of the European Semester, the article has argued that a shift in the Italian government's approach to the EU occurred in the transition from Conte I to Conte II, due to the PD's involvement in the latter. We showed that the PD exercised a 'mitigation effect' on the government's Euroscepticism, leading to a more accommodating relationship with EU authorities. In particular, we identified three manifestations of such a 'mitigation effect'.

First, the political programme of the Conte I cabinet offered clear evidence of that government's Euroscepticism. The Contract envisaged recourse to deficit spending and committed the parties to a radical review of the EU's economic governance. By contrast, upon the inauguration of his second government experience, Conte's policy statements to the Chamber of Deputies pointed to a pro-European turn, emphasising the need to address rising policy challenges in a fully European perspective. The PD exercised a 'mitigation effect' by making pro-Europeanism a precondition for joining the coalition partnership with the M5S. Second, the unprecedented party composition of Conte I earned it the label of 'sovereigntist' government as it combined two anti-EU groupings and included figures such as Paolo Savona, an anti-Europeanist who served as European Affairs Minister. The later changeover from League to PD ministers brought with it a Europeanist breath in the Conte II government. Roberto Gualtieri, a Brussels insider with previous working experience in EU institutions, became Minister of Economy, while pro-European Vincenzo Amendola took office as Minister of European Affairs. The Conte II government soon proposed long-time Europeanist Paolo Gentiloni for the post of European Commissioner, a clear sign of the government's changing attitude towards the EU and of the 'mitigation effect' provided by the PD.

Third, in terms of budgetary policy, both Conte I and Conte II fell short of the Commission's country-specific recommendations and SGP rules. However, their draft budgets were received differently by European authorities. Found to be in serious non-compliance, Conte I's 2019 DBP was rejected by the European Commission in its formal opinion, which was without precedent in the history of the European Semester. As Italy's revised DBP was almost unchanged from the previous version, the Commission took the first step towards the opening of an EDP against the country. By contrast, despite finding Conte II's 2020 DBP at risk of non-compliance, the Commission did not ask for a

resubmission of the budget, appreciating Italy's commitment to EU rules. Arguably, the two governments' approach to Europe played a role in the Commission's evaluations. Conte I acted in open defiance of European authorities, displaying an obstinate attitude throughout its exchanges with the European Commission. On the contrary, while not meeting the relevant macroeconomic benchmarks, Conte II maintained an accommodating line in its relations with Brussels, and proved willing to adjust its budgetary position consistently with the Commission's requirements. This offers final evidence of the PD's 'mitigation effect' on the government's Euroscepticism.

Understanding the causes of Italy's changed approach to the EU in the transition from Conte I to Conte II may lay the groundwork for a comparative research agenda with a focus on Western Europe. Comparable cases in Western Europe might help to explain how and why government reshuffles lead to changed orientations towards the EU. Specifically, our 'mitigation effect' hypothesis may be tested on other governing coalitions which include both a Eurosceptic and a mainstream party. Finally, further research may investigate this issue by adopting different methodologies, particularly by using quantitative techniques.

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How and why do Italian Party Leaders survive in office or come to an end?

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is twofold: to explore the dynamics of party leadership change in Italy, and to try to assess which (if any) characteristics of the leadership race (LR) to appoint (or re-appoint) the party leader, in combination with other conditions, could favour leadership re-selection in office at the end of the term, rather than a more or less forced early departure. To this end, we have taken into account about thirty LRs promoted by four Italian political parties over the last three decades, relying on a methodology which is new in this field of research: qualitative comparative analysis.

1. Introduction

A recent comparative article (Vicentini and Pritoni 2021) applied Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) to assess whether the two separate moments in which party leaders are selected and de-selected may be connected. More specifically, the authors investigated which (if any) characteristics of the selection system – in combination with other conditions such as participation in government and party electoral support – could favour leadership re-selection in office. They concluded by indicating four different combinations of conditions and suggesting different paths for future research, including a qualitative in-depth analysis to explain deviant cases and better understand country and party peculiarities, as well as the specific idiosyncratic characteristics of some LRs. This explains the decision to complement that study by focusing on a single country during the same period (approximately the last thirty years).

The choice to focus on the Italian case is motivated by different reasons. It is well known that in the early 1990s the old party system collapsed, and a new majoritarian electoral law was introduced (Cotta and Verzichelli 2020). It created a new basis for the internal organization of Italian political parties, which became more and more centred around the leaders. In this regard, the personalisation of political life (Rahat and Kenig 2020) and the presidentialisation of political parties (Passarelli 2015) affected the process and visibility of leadership selection and leadership change. In fact, Italian political parties are currently characterised by very different mechanisms of leadership selection, which are expected to produce different effects. It was no coincidence that we witnessed very solid leadership on the right side of the political spectrum (from Berlusconi to Salvini) and extremely fragile leaders on the centre-left side.

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That said, as far as party selection is concerned, we take into account the same four parties analysed in the comparative study, as they cover the whole left-right *continuum* and they are the only parties that were present on the Italian political scene for the entire thirty-year period under consideration. Actually, during this period they all underwent various changes in names and/or in organizational structure, following merges with other parties and/or internal ideological revisions (Cotta and Verzichelli 2020). Therefore, the huge variability over time in terms of organizational structure, electoral support, government participation and coalition potential (Sartori 1970) clearly had a significant impact in terms of leadership dynamics, which guarantees variability in the dataset. These parties are: the mainstream centre-left party [Democratic Party of the Left (PDS) until 1998, thereafter Democrats of the Left (DS) and finally Democratic Party since 2007 (PD)]; the mainstream centre-right party up until a couple of years ago [Forza Italia (FI) up until 2008, thereafter People of Freedom (PDL) and finally Forza Italia (FI) again since 2013]; a small leftist party that was an important coalition partner for about twenty years but has not been in Parliament since 2008 [Communist Re-foundation (PRC)], and a former regional right-wing populist party that has recently became the most voted Italian party thanks to its 'sovranist relocation' [Northern League (LN) /League (for Salvini Premier)].[1]

This contribution proceeds as follows: the next section introduces the theoretical framework, while section 3 is devoted to the calibration of both conditions and the outcome, and also offers the chance to describe the characteristics of the LRs promoted by the four parties under scrutiny over the last thirty years. Section 4 briefly presents the dataset and the main dynamics of party leadership change in Italy. Section 5 applied QCA to look at the different combinations of conditions which lead to the (possible) renewal of the party office *vis-a-vis* a more or less conflicting departure. Finally, in the conclusions, the findings relating to the Italian case are discussed in relation to the original comparative work (Vicentini and Pritoni 2021).

2. Theoretical framework and hypotheses

In their comparative study, Vicentini and Pritoni (2021) structured a novel theoretical framework by bringing together different strands of literature such as leadership selection, leadership survival, party change, etc. We refer to the same framework here, briefly recalling the main points and hypotheses to be taken into account for the successive QCA analysis.

While recent studies (Scarrow et al. 2017) show a certain uniformity regarding the core architecture of party organization, they also found variation between countries and party families in terms of their internal processes, with particular regard to how internally democratic they are, especially in terms of leadership selection procedures. However, over the

[1] As is well known, both PD and PDL came from the merging of, respectively, DS and FI with two other parties (the Daisy and Alleanza Nazionale), coming from a distinct political tradition and presenting a different organizational structure which may be interesting to consider in terms of leadership dynamics.Still, we prefer not to include those two parties in the analysis because of the need to have a balanced (though small) sample with only a mainstream centre-left and centre-right party vs. a smaller left-wing and right-wing populist/radical party. Moreover, while PDS/DS already existed in the 1990s before dissolving within PD, this is not the case for the Daisy, so it would have created a further problem of temporal continuity.

last few decades, the enhancement of intra-party democracy has often accompanied the growing personalisation of political life and presidentialisation of Western political parties (Poguntke and Webb 2005; Passarelli 2015; Rahat and Kenig 2020).This has entailed increased academic attention to the methods through which parties choose their leaders (Scarrow 1999; LeDuc 2001; Caul Kittilson and Scarrow 2006; Kenig 2009; Hazan and Rahat 2010; Cross and Katz 2013; Pilet and Cross 2014; Wauters 2014; Cross and Pilet 2015; Kenig*et al.* 2015; Vicentini 2020). However, there have been considerably fewer studies focusing on how and why leadership tenures end (Cross and Blais 2012; Gruber *et al.* 2015; Ennser-Jedenastik and Schumacher 2015-2020). Most of the few studies in the field suggest that leaders chosen by more inclusive methods face greater risks of de-selection (Bueno de Mesquita*et al.* 2002; Ennser-Jedenastik and Schumacher 2015; Ennser-Jedenastik and Müller, 2015; Schmacher and Giger 2017; Ennser-Jedenastik and Schumacher 2020). However, there are also scholars who suggest that a growing intra-party democracy will increase the legitimacy of the party leadership, securing greater organizational autonomy (Mair 1994; Sandri and Pauwels 2011; Ramiro 2016). Accordingly, we do not have clear expectations concerning the direction of the relation, but still we assume that the size of the selectorate affects leadership re-selection (H1).

Furthermore, the degree of approval that party leaders receive from their *selectorate* – even in the case of 'coronations' of a single candidate (Kenig 2008), i.e. with the absence of a formal opponent – is indicative of the extent to which they are in danger of being dismissed in the near future (Ennser-Jedenastik and Muller2015). In turn, a contested LR (namely a race with more than one candidate running for the leadership) which is also competitive (as it ends with very close results between the first two candidates) is more likely to be divisive for the party, which may contribute to further enhancing internal factionalism (Ware 1979; Hazan and Rahat 2010;Wichowsky and Niebler2010).Thus, when LRs are very competitive, we assume that parties are very internally fragmented, and therefore the office of party leader is particularly at stake (H2a). Similarly, even in the absence of an opponent, we expect a party leader selected or re-selected with a low approval rate to be less likely to be re-selected (H2b).

That said, leaders who overcome the hurdle of the first mandate are expected to exert a stronger control over their own party, which means that they are more likely to survive in office in subsequent years (Ennser-Jedenastik and Muller 2015). Accordingly, we hypothesise more chances of re-selection in successive LRs for incumbent leaders (H3). However, a party leader cannot stay in office indefinitely without showing signs of 'deterioration' (Vicentini and Pritoni 2021). In fact, quantitative studies on leadership survival (Andrews and Jackman 2008; Houriuchi *et al.* 2015) have demonstrated that younger party leaders tend to stay in office for a longer period compared to older colleagues.

Furthermore, previous research has found that electoral defeats and being stuck in opposition increase the probability of leader replacement (Andrews and Jackman 2008; Ennser-Jedenastik and Müller 2015). However, losing and winning elections may have a completely different meaning for mainstream and challenger or niche parties. Likewise, government participation is likely to be beneficial only for leaders of senior government parties, whereas the impact on leaders of challenger parties might go in the opposite direction (Ennser-Jedenastik and Muller 2015). In fact, smaller (challenger) parties may have different party goals and tend to consider policy purity (or ideology) more important than

winning votes or taking government office (Harmel and Janda 1994). Accordingly, regardless of electoral performance, we assume that a leader of a big mainstream office-seeking governing party is less likely to be removed from his/her party office, notably if he/she is simultaneously the head of government (H4a), while we expect the contrary in the case of smaller parties (H4b).

All these things considered, Vicentini and Pritoni (2021) identified five main conditions which are likely to affect the re-selection to office *vis-a-vis* de-selection/departure, both alone and in combination with each other: 1) whether there is an outgoing leader running for re-election (incumbency); 2) broad inclusiveness of the LR called to appoint the party leader; 3) a large victory (namely low competitiveness in contested LRs or high approval rates in coronations of a candidate); 4) participation in government during leadership tenure, and 5) party electoral support during tenure (whether the candidates run to become leader of either a big mainstream or small niche/challenger party). Though being aware that there are a number of other potential conditions that may be considered (leader personality, institutional context, external events etc.), it is not worth including too many conditions in QCA (Schneider and Wagemann 2012). This is particularly true if we only consider the Italian case, which of course presents a much more reduced dataset with respect to the one employed for the original comparative study. Either way, the focus on Italy just allows us to better complement the QCA findings with qualitative reflections concerning other specific factors that may have affected LRs as well as early terminations in office, especially in order to explain possible deviant cases.

3. Calibration

The first step in each fs-QCA is the 'calibration' of sets (both the conditions and the outcome), which can be conducted directly or indirectly (Ragin 2008, 85-105). This fundamental process, which should be as transparent as possible, (Schneider and Wagemann 2010, 403), allows us to investigate in detail the characteristics of the party leaders and LRs under scrutiny. We used the 'indirect method' – which requires the grouping of cases into set-membership scores on the basis of the individual researcher decision (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 35) – for calibrating the outcome as well as all conditions, except for that of 'Big Party', for which we opted for the direct method. Still, with respect to Vicentini and Pritoni's (2021) comparative paper, a few conditions (i.e. inclusiveness, winning margin and party electoral size) have been slightly re-calibrated in order to better adapt to the Italian context.

3.1. Incumbency

The operationalization of the first causal condition (incumbency) is easily explained: we assign '1' when the outgoing party leader runs for re-appointment in office, against other candidates or in uncontested races. Instead, '0' is assigned to all LRs presenting new candidates, including people who have been party chairs years before. Of course, in the case of contested races, it is not taken for granted that 'incumbent' party leaders will be reconfirmed in office. Theoretically, this is not the case for single candidates either, as there might be a threshold to be reached (normally 50 per cent). Yet, not reconfirming an incumbent leader in a coronation is very unlikely.

3.2. LR inclusiveness

According to the literature on candidate and leader selection, the main indicator to be taken into account to assess LR inclusiveness is the type (and size) of the *selectorate*, i.e. the group of people called on to choose the party leader. Scholars usually consider six 'pure' types of *selectorates*, ranked from the most to the least inclusive (Kenig 2009; Pilet and Cross 2014; Spies and Kaiser 2014, Kenig *et al.* 2015): electorate (open primaries), membership (closed primaries), party delegates, party council, party parliamentary group or party top organs, and party leader.

Thus, we assign '1' to open primary election, which allows all party sympathisers to choose the party chair. Far fewer people – from a few thousand to hundreds of thousands, depending on party membership – are (potentially and actually) involved in closed primaries, which nonetheless represents a fully inclusive system of leadership selection (we thus assign a '0.6' coefficient). Instead, the most typical *selectorate* called to appoint the party leader in the European context, namely the delegates to the party Congress, is coded with '0.4', just below the inclusiveness threshold. Not only do party delegates rarely surpass 1,000 people, but they are often required to approve a single candidate rather than choose between more competitors. Then, '0.2' is assigned when the appointment of the party leader is entrusted to the formal vote of the party top organs, normally made up of a few hundred people. Finally, '0' refers to uncontested races wherein the party leader is chosen (or reconfirmed) by informal negotiation within the party elite or he/she is self-proclaimed.

3.3. Large victory

The literature on primary elections and OMOV systems has estimated competitiveness in several different ways: through dichotomous (Hacker 1975; Bernstein 1977) or metrical variables (Piereson and Smith 1975; Grau 1981), or by using only the results of the winner, of the two most voted candidates, or of all the competitors (Atkeson 1998; Kenig 2008). We opted for a simple ordinal scale: very competitive, somewhat competitive, barely competitive, not at all competitive. A similar criterion was applied for measuring the winning margin of a single candidate: we assume 80% approval as the threshold between a (somewhat or very) large victory for the newly elected or reappointed leader and a (somewhat or very) disappointing result which may indicate a certain level of internal opposition. Accordingly we assigned '0' to very competitive contested LRs (less than 10 percentage points between winner and second candidate) and coronations with approval rates lower than 70%; '0.33' to somewhat competitive LRs (winning margin between 10 and 20%) and coronations with approval rates between 70 and 80%; '0.67' to barely competitive LRs (winning margin between 20 and 30%) and coronations with approval rates between 80 and 90%; '1' to not at all competitive LRs (more than 30 percentage points between a single intended winner and the second candidate) and coronations wherein the party leader is almost unanimously appointed (with an approval rate greater than 90% or by acclamation) or is automatically appointed with no formal vote.

3.4. Government participation

As far as participation in government is concerned, we first distinguish between chairs whose party was mostly in government during the leadership tenure and chairs whose party was mostly in opposition during tenure. Moreover, we also distinguish between party leaders who personally serve as heads of government (Berlusconi, Renzi, etc.) and party leaders who lead their governing party from the outside (or perhaps hold some other executive positions but not the 'main' one). Keeping these two criteria together, we came up with a five-point scale: we assigned '1'when the party is in government during the leadership tenure and the party leader is also the head of government, while '0.8' indicates that the party is the major party in government during the leadership tenure but its leader is not the head of government. '0.6' is assigned when the party is more in government than in opposition during tenure or is in coalition as junior partner. '0.3' is assigned when the party is mostly in opposition during the leadership tenure or at most provides external support to the government. Finally; '0' is assigned when the party remains in opposition for the entire leadership tenure.

3.5. Party electoral support

As anticipated above, for the last condition – namely party electoral support – we adopted the 'direct method' of calibration, taking into account the vote percentage in the closest general election in the course of the leadership tenure. Accordingly, we looked at electoral results for the four political parties under scrutiny in the 30-year period considered, taking into account the proportional vote in the Chamber of Deputies. More precisely, considering the traditional fragmentation of the Italian party system over the last 30 years (Cotta and Verzichelli 2020), we established a 15% threshold as the 'point of maximum indifference' between big and small parties. 15% indeed represents the average value of electoral support in our dataset, considering all the four parties over the last thirty years. Consequently, we set a 25% threshold for identifying 'full membership' (in that all parties obtaining more than 25% of electoral votes are undoubtedly 'big parties'), and a 5% threshold for identifying 'full non-membership' (in that all parties which cannot reach at least 5% of electoral votes are undoubtedly 'small parties').

3.6. Leaders' departure

Finally, we need to explain the calibration of the outcome. Reappointment in office represents the most 'positive' outcome for a party leader, which we assume to be 'qualitatively' different from any kind of departure, voluntary or not. Accordingly, we assigned '1' to party leaders who were reappointed in office at the end of the tenure.

The literature suggests that reasons for departure can be divided into five categories, ranging from the one showing the lowest level of conflict between the outgoing leader and his/her party to the highest level of conflict (Cross and Blais 2012; Gruber *et al.* 2015). These are, respectively: force majeure, voluntary resignation, post-election resignation, resignation under pressure, formal removal. The first category refers to cases where the party leader dies or the party disappears. In this case we do not know what would have happened otherwise: maybe the party leader would have been re-selected in the subsequent LR, maybe not. Accordingly, we assign '0.6' to party leaders who leave

their office because of force majeure, which is assumed to be the conceptual threshold between a positive and a negative outcome.

Thereafter we have three distinct types of resignation. The first, coded with '0.4', is the truly voluntary resignation in which the leader autonomously decides to leave. This means that the leader could remain in office if he/she wanted to, but it may also hide some internal tensions. The second category encompasses what has been said previously concerning the relation between leadership survival and electoral failure. Here we consider resignations that occur within one month of an election with 'national value', namely general and European elections. The third type (resignation under pressure) includes cases where there was a broad, organized movement calling on the incumbent to resign from the leadership (Pilet and Cross 2014), regardless of a negative electoral outcome, although the two things are often interlinked. Yet we prefer to collapse these two categories into one (Gruber *et al.* 2015), assigning it '0.2'.

To conclude, the 'formal removal' category (coded with '0') originally referred to a specific instrument through which a party top organ votes against the leader to remove him/her from office, which is typical of Westminster systems. However, here we adopt this definition to refer to cases in which the outgoing leader is formally challenged and defeated by other contenders at the end of a (more or less defined) fixed term, for instance in a party congress. From this point of view, formal removal (or de-selection) is just the opposite of re-selection.

4. Leadership selection and change in four Italian parties

Our sample includes 33 LRs/coronations accounting for both the party leader's first appointment in office and all the reappointments at the end of the term, for a total of 18 different party leaders. About half of the considered party leaders were not re-elected to office. Among those who were successfully reappointed (eight), five completed three or more terms in office. This seems to confirm that once the hurdle of the first mandate is overcome, party leaders are more likely to be reappointed. As far as the reasons for departure are concerned, there are only a few cases of party leaders who came to an end because of force majeure (Fassino) or formal removal (Franceschini, Martina), while 'voluntary resignations' and 'post-election/under pressure resignations' represent the most populated categories.

That said, it is worth noting that ten out of 18 considered party leaders chaired the mainstream centre-left party in its various forms (PDS, DS, PD). In this regard, the changing organizational structure and the progressive democratisation of leadership selection procedures did not help to solve the atavistic weakness of centre-left leaders. In the early nineties the PDS used to select its chair by a formal vote of the party top organs, which was the typical system characterising its predecessor, the Italian Communist Party (PCI). In ten years, three different leaders ran the party from its foundation in 1991: Occhetto, D'Alema and Veltroni. Instead, the DS had only a single party chair (Fassino), elected by the entire party membership for three consecutive terms. In April 2007, during the last DS Congress, Fassino was reconfirmed as DS chairman for a few months with the specific mandate to dissolve his own party in view of the forthcoming foundation of PD.

In a context of growing personalisation and presidentialisation of Italian politics (Passarelli 2015), open primaries represented a foundational myth for PD and reflected the 'thin ideology' characterising the party's overall organizational model, which was intended to merge two parties coming from completely different traditions: Communist and Catholic. In 2007, 3.5 million voters crowned Veltroni as first chair of the newly born party. Thereafter, this new system of leadership selection (accompanied by a preliminary vote by the party membership intended to reduce the number of candidates) was introduced in the party Statute. Since then, PD has resorted to open primaries to select its party chair four more times. In the last one (2019), voters were fewer than half compared to 2007, which shows a growing disaffection towards the instrument, going hand in hand with the PD erosion of electoral support. Meanwhile, leadership volatility further increased: in March 2021, the party appointed its eighth leader since its foundation in 2007, following the unexpected and contentious resignation of Nicola Zingaretti, the umpteenth party chair forced to resign because of internal conflicts and/or disappointing electoral results. In fact, no PD leader has been able to conclude a four-years term in office and obtain reappointment, notwithstanding the large victories they all had, once elected, in their first term. This is true for the four leaders selected by open primaries (Veltroni, Bersani, Renzi, Zingaretti) but also for those elected by a much less inclusive selectorate (Franceschini and Martina),[2] who then failed to be reappointed as they were both largely defeated in the subsequent open primaries. Only Matteo Renzi was able to be re-appointed by winning open primaries in 2013 and 2017, but just after a period of interruption in which the party was temporary led by Guglielmo Epifani. Still, Renzi's second term finished just one year later, following a severe electoral defeat in the 2018 general election.

Still, leadership volatility is not a 'leftist' characteristic. In fact, the PRC had much more durable leaders compared to the PD. Over the years, the party has not changed its practice of leadership selection: since its foundation in 1991 the choice is formally entrusted to party top organs, a system borrowed from the PCI. From 1994 to 2008, the party alternated (troubled) times as a government coalition party with periods of external support and opposition, also facing some serious electoral defeats, but the leadership of Bertinotti remained largely unchallenged. After Bertinotti's voluntary resignation, the party found another quite long-standing leader (Ferrero) from 2008 to 2017 but progressively became an opposition force which was largely irrelevant on the national political scene, losing all its seats in Parliament and its 'coalition potential'. The trend did not seem to reverse with the recent change of leadership.

Moving to the other side of the political spectrum, leadership volatility is even lower. Bossi's leadership of the LN was undisputed from its foundation in 1989 till 2012. The party leader was formally elected as a single candidate by Congress delegates, but

[2] In the case of the early resignation of the previous leader, the appointment of the new party chair is not entrusted to open primaries but to the party National Assembly, a body made up of about 1,000 persons, most of them selected during the previous party Congress (in fact, this system may be compared to the vote of party delegates in terms of inclusiveness). Actually, the PD Statute also established that in the event that none of the candidates for Secretary obtained 50% in the open primaries, the same National Assembly had the right to choose the new party leader. However, this event has never occurred in practice and it was formally prevented after the Statute's amendment in 2019, as only the first two candidates (according to party members' votes) qualified for the successive open primaries.

differently from PD and PRC, he/she did not serve for a fixed term. In fact, the LN did not hold any National Congress to renew internal offices between 2002 and 2012. Still, in 2012, the historical LN leader was forced to resign because of a scandal of the alleged appropriation of party funds for the private affairs of his family, although no pressure to leave apparently came from within his own party. Since then, after the short leadership of Maroni, the party radically changed its system of leadership selection, opting for closed primaries. Under the new leadership of Matteo Salvini (since 2013), the League has progressively become the most voted Italian party, reaching its peak in the 2019 European elections with 34% votes. Still, the new party, renamed 'League for Salvini Premier', was still unable to see its leader as head of government, although it served as (junior) coalition partner (though keeping some opposition attitudes) from 2018 to 2019 and in the current Draghi government. Thus, we expect Salvini as bound to keep his party office in the years to come, unless he suffers a resounding defeat in the next general election. In fact, the evidence pointed out by Vicentini and Pritoni's (2021) comparative work seemed to suggest that leaders of big parties are more subject to the effect of electoral swings compared to leaders of small parties. This is because, in the case of small parties, there is predictably less internal competition to become party chair as the leader has fewer resources to distribute, for instance in terms of government offices. In any case, for both the League and the PRC, the 'radical' political culture may contribute to explain the preference for a strong and durable 'charismatic' leadership. On the one hand, rightist forces tend to be more leadership-dominated (Schumacher and Giger 2017); on the other hand, parties coming from a communist tradition tend to disregard challenges to the dominant coalition (Vicentini and Pritoni 2021).

Still, leadership change does not seem to be an issue in the case of a personal party such as FI/PDL/FI, based on Berlusconi's charismatic leadership (Calise 2015). In fact, the party founder is still formally the party chair after almost 30 years, notwithstanding his old age, judicial problems and recent huge electoral losses. It also implies the lack of formal leadership selection procedures at the national level, as Berlusconi's leadership is self-proclaimed. Even in the (sporadic) cases when FI or PDL held a national congress (four in almost three decades), the reappointment of Berlusconi was not submitted to a formal vote of the delegates, but simply to audience 'acclamation'. In fact, Italy has been defined as the country of 'extreme selectorates' (Kenig 2009: 437): on the one hand, we have maximum inclusiveness with regard to the mechanism of selection of PD/centre-left leaders and candidates; on the other, a case of 'self-enthroned' leadership.

5. Exploring the determinants of party leaders' re-selection with QCA

Now we return to fuzzy-set QCA[3] in order to move from the explorative and descriptive overview of party leadership change in Italy presented above to more explicative reflections concerning the combination of conditions that might contribute to clarifying whether and how a party leader is reconfirmed in office or forced to resign.

In QCA terms, the four hypotheses presented in section 2 above can be addressed in terms of necessity and/or sufficiency: a scarcely or largely inclusive LR is necessary

[3] We use the software fsQCA 3.0 (Ragin and Davey 2017).

and/or sufficient for the party leader to be re-selected (H1); a large victory when originally appointed is necessary and/or sufficient for the party leader to be re-selected (H2), incumbency is necessary and/or is sufficient for the party leader to be re-selected (H3); the combination of presence in government and large party electoral support is sufficient for the party leader to be re-selected (H4a); the combination of absence in government and limited party electoral support is sufficient for the party leader to be re-selected (H4b).

Table 1. Truth table

Incumb	BroadIn	LargeVic	Gov	BigPar	N	Outcome	Raw cons	PRI cons	SYM cons
1	1	1	1	1	4 (12%)	0	0.65	0.50	0.50
1	**0**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**3 (21%)**	**1**	**0.84**	**0.79**	**0.79**
1	**0**	**1**	**1**	**0**	**3 (30%)**	**1**	**0.83**	**0.80**	**0.80**
1	0	0	0	0	3 (39%)	0	0.73	0.64	0.74
0	1	1	0	1	3 (48%)	0	0.57	0.36	0.36
0	**0**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**3 (57%)**	**1**	**0.88**	**0.82**	**0.86**
1	**0**	**1**	**0**	**0**	**2 (63%)**	**1**	**0.90**	**0.89**	**0.89**
0	1	1	1	1	2 (69%)	0	0.49	0.13	0.15
0	**0**	**1**	**0**	**0**	**2 (75%)**	**1**	**0.86**	**0.81**	**0.81**
1	**1**	**1**	**1**	**0**	**1 (78%)**	**1**	**0.84**	**0.79**	**0.79**
1	**0**	**1**	**0**	**1**	**1 (81%)**	**1**	**0.93**	**0.92**	**0.92**
1	0	0	0	1	1 (84%)	0	0.60	0.45	0.45
0	**1**	**1**	**0**	**0**	**1 (87%)**	**1**	**0.98**	**0.97**	**0.97**
0	0	1	1	0	1 (90%)	0	0.62	0.41	0.41
0	0	1	0	1	1 (93%)	0	0.75	0.65	0.65
0	**0**	**1**	**0**	**1**	**1 (97%)**	**1**	**0.84**	**0.62**	**0.62**
0	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**1 (100%)**	**1**	**1.00**	**1.00**	**1.00**

Note: All other combinations of conditions are logical remainders.

- PRI: Proportional reduction in consistency
- SYM: Symmetrical consistency
- Theoretical assumptions (directional expectations) for intermediate solution:
    1. Outgoing leader running for re-election (incumbency) should contribute to the outcome when it is present;
    2. No theoretical assumptions (directional expectations) for broad inclusiveness;
    3. Large victory should contribute to the outcome when it is present;
    4. No theoretical assumptions (directional expectations) for presence in government;
    5. No theoretical assumptions (directional expectations) for big party.
- In **bold** all single truth table rows included in the 'Boolean minimisation process'.

The analysis of *necessary* conditions for leader reappointment shows that no condition (or its non-occurrence) was necessary for the outcome (or for its non-occurrence)[4]. This is not even the case for sufficient conditions taken alone. Yet, our analysis shows that five different combinations of conditions are *sufficient* for being reconfirmed as a party leader. More precisely, in QCA, an empirical test of sufficiency set-relations between combinations of conditions and the outcome is conducted with a "truth table".

[4] All the consistency thresholds were lower than 0.9, which is the value above which empirical evidence supports the claim that a condition is necessary for the outcome (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 278).

Specifically, the process proceeds as follows. *i)* We convert the data matrix into the abovementioned truth table. *ii)* Single truth table rows are assessed for their consistency scores regarding whether they count as sufficient conditions for the result. Finally, *iii)* if they count as sufficient conditions, they are included in the "Boolean minimization process"; otherwise, they are not. See, on this, Table 1 above.

When logical remainders (i.e., combinations of conditions which are characterized by no empirical cases in the dataset at hand) exist, such as in this case, the solution formulas – complex, parsimonious and intermediate – are not interchangeable. In QCA, solution formulas differ on the basis of assumptions on logical remainders. The complex solution does not include remainder rows when minimizing the consistent rows with cases. The parsimonious solution treats remainders as 'don't care', stimulating outcome values to obtain parsimony. Conversely, the intermediate solution evaluates the plausibility of remainders in accordance with the researcher's simplifying assumptions based on theoretical or substantive empirical knowledge. In these cases – even though the most advanced methodological literature does not reach consensus on this issue (Thiem 2016; Thiem et al. 2015) – it is generally suggested that one should consider the intermediate solution to reduce the risk of drawing incorrect inferences about the automatic counterfactuals used in the parsimonious and complex solution (Ragin 2008, 175; Jano 2016, 15).[5]

That said, please see Table 2 presenting solutions terms, consistency, coverage and cases covered of the intermediate solution, which is as follows:

~BigParty*~Government*LargeVictory +
BigParty*Government*~BroadInclusiveness +
LargeVictory*~BroadInclusiveness*Incumbency +
~BigParty*LargeVictory*Incumbency +
~BigParty*~Government*~BroadInclusiveness*~Incumbency

Table 2. Intermediate solution: solution terms. consistency. coverage and cases covered

Solution term	Raw coverage	Unique coverage	Consistency	Cases covered (membership > 0.5)
~BigParty* ~Government *LargeVictory	0.342718	0.037379	0.863081	Salvini1 (LN) (0.96,1) **Maroni** (LN) **(0.88, 0.4)**, Bossi1 (LN) (0.7,1), Bertinotti1 (PRC) (0.67,1), Ferrero2 (0.67,1)
BigParty* Government* ~BroadInclusiveness	0.262621	0.084466	0.818457	**Epifani (PD) (0.8,0.4)**, Veltroni1 (PDS) (0.8,1), Berlusconi1 (FI) (0.6,1), Berlusconi2 (FI) (0.6,1), Berlusconi3 (PDL) (0.6,1), **D'Alema (PDS) (0.6,0.4)**, **Martina (PD) (0.6,0)**

[5] For the sake of transparency, as Thiem (2016) suggests, we also present the parsimonious solution.

LargeVictory* ~BroadInclusiveness* Incumbency	0.359709	0.072816	0.881094	Berlusconi2 (FI) (1,1), Berlusconi3 (PDL) (1,1), Berlusconi4 (FI) (1,1), Bertinotti2 (PRC) (0.67,1), Bertinotti3 (PRC) (0.67,1), Ferrero2 (PRC) (0.67,1), **Martina (PD) (0.6,0)**, Bossi1 (LN) (0.6,1), **Bossi2 (LN) (0.6,0.2)**
~BigParty *LargeVictory *Incumbency	0.251456	0.035922	0.836834	**Bossi2 (LN) (0.97,0.2)**, Salvini2 (LN) (0.96,1), Bossi1 (LN) (0.88,1), Bertinotti2 (PRC) (0.67,1), Bertinotti3 (PRC) (0.67,1), Ferrero2 (PRC) (0.67,1)
~BigParty* ~Government* ~BroadInclusiveness*~ Incumbency	0.166990	0.045146	0.895833	Ferrero1 (PRC) (0.8,1), Bertinotti1 (PRC) (0.8,1), **Maroni (LN) (0.6,0.4)**

- Intermediate solution coverage (proportion of membership explained by all paths identified): 0.689806
- Intermediate solution consistency ('how closely a perfect subset relation is approximated') (Ragin 2008, 44): 0.840828.
- Raw coverage: proportion of memberships in the outcome explained by a single path
- Unique coverage: 'proportion of memberships in the outcome explained solely by each individual solution term' (Ragin 2008, 86).
- Empirically contradictory cases are shown **in bold**.
- Complex solution: Incumbency*~BroadInclusiveness*LargeVictory + ~Incumbency*~BroadInclusiveness*~Government*~BigParty + ~Incumbency*LargeVictory*~Government*~BigParty + ~Incumbency*~BroadInclusiveness*Government*BigParty + Incumbency*LargeVictory*~BigParty(coverage: 0.66; consistency: 0.85)
- Parsimonious solution: ~Incumbency*~LargeVictory + BroadInclusiveness*~BigParty + ~BroadInclusiveness*Government*BigParty + BroadInclusiveness*~LargeVictory + ~LargeVictory*Government + ~Incumbency*~Government*~BigParty + LargeVictory*~Government*~BigParty + Incumbency*BroadInclusiveness*~Government + Incumbency*LargeVictory*~Government + Incumbency*~BroadInclusiveness*LargeVictory + Incumbency*Government*~BigParty + Incumbency*~BroadInclusiveness*Government (coverage: 0.74; consistency: 0.86)

Theoretically, the (intermediate) solution above means that re-selection in office is associated with five different combinations of conditions: first, leaders of small opposition parties who win the party office with a large victory are more likely to be re-selected. This solution term confirms theoretical expectations, as previous studies have shown that government participation is not beneficial for challenger or niche parties (Vicentini and Pritoni 2021). We only have a single deviant case here, namely a party leader who was not re-selected to office while presenting the abovementioned conditions: Roberto Maroni. Yet this contradictory case is easily explained. Maroni succeeded Bossi as League chair after the latter's forced resignation in 2012, and voluntary left the office one and a half years later, a few months after being elected President of the Lombardy Region. Although there are no internal party rules establishing the formal incompatibility between the two offices, Maroni declared he was leaving the position in order to work full-time for the Region, where he governed in coalition with the other centre-right forces (which may have not appreciated a President widely considered to have a partisan point of view). Thereafter, the new party leader, Salvini, progressively started the

national and 'sovranist' repositioning of the (Northern) League, which would have been much harder if the party had remained in the hands of the Lombardy President.

Secondly, re-selection to office seems to be more likely for big parties in government whose leaders have been selected by a non-inclusive selectorate. This might confirm the concerns of those scholars who suggested that inclusive procedures of selection are detrimental for leadership survival. Still, the contrary is not confirmed either, as shown by the short leadership of the two contradictory cases of PD leaders Epifani and Martina, both selected by a scarcely inclusive selectorate (the party National Assembly). In fact, their leadership was largely transitional (in view of the subsequent 'real' leadership selection by open primaries) and simply reflected the lack of valid alternative candidates and the necessity for a very fragmented party to show a certain unity in a delicate moment. As for the other deviant case, namely D'Alema, his resignation as PDS leader in 1998 may be explained with an argument similar to that made above with regard to Maroni. D'Alema was nominated Prime Minister, and although there was no formal incompatibility with his role of party chair, he preferred to leave in order to focus on the country's government. In fact, the fragile balances to keep united the contentious centre-left coalition implied a complex mediation between the interest of the various parties, which was probably easier to pursue while not being a leader of one of the parties at stake. In this regard, party traditions and the political context are also to be taken into account, as some parties are more likely to keep separate party offices and (monocratic) institutional offices.

Thirdly, leadership re-selection is apparently favoured by the absence of inclusiveness counterbalanced by a large victory once re-elected as party leader (incumbency). This is also in line with theoretical expectations, as incumbent party leaders are much more likely to be reconfirmed in office by scarcely inclusive selectorates. It is no coincidence, because political parties tend to adopt more inclusive procedures of selection as a consequence of a leadership crisis or electoral defeats (Cross and Blais 2012), possibly when the course of a long-standing leader is over. Furthermore, an incumbent leader is also quite likely to have a large victory once re-selected, unless he/she has started to show some signs of 'deterioration' because of age or the too-long administration of power within the party. Yet this does not seem to be the case for Berlusconi, as his leadership of FI is a structural feature linked to the 'personal' nature of the party (Calise 2015). Rather, 'deterioration' may have played a certain role in Bossi's resignation, which indeed appears as a deviant case. The fact that he was largely defeated by the young and still little-known Salvini in the 2013 primaries when he tried to win back his party office demonstrates that the grassroots had had enough of his 23-year leadership. As for the other deviant case, Martina, what we said above holds true.

Fourth, an incumbent leader of a small party who wins a large victory once elected is also more likely to be re-selected at the end of his/her term. The interpretation here is similar to what we said about the previous solution term: incumbent leaders are more likely to have large victory once re-elected. Moreover, leaders of small parties are likely to be less subjected to political contingencies.

Finally, the logical minimisation of the truth table shows that non-incumbent party leaders of small opposition parties elected through a scarcely inclusive LR have more chances of being reappointed to office. Actually, this solution only explains two

empirical cases referring to the first appointment of then long-serving PRC leaders, while Maroni turns out to be a deviant case again, for the reasons already explained.

6. Concluding remarks

In this paper, we have employed QCA in order to explore which (combinations of) conditions could favour the reappointment to office of Italian party leaders. We identified five different combinations: large victory, once elected as party chair of a small opposition party; scarce inclusiveness of the LR to select the leader of a big governing party; large victory but scarce inclusiveness of the LR to select an incumbent leader; large victory once re-elected as (incumbent) chair of a small party; scarce inclusiveness of the LR intended to select a brand-new leader (non-incumbent) of a small opposition party.

Thus, the Italian case presents few differences with respect to the findings shown by Vicentini and Pritoni (2021) in their recent four-country study. More precisely, starting from the same five conditions, they identified four solution terms: incumbency; small party electoral support and absence from government; absence from government counterbalanced by a large victory once elected as party leader, and inclusive procedure of selection and limited party electoral support. Still, some evidence remains valid for both studies: leaders who have already served for one or more party mandates seem to be more likely to be reconfirmed in office. At the same time, being in opposition is not necessarily an obstructing condition for a leader's reappointment, especially in the case of small parties and broad success in the previous LR. This latter condition is generally (but not always) a mirror of party unity and convinced support for a candidate with particular 'leadership skills'. Instead, the assumed legitimisation that may be associated with an inclusive process of selection does not guarantee re-selection.

Actually, with respect to the comparative study, the Italian case seems to confirm that party leaders selected by very inclusive procedures (i.e. open primary elections) are more in danger of being dismissed. However, while it is undeniable that PD leaders are particularly unstable, it is arguable that it may be a consequence of open primaries. Rather the recourse to open primaries to select the party chair (and the chief executive candidate) may also be considered as an attempt to compensate with popular legitimisation for the chronic weakness of centre-left leaders. Furthermore, the Italian case has to be interpreted considering the very peculiar nature of the (centre) right parties under scrutiny. If Berlusconi's party was undoubtedly a 'personal party' for at least two decades (Calise 2015), Bossi's Northern League was also close to that model, and it has clearly affected the dynamics of leadership selection and (the lack of) leadership change over the years. The progressive decline of Berlusconi's leadership, the new ascent of Salvini's League, the current and apparently irreversible political irrelevance of PRC and the continuous re-positioning of PD (in terms of alliances and internal political balances) would suggest replicating the same study in the next few years in order to assess the magnitude of change.

In any case, the present empirical analysis demonstrates the importance of focusing on the combined effects of different conditions to assess leadership re-selection and de-selection not only in a comparative perspective but also when dealing with a national case study. Yet, it also suggests caution in making generalised inferences. Accordingly, on the one hand, we are convinced that this novel methodological approach may inspire

different paths for future research in the field of party leadership selection and leadership survival. On the other hand, our study is a reminder of the importance of qualitatively considering country and party specificities in order to really understand the drivers and dynamics of leadership change in the different contexts.

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A contribution to [THE PROFESSION] series

Editing *South European Society and Politics*: A Labour of Love

An interview with Anna Bosco and Susannah Verney

Introduction

Anna Bosco is Associate Professor of Comparative Politics and Politics of the European Union at the University of Florence. She has carried out research on parties and party systems change in Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece and East-Central Europe.

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They are the Editors of the journal *South European Society and Politics* and the related Routledge book series. They have co-edited several comparative books, all published by Routledge: *Crisis Elections, New Contenders and Government Formation: Breaking the Mould in Southern Europe* (2018); *Protest Elections and Challenger Parties: Italy and Greece in the Economic Crisis* (2015); *Southern Europe and the Financial Earthquake: Coping with the First Phase of the International Crisis* (with Marina Costa Lobo, 2014); *Elections in Hard Times: Southern Europe, 2010–11* (2013); and a volume on Turkey, *The AKP Since Gezi Park: Moving to Regime Change in Turkey* (with Senem Aydın-Düzgit).

The following interview was conducted by the editor of *Italian Political Science*, **Nicolò Conti**, and edited by the two interviewees.

Nicolò Conti [NC]
Can you summarise the history of *South European Society and Politics*?

Anna Bosco and Susannah Verney [AB & SV]

SESP is now in its 26th year of publication. The journal's history reflects a quarter century of change, both in Southern Europe itself and in the way in which it is studied. The mid-1970s transitions to democracy in Portugal, Greece and Spain, followed by these countries' rapid requests to join the European Community, were crucial to the initial development of scholarly interest in Southern Europe as a region. These three new democracies, together with Italy, were perceived as a group with shared characteristics such as democratic fragility and difficulties in economic development. Twenty years after the regime changes, there were academic periodicals dedicated to the study of individual South European countries, but no social science journal covering the region as a whole. SESP was founded to fill this gap. The timing was important as in the mid-1990s, the region was changing shape. The Turkish, Cypriot and Maltese applications for European Union membership were seen as triggering the emergence of a 'New Southern Europe', alongside the

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existing 'Old-4'. SESP's mission was thus to deepen our understanding of a part of Europe which had become a significant focus of interest.

When the journal was launched in 1996, the study of Southern Europe was still somewhat in the shadow of transitology, a field which had been recently boosted by developments in Eastern Europe. This emphasis on its dictatorial past shaped a tendency to view Southern Europe as a region apart, in a different category from the rest of Western Europe and somewhat marginal to mainstream concerns. Over the subsequent years, the journal has tried to change this by choosing to publish on topics of broader interest in the social sciences and highlighting the relevance of South European experience. Characteristic were the special issues published in the journal's first years addressing welfare states, immigrants and the informal economy, gender inequalities, and unemployment and its consequences. All were 'hot topics' at the time and indeed, remain so today.

Thus, a central goal of SESP has been to put Southern Europe on the map of important academic debates. For example, SESP's contribution to Europeanisation studies – from the late 1990s, arguably the next big theme of research on Southern Europe – has included three special issues, examining both Europeanisation (published in 2000 and 2013) and de-Europeanisation (2016). A key issue of the last 15 years, through which SESP has contributed to the growing literature on democratic backsliding, has been Turkey's democratic decline, leading to regime change in 2018. Besides analyses of all the Turkish elections and referendums during this period, articles in SESP have addressed key dimensions of this process such as the Gezi Park mobilisation and the 'national will' backlash, grassroots clientelism, the Islamisation of Turkish society, public attitudes towards regime change, and the impact of social assistance and welfare regimes on regime support.

Meanwhile, the decade of economic and political crisis after 2008-09 was crucial in placing Southern Europe centre-stage. The danger of sovereign debt defaults with the potential to destabilise the eurozone attracted the spotlight of global attention. After extreme austerity triggered intense public discontent, the region became a vanguard of European political change. Phenomena identified in SESP as electoral and governmental 'epidemics', entailing party system mutation and difficulties in cabinet formation, soon spread to other European countries. SESP's crisis coverage dealt extensively with the consequences for political representation and the rise of challenger parties including the far right. But it also went well beyond this to address the crisis years' impact in multiple fields including the welfare state, administrative reform, environmental policy, emigration, centre-periphery relations, social capital, trust in the tax system, trade unions and even farms, as well as societal responses like the Spanish housing movement. In the last few years, the EU's Southern members have moved beyond the eurozone crisis to a new phase and once again this is reflected in SESP. The reversal of crisis-era policy measures, the particular experience of post-bailout Portugal and the politics of polarization are all topics of SESP special issues. And to bring the story right up to date, we also have a forthcoming special issue on the response to the covid pandemic in Southern Europe.

NC: Which theoretical approaches/methods are represented in the articles published by the journal

AB & SV: All are welcome! SESP has a clearly delimited geographical scope but huge boundaries in terms of disciplines as well as theoretical and methodological approaches covered. The journal only publishes articles focusing on Portugal, Spain, Italy, Greece, Cyprus, Malta and Turkey, either as case studies or in comparative perspective. At the same time, however, it accepts contributions by scholars of political science, sociology, political economy, social policy, social anthropology, contemporary history and socio-legal studies. As a consequence, there are no preferred theories or methods: any approach which serves our understanding of domestic politics and society in Southern Europe has a potential place in the journal.

NC: *South European Society and Politics* is ranked in the first quartile of the Journal Citation Reports (Impact Factor Best Quartile), an amazing achievement for a journal in area studies. How do you think this kind of ranking affects the authorship and readership of the journal?

AB & SV: We are also amazed by how well the journal has done. The latest Impact Factor, published in early July 2021, was 3.771, ranking SESP in the top 25% of both Political Science and Social Affairs journals for the fifth year running. Of course, we are thrilled with this result!

With regard to authors, success breeds success and it's clear a good IF encourages increased submissions. This isn't a surprise as it's well known that in many countries, including Italy, colleagues are under pressure to publish in high-ranked journals. But as far as readership is concerned, we tend to think the relationship works the other way round. We ourselves choose articles to read based on how they relate to our research and teaching interests rather than which journal they appear in. So, we think SESP articles are being read, not because of where they are published but because colleagues find the topics interesting and relevant to the profession. In this sense, rather than a good IF bringing more readers, it's the fact our articles are being read and cited that has made SESP a top quartile journal.

One final word about the journal's success so far: we don't take it for granted. Getting into the top quartile took a lot of hard work over many years. Staying there means we have to be careful not to become complacent and relax our efforts. In that sense, every year presents a new challenge.

NC: From your viewpoint, what are the main ingredients to a success story such as the one of South European Society and Politics?

AB & SV: Perhaps first and foremost – and this follows on from what we said before – it's important to publish material that colleagues will actually want to read. We want our articles to be relevant to current debates and to address themes that people are concerned about. Central to SESP's mission is to deepen our understanding of our own region. But as a regional studies journal, it's important not to become

insular or parochial. So, while the journal publishes South European case studies, the goal is for these to resonate beyond the specific national or regional experience and speak to scholars without a particular interest in Southern Europe, but with an interest in the broader issues raised. This need to cover important subjects and debates isn't always met by the regular submissions to the journal. One of the ways we try to ensure good thematic coverage is by promoting special issues on important topics. A themed collection of articles allows a broader and deeper investigation of a particular subject. Download figures suggest readers recognise this, as special issues often attract special attention.

Second, we think one of the key ingredients of SESP's success has been that we have a clear idea what kind of articles we are looking for. Each week when we assess the latest group of submissions, we are on the lookout for cutting edge topics. Timeliness is also an important aspect. Scholars are still writing about the early years of the eurozone crisis. But this is now more than a decade in the past, the debate has moved on and it's important that the content of the journal reflects this. We are also looking for articles with a strong empirical basis and presenting fresh data. South European societies have undergone significant changes in the last decade, so if we want to understand the region today, we need data which is as up-to-date as possible.

Implementing these criteria requires careful selection at the initial phase of editorial review. We think this is fundamental. We know that a desk rejection can be very hard to take and writing the letters informing authors about these decisions is the hardest part of our job. But in the long run it's better for everyone to do things this way. In the journal's early years, we were less selective - with the result that editors, authors and referees often lost time in review processes that didn't end with a decision to publish. A desk rejection frees an author to resubmit elsewhere immediately and, as should be clear from what we've said, doesn't necessarily mean there is a problem with the quality of an article – it may not suit SESP, but be a perfect fit for another journal.

Third, a good peer reviewed journal needs good peer review. Editors need constructive and unbiased guidance from colleagues with solid expertise in the topic. It's also necessary to find a balance, choosing referees with complementary expertise who can comment on different aspects of an article. It often takes a lot of research, looking through Google Scholar profiles and reading other articles on the topic, to find the best people for the job. We wouldn't say we always get it 100% right, but we try hard. And here we'd like to say a big thank you to all our referees – you are the unsung heroes of journal publishing and none of it would work without you.

The fourth magic ingredient is editorial tender loving care. Some people think editors essentially act as mailboxes, receiving referee reports and forwarding them to authors. This isn't the case. Between the first submission and the final published version, articles always change significantly. Sometimes that change can amount to a transformation. Building on the input of the referees, editorial direction is crucial. Revising a journal article is a crafting process. The editor's role is to guide the author on how to do this in a way which will lead to the

work achieving its full potential. Sometimes authors think we are pushing them too hard, but our goal is to help each article become the very best it can be.

Summing up what we have said so far, we could say that SESP's successful recipe is based on two main elements. The first is editorial experience. Unlike many society-based journals, there is no institutionalised turnover of the journal's leadership. Both of us have been involved in SESP's editorial work from the late 1990s. This means we have a historical memory of how SESP has evolved and a constant view of what the journal stands for and where it should be going. Over the past twenty years, we have also developed a deep understanding of what our readers want and whether and how an article can work for the journal.

The second essential element is intensive editorial input at every stage of the publication process. Our editorial style is very 'hands-on'. We are fortunate to have the support of a truly excellent editorial team. Many thanks are due to Associate Editors Senem Aydın-Düzgit, Sandra Bermudez-Torres, Lorenzo Mosca and Leire Salazar and to Assistant Editors Fabio Bordignon and Elisabetta De Giorgi for their irreplaceable role. On our part, editing SESP involves a huge time investment. Our work is largely not visible and it has to be said that editing the journal has not been good for our careers. But for us, it is a true labour of love and we are deeply proud of SESP and everything it has achieved.

NC: How does Italian scholarship figure in the authorship of the journal (in terms of coverage, diversity, competitiveness, etc.).
In your opinion, how does the logic of career progression in Italian academia affect the decision of what to publish and where?

AB & SV: These are interesting twin questions about the role of Italy in the journal and the role of SESP in Italian political science. There's no doubt Italy is a key country for SESP. If we look at the record of the last decade (2011-2020), articles with 'Italy' in the title are 21% of total published articles (which means at least twice as many submissions). And this without taking account of comparative articles focused on three or more South European countries. Italy is also one of the top citing countries - together with the UK, Turkey, Spain and the USA – where scholars refer to SESP articles most. Last, but certainly not least, Italian contributors have been among the most widely read (and cited) by the national and international community. This is easy to see on the journal website: among the 10 most downloaded articles since 2011, five have Italian subjects and Italian authors.

As this is an interview for *'Italian Political Science'*, it's worth stressing that despite SESP's multidisciplinary nature, in 2011-2020 around 90% of the Italian articles published in SESP were submitted by political scientists (with the remaining 10% submitted by members of different sociological schools). This is a tribute to the strength and vivacity of Italian political science, which has been able to 'populate' SESP with articles on different and timely topics.

The role of SESP for the career progression of Italian political scientists is difficult to overestimate. Besides being a first quartile journal, SESP has been ranked as an 'A' journal by the Italian Agency for Evaluation of the University and Research System. Because publishing in 'A' journals is essential to receive

the national scientific qualification and thus for career advancement, SESP has become a target outlet for many colleagues. It's well known that Italian political scientists can count on fewer 'close-to-home' journals than those available to other disciplines. Compared to scholars working in the various branches of Sociology, who have Italian as well as international 'A' journals as outlets for their submissions, Italian political scientists have a very limited number of journals 'made in Italy'. As a consequence, SESP, an international journal which hosts a group of Italian political scientists in the editorial team, has often been considered as a 'close-to-home' journal and a good place to submit.

This has led many junior colleagues to approach the journal. Seniority is not an issue and SESP devotes special attention to the articles of junior submitters. If we find an article by a junior scholar convincing and the referees give it a 'green light', we are ready to 'tutor' the author through the publication process with help and suggestions of different kinds. We are proud to say that SESP does a great job in offering junior scholars the possibility to publish, be noticed and become well-known in the scientific community. We have several success stories of this kind in our archive, not only for Italy, but also for the other South European countries covered by the journal. This is an important part of SESP's service to the profession.

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Italian Political Science, VOLUME 16 ISSUE 1

A contribution to [THE PROFESSION] series

Journal Editing and the *Italian Political Science Review*

An interview with Martin J. Bull

Introduction

Martin J. Bull is Professor of Politics and Associate Dean for Research & Innovation at the University of Salford, and former Director of the European Consortium of Political Research. He is currently Editor of the *Italian Political Science Review* and the *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, as well as Founding Editor of the ECPR's political science blog-site, *The Loop*. He serves on the Editorial Boards of *South European Society and Politics*, *Modern Italy*, and *Contemporary Italian Politics*. He is former Editor of *Modern Italy* (2005-2010), *European Political Science* (2006-2013) and *Social Sciences* (2011-2018), as well as former Associate Editor of *Parliamentary Affairs* (2007-2012), and former Editorial Board member of several journals including *West European Politics* and *Politics*.

The following interview was conducted by the editor of *Italian Political Science*, **Nicolò Conti** and edited by the interviewee.

Nicolò Conti [NC]:
In your experience as editor of several scientific journals, what are the main ingredients to a success story for a journal nowadays?

Martin J. Bull [MB] It depends, of course, on what you mean by 'success story', how you define 'success'. Readers might assume that success has to mean being in the top quartile of the Social Science Citation Index, with an Impact Factor of 'X.' But in my view that is simplistic for two reasons. First, despite the predominance of league tables for almost everything in our professional lives, journals do not simply have goals to rise in league tables. There is a very wide range of journals in any disciplinary area, and each has its own sub-disciplinary orientation, identity, specific mission, and its own 'community' of scholars to which it appeals.

Second, a journal depends on its Editors and most Editors are in that role for a fixed period. That fixed period constitutes a specific stage in the life of a journal, so it depends on how long the journal has been in existence, what identity it is developing, the state of its copy flow, what objectives the Editors set for their editorial period and so on. So, an Editor of a journal that has been in existence for a few years only will have very different goals to achieve in a fixed period than an Editor who takes over a journal that has been established for 30 years.

Volume 16, Issue 1, 46–51.

Having said that, I think there are, at the same time, certain 'constants' of which Editors should be aware if they want to (help to) make a success story of the journal they are currently editing.

First, never 'chase' impact factors (in the sense of considering submissions from the perspective of whether they might be good 'citable' papers) or high rejection rates (by pushing up your desk-reject stats for the sake of doing so). Anyone who has seen the detail on journal impact factors and what has produced them will realise that there is no science of prediction in this field. Avoid it, stick to your scientific mission. The journal's IF is simply one of many outcomes (good or not so good) at the end of each year.

Second, avoid being influenced by papers on the basis of the particular subject area the authors are writing about, whether it's 'sexy' or whether you are personally interested in it. You might get excited at receiving an article on 'populism' but that says nothing about its quality. At the same time, you might be missing a high quality case study on bureaucratic politics which you have overlooked because it didn't really interest you. Besides, what is 'sexy' today might quickly become old hat tomorrow, and your job is not just to publish 'in the current period' but to leave a legacy of high quality research for political scientists of the future to consult.

Third, and more generally, avoid trying overly to 'shape' and 'construct' the identity of the journal (within its formal scope or remit) you are editing. That identity will be primarily determined by the supply of material, not what Editors anticipate might be in demand or what interests them. The very profile of an Editor/Editors/Editorial Team will and does, inevitably, influence somewhat the nature of the supply (I have witnessed that every time) but that is enough. The role of the Editors is to be open, inclusive and genuinely welcoming of all research that falls within the formal scope of the journal, not picking and choosing according to other criteria than originality and excellence.

Fourth, do everything you can to avoid unconscious bias. Although I have not yet edited a journal based on 'triple blind' evaluation processes, I helped launch one that is (*Political Research Exchange*) and I think all journals should be thus. 'Triple blind' means not just that referees do not know the author of a paper, and the author of a paper does not know who the referees are, but the Editors of the journal do not know the authors either. The Editors, therefore, make a final decision on the paper without knowing the identity or institutional affiliation of the authors. This protects the Editors from unconscious bias related to 'seniority', gender, institutional affiliation, country of origin and so on. I find it curious that in countries such as the UK we have long adopted anonymity for students when we are marking their work, yet when we mark our own we don't. It is the future for all journals in my view. In its absence, the best practice is simply to avoid checking the author's profile: focus on the submission itself. It doesn't matter who an author is, your job is to see whether they have something interesting, original and of high quality to say.

Fifth, be thorough throughout. There are a number of stages to be followed. Is the article 'in scope'? In other words, is it an appropriate submission for the

journal you are editing? Check the mission of the journal and what it accepts, if it is clearly not in scope, do not persist with it, but reject it on procedural grounds. Then, does the paper cross the quality threshold to be considered by referees? If not, desk-reject it; if it does, process it. When referees' reports come in, consider them in some depth against the paper itself and reach your own verdict, consulting where appropriate with your co-Editors. When not sure, do not hesitate to send revised papers back to one of the referees for further evaluation, and do not hesitate to ask authors for further (and yet further) revisions, if it is evident that the paper could, through further revision, reach the standard of being accepted for publication.

Sixth, be diligent and timely. You should 'check in' on a regular (my advice is daily) basis to your journal. There is always something to do. Authors have spent a lot of time and care in producing their work, their work deserves to be processed in a timely manner. Word gets around if authors are kept waiting interminably for decisions. If you cannot carve out the time to the necessary work, don't take it on in the first place.

Seventh, despite the importance of the criterion of excellence, be realistic about your journal and what it is trying to achieve. There is no "universal" threshold of quality assurance in the market of journals that automatically dictates whether a paper should or should not be published. That standard can be different between journals, and that standard may move marginally according to the supply of material. Whether a journal is owned by a publisher or a scholarly society, an Editor is contracted to deliver a (normally) prescribed minimal level of published material each year. Be aware of your contractual duties and the need to strike the right balance between keeping the journal on track with high quality published material.

Eighth, always remember *your* role, which is to facilitate the dissemination of relevant, original, high-quality research in a disciplinary area in which you have some expertise. It is a service to a professional community, not a chore, and certainly not a contest. Be modest about your aims and likely contribution. You are not there to change the earth, but to build further on the good work of your predecessors and leave a solid legacy for those who come after you, thus helping the journal grow.

NC: Which are the theoretical approaches/methods represented in the articles published by the *Italian Political Science Review*?

MB: It should be said, first, that we do not, in IPSR, favour any particular theoretical approaches/methods. We are open to all approaches and methods. Our main principle is that papers aspire to, or embody, a 'scientific approach' to their research and writing.

However, in terms of what is eventually published in IPSR, there are evident trends. In terms of approaches or methods, between 2015 and 2020, 52% of articles published were quantitative-inferential-statistical, 39% qualitative-descriptive-statistical and 9% theoretical.

In terms of subject area, in the same period, 38% of articles published were in the area of political institutions, 20% political behaviour, 12% International Relations, 10% public policy/administration, 7% regimes, 6% public opinion, 6% media/communication, and 1% methodology.

These, of course, are all broad categories, hiding a good deal of nuance, and I recommend readers to take a cursory glance at the journal's "First View articles" and recent issues (on the website) to get a flavour of the rich diversity of subject matter and approaches that IPSR has been publishing. And, specifically regarding methods, we are devoting a Special Issue to this very topic in 2021.

NC: How does Italian scholarship figure in the authorship of the *Italian Political Science Review* (in terms of coverage, diversity, competitiveness, etc.)?

MB: It is fair to say that Italian scholarship figures highly in the authorship of IPSR. Between 2015 and 2020, in terms of published articles, approximately 71% of authors were Italian nationality and 29% from abroad. This strong presence of Italy in the journal is reinforced if we look at the geographic area on which published articles primarily focus their content. Between 2015 and 2020, 52% of articles had Italy as their primary focus, 30% Europe/EU, 13% other areas, and 5% global. Three points should be made about this.

First, IPSR is a journal which was, until the recent past, published in Italian only, and it is owned by the Italian Political Science Association (SISP), whose members are primarily Italian. Although I don't have the figures, I suspect that the 'Italian' presence was even higher during the years of RISP (an acronym many Italian scholars still use today to refer to the journal!). SISP serves its members and one of the membership benefits is the journal. But SISP is also, I believe, in taking the decision to publish the journal in English, making it clear to members that it also regards a key benefit to be the gradual internationalisation of the journal, in keeping with the trends of internationalisation in Italian political science. Rightly so.

Indeed, second, the journal can help with that process of internationalisation by hopefully displaying, over time, an ever greater diversity in the sub-disciplinary expertise of Italian political scientists. I have written elsewhere of the '(curious) elephant in the room' in Italian political science: "the historical and continuing preponderance of research on Italian politics amongst Italian political scientists. It is the (curious) elephant in the room: visible and clearly shaping Italian political science but rarely mentioned; curious, because, for all this, Italian political science remains dissatisfied with its lack of 'relevance' to the Italian world beyond academe. The discipline's future will likely be shaped by the possibilities of whether and how this preponderance is overcome".[1]

Third, we should not view this as a unique or deep-seated problem that has to be changed overnight. I suspect that analogous statistics can be found in a number of other European countries in relation to their house journals. A sudden enforced and artificial change in this situation, moreover, would be disruptive

[1] See: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/23248823.2015.1033927?journalCode=rita20.

and damaging. And it is worth emphasising the quality of coverage that IPSR offers. Although it is not a strictly fair comparison (because IPSR is, of course, a general journal of political science), if you do a Cite-Score publication by year comparison over the past decade between IPSR and the three main English-language journals which are purely dedicated to Italian studies, IPSR rose from bottom in 2010 to top in 2019. In any case, what is important is a gradual change which carries the journal's (changing) community (of authors and readers) with it, as it shows an increasingly prominent international profile.

NC: How does, in your opinion, the logic of career progression in the Italian academia affect the decision of what to publish and where?

MB: I assume this refers to authors and not to Editors (since, as Editors, we obviously do not take into account career progression of authors in our evaluation as to whether to publish a paper). And, if so, I am certainly not the best person to answer this question as I am located in the career structure of a different national political science community.

However, from my experience of scores of communications with authors over many years of editing journals, and from serving on the panels of several of the Italian political science research assessment exercises, it is clear that Italian political scientists are undergoing very similar pressures ('to publish or perish') to political scientists in other countries.

In terms of the 'what', the trend is obviously towards research which has, or can have, demonstrable impact or relevance to the 'real world'. The publication of research can no longer be seen simply as an end itself; rather, it has to be seen as a mid-point in the process by which social scientific research influences what is done in government, politics and society.

In terms of the 'where', it is now a fact of life that where you publish can make a difference to your career. Some universities are becoming ever more prescriptive in terms of what is expected of their researchers in terms of publishing. One's freedom to choose is, unfortunately, becoming increasingly constrained. The unfortunate consequence is that it can distort the choice of academics as to where to publish their papers towards journals according to their 'ranking', as opposed to their 'appropriateness' to the subject matter.

NC: The *Italian Political Science Review* ranks in the first quartile of Scimago (for both Political Science & International Relations and Political Science and Sociology). How do you think this kind of ranking affects the authorship and readership of the journal?

MB: Yes, and this is the second year running to secure first quartile ranking. And if you drill down into the detail of the Scimago result you can see the progress of the journal over the past decade – where all the indicators are pointing in the right direction.

There are other comparative indicators that are promising too. For example, in terms of Cite Score by year (for articles published 2016-2019), IPSR has made

a steady rise since 2013 compared with some other national community political science journals.

The icing on the cake, of course, will be the journal's acceptance into the Social Science Citation Index. That will be a watershed moment which will, I suspect, have a noticeable positive impact on submissions and the general standing of the journal – because that is how the world of academe works today.

That will probably not happen on our watch, but (to return to my answer to the first question) that is not our main aim; and, in saying this, I think I can safely speak for my esteemed colleague, Filippo Tronconi, and the rest of our fantastic Editorial Team at IPSR, as well as the team at CUP. IPSR, since it transformed itself from RISP, has been on a new journey of internationalisation and growth. It is climbing a mountain, which is a slow but steady process, and in which each editorial team must play its part. Our predecessors got us to Base Camp, and our achievements are simply building on theirs. Wherever we get the journal to by the end of our tenures, we will establish Camp 1 and pass the *staffetta* to our successors to continue the climb. It is a climb in which I am very pleased and honoured to be a participant.

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Italian Political Science, VOLUME 16 ISSUE 1

A contribution to [THE PROFESSION] series

Contemporary Italian Politics: Italy from abroad

An interview with James Newell

Introduction

James Newell is an adjunct professor at the University of Urbino Carlo Bo and former Professor of Politics at the University of Salford, UK. His recent books include, *Silvio Berlusconi: A Study in Failure* (2019), *Corruption in Contemporary Politics a New Travel Guide* (2019) (both with Manchester University Press), *Europe and the Left: Resisting the Populist Tide* (ed. Palgrave, 2020), *Italy's Contemporary Politics* (Routledge, 2020). He is founder and co-editor of the quarterly journal, *Contemporary Italian Politics*.

The following interview was conducted by the editor of *Italian Political Science*, **Daniela Sicurelli**, and edited by the interviewee.

Daniela Sicurelli [DS]:
Can you summarise the history of *Contemporary Italian Politics*?

James Newell [JN] *Contemporary Italian Politics* began life in 2009 as the twice-yearly *Bulletin of Italian Politics*. Hosted on the web site of the University of Glasgow, the *Bulletin* was an open-access publication whose aim was to provide a forum for discussion of recent developments in Italian politics and of their domestic and international implications. However, the journal's origins actually go back to 2002 and the founding of the UK Political Studies Association's (PSA's) Italian Politics Specialist Group (IPSG) with which it has always been in some way associated. PSA specialist groups, supported and funded by the Association, are designed to bring together academics with research and teaching interests in specific areas of politics, in order to enhance the quality of activities within the given field by providing opportunities for group members to network, organise conferences and carry out joint publication projects. The aim in establishing the IPSG was therefore to create a vehicle for the further development of the study of Italian politics in the UK. As such, the Group soon became highly successful – in terms of the number of members it was able to recruit; its sponsorship of conferences, and of panels at the Association's annual meetings; the publication activities of its members; its ability to bring to the UK internationally known Italian political scientists and so on (so much so that in 2017 the Group was awarded the PSA's "Specialist Group of the Year" prize) – and so the launch of the *Bulletin of Italian Politics* was designed to build on that success.

Volume 16, Issue 1, 52–57.

Contemporary Italian Politics was the name assumed by the *Bulletin* after Taylor and Francis agreed to take over its production in 2013 when it became a thrice-yearly publication. The change of name was perceived as necessary in order the more accurately to reflect the journal's aims. "*Bulletin"* had been chosen in order to emphasise our concern to fill a gap by providing a forum especially for articles analysing the most *recent* events bearing in mind both the rapidity of change in Italian politics at the time and the difficulties faced by conventional academic journals, with their long lead-in times, in doing this. Its disadvantage was that it risked giving the impression that the journal was a newspaper. *Contemporary Italian Politics* was therefore chosen in order *both* to emphasise the current relevance of the topics its articles cover *and* to remove any doubts about the academic rigour and analytic incisiveness we were aiming for.

The aims and scope of the journal meant that it had much in common with the well-known annual, *Politica in Italia* (Pit), published by il Mulino under the auspices of the Istituto Carlo Cattaneo in collaboration with the Johns Hopkins University SAIS Europe. As most readers of IPS will be aware, Pit began life in 1986, bringing together Italian and foreign scholars to provide description and analysis of the most significant events and developments of the year just passed. Like the journal, it seeks to bring a knowledge of Italian politics to a wide audience both in and beyond academia. Like the journal, it seeks to respond to the ethical imperative of inclusivity in the sense of knowledge production that is accessible, rather than being the preserve of those with intellectual resources out of the reach of the many. Like the journal, it provides a service both to contemporary historians (as volumes accumulate, allowing researchers to trace back developments and changes) and political scientists (looking for the empirical material that will enable them to include the Italian case in comparative studies). It therefore seemed fitting that the tenth anniversary of the journal should be marked by an increase in the number of issues from three to four per year to enable the publication to host the English-language edition of Pit, which in 2021 made its fourth appearance as an issue of journal, guest-edited by Arianna Giovannini and Lorenzo Mosca.

DS: Which theoretical approaches/methods are represented in the articles published by the journal?

JN: The scope and the remit of the journal – to provide rigorous analysis of contemporary events and trends in Italian politics – mean that it operates on the boundary between contemporary history and political science and that other disciplines, such as sociology and international relations, are also relevant to its concerns. Consequently, as one would expect, the theoretical approaches and research methods represented vary considerably. Both interpretive and positivist research paradigms are reflected in the published material as are cross-sectional and longitudinal studies, inductive and deductive approaches.

Since it began life in 2009, the journal has published a total of 254 articles (besides book reviews and, in its early days, dialogues, roundtables, news and events). Of these 254, about 60% are based on quantitative data with about 50%

using the data for exploratory and about 10% for confirmatory analysis. The remainder of the articles are based on the qualitative analysis of text and/or interview transcripts.

DS: How does Italian scholarship figure in the authorship of the journal (in terms of coverage, diversity, competitiveness, etc.)?

JN: The vast majority – meaning over 90% – of authors submitting articles to the journal are mother-tongue speakers of Italian, with over 90% of these being based at an institution located in Italy and corresponding proportions for the articles actually published. This means that with rare exceptions, most of the material is produced by authors whose first language is not English – with the result that in many cases the editors have to take considerable care, once articles have survived the refereeing process and been accepted for publication, to carry out the "polishing" necessary to bring them up to a publishable standard from a linguistic point of view. It is the policy of the journal not to release text for publication until it meets the standards one would reasonably expect of a mother-tongue speaker of English.

DS: How, in your opinion, does the logic of career progression in the Italian academia affect the decision of what to publish and where?

JN: I believe that the logic of career progression affects the decision of what to publish and where in the same way in the Italian as it does in other systems, although I am nonplussed by it. As I understand it, progression mostly depends on performance in terms of a number of publication and citation metrics. Consequently, like their counterparts elsewhere, Italian academics do want to publish in English; they don't want to publish book chapters and they don't want to publish in journals that are not in "*fascia A*". If we do not tackle language loss, more than half of all of the world's languages will become extinct in the next 100 years. One of the most influential works ever produced in political science is a book chapter (namely, Kirchheimer's chapter on the "catch-all" party). Galileo Galilei would have failed to publish his work in a "*fascia A*" journal had the category existed at the time. My point is that I am sorry that, as a profession, we seem unwilling to resist performance measurement and accountability for what we do. First, I think that it is inappropriate to hold academics accountable, for the same reason that it is inappropriate to make judges publicly accountable for their sentencing decisions. Second, it is difficult to see on what basis the more "significant" and "original" work deemed to score highly in research assessment exercises could be produced at all in the absence of the underlying routine, empirical research of other scholars on which it inevitably relies. In short, research is ultimately a collective endeavour to which everyone can and does contribute. Finally, assessment regimes underpin the marketization of higher education, the commodification of academic labour and the hegemony of the neo-liberal paradigm, so placing it beyond criticism. Yet the *sine qua non* of the academic enterprise is that *nothing* be placed beyond potential criticism and intellectual scrutiny.

DS: *Contemporary Italian Politics* ranks in the first quartile of Scimago (for both Political Science & International Relations and Political Science and Sociology). How do you think this kind of ranking affects the authorship and readership of the journal?

JN: Now I am compelled to take a position that clashes in many ways with what I have just argued since at a guess I would say that the journal's ranking means that it attracts more submissions than it would do were its ranking lower, and that this in turn has a positive impact both on the quality of the articles published and on reader numbers. However, as you might expect me say, I like to think that we might have succeeded in generating such a virtuous circle in any event, had journal "league tables" not existed.

DS: To conclude, from your viewpoint, what are the main ingredients to a success story such as that of *Contemporary Italian Politics*?

JN: I think, first, that timing has been significant. The journal was launched at the end of a twenty-five year period that had seen an explosion of interest in Italian politics beyond its frontiers as attested to by the growing number of English-language books, both academic and popular, focussing on the area or some aspect of it. Thus, in the mid-1980s there was (leaving aside very specifically-focussed research monographs) really only one general English-language text that teachers of Italian politics at university level could call upon (Frederic Spotts' and Theodor Wieser's, *Italy, a difficult democracy*, Cambridge University Press, 1986). The next quarter century then saw the appearance of roughly one new Italian politics book every eighteen months.

Reasons for the expansion in interest were not hard to find and included growing European integration and therefore the increasing relevance of its member countries for political developments within other EU-member states (Italy then being among the four largest and now, with Brexit, among the three largest); the considerable expansion in the teaching of politics in higher education thanks to the expansion in university-student numbers in general; the new emphasis placed in American universities on the European Union and its Member States; the dramatic social changes associated with globalisation such as the growth in air travel and tourism, as well as the explosion of information available thanks to development of the Internet, and so on.

If many of these changes applied to areas of politics other than the Italian case, then interest here was particularly sparked by the dramatic and profound changes that were set in motion by the great "Bribe City" corruption scandal and the other upheavals of the early 1990s and by the emergence and growth of Silvio Berlusconi, whose activities, political success and dominance of the political scene were unprecedented, not just in Italy but in Europe in general if not more broadly. Consequently, from being widely viewed as a country of "stable instability" – one where (for all that its political arrangements were fragile, inefficient and unpopular) the Christian Democrats were always in power and nothing important ever really changed – from the early 1990s the situation was one of almost "permanent revolution". Consequently, the future always appeared to be

completely open, with developments even in the near future incredibly hard to predict. And of course this fluidity, this sense of uncertainty, not to say anxiety, about the future has continued down to the present and extended well beyond the frontiers of Italy to become the *leitmotif* of early twenty-first century politics generally. If this has deprived Italy of much of its former distinctiveness, then by highlighting growing global interdependence it has helped to maintain interest in the country's politics from abroad at its former high level.

Against this background, I think that when we launched the journal we successfully identified a real gap in the market. That is to say, there is a need for the journal because the space which articles focussing on contemporary Italian politics can find in the two main, English-language journals focussing on Italy – the *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* (*JMIS)* and *Modern Italy* (*MI*) – is at least to some extent limited by the remit of these publications. Of course, articles on current Italian politics *do* find a home here, but the publications also have to give space to a much wider range of concerns which, in the case of the *JMIS* include "the political, economic, cultural, and social history of modern Italy from 1700 to the present",[1] in the case of *MI*, "the history, politics and social, economic and cultural life of Italy and the Italian peoples from the eighteenth century to the present".[2]

Finally, I think that the journal owes its success to the large quantity of high-quality material written by academics who are mother-tongue speakers of Italian who would otherwise publish their work in an Italian-language journal but who seek a wider audience by publishing in English. As already implied, the launch of the journal coincided with a considerable and growing demand among non-English speaking political scientists to see their work published in English owing to the growing internationalisation of political science and the growing impact of research assessment exercises, university league tables, measures of "impact" and so forth – giving publication in the English language definite and considerable advantages to authors. And of course it also coincided with the dramatic expansion of politics as a discipline in general that had taken place in Italian universities in the four decades leading up to its emergence.

We live in a world in which the public sphere has become internationalised: in which issues on the political agenda in any one part of the world have a high profile at least in part because of their echoes and their relevance for similar issues in other parts. An example of such an issue being debated in Italy at the present moment is the *proposta di legge* Zan, in public discussion of which the positions being taken on similar issues by Viktor Orbán in Hungary have featured highly as have the implications of failure to pass the proposal for Italy's record on the issue in comparison with that of other European countries. Another is Euro2020 and which teams, including Italy, are or are not taking the knee and why. Yet a third is the September 2020 referendum on the reduction in the number of parliamentarians which, as I wrote in a recent editorial for the journal, was in many respects Italy's answer to the UK's June 2016 Brexit

[1] See: https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?show=aimsScope&journalCode=rmis20.
[2] Accessible online at: https://www.cambridge.org /core/journals/modern-italy.

referendum. It may seem banal to say that events in any one part of the world cannot be fully understood without at least some knowledge of what is going on in the other parts, but it does mean that now more than ever there is a small but important part for the journal to play in dissemination of this knowledge.

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